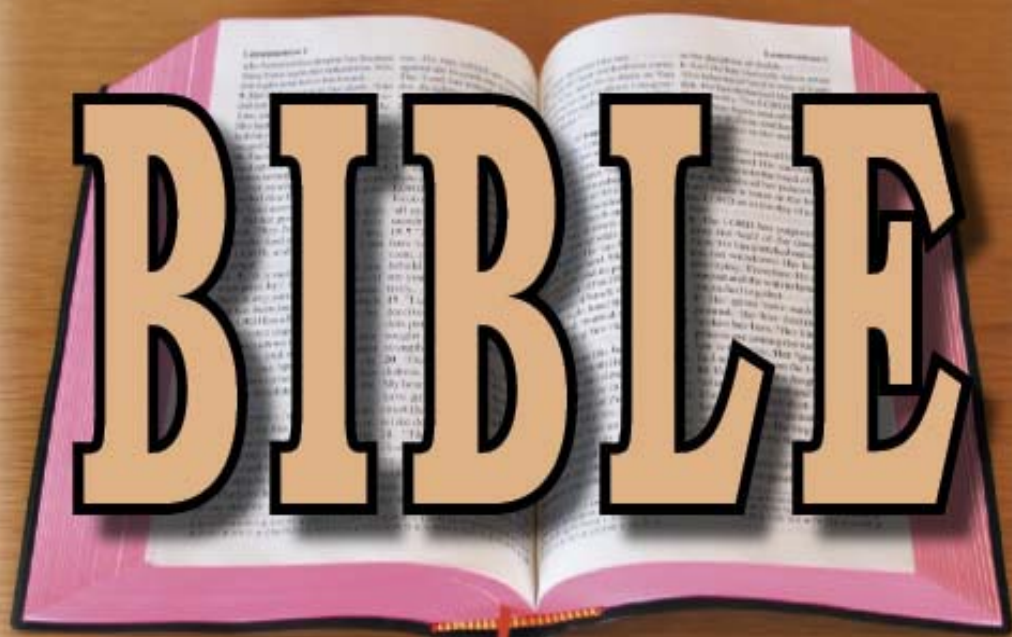


# INTRODUCTION

to the



**A Comprehensive Study Of The  
Origin, Content & Application  
Of The Word Of God**

**DICKSON**

# Introduction to the Bible

Roger E. Dickson

## CONTENTS

Introduction – 3

**1 – *History Of The Biblical Text* – 4**

**2 – *Introduction To The Old Testament* – 22**

**3 – *Introduction To The New Testament* – 29**

**4 – *The Inspired Word Of God* – 39**

**5 – *Old And New Covenants & Laws* – 52**

**6 – *New Testament Background* – 62**

**7 – *The Gospel Age Of Freedom* – 79**

rdickson@mweb.co.za

[www.africainternational.org](http://www.africainternational.org)

[www.blog.africainternational.org](http://www.blog.africainternational.org)

Facebook: Africa International.org

Philadelphia, Western Cape, South Africa

Copyright 1990, 2018, Africa International Missions

Scripture quotations from *New King James Version*

## INTRODUCTION

**What makes study of the Bible exciting is understanding the fundamental principles of its history, nature and content. Once one accepts the Bible as the inspired communication of God to man, then his or her interests are excited to investigate the means and materials by which God has preserved His written communication to man throughout history. When we understand how God used the abilities of man under the direction of the Holy Spirit to communicate and preserve His will for humanity, then we appreciate the nature of the content of the Sacred Scriptures. The word of God has come to us in the languages of men that were used by the Holy Spirit to communicate human history, historical characters, and divine instructions by which men are to live today according to the gospel. The Old Testament Scriptures were written to the Jewish nation that God selected from the nations of the world in order to preserve a segment of society through which the Redeemer would come into the world. The books of Matthew through John reveal the life and teachings of the Son of God to bring Israel and all mankind to the cross. The Holy Spirit then begins with Acts through Revelation in order to give instruction on how to live the gospel.**

The word “Bible” came from the Greek word *biblos*. During the eleventh century B.C., this was the word that was used to refer to the outer coat of the papyrus reed that grew along the banks the Nile River in Egypt. By the fourth century A.D., Christians were using the plural of the word *biblos*, or *biblia*, to refer to the Sacred Scriptures. Both Latin and French words were derived from *biblia*, and eventually, the English word “Bible” evolved from the Anglicized French word. The word “Bible” now refers to all sixty-six books of the present-day Bible.

The Bible is a collection of writings that are considered by Christians to be the inspired word of God. The Old Testament writings were also referred to by Christians as “the Scriptures” (or “writings”) (At 8:32,35; Gl 3:8,22; 2 Tm 3:16), the “Holy Scriptures” (Rm 1:2), the “Oracles of God” (Rm 3:2; Hb 5:12), the “word of God” (Mk 7:13; Rm 10:17; Hb 4:12), and “Sacred (Holy) Scriptures” (2 Tm 3:15). Though these references refer primarily to the Old Testament Scriptures, the term “Scriptures” was also used to refer to Paul’s writings (2 Pt 3:15,16). From Peter’s reference to

Paul's writings as "Scripture," we would assume that when the New Testament writers wrote their inspired letters, the early Christians accepted them as Scripture.

Before the writing of inspired Scripture for men to read, God communicated directly to man (Hb 1:1,2). The first written oracles of the Bible were written by the hand of God on tables of stone that were given to Moses on Mount Sinai (Ex 34:1,28). The first man who was used to inscribe Scripture was Moses, who probably wrote Genesis through Deuteronomy sometime before the nation of Israel entered the Promised land around 1400 B.C. The last written

revelation from God occurred with the writing of the letter of Revelation to the seven churches of Asia. Bible students differ concerning the date of writing of this letter. Some affirm that the letter was written sometime before A.D. 70, while others believe that John wrote the letter during his Roman exile on the island of Patmos around 96 A.D. The writing of the letter of Revelation concluded the canon of the Bible, that is, all the Holy Spirit inspired literature from God to man. Christians, therefore, do not accept as inspired Scripture any other writings than the sixty-six books of our present Bible.

## Chapter 1

### HISTORY OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

In John 20:30,31, John wrote concerning the ministry of Jesus,

*And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; **but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.***

John revealed the purpose for which the Scriptures have come to us in written form. Though the preceding statement of John was written spe-

cifically about his confirmation that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God, the statement could also be used to define the central purpose of the Bible. The Bible is about confirming the revelation of the gospel of Jesus Christ from the creation to the time when Christ was growing in the hearts of the early Christians. The Bible, therefore, is first about Jesus, and then about us.

God knew that it was not possible for men to verbally hand down from one generation to another a true knowledge of His revelation of the

gospel. Even within only a few years after the personal ministry of Jesus, Luke wrote that many erroneous statements concerning Jesus' ministry and teachings were being circulated. Luke wrote in order to correct these misunderstandings (Lk 1:1-4). If it were not for the inspired Scriptures, therefore, we would have no valid information about Jesus or His life and teachings. Since it is impossible for people to accurately hand down from one generation to another by word of mouth uncorrupted facts concerning teachings and historical events, God inspired the Bible to be written.

Because of God's work through the inspiration of the Scriptures and providential care in preserving the text of the Scriptures, Christians throughout the world today have the privilege of having a copy of the Bible. Therefore, through the Bible God continues to communicate His gospel message to receptive hearts who seek to do His will.

However, this privilege has not always existed. Before the existence of the written record of God's will, God communicated directly to man through various means of revelation.

### **A. God spoke to man in various ways.**

Throughout the history of man, God has chosen to speak to man

through various means of communication. The Hebrew writer said, "*God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son*" (Hb 1:1,2).



The advantage that we have today is that we have the written record of both history and God's word in a printed form. However, in the past, God did not use a written form in order to communicate His will to man. Before the giving of the Old Testament Scriptures on Mount Sinai, God spoke to man in various ways. Even after the giving of the Sinai law, God continued to speak to man in other ways than through the written word.

**1. God spoke through angels.** The Greek word *angelos* (angel) means "messenger." Angels were messengers sent from God to man. In times of special need, they functioned as the medium through whom God communicated messages to man (Gn 18,19,22; Ex 3). They did not originate the message that they delivered to man. They only spoke that which

they were to speak as the messengers of God (See Rv 1:1; 22:8-11). Therefore, it was not the work of angels to communicate any revelation to man that did not first originate with God.

**2. God spoke through dreams and visions.** Through this means of communication, God often spoke to individuals (Dn 2; 7:1; Gn 41). Though this was a subjective method of communication, the message of God was delivered to the recipient in such a manner that there was no question that the message came from God. God's message through dreams and visions seemed to focus around historical events that would happen. Therefore, dreams and visions were mostly prophetic in nature.

**3. God spoke through the Urim and Thummin.** Under the Sinai law, God instituted that when the high priest and leaders of Israel needed a "yes" or "no" answer to a particular question, they were to allow God to speak through the Urim and Thummin (Nm 27:21; Dt 33:8,10; see Ex 28:30; Pv 16:33). Unfortunately, there is no revelation for us today as how this process of decision-making was carried out. It was probably some type of lot casting wherein God intervened to determine the outcome of the lot.

**4. God spoke through the conscience of the Gentiles.** Paul affirmed that the Gentiles were a law unto themselves before the revelation of

the gospel in Jesus (Rm 2:14). This law was based on the fact that God instilled within man a conscience that should direct one to do that which is right. This would be a very subjective means of how God communicated to man. It would be subjective in the sense that the consciences of some people have been corrupted.

Nevertheless, the fact that man has a conscience of right and wrong is proof that God determined that through his conscience one should seek after God. For this reason Paul placed on the shoulders of those he discussed in Romans 1 the responsibility that they should have sought after God. One should reason that God exists because of the created world (Rm 1:20). When one concludes that the creation of the world was the result of a Supreme Being, then his conscience should drive him to seek the Creator. We should "*seek the Lord, in the hope*" that we might "*grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us*" (At 17:27).

**5. God spoke miraculously out of heaven.** On different occasions God spoke directly from heaven. He did this when Moses was on Mount Sinai (Ex 20). He did the same at the time of Jesus' baptism (Mt 3:17). He also spoke directly to Peter, James and John on the mount of transfiguration (Mt 17). This was not God's normal

means by which He communicated to man. It was an event of communication. The occasion for this special means of direct communication was because of the special need at the time for Him to deliver a message to the recipients. Those to whom the communication was made were subsequently awed by His presence, and thus, they did not reject the instructions of the message.

**6. God spoke through inspired men.** From the time of creation, and throughout Old Testament history, God spoke through chosen men whom He inspired to speak forth His message. These men were known as judges and prophets. Their work was to speak the word of the Lord to God's people. The ministry of the prophets was explained by Amos: "*Surly the Lord God will do nothing without first revealing His plans to His servants the prophets*" (Am 3:7).

The prophets functioned in the capacity of foretelling the future in reference to the history of Israel, as well as the coming of the Messiah (See Lk 24:25,26,44). The books of the prophets in the Old Testament comprise the collection of what God communicated to the nation of Israel in His efforts to direct them toward the revelation of the gospel through the Son of God.

**7. God has spoken through a written record.** The word of God was

first written for men to read when God gave Moses the tablets of stone on Mount Sinai around 1445 B.C. (Ex 31:18). Moses later wrote the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament. The prophets later wrote messages of warning and prophecy concerning the revelation of the gospel (1 Pt 1:10-12). The documents of Matthew through John were written to remind us of the ministry and teachings of Jesus, and the fact that He was the Son of God (Jn 20:30,31). Acts to Revelation were written for Christians of all time to give instruction in how to effectively live the gospel of Jesus. The sacred Scriptures were thus written for all men to read and study until the final coming of Jesus (2 Tm 3:15; see Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11).

## **B. Languages of the Bible:**

In order that the word of God be preserved for all people throughout history, God recorded His will in written form. When Israel was delivered from Egyptian captivity, the people first journeyed to Mount Sinai. It was there that God recorded for the first time in history His word in the languages of men. The ten commandments were written on tables of stone. Moses later wrote the Pentateuch (Gn – Dt) in order that Israel have a written document of God's will. The first

written document that God gave to His people was written in the Hebrew language.

**1. Hebrew:** Ancient Hebrew was referred to as the “Jews’ language,” or, “the language of Judah” (2 Kg 18:26,28; Ne 13:24). It was later called the “language of Canaan” (Is 19:18). It was a language of twenty-two consonants and no vowels. Except for a few portions that were probably written in Aramaic, the Old Testament was written in Hebrew.

**2. Aramaic:** Aramaic was the spoken language of the Near East from the sixth to the fourth centuries B.C. It was the major language of the Babylonian area until the conquest of Babylon by Alexander the Great. While in Babylonian captivity, Daniel and Ezra functioned as prophets of God. They, as well as all Jews, learned Aramaic, the language of their captors. Therefore, small portions of the books of Daniel and Ezra were probably first written in Aramaic. These portions would be Daniel 2:4-7:28; Ezra 4:8 – 6:18; 7:12-26.

When the Jews returned from Babylonian captivity, they returned with a second language. It was the language of their captors, the Aramaic language. This became the local language of Palestine, and much of Syria by the time Jesus and the apostles were born. It is probable, therefore,

that both Jesus and the apostles spoke Aramaic as they grew up in the land of Palestine. We would assume, therefore, that there would be some Aramaic influence in the New Testament. Aramaic words in the New Testament would be such words as *talitha cumi* (Mk 5:41), *ephphatha* (Mk 7:34), *eli eli, lama sabachthani* (Mt 27:46), and *abba* (Mk 14:36).

**3. Koine Greek:** The Greek word *koine* means “common.” Koine Greek was the language that was spread throughout the Mediterranean world during and after the conquests of Alexander the Great in the fourth century B.C. It was a language that was adopted by the Roman Empire as the “trade language” because many people throughout the Roman Empire knew this language. Therefore, by the time of Jesus’ coming, Koine Greek was commonly spoken in Palestine. This was the language that God chose to communicate His message of the gospel through the New Testament because the people throughout the Roman Empire could readily read Koine Greek.

## C. Writing materials for the Bible:

In order for God to communicate to man through written word, various types of writing materials were used. The most important material that was



used in ancient times was papyrus paper. In reference to the preservation of the Scriptures for modern times, vellum (or parchment) was also used.

**1. Stone:** God's will for man was first written on tablets of stone. Exodus 31:18 states, "*He gave Moses two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God*" (See also Ex 34:1,28). The occasion for this statement was the giving of the Sinai law to Israel on Mount Sinai. Though stone was not a common material for the inscription of God's written word, it was the first material used, and thus, would certainly symbolize the truth that God's word is durable. Metaphorically speaking, the word of God would last as stone throughout the existence of this world (See Mt 24:35; 1 Pt 1:23).

**2. Papyrus:** Papyrus paper was made from the papyrus plant that grew along the banks of the Nile River in Egypt. This type of writing material was in existence many centuries years before Christ. It is possible that the original autographs, that is, the original writings of Paul and the other New Testament writers, were first written on papyrus paper. Many ancient copies of both the Old and New Testaments have been preserved on papyrus paper.

**3. Vellum:** Vellum is also called

**parchment.** The term parchment was often used to refer to writings of authors because the writing material was so commonly used for important scrolls in New Testament times. This is how Paul used the term in 2 Timothy 4:13 when he wrote to Timothy, "*Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come—and the books, especially the parchments.*"

Parchment as a writing material is made of a fine quality of prepared leather. By a careful process of tanning, the leather is prepared on both sides for writing. It is very durable, and thus, preserved the text of writing for a great period of time. Archaeologists have discovered many ancient copies of portions of the Bible that were originally written on vellum, or parchment.

The most popular writing material in ancient times was papyrus because it was plentiful and inexpensive. However, vellum was more long lasting. Because of this characteristic, it was often used as a writing material for important documents, but particularly for prized copies of the Bible. Nevertheless, because papyrus paper was commonly used, it is believed that the writers of the New Testament first wrote their autographs on papyrus.

Before the advent of God having His word communicated to man by inscription on writing materials,

He first communicated to man through the inspiration of the fathers of extended families (Hb 1:1). Though this system of communicating divine instructions to man had existed from the beginning, God intended to change from the direct communication of His will to chosen heads of families to a means of communication by which all men would have the privilege of reading the word of God. The change would be to the communication of His will through written documents. From the time of Moses, therefore, God spoke through judges and prophets to the nation of Israel. However, He had His will inscribed by Moses in the books of Genesis through Deuteronomy in order to communicate His message to Israel. He later added the other thirty-four books of the Old Testament until the time of Malachi.

God's intention was to eventually work through a completed written word that we now have as the Bible. Though in the first century He briefly worked parallel through directly inspired men and the inspired written word, it was His final plan to speak to men exclusively through the written word. Since the completion of the New Testament writings, therefore, God seeks to work through the completeness of His word, the Bible (2 Tm 3:16,17). In some way this may explain "the perfect" about which

Paul wrote in the context of the direct work of God in 1 Corinthians 13:10. The perfect would be the finality of God's communication to man through directly inspired writings. Since the completion of the inspired canon of Scriptures in the first century, it has been God's intention to communicate to man through that which has already been revealed in written form. We thus have today the totality of what God wants us to have in order to connect with Him.

#### **D. Transmission and translation of the Bible:**

In reference to the transmission and translation of the Bible, there are two key words that are important to remember. First, there is the word "manuscript." A manuscript is a handwritten literary composition that is produced in usually a single language. In reference to the Old Testament, all manuscripts were written in Hebrew, except for a few portions of Daniel and Ezra that were probably originally written in Aramaic. In reference to the New Testament, the original manuscripts would be in the Greek language.

Second, the original **autograph** refers to the first writing of the manuscript. There are no known original autographs in existence today. Actually, there is no need for their exist-

ence simply because of the tremendous amount of copies that were made of the original autographs.

The existing manuscripts of the biblical text can be divided into different categories. **Uncials** (or, majuscules) are manuscripts where the text has been written with all upper case letters. These New Testament manuscripts in Greek were produced in great quantities from the third to the sixth centuries A.D. This style of writing lasted until copyists began to write in lower case letters. Several New Testament manuscripts that date from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries were written with lower case letters. These manuscripts are referred to as **minuscule** (also known as “cursive”) manuscripts.

When the Holy Scriptures were first written, they were written as uncial manuscripts. Their collection together into the canon of Scriptures took place over a period of many years. The Bible books were not written at one time. They were written at different times over a period of about 1,500 years. They were eventually collected into one book that we call the Bible. The New Testament letters were written over a period of about forty years, but their collection together into twenty-seven letters of the canon did not begin until the end of the first century.

**1. Writing of the books:** The word of God was first spoken by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Holy men were carried along by the Holy Spirit in order to deliver accurately the message of God to man. In order to preserve the message of His spoken word, God commanded that inspired records be made. Therefore, Peter, as well as all Bible writers, were “*moved by the Spirit*” (2 Pt 1:20,21). The commandment of the Lord was written “*not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches*” (1 Co 2:13). The detail of the mystery of God was revealed through inspired words (See 1 Co 2:6-16; Ep 3:1-5). John explained the purpose for inspired Scripture. It was written “*that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name*” (Jn 20:30,31).

The process of inspiration is defined by Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:13. He wrote, “*These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual [words].*” It is important to understand that in inspiration the Holy Spirit used the words of man’s dictionary in order to reveal the will of God. In most areas, the communication of divine truth could be revealed through human words in

a manner that could be easily understood. However, biblical students must realize that things which are above the realm of human experience cannot be completely revealed through the words of man. In other words, the nature of God cannot be explained fully by the words of man. The existence of heaven cannot be defined fully by the words that are of this world. When it comes to those things that are beyond our human experience, there is always an inadequate understanding of these things when the words of this world are used.

The New Testament books were written in a period of about forty years. However, if one accepts the early date of Revelation—before A.D. 70—then all New Testament books were written in a period of about twenty years.

Galatians and Mark were probably the first letters written and Revelation the last. Because the New Testament books or letters were first considered inspired when they were received by the original recipients, these writings were separated from other religious books of the time. It is important to remember this point for there are other writings of the New Testament era that some claim to be inspired, but they were never accepted by the early Christians to be the word of God.

All New Testament writings

were collected as the canon of New Testament Scripture upon their writing, though they were not assembled into one book until many years after they were written. Though the New Testament writings were not immediately collected together into one volume at the time there were first written, they were still considered inspired by the recipients, and thus, treasured and copied as inspired Scripture.

God's gospel message was recorded for the purpose of what Paul stated in 1 Thessalonians 5:27: "*I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren.*" God's message to His people, therefore, was to be written, copied and circulated among all Christians. John was likewise commanded by God to write the book of Revelation for the same purpose: "*What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia*" (Rv 1:11). This process of copying and circulating the written word of God was explained by Paul in Colossians 4:16: "*Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.*"

**2. Collecting of the books:** The circulation of inspired books led to their being copied and collected. The process of collecting the New Testa-

ment epistles had already started at the time Peter wrote 2 Peter 3:15,16, which would have been in the middle of the 60s. Peter wrote,

*... and also in all his [Paul's] epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which those who are untaught and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.*

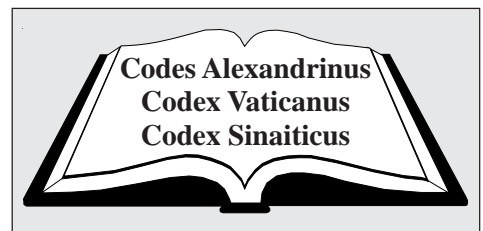
It is evident that by the time Peter wrote 2 Peter 3:15,16 that Paul's writings were being copied, collected and classified as "Scripture." The word "Scripture" was used by the Jews to refer to those documents that were considered inspired by God. The early Christians accepted and applied this same term to refer to the New Testament documents. Therefore, when Paul wrote, his writings were added to what was considered the canon of inspired Scripture. The divine wisdom that had been given to Paul by God was recorded for all men of history. We have these inspired documents today, because they, as well as the writings of other inspired writers, were considered inspired by the early church, and thus, preserved as Scripture.

## **E. Collection and translation of the Bible:**

When we speak of the accepted library of inspired books and letters of the Bible, we use the word "canon." The Greek word *kanon* was probably derived from the Hebrew word *kaneh* that means "a measuring rod" or "a rule." When applied to inspired Scripture, the word "canon" refers to a measure by which the Bible books were first considered inspired.

The word "canon" refers to those books that are considered genuine and authentic autographs of the writers. A certain book is considered canonical when it "measures up" to rules by which a book is classified as inspired literature. Once a book or letter became part of the canon of Scriptures, copies were made of the book in order to preserve the book, as well as circulate the book as much as possible among the early Christians. Therefore, through the art of copying the Scriptures, the Bible books have come to us today in the form that we now have them.

**1. Translation of the biblical texts:** The process of biblical translation is a very disciplined science in



the field of literary work. The first step in making a translation is to make a **text** in the original language from which to make translations. In other words, a text of the book of Isaiah would be in Hebrew. A text of any New Testament book would be in Greek. It is the work of the textual critic to accumulate all textual evidence together in order to make one text from which the translators can do their work.

In order to make a Greek text for the translating of the New Testament, over five thousand Greek manuscripts are in existence to be considered. By comparing the copy work of the scribes who produced these manuscripts in ancient times, a single Greek text is produced. From this Greek text, translators make translations of the Scriptures.

#### a. Manuscript discoveries:

The first step in producing a translation of the Scriptures is to have in hand **ancient manuscripts** from which to produce a common Greek or Hebrew text from which the translation can be made. Ancient manuscripts are usually only portions of the Bible books. Some partial Old Testament manuscripts date from 300 B.C. to A.D. 500. There are no Old Testament manuscripts that date before the Babylonian captivity of 586 B.C. Some significant discoveries

have been made of almost complete texts of the Bible in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. One of these discoveries would be the **Codex Alexandrinus** that dates to around A.D. 450. This is almost a complete Bible except for about twenty pages missing from the Old Testament and twenty-five pages missing from the New Testament. Another discovery is the **Codex Vaticanus**. The Codex Vaticanus dates to the middle of the fourth century, or around A.D. 350. This ancient Bible contains almost all the Old and New Testaments. Another discovery was the **Codex Sinaiticus** that was discovered in a monastery at the foot of Mount Sinai in the Sinai Peninsula. This text is believed to have been produced around A.D. 340. Add to the above discoveries the **Cairo Codex** (A.D. 895), the **Leningrad Codex** (A.D. 916), the **Aleppo Codex** (A.D. 930), the **British Museum Codex** (A.D. 950) and many others.

In reference to New Testament manuscripts, fragments or portions of the Greek text have also been discovered that are even older than the above major discoveries that contain the New Testament text. The **John Rylands Papyrus**, which is a fragment of the gospel by John, dates from A.D. 125 to A.D. 140. The **Chester Beatty Papyrus**, that contains portions of Paul and John's epistles, dates

to around A.D. 200. Other famous manuscripts of the New Testament are the P66, 72, 75, Bodmer Papyri (these date from A.D. 200 to the 225), Codex Vaticanus (A.D. 350), Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (A.D. 345), Codex Bezae (A.D. 450-550), Codex Claromontanus (A.D. 555), and a host of others.

There are over **five thousand ancient manuscripts** of the New Testament that have been discovered that are used by Bible scholars to formulate a text from which translations are made. Add to this manuscript evidence the ancient translations, or versions, that have been discovered. Over **ten thousand versions** of either the Old Testament or New Testament have been discovered either in part or whole.

One of the most significant discoveries of ancient biblical texts in reference to the Old Testament textual studies was made in 1947. This was the discovery of the **Dead Sea Scrolls**. These were ancient manuscripts of Old Testament books. They

were discovered in caves in the north-western Dead Sea area of Palestine. These scrolls were the product of a dedicated group of Essene scribes whose work it is believed, was to make copies of the Old Testament Scriptures. Portions of all Old Testament books, except Esther, were discovered in these caves. An entire scroll of the book of Isaiah was discovered. Most scholars believe that the materials of this discovery date from 175 B.C. to A.D. 68. For all students of the Bible, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls was one the most significant biblical text discoveries of history.

**b. Text production:** When the textual scholar has accumulated from the vast assortment of manuscript evidences every possible portion of text, he is then ready to compose a single Hebrew or Greek text from which translations can be made. The text is made by consulting the many ancient manuscripts and versions that have been discovered. In reference to the New Testament, it is the task of the translator to use a text that is in the Greek language. Old Testament texts would be in Hebrew.

An example of a Greek text is the Greek **Received Text** (*Textus Receptus*) from which the *King James Version* was translated. The *King James* Old Testament is a translation from the Hebrew **Masoretic Text**.



The Masoretic Text was a product of Jewish scribes who made copies of the Old Testament from the eighth and ninth centuries A.D. to the eleventh century. Many Hebrew and Greek texts have been made since the production of the Received Text. Common texts that are used today for New Testament translations are the United Bible Society Greek text, the Nestle Text, and the Scrivener Greek Text. For the Old Testament, the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* is often used.

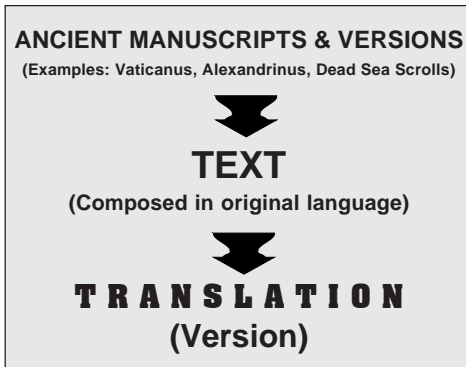
### c. Translation production:

The third step in translation is to make a translation from a common text that has been composed from the sources of all discovered textual materials. Depending on the method of translation of the translators, the thoughts and ideas of the original text are brought into the new language. When using a particular translation of the Scriptures, it is always good to know the background of the translation, specifically, the Greek and Hebrew text

from which the translation was made. This will help in understanding how and why a particular translation was made. It will also help one to understand why particular variant readings were chosen during the process of translation.

The work of copying the Bible books was carried out by men who were commonly referred to as scribes. This was not an inspired work of the Holy Spirit. The work of translation is also not inspired. Translation and transmission of the Bible are works that God expects men to do. Because men have been left to copy and translate the Bible texts, we would naturally assume that there are no perfect translations. However, the gospel message, and that which is necessary to be saved, can be learned from any translation.

God expects us to base our faith on translations of His word that have been made by faithful and dedicated translators. We know this because during His ministry, Jesus quoted from the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. He, as well as the early inspired writers of the New Testament, quoted from the Greek Septuagint. We thus have Jesus' approval of the work of men who have dedicated their lives to the preservation and translation of the word of God in a manner that is acceptable to God for His will to be imparted to man.





Since God has allowed man the responsibility of transmitting and translating His will to man, then we would assume also that He will allow Christians to deal with the accusations that the Bible is supposedly filled with errors. It is true that copyists made errors. It is true that translations are not perfect. A “variant reading” is when a particular manuscript or group of manuscripts offer different readings in a particular text. For example, Acts 20:28 reads in the *King James Version*, “... feed the church of **God**, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” However, the *Revised Standard Version* and *American Standard Version* read, “... church of the **Lord**.” Translators must make a decision as to which reading has the greater manuscript support. In order to make this decision, those who compose the text from which translations are made must consider the following questions:

- Which reading has the greater manuscript support?
- Which reading comes from older manuscripts?
- From what family of manuscripts does the reading come, for some manuscripts copied the same error?
- Which is the more difficult reading?

One of the more simple means

by which the correct reading is determined in almost all variants is the number of manuscripts that support a particular reading. For example, the word “God” may have been mentioned in more manuscripts of greater antiquity than the word “Lord.” On this basis—though not always the case—the word “God” would be the preferred reading. In the case of Acts 20:28, the *King James Version* has the preferred reading because of the greater manuscript evidence.

So why would God allow the art of biblical transmission and translation to carry on if men are fallible in their work? The answer lies in the fact that God demands faith. Without faith it is impossible to please Him (Hb 11:6). Faith is the very foundation upon which characters are developed for eternal dwelling. Those who seek always to be empirical in their living, that is, to trust nothing unless it can be encountered through the senses, have a difficult time living and working in a realm of faith that is above the existence of the senses. Since obedience to God’s will demands of us faith, it is difficult for those who seek to walk by sight to find God. For the Christian, our faith must first start with trusting in God’s means by which He has allowed His will to be communicated to man in written form.

Another reason why God did not

inspire the copying and translation of the text of the Bible is that **the power of His word is in the message of the gospel**. There is no Hebrew or Greek text that changes the message of the gospel. There is no translation that changes the message of the gospel. Since the Bible is about the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ, then the Holy Spirit did not need to inspire the transmission and translation of the message. It is simply a fact that the message of the gospel is so clear that it cannot be changed or made obscure by any variant reading or any translation of the Bible.

## 2. *Principles of translation:*

The type of translation one may have depends on the guidelines the translators set for themselves when they made the translation. These guidelines of translation can usually be found in the “Preface” that is at the front of any Bible translation.

Here are two general principles by which translators approach the translation of Bibles. Once the principle of translation is determined, then the translators who are involved in the work of translation center their work around these principles of translation.

**a. Word-for-word translation:** Generally, a word-for-word translation is an effort to translate with an equivalent word of the language

into which the translation is being made, the Hebrew or Greek word that is in the text. This is difficult to follow in some cases since idiomatic expressions make it difficult to translate the exact meaning of a phrase into another language. Sometimes there is simply no word in the new language that can adequately be used to translate a particular Hebrew or Greek word. However, if the translator is guided by the “word-for-word” principle, he will be striving to be as faithful as possible in translating the meaning of the original word.

A word-for-word translation has the disadvantage of often being awkward in the new language. This is true because the Greek language structure is different from most language structures today. Therefore, a word-for-word translation demands more from the student as to what the text is actually saying. The translator has simply made the translation as accurate as possible. It is the responsibility of the student to determine any Hebrew or Greek idioms in the text. It is the responsibility of the student to determine the values of money and measures of time and distance. Though these challenges often make it more difficult to determine the meaning of different portions of scripture, it is the preferred principle for making a translation.

**b. Thought-for-thought**

**translation:** This system of translation is usually referred to as a **dynamic equivalent** translation. This is the principle of translating into the new language the thoughts that are expressed by the original language. By this principle of translation, the translators seek to convey as accurately as possible the original meaning of the text in the new language. The reason behind this principle of translation is to make the new version easy to read in the new language.

This system of translation is more “free” in translation, that is, there is more liberty given to the translator to express the original thought in the choice of his words of the new language. Therefore, this principle of translation is often subject to the danger of a translator inserting his doctrinal prejudices into the text. In this process of translation, the translator often takes on the task of being a biblical interpreter, as well as a translator.

In every translation there are times when the translator must use his biblical background in order to translate a word or phrase correctly. This is necessary because a strict word-for-word approach cannot be followed in the translation of any language into another in order to produce a translation that is in some way easy for the reader to understand. This is especially true in the translation of idiom-

atic expressions of either Hebrew or Greek. Nevertheless, it should be the goal of the translator to translate the text as close as possible to the original language. Interpretation should be left to the reader.

Translation work generally follows the guidelines of one of the above two principles. In translation, emphasis is usually placed on one or the other, with deviations made at times in the translation. Generally speaking, however, the guidelines for a word-for-word translation help produce the best translation. This is true, though it is more difficult to read a word-for-word translation because the word structure in Greek and Hebrew sentences is different from most languages today.

A **paraphrase** is not an actual translation. A paraphrase is a “running commentary” of the text. In other words, the one doing the paraphrase is actually commenting on the thought of the original text instead of translating the words or sentences of the original language. In a paraphrase, the translator is concentrating on interpreting the meaning of the text and then translating this meaning into the new language. In this process, he is often commenting on what the text is saying instead of actually translating. A paraphrase, therefore, should not be considered a translation. A paraphrase

should not be considered more than a commentary of the text.

A paraphrase is usually the effort of one man who is trying to make the Bible more understandable. But in doing so, his work is often filled with his own doctrinal beliefs. Therefore, it is best to use a good translation of the biblical text under consideration when using a paraphrased version of the text.

If one does not know Greek or Hebrew, or have access to a Greek or Hebrew text, it is best to follow the principle of a comparative study of the text. A comparative study is the use of different word-for-word translations in order to determine what the text actually says. The great amount of scholarship that is behind each version can thus be considered when determining the actual Greek or Hebrew meaning of a particular scripture.

## **F. The Septuagint:**

Because of its unique place in the transmission and translation of the Old Testament, special mention must be made of the Septuagint. The Septuagint is often referred to with the Roman numerals LXX. This was a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into the Greek language. The work of translation started around 280 B.C. by about seventy Jewish scholars. They started with the translation

of the Pentateuch and then worked on translating the rest of the Old Testament in the years that followed.

This is the translation from which Jesus and the apostles quoted. This is also the Old Testament translation that is quoted in the Greek New Testament. The quotations of the Septuagint in the Greek New Testament have now been translated into English. This explains why the Old Testament quotations that are found in our English translations are sometimes slightly different from the Old Testament English translation. In other words, in the Old Testament the quotation was translated directly from Hebrew into English. The same quotation in the New Testament was translated from Greek, which was first translated from Hebrew by the Septuagint scribes. Therefore, there will often be some differences between the New Testament quotations of the Old Testament.

Keep in mind that the Septuagint is one of our most valuable sources of document evidence for the translation of the Scriptures into other languages. This is especially true in reference of how specific Greek words were understood by the Jews. The Greek words that they used to translate Old Testament words help us to understand better those same Greek words in the New Testament. Though we must first understand the Greek

words by the culture in which they were used in the first century, we must not neglect the source of the Septuagint to understand words and their definitions as they are used in the Septuagint.

## G. The Old Testament Apocrypha:

Some religious groups today consider the Old Testament apocrypha books to be inspired, and thus, they should be added to the canon of Scriptures. These books are found in the Septuagint, as well as the Latin Vulgate. However, the Old Testament apocrypha appeared in the Septuagint of the fourth century A.D., **not the original translation of the Septuagint**. They were not a part of the Old Testament canon that was accepted by the Jews when the Septuagint was translated.

Depending on how one would divide some of the books, the following are the apocryphal books of the Old Testament:

### OLD TESTAMENT APOCRYPHA

1. 1 Esdras
2. 2 Esdras
3. Tobit
4. Judith
5. Additions to Esther
6. Wisdom of Solomon
7. Ecclesiasticus
8. Song of the three Young Men
9. Susanna

10. Bel and the Dragon
11. Prayer of Manasseh
12. 1 Maccabees
13. 2 Maccabees
14. Baruch & Letter of Jeremiah

There are many historical and textual evidences that argue against the addition of these books to the sixty-six books of the Bible. These evidences against their addition are supported by almost all translators and publishers of the Bible today. These books were never considered inspired by the Jewish community at the time they were written. Neither did the Christians of the first century accept them as Scripture.

The word *apocrypha* means “hidden” or “concealed.” The writing of the Old Testament apocrypha occurred between 200 B.C. and A.D. 100. These books were thus written many centuries after the close of the Old Testament canon of Scriptures. These religious books are not a part of the Bible because they were not considered inspired when written. They are not considered inspired today by the majority of the protestant world. They are not considered a part of the canon of Scriptures for the following reasons:

### REASONS FOR REJECTING THE APOCRYPHA

- The Jews to whom the Old Testament Scriptures were first written did not

accept the apocrypha as Scripture.

- The apocrypha was not accepted by any biblical writers.
- The first century Christians did not accept them as inspired.
- The books were written after the close of the Old Testament canon of Scriptures.
- Neither Jesus nor the apostles recognized these books.
- The apocryphal books do not fit into the divine chain of Old Testament prophets that link the prophets together as God's messengers to the nation of Israel.
- The books do not fit into the revelation of the gospel plan of salvation.
- The books do not claim to be inspired by the Holy Spirit.
- There are contradictions between some statements in the books and biblical principles.
- These books do not have the character of inspiration as is characteristic of Old Testament books of the Bible.
- The unknown writers of the books were not accepted as inspired men.

For the preceding reasons, the apocrypha, as well as many other ancient religious books of the Jews,

should be rejected and not considered a part of the Bible that the Christian community considers to be Scripture. Simply because a religious book is of ancient origin does not mean that it is sacred. The books of the Bible have definite characteristics that classify them to be inspired from God. For this reason, we accept only the sixty-six books of the Bible to be from God.

A thorough study of the history of the Bible results in one overwhelming conclusion. That conclusion is that God has providentially preserved His word for man for all history. One's confidence in the Bible that he or she has in hand grows as one studies through the careful process of transmission and translation of the word of God. One can be completely confident today that he has the message of the gospel in the manner that God intended for us to have it. Having this confidence in the Bible increases our desire to study the Bible in order to be encouraged by the gospel message. The Bible thus becomes our source of faith. If we seek to grow in faith, then we must study the word of God (Rm 10:17).

## Chapter 2

### INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

Paul wrote, *“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scrip-*

tures might have hope” (Rm 15:4). The Old Testament was written for our learning. As Christians looking back to the work of God in history, it is the Old Testament that comes to us today as the most reliable document of history that can be fully trusted to tell us how God worked to bring His Son into the world.

The Old Testament was not only written for the sake of Israel to whom it was first directed, it was written for us today to inform us concerning God’s gospel plan of salvation. Paul again stated in reference to the Christian’s use of the Old Testament, *“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition”* (1 Co 10:11). We study the history of Israel in her relationship with God in order to understand how God works among the nations of men. Examples of both obedience and disobedience were recorded in the Old Testament for our admonition. It is important for the Christian, therefore, to have a clear understanding of the contents of the Old Testament in order to use it to its fullest in our spiritual growth. It is necessary to have an understanding of the Old Testament in order to understand the New Testament.

## **A. Introduction to Old Testament history:**

One of the easiest ways to retain a general organizational view of the Old Testament is to divide Old Testament history into fifteen major events. These divisions begin with the creation. After the creation, a few thousand years of time transpired before the flood of Noah’s day. This flood is recorded in Genesis 6-8. There are fifteen major Old Testament divisions of history before the establishment of the church in Acts 2. The Old Testament covers the events of the first thirteen periods. There was no revelation given through prophets during the approximately four hundred years after the work of Malachi. This period is commonly referred to as the “interbiblical period.” The next prophetic work after Malachi began with the work of John the Baptist. John preceded Jesus in order to prepare the way for Him as the Messiah, the Son of God.

The accompanying chart of Old Testament History gives a general view of the work of God throughout history. The dates that are given on the outline are suggested dates when the particular period of history began or ended. The prophets are listed in their respective time of work. The books of the Old Testament are also listed in the particular period in which they were written.

## **B. Jewish and Roman dates of the New Testament:**

We must keep in mind that Jesus' ministry took place during the Old Testament era. Therefore, when considering the calendar and times of His ministry, we must keep in mind that

He lived and worked according to the Jewish calendar. He kept the Jewish feasts because He lived under the Sinai law. When His ministry was recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke and

## Old Testament History

PERIOD	DATE	PROPHETS	BOOKS
1. <b>Creation</b>	(?)		
2. <b>Before the Flood</b>	(?)	Enoch	
3. <b>After the Flood</b>	(?)		
4. <b>Patriarchal</b>	2000 B.C. (?)	Job	
5. <b>Egyptian Bondage</b>	1871 B.C.		
6. <b>Wilderness Exile</b>	1441 B.C.	Moses	<i>Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy</i>
7. <b>Canaan Conquest</b>	1401 B.C.	Joshua	
8. <b>Judges</b>	1276 B.C.		<i>Joshua</i>
9. <b>United Kingdom</b>	1051 B.C.	Samuel	<i>Judges, Ruth, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, 1,2 Samuel</i>
10. <b>Divided Kingdom</b>	931 B.C.	Elijah (875-850) Elisha (850-800) Joel (840-830) Jonah (790-770) Amos (780-740) Hosea (760-720) Isaiah (745-695) Micah (740-700)	<i>Isaiah, Hosea, Joel, Amos</i>
11. <b>Judah</b>	721 B.C.	Isaiah (745-695) Zephaniah (639-608) Nahum (630-610) Habakkuk (606-586) Jeremiah (626-586)	<i>1,2 Kings, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah</i>
12. <b>Babylonian Captivity</b>	606 B.C.	Daniel (606-534) Ezekiel (592-570) Obadiah (587)	<i>Daniel, Ezekiel, Obadiah,</i>
13. <b>Restoration</b>	536 B.C.	Haggai (520-516) Zechariah (520-516) Malachi (450-400)	<i>1,2 Chronicles, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi</i>
14. <b>Interbiblical Period</b>	440 B.C.		
15. <b>John &amp; Jesus</b>	4 B.C. - A.D. 30	John, Jesus	



John, we must keep in mind that the inspired documents of Luke and John were directed to those who were not living according to Jewish dates and feasts. This is especially true with the document of John. John wrote to those who were not familiar with Jewish laws and feasts. John, therefore, uses Roman time in order to relate the events of Jesus' ministry to the Gentiles.

**1. The Jewish calendar:** The Jews had two calendars. The Civil Calendar was for recording of the dates of kings, contracts and births. The Sacred Calendar was for determining feasts. The Jewish months alternated between twenty-nine to thirty days. Every three years an extra 29-day month was added. This month was called Veadar and was added between Adar and Nisan.

Months	Corresponds to:	Days	Month of Civil Year	Month of Sacred Year
Tishri	Sept.–Oct.	30 days	1 <sup>st</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>
Heshvan	Oct.–Nov.	29 or 30	2 <sup>nd</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>
Chislev	Nov.–Dec.	29 or 30	3 <sup>rd</sup>	9 <sup>th</sup>
Tebeth	Dec.–Jan.	29	4 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>
Shebat	Jan.–Feb.	30	5 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>
Adar	Feb.–Mar.	29 or 30	6 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>
Nisan	Mar.–Apr.	30	7 <sup>th</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>
Iyar	Apr.–May	29	8 <sup>th</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Sivan	May–June	30	9 <sup>th</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Tammuz	June–July	29	10 <sup>th</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>
Ab	July–Aug.	30	11 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>
Elul	Aug.–Sept.	29	12 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>

**2. The feasts of Israel:** By the time of Jesus, there were seven principal feasts in Israel. All Jewish males were to assemble annually at the temple of Jerusalem for Passover and Pentecost (Ex 23:14-19).

Feasts	Month	Day	Present	References
Passover	Nisan	14-21	Mar.-Apr.	Ex 12:43-13:10
Pentecost	Sivan	6	May-June	Dt 16:9-12
Trumpets	Tishri	1,2	Sept.-Oct.	Nm 29:1-6
Atonement	Tishri	10	Sept.-Oct.	Lv 23:26-32
Tabernacles	Tishri	15-22	Sept.-Oct.	Ne 8:13-18
Dedication	Chislev	25	Nov.-Dec.	Jn 10:22
Purim (Lots)	Adar	14,15	Feb.-Mar.	Et 9:18-32v

**3. The Jewish days:** The Jewish day was divided into eight parts and was measured from sunset to sunrise. The Jewish day began at sunset.

Morning and Night Hours	
First watch:	Sunset to 9 <sup>PM</sup>
Second watch:	9 <sup>PM</sup> to midnight
Third watch:	midnight to 3 <sup>AM</sup>
Fourth watch:	3 <sup>AM</sup> to sunrise

Morning and Night Hours	
First watch:	Sunrise to 9 <sup>AM</sup>
Second watch:	9 <sup>AM</sup> to noon
Third watch:	Noon to 3 <sup>PM</sup>
Fourth watch:	3 <sup>PM</sup> to sunset

**4. Weights and measurements:**

WEIGHTS		
Talent (60 minas)	75 pounds	34 kilograms
Mina (50 shekels)	1 1/4 pounds	.6 kilograms
Shekel (2 bekas)	2/5 ounce	11.5 kilograms

Pim (2/3 shekel)	1/3 ounce	7.6 grams
Beka (10 gerahs)	1/5 ounce	5.5 grams
Gerah	1/50 ounce	.6 grams
<b>MEASUREMENTS</b>		
Cubit	18 inches	.5 meter
Span	9 inches	23 centimeters
Handbreadth	3 inches	8 centimeters

**5. The kings of Israel:** The dates on the list of the kings of Israel (the northern ten tribes) and Judah (the southern kingdom of Judah and Benjamin) are sometimes questionable. Some of the kings overlapped as kings rivaled one another in order to seize the throne of either the northern or southern kingdom.

<b>ISRAEL</b> Northern Kingdom	<b>JUDAH</b> Southern Kingdom
Jeroboam I (931-910)	Reoboam (931-913)
Nadab (910-909)	Abijam (913-911)
Baasha (909-886)	Asa (911-870)
Elah (886-885)	Jehosaphat (870-848)
Tibni (885-880)	Jehoram (848-841)
Omri (880-874)	Ahaziah (841)
Ahab (874-853)	Athaliah (841-835)
Ahaziah (853-852)	Joash (835-796)
Joram (852-841)	Amaziah (796-767)
Jehu (841-814)	Azariah (767-740)
Jehoahaz (814-798)	Jotham (740-732)
Jehoash (798-782)	Ahaz (716-687)
Jeroboam II (782-753)	Hezekiah (716-687)
Zachariah (753-752)	Manasseh (687-643)
Shallum (752)	Amon (643-641)
Menahem (752-742)	Josiah (640-609)
Pekahiah (742-740)	Jehoahaz (609)
Pekah (740-732)	Jehoiakim (609-597)
Hoshea (732-723)	Jehoiachin (597)
	Zedekiah ((597-587)

## C. Introduction to Old Testament books:

The Bible is made up of two

major collections of books and letters. There are thirty-nine books in the Old Testament. These books were originally written in ancient Hebrew between 1440 and 400 years before Jesus lived on this earth. They were given to the Jews as a part of God's covenant with the nation of Israel and have come down to us today for learning and admonition (Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11).

The New Testament contains twenty-seven books, or letters. The New Testament writings are inspired letters that were originally written in the Greek language. They were originally directed to either churches or individuals in the first century.

**1. Old Testament division and purpose of books:** There are thirty-nine books in the English Old Testament. The Jews generally divided these books into **the law** and **the prophets**. The first five books of the Old Testament (Gn - Dt) were written by Moses around 1400 B.C. The last book to be written of the Old Testament was Malachi. It was written around 400 B.C. As each of the thirty-nine books was written, they were added by the Jews to those books that were considered inspired. When the Holy Spirit inspired each to be written, the purpose for which the book was written determined the content or style of the book. Today, we can di-

<b>BOOK</b>	<b>AUTHOR</b>	<b>PURPOSE</b>
<b>THE LAW:</b>		
<i>Genesis</i>	Moses	Beginning of major historical events
<i>Exodus</i>	Moses	God establishes a covenant with Israel
<i>Leviticus</i>	Moses	God's laws for Israel
<i>Numbers</i>	Moses	Israel's journey to Palestine
<i>Deuteronomy</i>	Moses	Reaffirmation of God's laws for Israel
<b>HISTORY:</b>		
<i>Joshua</i>	(?)	Israel's conquest of Canaan
<i>Judges</i>	(?)	Israel's cycle of sin, punishment and repentance
<i>Ruth</i>	(?)	Reaffirmation of the messianic genealogy
<i>1 Samuel</i>	Samuel	Establishment of the Israelite monarchy
<i>2 Samuel</i>	Samuel	History of David's reign
<i>1 Kings</i>	Jeremiah	Division of the Israelite kingdom
<i>2 Kings</i>	Jeremiah	History of the divided kingdom
<i>1 Chronicles</i>	Ezra (?)	History of David's reign
<i>2 Chronicles</i>	Ezra (?)	History of the southern kingdom
<i>Ezra</i>	Ezra	Return from Babylonian captivity
<i>Nehemiah</i>	Nehemiah	Rebuilding of Jerusalem
<i>Esther</i>	Mordecai (?)	Jews' deliverance from extermination
<b>WISDOM LITERATURE:</b>		
<i>Job</i>	Job	The problem of suffering
<i>Psalms</i>	David & others	Devotional praises to God
<i>Proverbs</i>	Solomon or David	Wisdom for godly living
<i>Ecclesiastes</i>	Solomon	The vanities of life
<i>Song of Solomon</i>	Solomon	Solomon's beauty of marriage
<b>THE PROPHETS:</b>		
<b>Major Prophets:</b>		
<i>Isaiah</i>	Isaiah	Rebuke & messianic hope for Israel
<i>Jeremiah</i>	Jeremiah	Judgment upon Judah
<i>Lamentations</i>	Jeremiah	Lamentation over Jerusalem's destruction
<i>Ezekiel</i>	Ezekiel	Calamity is the result of Israel's sin
<i>Daniel</i>	Daniel	God is superior to pagan gods
<b>Minor Prophets:</b>		
<i>Hosea</i>	Hosea	Righteousness of God and doom of Israel
<i>Joel</i>	Joel	Appeal to seek God by repentance
<i>Amos</i>	Amos	Doom of Israel because of apostasy
<i>Obadiah</i>	Obadiah	Judgment on Edom
<i>Jonah</i>	Jonah	One God of all nations
<i>Micah</i>	Micah	Doom of Samaria & Jerusalem
<i>Nahum</i>	Nahum	Judgment of Nineveh
<i>Habakkuk</i>	Habakkuk	Faith is one's guarantee against destruction

<b>Zephaniah</b>	Zephaniah	God's judgment is for all men
<b>Haggai</b>	Haggai	Rebuilding of the temple
<b>Zechariah</b>	Zechariah	Rebuilding of the temple
<b>Malachi</b>	Malachi	Final warnings and restoration of Israel

vide these books according to their **content** or **style**.

Jesus mentioned three divisions of the Old Testament:

*These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in **the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms** concerning Me (Lk 24:44).*

Throughout history various subdivisions of the Old Testament have been made by Old Testament Bible students. All have been made in order to place into groups those Old Testament books that have similar content or literary style.

**a. The Law:** The first five books of the Old Testament are referred to as “the law.” These first five books contain the Sinai law that was given to the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai. These were the original writings of Moses that God provided for Israel (Ne 8:1). Other than the ten commandments that were written on tablets of stone, the first five books of the Bible were the first inspired Scriptures given to man by God in written form. The Jews referred to these books as the **Torah**. They were

also referred to with the Greek word “**Pentateuch**” which means “five-volumed.”

**b. History:** There are twelve books in the Old Testament that record Jewish history. These books give a history of the Jewish nation from the time the Israelites entered the land of Palestine around 1400 B.C., until the time of their last return from Babylonian captivity around 444 B.C. The Old Testament record of history ends around 440 B.C. with the rebuilding of Jerusalem under the direction of Nehemiah.

**c. Wisdom Literature:** These five Old Testament books are generally written in Hebrew or Jewish **poetry**. As a section of study, they are sometimes referred to as “poetry.” Reading these books will give one a greater understanding of the inner feelings of the Jewish mind.

**d. The Prophets:** There are seventeen books of the prophets in the Old Testament. The work of a prophet was to teach God’s word to Israel in an effort to restore the Israelites to righteousness. The Holy Spirit inspired the prophets to record in books the central message of their teaching. These books are usually divided into two groups: (A) the **Major Proph-**

ets, and (B) the **Minor Prophets**. This division is based only on the fact that the Major Prophets' books are **larger** than the Minor Prophets.

## Chapter 3

### INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

There are twenty-seven books in the New Testament. These books were originally written as letters to individuals or churches. Therefore, the word "letters" is more appropriate as a reference to the New Testament canon. The twenty-seven letters of the New Testament were written for specific purposes to Christians in different regions or cities.

The word "epistle" is also used to refer to the New Testament letters. This is an older English word that was used in reference to a letter that one writes to another person. Regardless of what term one chooses to use, the emphasis is not on what word is used to refer to the New Testament documents, but on the content of the material and the reason for which the letters were originally written.

#### A. Survey of New Testament books:

As with the Old Testament books, the New Testament letters were not all written at the same time. However, all letters were written in the first century A.D. When a letter was written by a man of God, it was

accepted as inspired, and thus, preserved by those who made copies of it. Eventually, all twenty-seven letters came together into one collection that we now call the New Testament.

**1. Understanding biblical content:** The twenty-seven letters of the New Testament are divided according to their general content. One must keep in mind when reading the New Testament that each letter was written for a specific purpose and to a specific individual or group of Christians in a general region. Generally speaking, the letters of Matthew through John were written to answer specific questions concerning the life of Jesus. Acts was written to present a defense for Paul who was going to trial before a Roman court. Romans through Jude were generally written to deal with dysfunctional behavior and relational problems among disciples. The book of Revelation was written to encourage Christians in times of trouble.

One might view the New Testament from the perspective of cause and effect. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John deal with the ministry and

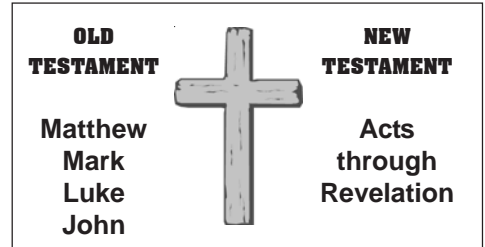
miracles of Jesus. This would be the cause of Christianity. This purpose for the writing of Matthew through John would be expressed in John 20:30,31.

*And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.*

Acts through Revelation are directed to the church, the effect of the gospel in the lives of people who obeyed the gospel. These letters are directed to those who believed in Jesus who is the cause of Christianity. Church is the effect. Through the letters that were written to established the early disciples, the Holy Spirit sought to fine tuned the dysfunctional behavior of many in the early disciples.

It is also significant to understand that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were written concerning Jesus' activities while He ministered under the Sinai law. Since the New Testament covenant was not enacted until the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, then we must understand that what takes place in the records of the ministry of Jesus are actually records of events of Old Testament history. Jesus' ministry was

to the Jews. Therefore, what He taught was directed specifically to the Jews in order to lead them to the new covenant that would be established on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2.



**2. Understanding inspired authorship:** As with the Old Testament, all New Testament letters were directed in writing by the Holy Spirit. For this reason, Peter, an apostle, considered Paul's writings to be "Scripture." This was a Jewish term that referred to inspired writings. Paul affirmed that everyone should recognize "that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Co 14:37). What he wrote was the word of God (1 Th 2:13). (More on this later.)

The style of writing of each letter of the New Testament is not easily distinguished by reading a translation. Nevertheless, when considering the original language in which the letters were first written, one can see differences in writing style between different authors of the New Testament letters. In the process of inspiration, therefore, the Holy Spirit allowed the

writers to use their own style of writing, and often, their own vocabulary. This is particularly noted in reference to the letters of Luke, the beloved physician. Within the letters of Luke and Acts, Luke, the physician, used some words, specifically medical terms, that are not used anywhere else in the New Testament. It is also characteristic of Luke's writings that they are the most difficult literary structure in the Greek language. The books of John are much easier to read in the Greek language.

In a critical study of the New Testament, therefore, sometimes one must consider the writing styles of the authors in order to determine which author wrote which letter. The similarity between the writing styles of books helps us to determine what writer wrote specific books.

**3. *Understanding dates of writing:*** All the New Testament books were completed by the close of the first century A.D. However, it is difficult to determine an exact date of writing of each book. Different historians sometimes assigned different dates to the books. However, no dates between the various historians varies over two or three years.

The importance of the dates is significant when compared to the time when a particular church was established with the secular historical facts that were transpiring during the time

the letter was written. For example, believers obeyed the gospel in Thessalonica no more than six months to a year before Paul wrote the 1 Thessalonians letter to these new disciples. When we read 1 Thessalonians, therefore, we interpret what Paul said in view of the fact that the Christians to whom he wrote were less than a year old as Christians. When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, the Christians to whom he wrote were less than five years old as Christians. This helps us to understand what God expects of Christians in their spiritual growth after obedience to the gospel.

One principle concerning spiritual growth is evident in determining the date of writing of the New Testament letters. This principle is that God expects Christians to take ownership of their spiritual growth upon their obedience to the gospel. If there is no spiritual growth, then the gospel is having little impact on their lives.

**4. *Understanding the purpose of writing:*** The Bible student must keep in mind that there was a prevailing problem that existed that stimulated the writing of each New Testament letter. Therefore, when studying each of the twenty-seven letters of the New Testament, the student must seek to determine this purpose for writing, and then understand the whole of the letter on the foundation of this purpose.

## B. Survey of New Testament authors, dates and purposes:

The following is a brief survey of the author, date and purpose (s) of the New Testament letters. It is important for the Bible student to specifically understand the general purpose of writing of any Bible document. An understanding of the general purpose of a letter helps guide one's study through the content of the letter. It helps one to remain focused on the purpose for which the letter was written. The pearls of truth in a letter are always strung on a line of the general purpose the author was trying to accomplish when he wrote the letter.

### I. THE LIFE OF JESUS

#### MATTHEW

1. **Author:** Matthew, the apostle
2. **Date:** Around A.D. 60
3. **Purpose:** Matthew wrote primarily to Jewish Christians. He accomplished at least three purposes in defending the messiahship of Jesus: (1) By collecting various teachings and events of the life of Jesus, he developed the theme that Jesus was the Messiah who fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. (There are sixty-four references to the Old Testament in the letter with forty-three direct quotations. See 1:1,22; 2:15; 12:17; 21:4)
- (2) Matthew wrote to reaffirm that

Jesus, as the Son of God, is the foundation upon which our faith is built. Jesus was the Messiah and Son of God upon which believers founded their faith (See 16:13-20). (3) By emphasizing holiness, Matthew stressed the fact that Jesus as a teacher did not come with a system of legalistic religiosity that was characteristic of the Judaism of His time (23:16-24).

#### MARK

1. **Author:** John Mark, the cousin of Barnabas
2. **Date:** Between A.D. 65 & 70
3. **Purpose:** In writing primarily to Gentiles, Mark presents a condensed and fast moving record of the works and teaching ministry of Jesus. He does such in order to reaffirm the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (See 1:1; 4:41) who died in order to save man from sin (10:45). By emphasizing such concerning Jesus, Mark seeks to call all men to live the gospel life of discipleship.

#### LUKE

1. **Author:** Luke, the physician
2. **Date:** A.D. 61,62
3. **Purpose:** As a Gentile, Luke wrote to Theophilus, possibly a government official, in order to present a defense of Christianity by giving a true account of the facts concerning Jesus and His teachings (1:1-4). In considering the fact that Luke was



with Paul at the time of Paul's first defense before the Roman court (At 27:1ff), and in defense of Paul, Luke wrote for Theophilus a defense for Paul's case by proving that Jesus, as the Son of Man, was the reason for the existence of Christianity and the motivation for the behavior of Paul. Acts, which is also directed to Theophilus, should be considered a companion document to the purpose for which the document of Luke was written. In Luke, Luke presents the cause of Christianity. The cause of Christianity was the Christ. Acts presents the effect of the Christ on the lives of those who believed that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God.

## JOHN

1. **Author:** John, the apostle
2. **Date:** Between A.D. 60 & 70
3. **Purpose:** John wrote to present a defense that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah) and Son of the living God (20:30,31). By emphasizing key miracles of Jesus, and material that is not recorded in either Matthew, Mark or Luke, John wrote with an apologetical argument to those who were not familiar with Palestine and its culture. He does so in order to defend the foundation of Christianity, that is, that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God. John accomplished his purpose by giving an accurate record of seven miracles that Jesus worked

to prove that He was sent from God (See 2:1-11; 4:46-54; 5:1-9; 6:1-14; 6:16-30; 9:1-12; 11:1-46). The book of John is the apologetic book of the New Testament that affirms the deity of Jesus (1:1,2).

## II. HISTORY OF EARLY CHURCH

### ACTS

1. **Author:** Luke, the physician
2. **Date:** Between A.D. 61 & 63
3. **Purpose:** Since the document of Acts ends with Paul and Luke in Rome for Paul's trial before the Roman court, Luke wrote both Luke and Acts as defense material for Theophilus on behalf of Paul. In making a defense, Luke wrote in the document of Luke to present the cause (Christ) of Christianity. In Acts he wrote to present the effect (the gospel living of the early disciples). Luke's method was to present historical arguments that can be answered only in the fact that both cause and effect in reference to the early disciples had divine origin. Among these arguments was one of Luke's greatest defenses, that is, the rapid growth of the Christianity, which growth can be answered only in the fact that God was behind the gospel of the cross and resurrection of the Son of God (See 2:47; 9:31; 11:21; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:31).

### III. LETTERS TO CHURCHES

#### ROMANS

1. **Author:** Paul, the apostle
2. **Date:** Between A.D. 56 & 59
3. **Purpose:** Romans deals with the centrality of the gospel. Since we cannot be justified by perfect law-keeping, nor receive atonement through meritorious good works, then our justification stands on the grace of God. In writing to the disciples in Rome, Paul had at least three thoughts in mind as he wrote to defend our justification by faith through the grace of God (See 1:17): (1) He reaffirmed the sufficiency of the grace of God as opposed to the infiltration of Jewish legalism among the disciples (chs 1-8). (2) He explained the problem of national Israel's unbelief in Jesus as the Messiah in relation to God's eternal plan of the gospel (chs 9-11). (3) He emphasized the fact that gospel living is produced in the hearts of those who respond to the gospel of God's heart through Jesus Christ (chs 12-16).

#### 1 CORINTHIANS

1. **Author:** Paul, the apostle
2. **Date:** Around A.D. 54, 55
3. **Purpose:** There were some in Achaia who were arrogant, and thus, opposed the apostleship of Paul. They questioned the fundamental teaching of the resurrection. There

were some who were puffed up and defiant in reference to the apostolic authority of Paul. Upon hearing of these dysfunctional attitudes and behavior among the disciples that disrupted their assemblies, Paul wrote to correct their erroneous spirit of sectarianism that resulted in their dysfunctional assemblies. He wrote to correct relational behavior that was contrary to living the gospel of love.

#### 2 CORINTHIANS

1. **Author:** Paul, the apostle
2. **Date:** Between A.D. 54 & 56
3. **Purpose:** The disciples in all Achaia had favorably responded to the first letter concerning their dysfunctional fellowship according to the gospel. In this second letter to the disciples in Corinth and Achaia, Paul wrote in order to further instruct the disciples in their struggles to live the gospel: (1) As a defense of his sincerity, he reminded the Achaian disciples of recent trials in his travels (1:1-2:13). (2) In defense of his ministry against those in Achaia who opposed his apostleship, he defined the character of true discipleship (2:14 - 6:10). (3) To emphasize the holiness of the Christian, he urged separation from that which would compromise gospel living (6:11 - 7:16). (4) In order that he not come to them with the rod of discipline of a Christ-sent apostle, he exhorted

them to correct some dysfunctional behavior before his arrival.

## GALATIANS

1. **Author:** Paul, the apostle
2. **Date:** Between A.D. 47 & 49
3. **Purpose:** The influence of a Jewish legal religiosity had soon entered among the disciples of southern Galatian soon after Paul had preached the gospel in the region. Paul wrote (1) to refute the judaizing teachers' belief that God's grace must be supplemented with meritorious works of law. (2) He defended the sufficiency of the grace of God that was revealed at the cross. (3) He defended such in opposition to those who preached "another gospel," which was a system of self-justification through self-sanctifying performance of law.

## EPHESIANS

1. **Author:** Paul, the apostle
2. **Date:** Between A.D. 61 & 63
3. **Purpose:** Paul wrote to Christians in the region of Ephesus who were older in the faith (See At 18:18-23; 19). He wrote for three main purposes: (1) He wrote to remind the disciples of God's eternal redemptive purpose of the gospel through the church (1:4-20; 2:4-6; 3:11). (2) He wrote to remind the Ephesians of the unity believers have as a result of God manifesting the gospel to the

world through those who obeyed the gospel (2:11-22). (3) He reminded this predominately Gentile fellowship of believers of their blessings in Christ as a result of the grace of God (1:3; 2).

## PHILIPPIANS

1. **Author:** Paul, the apostle
2. **Date:** Between A.D. 61 & 63
3. **Purpose:** Paul wrote this letter to the disciples in the city of Philippi, whom Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke initially made on the second missionary journey of Paul (At 16). He wrote (1) to thank them for their contribution of things to sustain him in prison (4:14-18), and (2) to remind them to maintain a harmonious fellowship and life-style of unity and joy that is the nature of the one gospel they had obeyed (1:27; 2:16; 4:4).

## COLOSSIANS

1. **Author:** Paul, the apostle
2. **Date:** Between A.D. 61 & 63
3. **Purpose:** Paul wrote to the disciples in Colosse who evidently were made from evangelistic work out of Ephesus (At 19:8-10). He wrote (1) to exalt the preeminence of Jesus as the Creator who is over all things (1:15-23), (2) to explain his apostolic work (1:24 - 2:5), (3) to argue against the infiltration of Judaeo-gnosticism that affirmed that Jesus was above man, but was not deity as God (2:5 -

3:4), and (4) to exhort Christians to refuse a legalistic approach to gospel living. He concluded the letter by exhorting Christians to maintain godly principles in their lives (2:16 - 4:6).

## 1 THESSALONIANS

1. **Author:** Paul, the apostle
2. **Date:** Between A.D. 50 & 52
3. **Purpose:** From Corinth on his second missionary journey, Paul wrote to this young fellowship of disciples who were probably less than a year old in the faith (At 17). He wrote (1) to commend them for their evangelistic outreach (1:2-10), (2) to remind them of how they came to Jesus, and (3) to give them further instruction concerning gospel living and teachings concerning the coming of Jesus and the resurrection (4:1 - 5:11).

## 2 THESSALONIANS

1. **Author:** Paul, the apostle
2. **Date:** Between A.D. 50 & 52
3. **Purpose:** Paul wrote this second letter to Thessalonica in order (1) to comfort the disciples in times of persecution (ch 1), (2) to correct misunderstandings concerning the final coming of Jesus (ch 2), and (3) to exhort the Christians concerning how to deal with those who were not working (ch 3).

## 1 TIMOTHY

1. **Author:** Paul, the apostle
2. **Date:** Between A.D. 61 & 63
3. **Purpose:** In this letter Paul wrote to the young evangelist Timothy in order (1) to give guidance in Timothy's evangelistic outreach. (2) He wrote in order to exhort him to stop the infiltration into the fellowship of the disciples the teaching of judaizing false teachers who had adopted Gnostic theologies, and (3) to give instructions concerning gospel living.

## 2 TIMOTHY

1. **Author:** Paul, the apostle
2. **Date:** Around A.D. 67
3. **Purpose:** As a prisoner in Rome around A.D. 67, Paul wrote this letter to the young evangelist Timothy who was somewhere in the region of Asia Minor at the time of writing. He wrote in order that Timothy stand against Gnostic Jewish teachers who turned the grace of God into a license to live after the flesh (3:1-9; see 1 Tm 6:3-5; Jd 4) and those who taught a legalistic asceticism (1 Tm 4:1-3). In view of the constant threat of false teachers who twisted Christianity to conform to their own desires, he encouraged Timothy to teach faithful men to carry on with their responsibilities as teachers of the word of God (2 Tm 2:2).

## TITUS

1. **Author:** Paul, the apostle
2. **Date:** Around A.D. 67
3. **Purpose:** After Paul's release from his first imprisonment, he traveled throughout Crete with Titus. Because he had to travel on soon after preaching in Crete, he left Titus on the island. He later wrote to instruct Titus concerning the work and spiritual conduct of the infant disciples (1:5). In giving these instructions, Paul specifically instructed Titus to deal with false judaizing teachers who threatened the unity of the fellowship of disciples and corrected dysfunctional gospel living (1:10-16; 3:9-11).

## PHILEMON

1. **Author:** Paul, the apostle
2. **Date:** Between A.D. 61 & 63
3. **Purpose:** Paul addressed this letter to his friend Philemon on behalf of Onesimus who had run away as a slave from Philemon. Paul wrote to encourage Philemon to receive Onesimus back as a brother in Christ, for Paul had converted him in prison.

## HEBREWS

1. **Author:** Paul, Barnabas, or some other writer
2. **Date:** Between A.D. 64 & 68
3. **Purpose:** This letter is directed to Jewish Christians who had been Christians for some time. In the face

of Jewish intimidation and persecution, they were on the verge of returning to Judaism. Therefore, the writer explained (1) the supremacy of Jesus (chs 1,2), (2) the better hope we have in Christ (3:1 - 4:13), (3) the superiority of the high priesthood of Jesus (4:14 - 7:28), and (4) the better covenant and sacrifice of Jesus over the Sinai covenant and sacrifices (10:19 - 13:25). In a discussion of these major subjects, the Hebrew writer sought to convince his audience that any return to their former Judaism would be forsaking the gospel that was revealed through Jesus.

## JAMES

1. **Author:** James, Jesus' brother
2. **Date:** Between A.D. 62 & 68
3. **Purpose:** In writing to the spiritual Israel of Christians who had been scattered throughout the world because of persecution (At 8:4), James wrote to encourage these predominantly Jewish Christians to maintain Christian values in the hostile environment in which they lived. They must remain faithful to their commitment in view of the impending destruction of Jerusalem and the Jews' heritage in A.D. 70 by the coming of Jesus in time in judgment on national Israel (5:7-9).

## 1 PETER

1. **Author:** Peter, the apostle

2. **Date:** Between A.D. 63 & 66
3. **Purpose:** In view of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, Peter wrote a few years before the event in order to exhort primarily Jewish Christians to remain faithful to their commitment to Christ throughout the calamity of the fall of national Israel (1:13 - 3:12). He wrote that they remain faithful regardless of the peripheral persecution through which the Jewish disciples would suffer as the Roman Empire terminated national Israel in A.D. 70 (3:13 - 4:19).

## 2 PETER

1. **Author:** Peter, the apostle
2. **Date:** Between A.D. 65 & 67
3. **Purpose:** In this second letter to Jewish Christians who were scattered through Asia Minor (See 3:1), Peter wrote to correct the misunderstanding that grace relieved one of conducting himself after Christian standards of gospel living. Peter wrote (1) to explain the nature of true knowledge (1:2-21), (2) to remind his readers of the dangers of falling from their salvation if true knowledge is forsaken (2:1-11), and (3) to give his readers hope in the passing of the things that now existed (3:1-18).

## 1 JOHN

1. **Author:** John, the apostle
2. **Date:** Between A.D. 60 & 70
3. **Purpose:** The apostle John wrote

to reassure Christians that they may know that they have eternal life in Jesus who was God incarnate in the flesh (5:11-13). In upholding this purpose of writing, he argued against some teachers who denied that the Son of God had come in the flesh. Believing that He did, says John, is the basis of Christian fellowship (1:3). Our belief in the incarnate Son of God should move us to obey the commandments of God and grow closer in fellowship with one another.

## 2 JOHN

1. **Author:** John, the apostle
2. **Date:** Between A.D. 60 & 70
3. **Purpose:** John wrote this short letter (1) to exhort the elect lady to continue in love, and thus, obey the commandments of Jesus. (2) He wrote to encourage her to resist those who come to her with the belief that the Son of God did not actually come in the flesh. (3) He thus reaffirms her faith in believing that Jesus was the incarnate Son of God.

## 3 JOHN

1. **Author:** John, the apostle
2. **Date:** Between A.D. 60 & 70
3. **Purpose:** Because Gaius had been discouraged and intimidated by the dictatorial control of the some disciples by Diotrephes, John wrote (1) to reassure and commend Gaius for his financial work in supporting

traveling evangelists (vss 1-8), (2) to identify the arrogant dictatorial rule of Diotrefes over other disciples (vss 9,10), and (3) to recommend Gaius to fellowship with Demetrius and follow after his good example (vss 11,12).

## JUDE

1. **Author:** Jude, Jesus' brother
2. **Date:** Between A.D. 65 & 67
3. **Purpose:** Jude wrote to counter the influence of arrogant Judaeo-agnostic teachers. These teachers taught that one could claim to be Christian as a result of the grace of God, but at the same time live a life of arrogance and lewdness. These teachers also denied the incarnation of the Son of God. In writing primarily to a Jewish audience, Jude encouraged the godly to remain faithful during the coming of the Lord in judgment on national Israel. This judgment came in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (vss 14,15).

## IV. PROPHECY

### REVELATION

1. **Author:** John, the apostle
2. **Date:** Between A.D. 65 & 96
3. **Purpose:** By writing this apocalyptic message in figurative language with cryptic images and symbols (Rv 1:1), John desired to encourage the disciples who were beginning to enter the state persecution of the Roman Empire, which persecution would last for well over a century. John wrote to reassure the saints that regardless of the force of state and religious persecution, they would overcome in the end because they had joined themselves to the Lamb (Jesus) who had overcome all things (See 15:2; 17:14). The historical events about which John wrote would shortly come to pass in reference to those of his audience (1:1; 22:6). He was not writing of judgments that would happen at the end of time, but to judgments that God would shortly unleash in time on those who persecuted the flock of God. Though writing of judgments in time, there are many lessons for the persecuted to remember when they are in times of trials.

## Chapter 4

# THE INSPIRED WORD OF GOD

The content, history, nature and every word of the Bible has been examined and scrutinized by scholars throughout centuries of diligent Bible study. And yet, it continues to be confirmed by millions of people to be the

inspired word of God. No other book in the history of the world has been examined in greater detail than the Bible. If there were any valid reason for it not to be a book beyond the ability of men to produce, then certainly such evidence would have been found.

Unbelievers have made numerous accusations against the Bible, and yet, men cannot explain its existence other than to say that it is existence is beyond the ability of men. Skeptics have accused that the Bible contradicts itself. And yet, no supposed contradiction has stood the test of a reasonable explanation. It is with great boldness, therefore, that Christians can confidently affirm that the Bible is from God. There is no other logical answer for its existence.

Contrary to the claim of some who have assumed that their own personal writings are from God, God determined to use several men over a period of many centuries in order to reveal His will to man in written form. There are numerous books in circulation today that were written by individuals. The *Quran*, the *Book of Mormon*, *Science and Health and Key to the Scriptures*, and such like are claimed to be from God. However, these and similar writings are the work of individuals whose content in no way compares to the Bible.

When one studies the Bible, it

too is a collection of the writings of different individuals. However, when these writings are considered together as one book, they do not contradict one another in their themes. The fact that they do not is evidence that their authorship is above the authors who originally penned the individual documents. Only through the inspiration of God could such a feat have been accomplished. We conclude, therefore, that we have the word of God today in the Bible only because such could not have been invented by men.

### **A. The origin of the Bible:**

The Bible could not be the invention of men. If it had been the invention of men, then the invention would have superseded the men who wrote it. God used men, however, to bring the Bible into existence. He used men to communicate His will to the world. This was accomplished in the following manner:

**1. Definition of inspiration:** The word of God came to man by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Greek word that is translated “inspiration” is *theopneustos*. It literally means “God-breathed.” The Bible as the word of God, therefore, has been breathed out by God.

**2. Biblical use of the word “inspiration”:** The word *theopneustos*



is used in the New Testament in 2 Timothy 3:16 where it is stated that the word of God is inspired by God. Paul wrote, “*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God ....*”

Through the Holy Spirit, God “breathed out” His word to chosen men in a manner that all men could understand His will (See 1 Co 2:10-13; 2 Pt 1:20,21; Ep 3:3-5). Paul wrote,

*You have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I wrote before in a few words, by which, **when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ**) (Ep 3:2-4).*

**3. The process of inspiration:** God’s work through the Holy Spirit to reveal His will to man came through inspiration. It was a work of God to use spiritually qualified men in order to convey to all men spiritual concepts.

**a. Writing by the direction of the Holy Spirit:** Men were inspired to write the word of God. Peter explained,

*Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, **but holy men of***

*God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit* (2 Pt 1:20,21; see 2 Sm 23:2; Mt 22:43; At 1:16; 2 Tm 3:16; Hb 3:7; 9:8; 10:15).

**b. Writing God’s words by the direction of the Holy Spirit:** By inspiration, the Holy Spirit guided the writers of the Bible (Jn 14:26; 16:13; 2 Pt 1:20,21). He did so in order to reveal the mind of God to man through the use of inspired words. Paul affirmed,

*But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit.” (1 Co 2:10). “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual [words] (1 Co 2:13).*

**c. Writing the commandments of God by the direction of the Holy Spirit:** The Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the Bible both to speak and to write the word of God for man. Paul wrote,

*If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, **let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord** (1 Co 14:37; see Ex 2:7; 3:4,10; 24:4; 35:1; Nm 22:35; 23:5,12,16; Dt 18:18; 2 Sm 23:2; Is 51:16; Jr 1:9; 36:4-6; 1 Co 7:40).*

**d. Writing the communication of God by the direction of the Holy Spirit:** The word of God is God's medium of speaking through inspired men (Dt 18:18; Jr 1:9; Ez 2:7; 3:4,10,11,17; 2 Tm 3:16,17; 2 Pt 1:21), to men (2 Th 2:14; Hb 1:1,2). It is God speaking through the Holy Spirit to men (2 Sm 23:2; Ez 11:5; Lk 1:67), and God speaking through the Holy Spirit through men to men (Lk 1:70; At 28:25; Rm 1:2; 16:26). It is God's revelation to man through inspired words of truth (1 Co 2:13; Jr 36:4).

Any book can claim to be inspired. If a book as the Bible is inspired by God, then certainly we would expect it to claim to be inspired. Because the Bible claims to be inspired, men who doubt its inspiration must deal with this claim. One cannot deny the inspiration of the Bible without first investigating the text of the Bible. But when men investigate the text of the Bible, they must investigate it from the viewpoint of how we would expect the Bible to be inspired and preserved for us today. We must remember that God inspired His word to be written in a manner that would demand faith on the part of those who are hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

## **B. The confirmation of the Bible:**

If the Bible is the inspired word of God, then certainly we would expect that God would in some way give His miraculous approval that it was actually His word. In other words, He did not give His word to man without confirming it to be from Him. The word of God thus came to man in a different manner than the word of ordinary men. God not only inspired men to preach and write His word, but He also sent confirming miracles to prove that His word was more than the product of mere men.

**1. The work of confirmation:** God did not expect us to believe His word simply by having it written for us to read. There are other great pieces of literature that have been written throughout the centuries. What makes the Bible different is the fact that God confirmed His word with that which only God can do, that is, manifest Himself through miracle. Mark recorded, "*And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs*" (Mk 16:20).

**a. Confirmation:** The word "confirm" in reference to the word of God means that God's word was proven to be the direct work of God. It means that the Bible is not the in-

vention of men, though men were used to bring the Bible into the hands of men.

**b. Miraculous confirmation:** The word that was spoken by the early messengers of God was proven to be from God by the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who first spoke the word of God. In reference to the work of the early Christians who preached the word of God, the Hebrew writer stated concerning God's work in their lives,

*How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will (Hb 2:3,4; see 1 Kg 18:30-40; Mk 16:20; At 2:33; 4:29,30; 1 Co 2:1-5; 12:7; Gl 3:5; 1 Th 1:5).*

Once God proved that He was behind His messengers, He then expected everyone to listen to the word they spoke. Confirmation of the Bible, therefore, means that God confirmed His messengers as His spokesmen in order to confirm their word.

**2. The writing of the confirmed word:** Once God confirmed the spoken word, then the spoken word could

be written and believed by men of all history.

**a. The spoken word was written.** The inspired writers of the Bible recorded by the aid of the Holy Spirit their miraculously proven word for the benefit of all men of all ages. Inspired truth was usually first spoken through God's messengers. It was later written in order to be preserved for later generations. Paul wrote in reference to this point,

*For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope (Rm 15:4; see Rm 15:18,19; 1 Co 2:4; 10:11; 1 Th 1:5).*

**b. The word was recorded for all time.** The written word of God is the Bible. This word need not be reconfirmed today by miracles because we have the record of confirming miracles recorded in the Bible. Once the word of God was confirmed to be from God, then it was confirmed for all history. We thus believe the Bible today because we believe the testimony of those who first experienced the confirming work of God in their lives.

**C. The all-sufficiency of the Bible:**

If the Bible is from the God who created man a free-moral individual in order to make choices, then we would assume that God would deliver to man His word that would be sufficient for all the choices that a free-moral individual would have to make. In this way, the Bible is all-sufficient. It is all-sufficient in giving every free-moral individual that which is necessary in order to live a godly life in his relationship both with God and his fellow man.

The fact that the word of God is all-sufficient in order to furnish the Christian with all that is necessary to be acceptable to God, affirms also that binding religious traditions of men are unnecessary as requirements for salvation. Every self-sanctifying religious tradition that is bound on the consciences of men is an attack against the sufficiency of the Bible. God expects us to accept His word as sufficient, for He expects to accomplish great things in our lives through His word. If the following can be accomplished through the revealed word of God, the Bible, then the binding of religious traditions on the consciences of men is not necessary:

**1. *The Bible has the power to change lives.*** The word of God is completely able, if obeyed by an honest individual, to change the moral behavior of that individual to be well-

pleasing to God. Paul affirmed that the word of God is ...

*... profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, **thoroughly equipped for every good work** (2 Tm 3:16,17; see 1 Pt 2:1,2; 1 Th 4:1,2; 3 Jn 3,4).*

Peter wrote that ...

*... His divine power has given to us **all things** that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue (2 Pt 1:3).*

**2. *The Bible has the power to save souls.*** Because the word of God can change the behavior of those God-fearing people who accept it as the word of God, the Bible can do the following:

**a. *The word of God gives life.*** Jesus said that if we keep His word, we will never eternally die. *“Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death”* (Jn 8:51; see Jn 5:24; 11:26). The obedient will physically die. However, they will not suffer the second death of separation from God (2 Th 1:7-9).

**b. *The word of God saves.*** The word of God is sufficient to eter-

nally save one's soul. James wrote,

*Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls* (Js 1:21; see At 11:14; 20:32; Hb 4:12).

The word of God is able to save one's soul because in God's word are those principles by which we must conduct our lives (Ph 3:16; 1 Th 4:1; 1 Jn 1:6,7; 2 Jn 4; 3 Jn 3,4).

**c. The word of God reveals spiritual principles.** The word of God is the perfect law of liberty that gives principles by which we have the liberty to free-morally direct our lives according to the will of God (Js 1:25). Through His word, God has delivered unto us the spiritual principles by which we must conduct our lives. Those who are hungering and thirsting after righteousness will seek to live by these principles.

**d. The word of God is sufficient for godly living.** The word of God is sufficient in the Christian's life to produce that which God requires of all Christians. The following are things that God expects to be accomplished through the power of His word working in receptive hearts. Christians are to use the word of God to do these things:

- To preach in order to be heard

(Mt13:9,43; Lk 16:29; Jn 6:45), understood (Ep 3:4,5), and believed (Jn 20:30,31; At 8:12,13,37,38; 13:48).

- To teach Christians (Rm 15:4; Pv 22:6; Ps 119:103,104).
- To admonish Christians in moral conduct (1 Co 4:14; 10:11).
- To reveal the will of God (2 Co 13:10; 2 Pt 1:12).
- To direct the Christian's behavior in relation to others (Cl 1:5-10; 1 Tm 3:14,15).
- To guard the Christian against apostasy (Mt 4:4-11; 2 Tm 3:14-17; 2 Pt 1:12; Jd 17-21).
- To assure the Christian of salvation (2 Pt 1:9-11; 1 Jn 2:2-4; 5:13).
- To reprove, rebuke, correct and instruct Christians (2 Tm 3:16).
- To bring fellowship between the Christian and God (1 Jn 1:1-4,6-10).
- To motivate the Christian to a better life (1 Pt 5:12; 2 Pt 1:12-14).

The fact that the Bible produces that which is necessary to direct every aspect of one's behavior in relation to his fellow man is evidence that the Bible is from God. It is not a culturally linked book in that it was written for only one cultural group in one nation. It was written with principles that permeate time and culture. It was written with principles that will guide everyone unto an abundant life (Jn 10:10). Such is proof that the Bible is not of human invention, for only

God could have produced that which is applicable to all men for all time.

#### **D. The completion of revelation through the Bible:**

It was never God's plan to continually speak directly to the fathers of tribal families throughout history (Hb 1:1,2). It was never His plan to always use living judges and prophets as a means of revealing His will to man. The giving of the ten commandments on Mount Sinai was God's first indication that the communication of His will, and the obedience of His people, should rest on their knowledge of and obedience to a written record of His will. For this reason, God planned that through a complete revelation of what He wanted man to know should be recorded for His people to study and obey. It is for this reason that we have the word of God in written form today.

All that God wants us to know is revealed in the Bible. He has completed His revelation of truth to man. No more inspired revelation has been added to the Bible since the last book of the Bible (Revelation) was written by inspiration.

**1. All truth from God has been revealed through the Bible.** All truth that is necessary for godly living in a

world where free-moral individuals live has been revealed through the Bible. Paul wrote that the Scriptures are sufficient to thoroughly equip the man of God unto every good work (2 Tm 3:16,17). Because we are free-moral individuals with the freedom and ability to choose, God has revealed His instructions for us to live in this environment of free-moral existence.

##### **a. Revelation to the fathers:**

God revealed His will to fathers of extended family groups in the Old Testament era before the giving of the Sinai law on Mount Sinai. "*God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets*" (Hb 1:1,2).

**b. Revelation to Israel:** God revealed His will to Israel on Mount Sinai. To Israel, God gave His oracles (Rm 3:1,2; see Dt 4:1,13; 5:1-5; Ex 19:4-6; Ne 8:1).

**c. Revelation for our learning:** God revealed His will to the Old Testament writers who recorded such for our learning. Paul wrote, "*For whatever things were written before were written for our learning*" (Rm 15:4; see 1 Co 10:11).

**d. Revelation of final truth to the apostles:** God revealed all truth to the New Testament apostles in the first century. Jesus promised His apostles,

*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you (Jn 14:26)*

*However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come (Jn 16:13).*

We have all necessary truth today that has been recorded for our doctrinal and moral guidance. Peter wrote, “His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pt 1:3; see Gl 1:11,12; Ep 3:3-5; 2 Tm 3:16,17).

**e. Revelation of the mystery to the apostles:** The truth that was revealed to the apostles was recorded by the New Testament apostles and prophets. Paul reminded the 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 (Ep*

*3:3-5; see 1 Co 2:10-13; 14:37).*

Throughout the Bible it is stated that God has revealed His will to man through a written medium of communication. The written will of God is now God’s medium by which He seeks to communicate to us today. Anyone who would seek communication from God apart from the Bible is actually forsaking God by forsaking the medium of written communication through which He seeks to direct man.

**2. The revelation of God has been completed through the Bible.** Since God has revealed His will for man to live in an environment for free-moral individuals, then we must assume that His revelation (directions for living) is complete and sufficient for men of all time to direct their steps. It is necessary to come to this conclusion lest we question the very sufficiency of the Bible as God’s means by which He seeks to direct man. Since the written word of God is the means of communication through which God seeks to direct men today, then we would naturally assume that the Bible would claim to be sufficient to accomplish God’s purpose of directing our steps in gospel living.

**a. God’s word is all-sufficient.** The word of God is complete

and able to furnish us with all things that are necessary for life and godliness (2 Tm 3:16,17). It furnishes man with all that is necessary for gospel living (2 Pt 1:3). The point is that if we did not have the written record of God's directions in the Bible, we would not know how to live according to the will of God. The vast assortment of world religions that have been created after the desires of man is evidence of this fact. Men are religious. They must express their religiosity in some manner. If men forsake the communication of God through His word, then they will create a religion after their own desires and a god after their own image. Because men seek to do this, it is absolutely necessary that people allow God to explain Himself and His will for man through the written revelation of the Bible.

**b. Additions or subtractions from God's word is condemned.** God has explained Himself. He has revealed truth by which all men can direct their paths. The truth, or the faith, to which we are warned not to add or subtract (G1 1:6-9; Rv 22:18,19), has been once and for all time delivered to man (Jd 3).

There are three very important statements concerning this matter in the New Testament. In the Galatian context, judaizing teachers were infiltrating the church with "another

gospel." This other gospel was a legalistic teaching of perfect law-keeping that attacked the sufficiency of the grace of God. The judaizers taught that meritorious works of law and good deeds must supplement the grace of God. However, Paul stated the principle that we must not allow the addition of man's religious rites to be added to that which is required of God for salvation.

*I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a **different gospel**, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to **pervert the gospel of Christ**. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed (G1 1:6-8).*

Second, Jude wrote to those who were suffering from the same attack against the grace of God that was happening among the Galatian disciples. In this brief document of inspired direction, Jude wrote,

*Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for **the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints** (Jd 3).*



The nature of Jude's statement is that "the faith" has once and for all time been delivered to the saints. The conclusion is that there will be no more revelation from God until Jesus comes again. There will be no more religious rites added to that which has already been revealed.

A third important passage on the above theme is the last statement of the New Testament canon of scriptures. In making the statement of Revelation 22:18,19, the Holy Spirit certainly knew that men would seek to add to or revise what was revealed in the book of Revelation. Because it was a book of figurative literature, the Spirit knew that the uncontrolled imaginations of misguided religionists would distort what He had revealed through John. Therefore, the Spirit warned,

*For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: **If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.***

The principle from the preceding statement of the Bible is very clear. God intended that His revelation to

man through a written record should be complete, and since it is complete, then men should never add to or subtract from this word of revelation. All who would lay on the consciences of men the religious rites of men or the directions of misguided emotional hysteria, would do well to take serious heed to what God has instructed concerning His word. Since the Bible is the final communication of God to man, then men must humbly search the Scriptures (See At 17:11).

**3. God warns against adding to His word.** Since the Bible is God's final word to man, then naturally one would conclude that this revealed word should be guarded against additions and subtractions. God created man a religious being who is a free-moral individual with the freedom to choose. In man's rebellion against his Creator, it is always the desire of men to stray from the directions of the Creator. Therefore, within the revelation of God to man, there are stern warnings against adding religious laws to what God would require of man to do in order to be saved.

**a. Warnings against additions:** There has been no more revelation of truth from God since the first century A.D. The word of God warns that some would stray from the truth, but it exhorts Christians not to

follow such false teachers. There would also be those who have no love of the truth, and thus, would seek to create their own expression of religiosity. Paul wrote,

*... and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Th 2:10-12; see Rm 16:17; 2 Th 3:6; 2 Tm 4:1-4; 2 Jn 9-11).*

**b. Warnings against adding religious traditions:** The Bible contains stern warnings against any who would attempt to add human religious rites or traditions as law in order that men might self-sanctify themselves before God. When anyone leaves the direction of God through His written revelation, he will seek after an expression of religious behavior that is according to his own desire to justify himself before God.

It is also true that when a culture of people seek to maintain their own religious traditions, those traditions will lead those of the cultural group away from the word of God. This is precisely what happened to the Jews by the time Jesus came. Jesus said of

the religious leadership of Israel, “*All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition*” (Mk 7:9; see Dt 4:2; Mk 7:1-9; Gl 1:6-9; 2 Jn 9-11; Rv 22:18:19).

The biblical claim of the all-sufficiency of the word of God assumes that men not add to it. If the Bible is what it claims to be—the word of God—then men must assume that God is able to produce a timeless book of principles for man’s direction. If God could not produce a guide for moral behavior for all time, then we would question His ability to reveal timeless moral values to man. The result of adding human invented religious traditions, therefore, is to accuse God of being unable to produce a book of timeless moral principles by which we can live according to His will. Any religious law of man that is bound on man is an attack against the all-sufficiency of the word of God, and thus unproductive in bringing one closer to Jesus.

## **E. The power of the Bible:**

The word of God is the active instrument of God to convict the world of sin, as well as to build up the saint (At 20:32; 1 Th 2:13; Hb 4:12; 1 Pt 1:23; Jr 20:9; 23:29). It is not a dead letter. When believed by

honest, God-fearing people, the Bible produces great spiritual lives. It produces such lives because God-fearing men and women seek to live in response to the gospel they have obeyed.

**1. The characteristics of the word of God:** The characteristics of the word of God are manifested in the fact of what the Holy Spirit says God's word is to do in our lives. It is able to do the following when men and women allow it to direct their lives:

**a. The word of God is to be laid up in our hearts.** The word of God can be laid up in our hearts in order that we not sin against God. David wrote of the righteous man, "*The law of His God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide*" (Ps 37:31). He wrote of himself, "*Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You*" (Ps 119:11).

**b. The word of God can dwell in our hearts.** It can dwell in our hearts as we allow its principles to permeate our behavior. Paul wrote, "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom ...*" (Cl 3:16; see 1 Jn 2:14,25; 3:9; 2 Jn 2).

**c. The word of God is written on the hearts of the righteous.** The word of God can be written on our hearts when we submit to its prin-

ciples. David wrote, "*I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart*" (Ps 40:8; see Jr 31:32,33; 2 Co 3:3; Hb 8:10; 10:16).

**d. The word of God dwells in the hearts of the obedient.** It dwells in our hearts when sincerely believed and obeyed. James wrote, "*... receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls*" (Js 1:21; see Js 1:22-25; 1 Jn 1:6,7; 2 Jn 4; 3 Jn 3,4). Peter wrote, "*Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart*" (1 Pt 1:22).

**2. The work of the word of God:** God intends that His word function in the following ways in the lives of those who submit to the authority of His word:

- Produce faith (Jn 20:30,31; Rm 10:17).
- Sanctify the soul (Jn 17:17; Ep 5:26; 1 Tm 4:4,5).
- Cleanse the heart (Jn 15:2; Ep 5:26).
- Purify the soul (1 Pt 1:22).
- Quicken the soul (Ps 119:50,93; Ep 2:1,5).
- Enlighten the mind (Ps 19:8).
- Give understanding (Ps 119:104, 130; Ep 3:4).
- Lead one's life (Ps 73:24; 119:105).

- Comfort the heart (Rm 15:4; 1 Th 3:2; 4:18).
- Produce spiritual growth (At 20:32; Cl 1:10,11).
- Strengthen the heart (At 20:32; 2 Tm 2:1,2).
- Admonish (1 Co 4:14; 10:11).
- Exhort (1 Pt 5:12).
- Instruct (Ne 9:20,26,30; 2 Tm 3:16,17).
- Move to obey the gospel (At 18:5).

Since God intends that the Bible be the final revelation of His will to man, then it is imperative that all men seek to obey what is revealed in the Bible. We live in a world where men have sought to create every sort of religion. The fact that men have done this is evidence that men do not have a love for the truth. They do not have a desire to seek for written communication from God through His word. Therefore, since men will refuse to seek after their Creator, we must guard ourselves from being led astray by the masses of humanity who do not have a love for the truth.

With an increased faith in the Bible as the word of God, one is en-

couraged to study the Bible in order to understand the will of God. In understanding the will of God, one is directed in his life to live a godly life. It is imperative, therefore, that one first understand that the Bible is the actual word of God. If he or she does not, then there will be no motivation to either study or apply what the Bible teaches concerning godly living. But if one understands that the Bible is the actual word of God, then he or she does not have enough time in the day to study. Every Christian should make every effort to increase his or her confidence in the fact that the Bible is God speaking to us in order to bring us into an eternal dwelling in heaven. If we understand this, then the Bible comes alive in our lives as we seek to do the will of God, as well as learn the mind of God and the knowledge that God has revealed to us through the pages of the Bible.

When one has confidence in the Bible as the word of God, then he excludes any other religious rites as conditions for salvation. He concludes that the word of God is our sole authority in matters of faith.

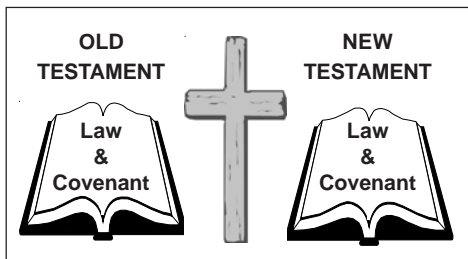
## Chapter 5

### OLD AND NEW COVENANTS AND LAWS

The Bible contains two major covenants and two written laws that God has given in history to His people. The first covenant was made

only with the nation of Israel. The first law of this covenant was the Sinai law that was given as the conditions for keeping of the covenant. This law was referred to as the “law of Moses” (Ne 8:1), the “law of God” (Ne 8:8,18; see 8:14), the “law of the Lord” (Lk 2:22-24), or simply “the law” (Jn 1:17; 8:9-19; Rm 8:9-19; 7:7).

The second covenant and law, the New Testament covenant and law of Christ, were brought into force after Jesus died on the cross. This covenant and law were brought into force at the first official announcement of the kingdom reign of Jesus. The first official announcement of Jesus’ reign occurred in Acts 2 when Peter proclaimed Jesus’ reign on the throne of David (At 2:29-36; see Cl 2:14; Hb 9:16,17). A new covenant has now been established between God and His people (Mt 26:26-29). God’s people today are under a new law which is referred to as the “law of the Spirit of life” (Rm 8:2), the “perfect law of liberty” (Js 1:25), and the “law of Christ” (Gl 6:2).



It is important to understand the division between the Old and New Testaments in order to understand the Bible. Most people today do not understand the Bible correctly simply because they do not understand the difference between the two covenants of God that are explained in the Bible and the two laws of these two covenants. This is even true in reference to understanding the ministry of Jesus. Jesus did not live under His new law and covenant. Jesus was a Jew. His ministry was to the Jews. He thus lived under the Sinai law in order to bring Israel to the cross and the new covenant that God had promised He would establish with all men who would come into a covenant relationship with Him (Jr 31:31-34). For this reason, we must understand the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John as history books concerning the ministry of Jesus who lived and ministered under the Sinai law.

### A. The Sinai covenant and law:

The Sinai law of the covenant that God established with the nation of Israel existed because God wanted to preserve a segment of society for the coming of the Son of God. When considering the origin and purpose of the Sinai law, we must always keep in mind that both the nation of Israel and the Sinai law were established and

given for the purpose of bringing the Savior of man into the world.

**1. Origin of the Sinai law:** The Sinai law (Gn - Dt) was given to the nation of Israel by God about 3,500 years ago on Mount Sinai. In God's eternal gospel plan of redemption, this law was given to prepare and preserve a remnant of society for the revelation of the gospel of the Son of God. God worked in history by establishing a covenant with the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai. The conditions for Israel to keep this covenant was the giving of the Sinai law to the nation of Israel.

**a. Establishment of a covenant:** God established a covenant with the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai. He first made a covenant with Abraham, the father of the Israelite nation (Gn 15:18). When Israel came out of Egyptian captivity over four hundred years after Abraham lived, Moses was directed to bring the Israelites to Mount Sinai. At Mount Sinai God then went through the rites of establishing a covenant relationship with the entire nation of Israel (Ex 24).

**b. Establishment of the law of the covenant:** The ten commandments of the Sinai law were given on Mount Sinai in the fifteenth century before the revelation of the gospel (Ex 19:11,18-20; Dt 33:2; Ne 9:13). The

Sinai law was given as the condition upon which Israel was to maintain their covenant relationship with God.

**c. Establishment of the law through the medium of angels:** The Sinai law was given through angels. The Angel of God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai (At 7:38). Israel then received the law through the direction of angels (At 7:53; see Gl 3:19; Hb 2:2)

**d. Establishment of the law through the mediatorship of Moses:** The Sinai law was given through angels to Moses for Israel. As Christ was the mediator through whom the New Testament law came, Moses was the mediator through whom God worked to give the Sinai law to Israel (Ne 8:14; 9:14 Jn 1:17; 7:19).

**e. Establishment of the law with Israel:** The Sinai law was given only to the Jews, the children of Israel. The Sinai covenant was not established with all men. The conditions for keeping the covenant, therefore, were not for all men of all history. Before their entrance into the land of promise, Moses said to Israel,

*Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you (Dt 4:1, see vs 13).*

*And Moses called all Israel, and said to them: "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your hearing today, that you may learn them and be careful to observe them. The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb [Mount Sinai]. The LORD did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, those who are here today, all of us who are alive (Dt 5:1-5; see Ex 19:4-6; Ne 8:1).*

The conditions for this covenant, the Sinai law, were given specifically to them (Rm 3:1,2). For this reason, Christians today are not under either the Sinai covenant or law.

## **2. The purpose of the Sinai law:**

Once we understand that the Sinai covenant and law were never meant to be an end within themselves. The Sinai covenant and law were preparatory for the coming Messiah and the revelation of the gospel. Through the revelation of the gospel, God explained the purpose for which the Sinai law was given and the special covenant He made with Israel. Understanding this purpose helps us to understand that once the purpose of the Sinai covenant and law were fulfilled, they were terminated.

### **a. The law was a shadow.**

The Sinai law was a **shadow** that was

cast by good things to come in the future of national Israel (Hb 10:1; Cl 2:16,17). Therefore, it was not the substance. It was only an indication of better things that were to come. The better things to come have now come, and thus, we are not subject to the shadow, but to the substance that cast the shadow.

**b. The Sinai law was a tutor.** The Sinai law was a **tutor**, or headmaster, to preserve a portion of humanity (the nation of Israel) until men could be delivered to faith in Jesus (Gl 3:24,25). Once a tutor accomplished his purpose, he was no longer needed. Once the Sinai law had accomplished its purpose, it was no longer needed for the purpose for which it was originally established.

**c. The Sinai law was given to manifest imperfection.** The Sinai law was given to reveal one's inability to be justified by perfect law-keeping. It is impossible for any man to live without sinning against law. In order to prove this point, Israel was given law in order that they might understand that all have sinned, and thus, fall short of the glory of God (Rm 3:9,23). Therefore, when Jesus came, sincere believers in Israel were moved to depend on the grace of God that was revealed through Jesus (Gl 2:15,16). They were thus moved to grace because no one could perfectly obey any law in order to be justified

before God (Rm 3:20; 7:7,24,25; Gl 2:16).

**d. The Sinai law preserved a heritage.** The Sinai law was given to preserve Abraham's heritage until God could fulfill His promise that in Abraham's seed all nations of the earth would be blessed with the eternal offering of the Son of God (Gn 12:1-3; Gl 3:8,16-19). God did not want to happen with Israel what happened before the flood of Noah's day when every imagination of men became evil continually (Gn 6:5). In order to direct man to the cross, He gave a segment of society (the nation of Israel) a law by which there would be the preservation of this group of faithful followers who would accept the Son of God when He was revealed.

**e. The Sinai law was written for our learning.** The Sinai law was written, and thus, it preserved for our instruction today the will of God. Paul wrote, "*Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come*" (1 Co 10:11; see Rm 15:4).

**3. Weakness of men under the Sinai law:** The Sinai law that was given to the Jews was not faulty for the purpose for which it was given. It was God's law, and thus, it was holy, just and good (Rm 7:12). It was not given to man as a means to salvation,

for no one can keep law perfectly in order to save himself (Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16). One can never be saved by his own meritorious works of law, for all men sin (Rm 3:23). Because all are sinners, no one could keep the Sinai law in order to save himself from spiritual death, for the law demanded perfection in order to be saved (Hb 8:7,8). Therefore, the weakness of the law was not in the law itself, but in the ones to whom the law was given.

**a. Insufficiency of animal sacrifices:** Animal sacrifices of the law could not in and of themselves take away sins. The Hebrew writer stated, "*For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins*" (Hb 10:4; see 9:15).

**b. Insufficiency of man:** No man can be justified by meritorious works of the law (At 13:39; Rm 3:20,28; Gl 2: 16; 3:10,11; Hb 10:1-4). It was the misunderstanding of the Jews that they could acquire salvation by meritoriously doing good works in order to atone for sins against the law. They also believed that through their self-sanctification through good words, they could merit justification before God.

Many Jews did not understand that God's salvation has always been extended to man by His grace and is to be accepted by obedient faith (See Hk 2:4; Rm 1:17; Gl 3:11; Hb 10:38).



Therefore, by the performance of law men could not be justified by the Sinai law. Paul clearly stated, *“Therefore by the deeds of the law **no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin**”* (Rm 3:20; see Gl 2:16).

The fact is that no man can be justified by any law of God simply because no man can keep any law perfectly in order to demand salvation on the basis of meritorious obedience. Our problem, therefore, is that righteousness (justification) before God cannot be achieved by meritorious works of law. It is not possible for man to keep law perfectly in order to save himself.

By works of merit one cannot receive life under law (Gl 3:21,22). God never intended that the Sinai law could make man perfect before Him (Hb 7:18,19). It was only a shadow that was cast by the good things to come. The law was a shadow of the gospel of Christ (Hb 10:1). Therefore, there was forgiveness under the Sinai law only in prospect of the blood of Christ that was given for those who responded to God through faith (Rm 3:27; Hb 9:15). The blessing of our forgiveness, therefore, is not in our meritorious obedience to law, but in the cross of Jesus Christ.

#### **4. Abolishment of the Sinai law:**

The Sinai law was never meant to be a permanent law of God. It was only temporary, for God promised a new law and covenant that was to come (Jr 31:31-34). Therefore, God intended that the Sinai law exist only until the time came for the establishment of the New Testament law of Christ. When the law of Christ came, the Sinai law vanished away.

##### **a. Enforcement of the Sinai law until the coming of the Messiah:**

When the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy concerning the coming of the Messiah was fulfilled, God sent forth Jesus into the world. *“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law”* (Gl 4:4). Therefore, the Sinai law was to be in force only until the time when the Seed (Christ) came (Gl 3:19).

##### **b. Abolishment of the Sinai law by the Seed:**

Jesus came to fulfill the Sinai law (Mt 5:17,18). He said, *“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy **but to fulfill**”* (Mt 5:17,18). His fulfillment of the Sinai law meant that it would be taken away as a law that God would demand that men obey.

##### **c. Nailing of the Sinai law to the cross of Christ:**

When Jesus died on the cross, the Sinai law was made void. In reference to the abol-

ishment of the Sinai covenant and law, the Hebrew writer stated of Jesus, “Then He said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.’ **He takes away the first that He may establish the second**” (Hb 10:9). The Sinai law was thus abolished at the cross (Cl 2:14; Ep 2:14-16). This was accomplished in order that the new covenant and law of Christ be brought into force (Hb 9:16,17). The abolishment of the Sinai law made room for the establishment of the New Covenant law of Christ. We are thus under Christ, not the Sinai law.

**d. Dead to the Sinai law by the body of Christ:** The early Jews during the time of Christ were made dead to the Sinai law by the death of Jesus. When they submitted to the gospel of Christ, they were no longer subject to the Sinai law. Paul wrote,

*Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God” (See Rm 7:1-6).*

Christians are not obligated by God to submit to the ordinances of the Sinai law as a legal system of justification. Their obedience to the gospel frees them from the bondage of animal sacrifices and the ordinances of

the Sinai law.

**e. Benefit from the priesthood of Jesus:** There was a change of priesthood when Jesus ascended to heaven (Hb 7:11-25). Jesus became our high priest (Hb 8:1; 9:11; 2:17). Therefore, the change in priesthood necessitated a change from the Sinai law to the law of Christ (Hb 7:11-14), for under the Sinai law only those of the tribe of Levi could be priests. But Jesus was of the tribe of Judah. Therefore, He could not be our high priest today unless the law was changed.

The Sinai law has been nullified and Christians are free from its bondage through the freedom of the gospel (Gl 4:21-5:1). Since it has been nullified for those who are now sons of God by faith, then the sons of God are no longer subservient to its ordinances.

## **B. The new law of liberty:**

The Sinai law was given in view of the revelation of the gospel through Jesus Christ. The termination of the Sinai law was exemplified by the coming of the new covenant of Christ, for the new covenant manifested the weakness of those who lived under the Sinai law. The giving of law manifested the inability of man to keep law perfectly in order to be saved. The Sinai law functioned in this manner

to reveal the sinfulness of man. The coming of the new law of liberty continued to manifest the inability of man to be justified by meritorious works of law. However, the new covenant has a law of grace and faith. In this way, it is a law of liberty (Jn 1:25). John wrote, “*For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*” (Jn 1:17). Jesus came with a message of grace, not a message of law. It is for this reason that Christians concentrate on the superiority of the law of liberty over the old law.

**1. Establishment of the law of liberty:** When Jesus came, He came with a new covenant (testament) and law for man. This was a better covenant with a better law. It was a covenant and law of grace and truth that was purchased by His own blood. Our focus today should be on Jesus and His covenant that He has established with all those who have submitted to the gospel.

**a. God speaks through Jesus.** Before the cross, God spoke to the fathers through the prophets, but “*has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things*” (Hb 1:1,2). God speaks to man today through Jesus (See Mt 17:5; Jn 12:48; At 4:12). Therefore, it is to Jesus every man

must turn in order to be directed by God.

**b. God revealed His grace through the cross.** Grace and the truth of the gospel were revealed through Jesus (Jn 1:17). The revelation of God’s grace and the truth of the gospel came through the sacrificial offering of Jesus on the cross. “*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men*” (Ti 2:11). Therefore, those who seek to be saved by the grace of God must flee to the cross where there is redemption and sanctification of sins through the blood of Jesus (Ep 1:7).

**c. The way to life is through the gospel.** Jesus is now the way, truth and life. Jesus said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*” (Jn 14:6).

**d. Jesus is our final authority.** At the final judgment, Christians will be judged by the words of Jesus. Jesus said, “*He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day*” (Jn 12:48; see At 17:30,31). Therefore, Jesus has the words of spirit and life (Jn 6:63). It is through Him that all men must approach unto God (See At 4:12).

**e. Jesus instituted a new covenant.** The Hebrew writer wrote of Jesus’ work of establishing a new

covenant with man:

*For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. **For a testament is in force after men are dead**, since it has no power at all while the testator lives (Hb 9:16,17).*

The Hebrew writer's point is that the new testament (covenant) under which Christians now live in their relationship with God was dedicated with the sacrificial blood of Jesus (Hb 9:18-28). Therefore, Christians do not seek a blood offering through animals as was the case under the Sinai law. They seek for the blood offering of the incarnate Son of God who gave Himself on the cross.

**f. Christians are under a perfect law of liberty.** Because of the grace of God that was revealed through Jesus on the cross, Christians are not under law. They are under grace. They are under a law that allows liberty. The new covenant has a perfect law of liberty as the condition for the keeping of the covenant policy (Js 1:25).

**2. Superiority of the law of liberty:** The law of liberty and covenant is superior to the Sinai law and covenant because the new has a better hope (Hb 7:19), a better covenant (Hb 7:22; 8:6), better promises (Hb 8:6),

better sacrifices (Hb 9:23), a better possession (Hb 10:34), a better resurrection (Hb 11:35) and a better blood offering (Hb 12:24). Because of these better things, the law of liberty and covenant are superior to the old.

**a. The law of liberty and covenant are for all nations.** Jesus commanded His disciples to take the gospel into all nations (Mk 16:15). Those who were discipled to Christ were to be baptized (Mt 28:19,20). In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile (Gl 3:26-28). The New Testament law and covenant, therefore, are offered to all nations, not just to the Jews.

**b. The law of liberty and covenant were dedicated with blood.** The new covenant was dedicated by the sacrificial blood of the Son of God (1 Co 5:7; Hb 10:10, 19,20; 1 Pt 1:19). Therefore, all who come into a covenant relationship with Jesus through obedience to the gospel, come into a covenant that was dedicated by the blood of the incarnate Son of God.

**c. The law of liberty and covenant come with the eternal offering of Jesus.** The law of liberty and covenant have Jesus as an eternal offering (Hb 9:28) and high priest (Hb 8:1; 9:11). Therefore, those who come into this covenant relationship with Jesus need not worry about the

insufficiency of any offering that is of this world.

**d. The New Testament law and covenant save to the uttermost.**

The Hebrew writer stated, *“Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them”* (Hb 7:25).

**e. The law of liberty and covenant offer justification.**

Paul wrote that the Corinthians were justified when they came into Christ (1 Co 6:11). They, as well as all Christians, have been justified by the blood of Christ (Ep 1:7).

**f. The law of liberty and covenant are written on our hearts.**

In quoting Jeremiah 31:31-34, the Hebrew writer stated, *“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts”* (Hb 8:10).

**g. The law of liberty and covenant give an eternal inheritance.**

Through Jesus, God has brought us forth unto *“an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away”* (1 Pt 1:4).

**h. The law of liberty and covenant contain spiritual ordinances.**

The words that Jesus spoke are spirit and life (Jn 6:63; 4:23,24; Rm 12:1,2). Those who submit to the will of Jesus will reap the eternal life

that He has promised to the obedient.

**i. The law of liberty and covenant were ordained by the Son of God** (Hb 2:1-4). Since they have been ordained by the Son of God, then we have faith in the fact that the Son can also deliver that which He promised to those who are in a covenant relationship with Him.

**C. The nature of the law of liberty:**

A comparison between the Sinai law and the law of liberty reveals the superiority of the law of Christ. The superiority of the new teaches that God expects us to cling to the new. Though Christians refer to the Sinai law and covenant for instruction (Rm 15:4), it is the new by which they guide their lives for the following reasons:

**SUPERIORITY**

**OF THE LAW OF LIBERTY**

- It was established with all believers in all nations throughout the world (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15).
- It was dedicated by the blood of Jesus (1 Co 5:7; Hb 10:10,19,20).
- Jesus is its eternal offering (Hb 9:28).
- Jesus is its high priest (Hb 8:1; 9:11).
- It completely saves (Hb 7:25).
- It provides justification by grace (1 Co 6:11).

- It is written on the hearts of people (Hb 8:10).
- It contains spiritual ordinances (Jn 4:23,24; 6:63).
- It was ordained by the Son of God (Hb 2:1-4).
- It will be the standard of judgment for people today (Jn 12:48).

Because Christians are under a new law and covenant relationship with God today does not mean that we discard the Old Testament. We have the Old Testament today as an

inspired record for our learning and admonition (Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11). However, the Sinai law of the Old Testament is no longer binding on mankind as a religious law. All men this side of the cross of Christ must submit to the law of Christ (Rm 6:17; Hb 5:9). It is the perfect law of liberty that offers life (Js 1:25). It is the law of grace and faith that will bring salvation to all those who will submit to Jesus in loving obedience (See Rm 5:1,2).

## Chapter 6

### NEW TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

Our understanding of the New Testament is increased by knowing a few events and facts concerning the historical setting of Palestine at the time of Jesus' ministry and the establishment of the church in the first century. There are some key historical events and facts that shaped the political and religious environment of the world at the time of Jesus.

To understand the historical background of the New Testament, we must go back about four thousand years ago to a man named Abraham. God promised Abraham that from him would come a great nation. His name would be great. God would give his descendants a land. From his seed,

God would bring a great blessing to all men.

In Genesis 12:1-3, God promised that He would give Abraham and his descendants a specific land for their possession (Gn 17:8). In Genesis 15, God specified that the land was the land of Canaan or Palestine (Gn 15:18). When the nation of Israel (the descendants of Abraham) was delivered from Egyptian captivity under the leadership of Moses, the twelve tribes of Israel were brought by God into this land (Ja 1:3,4). However, throughout their history they continued to rebel against God. As a result, the northern ten tribes of Israel were taken into Assyrian captivity in 722/21 B.C.

(2 Kg 17). While the Assyrians scattered Jews throughout their empire, they also brought people from their empire into the land of Palestine (2 Kg 17:24). The intermarriage of these people with the Jews who were left in Palestine, eventually led to the Samaritan people.

In 586 B.C. the two southern tribes of Israel, Judah and Benjamin, were carried away into Babylonian captivity (2 Kg 24). They remained in Babylonian captivity until a remnant from each tribe of Israel began to return to Palestine beginning in 536 B.C.

The two major captivities of Israel (the Assyrian and Babylonian) are significant to New Testament studies. They are important because through these captivities the Jews were dispersed throughout the ancient world. Many of the dispersed Jews were still living among the nations when Jesus came. It was through the conversion of these Jews that the gospel was eventually preached to all the world. We can see the providence of God in the captivities of Israel. The scattering of the Jews throughout what later became the Roman Empire led to the rapid evangelization of the ancient world. Therefore, when Jesus came into the world, it was a time ready for world evangelism. All things were ready for the coming of the Savior of the world (Gl 4:4).

When the Jews came to Palestine from their former lands of captivity for the annual Passover/Pentecost feast, a special Passover/Pentecost event was waiting for them in A.D. 30. On the Passover/Pentecost of that year, Jesus was crucified and resurrected. The mystery of the gospel was revealed (Ep 3:3-5). As the Son of God, Jesus ascended to heaven after His resurrection.

Fifty days after He was crucified on Passover, Jesus sent forth the Holy Spirit on a few chosen men on the day of Pentecost. On this Pentecost of A.D. 30, the apostles made the first official announcement of Jesus' kingdom and reign in heaven (At 2:1-4). When this first announcement of the gospel was made, about three thousand people obeyed the gospel (At 2:41). After Pentecost, and further teaching from the apostles, these immersed Jewish believers returned to their homes throughout the Roman Empire. They returned with the message of the gospel, and thus began the evangelization of the world.

### **A. The political world of the New Testament:**

The events of the New Testament were influenced by the historical events of three world empires. They were the Medo-Persian, the Greek and the Roman Empires. The Maccabean

period was a local Jewish time of struggle in Palestine to rid the land of Palestine of foreign occupation. During the end of the Greek Empire, and subsequent rise of the Roman Empire, the Jews were tossed from one controlling foreign power to another. In all this political turmoil, the foundation was laid for the establishment and early spread of Christianity beyond the boundaries of the Roman Empire and into all the world.

**1. *The Medo-Persian Empire (538 B.C. - 332 B.C.):*** The Medo-Persian Empire came into prominence when Cyrus defeated Media in 550 B.C. and the Babylonian Empire in 539 B.C. Cyrus was a humanitarian, and thus, encouraged exiled people to return to their homelands. This policy led to the return to Palestine of a representative remnant of Jews who had been scattered throughout the world many years before by the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. There were three returns led by three Old Testament characters: (1) Zerubbabel (536 B.C.), (2) Ezra (457 B.C.) and (3) Nehemiah (444 B.C.). Though all Jews did not return to Palestine, those who did brought with them influences of foreign culture, religion and language that molded the Jewish culture of Jesus' day.

One of the greatest contributions the returning exiles brought back to

Palestine was the Aramaic language. Most of the exiles had been raised in an Aramaic-speaking culture in Babylonia. Upon returning to Palestine, Aramaic was their primary language. It is probable that the language Jesus ordinarily spoke during His life and ministry on earth was Aramaic.

The scattering of the Jews throughout the ancient world was referred to as the Dispersion (Gr., *diaspora*, see Js 1:1; 1 Pt 1:1). This dispersion was the foundation upon which initial world evangelism occurred in the first century. When the early evangelists went forth to preach the gospel, they went to the Jewish synagogues that had been established throughout the regions to which Jews had been scattered. They thus went to a religious culture that had a background of God as He was revealed through the Old Testament. From there they preached to the Gentile nations of the world.

Add to the preceding historical fact that the Jews also made their way to Jerusalem for the annual feasts of Passover and Pentecost. While in Jerusalem on the annual feast of Pentecost in A.D. 30, God made the first official announcement of the gospel and kingdom reign of Jesus. As a result, the church was established when about three thousand people submitted to the kingdom reign of Jesus (At 2:41). From the conversion of these



first believers, the message of the gospel went into all the world as these converted Jews returned to the nations from which they came.

**2. The Greek Empire (332 B.C. - 167 B.C.):** Alexander the Great took control of Palestine in 332 B.C. He maintained control until his death in 323 B.C. After his death, his empire was divided among his generals. However, during his rule, the Greek language spread throughout the world. Greek became the common international language of commerce, government and literature. The Greek culture permeated the Jewish culture to the extent that many Jews adopted the Greek language and culture. This led to the rise of what was referred to as Hellenism. Hellenism was the acceptance of the Greek language and culture by many Jews and other conquered people who generally lived outside Palestine.

The Greek language was so influential among the Jews after the era of Greek conquest and rule, especially among those Jews in Egypt, that portions of the Old Testament were translated from Hebrew into the Greek language around 250 B.C. This translation of the Old Testament was referred to as the Septuagint (LXX). This was the translation from which Jesus and the New Testament writers quoted. The Septuagint was quoted because this was the translation of the Old

Testament Scriptures with which most Jews in the first century were familiar.

**3. The Maccabean Period (167 B.C. - 63 B.C.):** This was a period of guerrilla warfare that was waged by zealous Jews to rid Palestine of foreign occupation. The turmoil of this period began when Antiochus IV of Syria, who now ruled Palestine, tried to persuade the priest Mattathias to offer sacrifices to pagan gods in Jerusalem. Mattathias refused and fled to the hills in order to lead a militant revolt against foreign occupation. Before his death in 164 B. C., Mattathias appointed his son, Judas, as his successor.

Judas soon gained the nickname Maccabee (“the hammer”). He conducted a guerrilla war to expel the Syrians from Palestine and to restore rightful temple worship in Jerusalem. On December 14, 164 B.C., he succeeded by restoring daily burnt offerings at the temple. This day was set aside as the feast of Dedication (or feast of lights) and was kept at the time of Jesus’ ministry (Jn 10:22).

After Judas Maccabee’s death, his brothers assumed the leadership in the war against Syria. Jonathan (160-143 B.C.) restored the priestly aristocracy and Simon (143-134 B.C.), and gained political independence. Succeeding Jewish leaders further solidified the Jewish nation in

an effort to secure independence. Under the leadership of John Hyrcanus (134-104 B.C.), the son of Simon, the Pharisees and Sadducees became prominent by influencing political policies among the Jews. Aristobulus I (104-103 B.C.), the son of Hyrcanus, was the first Jewish leader during this inter-testamental period to assume the title of "king." After his rule, his widow, Salome Alexandra, designated his oldest brother, Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 B.C.), as high priest and king of the Jewish nation. After the death of Alexander Jannaeus, Salome Alexandra served as Israel's only queen during the inter-testamental period (76-67 B.C.). She was the first wife of Hyrcanus and later the wife of Jannaeus. During her reign, the Pharisees were active in the Sanhedrin.

Civil war broke out in Israel under the leadership of Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II (67-63 B.C.), the sons of Salome Alexandra. The Romans were asked to settle the dispute. Rome decided in favor of Hyrcanus. Hyrcanus was subsequently appointed high priest to rule over Judea and Idumea. This is when Roman influence and control entered the land of Palestine. Palestine was under Roman occupation during the time of Jesus' ministry and the early history of the church.

It was during the Maccabean pe-

riod that the Old Testament apocryphal books were written. Though some of this literature was written during the early Roman period, the majority of the works were produced during the Jewish struggles to rid Palestine of Syrian influence. These books are *1 & 2 Esdras*, *Tobit*, *Judith*, *Additions to Esther*, *Wisdom of Solomon*, *Ecclesiasticus*, *Baruch*, *Letter of Jeremiah*, *Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men*, *Susanna*, *Bel and the Dragon*, *Prayer of Manasseh* and *1 & 2 Maccabees*.

These books were not accepted as inspired books by the Jews, Jesus, the apostles, or the first century church. They were simply written for the purpose of encouraging Jews during their time of struggle in the inter-testamental period. They were thus accepted by the Jews only as letters of encouragement, not as inspired messages from God.

**4. *The Roman Empire (63 B.C. - A.D. 476):*** In the last part of the first century B.C., the Roman Empire began to grow as a dominant world empire because of the turmoil of numerous civil wars that the Roman armies settled. The city of Rome, that later become the capital of the Roman Empire, was founded in 753 B.C. As disputes were settled and peoples conquered by the Romans, vast areas of the ancient world came under the control of Rome. The Empire eventually

encompassed North Africa, the Middle East, Europe, Asia Minor, Macedonia and Greece. Peace was secured by Roman power in the troubled areas of the ancient world. As a result, Rome eventually became the world-ruling empire into which Jesus came and the New Testament church was established with the preaching of the gospel on the Pentecost of A.D. 30 (At 2).

The Roman government laid a foundation of social and political stability for the establishment of the church. It opened up communication with a system of roads and commerce that reached to the far corners of the Empire. Rome thus established an environment and system of communication by which world evangelism could be accomplished in one generation.

**a. Roman government:** At the top of the Roman government was Caesar. He possessed the final power of authority. Caesars eventually claimed deity, and thus required worship from citizens throughout the Empire. The Roman Caesars during New Testament times, and their dates of rule, are the following page:

### ROMAN CAESARS OF 1<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

1. **Augustus** (27 B.C. - A.D. 14; see Lk 2:1)

2. **Tiberius** (A.D. 14-37; see Lk 3:1)
3. **Caligula** (A.D. 37-41)
4. **Claudius** (A.D. 41-54; see At 11:28; 18:2)
5. **Nero** (A.D. 54-68; see At 25:10-12; 27:24; 2 Tm 4:16,17)
6. **Galba** (A.D. 68)
7. **Otho** (A.D. 69)
8. **Vitellius** (A.D. 69)
9. **Vespasian** (A.D. 69-79)
10. **Titus** (A.D. 79-81)
11. **Domitian** (A.D. 81-96)

The Roman Senate was generally made up of about three hundred members who were members of the Senate for life. They were an advisory body in Rome. At times in Roman history, however, they acted as the ruling body to maintain continuity of the government of the Empire when there was struggle between opposing Caesars. The Caesars, with the guidance of the Senate, continued ruling the Roman Empire until the fall of Rome in A.D. 476.

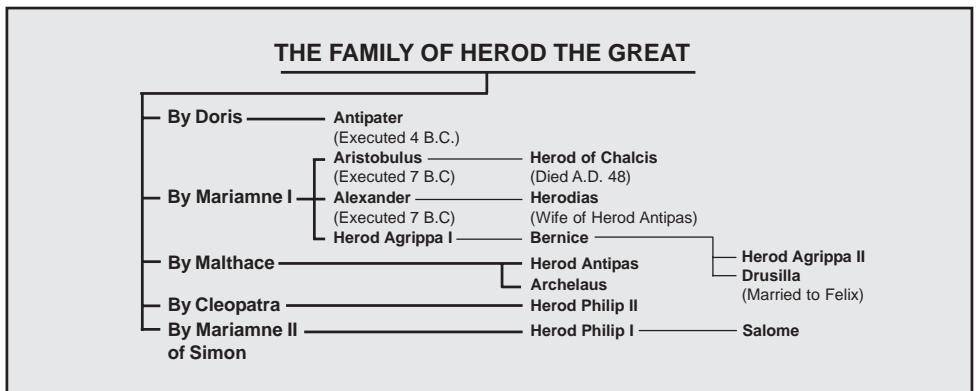
Herod the Great had more influence on the political environment of Palestine by the time of Jesus than any other Jewish king. When John the Baptist and Jesus came preaching the kingdom of heaven, Herod was firmly in control of the Jewish nation as the puppet ruler of the Roman Empire. According to our calendar today, Herod the Great died in 4 B.C. Since Jesus was born within two years be-

fore Herod died, and was crucified when He was about thirty-three years old, the church, according to our calendar today, was established on the Pentecost of A.D. 30.

During the time of Jesus and the early church in Palestine, Rome allowed the Jews to govern themselves to some extent by their own kings. This succession of kings began with Herod the Great (37 B.C. - 4 B.C.) who brutally reigned over the Jews (See Mt 2:1-18; Lk 1:5). By his wife, Doris, Herod had a son named, Antipater. By Mariamne of Simon he had Herod Philip I (Mt 14:3; Mk 6:17; Lk 3:19), the first husband of Herodias (Mk 6:17-28; Lk 3:19). By Malthace he had Herod Antipas (Mt 14:1-10; Mk 6:14ff; Lk 3:1,19) and Archelaus (Mt 2:22). By Cleopatra he had Herod Philip II (Lk 3:1). By Mariamne I he had Alexander and Aristobulus. From Aristobulus came Herod Agrippa I and Herodias (Mt 14:1-12) who left Herod Philip I for

his brother Herod Antipas (Mk 6:17). From this marriage came Salome (Mt 14:6-11). From Herod Agrippa I (At 12) came Bernice (At 25:13), and Drusilla who married Felix (At 24:24), and Herod Agrippa II (At 25:13-17; 26).

After Herod's death, his territory was given to his sons, though they did not receive the title of "king." Herod's son, Archelaus (4 B.C. - A.D. 6), was made a tetrarch and given Judea, Samaria and Idumea. Philip (4 B.C. - A.D. 34) was made tetrarch of Auranitis, Betanea and Trachonitis (Lk 3:1). Antipas (4 B.C. - A.D. 39) was made tetrarch of Galilee and Perea (Mt 14; Lk 23:7-12). Herod Antipas appointed his brother-in-law Agrippa I as overseer of markets in Tiberias from A.D. 37 to A.D. 44 (At 12). One of the daughters of Agrippa I, Drusilla, married Felix, the procurator of Judea. Eventually, the only son of Agrippa I, Agrippa II, was given the areas formerly ruled by



Philip and Lysanias. He was also given Galilee and Perea (See At 25:13-23:32). Agrippa II died in A.D. 100.

The Roman Empire was divided into provinces and districts. The provinces were divided into public and imperial provinces (At 13:7; 18:12). Public provinces were generally governed for one year by proconsuls who were chosen by lot or selected by the Roman Senate. Imperial provinces were governed by one who was directly appointed by the Roman Emperor (See Lk 2:2). Governors, or procurators, who were often military officials, were usually appointed to rule these areas for an indefinite period with the power of strong military legions (Jn 19:12). At the time of Jesus, Palestine was governed by Pontius Pilate who was appointed as governor by Rome (Mt 27:11).

**b. Roman military:** The principal military unit of the Roman army was the legion that consisted of 4,000 to 6,000 men. Each legion was divided into ten cohorts (At 10:1; 21:31; 27:1). The smallest military unit was the century that was commanded by a centurion. There were six centuries to a cohort (See Mt 27:54; Mk 15:39ff; At 10:1ff).

**c. Roman citizenship:** Roman citizenship was a prized possession. It could be acquired by birth, service in the army, purchase, special

service given to the state, or a special grant by the state in honor of a particular individual. The death penalty was enacted on those who falsely claimed citizenship. A citizen could not be punished without trial (At 16:39), or bound and scourged without thorough examination and conviction of a crime (At 22:24-29). A citizen had a right to appeal his case to the Caesar (At 25:10-12).

**d. Roman economy:** Slavery was at the center of the Roman economy. Some have estimated that at the time of Jesus, from a third to a half of the Roman Empire's population were bondservants. Support of the Roman state was through taxation that was often left in the hands of local officials. Tax collectors exacted the funds from the public, keeping a portion and sending the remainder to Rome. This system was filled with corruption. Tax collectors (publicans) thus gained the reputation for being some of the most corrupt people of society.

**5. The destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70):** One of the most significant events that occurred in the first century that greatly affected the church was the end of national Israel with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Bible interpreters must not underestimate the significance of this historical event in reference to bibli-

cal interpretation and the early evangelistic work of the first century. This is particularly true in reference to Jesus' teachings in the parables, and specifically, the context of Matthew 24 where He prophesied the consummation of Israel with the destruction of Jerusalem.

Israel was chosen through Abraham from among the nations of the world in order to preserve a segment of society through which God would send the Redeemer into the world (See Gn 12:1-3). Bible students must understand that through the seed of Abraham the Messiah (the Christ) would come (Gl 3:16). Once the Seed came, then Israel was dissolved in Christ (Gl 3:26-29). The Israelites who were sons of Abraham by faith were brought into Christ, wherein they enjoy a prophesied new covenant relationship with God (See Jr 31:31-33). The consummation of all that God planned through Israel was finalized in the destruction of national Israel in A.D. 70. Any who would now claim some physical identity as national Israel are no longer considered to be in a special covenant relationship with God. The church of Christ is now the new Israel of God, which people of God are now in a covenant relationship with God through Jesus (See Hb 8:7-13).

The early evangelists and writers of the epistles had in mind the

prophecy of Jesus concerning the destruction of Jerusalem when they wrote to the disciples of Christ throughout the early years of the church (See Mt 24). This is particularly true in reference to those epistles that were written in the middle and latter 60s. When Jesus and the New Testament writers prophesied concerning the coming of the Lord in judgment on Jerusalem, they were warning Jewish Christians to stay away from Jerusalem and Judaism. When the time came for the destruction to occur, the early church had been thoroughly prepared to accept the end of national Israel. This preparation was particularly important for Jewish Christians.

## **B. The religious world of the New Testament:**

It was generally Roman policy to allow freedom of religion among subdued peoples. This practice allowed the free expression of numerous religions throughout the Roman Empire at the time of Jesus. However, this policy changed as Roman Caesars became more oppressive, even to the point of claiming deity for themselves, and subsequently, making Christianity an illegal religion. Roman state religion thus became the oppressor of Christians during the last part of the first century. This is evi-

dent in the book of Revelation that John wrote to the seven churches of Asia. Some of the religious and philosophical thinking in the Empire would be the following:

### 1. *Greek/Roman Pantheon:*

Under the Greek/Roman Pantheon, Roman names were applied to Greek gods. These gods were worshiped throughout the Empire (At 14:12; 19:27,35). Jupiter, the god of the sky, was identified with the Greek god Zeus. The Greek god Poseidon, the god of the sea, was called Neptune. Hades, the god of the underworld, was called Pluto. Hermes, the messenger god, was identified with Mercury (At 14:11ff). Rome built temples and appointed priests to administer these temples and conduct religious rites for this pantheon of gods.

Wherever the gospel went, there were many who converted from false gods that had been created after the imagination of men (See At 17:22-29; 1 Th 1:9,10). This conversion from false gods eventually led the Christians into conflict with local traditional religious leaders (At 19), and the “beast” (the Roman state) and “false prophet” (Roman religion) of the Roman Empire at the end of the first century (Rv 13).

2. *Emperor Worship:* Emperor worship began as early as the death of Julius Caesar who was deified af-

ter his death. Various Caesars claimed deity during their lives. Domitian was particularly open to make this claim. The refusal of Christians to worship the Emperor branded them as unpatriotic, and thus, insurrectionists against the Empire. Because Christians were accused of being insurrectionists, for almost 150 years they suffered severe persecutions at the hand of the Roman state. The book of Revelation was written to reassure Christians as they suffered through this period of persecution. Roman state persecution of Christianity did not officially end until the signing of the Edict of Toleration in A.D. 311 and the Edict of Milan in A.D. 313 by Constantine, the Caesar of Rome.

3. *Mystery Religions:* Mystery religions permeated Roman society to fill a void in the individual’s life for a personal experience with deity. Cybele of Asia Minor, Isis and Osiris of Egypt, and Mithras of Persia were only a few of these deities. Throughout the Roman Empire there was an assortment of religions that had been created after the desires of men. It was from these gods that thousands turned when they found, through Jesus, the true and living God (1 Th 1:9).

Luke wrote the documents of Luke and Acts. It was one of his purposes in these documents to distinguish the true faith that was the result

of God's supernatural intervention in the affairs of man from false religious inventions of men. Christians lived in a world that was filled with the religions and gods that had been created after the imagination of men. Therefore, the defense of Christianity that was made by Luke in both Luke and Acts sets forth the belief that there is only one God and that this God has revealed Himself through His Son Jesus. The book of John argues that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God (Jn 20:30,31).

**4. *Occultism:*** Occultism was the practice of magical arts as a religion. Occultism was very prevalent throughout Roman society (At 8:9-24; 13:6-11; 19:19). In general, the worshipers of the various cults of Roman society superstitiously believed that evil spirits and demons could be controlled by those who either knew the right ceremonial rituals or could recite the right incantation to move and control the spirits. Though these religions claimed miraculous workings, there is no indication in the New Testament that any occult workers exercised any miraculous works (See At 8:1-25; 19:11-20). Their works were centered around great abilities to deceive people through their magical arts, which arts they claimed to be miraculous.

**5. *Philosophy:*** Plato lived in the fourth century before Jesus. His phi-

losophies permeated the philosophical world at the time of Jesus. Plato believed that the real world was composed of ideas. The material world was only an extension or manifestation of these ideas. To him, knowledge was salvation. Systematic Gnosticism resulted from the combining of several philosophical and religious thoughts into a system of religious belief that influenced most religions of the second century.

The Epicureans believed that happiness was acquired by those pleasures that brought about more permanent pleasures. The Stoics believed that happiness was acquired by practicing self-control in all aspects of life. The Cynics believed that the greatest virtue was to have no desires. To be free of desire, one must suppress lusts.

Those of the Roman society who had no faith in the gods believed that there was no final authority in life and morals because each person's experiences in different environments are different. They believed that what ruled one's life in one society would not serve to guide one in another society.

It would be safe to say that the diversity of the many philosophical religious beliefs that we see today in the world existed also in the first century. These beliefs were clothed in different systems of religion. However, the basic premises of modern-



day beliefs also existed at the time of Jesus. When one studies the New Testament, therefore, he or she is sure to discover an answer for any ungodly philosophy of false religion that exists today (See Cl 2:20-22; 2 Tm 3:16,17).

Gnosticism was a belief that led to the apostasy of many in the church in the second century. This system of thought had its beginnings in the first century, and thus, there are several warnings concerning the fundamental beliefs of the Gnostics that are found in New Testament letters as Colossians, 1 & 2 Timothy and 1,2,3 John.

The general belief of the Gnostics was based on the arrogance of the individual to presume that a knowledge of his inner self elevated him to a higher level of spirituality. The focus of his salvation, therefore, depended on his self-awareness of the supposed inner spark of light that brought salvation. This religious belief was essentially a spiritual arrogance that led many in the first and second centuries to turn away from the truth of the gospel in order to seek inner awareness. Thousands thus distorted the truth of the gospel by blending it with the teachings of misguided men who gave up their commitment to the fundamentals of the gospel (2 Th 2:10-12).

**5. *Judaism:*** Judaism at the time

of Jesus and the apostles was largely a digression from the Sinai law that was originally given to Israel by God. Jewish tradition and world religions had destroyed the true intent of the law that God had revealed through Moses. Judaism was thus a mixture of the Jews' traditions and the religious beliefs of the cultures in which many of the Jews lived outside Palestine (See Mt 15:1-9; Mk 7:1-9; At 26:5). Paul referred to this religion as the "Jews' religion." He did so because the Jews who promoted Judaism no longer conformed to the nature of the Sinai law (Gl 1:13,14).

Judaism developed into a system of legalistic obedience. Religious codes and rites were bound on adherents in order to guarantee strict compliance to the Sinai law and Jewish religious traditions (Mt 23; Cl 2:20-22). This system of theology thus digressed to imposing on men the necessity of conforming to the traditions and opinions of the Jews. In the Jews' efforts to make everyone conform to their legalistic code of religious behavior, they promoted the belief that one's supposedly perfect keeping of the law and added traditions would guarantee salvation. However, by emphasizing the religious traditions of men, they rejected the law of God (Mk 7:1-9). Throughout the New Testament, the Holy Spirit dealt extensively with this system of a legal-oriented

religion. It was a system of religiosity that was in contrast to the grace of God that was revealed through Jesus. In the letter that Paul wrote to the Romans and Galatians, he dealt with the fallacy of any legalistic religion that affirms that one can be saved by self-sanctifying works of merit or attempts at self-justification through perfect law-keeping.

The religious leaders of Palestine at the time of Jesus practiced the Judaism that had evolved into an institutional religion. The following are the major religious groups of Judaism that had great influence at the time of Jesus' ministry:

**a. The Pharisees:** It is believed that the Pharisees originated among the Jews after the Babylonian captivity. By the time of Jesus, the Pharisees had developed and maintained an elite religious group that dominated the religious structures of Judaism. Their religious and political influence grew throughout the inter-testamental period. By the time of the ministry of Jesus, they had gained a hold on the minds of many people, and thus, intimidated much of the populace to conform to their system of a legal and meritorious obedience to the Sinai law, plus a host of religious traditions.

The Pharisees were the most powerful and influential religious sect

in Judaism. They accepted the Sinai law as their religious authority. They also accepted many oral traditions that had been handed down from generation to generation in the history of the Jewish nation (Mt 15:1-9; Mk 7:1-9). They were a group of religious leaders who loved money (Lk 16:14). They also loved their power that they exercised over the people of Israel (Mt 23).

**b. The Sadducees:** The origin of the Sadducees is difficult to determine. Some Bible students believe that they originated from Jewish government officials who descended from the priest Zadok (See Ez 44:15,16; 48:11). Some have thought that they were simply a political party among the Jews. Others have believed that they were a religious party, of which many scribes were a part during the time of Jesus. Still others believed that they were an aristocratic body of religionists. Regardless of their origin, at the time of Jesus they were considered a separatist group who considered it honorable to dispute with any who disagreed with their teachings.

The Sadducees, of whom many were priests, were the aristocrats of Jewish religious society. They placed more emphasis on the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament). They were often in conflict with the Pharisees and always in jealous con-

flict with Jesus (Mt 22:23-33). Their philosophy of life was basically materialistic, for they did not believe in the soul, the resurrection of the dead, or life after death (At 23:8). They believed in the free-will of man and that one's life was dependent on the choices he made during life.

**c. The Essenes:** The Essenes are not mentioned in the New Testament, though their influence of a pious life influenced many faithful Jews. The Jewish historian Josephus recorded that the Essenes were found in towns and villages throughout Judea. They were a religious people who were hospitable toward one another. They dedicated themselves to prayer and interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures. It is believed that they lived in separate communities, practiced celibacy, and were diligent in caring for one another. They were a very devout sect of the Jews and were diligent in preserving copies of the Old Testament Scriptures. Some believe that John the Baptist was a product of the Essenes.

The Essenes are often associated with the Qumran Community that was discovered in the northwestern area of the Dead Sea. This community was dedicated to copying the Old Testament Scriptures. In 1947 several of their copies of the Old Testament and other writings were discovered in caves. This has proved to be the most

important discovery of biblical texts made by biblical archaeologists.

**d. The zealots:** The zealots were Jewish nationalists whose objective was to deliver Palestine from Roman rule and taxes. In the first century the group was led by Judas the Galilean who rebelled against Rome in A.D. 6, which revolt was brutally suppressed by Rome. In modern-day terms, the zealots would be called terrorists. They followed the zeal of Mattathias and his sons who were zealous for the Sinai law.

After the crushing of the zealot revolt of A.D. 6, the spirit of the zealots remained alive until the Romans took the zealot stronghold of Masada in May of A.D. 74. The zealots had intensified their anti-Rome activity in Palestine during the 60s. Their zealous leadership among the Jews against Rome eventually led to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Simon, one of the apostles, was a zealot before he was called into apostleship (Lk 6:15; At 1:13). The theology of the zealots was based on the belief that God would restore Israel as a nation to the glory it enjoyed during the days of former kings as David and Solomon. The zealots' theology influenced the thinking of the Jews, and subsequently, distorted some of the disciples' understanding of Jesus' statements concerning His kingdom reign throughout His min-

istry. When Jesus spoke of the kingdom, their interpretation was that He would restore the nation of Israel to her former nationalistic glory (At 1:6). But such was not the case, for the kingdom was not to be of this world (See Jn 18:36-38).

All of the preceding philosophies and religions permeated the minds of those to whom Jesus and the early disciples preached the gospel. It was truly a time that had been prepared by God to bring forth His Son into the world (Gl 4:4). It was a time of relative peace. Communication and travel were possible over great portions of the Roman Empire. It was a time of expectation in the midst of religious confusion. Jews had been scattered throughout the world where synagogues were built. God had providentially placed these Jews throughout the world in order to lay the foundation for world evangelism through converted Jews who would return home after their conversion during the annual Passover/Pentecost feast in Jerusalem. God had thus prepared the best environment, at the best time in the history of the world in which to send Jesus into the world for the redemption of all men of all history. When Jesus came, therefore, it was time for a transition from the Old Testament era of the Sinai law to the gospel of the Son of God. It was a

time for grace and truth to go to all men in all the world.

### **C. Change from the Old Testament to the New Testament:**

One of the most important subjects in Bible studies is the separation of the Old Testament era from the New Testament era. Separating the law and covenant mentioned in the Old Testament from the law and covenant mentioned in the New Testament is necessary in order to understand God's work among men throughout history. From Genesis 1 to Exodus 19, God worked in a covenant relationship with all mankind. There were no Jews, for a Jew is defined as one who was an Israelite and in a covenant relationship with God through the Sinai covenant. However, from Exodus 20 until the activation of the new covenant that was revealed and established in Acts 2 in A.D. 30, God had established a special covenant relationship with the nation of Israel. Studying through the material that is revealed in Acts through Revelation, therefore, one must keep in mind that the new covenant and law are now in force (Hb 9:16,17). This covenant and law will be in force until Jesus comes again. The Bible student must be cautious, therefore, not to bring laws of the Sinai covenant that God had with the nation of Israel

over into the new covenant relationship that God now has with His people through Christ.

In the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, God recorded for us the last days of the Old Testament era. It was during this time that Jesus came to finalize the Sinai covenant relationship and law that were established between God and Israel. By fulfilling the purpose for which the Sinai law and covenant were given, Jesus fulfilled the law. This is the meaning of Jesus' statement of Matthew 5:17,18.

Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets. The fact that He fulfilled the purpose of the Sinai law means that there was an end of the Sinai law. At the end of His ministry, and prior to His ascension, He reminded His disciples that all things had been fulfilled (Lk 24:44). What Jesus stated in Matthew 5:17,18 was completed by the end of His ministry. Therefore, the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in Christ, and the covenant that God had with the nation of Israel came to an end. Jesus' work in reference to the Sinai law and covenant was explained by the writer to the Hebrews (Hb 10:9). Jesus took away the Sinai covenant that God had with the nation of Israel in order to establish His covenant that was purchased with the blood of His Son (See Mt 26:26-29).

It is important to understand that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John record Jesus' ministry to the Jews in order to bring them to repentance and acceptance of His kingdom reign that was to be established in Acts 2. Jesus lived under the Sinai covenant and law (Gl 4:4). Many things that Jesus said during His ministry must be understood in the context of His ministry to the Jews, who with Himself, were living under the Sinai law. Jesus' obedience was to the Sinai law. It is important to understand this lest the Bible interpreter bring the teachings of the Sinai law into the New Testament under which the disciples of Jesus now live.

In order to understand the New Testament by rightly dividing the word of God (2 Tm 2:15), we must understand what Jesus teaches concerning the Sinai law. His revelation of New Testament law was revealed through the apostles (Jn 14:26; 16:13). The new law of liberty of Jesus was established when men and women first came into a covenant relationship with God on the Pentecost of A.D. 30 that is recorded in Acts 2. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, therefore, are books that record events of the Old Testament era while the Jews were still in a national covenant relationship with God. Acts through Revelation record the events of the early disciples who were in a new covenant relationship with God. Jesus' teach-

ings concerning the will of God were recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John for the benefit of the church.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus prophesied of the new covenant and law that would come (Mt 26:26-28; Jn 3:3-5). However, He reminded His disciples that in His immediate audience many would not understand His message to Israel (See Mt 13:10-17). However, it would be understood by those who would later come into a covenant relationship with God through their obedience to the gospel. Throughout His ministry, therefore, Jesus pointed people toward the event that is recorded in Acts 2 when men and women first came into a covenant relationship with God through their obedience to the gospel in baptism.

In fulfillment of Jesus' promise of Matthew 16:18,19, Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 in A.D. 30 and officially proclaimed for the first time in history the good news of the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection for our hope (At 2:29-36). When thousands heard this message, they were cut to the heart. They repented, and on that very day, about three thousand people were immersed into a new covenant relationship with God (At 2:37-41). This initiated the new covenant that God established with mankind through Jesus Christ. Beginning with this day, God revealed through the apostles all truth

for the nurturing and building up of those who obeyed the gospel (Jn 14:26; 16:13; Jd 3). The New Testament era began in Acts 2 and will continue until Jesus comes again. It began with the first official announcement of Jesus as the reigning Son of God. It will end at the time of His final coming when He returns kingdom reign to God the Father so that God will be all in all (1 Co 15:24-28).

Israel continues as a nation, but they do not continue in a special covenant relationship with God. The Sinai covenant that God had with national Israel was dissolved in Christ. For all men today, the statement of Galatians 3:26-29 applies:

*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither bond-servant nor free. There is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.*

Christians are now the new spiritual Israel of God, for they are in a covenant with God that was purchased with the blood of His Son who brought us into the age of the gospel.

The most significant obstacle that faced Jesus during His earthly

ministry was the “Jews’ religion” (Judaism) that was propagated by the Jewish religious leadership. It is impossible to understand the setting of the ministry of Jesus without understanding the nature of the religious world of Judaism in the first century. God used the misguided religiosity of the religious leaders of Israel to take Jesus to the cross and reveal the gospel. This occurred because the gospel of grace that Jesus brought into

the world was entirely different from the legal system of religion that was promoted by the Jewish religious leaders. In defending their legal religiosity, the antagonism of the religious leaders against Jesus became so tense that they eventually schemed, and subsequently were successful in having Him crucified. All of this was in the eternal plan of God to bring the gospel into the world.

## Chapter 7

### THE GOSPEL AGE OF FREEDOM

Jesus was sent forth into the world at a predetermined time. God knew that the religion of Israel would digress to a legal system of meritorious religiosity. Men have a tremendous urge to meritoriously self-sanctify themselves before God. This is exactly where the religious leaders of Israel had led the people. Jesus came this people at a time when this system of religion had developed to its fullest in Israel.

Israel’s digression into legalistic and institutional religion was no different from the thousands of similar religions throughout the world today. Therefore, when we study the confrontation of the religious leadership of Israel against Jesus throughout His ministry, we discover how the gospel conflicts with the religious world to-

day that is built on the foundation of meritorious religiosity. Our study of Jesus’ ministry is our preparation for the conflict that we face when dealing with the religions of the world in which we live today. Jesus’ conflict with meritorious religion gives us an insight into how the religions of men conflict with the gospel.

Understanding this conflict begins by understanding that we were created religious beings. God created us with a spiritual yearning so that we “*should seek the Lord*” (At 17:27). Paul stated to the Athenians that the instinct of man should be that he would “grope for God” (At 17:27). Man is thus a religious being. Regardless of his selfish wanderings in order to satisfy the lusts of the flesh, lusts of the eyes and pride of life, he

must eventually satisfy his religious cravings to worship God.

The problem with men satisfying their religious yearnings is that most people do not seek the one true and living God through His inspired revelation. They seek to create a god after their own image and a religion after their own desires. In order to fulfill their innate desire to search for and worship a being that is higher than themselves, people throughout the world have resorted to various “systems” of religiosity in order to self-sanctify themselves before their gods. In the absence of God’s word, and a knowledge of the one true God, religious people throughout the world have created self-sanctifying religious rites after their own desires.

Regardless of the system of religion that one might create in order to fulfill the desire to worship, all religions of the world fall into two basic categories. The first is that people follow after their emotions or feelings. Man is certainly an emotional being. Those religions of the world that are based on emotions as the fundamental foundation of the religion, are carried to and fro by the emotional state of the adherents in order to self-sanctify themselves emotionally before God. The adherents say, “If it feels right, then it must be right.” Such self-sanctification in religion places man at the center of the religion and his

emotions as the authority upon which faith is based. Such religions are basically humanistic in the sense that man himself is the foundation upon which the religion is based.

Solomon wrote, “*There is a way that seems right to man, but its end is the way of death*” (Pv 14:12; see Pv 16:25). It is not within the power of man to direct his own self-sanctifying religious behavior. This is especially true in reference to one’s religious feelings and beliefs. When the foundation of one’s religiosity is based on his own feelings, the end result will be death. Therefore, we can never trust our feelings to be the final authority by which we should judge faith to be on a solid foundation.

The second system of religion that is established by man is the most common, and thus, the most difficult for the gospel to penetrate. This is religion that is based on the traditional religious institutions of men. Most world religions that have been developed throughout the history of mankind have found their foundation in tradition. This was particularly true during the time Jesus came into the world (See Mk 7:1-9).

It is only natural for people to establish religion upon their religious traditions since people are beings of tradition. We are creatures of culture, and culture is a systematic obedience to behavioral characteristics by which



individuals live in harmony in any society. We thus seek to mold our religious behavior around the traditions of the fathers in order to live in harmony with one another. However, the problem is that the traditions become the final authority of our traditional religion, and thus, the religious traditions of the fathers lead the children away from God. The traditions institutionalize the religion by becoming the identity of the adherents who seek to self-sanctify themselves by adherence to their religious traditions.

Traditional religion in Israel was at its peak when Jesus came into the world. This was the system of religious thought and behavior that Jesus confronted throughout His ministry. This was the religious behavior that Jesus stirred up in order to take Himself to the cross (Jn 10:17,18). It is imperative, therefore, that every Bible student understand the nature of the traditional religion that was maintained by the Jews of the first century in order to understand the same conflict between the gospel and religion in this age.

The majority of the early disciples were Jews. Therefore, some of these Jewish converts brought into the church the legalistic system of religious behavior that defines Judaism for several centuries. The greatest threat against the church in its early beginnings was the legalistic system

of Judaism that was characteristic with the religious world of the first century.

Meritorious legalism is the belief that one can legally justify himself before God on the merit of his self-sanctifying performance of law and good works. When sin occurs, the self-sanctifying legalist assumes that He can atone for his violations of law through meritorious good works. The legalist assumes, therefore, that his salvation is centered around his ability to perform law and do meritorious deeds in order to stand justified before God. He thus seeks to earn his salvation by putting God in debt to save him because of his self-sanctifying meritorious law-keeping and good works.

Combined with traditional religious codes, the traditional legalist has constructed a religion that conforms to his desire to justify himself before God through perfect law-keeping. The result of this thinking moves the legalists into numerous erroneous conclusions. Principle among these is the fact that religious legalists often move their traditions into the realm of law, and thus, make their traditions meritorious requirements for salvation. The result is that the legalist moves himself further away from the commandments of God. Because he has assumed that he can meritoriously justify himself before God

through law-keeping, he often arrogantly sets forth his religious deeds before others in order to manifest his religiosity and self-imposed righteousness.

When Jesus began His ministry among the Jews, the fury of the religious leaders was inflamed against Him because He did not conform to their legal codes of Judaism. He was thus rejected as the Messiah of Israel. The intensity of the legal mentality of the religious leaders was manifested in their scheme to murder Jesus, which thing they eventually did.

Therefore, one must never underestimate the control religious legal thought places on the behavior of people. Judaism was a religion that was based on the theology of meritorious religious behavior. This was the religious environment into which Jesus came. It was the leaders of this theology that put Jesus on the cross. It was the leaders of this theology who defiantly continued to oppose to the preaching of the gospel.

When Jews were converted in the first century, many often brought into the church the religious legalism of the Judaism from which they came. The letters to the Romans and Galatians specifically dealt with this threat that denied the foundation of the gospel of freedom.

Galatians was possibly the first inspired letter of the New Testament

canon to be written. It was a stern letter that was directed against the self-sanctifying legalist theology that was invading the fellowship of the disciples in southern Galatia. If Galatians was the first letter of the New Testament, then the Holy Spirit considered Jewish legalism to be a great danger to the continued existence of the early church. The sternness by which the letter was written indicates the seriousness of the attack of legalism against the truth of the gospel.

Paul's purpose in writing Galatians was to investigate the erroneous nature of the Jewish legalism of the first century in reference to the threat of any legalistic theology that would attack the gospel at any time in history. One of the great threats against the church today is systematic legalism. This was the primary threat against the church in the first century.

Throughout every century, systematic legalistic theology has always sought to divide Christians from one another. It is imperative, therefore, that disciples be very familiar with the characteristics and behavior of legalistic religiosity.

In the first century, the Jews viewed religion from the standpoint of the ability of the individual to perform established religious rites in a manner by which one could self-sanctify himself before God. This system of meritorious justification inevitably

made an attack against the gospel. There was thus the rise of the judaizing teachers who sought to promote in the church this system of legalistic justification by meritorious works. The evidence of this invasion of heresy was the judaizing teachers' binding on Christians various statutes of the Sinai law, as well as many of the religious traditions of the Jews.

When Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians, he sternly attacked the theology of the self-sanctifying religious teachers in the church. It must be emphasized again that the sternness of the letter reveals the fact that the Holy Spirit did not view this as a minor threat to the gospel. The nature of the Galatian letter clearly indicates that God was serious about this system of theology that attacked the very foundation of the truth of the gospel.

There were judaizing teachers threatening the Galatian disciples, and thus, the disciples in Galatia were on the verge of a whole scale apostasy from the truth of the gospel. The nature of the Galatian letter, therefore, reveals to us that God will not tolerate today those who marginalize the gospel through the teaching of meritorious self-justification.

We must not accuse the judaizing brothers in Galatia of being insincere. Neither should we view many of the Pharisees during the ministry of Jesus of being insincere. They sincerely

thought that they were right. They never viewed themselves as false teachers. Such is often the case with those of a legalistic persuasion. Because their legalism has come to them through the tradition of their fathers, they feel confident in their self-sanctifying religious heritage. However, the zeal of the Jewish legalists was without knowledge of the will of God. Their goal was often one of selfish ambition (See Gl 6:13).

The problem with legalistic religion is manifested in the results or behavior of those who believe in and practice such. In order to understand the confrontation of Jesus with the religious leaders during His ministry, and to understand the background upon which much of the New Testament was written, it is imperative to understand the nature of self-sanctifying legalism, which is basically the definition of religion. Our understanding of this system of religious thought helps us to guard ourselves from denying the truth of the gospel.

We must understand that the nature of the Jews' religion into which Jesus came is the same nature of any religion throughout history. Religion exists because men obey self-sanctifying religious rites of each unique religion.

The Jews' religion that was constructed after the traditions of the fathers is typical of institutional reli-

gious structures today where heritage and tradition has been exalted over the Bible. We live in a world of traditionally oriented religions that view their traditions after the same manner the religious leaders of the Jews viewed their traditions during the ministry of Jesus. Religious tradition was sacred to the Jews. It is sacred to religions throughout the world today.

Because traditions have become so sacred to religions in the world, such traditions are viewed as a legal system by which one is to stand justified before God. In other words, adherents of the particular religion must honor the traditions of the religion in order to supposedly be pleasing to God. It is essential, therefore, to understand the nature of religious legalism in order to understand the religion that confronted Jesus and the legalistic system of religion that made attacks against the gospel.

### **A. Gospel freedom delivers us from self-sanctification.**

The gospel is the message that one is saved by the initiative of God, who at the cross, justified us legally before Him apart from our efforts to self-justify ourselves by legal performances of law (Rm 5:1,2,8; see Is 53:5; Jn 3:16; 15:13). In other words, there is no salvation apart from the gospel of grace simply because it is

impossible for anyone to keep law without sinning against law (Rm 3:9,23). If meritorious works can atone for sin against law, then it would be assumed that the grace of the cross was insufficient.

The religious legalist believes that his law-keeping and meritorious works must be the foundation upon which he is saved. He may believe in the grace of God. However, by his belief to self-sanctifying himself through meritorious works of religious laws, he feels that the grace of God must be subsidized by his legal performances.

The judaizing brethren of the first century believed in the gospel of God's grace. However, they also believed that circumcision and other Jewish religious rites of their tradition were also necessary. Paul's argument with these religious legalists, therefore, was directed toward the false implications of their teaching. Their teaching assumed that the grace of the gospel was not sufficient. If self-sanctifying legalism were correct, then men could add to the gospel of God in reference to one's salvation. If legalism is correct, then the atonement of Jesus on the cross was insufficient. They were obligating God to add to His grace their self-sanctifying meritorious religious rites in order that sin be forgiven. In other words, since the atonement of the cross was suppos-

edly insufficient, then complete forgiveness must come from somewhere else. Complete forgiveness must come from one's self-sanctifying meritorious good deeds.

The problem with self-sanctification through good deeds is that one can never feel that he does enough in order to be confident that he has atoned for the wretchedness of sin in his life. If he does feel confident, then he becomes religiously arrogant. It was this religious arrogance that came into the early church through self-sanctifying religionists who stood confident before God on the basis of their religious performances. Their religious arrogance changed their behavior. Jude wrote of them:

*For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, **ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ** (Jd 4).*

Such men “*reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries*” (Jd 8). They “*speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves*” (Jd 10).

The arrogance of the religious legalist is in the fact that he believes his performance of law and good deeds are sufficient to add to the in-

sufficiency of the gospel of grace. He subsequently puffs himself up in his relationship with those who are not performing according to the excellence of his religious rites.

## **B. Gospel freedom frees from legal religious rites.**

The religious legalist actually promotes a quick fix for Christian growth. He feels that rules and regulations will guarantee the structured life that is in agreement with the behavioral pattern prescribed by law. Therefore, in order to guarantee obedience to law, the religious legalist prescribes codes and religious rites in order to marshal the believers' lives into conformity with the traditionally accepted pattern of behavior that guarantees obedience to law. Law, therefore, takes second seat to the practice of the codes that are emphasized to make sure law is obeyed.

The same scenario exists today. Those who march according to the religious rites of a legal system of religion are thus judged to be “faithful” to a particular religious group by those who have set themselves up as judges and lawgivers of the group to make sure that the religious rites of the denominated religious heritage are performed. In religions that become legalistic in their behavior, the members are judged by those who have estab-

lished and maintained the legal heritage by which all members must march. Thus, faith digresses to a behavioral system of religious rites that are established after a particular religious group. This is exactly what Jesus was confronting when He said to the Jews, *“This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men”* (Mk 7:6,7).

In the Galatian situation, the members of the body were being convinced to return to a system of religious slavery. Paul wrote to them, *“But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?”* (Gl 4:9).

Paul could not understand why they wanted to go back to a system of religious slavery from which they had escaped through their obedience to the gospel of freedom. They were allowing the judaizing teachers to regiment them again into conformity to legal religion in order to supposedly guarantee their salvation.

The problem was that the Galatians were not recognizing the legal trap into which they were going. They were being drawn into a religion where the heart could go unchecked as the believer legally enslaved him-

self after a system of obedience to outward religious ceremonies. This is what Jesus meant when He said, *“Their heart is far from Me”* (Mk 7:6).

The Jewish religious leaders during Jesus’ ministry expressed outward religiosity, but their religious acts were regimented behavioral actions that could be performed without any heart. They could keep the religious rites without checking their hearts. In one’s zeal to conform to the accepted regimentation of legal rites that have been established by the traditions of the fathers, one begins to ignore God in order to focus on strict obedience to the legal identity of a particular religious group. One’s mind is slowly changed from focusing on pleasing God to pleasing those who have set themselves up to be the guardians of the “truth.”

The religionist in this structure of religion moves from focusing on God to focusing on making sure his behavior is according to the leaders of the group who enforce the legal codes of identity of the group. The members of the group have a greater concern about being accepted by the group than allowing the gospel of Jesus to reflect their appreciation for the grace of God. Their motivation as a member of the group turns from God to doing those things that will make one accepted to the group lead-

ers and group itself. In order not to be an outcast of the group, their motivation turns from God to upholding group heritage in order that they not be intimidated by others in the group. In the slow, and often unintentional change of focus, each member of the group gives up being motivated by the gospel of God's grace.

### **C. Gospel freedom inspires spiritual growth.**

The problem with a legal approach to serving God is that one can perform legal rites of religion without true or long-term spiritual growth. However, once one becomes frustrated with keeping all the rules, it is easy to fall away. Since the religious legalist has given up his focus on the gospel in order to focus on his performance of the identity of his religion, apostasy becomes an act of falling from the accepted rules of his particular religion. It is not apostasy from the gospel of Jesus. Changing churches is simply a matter of changing sets of rules. Living the gospel is blurred in the maze of denominational regulations that identify each particular religious group. When one falls away, it is simply apostasy from a religion of man.

In the first century context, the judaizing teachers saw the church as another "sect" of Judaism. Therefore,

there were some who accepted Jesus and obeyed the gospel by immersion. However, they simply added the rules of another faith to their existing rules of Judaism. They were as John described, "not of us" because they had not submitted in their hearts to the gospel (1 Jn 2:19). They had simply joined the "Christian" movement in Jerusalem when thousands were becoming members of the body of Christ.

Because those who were "not of us" were not converted in response to God's grace that was manifested through Jesus on the cross, they were simply moving from one religious group to another. At the same time, they believed that they were remaining within the broader community of Judaism. When they saw many Gentiles becoming members of the "Christian sect" of Judaism, it was only natural for them to demand that the Gentiles also become circumcised and adhere to other ceremonies of the Sinai law.

When one obeys the gospel, he has left religion for grace. He has responded to the grace of God in response to grace. However, when one seeks to produce spiritual growth through religious regulations, one's life-style is only superficial. True growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pt 3:18) comes as a result of sow-

ing works of thanksgiving for one's salvation (See 1 Co 15:10 2 Co 4:15). The fruit of the Spirit comes forth from the heart of the one who truly has Christ in his heart (Gl 2:20; 5:24). Those who "live in the Spirit" will manifest long-term growth as opposed to the one who simply follows the accepted pattern of religiosity that has been formed after the traditions of men. When one maintains his focus on Jesus, he will obediently live the gospel in gratitude for that which he has in Christ (Rm 3:31).

On the other hand, there are those religious groups that require little in a legal response to belief. These are those groups that have created a religion after their own desires. And their desire is to have as little involvement in religion as possible, while at the same time, feel comfortable about their faith. There is thus a stagnation of gospel behavior in these groups. As long as one is doing the minimal requirements for "faithfulness," he is accepted by the group as a "faithful" member. Legalism in this system of religion produces a mental complacency, a self-deception that everything is fine while one is on the road to destruction. This legalistic religion thus limits spiritual growth because the adherents believe that they are spiritually acceptable to God in their state of indifference.

This "easy going" legalism con-

vinces one that as long as he or she accomplishes the ceremonies of worship of the particular religious group, then he or she has worshiped God. As long as one has gone through the legal steps of conversion, he is once saved and always saved. As long as one clones the correct religious phraseology of the group, then he is legally sound. As long as one functions with accepted methods, then he is sound and of "the truth."

This form of legalism lacks substance. Adherents become frustrated with their lack of spiritual growth. In their frustration they feel a change of rules, or a change of churches, or a change in preachers, will produce growth. It is believed that the solution to the problems of stagnation is that the change will produce growth. When we make superficial changes to correct deep spiritual problems, we are failing to deal with the sin beneath the sin.

Once rules and regulations take a back seat to the gospel of Jesus, then His commandments are not burdensome (See 1 Jn 5:3). The Christian who is truly motivated by thanksgiving for his or her salvation finds no commandment of God burdensome. He finds no limits to his spiritual growth. If we deal with the sin of the heart, then we are beginning to correct the sin beneath the sin.

Herein is revealed the nature of



the law of Christ, the perfect law of liberty (Js 1:25; 2:8). There is law under grace, but the law of Christ is usually stated in principle. For example, James stated,

*Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit [take care of] orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world (Js 1:27).*

The principle is to care for orphans and widows. However, there are few instructions in the New Testament on how this is actually carried out in one's life. Thus, there is law to do this work, but there is liberty on how it is to be carried out. It is a law of liberty. God gives the principle. He expects our gratitude for His grace to motivate us through love to act in response to grace in order to take care of orphans and widows. When love replaces indifference in the heart, then widows and orphans eat.

The above frustrates the legalist. He needs a set of rules by which he can measure his meritorious performance in taking care of orphans and widows. He must know exactly how to take care of the orphans and widows by establishing regulations on how the law is to be carried out. He must establish a system by which the orphans and widows are cared for, and the number of orphans and widows

for which he must care in order to feel confident that he has self-sanctified himself in obedience to the law to take care of orphans and widows. He thus destroys his liberty under the law by establishing self-sanctifying laws for himself.

#### **D. Gospel freedom avoids denominating over religious rites.**

When the self-imposed laws become the tradition of a particular religious group, then a legal system of religion has been imposed on the members. The members of the group have thus become a denomination because other churches would have imposed other regulations on themselves as to how they must legally take care of orphans and widows. The different means and methods by which each group has established laws for themselves separates them from one another. They thus become denominations in their relationship with one another.

Regardless of how we might define legalism, one thing is common and central to all legalistic thought. The legalist will establish regulations on how the principles of law are to be obeyed. His regulations often digress to tradition, and then, tradition digresses to religious law. His problem then becomes his emphasis on maintaining the "doctrines and command-

ments of men” in order to make sure that the accepted religious laws of a particular religious group are maintained.

The problem comes when his manner or method to accomplish the principle of the law becomes law or when his way of carrying out the principle contradicts the manner or method of carrying out the same principle of law that is established by another church. Because he has in his mind determined that his way of carrying out the command is the only way it can be carried out, he judges his brother as liberal and in violation of law when he does not conform to his accepted traditional way by which he carries out the principles of law. When the traditional definition for carrying out a principle of law becomes the heritage that identifies a particular religious group, then a denomination has been born.

Add biblical ignorance to this scenario and one can see the difficulty many churches are in today. They do not know the Bible well enough to distinguish between tradition and Bible. When the freedom that we have in Christ is preached to these religious groups, the conflict comes between allowing freedom where God has not bound law. The problem in restoration, therefore, comes not in dealing with obedience to what the Bible teaches, but in giving up tradi-

tional religious marks of identity that have been accepted as law for many years.

This was the problem of the Jews in the first century when they became Christians. By the time of Jesus and the establishment of the church, many Jews found it difficult to give up those Jewish traditions that had been established that identified the “Jews’ religion.” Their answer to the conflict of giving up such traditions was to bind the traditions on the Gentiles. They thus sought to bind where God had not bound.

If we view Christianity to be a legal system of religion, then we will lay the foundation for laying burdens on members of the body as the Jewish religious leaders laid burdens on the backs of the Jews. The established methods to accomplish the prescribed principles of the law of liberty almost always become a burden to the ones who are struggling to maintain a behavioral checklist. Traditional laws continue to be bound on the consciences of brothers and sisters until a frustration level is reached.

Those disciples who have a high frustration level are usually those who are very legalistic in their religion. When one is not motivated in heart in gratitude of the gospel, he or she simply becomes frustrated with not feeling good about doing what he or she believes is the will of God. The frus-

trated become weary of feeling guilty about wondering if the good he does is pleasing to God. There is no peace of mind in the heart of the legalist. If there is peace, then he or she is self-righteous, believing that his self-sanctifying performance of law is accepted by God. The next step to this feeling is spiritual arrogance.

On the other hand, the one who has responded to the heart of God in obedience to the gospel knows that he can never perform enough for others to repay the debt God has cancelled in his life by grace (See Lk 17:10). He is driven by thanksgiving (See 1 Co 15:10). The legalist is driven by guilt. The one who works in thanksgiving knows he can never perform enough, thus he must trust in God's grace. The legalist trusts in his checklist that assures him that he has checked off his responsibility toward orphans and widows. The one who is driven by the gospel knows that he can never care for enough orphans and widows. There are too many. Therefore, he must trust in the grace of God for that which he cannot do.

There is a vast difference here between legal religion and the spirit of true gospel living. One system brings frustration. The other brings peace of mind. One breeds arrogance and boasting. The other produces the fruit of humility and service. One puts a ceiling on spiritual growth. The

other has no limits to which one will spiritually grow. If one can discover this difference, then the gospel of Jesus has won a victory.

### **E. Gospel freedom avoids spiritual discrimination.**

Obedience to the gospel naturally bring unity between all those who obey the gospel. However, religious legalism inherently works against this united fellowship. Since the legalist views his good works as an effort to meritoriously justify himself before God, then he views his works as a "spiritual level" of attainment. He thus compares his works with those of this brother in order to determine his level of spirituality. He views righteousness to be based on deeds. He thus begins comparing himself with others, and others against others. His religious arena becomes a field of competition between brothers who compare religious achievements. In such a competitive environment, brotherhood is lost.

Jesus said that the self-righteous pray, "*God, I thank you that I am not like other men ...*" (Lk 18:11). This expresses the attitude of the religious legalist in reference to his brother. The legalist starts counting his or her meritorious works by comparing them with the works of others. He or she develops a spiritual scorecard of

works that are used in reference to others who may not have performed equally as well. The legalist thus spiritually discriminates against those who do not score as high according to his own meritorious scorecard. Paul had this group of religionists in mind when he wrote,

*For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise (2 Co 10:12).*

In the Galatian situation, the Jewish believers had come out of a religious environment of believing in the one true God. On the other hand, the Gentiles were converted out of idolatrous religions that promoted many gods. Since the Jewish believers thought they had an advantage in the area of belief, they naturally thought that their past religiosity gave them an advantage over the Gentiles converts. For this reason Paul stated, *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gl 3:28).*

In Christ there are no spiritual scorecards by which one brother might compare himself with another. In Christ one cannot consider his

background to be a spiritual advantage because all come to Christ as sinners and in need of the grace of God (Rm 3:23).

Religious legalism also tends to puff up those who have been older in the faith, and thus, promotes either scholastic or seniority discrimination among believers. Knowledge of the legalistically established codes supposedly gives one an advantage in the status of brotherhood scholarship. One’s knowledge and teaching of the “precision” of the system often promotes one to be the judge and law-giver in the brotherhood on matters of the heritage of the particular religious group.

It is often stated that the new convert will “fall in line” as he or she grows. Since the accepted rules of traditional conduct of a particular group have been firmly established in the group into which the new convert has come, he or she usually succumbs to the heritage that identifies the particular group into which he is converted. Once the cloning process is completed, he or she “falls in line” and is no longer considered a new convert. One has thus identified with and accepted the new culture of newly accepted religion.

Religious legalism promotes discrimination in reference to performance. Since the legalist is measuring the faithfulness of his life by his

performance of those religious rites that identify a particular religious group, he naturally compares his behavior with that of others (2 Co 10:12). In competitive cultures this often leads to “spiritual” competition among disciples. For this reason, Paul often placed statements concerning the problem of boasting in the context of discussions against performance oriented religiosity. To the Ephesians, he wrote in reference to salvation, that it is “*not of works, lest anyone should boast*” (Ep 2:9). To the Roman disciples he wrote, “*Where is boasting then? It is excluded*” (Rm 3:27).

In view of the fact that one is saved by the grace of God, he has no opportunity to boast in reference to gospel living. When one comes into Christ through obedience to the gospel, his religious competitiveness that he had as a member of some man-made religious group, must be discarded as he grows in gratitude for the grace of God.

## **F. Gospel freedom prevents personal boasting.**

As stated in the preceding point, the less talented Christian is not only discriminated against, he becomes the occasion for the talented brother to become arrogant concerning his supposed meritorious abilities. The

brother who considers himself greater in good deeds boasts in reference to those he considers not to have reached his level of the Holy Spirit working in his life.

Boasting arises out of an environment where there exists different abilities or talents within the same fellowship. If all had the same ability, there would be no occasion for one boasting of his abilities over those of his brother whom he believes is performing in an inferior ministry. Once a legal chart of performance is produced in a religion that measures performance according to one’s abilities, there is judgment according to that chart. The self-righteous start boasting about “fasting twice a week,” having contributed so much, taught so many Bible classes, or baptized so many people. All such measurements according to the performance chart become occasions for one brother to boast against another.

The judaizing legalists of Galatia were no doubt teachers with great credentials and degrees of education. Because they were such, the Galatians were in awe of their positions and abilities. The legalist had high standards, and thus, used such as the measure by which others were to be judged (See Gl 4:17,18; 6:12-14). Their abilities and standards, therefore, became the occasion for their internal boasting and intimidation,

even of those as Peter and Barnabas (See Gl 2:11-13).

If one is saved by performance of either law or meritorious deeds, then certainly there is the opportunity for one brother to boast of his works in comparison to his fellow brother. For this reason, Paul wrote to the Ephesians concerning our salvation, that it is “*not of works, lest anyone should boast*” (Ep 2:9). If salvation is dependent on the gospel of God’s grace, then Paul states, “*Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works, No, but by the law of faith*” (Rm 3:27). The problem in Galatia was boasting over meritorious deeds. There was even boasting on the part of the judaizing teachers concerning their recruitment of Gentiles by having them circumcised. Paul wrote, “*They desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh*” (Gl 6:13). But if one is saved by the grace of God, and not the performance of meritorious works of law and good deeds, then there is no room for boasting.

Paul’s answer to the preceding boasting in the flesh was boasting in the cross of the gospel. “*But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world*’ (Gl 6:14). Since one is totally dependent on God’s grace for salvation, he has no

opportunity to boast of earning or maintaining his salvation through self-sanctifying meritorious works.

If our friend wakes up one morning and writes us a check for a million dollars because we are his friend, how can we boast that we earned the million dollars? God has freely given us the gift of the gospel. How can we boast that we deserved or earned the gift? In fact, Paul wrote, “*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Rm 5:8).

It is the nature of the religionist to compare, and thus, boast of his works in relation to his brother. He is the one who will pray, “*God, I thank you that I am not like other men*” (Lk 18:11). He is thus the man about whom Jesus said, “*For everyone who exalts himself will be abased*” (Lk 18:14). The legalist exalts himself above his fellow brother and assumes that his law-keeping and meritorious deeds are better or greater. As the Pharisees, he thus boasts concerning his “*righteousness.*”

## **G. Gospel freedom inspires world evangelism.**

The religious legalist is so busy sorting out the brotherhood over the most recent issue, his thinking is diverted from the mission of the gospel. He is so busy troubling the

church over issues (Gl 1:7), that the members' thinking and energies are often consumed and diverted from the work of preaching the gospel to the world. The legalist frets so much about issues that he has no mental time for the lost. His mission changes from saving the lost to saving the saved. When this change has been made, those who revere him as a great prophet among them, also have their thinking diverted. The legalistic leader is in such a struggle to keep the saints in line with "his gospel" that he has no time or energy to preach the gospel of grace to the lost world.

The religious legalist has changed the focus of evangelism. His concept of evangelism is quite different from the one who seeks to preach the gospel of the crucified Christ (1 Co 1:23,24). The Jewish legalists of the first century sought to proselyte Gentiles to their system of religious rites that were manufactured after the traditions of the fathers. Of them Jesus said,

*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves (Mt 23:15).*

Jewish legalism was evangelistic in that the Pharisees sought to bring

Gentiles into conformity with the traditions of Judaism. This system of evangelistic thought was brought into the first century church by Jews who did not understand the nature of the gospel of freedom in Christ. When Jews were converted, they tried to make the church Jewish by enforcing on the disciples circumcision and ceremonies that God had not bound. Evangelism to the judaizing teachers, therefore, was not bringing people to the cross, but to their system of religious regulations.

Legalistic leaders today function in the same manner in their work as the scribes and Pharisees functioned in the first century. They search among the disciples for those who would be loyal to them and their systematic theology. They do as the judaizing teachers who followed Paul throughout southern Galatia. They were recruiting Gentile converts to the blade of the scissors of circumcision (Gl 4:17).

The mission of the judaizing legalists was not focused primarily on the lost. Their focus was on the saved. Since they believed that unless one was circumcised he could not be saved (At 15:1), they searched throughout the brotherhood in order to find uncircumcised Gentiles. Once found, they brought innocent Gentiles into conformity to the law of their

scissors.

## H. Gospel freedom avoids contention.

The judaizing teachers of the first century taught a concept of grace that demanded the addition of self-sanctifying meritorious law-keeping and good works on the part of Christians. They wanted and taught the gospel, but they added their religious rites of conduct after the Sinai law (circumcision and ceremonies). By their additions they became an occasion for division among the disciples.

Their concept of grace, therefore, was similar to the religious world of today. Those of the religious world believe in the cross. They believe that Jesus died for our sins and was raised for our hope. However, in conjunction with belief in the gospel—though they often deny the necessity of obedience to the gospel by immersion—one must conform to the traditions of a particular religious heritage. Their view of salvation is the same as the judaizing teachers of the first century. They believe the gospel, but they add self-sanctifying obedience to the rites of their particular religious heritage.

We must not miss a significant point here. **It was the legalistic false teachers in the first century who were binding where God had not bound.** They were binding circum-

cision and other religious rites of Jewish heritage in order to marshal the Gentile converts into their Jewish heritage.

This is the nature of religious legalism. By binding where God has not bound, the truth of the gospel is compromised. Another gospel is being taught. It is this other gospel, the binding where God has not bound, that divides brethren. Paul wrote, *“They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you [from the rest of the saints], that you may be zealous for them”* (Gl 4:17).

The result of the legalistic teachers’ work in Galatia and Rome was division among the saints by the recruiting of Gentile converts to the “gospel of works.” The judaizers had established what was necessary for salvation according to their system of religious codes. They thus sought to bind on the Galatian and Roman disciples what they considered to be additional requirements for salvation. Their binding where God had not bound produced trouble and division among the disciples (See Rm 16:17,18).

When religious legalism arises among disciples, division is inevitable unless all members are intimidated into conforming to the same regimented practices and religious rites. And this is exactly what the false teachers from Jerusalem sought to do



when they came down from Jerusalem to Antioch in order to bind where God had not bound (See Gl 2:11-14). This is what was happening among many disciples in the first century concerning those who were teaching circumcision as a condition for salvation. Luke recorded of the situation, *“And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’”* (At 15:1). By binding where God had loosed (circumcision and the law), these teachers were dividing the brotherhood of believers. In doing this, Paul stated that they were preaching another gospel (Gl 1:6-9). Therefore, anyone who would teach the gospel, plus their added religious traditions, is actually preaching another gospel.

The irony of division over the binding of religious rites is in the fact that the legalist often accuses others of dividing the church than himself. He accuses those who refuse to be bound by the precepts of the legalist’s checklist of actually dividing the church.

The legalist fails to separate his religious traditions from the gospel. His legal religious rites have become law in his mind, and thus he assumes that in order for the saints to be united, everyone must conform to his system of religiosity. He often does not know

enough Bible to separate tradition from what is Bible, and thus, sincerely, but ignorantly, binds his traditions on the brotherhood of believers. When some rise up and discover that the accepted tradition is not Bible, and thus, seek to change, then these people are often accused by the religionist of being liberal and dividing the church. The religious legalist thus gives a pretense of spirituality because he is “defending the faith” against those he has judged not to be living according to the “truth” of his religious rites.

The truth of the matter, however, is in the fact that he has defined “the truth” by the addition of matters of opinion or the traditions of the fathers. He has actually twisted the truth of God to his own destruction (2 Pt 3;15,16).

The religionist’s accusation often becomes more intense as he is pressed to find scripture for his traditions, but cannot. His only recourse to maintain his position is to defensively cry out “church divider,” “liberal” or “unsaved.” However, one’s position is not proved right by the volume of one’s voice or the zeal by which he defends his religion. It is proved right only by a finger on a passage in the Book of God.

An explosion into division always lies under the surface of a brotherhood that is constructed on a foundation of religion. Because no free-

dom has been taught in order to produce an atmosphere of loving forbearance (Ph 4:5), the potential for conflict between parties within a religion is always present.

Among those disciples where forbearance and liberty have always been maintained in a spirit of gospel love and unity, the potential for division is always defused by love and forbearance before it has any opportunity to divide the saints. It is for this reason that Paul wrote to the Colossians, “*Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words*” (Cl 2:4). The zeal of the religious legalist may deceive one into believing that his position is correct. However, Paul warned,

*Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ (Cl 2:8).*

### **G. Gospel freedom denies the works of the flesh.**

Legalistic theology often develops a dichotomous behavior. In other words, a supposedly religious person will do those things that are contrary to the word of God, and yet, he will justify his behavior by his self-sanctifying obedience to the religious rites

of his particular religion. He will often justify his behavior because he has convinced himself that such behavior does not conflict with God’s will, for he has successfully self-justified himself by his performance of legal rites of worship.

The religious legalist can feel justified before God by performing the act of contribution, or supposed leadership action of taking up the contribution in the assembly, but then taking the contribution for his own use because he feels that his personal need outweighs the purpose for which the contribution was taken. The means justifies the end. The legalist often believes that the merit of his leadership and the performance of a legal act of contribution has atoned for what sin may have committed in taking the contributed money. If the legalist feels he has checked off all necessary requirements for his self-justified worship, then he often believes he is permitted to partake of some sin after the “closing prayer.”

But the problem with the legal religionist is that he fails to deal with the sin beneath the sin. His legalistic approach to religion has diverted him from concentrating on holiness in his heart while he feels self-justified by his legal worship. His concentration on the outward appearance of legal religious rites has hindered his focus to correct inward attitudes that give rise

to outward sin.

One does not have to wonder much in order to understand the legalistic mentality of Judas in taking money from that which was contributed to Jesus and the disciples (Jn 12:6). He was born into a Jewish religious system of legalism that justified actions that were wrong, but were right if the end justified the wrong. In this way, the legalist sees the importance of the outward performance to be more important than inner holiness. It was for this reason that Paul had to write concerning the works of the flesh in the Galatian context of Jewish legalism (Gl 5:19-21). This explains why the supposedly faithful member can worship God according to legal acts of accepted worship, and then, commit adultery with the church secretary. This explains why the preacher can preach on kindness, and yet be unkind to his family. This explains why the legalistic church can teach longsuffering, and yet hastily draw up disfellowship papers.

This explains how a self-sanctifying experientialist can enjoy an emotional euphoria that is poured out on a Sunday morning, but in his self-righteous religiosity live a life of sin from Monday to Saturday.

When outward performance becomes more important than inward holiness, then all sorts of contradictions are witnessed in legalistic reli-

gion. This is why Paul immediately saw the hypocrisy in the situation where Peter withdrew from the Gentiles when Jerusalem teachers came to Antioch. *“And the rest of the Jews also **played the hypocrite** with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with **their hypocrisy**”* (Gl 2:13).

Peter and Barnabas behaved hypocritically because they *“were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel”* (Gl 2:14). They were not living according to the gospel. Their behavior on that occasion was contrary to the nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Though their sin was not of the flesh, they were not living in tune with the straightforwardness of the gospel.

Because legalism appeals to the flesh, the flesh is trapped in a system that does not offer complete control over the flesh. Since the flesh cannot remain controlled by law, it eventually rebels against all the rules, and thus breaks out of control. When the frustration with meritorious law-keeping reaches a certain point, the legalist spiritually crashes. He often dis-cards religion and blames God in his frustration, and then falls away to the world. When the crash comes in the religious life of a legalistic church, the members will fight and devour one another (Gl 5:15; Js 4:1,2).

**J. Gospel freedom avoids self-sanctifying religious rites.**

In a legalistic religion, all matters of belief of the religion have been established. These beliefs are sometimes recorded in a written form as a creed book or church manual. Sometimes they are unwritten, but believed by the group. The unwritten codes and regulations of a particular group are often more damaging to the unity of the group in the sense that members of the group are always in question concerning what someone else believes and does. What is developed is a committee of watchdogs in the group who appoint themselves to be guardians of the beliefs of the group. Suspicion and intimidation thus develop in the atmosphere of the fellowship of people who are intimidated to study their Bibles for fear of being attacked by the guardians with whom they might disagree.

This atmosphere of fear and intimidation was prevalent during the ministry of Jesus. For example, Jesus healed a man in Jerusalem who had been born blind. The Pharisees interrogated the man's parents concerning the healing that had taken place on the Sabbath. However, the parents would not confess to the Pharisees who or how the man had been healed. John recorded,

*His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews*

*had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue (Jn 9:22).*

In the above scenario of legal religiosity, the religious leaders controlled the adherents of the religion by fear.

Groups that establish their religious behavior on the foundation of identifiable religious rites seek to clone all adherents to the accepted rites. Since the religion exists because of the established traditions, it is imperative that the traditions of the fathers be maintained. If the Bible plays a part in such religions, then interpretations are often traditionalized. All adherents must therefore conform to the accepted interpretations.

Since all beliefs of a traditional religion have been established by the group, there is no need to restudy any points of the established codes or interpretations that are commonly held by the group. Emphasis is placed on what the group believes on a particular issue or passage, not on any teaching some individual adherents might glean from personal Bible study. It is for this reason that most independent or traditional churches do not have open Bible study classes. In independent churches the "pastor" is the final authority, and in traditional churches, the "heritage" is the final

authority in matters of faith. It is the duty of the pastor to uphold the heritage of the group.

The individual members of both independent and traditional churches have given their brains over to the accepted “scholars” of the group or the traditional beliefs of the fathers. The traditional interpretations of the group are then handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth or in books that the group accepts as “sound doctrine.” This is exactly what the religious leaders of Israel did (See Mk 7:1-9).

When we understand the preceding point, we can understand why Paul exhorted Timothy to be a good student of God’s word. *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word of truth**”* (2 Tm 2:15). Christians must know their Bibles well enough to be able to determine what is binding and what is not binding. A generation of believers who become ignorant of the Bible is fertile soil for the germination of the seeds of religion. An ignorant generation is fertile soil because legalists can bind where God has not bound. Those who are ignorant of the word of God will allow their leaders to do such without opposition because they do not know the difference between Bible and Baal. The membership is then

simply held in line by the intimidation of the accepted “scholars” and an ignorant generation of the church who believe the accepted “authoritative” interpreters of the Scriptures. This was the religious environment into which Jesus introduced the gospel of freedom.

In the Galatian situation, the young Galatian converts were swept away by the presentation of the judaizing teachers. They were being zealously courted by the religiosity of those brethren who claimed to be ambassadors of the truth from Jerusalem (Gl 4:17; At 15:24). These legalists were taking advantage of some young Christians they thought they could bring into the bondage of their religion. They would have succeeded if Paul had not flatly stated that they were teaching another gospel (Gl 1:6-9). If the Galatians followed after the gospel of the judaizing teachers, then they would fall from grace (Gl 5:1-4).

Because there is always a danger of falling victim to the unwritten codes and interpretations of legalistic teachers and their teachings, Christians must continually be good students of God’s word. John warned, *“Beloved, **do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world**”* (1 Jn 4:1). It is important to remember to

test the spirits. However, it is vital that the standard of testing be the word of God, not the accepted interpretations and opinions of any particular religious group. God's word is the only final authority concerning religious beliefs. It is for this reason that each Christian must be a diligent student of the Bible.

### **K. Gospel freedom promotes sincerity.**

Paul caught the legalistic teachers of Galatia in the hypocrisy of their own theology. *"For not even those who are circumcised keep the law ...."* (Gl 6:13). These teachers kept only that part of the law they desired. They turned away from that which they chose to ignore. They ignored animal sacrifices. They ignored those parts of the law that would bring them into conflict with those parts of the law of Christ they chose to apply.

The problem in a legalistic approach to Christianity is that one often finds himself in a hypocritical trap. He professes to keep the law, and yet, he must confess that he is not keeping all the law.

Paul wrote, *"And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law"* (Gl 5:3). In other words, when it comes to law, one cannot pick and choose. If one wanted to return

to the Sinai law for circumcision in order to be saved, then he must return to all the law. Paul said the same thing to some legalistic teachers in Rome: *"For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law [perfectly]; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision"* (Rm 2:25). If one wants to go to the law in order to self-justify himself through circumcision, then he must go to all the law. He must give up the gospel of grace.

The law could be profitable on this basis except for one problem. We break law (Rm 3:23). We are thus lawbreakers. And lawbreakers are dead in sin (Rm 6:23). Circumcision availed nothing toward the salvation of the Jews because they could not keep all the law perfectly. Because they could not keep the law perfectly, they were judged by the law to be sinners, and thus, as sinners they were condemned (Js 2:10). Those who would seek to be justified by the law of Christ must remember this.

A legalist cannot theologially pick and choose what laws he wants to recognize and practice. He either has to be theologially consistent by keeping all the law and taking his chances, or he has to step forward and accept the grace of God on the foundation of the gospel. He has to either trust in God's grace or trust in his own perfect performance of law. If he

trusts in his performance of law, then he must be perfectly obedient to the whole law, not just that portion he chooses.

When studying the problem of legalism, we must keep in mind that such is a digression from the truth of the gospel. It is as Paul stated, **another gospel** (Gl 1:6-9). This other gospel leads one into falling from grace because it leads one to focus on his own abilities to meritoriously keep law and perform good deeds (Gl 5:4). It destroys the liberty one has in Christ (Gl 5:1). It brings one into bondage (At 15:10; Gl 5:1). It leads one to live in conflict with the truth of the gospel (Gl 3:1). It leads to boasting (Ep 2:9; Gl 6:13). It leads to cancelling the effectiveness of the cross (Gl 2:2; 5:2).

### **L. Gospel freedom seeks the guidance of law.**

We must understand that Jesus' ministry was to a religious people who were led by legalistic religious leaders. The early disciples were established first among the Jews who were the product of these leaders. In order to understand the purpose for which much of the New Testament was written, one must understand the nature of traditional legalistic religion.

We must not misunderstand what Paul is saying concerning legalism in

many of his writings. Too often critics accuse Paul of believing that obedience to law was not necessary concerning one's salvation. In fact, some in Rome believed that because we are saved by grace, we are not obligated to direct our lives by the law of God. Paul rebuked some Roman Christians, "*Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?*" (Rm 6:1). In other words, if grace saves to the uttermost, then in order to have an abounding grace of God in one's life, we can live as we please. In doing this, Jude stated that some "*turn the grace of our God into licentiousness*" (Jd 4). Some felt free to live as they wished because of an erroneous belief that grace would cover all sin. This is the Christian who believes he can get by with all sorts of sin because we are under grace. This is also the Christian who feels he has no obligations because we are supposedly saved by grace alone.

One must not deceive himself into believing he can sow to the flesh and reap the fruit of the Spirit of God (Gl 6:6,7). One must not believe that he or she has no obligations toward his or her brother or sister, for we must "*bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ*" (Gl 6:2). One must not believe that he can idly sit by and do nothing, for in Christ our faith must be working through love (Gl 5:6). If one is doing nothing, then

it is evident that he has no gratitude for the gospel of Jesus.

We must not misunderstand grace. Grace frees one from salvation by meritorious law-keeping. It does not free one to do his own thing, and thus, live after the flesh. We must always remember that when the Scriptures discuss faith, faith in response to the gospel is assumed. If our faith in the gospel produces no good works, then we are dead (Jn 2:17). The truth of the gospel is so axiomatic in the lives of those who live by faith, that obedience is simply assumed.

When one understands salvation by grace, he understands that he is not saved by the traditions of men. He is freed from human religious traditions. For this reason, those who preach the gospel of grace have the greatest message in the world to a religious world that is in the bondage of their own religiosity. In a world that struggles to maintain the religious traditions of the fathers, the freedom of the grace of God comes as a message of deliverance.

When one understands salvation by grace, then the law of God is established in his life by faith. Paul wrote, *“Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, **we establish the law**”* (Rm 3:31). When one through faith recognizes and trusts in the grace of God, he cries out, “Abba, Father.” He seeks

to obey the Father as an obedient child of faith. In gratitude to the Father, therefore, he seeks to obey the Father. His life under grace is thus more abundant than a life of self-sanctifying law-keeping. Paul wrote of his own life,

*But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; **but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me*** (1 Co 15:10).

While a legalistic Jew, Paul was known for being a diligent laborer for God. However, when he discovered the grace of God that was revealed through Jesus, he labored more abundantly. Therefore, when one discovers the gospel of grace, he labors more abundantly for God than when he sought God through meritorious obedience. Legalistic theology puts limits on the obedience of an individual. However, the gospel frees one to spiritually grow without limits. Legalism limits; gospel causes growth.

As we venture into the marvelous letters of the New Testament, we discover the nature of God’s heart of grace that sets men free. Jesus came to set men free. Jesus said, *“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (Jn 8:32). *“Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed”* (Jn 8:36).



Jesus came to set the captives free (Is 61:1; Ep 4:8,9). The captives are not free from law, but they are free from themselves in reference to meritorious performance of law. They are free from religion through the gospel of Jesus. They are set free in order to obey God rather than man.

In a religious sense, legalism is **religious humanism**. Secular humanism makes people the center of reference to life. It is believed that the power of existence centers around the ability of the individual to control his own destiny. The secular humanist discards God for the sake of trusting his own egocentric ability to be his own person.

The religious humanist maintains belief in God. In the Galatian and Roman context, the religious humanist believed in the gospel of grace on the cross. However, he also trusted in himself by emphasizing his ability to perform law or do meritorious deeds in order to sanctify himself. The legalist, therefore, becomes the center of reference for his own religion that he has created after his own system of religious self-sanctification.

However, all such beliefs enslave one to himself. The legalist usually does not have a conscience that is free of guilt. If it is free of guilt, it is arro-

gant, for he assumes that he has performed law sufficiently in order to save himself. Such a one is self-centered. In his or her self-centered religious egotism, dependence on the gospel fades into a distant past as one arrogantly assumes pride in oneself to self-sanctify oneself through the performance of religious rites.

The more we understand the true mentality of legalism, the better we will understand why Holy Spirit was so stern against its invasion into the Galatian and Roman churches. The better we understand Spirit's argument against legalism, the better we will appreciate the tremendous grace of God in our lives to save us from ourselves.

It is through this grace that we receive the peace of God that surpasses all understanding. It is because of this grace that the Christian can have confidence in his salvation. He can have confidence, not because of meritorious good works, or his ability to keep law perfectly. His confidence is in the grace of the gospel regardless of human imperfections. Therefore, because of His grace toward us at the cross of Christ, we live out thanksgiving to Him for the revelation of the gospel.