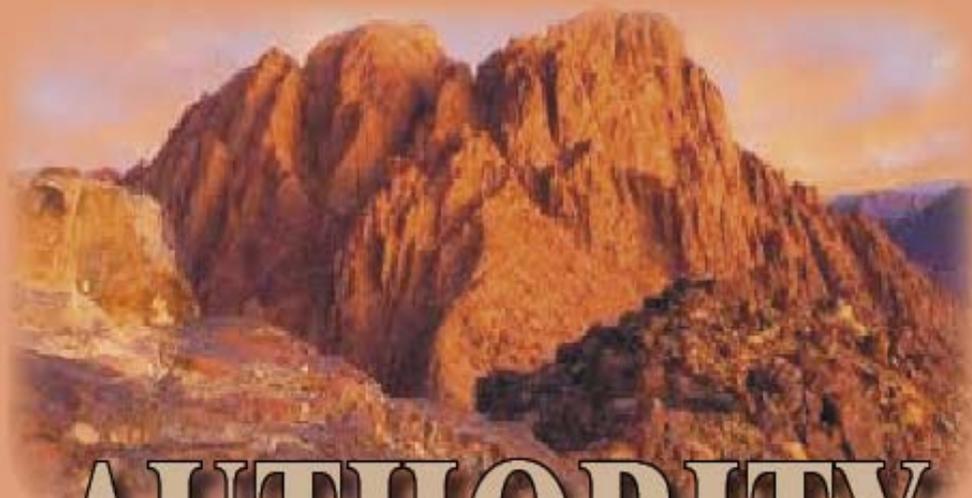


**Restoring Faith That Is Based  
On The Word Of God**



**AUTHORITY**

**from**

**HEAVEN**

**DICKSON**

# Authority From Heaven

Roger E. Dickson

## CONTENTS

Introduction – 3

**1 – Remembering Sobering Examples – 4**

**2 – Cultural Paradigm Shift – 9**

**3 – Difficult Paradigms To Shift – 13**

**4 – Confessed Religiosity – 17**

**5 – The Authority Of God’s Word – 19**

**6 – National Apostasy – 34**

**7 – The Futile Restoration – 40**

**8 – Radical Restoration – 48**

**9 – Gospel Freedom – 62**

**10 – The Law Of Liberty – 67**

**Biblical Research Library – 81**

**Abbreviations – 82**

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 2020, Africa International Missions

Scripture quotations from *International King James Version*

Cover photo: Traditional Mount Sinai in the Sinai Peninsula

## INTRODUCTION

There is a great open door that has been made possible by the Covid-19 pandemic. Members of religious groups around the world are now home, and in some ways, detached from their Sunday-morning rituals that were conducted by the local pastor or priest of their choice. Other than the limited attachment with their favorite preacher through live-streaming, members of religious groups have now been moved into an opportunity to dust off their Bibles and start reading again for themselves the Divine instructions of the word of God.

We know that it is God's customary plan to allow Satan to work against himself. The most dramatic case of this work on the part of God was when He allowed Satan to stir up a mob to have His Son crucified. Since we conclude that God has allowed Satan to bring the dark cloud of the present pandemic upon the face of the world, He will use this opportunity to sift from the earth those who truly love His word. We must assume, therefore, that God is using us as His harvesters to reap fruit from the fields. We must be attentive to Jesus' encouragement with which He challenged His disciples, "*Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already for harvest*" (Jn 4:35).

We see the pandemic, therefore, to be a fantastic opportunity to encourage home Bible study. The pandemic may be one of God's ways to give people one last chance to be reminded of His road map unto eternal glory. It is at least an opportunity for all of us to reconnect through prayer and Bible study with the one true and living God. After following so many other professionals who have monopolized, and limited, our knowledge of the Bible, it is now time to take the time to learn directly for ourselves His true destiny for us through a personal study of His word.

We have simply discovered that we no longer need those dreamers and man-made traditions that have been shouted from pulpits and podiums around the world. We no longer need all the prophets of doom. We have discovered that in our humble homes we can learn again the song, "The Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the world keep silence

before Him.” So now, both preachers and people have been confined in lockdown silence in order to search their hearts for the purpose of building a true relationship with the Father through His word. This is indeed the days of opportunity to again walk by faith.

## 1 REMEMBERING SOBERING EXAMPLES

The Holy Spirit calls on all Christians to study their Old Testaments in order to remember the error of God’s people throughout the history of Israel: “*For whatever things were written [in the Old Testament] before were written for our learning, so that we through patience and encouragement of the Scriptures might have hope*” (Rm 15:4). “*Now these things happened to them [Israel] as an example, and they were written [in the Old Testament] for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come*” (1 Co 10:11).

This brings us to one of the most sobering chapters of the entire Bible. It is sobering because the people of God at a particular time in history fell away to that about which God warned them in Deuteronomy 13. This chapter was a direct mandate from God that was issued before the children of Israel entered into the land of promise. Every time we read this chapter, our hearts are moved just this side of being terrified of what God forewarned His people about in reference to their eventual turn away from Him to the charismatic leaders of the Baal prophets. So much of what God said in this chapter applies so well to the religious world today in which we live.

In order to understand the context of what God revealed to the Israelites through Moses in Deuteronomy 13, we must clearly understand that the apostasy about which the people were forewarned was not about them becoming a nonreligious people. On the contrary, **the warning referred to an eventual paradigm shift in their religiosity**. They would remain religious, but the focus of their religiosity would be shifted from God and His commandments to obedience of the religious rites, rituals and ceremonies they would create for themselves after their own desires.

Because they would eventually forget the word of God (Hs 4:6), they would create their own religiosity. Once they had established their own religious rites, rituals and ceremonies, especially their own immoral behavior in reference to the practice of their religion, they would then “hire” priests and prophets to promote their religion. The priests and prophets of their religiosity would then impose on them their religion in order to maintain their supported positions as priests and prophets.

In all this the people would forsake the word of God. Because the people would eventually become ignorant of what their “Bibles” said, they would shift from the authority of God’s word to their own religious authorities. They would move from God to the gods that they would create after their own imagination.

Moses and Aaron had been warned forty years before Deuteronomy was written of Israel’s drift toward creating idolatrous religiosity. The Israelites were a stubborn and stiffnecked people who wanted to do their own thing (See Ex 32:9; 33:3,5). A few months after being delivered from the polygamist religious culture of their Egyptian captors, and while at the foot of Mount Sinai, the people revealed that they were at that time prone to “evil.”

This “evil” was defined by what Aaron said to Moses after Moses came down from Mount Sinai with two stone tablets of God’s commandments in his arms. Aaron justified himself for building the golden calf by saying that the people demanded of him, “*Make us gods that will go before us*” (Ex 32:23). In other words, the people wanted gods who would do what they wanted them to do, that is, they wanted to be the authority of their own faith. And so, Aaron made the golden calf that was a symbol of self-imposed religiosity. This was “evil,” and this is a description of most of the religious world today.

In contrast to those of Israel who sought to create their own religion, we seek a faith that is based on the validation of the word of God. When we struggle with our faith, we study our Bibles. We do not seek a “miracle.” We do not need a faith that must be constantly and empirically validated by touching the nail holes in the hands of Jesus or the wound in His side (See Jn 20:24-29). All such things were written for our learning, and thus we study our Bibles in order to energize our faith (Rm 10:17).

“Evil” religion is narcissistic, which explains the religiosity of the people who were at the foot of Mount Sinai. They wanted gods who would be subject to their desires instead of them being subject to the authority of a God they could not see. In this way, evil religion is always subjective since it is the product of those who seek to be their own authority in matters of faith. Religion is always empirical because the adherents always, if not weekly, validate their faith by some “miracle” or speaking in tongues at the local assembly. Contrary to narcissistic and empirical religion that is subjective, faith in the authority of the word of God is always objective. Objective faith is always expressed in the words that Eli instructed young Samuel, “*Speak Lord, Your servant hears*” (1 Sm 3:9). The objective believer seeks to hear from the word of God. The subjective religionist seeks to see and experience.

When one seeks to be religious according to his own subjective feelings, or some “miracle” he subjectively conjures up in his mind, then he is simply following after evil religion. His faith is based on his own humanity. But if one objectively seeks out the word of God and reads, then he or she has a faith that is based on the word of God (Is 34:16). The word of God becomes the objective foundation of his or her faith (Rm 10:17). Subsequently, this person is seeking to worship and serve God according to God’s word. These are the folks for whom God is seeking throughout the world today to worship Him (Jn 4:23).

So in the Sinai Peninsula God asked Moses, “*How long will I bear with this evil assembly who murmur against Me?*” (Nm 14:27). Those who came out of Egyptian captivity were still infected with the virus of Egyptian religiosity. And for this reason, they had to be quarantined in the wilderness for forty years until they were disinfected. They had to be quarantined in the wilderness until that first freed generation of Israelites, who were idolatry-infested, had died in the wilderness. God did not want the initial idolatry-contaminated generation to enter into the purity of the land of promise. So God said, “*In this wilderness they will be consumed and there they will die*” (Nm 14:35).

The people did evil by seeking to make idol gods who would go before them. Forty years after the Sinai incident, when they were about to enter into the land of promise as a new generation that had been born

in the wilderness, Moses wrote the book of Deuteronomy. In the book God forewarned the Israelites that they would likewise be doing evil if they decided in the land to infect themselves again with their own religions they would create after their own desires (Dt 4:25). And thus in the context of Deuteronomy 13, we understand how God used the word “evil.” “Evil” would be turning away from the moral standards of the God who brought them out of Egyptian captivity. “Evil” would be creating a religious faith after their own desires, and gods whom they supposed would go before them. Evil religion exists when people reject the authority of the word of God in matters of faith.

Since Israel’s eventual shift away from the moral authority of the word of God would lead them to establish their own moral standards, then only evil behavior would result. In other words, if one wants to live in adultery, then he or she must either change or discard the dictionary that defines adultery. If one wants to live as a homosexual, then one must discard the dictionary (the Bible) that states what homosexuality is and that homosexuality is evil. The same would also apply to “evils” as thief, murder, drunkenness, fornication and such works of the flesh that the Holy Spirit noted in Galatians 5:19,20. Therefore, any apostasy from the authority of the word of God results in that which the word of God defines as evil.

The apostasy to evil in Israel would be led by those who would no longer be teachers of the authority of the law of God. They would be teachers of their own religious rites, rituals and ceremonies that would permit evil behavior to exist among the people. It is this “evil” in the context of Deuteronomy 13 that God commanded through Moses, “*Put away the evil from you*” (Dt 17:12).

This is the same mandate that the Holy Spirit gave to some Corinthians who were making friends with the evil idolatrous religiosity of unbelievers in Corinth, which unbelievers were promoting fornication as worship to their gods: “*Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness. And what fellowship has light with darkness?*” (2 Co 6:14). If this were true with Israel, and with the early Christians in Corinth, then certainly it is true with us today.

Christians must be cautious about fellowshiping the “evil” that is represented by the religions of the world in which we live. Since religion is a denial of the moral authority of the word of God, then the beliefs and behavior of all religion must be questioned and compared with the word God. The word of God must be our standard of judgment of the faith of all men because many religionists either deny or twist that which the word of God defines as evil. This is exactly what happened in the apostasy of Israel. They had morally digressed to the point of reversing evil and good: “*Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness*” (Is 5:20). If one does not think this is true today, then think of all those religionists who are members of churches that condone abortion (murder). Think about all those prophets who stand up before the people and are afraid to preach against homosexuality. Think of all those pastors and priests throughout the world who have no idea what it means to respect the authority of the word of God.

And now today, the present pandemic has presented us with the opportunity to put “evil religiosity” away from ourselves and reconnect again with God through His word. It is a time of restoration wherein we can step outside the cathedrals and temples wherein religious rites, rituals, ceremonies and supposed miracles were meritoriously performed that defined our religiosity. This is an opportunity to read again the Holy Spirit-inspired dictionary in the quietness of our own homes in order to check our moral behavior and beliefs.

We have also discovered that our rituals of worship do not define our worship, nor do they make our worship meritoriously acceptable before God. The people of God now have the opportunity to step inside their closets, and worship in prayer on their knees. This is indeed a time to feel the refreshing winds of a word-based relationship with the Father, which relationship we have often cluttered with the performance of our own religiosity. We are now laid bare before our Creator, being stripped naked of all our presumptuous and meritorious performances that we presumed would sanctify us before God.

## 2 CULTURAL PARADIGM SHIFT

In order to understand where the recipients of the Deuteronomy 13 directives were socially, culturally and religiously, we must go back in their history almost four centuries. We must go back to a land in which they were “taken care of” by a very polytheistic society that initially invited Jacob and his family into the land of Goshen (Gn 45:10). Until that time in Egypt there had been a succession of pharaohs that extended back several centuries before the arrival of Jacob and his sons. In fact, when Jacob arrived in Egypt, there were monuments throughout Egypt, many of which were at least one thousand years old. There were pyramids and temples that were intimidating to this small clan of shepherds from Palestine. We can only imagine how awesome the structures of Egypt appeared to these shepherds who had come from a land where they experienced no such massive monuments or temples.

Nevertheless, at the time when Jacob’s clan arrived in Egypt, the Nile Delta of Egypt was the ideal environment in which shepherds could graze their sheep and goats in the fertile region of Goshen, a place of rivers and grasslands. What could be more peaceful than to reside in such a social and political environment under the protection of a stable government. We are convinced that Jacob and his sons were truly grateful for the kind gesture that was shown them by the pharaoh of Egypt.

But from the very beginning of their arrival, there were challenges for these monotheistic shepherds from the pastures of Palestine. As guests in the land of Egypt, the Israelites had to accommodate the polytheistic religiosity of their host. Egypt was a society that believed in many gods whom they assumed had allowed them to become such a great and powerful society at the time. The Egyptians had history, and a culture that dated back centuries.

The Egyptians had invested heavily in their military, having some of the greatest war chariots of the ancient world. Archaeological evidence reveals that they had compound bows that would send arrows further in distance than any contemporary bows of the neighboring nations. The Egyptian military was unmatched by other nations at the

time Israel resided in Egypt. It was the perfect environment, therefore, for God to grow a nation in order to preserve the promises that He had made to Abraham (Gn 12:1-3).

But then problems came for the innocent shepherd culture. After being in the Egyptian social and cultural environment for almost four centuries, something began to happen to the foundational beliefs of the people. Not only did the descendants of the shepherds begin to accommodate the polytheism of their host nation, they also started to adopt—at least condone—the polytheism of their host. Israel's gratitude for their protection led them to be very tolerant of the fact that the Egyptians were atheists in reference to believing in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But since they were economically at the mercy of the economically powerful Egyptians, they thought they had to compromise their faith in reference to there being only one God. They were cautious about speaking against the gods of the Egyptians. So God determined that it was time for them to leave the comforts of their host.

The monotheism of Israel was contrary to Egypt's polytheism. Nevertheless, Israel remained tolerant, so tolerant that in some ways they learned to bear with all those who believed in other gods. They lead themselves to believe that if one were simply a good person, believed in the human rights of the individual, then they as monotheistic believers could cohabit with such good polytheists. But in the eyes of God, His people were starting to conform too much to the religiosity of their host.

Faith, or religion, should never be an obstacle to one's association with other people, even with those who believe in other gods. Regardless of how many gods in which their host nation believed, and as long as they were tolerant of their beliefs, then the Israelites could reside peacefully in the land. But the Israelites' toleration went too far. They began to accept some of the Egyptian gods, or at least believe that there were other gods to whom they should reverence out of respect for the Egyptians. This compromise in belief did not reveal itself until they were in a time of desperation at the foot of Mount Sinai. It was then that they cried out to Aaron, "*Make us gods that will go before us*" (Ex 32:1). This plea to Aaron after they had been set free from Egypt re-

veals that at least this generation of freed Israelites had been infected with the virus of Egyptian polytheism.

But then politics also entered into the picture while the people were still in Egypt. Because the Israelites were pacifists, and Egypt protected them with their military strength, they became comfortable in their state of security. They did not need their own military to guard and provide their security. They subsequently began to multiply to the point that their host nation of Egypt became worried that they would eventually outnumber the Egyptians in the land. Israelite “votes” began to grow to the extent that the host nation believed that the Israelites would take over Egypt. In fact, the chronicler of the times wrote of the Israelites, *“The children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty. **And the land was filled with them**”* (Ex 1:7). In fact, according to archaeological records, the Israelites became so great in numbers that historically they possibly seceded from Egypt as a whole, having gained self-control of the northeastern region of Goshen. At least this is what seems to appear in some Egyptian historical records of the time.

Therefore, our biblical account must be understood in view of this mass growth of the population of the Israelites in Egypt. The pharaoh at the time of the massive growth was greatly concerned that the Israelites would eventually take over all Egypt. If this happened, then God’s promise to Abraham, that He would give to his descendants the land of Palestine, would possibly never be fulfilled (Gn 12:7). Therefore, God had to raise up a pharaoh, who through slavery, would generate in the Israelites a thirst for freedom (See Rm 9:14-18).

Change for the Israelites came when the legacy of Joseph faded in the minds of the Egyptians. So after more than three centuries after the arrival of Jacob’s clan in Egypt, *“there rose up a new king over Egypt who did not know Joseph”* (Ex 1:8). Because the Israelites had increased so extensively in the land, this new pharaoh complained to his



fellow Egyptians, “*Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we*” (Ex 1:9). Therefore, the southern part of Egypt rose up to retake control of the Goshen region, subjugating the Israelites to slavery. “*They set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens*” (Ex 1:11).

Once God had toughened His people through slavery, it was time for Him to raise up Moses and send him to Sinai for forty years of training in wilderness living. He then brought Moses back to deliver a people who had been hardened by years of slavery, but influenced by the polytheism of the Egyptians. The influence of four hundred years of polytheistic religionists had to come to an end. The people were thus made to cry out for freedom in order that they not make Egypt their permanent homeland. A promise of a homeland for Israel had to be fulfilled that was made about five centuries before to Abraham (Gn 12:7).

In their slavery, the Israelites became hardened and stubborn. In order to retain their identity, they were changed into a stubborn people who resisted their taskmasters. In their stubbornness, however, they preserved themselves as a unique people who did not succumb completely to the culture of the Egyptians. They maintained their identity as the children of Israel (Jacob). As slaves, however, the children of Israel learned to be a people who were “taken care of” as slaves, but unique in their identity as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Though they developed a bondage mentality in Egypt, at least they could eat, for their taskmasters gave them the right to grow their own food. During times of drought, they could receive grain from the southern lands of Egypt. Therefore, in reference to their food supply, they had no worries. Though they were in slavery, they had no worry about their next table of food.

But when God sent Moses to fetch His people out of Egyptian captivity, this all changed. It changed so rapidly in their lives that the Israelites went through a shock of acculturation in the wilderness, even though they had been delivered from the bondage of Egypt.

Deliverance entailed a tremendous social paradigm shift. They went from the security of a society wherein all decisions were made for them by their taskmasters whom they could see, to a society where

decisions were mandated through written commandments from a God whom they could not see. In the wilderness they had to wake up every morning and make decisions as to what they should do for the day. They went from depending on food from the harvest of their own crops in a secure land, to food (manna) they would receive only when they awoke every morning. They went from the security of what happened every day, to the insecurity of a whole new world in a wilderness about which they knew nothing. They went from grasslands to desert; from rivers to water springs from the ground; from trusting in the power of a host country to being a people who had to depend only on themselves and one God who would protect them. They even went from a military that protected them to building their own military.

It was an almost impossible social paradigm shift that was very difficult for them to bear. In fact, in the months that followed their crossing of the Red Sea they struggled to accept the new wilderness paradigm into which they had been delivered. It was not easy. In fact, their attitudes could be summed up in the following statement that was made on several occasions in the wilderness: “*Now when the people complained [or, murmured] ...*” (Nm 11:1; see Ex 15:24; 16:2; 17:3; Nm 14:2; 16:41).

## **3 DIFFICULT PARADIGMS TO SHIFT**

Regardless of all the changes that the newly freed children of Israel had to endure in their lives in order to move into a new paradigm of freedom and independence, there was one change that seemed almost impossible to make. In fact, it was so impossible that God had to take out an entire generation of Israelites in order to bring into the land of promise a new generation. The first generation of Israelites, who had been infected with the virus of Egyptian religiosity, had to be buried in the desert before the new nation of believers could be allowed into the land of promise.

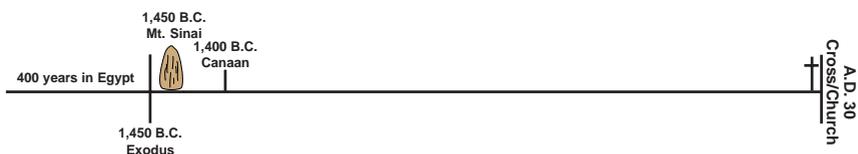
**The children of Israel would have to change from a spoken**

**oral tradition of moral authority of many gods to a revealed word-based authority of commandments and statutes from only one God.** They would even have to move from the word that came through their fathers and prophets, to the word of God that was revealed and finalized by being written on stone tablets or parchment.

Since the beginning of time, God’s moral standards of belief and behavior had been delivered orally to mankind. “*God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets*” (Hb 1:1). But at the foot of Mount Sinai, the gods of Egypt, as well as the inspired spoken word of the fathers and prophets, would give way to the final authority of the written word of a God who spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai. After Sinai, He would later direct Moses under the influence of the Holy Spirit to inscribe the entire Law (Gn, Ex, Lv, Nm, Dt).

While the children of Israel were in Egypt, God had previously and orally spoken through Abraham, and then Isaac, and then Jacob. The people lived by the spoken word of these fathers, who were also prophets. We do not know if there were prophets among them while they were in Egyptian captivity. All their beliefs and behavior throughout their history had come to them orally through the fathers and prophets, but not in the form of written documents. Because of this, the people were prone to create some of their own beliefs and codes of behavior. Most of the civilizations at the time inscribed in stone or on monuments their legal codes of behavior. But not the Israelites. All their instructions came to them orally, as was the giving of all of God’s instructions from the beginning of time. But this was to change in the giving of the written Law that would come through Moses.

Before the Israelites arrived in Egypt, they had already been following some of the behavioral codes of the nations. For example, in the Code of Hammurabi, that dates back to the time of Abraham around 2000 B.C., this Babylonian stone inscription listed some of the laws



that were eventually included in the law that God wrote for the people through Moses. We would assume, therefore, that these social and civil laws originally came from God through the fathers, but we cannot confirm this. The Code of Hammurabi was a secular inscription of civil and moral laws that were inscribed by a Babylonian king.

The Israelites were undoubtedly living by some of the civil laws of the Code of Hammurabi while they were in Egypt. However, this does not assume that their obedience to such laws proves that the civil laws of the Code of Hammurabi were inspired by God. For example, the “eye for an eye” law of Hammurabi later became one of the laws of the Sinai Law (Ex 21:23-25; Dt 19:21). We would not assume, however, that the Code of Hammurabi was inspired by God because some of its laws were incorporated into the Sinai Law. The origin of the “eye for an eye” law may have orally been spoken through the ancient fathers and prophets, and subsequently included in the Code of Hammurabi. But it was definitely considered an inspired written law when it became a part of the Sinai Law.

Abraham had no written codes to hand down to his descendants. However, the Egyptians among whom the Israelites lived had written commandments of belief and conduct. The temples and tombs of Egypt were covered with the Egyptian hieroglyphics of codes and commandments. But the Israelites had no written documents that they used as authority for their beliefs and behavior. For this reason, they were prone to harvest beliefs and moral behavior from the people among whom they dwelt. This was particularly true in reference to their four centuries in Egypt.

But this paradigm would shift. They too would be given written instructions, first on stone, and then as inscribed documents from the hand of Moses. When God shifted from the fathers and prophets among them who had given instructions for millennia, to written commandments, **this would mean that the Israelites could no longer adopt beliefs and moral standards from the people among whom they would reside.** For example, the very first commandment of the written ten commandments clearly reveals the problem that the Israelites faced while in Egypt. This problem would plague them throughout

their stay in the land of promise. This major problem was inferred when God inscribed on stone, “*You will have no other gods before Me*” (Ex 20:3).

God knew that the Israelites would always want to create in their minds “gods” who would dictate their moral and civil standards. Because they were a stubborn and stiffnecked people, God knew that throughout their history they would want to adopt the religious beliefs and behavior of the people around them, and then create gods who would conform to their religious desires. The people were prone to creating gods after the culture in which they lived in Egypt. This curse would follow them for the next one thousand years. When they came into Palestine, and disobeyed God by not scattering from the land all the idolatrous people within the land, they would eventually start believing the Baal prophets of the Canaanites who lived among them. This apostasy would reach its zenith during the great times of King Solomon, who would marry the women of the nations around Israel, which women would lead him and Israel astray after Baal gods.

Because the Israelites were a stubborn and stiffnecked people, they eventually, throughout their history, found it impossible to make the paradigm shift from a faith that was based on moral tradition and the voice of the fathers and prophets, to a written document that would be the only foundation of their faith. Because they had always accepted some of the moral standards of the nations in which they lived, or that surrounded them while they resided in Palestine, their faith would digress into a religiosity that was foreign to the written law of God.

While in Egyptian captivity for four centuries, the authority of their faith was influenced by the gods of the Egyptians. When they came into the land of promise, their faith eventually found its authority again in the gods of the nations around them. The same happens today when people allow the religious beliefs of those among whom they must dwell to influence their faith. We often find it too easy to shift from the written moral beliefs and standards of the word of God to accepting the moral beliefs and standards of the religious majority among whom we live. We find it difficult to stand alone on the authority of the written

word of God and refuse to conform to the religious authority of the majority.

## 4 CONFESSED RELIGIOSITY

When the people of Israel eventually came into the land of promise, and once they changed the focus of their religious behavior to that which would conform to their own desires, it was then that they created in their minds gods who would condone their wayward behavior. This is indeed the most frightening aspect of the warning of Deuteronomy 13 against the Israelites. They eventually turned from God and His moral authority to gods they imagined after their own misguided moral desires, just as millions today have done throughout the world.

The sad thing about this present-day apostasy is that religious people around the world who call themselves after Christ have so little knowledge of the Bible that they do not realized where they are. In fact, they vex those who are trying to lead their lives according to the authority of the word of God. If the definition of “evil” in Deuteronomy 13 is taken into the context of Genesis 6:5, then we can assume that the world today is indeed in perilous times. In those days of Noah, *“Every imagination of the thoughts of his [man’s] heart was only evil continually.”* Because of a worldwide lack of knowledge of the moral authority of God, we are in the same predicament as Noah.

We must understand the “evil” of Genesis 6:5 in the context of the time when Noah was preparing the ark for the deliverance of his family from the total destruction of the population of the world at that time. Peter revealed that the conditions of the world at that time were “evil.” He revealed that Jesus in the spirit went and preached to those of Noah’s generation, *“who once were disobedient when the longsuffering of God waited patiently in the days of Noah”* (1 Pt 3:20). God *“did not spare the old world, but saved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others”* (2 Pt 2:5).

The early Christians were warned by Jesus that the same moral

and religious conditions that existed during the days of Noah would prevail when God would again bring judgment into the world, specifically in reference to the destruction of national Israel: ***“But as the days of Noah were, so also will be the coming of the Son of man”*** (Mt 24:37). One might conclude that Jesus was here speaking of His final coming, but the “coming” in the text is better understood in the historical context of those of Jesus’ generation who would not pass away until all those things about which He spoke came to pass (Mk 9:1).

When we understand the work of God in judgment of those of this world, the same principle of judgment is true in reference to the “evil” that would prevail at the time when He would come in His final judgment. So Jesus reminded His generation, ***“For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark”*** (Mt 24:38). Noah’s generation was carrying on with a normal life, being totally unaware and unbelieving concerning the impending destruction that was coming upon them. ***“And they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away. So also will be the coming of the Son of Man”*** (Mt 24:39).

Also, according to Genesis 6:5, **the generation that suffered the judgment of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was an “evil” generation.** Those Jews were fervently religious, but they were evil. They had rejected and crucified the Son of God. It was a religious generation, but it was “religiously evil.” So we must not assume that an evil generation is a generation of thieves and reprobates. Normal life is carried on by evil generations. They find comfort in their “evil” religion because their religion conforms to their narcissistic desires.

Noah’s generation was not as that which was portrayed by the movie *Noah*, starring Russell Crowe. This movie that was released in 2014 portrayed Noah’s generation to be composed of a vile and murderous people. But Jesus’ description of that generation in Matthew 24 does not conform to what was portrayed by the movie. And we will believe Jesus over the producers of the movie.

Those of Noah’s generation were as those of the generation of Israel to whom Deuteronomy 13 was addressed. They were ordinary

people who had given up on the God of heaven and created gods that would agree with their own religious and moral behavior. Their faith became subjective to their own desires, and thus, their religion was defined as “evil.” That was an “evil” generation.

In contrast to those of his generation who had no respect for the authority of God’s moral standards of faith and behavior, “*Noah, being warned of God of things not yet seen, moved with fear*” (Hb 11:7). Noah respected the mandates of the word of God. When people stop fearing the word of God, they are defined in the Bible as “evil.” These are those who will vex (mock) those who are preachers of the word of God (2 Pt 2:7,8). Subjective religionists will always mock those who have an objective faith that is based on the word of God.

## 5 THE AUTHORITY OF GOD’S WORD

The statements of God in Deuteronomy 13 are as relevant today as they were when they were first delivered to Israel 3,400 years ago. We are living in a confused religious world that is, in many ways, parallel to the “evil” to which the Israelites would eventually digress after they had been in the promised land for many years. We are likewise in an “evil” generation where some prophets (preachers and pastors) are more zealous about promoting the religion that supports them, than living the incarnational life of the Son of God who died for them. So with fear in our hearts, we notice some very striking similarities between the religiosity that backslidden Israel promoted and the religious world in which we now live. These similarities are quite sobering in view of what is stated in Deuteronomy 13.

Before Israel entered the land of promise, God warned the people about that which they would eventually become in their relationship with Him. In the warnings, therefore, there is a prophetic statement of what they would become religiously when they forsook the authority of the commandments of God. Through Moses in the Deuteronomy 13 warnings, therefore, God spoke of things they would become centuries

before they arrived at the point where they would be rejected as the people of God.

- ***“If there arises among you a prophet”*** (Dt 13:1). The context is not about some atheistic or secular leader who would captivate the minds of the people in order to lead them astray into atheism. **The false prophets who would lead them astray would be religious prophets who would rise from among them** (See At 20:30). It is important to notice what these religious prophets would do in reference to gaining the allegiance of the people. They would be “dreamers of dreams,” and those who give “*you a sign or a wonder*” (Dt 13:1). The misguided prophets would infatuate the people with their religious performances and declarations in order to either become or remain the authorities of their faith.

We have likewise been burdened today in the religious world with those who stand before the people in order to impose their dreams on the people. In order for these modern-day prophets to validate their dreams, they even work supposed “signs” and “wonders.” All such performances are worked in order that the religious prophets reaffirm their positions of authority before the people. We must not forget that **the more authority a preacher or prophet assumes, the less authority is placed on the word of God.**

In the first century, Paul wrote in the text of 2 Thessalonians 2 concerning the same authority that was assumed by religionists. In particular, he referred to the “**lawless one,**” a term referring to one who had no respect for the authority of the law of God (2 Th 2:9). This is the one who does not walk according to the authority of God, but walks according to the authority of his own religious rites, rituals and ceremonies that he presumes is a validation of his existence as a religious leader of the people. We can think of such prophets or priests today who seek to preserve their religious heritage by doing the same as those about whom Moses prophesied in Deuteronomy 13. These are those who work “*with all deception of wickedness among those who perish*” (2 Th 2:10). If such religious workers existed in the religious world of the first century when Paul wrote the words, then certainly we

must assume that they also exist today.

*“Those who perish”* are those disciples who innocently follow after these dreamers, being captivated by their “signs” and “wonders.” John also warned his readers that there were *“many false prophets”* who *“have gone out into the world”* (1 Jn 4:1). If these clever prophets went out into the world during the days of the apostle John, then certainly they are going out among religious people today.

So it may be that through the present pandemic lockdown that is worldwide, God is giving us a chance to take a moment in order to reconsider who we are following. Since the “dreamers” and “wonder workers” have been restricted from an opportunity to publicly deceive the people, it is a time for the people to reconsider their allegiance to such prophets. This is particularly true in reference to those who presumptuously proclaim that they can foretell the future. We have not heard of one of these self-proclaimed prophets who prophesied the coming of the present pandemic that has cursed our world. Where were all these supposed prophets in 2019 before the onslaught of the present Covid-19 pandemic in 2020?

• ***“And if the sign or the wonder comes to pass that he spoke to you”*** (Dt 13:2). If by chance one of these prophets predicts something that might by chance come to pass, then the people must be very cautious about giving allegiance to such a prophet on the basis of his predictions. Prediction is not God-inspired prophecy. Anyone can read existing indicators and circumstances that would be the foundation upon which a prediction can be made. But with true prophecy, there are no present indications of that which would come to pass.

But if the pronouncement of the predictionist did occur, then there is another test to determine if the supposed predictionist is actually a prophet of God. His message must be according to the word of God that has already been revealed in other texts of the Scriptures (See Dt 18:19-22).<sup>\*</sup> In our situation today, if any predictionist does not know and preach the gospel of the incarnation, atoning death, resurrection,

---

<sup>\*</sup> See also Book 27, chapter 5, *The Bible And Faith*, in the Biblical Research Library at [www.africainternational.org](http://www.africainternational.org)

ascension and gospel reign of Jesus, then he is a false prophet, regardless of what supposed signs and wonders to works, or dreams and visions he has.

Those gullible disciples during John and Paul's day were led astray by false signs and wonders "*because they did not receive the love of the truth [of the gospel] so that they might be saved*" (2 Th 2:10). Now notice this sobering fact: "*For this reason God will send them strong delusion so that they should believe a lie, that they all might be condemned*" (2 Th 2:11,12). The first validation of those who would be prophets of God was not their fulfilled prophecy, but their love of the truth. Today, God will allow in our lives "strong delusions" in order to test our love for the truth of the gospel. We live in a world where there are delusions everywhere. If one has no love for the truth of the gospel, then he or she can choose which delusion to follow.

Would God allow false prophets of Israel to work "signs" and "wonders" in order that the people have an opportunity to turn from the truth of His commandments? Would He allow the same today in reference to the gospel? It seems that He would, even though the so-called "signs" or "wonders" were such only in the minds of those who would seek to follow after that which is subjective, rather than the objective truth of the gospel. God would allow those who seek to be deceived to believe in that which is false. It is not that the signs and wonders are real, **but that those who are willing to be led astray always look for something to validate their flight from the authority of the word of God.** Those who are willing to be deceived by "strong delusions" thirst after something other than the word of God in order to validate their faith. They thus stir up in their minds something to be supposedly supernatural in order that they might justify their escape from the authority of the word of God. In other words, if one is looking for a sign or wonder, sure enough, he will find such.

Since God allows Satan to deceive the people through presumptuous prophets who claim that their predictions are true prophecies, as well as supposedly working deceiving signs and wonders, then He will take the credit for allowing the deceptions to be spoken and the false signs and wonders to be performed. He will allow the dreamers and

wonder workers to lead the willfully deceived astray since Satan is ultimately under His control.

The strong delusion is directly from Satan. However, because God allows Satan to wander about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, the final responsibility rests with God because He allows Satan to exercise such temptation over the minds of men (See 1 Pt 5:8). He allows Satan to wander about in order that we have the opportunity to make a choice to obey either God or Satan (Compare Js 1:13).

But make no mistake about understanding the false prophet of Deuteronomy 13 and the “lawless one” of 2 Thessalonians 2. All the dreams, signs, wonders and fulfilled predictions are according to the “*working of Satan with all **deceiving power and signs and wonders***” (2 Th 2:9). The prophets were not working real supernatural signs and wonders. Their predictions were fulfilled only by chance. All their power, signs, wonders and predictions were deceptions, and being deceptions, they cannot be trusted to validate one’s faith. We are not deceived if we believe that which is true. However, if we are looking for an escape from the authority of the word of God, then we will believe whatever is necessary in order to escape accountability to God’s word.

The reason why Israel walked away from God was because the people walked away from the authority of His word. Hosea identified the problem that existed among the people at the time when the nation was about to be sent into captivity because they forgot the word of God:

***My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you so that you will be no priest to Me. Seeing you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children*** (Hs 4:6).

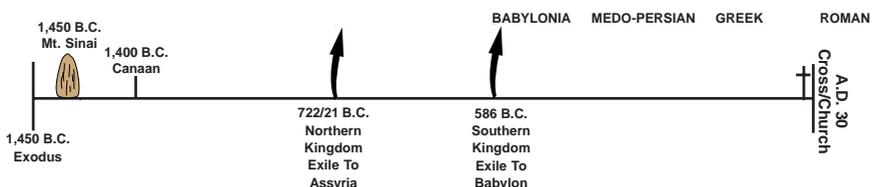
Does this sound familiar? Paul explained that “the deceived” did not love the truth, specifically the truth of the gospel (2 Th 2:9-12). For this reason, they were candidates to be “deceived.” Both the deceived of Israel, as well as those of Paul’s day, had the same problem. They allowed themselves to reject the authority of the word of God which

led to them forgetting **the word of God**. They became ignorant of God's authority in matters of faith because they had no knowledge of their Bibles.

In fact, at one time in Israel's history, the people had literally lost the "Bible." The word of God had disappeared from the hands of the priests and Levities, whose responsibility it was to teach the people the word of God. When a copy of the law of God was eventually discovered many years later in some renovation work on the temple that was built by Solomon, King Josiah was greatly disturbed about what he read in this very book of Deuteronomy (2 Kg 22). He was terrified when he read the words of Deuteronomy 27 concerning the curses that would come upon Israel if they forgot the word of God (Dt 27:9-26; see 2 Kg 22:11).

Josiah realized that the people had culturally and socially moved so far away from the moral standards of the law of God that he himself was moved to institute a national restoration throughout Judea (See 2 Kg 23). However, it was too late. Though he instituted a short-term restoration effort, the king who followed him continued to lead the people in the sins of the past. The people had strayed so far away from the law of God that they could not return. Captivity, therefore, was imminent.

So after about nine centuries as an independent people in the land of Palestine, the last two southern tribes of Israel were taken into Babylonian captivity in 586 B.C. From the time of that captivity, the Jews never again enjoy their own independence in Palestine. A remnant would eventually return to the land. However, when they did return in 536 B.C., the land was controlled by the Medo-Persian Empire. After the Medes & Persians came the Greeks, and then came the Romans. Because the people failed to live by the law of God, they lost their freedom forever as an independent nation. It was only when the Messiah



came that they would be set free from oppression, not from oppression of an occupying government, but from sin.

There is a resounding lesson we can learn from Israel forgetting the law of God. The lesson is that anytime we forget the word of God, we are brought into the captivity of some other religious authority that we create for ourselves. Either we are brought into the captivity of our own religious traditions, or the captivity of a dominant religious leader. Whoever or whatever our captor may be, we are brought into bondage. With this danger always present, Paul urged Christians in the first century, “*Stand fast therefore in the liberty [freedom] by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage*” (Gl 5:1).

Paul identified the “deceived” as those who “*did not love the truth*” (2 Th 2:9-12). The Israelites revealed their lack of love for the truth by ignoring, and eventually losing their “Bibles.” The curse that has come over the world today is that people no longer study the Bible because they no longer love the truth. The world does not seek to live under the authority of the word of God.

Most of the world today simply rejects the Bible as the word of God. In many cases, churches around the world today have hired professional prophets to study the Bible for them. The professional prophets have thus captured the hearts of the people because the people no longer study the Bible for themselves. This is exactly what happened in Israel in reference to the Baal prophets. Because the people were ignorant of the word of God, the Baal prophets easily became the authorities of their religion.

People today have become so “studiously lazy” that they are willing to hand over their study of the Bible to a professional, who himself, often knows little Bible. When people no longer love to study the Bible, then it is certain that they will fall away to establish a religion that is according to their own desires. They will then be led by their prophets who proclaim each particular religion of the day, whether the religion is Christ oriented or Buddha oriented, or whatever. They will seek moral authorities in their lives other than God who would speak to them through the authority of His word. When this happens, it is then

that religious people will seek other “gods” to direct them.

- **“Let us go after gods”** (Dt 13:2). These would be those “gods” *“you have not known”* (Dt 13:2). They originally knew the one true and living God through both His power that was revealed to them at the Red Sea and His manifestation on Mount Sinai. They knew Him through this word that He gave to them on Mount Sinai. But they would forget this God when they forgot their knowledge of Him through His word. When they turned to creating in their minds authority for their own desires, then a god would arise in their minds who would condone their desires. When people refuse to have a knowledge of the word of God, then they create a “Jesus Christ” who behaves according to their desires. If their desire is to live as homosexuals, then they will create a “Jesus” who either teaches such or behaved in a homosexual manner.

These other “gods” would be “foreign” to the word of God. They would be foreign to the God of Abraham. Knowledge of these gods had to be taught to the people by their misguided teachers, whereas the God they knew had directly revealed Himself to the people both in the beginning of the nation of Israel, and then through the revelation of the law at Mount Sinai. However, whenever people do not have a knowledge of God and His Son who are defined only in the Bible, they will create a concept of God and Jesus who conforms to their ignorance of the Bible.

The call of the false prophets, therefore, was to serve that which they had fabricated in their own minds because of their ignorance of the word of God. Once the people of Israel forgot the God of Mount Sinai, their appointed (“hired”) Baal prophets enabled the desire of the people to follow after their desires. **This is the heart of true religion.** When people cease studying the Bible for themselves, they will give their thinking over to other gods (authorities) to whom they will submit. In other words, they will give their minds over to that which they know. In the absence of their knowledge of the God of the Bible, they would become their own religious authorities. Once their created religion becomes codified, or a part of their heritage, then professional prophets are hired in order to continue the religion.

These are now the days of great religions, for before the Covid pandemic lockdown, charismatic religious leaders stood before the people with delusionary signs and wonders they hypnotically claimed to be revelations from the realm of the supernatural. They led experientially energized people into the subjective foolishness of throwing themselves down on the floors of church buildings and temples throughout the world, writhing uncontrollably, and slurring gibberish from uncontrollable mouths. Because people have forsaken any love of the truth, they stopped studying their Bibles. They have subsequently given themselves over to any presumptuous prophet who claims to have received some dream or vision from God.

Unfortunately, when mesmerized people eventually regain their sobriety, and come to their senses, they pat themselves on the back that they have had some exhilarating religious experience that was supposedly sent from the Holy Spirit. If one believes that he is saved through such subjective meritorious religiosity, then he has reached the point of deception from which there is usually no return. There is no return because one is trusting in the merit of his subjective religious experiences, and not in what he or she reads in the Bible. The authority of narcissistic religiosity is one's self, not the word of God. This is what happened when Israel followed after Baal. It is what has and is happening in many places throughout the world today.

This is exactly that about which God warned Israel in Deuteronomy 13. This was also the problem of those who did not love the truth in the first century. And because the Israelites would eventually lose their love of the truth, they would run after strange practices of religion because they would convince themselves that the Baal gods were real. They made the Baal prophets the spokesmen for these gods, and thus followed all that the prophets dictated.

Nothing has changed since those days. The deceived still take the word of the pastor over what is stated in the Bible. When people must ask their pastor the answer for a Bible question, instead of studying the Bible for themselves, then we know we are in trouble. If we give our brains over to a man, then we have exalted a man over the word of God. This was the meaning behind the Holy Spirit inspiring Paul to write the

following exhortation to the Christians of the first century: *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* (2 Tm 2:15).

- **“You will not hearken to the words of that prophet”** (Dt 13:3).

The key word here is “words.” These are instructions in reference to listening to the prophet who performed deceiving signs and wonders before the people in order to convince the people that he should have authority over the people in reference to his pronouncements. This is the preacher to whom no allegiance is to be given.

The first signal that a prophet is false is that he stands before the people and says, “I had a dream.” He then seeks to use his dream as the validation of what he is about to say. And in doing this, he is leading the people away from the authority of the word of God to the authority of his dreams. He is seeking to set himself up before the people as someone whom God has supposedly spoken directly as a prophet. This is the false prophet, and this is the method by which he leads people astray. When people stop studying their Bibles, the opportunity is ripe for the rise of such false prophets. When people stop believing that the Bible should be the authority in all matters of faith, then the people go searching for another authority for their faith. If the people are too lazy to study their Bibles, then they usually find it much easier to listen to someone who has supposedly had some dream sent to him by God.

If the “dreamer” does not preach that which has already been revealed in the word of God (the Bible), then he is a false prophet. He is seeking to lead the people away from the commandments of God with the authority of his own dreams. God later warned such presumptuous prophets, *“It will come to pass that whoever will not hearken to My words that he will speak in My name, I will require it of him”* (Dt 18:19). And then the warning to Israel became stringent:

*But the prophet who will presume to speak a word in My name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who will speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet will die* (Dt 18:20).

The dreamer who does not know his Bible, and thus would depend on his dreams as the authority for his own words, that prophet will die. The presumptuous prophet who would validate his message by supposed “signs” and “wonders” was to be put to death among the children of Israel.

So we wonder what God thinks of such presumptuous prophets today who do the same as the false prophets that He instructed His people to flee? We must not be fooled. There may not be immediate death of the false prophet by stoning, as God instructed Israel to do with the prophet who did not teach the Sinai law of God, but there is death coming. It is only a matter of time.

In the history of Israel, the presumptuous prophets did arise among the people. The people failed to stone these prophets to death. We have only the record of a mass stoning during the life of Elijah when he put to death about 850 prophets of Baal and the Asherah (1 Kg 18:19,40). But after Elijah, the Baal prophets again rose up among the people, which prophets the people did not put away through stoning because the people themselves had forgotten the word of God (See Hs 4:6). As a result, the people went into apostasy, and eventually were taken into captivity. The problem was with the people. Though the prophets spoke presumptuously, claiming to be the authority of their Baal gods, God laid the responsibility for controlling the prophets upon the shoulders of the people. He laid the problem of deception on the shoulders of the people.

There will always be false prophets among us who will rise up and carry the people away after their own desires. But it is the responsibility of the people to take ownership of their own spiritual destiny. We must take ownership for being deceived, for there is always the opportunity in life to be deceived, especially in the realm of religion. If one has a Bible in his or her hand, then there is no excuse for being deceived. Inherent in the concept of apostasy, is the responsibility of those who would be led into apostasy to guard themselves from being deceived.

- ***“The Lord your God is testing you”*** (Dt 13:3). So now we

know why God allows presumptuous religious prophets to exist among His people. God is testing His people in order to determine if they truly love the truth of His word (See 2 Th 2:10-12). He is testing His people concerning their loyal obedience. If one does not seek to live under the authority of God, then he or she will seek another authority. This is the core of all religion.

There will always be those who will preach messages that will excite the people, and thus, draw the attention of the people away from the word of God to their own inspiring speeches. We find comfort in psychological messages that deal with the problems of our lives. But we must be careful. It may be that God is testing us as to whether we find comfort in His word or in the words of those who speak to us with appealing words. We must not forget what the Holy Spirit said about those who speak with appealing words: “***For they who are such serve not our Lord Christ but their own belly*** [that is, preaching for money], *and by appealing words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the innocent*” (Rm 16:18). When a prophet uses “*appealing words and flattering speech,*” he is often exalting himself. And by exalting himself, he is urging the people to be impressed with him, if not to submit to his supposed authority.

If the message of the speaker is not saturated with the word of God, then we know that the preacher is not focusing on the word of God. He is possibly doing such for the sake of either notoriety or gain, or both. We must not forget that God will allow us to be deceived by influential speakers if we do not love the truth. He will allow us to be deceived by eloquent speakers and charismatic personalities. He allows the opportunity for us to be deceived in order to determine whether we have a love for the truth of the gospel.

We have discovered throughout the years that many of the most notable prophets throughout the world today to whom a vast majority of the people have given their allegiance are those prophets who speak great messages, but very little Bible. These speakers have appealing messages that address the psychological needs of the people, but their messages are based more on psychology, than the Bible. Bible passages are sprinkled throughout the psychology speeches, but the Bible

is used only as a prop, not as the final resource in which we must find solutions for our problems of life.

The people are thus enthralled by the speaker and his ability to speak to the physiological needs of the people. However, the people do not walk away from the speeches with the feeling that God has spoken to them through His word. The words of the speakers, therefore, are exalted over the word of God. And when the people say, "Amen," they are saying "amen" to the speaker and not to a truth of the word of God.

We must not forget what Paul meant in Romans 16:18: "*And by appealing words and flattering speech, [they] deceive the hearts of the innocent.*" In the context of this statement Paul put the blame for the people being led astray on the shoulders of **the speaker**, not the innocent one's who are led astray by deceptive speech. He did this because in the historical context of the statement, the people had no Bibles. They had no New Testament Scriptures because the written word of the New Testament had not yet been written. And because the people had no Scriptures to check the message of the speakers, the people were innocent, and thus could be easily led astray.

Two things have resulted today from the Covid pandemic: First, God has taken the people away from presumptuous preachers in order that they reconsider through His word their relationship with Him as individuals. Second, and at the same time, we must know that the pandemic has unfortunately also taken Bible-loving people away from Bible-preaching gospel preachers.

We assume that in all lockdowns the people can work out a restoration to the one true and living God through their personal studies of the Bible. They now have an opportunity to fall in love again with the word of God. It must be our prayer that people throughout the world today be driven to personal Bible study in order to discover the God of the Bible. Since God has parked all the false prophets in their own houses, and locked them down from influencing the people, we can assume that God is giving the people a chance to dust off their Bibles and read again the precious words that were given to us through the Holy Spirit.

• ***“You will walk after the Lord your God and fear Him and keep His commandments and obey His voice. And you will serve Him and cleave to Him”*** (Dt 13:4). After reading this mandate from God, we should take a reality check in reference to whom or what motivates us in reference to our faith. This one statement explains what is meant in the Bible to maintain the authority of God in our lives.

If the eloquent preaching of rites, rituals and religious ceremonies is the foundation of our faith, then our faith is religion. Our faith is not based on the authority of the word of God. Likewise, if our faithfulness is based on allegiance to a favorite prophet, then our faith is based on man, not God. Every disciple must reaffirm the foundation of his or her faith, whether it is on man, or on the solid teachings of the word of God. Simply stated, we must fear God more than we fear any man.

If our faith is based on the deceptive signs, wonders and eloquent speeches of a favorite prophet, then we have allowed ourselves to be deceived. We are following after those who would impose on us religion, and not Christ. If our faith is based on those who fascinate us through their inspiring dreams, signs and wonders, then our faith has digressed into religion. On the other hand, if our faith is based on the word of God, then we are good (See Rm 10:17). Those who would guard our faith by preaching the word of God are exalting the word of God over themselves. This is the prophet to which we must listen.

The Deuteronomy 13:4 mandate is that the people *“cleave [hold fast] to Him [God].”* If we discover that we are *“cleaving”* to a man, then we know that we have been led astray. In matters of faith, *“cleaving”* must only be to God. We know when we are *“cleaving”* to God when we are infatuated with His word, and thus, are walking therein. And we can know that we are infatuated with the word of God when we are diligently reading and studying our Bibles every day.

• ***“That prophet or that dreamer of dreams will be put to death, because he has spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God”*** (Dt 13:5). We must not forget that the dreamer is seeking to turn us away from the authority of the commandments of God, and in doing such, turn us away from God. If we are led to *“cleave”* to a man be-

cause of our infatuation with what he either does or says, then it is that prophet who must suffer the consequences of his behavior because he has allowed himself to be followed as a god. The workers of “signs” and “wonders” are seeking to deceive us into believing that they themselves are the authority for our faith if we would only follow after their pronouncements. God told the Israelites to put such a person away from their midst by stoning (Dt 18:20). He was to be put to death because he was seeking “*to seduce you from the way that the Lord your God commanded you to walk in*” (Dt 13:5).

This specific point should strike fear in the hearts of all who would stand up before the people in order to be a representative for God. If one is self-centered, or narcissistic, then he should be warned about his efforts to draw away the disciples after himself. This was the very thing about which Paul warned some church leaders in the city of Ephesus: “*Also from your own selves will men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves*” (At 20:30). The apostle John also said that at the time he wrote there were church leaders as Diotrephes “*who loves to be first among them*” (3 Jn 9). And even the apostle Peter warned that elders not lord over the flock of God in order to submit the people to their supposed authority (1 Pt 5:3). In view of all these warnings in reference to those who would be teachers of the people, James warned, “*My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we will receive the stricter judgment*” (Js 3:1).

Any church leader who would set forth his dreams or opinions in order to draw the people away unto himself, is walking in dangerous territory. We can thank God today that the Sinai law was nailed to the cross (See Rm 7:1-4; Cl 2:14), lest there be too many stonings today of those who set themselves up as authorities in order to draw the people away from the only true and living God of heaven.

- “*So you will put the evil away from the midst of you*” (Dt 13:5). The preacher who is preaching in order to lead people by his dreams, flattering speech, or by the performance of his religiosity, is doing evil. The preacher who has set himself up as the authority to

which the people must submit, has become a lord over the flock. God instructed Israel to put away such evil influences from among themselves. The assumed mandate of the Deuteronomy 13 instructions for us today is to do likewise. Christians must not allow themselves to be led astray by those who would call us through their self-assumed authority. It is only the authority of the word of God that must lead the people of God.

In these times of the pandemic, the evil prophet has either been put away, or the people have been taken away from the influence of false prophets who seek a following by their presumptuous “signs” and “wonders,” and the deceptive authority of their “dreams.” It is now time for the people to dust off their Bibles and restore the influence of the word of God in their lives. These are times for a restoration of the word of God as the final authority in matters of our faith. Even if a brother, or mother, or son, or daughter, or wife, or friend would entice us to follow anything other than the word of God, then in lockdown we must saturate ourselves with the oracles of God (See Dt 13:6-8).

Please read the remainder of Deuteronomy 13 in order to understand how serious God is about these matters. Once we understand how serious He is about His people remaining faithful to the authority of His word, then we should take the opportunity of being in lockdown in order to lock in with God through His word.

## **6 NATIONAL APOSTASY**

We assume that most people have read the curses of Deuteronomy 27 when God forewarned Israel that if the people turned away from the authority of His word, He would terminate them as an independent nation in the land of Palestine. When reading the entire book of Deuteronomy, it is important to keep in mind that the independent nationhood of Israel initially began around 1450 B.C., but was terminated in 586 B.C.

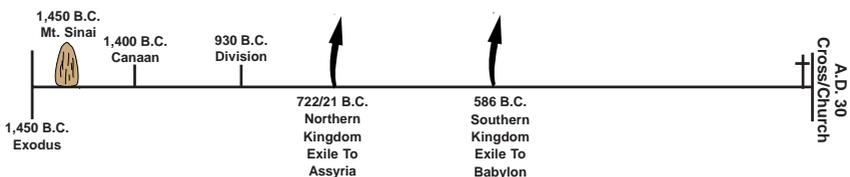
Because of the promised curses that would come upon Israel as

stated in Deuteronomy 27, the pronouncement of the curses was actually a prophecy. The curses were a prophecy because God knew the future. He knew their future. He knew that they would have a difficult time over the next fourteen centuries to keep their focus on the commandments of the Sinai law that He had given to them before they entered the promised land.

The Israelites' inevitable termination as an independent nation in the land of Palestine occurred when the Babylonian Empire accomplished the final scattering of the people in 586 B.C. (Dt 28:64). The Jews' residence as an independent nation in the land extended over a period of approximately eight centuries, but was eventually terminated because they turned from the authority of the word of God. Throughout their eight centuries as an independent nation, the Israelites went from one apostasy to another, particularly during the days of the Judges. But when they were in their final days in Palestine prior to 586 B.C., there was one last effort to bring the nation back to the authority of the word of God. However, it was too late.

• **Apostasy and the northern kingdom of Israel:** After the death of Solomon, during whose reign Israel reached her zenith in power and wealth, the twelve-tribe nation divided into the northern and southern kingdoms. Rehoboam retained control of the two southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin. However, Jeroboam carried off in his insurrection the ten northern tribes (1 Kg 11:26). When Jeroboam took into apostasy the northern ten tribes, that was essentially the end of those tribes as a representative of the God of Israel in the northern part of Palestine. Through the prophet Ahijah the Lord denounced the wicked insurrection of Jeroboam:

*For the Lord will smite [northern] Israel as a reed is shaken in the water.*



And **He will root up** Israel out of this good land that He gave to their fathers. And **He will scatter** them beyond the [Euphrates] River because they have made their Asherim [gods], provoking the Lord to anger (1 Kg 14:15).

Jeroboam became both the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel, and their religious leader. By taking ten tribal groups away from the southern two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, he led the people away from the authority of the word of God. Therefore, the prophet Ahijah pronounced that God “*will give up [northern] Israel because of the sins of Jeroboam, who sinned and who made Israel to sin*” (1 Kg 14:16; see 15:30,34; 16:31; 2 Kg 3:3; 10:31). Jeroboam made Israel sin by setting up competitive altars in Dan and Bethel to which the people were to take their sacrifices instead of going to Jerusalem (See 1 Kg 12:29,30). In doing this, the people sinned annually after the sins of Jeroboam.

Jeroboam established a competitive system of religion. He copied the original, but made changes that would conform to his political move to keep the northern tribes separated from the two southern tribes. He thus instituted his own religious laws in reference to sacrifices. He also consecrated his own priests for the people (1 Kg 13:33). He established different altars and places for sacrifices (1 Kg 12:29,30). He started his own “church” according to his own desires. He based his changes on his own presumptuous authority.

God allowed Jeroboam to make himself the king of the people, but in assuming such a position, he obligated the people to submit to his mandates. The consequences of his sinful leadership were tragic. We must understand that God gave him permission to do what he wanted to do. God will allow one to believe a lie, thinking he is believing truth. We remember what Paul said concerning those who do not love the truth. “*And for this reason God will send them strong delusion so that they should believe a lie*” (2 Th 2:11). God allowed Jeroboam to believe a strong delusion.

Because Jeroboam started his own religion according to his own desires, his own house paid the price. 1 Kings 13:34 reads, “*This thing*

*became sin to the house of Jeroboam, even to cut it off and to destroy it from off the face of the earth.”* The house of Jeroboam was cut off from existence as a lineage of people. And because of the wayward direction in which Jeroboam led the northern kingdom, the kingdom itself would eventually be taken into captivity, which thing happened when the Assyrians came in 722/21 B.C. and took them into Assyrian captivity. This was the end of the northern kingdom of Israel.

The northern ten tribes as a part of the united Israel were independent in the land a little over six hundred years before they suffered the curse that God pronounced even before Israel came into the land in 1400 B.C. (Dt 28:64). However, after the apostasy of Jeroboam, the northern tribes only lasted a little over two hundred more years before the people lost their independence and were scattered throughout the Assyrian Empire.

• **Apostasy and end of the southern kingdom of Israel:** Rehoboam was the first king of the southern two tribes of Israel after the death of Solomon. But in reference to faith, these two tribes likewise did not do well in remaining faithful to the authority of the word of God. The fall of the southern kingdom likewise teaches a very significant lesson. It is a lesson that is relevant to the present curse of religion that has come upon our world in these days.

The well-known statement of Hosea 4:6 is quoted by many, and often not fully understood. In the context of God’s final judgment of Israel, it is worth repeating the reason why Israel was terminated as an independent nation. God’s reason for the termination of the nationhood of Israel was based on one principle: *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge”* (Hb 4:6).

We have found it easy for people today to make judgments concerning this problem among the Israelites. However, we have also discovered that these judgments are sometimes quite hypocritical. They are hypocritical judgments because the same people who judge Israel for becoming ignorant of the law of God are the same people who are ignorant of their own Bibles today. We must confess that the normal “person in the pew” today has little knowledge of the word of God.

Members of churches are often “nurtured” by preachers who also have a limited knowledge of the Bible. Because some charismatic preachers have a gift to speak, they have used this gift to “start a church,” but they have little knowledge of the Bible in order to continue nurturing the people in the word.

Our situation today among many religious groups helps us understand the problem that eventually prevailed in Israel in her final days. It seems that in those final days of Israel in the land the Israelites had “*forgotten the law of your God*” (Hs 4:6). As previously stated, this could just as well be an indictment against the religious world today.

So the question is, Can a people forget the law of God and still remain religious? The answer is obvious. To fill in their lack of knowledge of the word of God, the Israelites simply went looking around for other options. They thus created “a Baal religion,” which religion satisfied their religious yearnings in view of the fact that they had given up a “Bible-based faith.”

And so it is today. It is not that the world has become totally atheistic in reference to belief in higher powers. It is simply the fact that religion throughout the world today, including those religions that claim some adherence to Christ, have forgotten the law of God and followed after their own religious inventions. For many of the leaders of these religions, they have simply turned on their radios or televisions—or better, clicked on some internet lesson—in order to find something to preach next Sunday morning. Ignorance of the word of God, therefore, is perpetuated from one generation to another. This highlights the initial warning that God gave to the Israelites before they entered the promised land:

*You will not **add** to the word that I command you, nor will you **diminish** from it, so that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you (Dt 4:2).*

We must notice carefully in this text what it means for religious people to add to the word of God. In view of Hosea 4:6, the problem was not that they added to the **existing** commandments of God that

they knew. The problem was that they first **forgot** the commandments of God. It was in this manner that they **diminished** (minimized) the commandments of God. The further they moved from the existing commandments, the more they forgot those commandments. In ignorance of their “Bible,” they simply invented religious rites, rituals and ceremonies that would conform to their own religious instincts. The Israelites were a religious people, and thus, they kept adding the commandments of their Baal gods in order to fill in the void that was left by their ignorance of the word of God.

When we compare the indictment of Hosea 4:6 that was made at the end of the northern kingdom of Israel, with the Deuteronomy 4:2 warning that was made at the beginning of their nationhood in Palestine, something tragic is revealed. **The people forgot the commandments of God, and then added their own religious commandments in order to continue their religiosity.** This same problem is happening in this century in reference to religion. There are those who still claim to be “Christian,” but they have forgotten the commandments of God. And in forgetting to study their Bibles, they have invented commandments of their own in order to have some authority that would validate their religiosity. This is exactly what Jesus prophesied would come: *“Not every one who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven”* (Mt 7:21).

So in 586 B.C., with the Babylonians standing at the gates of the last two remaining tribes of Israel who were held up in Jerusalem, the Jews were possibly crying out to their Baal gods for deliverance. But there was no answer. They had long forgotten the only God who could deliver them. If they did as many religious people do today, then we can imagine that they were throwing themselves down on the ground inside Jerusalem in fits of uncontrollable emotional hysteria, speaking gibberish (“tongues”) to their false gods in order to be delivered from the Babylonians who stood outside the city gates. But all their emotional hysteria was in vain. They met their final destiny in fulfillment of the curses of Deuteronomy that were pronounced over eight centuries before.

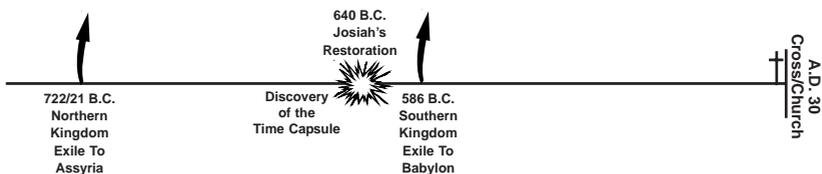
## 7 THE FUTILE RESTORATION

Until those gates of Jerusalem were eventually crashed open by the invading army of Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C., we need to go back a few years to witness one of God’s last efforts to preserve a remnant of His people. Solomon began to build the temple 480 years after the children of Israel came out of Egyptian captivity (1 Kg 6:1). He built the temple in Jerusalem in the first part of his forty-year reign. Since he died in 930 B.C., we can calculate that the temple was completed around 963 B.C., since it took him seven years to complete (1 Kg 6:38).

One can read all the construction matters concerning both the house of Solomon and the temple in 1 Kings 6 & 7. But one thing that is not said in all the description of the construction is what some dedicated priest, or priests, did in reference to written copies of the law of God. We might assume that the deed of these priests was not made known to others. However, it could have been made known to others, but after all those who had built the temple eventually died, the deed of these dedicated priests was long forgotten.

The priests of Solomon’s era knew the Israelites. They knew how stubborn and stiffnecked they were in reference to their beliefs. What inspired these priests was that they believed all that Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 27 over five centuries before. Moses had written concerning the curses that God would bring on Israel if the people forgot His word. In the construction of the temple, therefore, these priests buried a “time capsule” somewhere in the structure of the temple.

A time capsule is made up of documents and artifacts that are placed in a container. The container is then buried for future generations to discover. In this case, the unknown priest, or priests, put a copy of the law of Moses in a time capsule for future generations to discover. They



then buried the capsule somewhere in the structure of the temple where it could possibly be discovered by someone far in the future. In this case, it was discovered over **300 years later** during the reign of King Josiah (See 2 Kg 22).

It occurred in the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah that the king commissioned that repairs should be made to the house of the Lord (2 Kg 22:3-7). But during these repairs, Hilkiyah, the high priest at the time, said, *“I have found the book [scroll] of the law in the house of the Lord”* (2 Kg 22:8). The discovered book was subsequently delivered to King Josiah. Shaphan the scribe then read the curses of the book that would come upon Israel if they turned from the law of the Lord—he surely read the text of Deuteronomy 27. What happened next reveals the sincerity of a young king who sought to be obedient to the word of the Lord: *“Now it came to pass when the king had heard the words of the book of the law **that he tore his clothes**”* (2 Kg 22:11). And from that time, Josiah initiated a great restoration throughout all Judah. Josiah immediately commanded,

*Go. Inquire of the Lord for Me and for the people and for all Judah concerning **the words of this book** that is found, for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us **because our fathers have not harkened to the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us*** (2 Kg 22:13).

When people who truly fear God discover that which is the revealed truth of God, they will respond with fear and repentance. Those religionists who are satisfied with their man-made religiosity will offer excuses, or simply dismiss what they learn through Bible study by exalting their religious heritage above the word of God. Some will even do as Jehudi who cut the “Bible” in pieces once it was read to him (Jr 36:23). He even threw the “Bible” in a fire and burned it.

For the sincere heart of Josiah, however, what the book said was a terrifying message. Though Josiah was a good king, and tried to do the best he could with what he knew, it was not good enough when he read the book. Though he was doing the best he could with what he be-

lieved, he still realized that he had fallen far short of what God intended for him and all Israel to be. What they were doing religiously was not authorized by “*the words of this book.*” They were religiously performing and living outside the authority of the word of God.

The problem with their faith was that they had first lost the “Bible,” and then their fathers had not “*harkened [obeyed] to the words of this book.*” And since the fathers lived outside the authority of the word of God, they passed on to their children a religious heritage that found no validation in the law of God. The same is true of millions today. Many have a form of “Christianity,” but if they are functioning outside the authority of the written word of God, then they are doomed.

One may feel good about his or her religion. One may come away from inspiring assemblies with a feeling of contentment because one has meritoriously fulfilled his or her desires and poured out one’s heart. But we must be honest with ourselves. If in the worship of our hearts we do not bow down to God according to His word, then our worship is vain. We are reminded of what Jesus said in John 4:23: “*But the hour is coming and now is when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him.*”

We are also reminded of the vanity of ceremonial worship acts that are performed by some in order to manifest a presumed true worship. In reference to these meritorious acts of worship, Paul warned, “*Beware lest anyone take you captive through philosophy and vain deceit according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, but not according to Christ*” (Cl 2:8). “*All these concern things that perish with the using,*” Paul continued, “*after the commandments and doctrines of men*” (Cl 2:22). What is so common today is that people often worship God according to their own worship performances, but not according to what God desires from a repentant and thankful heart (See 2 Co 4:15; 5:14). Instead of worshiping God in gratitude for the gospel of His Son, they come together to see what they can get out of worship.

The problem with the generation in which Josiah lived was that the people were worshiping Baal according to their own self-righteous inventions of worship. Paul explained precisely what their problem

was: “*For they [Israel] being ignorant of God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God*” (Rm 10:3). This is about as clear as it can be stated.

When religious people become ignorant of the word of God, they will continue to worship, but they will worship according to their own inventions. They will consider themselves righteous because they have meritoriously obeyed their own religious rites, rituals and ceremonies. Some will consider themselves self-righteous because they have faithfully performed certain acts of worship on Sunday morning that they have supposedly proved to be “true worship” by proof text of Scripture. But such legal worship is self-righteous because the performer has led himself to believe that once all the acts of worship have been meritoriously performed, then one has worshiped God. The problem is that such worship is meritorious, and thus self-righteous. It is not worship that is caused by the grace of God (See 2 Co 4:15).

Self-righteous people usually do not worship God according to His righteousness. They usually do not worship in response to what God has done for them through the cross, but what they meritoriously perform for Him according to His supposed legal acts of worship. And then, those who are ignorant of the word of God never know if their worship is acceptable to God. Most religious people can be found in the following statement that Jesus made to some very religious people: “*In vain they worship Me, teaching as [religious] doctrines the commandments of men*” (Mk 7:7).

So we would link Hosea 4:6 with Romans 10:2, and thus define where Josiah was religiously before the discovery of the “book,” as well as our generation of many religionists today. Paul wrote, “*For I testify to them that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge*” (Rm 10:2). When a religious person discards his or her study of the Scriptures, it is then that they are in trouble. They may display a zeal for the Lord on Sunday morning, or doing many wonderful works (Mt 7:22), but in their ignorance of the word of God, their worship service is not according to knowledge. Their worship is not a response to what God seeks because it is a self-righteous worship that often fo-

cuses more on the needs of the worshiper than what God desires.

We might add what Paul said to some religious people in the city of Athens: “*The times of this ignorance God has overlooked, but now He commands all men everywhere to repent*” (At 17:30). Those who were mandated to repent in this statement were religious people. They were idolaters, but they were religious, just as the idolatrous Israelites whom God sent into captivity. Simply because one is religious does not assume that that person is in a covenant relationship with God. When Paul made the preceding statement to the religionists in Athens, there were other religious people throughout the world. But because they had not obeyed the gospel, they were not in a covenant relationship with God.

There is something inspiring about the religious nature of Josiah that should encourage us. Josiah was only eight years old when he was anointed king of Judah (2 Kg 22:1). It is recorded of him, “*And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord*” (2 Kg 22:2). Keep in mind that by the time of Josiah’s reign, there was no copy of the law throughout Judah for him to study and obey. But the text of this account continues to explain, “*And he walked in all the ways of David his father and did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left*” (2 Kg 22:2). That which he did was considered right in the sight of God because he walked according to “*all the ways of David,*” not according to a written law that he had in his hands. He assumed that David followed the commandments of God, and thus he walked according to the religious heritage of David. The striking lesson that we learn from this is the fact that if the fathers leave no religious heritage for their descendants to follow, then civilization in the long term is doomed (See Gn 6:5).

What is interesting to note is that “King David his father” lived over **300 years before Josiah was born**. When David was alive, the nation of Israel still had a copy of the law of God, which law David obediently followed. After David died, a copy of this law was made and hidden in a time capsule in the construction of the temple that was built by Solomon, David’s son. Those righteous kings who lived three centuries before Josiah had enough respect for the word of God that

they took measures during the reign of Solomon to preserve a copy of the law for future generations. According to what God revealed in Deuteronomy, they knew that the kings of Israel would eventually become evil in the years to come.

And then one day some men in the reconstruction of the temple reaped the reward of those who had enough foresight to make sure that the “Bible” was preserved for their descendants. Respect for the law was the legacy of David, and this was the reason why the 2 Kings report speaks of the young King Josiah doing that which was right. Without a copy of the law, Josiah at least followed in the obedient relationship that David had with God. If religious leaders want to do that which is right today, they too need to find a copy of the Bible, tear their clothes in repentance as did Josiah, and then get to work preaching the word of God to those who would hear them and respond as Josiah.

Nevertheless, the story of Josiah and his restoration did not have a happy ending. Fortunately, because Josiah torn his clothes in repentance and cried out before God because of the sins of the people, God promised that personally he would have a happy ending: *“I will gather you to your fathers and you will be gathered into your grave in peace. And your eyes will not see all the calamity that I will bring on this place”* (2 Kg 22:20; see 23:25).

Unfortunately, Josiah was killed in a battle with Pharaoh Neco of Egypt. The people then took Jehoahaz, a son of Josiah, who was not God-anointed, and made him the king of Judah. But Jehoahaz ***“did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done”*** (2 Kg 23:32). Jehoahaz was subsequently taken captive by Pharaoh Neco into Egypt. The Pharaoh then anointed as king of Judah, Jehoiakim, another son of Josiah. But Jehoiakim ***“did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done”*** (2 Kg 23:37). And then came Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, to take the remaining Israelites in Palestine into captivity (2 Kg 24). This was the end of Israel’s existence as an independent people in Palestine. From this time on, Palestine would always be controlled by foreign powers.

Unfortunately, the zealous efforts to restore Israel to the authority

of the word of God by Josiah did not last. His efforts were futile because the sins of the fathers had already been embedded in the social behavior of the people. Once the influence of Josiah was gone, the people reverted back to the religious heritage that was handed down to them by their backslidden fathers who did not know the law of God. Their wayward fathers had no fear of the word of God. They were as Jeremiah wrote of them: “*Yet the king [Jehoiakim] and all his servants who heard all these words were not afraid, nor did they tear their garments*” (Jr 36:24).

It is incumbent on those who love the word of God to make a judgment concerning the people among whom they minister the word. They must determine if the people have gone too far away from a fear of God that they are unable to tear their clothes in repentance, and return to the authority of the word of God. God does not bind on His people futile efforts to preach to those who have hardened their hearts against Him.

Nowhere in the New Testament is it bound on the people of God to keep preaching the gospel to those who have no inclination to be responsive to the gospel. Jesus forewarned His disciples of this matter before He sent them forth with the message of the gospel: “***Do not give what is holy to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet and turn and tear you in pieces***” (Mt 7:6).

It seems that this method of evangelism is exactly what Paul practiced on different occasions on his mission to preach the gospel to the world. For example, when Paul and Barnabas came to the synagogue of the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia, there were Jews in the city who “*were filled with envy. And contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed those things that were spoken by Paul*” (At 13:25). But when Paul and Barnabas perceived those who were hardened against the message of the gospel, they said to the hardened, “*It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you. Since you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles*” (At 13:46). On another occasion when some Jews in Corinth “*resisted and blasphemed,*” Paul also said to them, “*Your blood be*

*upon your own heads. I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles”* (At 18:6).

The preceding reveals the efforts of God to at least give Israel one last chance to save themselves from death and captivity. In the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah, Jeremiah was called to preach repentance to the last two remaining tribes in Judah (Jr 1:1,2). At the time, the end of national Israel was only a few years away. When the time of termination eventually came in 586 B.C., and while the Babylonians surrounded the city of Jerusalem, Jeremiah was called to preach repentance to the enclosed Israelites in order to give them one last chance to repent. He encouraged the remaining Israelites to turn themselves over to the Babylonians because God had destined the termination of independent national Israel. If they turned themselves over to captivity, many of them would escape death. They would continue to exist as a culture of people in order that the promises to Abraham be fulfilled concerning the Blessing (Branch) that would come out of Israel for the salvation of the world (Jr 23). But as an independent nation of people in Palestine, such would be terminated.

In his call, God said to Jeremiah, “**They** [the resistant Jews] **will fight against you**. *But they will not prevail against you, for I am with you”* (Jr 1:19). Because of his message to the people, the people eventually threw Jeremiah in a pit (Jr 18:19,20,22,23). They slandered Jeremiah, calling him a traitor to Israel (Jr 18:18). Diotrefes likewise slandered the early evangelists (3 Jn 10). The hardened Jews stirred up animosity against Paul (At 13:50). On one occasion, they cast him out of a city and stoned him (At 14:19). Because the Jews of Paul’s day rejected the gospel, God rejected them (See Rm 10:19-21). They too were consigned to being shut up in Jerusalem in A.D. 70 by the Romans. The ensuing war of Rome against the insurrectionist Jews led to about one million being killed in the fall of Jerusalem. A similar fate awaits all those who reject the gospel (See 2 Th 1:6-9).

When swine reject the pearl of the gospel, it is time to move on. If the religious heritage of self-righteous religionists are set in stone to the point that even a “Josiah restoration” cannot turn them from their destiny of doom, then it is time for the disciples of Jesus to remain

faithful, but they too must move on. We must always remember that only eight people made it out alive during the flood of Noah's day. Only a small remnant of the people of Israel eventually return to Palestine after being scattered throughout the world in the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Only a few Jews escaped death in Jerusalem during the A.D. 70 judgment of Israel. Only a few faithful disciples will likewise escape the destruction of the world when Jesus comes again (Mt 25:41; 2 Th 1:6-9). What will determine our destiny is our reaction to the reading of the law of God. If there is no repentant "tearing of clothes," then we know that we will not have a happy ending when our Lord Jesus Christ is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire.

## 8 RADICAL RESTORATION

Josiah sought to initiate a religious paradigm shift in the society of Israel. Unfortunately, the backslidden religiosity of the people was so embedded in the culture of the people that it was not possible from him to change their God-ordained destiny. After all his efforts to turn the people from their destiny that was pronounced in the book that was discovered in the repairs of the temple, God had already consigned Judah to captivity. After all his efforts to shift the religious paradigm of Israel, "*the Lord said, 'I will remove Judah also out of My sight as I have removed Israel [the northern kingdom]'*" (2 Kg 23:27). Therefore, regardless of Josiah's radical restoration, "*the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath with which His anger was kindled against Judah*" (2 Kg 23:26). Their captivity was God's answer to their continual backsliding: "*Your own wickedness will correct you and your backslidings will reprove you*" (Jr 2:19; see Jr 3:6,8,11; 5:6).

We learn a great deal from Josiah's efforts to initiate a religious paradigm shift in Judah. **Sometimes religious paradigm shifts are impossible to accomplish because the wayward religious beliefs and behavior of the people are so embedded in the culture that it is**

**impossible to accomplish any long-lasting restoration to the authority of the word of God.** This indeed can be a discouraging lesson. However, it is necessary to understand this point lest we are discouraged by our own efforts to change the religious culture of a people who have moved so far away from the authority of the word of God that the people cannot, because they will not, turn to the Lord. When a religious people forsake the Bible as the foundation of their faith, it is not possible to restore them to the authority of the Bible.

Our hearts and desires may be as Josiah: *“Before him there was no king like him who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses. Neither after him arose there any like him”* (2 Kg 23:25). This may be the faithful character of a gospel preacher who has set his heart to restore the people to the word of God. Since we are to learn from the things that are recorded in the Old Testament (Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11), then it would be beneficial that we learn from Josiah’s restoration efforts to bring the people back to the commandments of the Sinai covenant. At least we must understand the radical measures that were necessary for him to take in order to restore his generation to the authority of the word of God.

The statement *“there was no king like him”* was made of him because he carried out radical measures in order to at least prolong Israel a few more years. After his death, however, the people of God would suffer their assigned captivity for their backsliding. The following measures that Josiah took, therefore, give us some guidelines concerning what is necessary to at least turn the religious behavior of the people of our generation again to the authority of the word of God:

- **Call together the religious leaders.** *“Then the king sent and they gathered to him all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem”* (2 Kg 23:1). In order to initiate a restoration to the authority of the word of God, Josiah started at the top. He gathered together those whose responsibility it was to spiritually lead the people. When the apostle Paul made his last appeal to the churches of Asia, he did something that was similar. *“So from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the presbyters*

[elders] of the church” (At 20:17). He reminded them, “*I have not shunned to declare to you all the counsel of God*” (At 20:27). And then he admonished them, “*Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock*” (At 20:28). He warned, “*For I know this, that after my departure grievous wolves will enter in among you, not sparing the flock*” (At 20:29). Paul knew that backsliding was coming. Therefore, he took the opportunity to forewarn the elders of the church to always be on the lookout for wayward people and their teaching. In order to give the elders this warning, he called them together in Miletus.

God has always instituted shepherds (elders) among His people, which shepherds are to do the work to “*shepherd the flock of God*” (1 Pt 5:2). When the flock goes astray, therefore, it is the fault of shepherds who did not assume their responsibility to teach the word of God. Every shepherd must hold “*fast the faithful word as he has been taught, so that he may be able by sound teaching both to exhort and refute those who contradict*” (Ti 1:9). The reason that elders must be admonished to carry out their responsibility of teaching the word of God is to guard against apostasy. “*For there are many rebellious and idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped*” (Ti 1:10,11).

Therefore, in order to initiate a restoration to the authority of the word of God, those who have the responsibility to lead the people spiritually through the teaching of the word of God must first be reminded of this responsibility. This is not a meeting specifically of the preachers. It is a meeting of the elders whose specific responsibility it is to teach the people the word of God. Preachers who are not elders may be in such a meeting, but they are not the primary focus of the meeting.

Unfortunately, too many calls for restoration have been initiated by calling together those whose financial well-being depends on their salaries from the backslidden people. Add to this the prestige of the preachers, whose prestige and positions could be endangered if a radical restoration were initiated. If restorations are sought to be initiated by the preachers, then a call for the preachers to come together reveals that the church has backslidden from the leadership of the elders. The church has gone astray by shifting the primary responsibility for teach-

ing the word of God from the elders to the preachers. It is of concern to notice how Josiah dealt with this matter in the radical restoration of 2 Kings 23.

- **Call a general meeting of all the people.** *“The king [Josiah] ... and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem ... the priests and the prophets and all the people”* went to a specific location for a meeting (2 Kg 23:2). When there was to be a discussion concerning spiritual matters in the early church, not only were the elders of the church called together, but also the apostles, elders **and the whole church**. At the time, it was determined that Paul, Barnabas, and other members of the church *“should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning”* the problem of Jewish legalism (At 15:2).

Meetings, therefore, should be called beyond the meeting of the elders. Everyone must be informed that a radical restoration must be initiated among all the people. The people must be informed that it is time to return to the word of God as the center of reference of our faith.

*“Now when they came to Jerusalem, they were received **by the church and the apostles and elders**”* (At 20:3). After much deliberation concerning the prevailing problem, *“It pleased the **apostles and elders, with the whole church**”* sent representatives out among the greater assembly of the disciples throughout the Roman world in order to inform the members concerning matters that were discussed in Jerusalem (At 15:22). This meeting of the church started with a meeting with the elders and apostles, but it was eventually extended to the whole church. Meetings that are called in order to initiate restorations to the authority of the word of God must first be called by those whose responsibility it is to teach the word of God to the people. But eventually, all the people must be called in order to take ownership of the restoration.

It is significant to note that the preachers were called for the initial Jerusalem meeting, **but they were called only as a part of “the whole church.”** There was no mention of them as a special group who came together to make arbitrary decisions for the church. The preachers had no authority to decide for the church those things that were matters of

faith. All authority for such matters rests only in the word of God. In the call of the Jerusalem meeting, this specific group would be the apostles and elders. The preachers, or evangelists, were only included in the phrase, “the whole church.”

Whenever preachers are elevated to be a specific group of authorities who are separate from the “whole church,” then they have been elevated to a position above the church. This exaltation of preachers is nowhere found in the New Testament. When the preachers are so exalted, it is often these who are the problem, which was the case in the restoration that Josiah initiated. This was the leading group—the Baal prophets—whom Elijah had to eradicate from Israel during his restoration movement (See 1 Kg 18:17-46).\*

- **Reaffirm the authority of the word of God.** King Josiah then *“read in the ears all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of the Lord”* (2 Kg 23:2). When Paul had called the Ephesian church leaders together, he reminded them, *“I kept nothing back that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house”* (At 20:20). He reminded the elders that he had taught them *“all the counsel of God”* (At 20:27). When a restoration to the word of God is to be implemented in order to lead people out of religion and into a word-based faith, then the center focus of the restoration must be on the word of God. A restoration will never occur when people seek to hang on to those traditions of the past that cause division within the restoration.

When Josiah had gathered the people together, he took a great deal of time reading the “Bible” to the people concerning the covenant that God had established with Israel. Therefore, the first point on the agenda of the meeting was the word of God, not the opinions and speculations of the religious leaders. It was not a time for heartwarming sermons from the mouths of feel-good preachers. It was a time for restoration of the word of God, and in order to initiate such a restoration, total focus had to be on the word of God.

---

\* Research Book 93, *A Certain Destiny*, in reference to this point. Download from the Biblical Research Library at [www.africainternational.org](http://www.africainternational.org)

Once focus has been placed on the word of God, then it is a time for exhortations. It is a time *“to exhort and refute those who contradict”* the word of God (Ti 1:9). This can be done only when it is pointed out clearly in the word of God where some have contradicted the word. And generally, those who contradict are those who seek to bind traditions, beliefs and religious customs on the people of God that are not bound in His word. This was the case in reference to the apostate Israel whom Josiah sought to restore. The Baal prophets had bound on the people those things that had no authority in the word of God. They had brought the people into the bondage of beliefs and behavior that were based on their own speculations and opinions.

- **Leaders must make a personal covenant (commitment) to obey the word of God and to initiate a restoration.** *“Then the king stood by a pillar and made a covenant before the Lord to walk after the Lord, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book”* (2 Kg 23:3). This was a phenomenal commitment that was made by the young king. There had to be a total commitment on the part of those who would lead in the restoration. Josiah was willing to make that commitment first.

But if a radical restoration is to be accomplished, it cannot be the plan of one or two dedicated individuals. The people as a whole must take ownership of the effort. Since it is the people who must turn from their backslidden ways, then it is the people who must make a decision to commit to restoring the word of God as the center of our focus for building faith.

Josiah took the lead by committing himself to the restoration of the authority of the word of God. This meant that his leadership in restoration could be validated only insofar as he himself dedicated himself to be obedient. This meant that all his former obedience to the religious rites, rituals and ceremonies of the past had to be sacrificed for obedience to the law of the book that was discovered in the temple. The people must have an example of obedience, and Josiah was willing to give that example. These were the instructions that were given

by Peter to those elders he exhorted to lead by example (1 Pt 5:3). This was the mandate that Jesus commissioned His disciples to live: “*And you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength*” (Mk 12:30).

When the early disciples were obedient to the gospel, their obedience meant that they had to walk away from their former religious traditions and heritage. If there is no commitment to study the word of God anew without the prejudice of our former religious traditions, then we will never arrive at a restoration to the authority of God in matters of faith. If the word of God is to be the foundation of our faith, then all religious traditions that would hinder our total commitment to the authority of the word of God must be sacrificed. **Radical restoration often calls on one to walk away from the religious heritage of his fathers.**

At one time during His ministry, some of the religious leaders of Jesus’ day complained to Jesus, “*Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?*” (Mt 15:2). By this time in Jesus’ ministry, the disciples had learned enough from Jesus, that they knew the difference between the religious traditions of the established religion of the day and the authority of Jesus in their lives. Therefore, if the leaders do not take the lead in committing themselves to the authority of the word of Christ as did Jesus’ disciples, then they will continually complain against those who would initiate a radical restoration. It was for this reason that Josiah first called together the elders and read in their ears the law of God. He knew that if he could not get the elders to join in the restoration, then those who would personally go on a mission to restore the word of God would continually be hindered by the religious leaders in the community.

Since it is usually the elders of the religious community who are often stuck in maintaining the traditions of the fathers, then it is they who are often the last to realize that they have no Bible authority for their religious traditions. These are often those who need the exhortation that Jesus gave to those religious leaders who came to Him with a complaint concerning the disciples’ failure to obey the religious traditions of the fathers. “*But in vain do they worship Me,*” Jesus judged

these religious leaders, for they are “*teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*” (Mt 15:9). This statement reminds us of the exhortation that Paul wrote to the Colossian disciples: “*Beware lest anyone take you captive through philosophy and vain deceit according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, and not according to Christ* (Cl 2:8). When Jesus came into the world of Judaism, He came into a religious environment that had been taken captive by the scribes and Pharisees. These were those religious leaders who had backslidden from the authority of the word of God in order to promote the doctrines and commandments of the fathers.

What is so outstanding about the apostle Paul in these matters is the fact that he was willing to walk away from his former obedience to the traditions of his forefathers in order to obey and preach the gospel. He wrote an informative reminder to the Galatian disciples who were being tempted to fall back under the legal religiosity of Judaism which he left: “*I advanced in Judaism above many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions*” (Gl 1:14). Though he was so zealous in his former Jewish religiosity, he walked away from power, pomp, purse and pride in order to be a humble servant of Jesus Christ. He wrote in reference to his commitment, “*I have been crucified with Christ. And it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me*” (Gl 2:20). Sometimes one must demonstrate that Christ lives in him by his walking away from the religious heritage of his fathers.

If one is not willing to sacrifice the religious traditions of his former religion, then he or she will find it very difficult to initiate in his or her personal life a restoration to the word of God. Josiah and Paul were willing to make the commitment and sacrifice. If one would lead in a restoration, therefore, he or she must stand before the people and be willing to commit to the authority of the word of God in all matters of faith. This will often mean that the religious traditions that were handed down from our fathers must fall by the wayside in order that the gospel be the focus of our lives, and that in all matters of faith the word of God should be our final authority. This was the choice that Paul made in his life. In fact, he stated to those in Galatia who were trying to hold on to

their past religious way of life, “*For if I still pleased men, I would not be the bondservant of Christ*” (Gl 1:10). In other words, if Paul tried to continue in the backslidden religion of Judaism in which he enjoyed great position and pomp, then he would not be following Christ.

- **The people must make a personal covenant (commitment) to initiate a restoration.** At the beginning of Josiah’s restoration, not only did he as the king make a personal commitment to follow after the word of God, but also all the people had to be “*committed to the covenant*” (2 Kg 23:3). If there is no commitment on the part of all the people to establish the word of God as the foundation of their faith, then the people will continue to be religious, but there will be no restoration. Their religiosity will continue to be based on the traditions of the fathers and the pronouncements of the preachers who seek to sustain the accepted religious traditions for their own benefit. There will be a continual conflict between those who are committed to a restoration and those who seek to continue the heritage of the religion.

A restoration movement is such because the majority of the people have committed themselves to the authority of the word of God. There can be no restoration when only certain leaders commit themselves to the effort. The people must also follow. This was what happened in the first century. After the mass Pentecost conversion of A.D. 30 in Jerusalem, not too long afterwards Peter addressed a community of Jews in the same city by exhorting, “*Repent and be converted so that your sins may be blotted out, in order that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord*” (At 3:19). Peter made this statement to those who were very religious. But he called on these very religious people to repent. If there is no repentance on the part of religious people as a whole, then there will be no times of restoration.

This is true because religious people have a heart for God. However, they are misguided in their religion by following after the religious traditions of their fathers. Their faith, therefore, is vain because it is not based on the word of Christ. “*Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ*” (Rm 10:17). If our faith has not come to us by our study of the word of Christ, then it is a religiously vain

faith. Muslims and Hindus have a strong faith, but their faith is vain because it does not find its origin in the word of Christ.

We must repent of our “religious faithfulness” in order that God “*may send Christ Jesus, who was before appointed*” to deliver us from our own misguided religiosity (At 3:20). Peter urged his religiously faithful Jews to repent in view of “*the times of restoration of all things that God*” had “*spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets*” (At 3:21).

The gospel was the message of the apostles. This was the power through which God drew all people unto Him in order that a new covenant be established between the repentant and God. “*Jesus made a guarantee of a better covenant*” through His atoning sacrifice on the cross (Hb 7:22). For this reason, He will be our high priest forever (Hb 7:26-28). It is because of this that all people who would seek a refreshing relationship with God today must submit to the call and obedience of the gospel. This is the good news about which all the prophets spoke that was revealed in the generation of the Jews to which the apostles first preached (See 1 Pt 1:10-12).

• **We must put away those things that remind us of past religious rites, rituals and ceremonies that led us astray.** Josiah commanded the religious leaders “*to bring out of the temple of the Lord all the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the Asherah, and for all the hosts of heaven*” (2 Kg 23:4). These idolatrous articles were taken outside Jerusalem and burned them in the fields of the Kidron Valley. Josiah knew that if there were to be a true and lasting restoration, then everything that reminded the people of their former religious ways had to be destroyed.

This is exactly what Paul did in putting away all the ways of Judaism out of his life in order to be a Christian only (See Gl 1:13). It was difficult for some of the first Jewish Christians to do this in reference to the rite of circumcision. They had the right to continue with circumcision as a matter of social custom. But it could no longer be bound as a religious law on the Gentiles as it was under the Sinai covenant. Unfortunately, some of the Jewish Christians continued to make this reli-

gious rite a condition for salvation (See At 15:1). They thus sought to bring the Gentile disciples into the bondage of being circumcised (See Gl 5:1). But when such was attempted in the presence of Paul, he refused to allow this religious rite of the past to be bound as a matter of salvation on those Gentiles who were in his company (Gl 2:3).

There were other religious customs of the times that were often bound on the early Christians. But Paul wrote a sweeping indictment against all such religious rites, rituals and ceremonies being bound on the consciences of the early disciples:

*Therefore, let no one judge you in food or in drink, or in respect to a festival, or of a new moon, or of sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come. But the body is of Christ. Let no man disqualify you of your reward by delighting in false humility and the worship of angels, intruding into those things that he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind (Cl 2:16-18).*

In reference to the eating of certain meats as a religious rite, Paul warned the new disciples in Rome, “*Do not let him who eats [meat with a religious sentiment] despise him who does not eat. And do not let him who does not eat [meat with a religious sentiment] judge him who eats, for God has received him*” (Rm 14:3). In writing this mandate to both Jews and Gentiles, all connotations concerning the eating of certain foods religiously must be “taken outside the city and burned,” just as Josiah took all the idols with religious connotations outside Jerusalem and burned. Jesus said, “ ‘*Do you not understand that whatever thing from outside that enters into the man, it cannot defile him, because it does not enter into his heart, but into the stomach, and is eliminated?*’ ***(Jesus thus declared all foods clean)***” (Mk 7:18,19).

When Paul wrote to the Colossians, he was writing primarily to a Gentile audience of Christians. The Gentiles did not have the religious past as the Jews, whose religion was burdened with all sorts of doctrines, and religious fetishes. However, the Gentiles did have a religious past of their own fetishes and rituals that some tried to retain in their faith as Christians. A fetish is an object that has mythical conno-

tations connected with it. For example, in the animistic religions of Africa certain rocks or trees are claimed to have indwelt within them the spirits of dead ancestors. Certain “charms” were used to bring protection to one in life, and especially, in battle. When we assign a certain “power” to a fetish, or charm, then we have created a point of religious belief. We may not assign a “religious faith” to the fetish or charm. Nevertheless, it is such in the definition of religion. These were the religious fetishes (idols) of Asherah that Josiah cleared out of the temple. He carried them outside Jerusalem and burned them.

A relevant example would apply to a particular fetish that existed in the early days of America. We have no idea concerning the origin of the fetish, but it continues to exist in our youth. The fetish was in reference to a rabbit’s foot. It was believed that a rabbit’s foot would bring good luck. If one carried around a rabbit’s foot in his or her pocket, then it was believed that good luck would come in one’s life. In fact, one could purchase a rabbit’s foot that was attached to a necklace that could be carried around one’s neck. The bearer thereof was assured of good luck because of this charm. There was a religious faith that was attached to something physical. Josiah would have taken all the rabbit’s feet from the pockets and necks of the Jews and carried them outside Jerusalem to be burned at the Brook Kidron. If we still believe in a “rabbit-foot religion,” then it is time to do the same. Rabbit foot religion controls one’s thinking. And because the rabbit foot, or fetish, does such, then it is to be taken from the temple of our lives as Christians. We cannot be rabbit-foot Christians.

- **Dismiss those religious leaders who refuse to submit to the authority of the word of God.** Josiah then “*put down the idolatrous priests*” (2 Kg 23:5). Not all the priests accepted the invitation for the general restoration meeting in Jerusalem. These were those religious leaders in the community who led the people to burn incense to Baal. These included astrologers who burned incense “*to the sun and to the moon and to the planets, and to all the hosts of heaven*” (2 Kg 23:5). These religious leaders refused to attend Josiah’s meeting and call for a restoration to the authority of the word of God.

Regardless of their refusal to join in the restoration movement, Josiah brought the Asherah idol out of the temple and “*burned it at the Brook Kidron and beat it into powder*” (2 Kg 23:6). He broke down the houses wherein sexual immorality was performed as a religious act (2 Kg 23:7). He brought the leaders of this backslidden religiosity out of the cities of Judah, and then defiled the places wherein and whereupon they practiced their religion (2 Kg 23:8,10).

Regardless of his zealous efforts, not all the idolatrous priests showed up in Jerusalem for the general call for restoration. On the contrary, some remained in their “high places” and continued to rebel against any efforts to restore Israel to the authority of the word of God (2 Kg 23:9). It would be these religious leaders who would eventually lead the people back into worshiping Baal and the Asherah after Josiah died. Nevertheless, a call must be made to them to join in the effort to restore the authority of the word of God. Even if they do not show up, the movement must be continued by those who seek to preach the word of God.

Josiah continued his campaign for restoration throughout the land of Palestine regardless of the opposition of some of the backslidden prophets and priests who prized their positions more than the word of God (See 2 Kg 23:10-14). However, anything that reminded the people of their wayward religiosity, Josiah destroyed. Any article that they used to practice their idolatrous religiosity, was destroyed.

In order to implement a restoration, all those things that would encourage one to return to his or her former religiosity must be put away. What Josiah knew, and what we must understand, is that religious people often attach religious significance to material things of this world. In order to implement a true repentance from the religious ways of the past, therefore, these things must be put away. Any idolized article that would discourage us from totally focusing on God and His word, must be removed from our lives.

• **Disfellowship those leaders who are not committed to the restoration of the people to the authority of the word of God.** We can be thankful that we do not live under the Sinai law that instructed Israel to stone those prophets who stood up and preached contrary to

the word of God. Josiah had read in the discovered “book,” “*You will not hearken to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams*” (Dt 13:3). In fact, for the education of the people concerning the mandates of the law, he continued to read unto Deuteronomy 18: “*But the prophet who will presume to speak a word in My name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who will speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet will die*” (Dt 18:20).

Josiah “*killed all the priests of the high places who were there on the altars*” (2 Kg 23:20). Josiah obeyed to “the letter of the law” that which was necessary in order to implement a restoration to the commandments of the Lord. Those priests and prophets who were leading the people with their own words that were contrary to the revealed word of God, had to go.

It was a common practice of some who were condemned to death to plead for life while clinging to the altar. But those priests who did not show up in Jerusalem at the initial call of the king, were condemned to death because of their refusal to restore obedience to the Sinai law. They had clung to their own altars of Baal in order to be spared. But the king sent the executioners to their cities while they held on to the altars to Baal that they had built. As Elijah had initiated a restoration by putting to death the Baal and Asherah prophets, so Josiah did likewise. He burned their bones, and then returned to Jerusalem (2 Kg 23:20).

Christians have no authority to do such today simply because the new covenant we have with God is far different than the covenant that God established with the nation of Israel. Israel’s covenant with God, and our covenant we have with Him through our obedience to the gospel, were established for different purposes.

Israel was called out of the nations of the world through Abraham in order to preserve a segment of society for the coming of the Savior of the world. God instilled within the law of the Sinai covenant that He made with Israel some unique laws that would preserve the identity of Israel until the Messiah came into the world. Some of these laws, as the execution of those who worked against the preserving commandments of the covenant, were embedded in the Sinai law for the purpose

of preserving the identity of Israel. Josiah and Elijah's execution of the Baal and Asherah prophets was for the purpose of preserving the identity and faith of Israel until the coming of the Blessing that was promised to Abraham (See Gn 12:1-3). If no identity of the seed of Abraham could be made at the time the Blessing came into the world, then we could not know if the promise of God to Abraham had been fulfilled (See Gn 12:1-3).

- **Celebrate the restoration.** After all the efforts to cleanse the land and people of idolatry, Josiah then called for a celebration: *“Keep the Passover to the Lord your God as it is written in the book of this covenant”* (2 Kg 23:21). And *“surely such a Passover had not been celebrated from the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah”* (2 Kg 23:22).

Christians today have the opportunity to celebrate the times of refreshing that have come from the Lord. They can do so every first day of the week as they surround the Lord's Supper. As the Passover was reinstated by Josiah to celebrate the restoration of the commandments of the Sinai covenant, so also Christians gather around the Supper to celebrate their deliverance from the religious deceptions of their past. They have been delivered from the bondage of their past religiosity (See Gl 5:1). They have been set free in Christ. When Christians eat and drink in the Supper, they are celebrating their freedom from religion that was made possible by the cross and their obedience to the gospel.

## 9 GOSPEL FREEDOM

What was commendable about Josiah and his restoration was his determination *“to walk after the Lord, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book”* (2 Kg 23:3). This should be the desire of every disciple of Jesus in refer-

ence to restoring simple Christianity. Those who simply want to do what Jesus wants them to do are sincere in their efforts. It is always right to seek a restoration of the commandments of God. However, those who seek restorations are sometimes doing so in the wrong manner, or possibly with the wrong intentions. Their objective is sometimes misleading. Nevertheless, with a Bible in our hands, and the love of God in our hearts, we must always strive to bring ourselves and the people closer to an obedient relationship with God.

Restoration of our lives to the will of Christ is simply Christian in every sense of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. This purpose of discipleship was embedded in Paul's words to the Colossians: "*If you then were raised with Christ, seek those things that are above*" (Cl 3:1). "*Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth*" (Cl 3:2). Religion originates from this world because it is based on the meritorious performances of man. But if we seek those things that are above, our minds are focused on what information we can receive from God through His inspired word. And if the obsession of our lives is to seek God, then we can be assured that "*every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights*" (Js 1:17). Therefore, when considering the gift of the word of God that has come down to us from the Father of lights, we must "*let everyone be swift to hear, slow to speak*" (Js 1:19). It is the nature of being a disciple of Jesus to listen to the word of God. In other words, discipleship is first about Bible study, for it is only through the Bible we learn about the One we would follow.

- **The rise of religion:** Whether one is swift to hear the Lord Jesus depends on the religiosity from which he was delivered by the grace of God. We must first understand that all religion is legal oriented. In other words, religions exist because the adherents of each religion give their allegiance through the legal obedience of rites, rituals and ceremonies that define each particular religion. The result of this often sincere legal obedience to that which identifies a person's particular religion, inherently denominates people from one another. Denominationalism exists, therefore, because religious people adhere

to the unique religious doctrines or characteristics that define a particular denomination. It is for this reason that religion is earthly, and in some cases, sensual. In the city of Corinth in the first century, the temple in Corinth was a place of fornication. It was a place to which religious people went to commit fornication in the name of the idol god in which they believed.

In order for each particular adherent to identify the religion of his or her choice, a unique name is often legally assigned to the religious denomination. In order to locate the assembly of each unique denominated religion, buildings are often built and religious ceremonies legally performed within the buildings. Religious performances are carried out within the assembly so that each worshiper has a sense of identity by fulfilling his or her respective duties as a faithful member. When all the acts of performance are completed during an “official” assembly, the assembly is concluded with a “closing prayer” and the adherents go on their way with a sense of satisfaction that they have worshiped God. This is the nature of legal-oriented religion. It is religion that is contrary to the grace of God that was revealed through our Lord Jesus Christ.

If one is the product of such a legal-oriented religion (denomination), then it is often natural for him to bring this view of religious behavior into Christ, wherein he was baptized. This was the problem with some of the early Jewish Christians in the first century. Judaism was a strict legal-oriented religion. Paul referred to this religion as Judaism, or “the Jew’s religion” (Gl 1:14). By the addition of their religious rites, rituals and ceremonies, the scribes and Pharisees had hijacked the faith of the Jews, and thus assumed control of the peoples’ religiosity. But when thousands of Jews were obedient to the gospel of God’s grace, there was an attempt on the part of some Jews to bring their previously legal-oriented religiosity into the fellowship of disciples who had been set free from the bondage of both sin and religion.

This problem in the first century was so prevalent in the early church that the Holy Spirit deemed it necessary to write two letters to the church, which letters would throughout posterity become the constitutions against turning the grace of God into a backslidden religiosity (See Rm

& Gl). In fact, when Paul wrote to the Galatians, he said, *“I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away from Him who called you into the grace of Christ to another gospel”* (Gl 1:6). And in reference to morality, there were *“ungodly men who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ”* (Jd 4).

Legal-oriented religious thinking and behavior in the first century was corrupting the true gospel, and thus creating another gospel, which “gospel” was simply another religion. In his final conclusion concerning this matter in his letter to the Galatians, Paul pronounced that those who would turn a gospel response to the grace of God into a meritorious religion had separated themselves from Christ: *“You have been severed from Christ, you who seek to be justified by law [keeping]. You have fallen from grace”* (Gl 5:4).

- **From law to grace to freedom:** Because Paul was formerly so steeped in legal religion, he was the natural choice of the Holy Spirit to write concerning the error of legal religiosity. Paul knew the mentality of being legal oriented in reference to one’s faith. After he obeyed the gospel, however, it took him some time to readjust his thinking. After his baptism in Damascus, he subsequently went into Arabia, and then back to Damascus. It was three years after his baptism in Damascus that he returned to his home country (Gl 1:15-18). For five to seven years he worked himself out of the error of his past legal-oriented religious thinking and behavior. It was this amount of time before his first call eventually came to preach the gospel to the world. After he had made the transition from law to grace, it was time for the Holy Spirit to use him to preach the gospel of grace to the Jews throughout the ancient world.

The Holy Spirit sent Barnabas to Tarsus in order to fetch Paul for the great ministry of preaching the gospel of freedom to all those who were in the bondage of legal religiosity (See At 11:25,26). Once Barnabas brought Paul (Saul) to Antioch in order to enjoy the fellowship of Gentile brethren who were uncircumcised, it was time for the Holy Spirit to send Paul on a mission from synagogue to synagogue to preach the gospel that the Jews were no longer in the bondage of legally work-

ing for their salvation. It was time to proclaim that they no longer needed to offer meritorious sacrifices for their sins. They needed only to give themselves over to the sacrificed Lamb of God who had offered Himself once and for all time for the sins of the world (Hb 7:26,27).

• **Deliverance from perfect law-keeping:** It was the Holy Spirit, through Paul, who wrote the profound statement, “*By works of law no flesh will be justified in His sight*” (Rm 3:20). This liberating statement was made in reference to being set free from meritorious law keeping in an attempt to save oneself. It is a statement that is totally contrary to religion.

There is a significant difference between what Josiah reinstated and that under which Christians are now called to live today. Josiah sought to reinstate legal obedience to the commandments of God in order to preserve the heritage of national Israel. His motivation was not a response to grace, but a realization that obedience to the commandments of the covenant would bring the Israelites back into honoring the covenant that God had established with them at Mount Sinai.

The times of refreshing that now come from the presence of the Lord is a restoration to the gospel of God’s grace (At 3:19). Our covenant with God does not depend on our perfect obedience to a system of commandments. It is founded on the grace of God. Unless we understand this difference between the restoration of Josiah and the grace of God under which we now live, we will continue to change the law of the covenant under which we now live into a legal religion of obedience to statutes. We will change the law of Christ into a meritorious system of obedience by which we will seek to justify ourselves before God. And, we will not be able to understand what the Holy Spirit said in Romans 3:20.

Once the early Jewish disciples saw the difference between meritorious law keeping and grace, they in mass were obedient to the gospel in order to come into the new covenant. They realized that it was by the grace of God that Jesus was lifted up on the cross, and thus it was only natural for them to respond to this grace (See Jn 3:14). In fact, the formerly Jewish Peter and Paul were even drawn out of their

legal system of religion when they discovered the difference between meritorious law keeping and grace. Paul later said to Peter,

*Knowing that a man is not justified by [meritorious] works of law [specifically, the Sinai law], but by the faith of Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus so that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by [the meritorious] works of law, for by [meritorious] works of law no flesh will be justified* (Gl 2:16).

2 Corinthians 4:15 was written on the background of the preceding truth of what inspired both Paul and Peter to leave the law-keeping religion of Judaism in order to respond to grace: *“For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.”*

There is no difficulty in understanding the personal testimony that Paul wrote to the Galatians, and the legal restoration of the law of the covenant that Josiah sought to restore. The difference between Josiah’s restoration and our call for restoration today from legal religiosity, is that our call is based on grace. If we understand that one cannot keep any law perfectly in order to save himself, then grace abounds. The fact is that no one can keep perfectly any commandment that God may enjoin on us today as His people. This is true because our obedience is always imperfect. As under the Sinai law, so it is true today. *“For we have,”* wrote Paul, *“proved that both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin”* (Rm 3:9). The reason for this is that *“there is none righteous, no, not one”* (Rm 3:10). If we seek to live by a supposed perfect keeping of law, then the law becomes our signature FOR death. Therefore, we must remember that *“the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed you from the law of sin and death”* (Rm 8:2). Grace has freed us from the death that comes when we break the law (Rm 6:23).

## 10 THE LAW OF LIBERTY

It is for the preceding reasons of the previous chapter that the Holy Spirit introduced a new concept into our biblical vocabulary when He spoke of law in reference to Christians. He introduced this new concept when He directed the hand of James to write specifically to some Jewish Christians who were making an effort to justify themselves legally according to their former religiosity under the Jew's religion. The Spirit wrote: "*But he who looks into **the perfect law of liberty** and continues to abide in it, not being a forgetful hearer, but **a doer of the work**, this man will be blessed in his deed*" (Js 1:25).

Notice carefully that the Spirit said "*doer of the work*," not doer of the law. In another statement He reminded Christians that they were "*created in Christ Jesus for good works*" (Ep 2:10). Christians were not created in Christ by works of law in order to continue to justify themselves through good works. It is for this reason that we must take a closer look at the purpose of the "law of Christ" in the life of the Christian. The Christian's relationship with law is somewhat different than the Jew's relationship with the Sinai covenant.

When we consider the law, or commandments, John reminds us, "*By this we know that we know Him, if **we keep His commandments***" (1 Jn 2:3). "*Whatever we ask, we receive from Him, because **we keep His commandments** and do those things that are pleasing in His sight*" (1 Jn 3:22). "*For this is the love of God, that **we keep His commandments***" (1 Jn 5:3).

Some may assert that there is a contradiction on this matter between Paul, John and then James in reference to the law of liberty. On the contrary, if we do not forget what the Holy Spirit wrote through Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:15, then there is no contradiction. **Christians are obedient to the commandments of God because they walk in thanksgiving of the grace of God that was poured out on them through Jesus Christ.** Christians are obedient because they are saved by grace, not in order to become saved. If they were to keep the commandments in order to be saved, then they would be seeking an impossibility, for no one can keep the commandments perfectly in order to be saved.

Knowing this is understanding the difference between religion and

Christianity. Religionists are seeking to justify themselves before God through the legal and meritorious keeping of the commandments of God. On the other hand, grace-motivated disciples of Christ are working Christians because they are responding to the grace of God that was revealed on the cross. Maybe this could be better understood by what Paul wrote in Philippians 2:12,13:

*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed [the commandments of God], not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, **for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure.***”

The Philippian Christians obeyed because it was God working in them through the power of the gospel of grace. This simply means that the grace of God motivated (“caused”) them to obey the commandments of God. It was not their desire to meritoriously obey in order to earn the right to be Christians. They were already Christians. Because they were already saved by the grace of God, they continued to work in response to the grace that God had poured out upon them through the Lord Jesus. They were doers of the work because Jesus had worked for them at the cross.

When we connect the dots between Paul’s statement in Philippians 2:12,13 with what he said in Ephesians 2:10, then everything is clearly understood: “*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.*” The Philippians were already in Christ because they had been baptized into Christ (Rm 6:3-6; Gl 3:26-28). They had obeyed the gospel in response to the gospel of God’s grace. The same motive for their obedience of the gospel continued to work in their lives to obey the commandments of God. John’s point, therefore, is that we manifest our love of God through our obedient response to His grace.

There was nothing meritorious in John’s mind when he wrote concerning obedience to the commandments of God. He simply stated the matter in a different way than how Paul expressed the same thing. If we love God for loving us, then we will respond to all that He would

communicate to us concerning how we must conduct our lives. There is nothing meritorious about such obedience. We work because we are saved, not in order to be saved. It was for this reason that John began the very letter from which we have quoted, *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us”* (1 Jn 1:8). John says that we manifest our love for God by keeping His commandments, but at the same time, we cannot keep the commandments perfectly. This is exactly Paul’s point in writing the books of Romans and Galatians. We are all “cleansed sinners” by God’s grace because we continue to walk in response to His grace. John so said this in the following statement: *“If we [Christians] walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”* (1 Jn 1:7).

• **Bible authority assumes grace:** If this one point is understood, then one can understand the vast difference between the Sinai law that Josiah sought to restore, and the law of liberty that God has established with each Christian through Jesus. Josiah sought to restore a legal obedience to those commandments of the covenant that led to the continued identity of the nation of Israel, as well as Israel’s continued covenant relationship with God as a nation. In order to be preserved as a covenanted nation with God, Israel’s obedience to the Sinai law was mandatory. By reinstating the commandments of the Sinai covenant, therefore, Josiah restored the nation of Israel to a covenant relationship with God for the remainder of his short life.

But it is different with the law of liberty by which we live as Christians in a covenant with God. Our covenant with God today is individual, not national. When the grace of God was revealed at the cross, *“the righteousness of God”* was revealed *“from faith to faith, as it is written, ‘The just will live by faith’”* (Rm 1:17). We individually walk by faith, whereas the nation of Israel had to walk by a national commitment to keep the law of their covenant with God. Individual Jews could sin, but their individual sins would not make void the national covenant that they had with God. However, if the nation as a whole sinned, then they were in trouble. Josiah sought to restore the nation

from national sin, not necessarily individual sin.

The Holy Spirit used the national sin of Israel to illustrate our individual covenant relationship with God that is based on our faithful walk in response to His righteousness. We see this in Paul's following statement: "*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness*" (Rm 1:18). When Josiah initiated a restoration in Israel, he realized that God was about to unleash judgment on the nation because the people had suppressed the truth in their willingness to follow after their own unrighteousness. The same judgment will occur in our lives individually if we seek to follow after our own unrighteousness in order to live an ungodly life. Israel's judgment came in time, but ours will occur at the end of time.

We must not forget that ungodly behavior on the part of any individual can never find atonement in our supposed meritorious performance of law, "*for all have sinned [individually] and fall short of the glory of God*" (Rm 3:23). Therefore, the Holy Spirit asks, "*You who make your boast of law [keeping], do you dishonor God through breaking the law?*" (Rm 2:23). If one would seek to keep the law of God in order to boast in his law-keeping, then he dishonors God who says all have sinned. There is no such thing as establishing ourselves to be righteous before God on the basis of our perfect keeping of God's law.

No one can keep law perfectly in order to be justified before God through the obedience of any system of law. Christians are "*justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*" (Rm 3:24). Therefore, "*by [His] grace you are saved through [your] faith, and that not of yourselves [through perfect law-keeping], it is the gift of God*" (Ep 2:8). We are simply not justified by "*works, lest anyone should boast*" (Ep 2:9).

When we speak of the authority of the word of God, therefore, we cannot be referring to a legal justification of ourselves through law keeping. No one can be justified before God on the basis of keeping law perfectly. We are saved by the gospel of God's grace in spite of our efforts to keep His commandments. "*And if by grace,*" Paul concluded, "*then it is no more by works [of law], otherwise grace is no more grace.*"

*[But if it is by works, it is no longer grace, otherwise work is no longer work]*” (Rm 11:6).

We must be careful, therefore, when we speak concerning the authority of the word of God. The reference to doing things “biblically” can often in the minds of some mean something totally different than what the New Testament explains when one is walking in the way of the word of the Lord. In fact, when some people say they are “biblical” in their obedience, they are possibly working contrary to the grace of God, if not working against the grace of God.

The authority of the word of God does not mean keeping law legally in a perfect manner in order to justify oneself before God. If we come to this conclusion in our relationship with the word of God, then we set aside the grace of God. If we are perfect in obedience, what need do we have of grace? We have become self-righteous, basing our salvation on our supposed perfect obedience to a system of law. Therefore, the affirmation to have Bible authority in all matters of faith cannot mean to legally keep law perfectly in order to justify oneself before God. If we believe such, then we have set aside the gospel of God’s grace. We have become self-righteous in our assertion to be able to keep law in a manner by which we can proclaim our own salvation before God and others.

- **Silence of the Scriptures means freedom:** We must be clear concerning what we mean when we seek Bible authority in all matters of faith. Some have misunderstood the following statement concerning this theme: “Speak where the Bible speaks, and be silent where the Bible is silent.” If one sets aside grace, and subsequently views his relationship with God to be legally established, then he will not understand the meaning of this statement. Neither will he understand that we are saved by grace through faith (Ep 2:8). On the contrary, some will be thinking that we are saved by law through grace, and our faith (trust) in our own meritorious obedience to law.

It is true that we should speak when the Bible says this or that about the will of God. By faith, we seek to obediently follow His instructions. However, when the Bible says nothing about a particular

matter, then there is freedom. We thus keep our silence in judging others concerning their unique choices to carry out the will of God in their lives. We keep silent in the matter of choice that each person has in reference to carrying out the intent of the instructions of God. We are not judges of one another in areas where the Bible gives no instructions.

For example, it is a clear mandate of the word of God to take care of orphans and widows. This is indeed a matter of the will of God in our lives (Js 1:27). This is where the Bible clearly speaks. When Christians care for orphans and widows, therefore, they are implementing in their lives a ministry that has the authority of the word of God. They are walking by faith in the instructions of the word of God to care for orphans and widows. We usually have no problem in understanding this point.

However, how each Christian would fulfill the mandate concerning orphans and widows of the law of liberty is a matter of choice. There is silence concerning how to implement our individual care of orphans and widows. Some Christians may want to take orphans and widows into their own homes. Others may want to support a married couple who is gifted in the ministry of caring for either orphans or widows. How we individually fulfill the mandate to care for orphans and widows is a matter of freedom. The law is to take care of the orphans and widows. The liberty is in how each one of us fulfills this law in our lives. If we are caring for orphans in a certain manner of our own choice, then we cannot make judgments concerning how others may fulfill the same law. In the area of silence, there is freedom. We must always strive to guard one another's freedom to implement the law of God in our lives.

Having authority in matters of faith, therefore, does not mean that we must have a law for each method of how we carry out in our individual lives that which is required by a clear mandate of the word of God. If we concluded that we must have a scripture (law) for each method of how we carry out in our lives that which is required by a specific law, then we run into problems, if not hypocrisy. For example, suppose one seeks to obey the commandment, "*Go into all the world*

*and preach the gospel*” (Mk 16:15). This is a clear mandate of the word of God. When we go and preach the gospel, we have Mark 16:15 as the authority behind our efforts to carry out our responsibility to preach the gospel.

Now how each one of us goes into all the world is a matter of freedom. Some may go personally, by acquiring a “missionary visa,” boarding a boat or airplane, and then going to a specific country. Others may turn on a computer and go into all the world through the internet. Others may pick up a phone and make a simple phone call to someone with whom they are trying to preach the gospel. We know of one woman who baked bread, and then went to the neighbors in her village, knocked on the doors, and then asked the occupant after given them a loaf of home-baked bread, “Can I talk to you about the Bread of Life?” When there are no specifics given in reference to accomplishing a Bible command, then there is freedom. Each disciple has the freedom to determine how he or she would go into all the world.\*

When we examine some examples in the New Testament, many people become quite confused concerning biblical authority. In fact, some become very inconsistent in their understanding of the word of God. As an example to illustrate the point, there was a time in the first century when there arose a great need among some of the disciples in Jerusalem, especially among those who had traveled to Jerusalem in order to sit at the apostles’ feet to be taught (See At 2:42). Fortunately, these visiting disciples came into an environment where the grace of God had caused a great deal of thanksgiving (2 Co 4:15).

*“Now the multitude of those [in Jerusalem] who believed were of one heart and one soul. And no one said that any of the things that he possessed was his own. But they had all things in common”* (At 4:32). This was the character of those disciples in Jerusalem who sought to be as Jesus who gave up heaven and came into this world. *“Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God. **But He made Himself of no reputation**”* (Ph 2:5-7). This is the principle that defines the

---

\* For continued study on this subject, see Book 2, chapters 11-17, in the Biblical Research Library at [www.africainternational.org](http://www.africainternational.org)

character of a disciple of Jesus. This is the foundation upon which each Christian carries out the word of Christ in his or her life.

When Jesus saw our spiritual need, He gave up heaven. He gave up being on an equality with God. We must now return to Jerusalem to those who responded to this gospel mission of the Son of God. Luke, the historian, wrote of the Jerusalem disciples, “***And great grace was upon them all***” (At 4:33). When grace is upon us, marvelous things will happen. This grace will cause us to do those things that are not natural according to the worldly life. In fact, the disciples of Macedonia, “*in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty, **abounded in the riches of their liberality***” to contribute to the saints who were afflicted with a famine in Judea a few years after the incident about which we are discussing in Acts 4 (See 2 Co 8:2). The extremity of the grace of God that worked in their hearts was magnified when Paul wrote of the Macedonian disciples: “*For I testify that according to their ability, yes, **and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord***” (2 Co 8:3).

So in Jerusalem in reference to the needy, Luke recorded, “*Nor was there any among them who lacked, **for as many as were owners of land or houses** [in Jerusalem] **sold them** and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold and laid them at the apostles’ feet” (At 4:34,35). This is what these disciples did in reference to fulfilling the needs of the needy. This is where the Jerusalem disciples worked in the area of silence, for there are no commands in the New Testament that one must sell his or her house. And if one would sell his house for Jesus, there is no mention of real estate brokers who would sell one’s house. The silence of the Scriptures on how the house is to be sold is in the realm of freedom.*

This is an example of how the Jerusalem disciples allowed the grace of God to cause thanksgiving in their hearts. But would this example by which they fulfilled the needs of others be binding on all Christians for all time in reference to giving? Must we all sell our houses because of this example? Add to this what John stated: “*But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in Him?*” (1 Jn

3:17). Those disciples in Jerusalem saw their brothers in need, and thus they were so loving that they sold their lands and houses in order to carry out their love to take care of those in need. As the Philippian disciples, they worked in the area of the silence of the Scriptures in this deed in order to accomplish the scriptural principle of loving their brethren.

But we need to go deeper into this point in order to possibly see some of our hypocrisy in reference to how we apply “Bible authority.” For example, we say that we love our brother. However, some will say they cannot give because they have no money. But they will go home to a house that they own. If we seek to have Bible authority in all matters of faith (love), then certainly we should follow the example to sell our houses and lands in order to take care of those brothers we love, but are in need. Before one starts proclaiming an arbitrary principle of “Bible authority,” then he or she should reconsider some of the examples of the New Testament. Simply because we read in our New Testaments how the early Christians decided how they would carry out the principles of commandments of God **does not mean that we should respond in the same way**. Their examples, therefore, did not become laws for the church. The examples of obedience by the church in the first century did not establish laws for the church throughout the centuries. If this were true, then the church has as much authority to establish law as the word of God. This is exactly what happened to the Jews by the time Jesus came into this world. “The Fathers” had established law that the people had to obey (See Mk 7:1-9). Of this situation, Jesus said, “*In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*” (Mk 7:7). We must think about this for a moment.

The preceding thoughts should have by now brought us to a better understanding that the examples of the early Christians only give us illustrations as to how we can respond to the commands of God. The examples in themselves do not constitute any laws. Though the example of the disciples’ selling their houses and lands in Jerusalem in order that they carry out the principle to love one’s brother, such does not become “authority” that we do the same today in order to respond to the law of God according to “biblical authority.” We can do the

same, but the example of the early disciples on that particular occasion never became a commandment that should be bound on the church throughout the world.

We must keep in mind that the historical incident of Acts 4 probably took place about three or four years after the events of Acts 2 when many of the disciples first obeyed the gospel. By the time the need arose in Acts 4, they still owned their houses and lands. Therefore, becoming a Christian did not mean that one had to automatically sell his house or land. There was something behind the selling that is not discussed in Luke's historical account of the matter. We would also assume that no one sold his house out from under his family, and then began living on the streets as a homeless family.

We would assume, therefore, that those disciples who sold their houses and lands in Acts 4 did so out of choice, not mandate. They had the freedom to sell or keep. Biblical authority in matters of faith, therefore, does not mean to bind where God has not bound, even though an example to carry out a principle of the law of liberty is recorded in the New Testament. If one does not understand this, then he will end up being a hypocrite if he does not sell his own house or lands.

Maybe we need to add some specific examples to illustrate further the preceding. On more than one occasion, we have had people argue that only a Christian can baptize a person into Christ. Since we have examples of only Christians baptizing people in the New Testament, then we assume that we have "authority" for Christians only to baptize people into Christ. But such a position ("doctrine") is not only "unbiblical," but also quite impractical. And, maintaining such a belief assumes an erroneous doctrine.

**Nowhere in the New Testament is the doctrine of "baptismal authority" taught.** If it were, then think of all the confusion, if not questioning this would cause among all those who have been baptized into Christ for the past two thousand years. Think of all the background checking that would have to be made in order to validate those who baptize others, for if one was not himself baptized by a Christian, then his supposed "baptismal authority" would be invalid. If the one who was baptized, was baptized by one who had not been baptized by

someone who had not been baptized by a Christian, then his own baptism would not be valid. Anyone whom we would baptize would also be baptized with an invalid baptism, for our baptism was not performed by one who had been baptized by one who had “baptismal authority.” If the one who baptized us, was baptized by someone back in history who was not baptized by a Christian, then we could assume that there would be no valid baptisms today, for everyone who has been baptized throughout history had no idea that the one who baptized our forefathers had been baptized by a Christian. Does this all sound senseless? It does. And so the doctrine of “baptismal authority” is senseless.

We can certainly take this sensible reasoning into another area in reference to baptism in order to emphasize the point that some are quite inconsistent in reference to their understanding of Bible authority. We were recently asked if a woman could baptize someone. Again, many would resort to the fact that we have no example of women baptizing in the New Testament. Nevertheless, some are quick to extend the doctrine of “baptismal authority” to “male baptismal authority.”

We have already stated that if there were an example on these matters, then the example does not establish a law. And because there are no examples on who has the right to baptize another, does not mean that we can make a law where God made no laws. We are under the law of liberty. This means that we have freedom where there is silence on this matter.

Some seem to forget that in obedience to the gospel (baptism), **the emphasis in the New Testament is on the one who is baptized**, not on the one who does the baptizing. Legalists always get confused on these matters. Their zeal to establish a law in order to have biblical authority moves them into violating that about which Paul wrote in Galatians 5:1: “*Stand fast therefore in the liberty [freedom] by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.*” There are those who seem to be agents of entanglement in many matters where there is silence. In order to satisfy their desire to set aside the grace of God through law-keeping, they are willing to use the silence of the Scriptures in order to bring the disciples into the bondage of their own imagined laws. Where there are examples and si-

lence, they seek to insert law in order that they might boast about being “biblical.” And by inventing a supposed law, they arrogantly claim to have biblical authority in all matters of faith.

Unfortunately, such people are often full of hypocrisy in reference to their legal system of religion. They will bind on the consciences of the disciples their presumptuous “laws,” but will at the same time print and distribute Bibles for which they have no biblical authority. They will board an airplane to go into all the world to preach the gospel, but have no biblical authority for traveling by airplane. They will print and distribute literature for which they have no biblical authority, but at the same time make a judgment concerning one who wants to obey the gospel by a woman doing the baptizing. The truth is always axiomatic that a legalist can never be consistent in reference to his legal religiosity. Legal bondage always binds. Grace always frees.

So we are reminded again of what the Holy Spirit wrote, “*You are not under law, but under grace*” (Rm 6:14). We are not under law keeping in order to save ourselves. This simply means that we are not looking for some law whereby we can say that we are “biblical.” We are looking for the principles of the law of liberty, knowing that we cannot keep law perfectly in order to save ourselves. The legalist is on a search for law in all matters of obedience, and for this reason, it is difficult for him to understand how he is under grace. Because he is so strict to discover some law in order to self-justify himself before God, he has forgotten that our obedience is a response to the grace of God. For this reason, our obedience is not confined to carrying out a specific law, but gives authority to all that we do in response to the grace of God.

Being under grace means that the silence of the Scriptures on how we implement our response to grace in our lives is a matter of choice. Grace opens the door to freedom in order that we may make our individual choices as to how we would respond to Jesus. It opens the door concerning a multitude of ways and means by which every disciple can express his or her faith. Those who walk by faith are not restricted by law-keeping, but are set free to express their thanksgiving to God for what He did for them through the cross. It is for this reason that grace

is good news because it sets us free from the restrictions of our own religious inventions. We have the freedom to sell our houses and lands if we are in the position to do so in order to express our love for our brothers. We have the freedom to keep our houses and bring needy brothers and sisters into our homes. We have the freedom to preach gospel meetings, though such is nowhere found in the New Testament. We have the freedom to print and distribute Bibles, though such is nowhere found in the New Testament. We have the freedom to even build a place of assembly, though such is found nowhere in the New Testament. We have the freedom to have Sunday schools for our children, and Vacation Bible Schools for the community children, though such is found nowhere in the New Testament. We have freedom to have song books, though such is found nowhere in the New Testament. Grace simply results in our freedom to serve God according to all our talents.

If we feel that we must have biblical authority for everything that we do in responding to the grace of God, then we are quite hypocritical when we judge others who do not walk according to our own self-imposed rules. Therefore, our exhortation is that one must be very honest with his or her own beliefs and behavior in reference to these matters. We must always keep in mind that if we seek to approach the gospel as a legal system of law, then we will end up with a religion. And religious people have endless debates with one another as to which group has the most correct systematic theology. Because religious people end up debating one another in reference to all their rules, there is little sense of contentment among strict religionists. We must never forget what someone correctly stated, “Religion pacifies, but never satisfies.”

**Other books by Roger E. Dickson**  
**Download free from The Biblical Research Library,**  
**www.africainternational.org**

- Book 1: *Introduction To The Bible*  
 Book 2: *Biblical Interpretation*  
 Book 3: *Sovereignty Of Deity*  
 Book 4: *The Seedline Promise*  
 Book 5: *Finding The Priceless Pearl*  
 Book 6: *Law And Covenants*  
 Book 7: *The Gospel Covenant*  
 Book 8: *The Gospel World View*  
 Book 9: *The Gospel Reign Of The Son Of God*  
 Book 10: *The Judgments Of God*  
 Book 11: *The Church In Eternity*  
 Book 12: *God The Father*  
 Book 13: *God The Son*  
 Book 14: *God The Holy Spirit*  
 Book 15: *The Promise Of The Holy Spirit*  
 Book 16: *The Holy Spirit And The Early Church*  
 Book 17: *The Holy Spirit And The Church Today*  
 Book 18: *Satan And Demons*  
 Book 19: *Gospel Leadership*  
 Book 20: *Equipping The Saints*  
 Book 21: *Developing Character*  
 Book 22: *The Function Of Discipleship*  
 Book 23: *Gospel Evangelism*  
 Book 24: *Authentic Church*  
 Book 25: *The Existence Of God*  
 Book 26: *The Bible And Science*  
 Book 27: *The Bible And Faith*  
 Book 28: *Luke's Historical Defense Of Christianity*  
 Book 29: *Sectarian Denominationalism*  
 Book 30: *Roman Catholicism*  
 Book 31: *Justified By Works*  
 Book 32: *Making Disciples In A Global Community*  
 Book 33: *21<sup>st</sup> Century Restoration*  
 Book 34: *Restoration!*  
 Book 35: *Worship God*  
 Book 36: *Worship Freely*  
 Book 37: *One Lord With All Authority Over All Things*  
 Book 38: *The Christ-Centered Faith*  
 Book 39: *The Lord's Supper*  
 Book 40: *Fundamental Messages*  
 Book 41: *Obedience To The Gospel*  
 Book 42: *The Music Of The Church*  
 Book 43: *Exercising Sobriety And Self-Control*  
 Book 44: *Experiential Religion Versus Word-Based Faith*  
 Book 45: *Grace Response Versus Tithing By Law*  
 Book 46: *The Religious Sectarian*  
 Book 47: *Fellowship And Unity Of The Organic Body*  
 Book 48: *The Cross-Centered Faith*  
 Book 49: *Escape From Bondage*  
 Book 50: *Perceptions And Postulations*  
 Book 51: *Our Faith – Our Salvation*  
 Book 52: *His Grace – Our Faith*  
 Book 53: *The Living Sacrifice*  
 Book 54: *Committed To World Evangelism*  
 Book 55: *Organic Function Of The Body Of Christ*  
 Book 56: *The World As It Is*  
 Book 57: *The Godly Giver*  
 Book 58: *Thirsting For Word From God*  
 Book 59: *Following Jesus Into Glory*  
 Book 60: *The Seven Flickering Flames Of Asia*  
 Book 61: *The Giants Among Us*  
 Book 62: *Dead Preachers*  
 Book 63: *New Creation*  
 Book 64: *Character For Christ*  
 Book 65: *The Power Of Many As One*  
 Book 66: *The Last High Priest*  
 Book 67: *Survivors*  
 Book 68: *Change For Growth*  
 Book 69: *Building Eternal Relationships*  
 Book 70: *Inscriptions I: Living The Word Of God*  
 Book 71: *Disciples Of Divinity*  
 Book 72: *Fasting*  
 Book 73: *The Gospel Of God's Heart*  
 Book 74: *Inscriptions II: Implementing Gospel Living*  
 Book 75: *It's All About Jesus*  
 Book 76: *Escape From Religion*  
 Book 77: *Rise And Fall Of Civilizations*  
 Book 78: *In Search Of The First Love*  
 Book 79: *Gospel Restoration*  
 Book 80: *Solutions To The Problem*  
 Book 81: *Tethered To Christ Through The Gospel*  
 Book 82: *The Gospel According To Hebrews*  
 Book 83: *Gospel Teacher*  
 Book 84: *Gospel Teacher In Times Of Turmoil*  
 Book 85: *The Incarnational Journey Of God*  
 Book 86: *Angels*  
 Book 87: *Beginner's Road Map For Gospel Living Into Eternal Life*  
 Book 88: *Inscriptions III: Just Saying*  
 Book 89: *Your Gospel Journey With The Son Of God*  
 Book 90: *The Incredible Mystery*  
 Book 91: *Inscriptions IV: Finding Our Way Back*  
 Book 92: *Releasing The Gospel*  
 Book 93: *A Certain Destiny*  
 Book 94: *Latin America Odyssey*  
 Book 95: *African Odyssey*  
 Book 96: *African Workshop Odyssey*  
 Book 97: *African Literature Odyssey*  
 Book 98: *Encounter With Ghana*  
 Book 99: *Faith Is The Victory*  
 Book 100: *Passage To China*  
 Book 101: *Authority From Heaven*

Plus commentaries on all the books of the Bible in the  
*Dickson Teacher's Bible*, at [www.africainternational.org](http://www.africainternational.org)

## ABBREVIATIONS

### OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

### NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**