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A Newsletter for the People of God
December 30, 2023 --- Issue No. 152

Publisher: Church of God, Bismarck, Darwin & Laura Lee, **Editor:** Laura Lee, **Assistant Editor:** Darwin Lee We do not necessarily agree with all contributors, or their works submitted and printed in this newsletter. It is up to you to get out your Bible and see whether these things are true. Iron sharpens Iron

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1Co 14:26 How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.

Your First Love—NOW!
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Rev 2:1-7 states as follows: “To the angel of the church of Ephesus write: 'He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands, says these things. 'I know your works and your labor and your patience, and how you cannot bear those who are evil. And you tried those pretending to be apostles, and are not, and have found them liars.

“And you have borne, and have patience, and for My name’s sake you have labored and have not fainted. But I have against you that you left your first love.

“Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent, and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and will remove your lampstand out of its place unless you repent. But you have this, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat of the Tree of Life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. “

Many bible scholars claim that the verses related to the Churches of Revelation 2 and 3 are successive Church eras. This may or may not be true; that is not important for this article. We do know that those churches were on a postal route in John’s day.

It is certain that there were churches in those cities and perhaps they each had problems that the Christ wanted John to make known to them. It is my opinion that the picture the Christ was trying to paint was one of warning for everyone in the Church down through the ages. With that in mind, let us consider the warning to the Church in Ephesus. In particular, I would like to focus on verse 10 wherein the Church was warned by the Christ that they had left their first love.

Jesus, or Yeshua, or whatever other appellation you might find comfortable to indicate the Christ, certainly was not concerned about someone’s “puppy love,” or even the love of a man for his wife in their beginning. Yes, one of the things men and women need to do as the years go by in their marriage is to remember those early days of their love and to rekindle them often.

But the Christ was not talking about that. He, the Christ, was referring to something we experience when we first come into the initial blush of understanding of what it is that God is doing with us, and with all of mankind. I’m sure we all remember those days when we saw God’s truths and plan to be so simple that we thought everyone should be able to

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understand it. We told everyone who would sit still (or we could trap!) everything we knew about this wonderful truth we'd been blessed to know.

Why is recapturing this “first love” important? It obviously is important to God because, having fallen out of that first love, we are warned that He would remove His lampstand from its place unless we repent.

We all know that “repent” means to change direction, to turn around and go the other way. In this context, we are being told to get back to that first love we had. This doesn't mean that we should abandon the wisdom we have gained since then. We should recognize that people are not swayed by our words but how well we demonstrate Christ living in us. We are not being encouraged to grab everyone we know by the lapels and try to make them understand God's way.

When we first came into a clear understanding of God's Way, we did, as Israel did at Sinai, commit unconditionally to walk in “every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” We committed ourselves to not only pray, but to engage in regular study of the scriptures. We thought on, or meditated on if you prefer, those scriptures we had studied.

We even fasted for the things that are pleasing to God. We ached to know more! As time has progressed, how many of us have let the cares of this world weigh us down, distract us from being “instant in prayer?” Indeed, how many times have we suddenly realized that we have not prayed today at all?

As men and women, we all recognize that first love we had for our mates. We could hardly stand to be away from them when we had to leave them at their door after a wonderful evening with them. Our attention hung on their every word, the meaning of each sigh, or smile. We worried that maybe that love was not requited in the way that we desired.

This is the kind of love for God the Father and Jesus the Christ that we need to be rekindling. We don't have a God who keeps us in the dark as to His love for us. He tells us plainly that He loves us and wants to spend eternity with us. He tells us that He loves us so much that He designated the One who became the Christ and His Son, from the beginning of creation, to come to earth to reconcile His sinful children to Him. There are very few people who would give up their lives for people who are so rotten to them. Yet, the Christ did!

Moreover, the One who became the Christ had to be willing to take on that mission, to love the Father so much that He was willing to divest Himself of all things, and then come to live as one of us, then to die horribly as the only possible sacrifice for that reconciliation. This love far exceeds that yearning of our first love for our mates.

Yet, that is the example the Christ instructs John to write down for us. He says, “Remember your first love.” Like that first love we had for another human being, we need to rekindle the flame that was in our opened mind for the Father and His Way.

We all can easily understand the analogy of the first love. But, like a long-time marriage, the question becomes “How do we get back to that point?” It certainly can't be impossible to do, or the Christ would not have cautioned us to do it, even going to the point of warning us what would happen if we did not. So, how, then, do we do this?

God never gives us instruction without showing us the “how” of the instruction. If we are having a problem with our first love of God, then we need to remember who we once were and what joy filled our hearts when we learned that “Daddy” had provided us forgiveness and that all we needed to do was to repent and then obey.

Next, we have to enthusiastically return to the tools that led us to the understanding that brought such joy. Have we let our prayer life slip? We are the only one who can fix that! Have we slacked up on the bible study thinking we know what God wants? If so, we need to remember that even the noble Bereans eagerly searched the scriptures daily!

What about fasting? When was the last time we took our lack of “first love” to Daddy in a fast? We fast for God to help us and others in ways that we cannot understand. If we don't understand how to recapture that first love, we should fast for God to show us from where we have slipped.

The fourth tool for recapturing that first love is for us to meditate on what God has said to us. When we were new to the Way, we thought about what we had learned from God all the time. Do we do that today? If not, we can't begin to get

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back to our first love any sooner than this minute.

When we study the Word, God speaks to us. When we pray, we have God’s promise that He will hear. When we meditate, we go past merely considering what God has said and consider how those words apply to us. Meditation is that “alone time” that allows us to think about what God has said. Finally, when we fast, we ask God for help with those things we cannot do.

In short, getting back to our “first love” of God restated is this: we need a revival. There is no doubt that the Church is in need of revival. If it was not, the Christ would not have left us the warning He sent to Ephesus through the Apostle John. I encourage everyone to consider whether or not that first love still burns in their breast, and to act accordingly.

Nobody wants to lose their lampstand.

See Royce Mitchell’s other articles at:

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Seven Mysterious Letters: A Timely Challenge

(Copyright 1993) by Chuck Missler (Cour d’ Alene, Idaho)

The Book of Revelation

Revelation is the only book in the Bible that promises a special blessing to the reader.¹ (Many passages tell us to read the Bible in general terms. Only one book has the audacity to say, in effect, Read me; I’m special.)

Early in my teens, I encountered a Bible teacher who heralded that The Book of Revelation is written in code; but every code is explained somewhere else in the Bible.

That really caught my attention. And that discovery changed my entire life.

The Seven Letters

Ask any Bible student how many epistles (letters) are in the New Testament. He will probably answer 21 : 13 authored by Paul, plus Hebrews, which appears anonymous;² and the seven “general epistles” by Peter, James, John, and Jude.

We usually overlook the *seven most important letters*: the seven authored by Jesus personally. For many reasons, these seven letters, comprising Chapters 2 and 3 of the Book of Revelation, are probably the most important part of this book for you and me.

Why These Seven?

There were many other churches at that time that would seem to be more historically significant than the seven that Jesus addressed: the churches at Jerusalem, Rome, Galatia, Corinth, Antioch, Colossae, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Miletus, to name a few. Why did Jesus select just these seven Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea?

Four Levels of Meaning

There appear to be at least four levels of application to these letters:

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1. Local: These were actual, historic churches, with valid needs. Archaeological discoveries have confirmed this.
2. Admonitory: In each of the letters there appears the key phrase, "Hear what the Spirit says to the churches". Note the plural, *churches*. It turns out that each of the letters applies to *all churches* throughout history. As we understand the sevenfold internal structure, the uniquely tailored messages, and the specific admonitions in each of the letters, we discover that any church can be "mapped" in terms of these seven composite profiles.
3. Homiletic: Each of the letters also contains the phrase, "*He that hath an ear let him hear...*" Doesn't *each* of us "have an ear"? Each letter applies to each of *us*. There are some elements of each of these seven "churches" in each of us. Thus, this may be the most practical application of the entire Book of Revelation.
4. Prophetic: The most amazing discovery, however, of these seven letters is their apparent prophetic application. These letters describe, with remarkable precision, the unfolding of all subsequent church history.

These letters describe, with remarkable precision, the unfolding of all subsequent church history. If these letters were in any other *order*, this would not be true!

These letters appear to fill the interval between the 69th and 70th "weeks" of Daniel 9. The Book of Acts covers about 30 years; these two chapters of the Book of Revelation cover the next 1,900 years.

Seven Key Elements

A key aspect to understanding the letters is to grasp the structure of their design. A careful examination of the letters reveals seven key elements in their design:

1. The meaning of the name of the church being addressed (see below);
2. The title of Jesus, each chosen relevant to the message to that particular church;
3. The commendation of things that have been done well;
4. The "criticism" of things that need attention;
5. The exhortation, specific to the condition of the particular church;
6. The promise to the "overcomer" included with each letter;
7. The key phrase, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."

The Meaning of Names

Ephesus:	<i>The Desired One</i>
Smyrna:	<i>Myrrh; Death</i>
Pergamos:	<i>Mixed Marriage</i>
Thyatira:	<i>Semiramis</i>
Sardis:	<i>Remnant</i>
Philadelphia:	<i>Brotherly Love</i>
Laodicea:	<i>People Rule</i>

It is also interesting that this key phrase in element 7 is the final element in the last four letters but appears *before* the "Promise to the Overcomer" (element 6) in the first three, leaving the promises as a kind of postscript after the body of the letters themselves. This design suggests that the first three letters and the last four may share some particular characteristic. [It is also interesting that only the last four letters include explicit references to our Lord's Second Coming.]

The Missing Elements

Once the basic structure is evident, one also notices that two of the letters, Smyrna and Philadelphia, have *no Criticism*, Element 4. That's encouraging for them.

Also, two of the letters, Sardis and Laodicea, have *no Commendation*, Element 5. That's rather grim.

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The Prophetic View

If these seven letters really do include a *preview* of all church history, then where are we now? Are we, indeed, in the period suggested by the letter to Laodicea?

Judge for yourself.

Other Parallels

Also, is there an intended parallel between these seven letters of Jesus Christ and His seven "Kingdom Parables" of Matthew 13?

And what about Paul's letters? It is interesting that Paul signed 13 epistles; but 3 of these had "duplicate" addressees: Corinthians, Thessalonians, and Timothy. That is $13 - 3 = 10$ addressees.

But three addressees were individuals: Titus, Timothy, and Philemon. $10 - 3 = 7$. Paul wrote *seven churches*.

Is there a possible parallel between the seven churches Paul wrote to and the seven that Jesus addressed in Revelation 2 & 3?

A detailed study of these seven letters exceeds the scope of this brief glimpse. These remarks have been included to stimulate you to take a closer look at these two chapters and conduct your own careful analysis.

In addition to the practical insights from the letters, you will also see another of the many example's demonstrating the evidence of careful design: the Bible consists of 66 books, written by 40 authors over thousands of years--and yet bears the clear evidence of supernatural engineering.

1. Revelation 1:3; 22:7, 18.
2. We happen to believe Paul also wrote Hebrews. Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews are a trilogy around Habbakuk 2:4. (Cf. Romans 1:17; Galatians, and Hebrews 3:8.)

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More info, see Chuck Missler's [The Seven Letters to the Seven Churches](#)

This is Not God's World
(Copyright 2023) by John W. Ritenbaugh (Lancaster, South Carolina)

Having been born and reared in Pennsylvania, I have more than a passing knowledge of the Amish country of southeastern Pennsylvania. People similar to the Pennsylvania Amish live in communities in other states, too, like the Amish of Ohio, Indiana, West Virginia, and Kansas. The Amana people of Iowa are also religiously related. In addition, the Mennonites, the original Anabaptist group and somewhat more liberal than the Amish, have communities scattered across the nation and around the world.

These non-conforming people are well-known for pursuing quaint and seemingly severe lifestyles; wearing dark, antiquated garb; running beautiful farms; avoiding electricity, tractors, and automobiles; and producing quality goods like high-end furniture. But why do they live as they do—within, yet isolated from, the larger community surrounding them? The answer largely stems from a sincere effort, in obedience to I John 2:15-17, to avoid the world's spiritual contamination.

John is not the only apostle who called on the children of God to do this. James urges us "to keep oneself unspotted from

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the world" (James 1:27). The apostle Paul makes a strong appeal in Romans 12:2, writing, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

Though we disagree with the Amish method, we must admire their strong and enduring practice to combat an appealing but deceptive roadblock to growth. We wage this same battle in Christ as we prepare for His Kingdom.



The World Is Anti-God

We must realize that *this world is not God's world!* Some have trouble grasping the practical ramifications of this concept, perhaps because many think of God as Creator, Owner, and Ruler and marvel at the staggering beauty of what He has made. In that sense, it is His world.

Nonetheless, the systems that operate our cultures are not His. The Greek word translated "world" in I John 2:16, *kosmos*, has a moral connotation. It implies "the world *apart from God*." In his commentary on this verse, theologian William Barclay writes, "To John the world was nothing other than a pagan society with its false values and its false gods" (p. 56).

The world's systems generate and sustain our government and politics, entertainment, fashion, religion, business ethics, medicine and health care, culinary tastes, social programs and institutions, education, science and technology, economics, and use of power. The world's systems have formed much of humanity's belief systems and attitudes, which, in turn, have shaped human conduct.

These are the things God's Word tells us to overcome. Yet this world and its systems are so appealing! But God in His wisdom advises us not to waste our love on them because they have no future! In fact, this world is so corrupt that other prophecies show the whole thing will be destroyed and replaced when God invokes the restitution of all things (*cf.* II Peter 3:10-11; Revelation 21:1).

The basic reason all must be destroyed is because at its very foundation stands a destroying and antagonistic spirit, Satan the Devil, the ruler of this world (see John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Ephesians 2:2). Henry David Thoreau grasped an important principle when he stated, "Every institution is but the lengthened shadow of one man." As Jesus phrased it, "A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit" (Matthew 7:18). Satan is a destroyer, and his way is at

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best a deadly mixture of good and evil. James confirms this when he asks this rhetorical question, "Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?" (James 3:11).

"Come Out of Her"

So strong is God's warning about the world that He says through Paul in II Corinthians 6:14-18:

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

"I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

Therefore

"Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you."

"I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty."

That is mighty strong language! Not one part of this system will be carried over into the world to come! The whole thing is unclean, something that contaminates and defiles, rendering unholy those who are touched by it (Haggai 2:10-14). Though it sounds contrary to common sense, the world is most dangerous to Christians when it is not persecuting them. It may seem friendly and tolerant, even producing apparently good things, but God says even then it is still unclean. The mixture of good and evil still produces a poisonous brew. In these matters, it is God's judgment that counts.

Have we considered this? Are we afraid of what it might cost us to "come out of her" (Revelation 18:4)? The price might be high in some areas of life, but it is so important that it is worth considering again. We must think about these ideas more intensely because, on the verge of the fall festivals, we will appear in God's presence even more frequently. We would be wise to reevaluate ourselves again in the light of this vital fundamental principle and resolve to "come out" of a habit or practice of the world that we have—perhaps unwittingly, perhaps stubbornly—dragged into our relationship with God.

See John W. Ritenbaugh's other articles at:

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A Spiritual Leader Must Be Called by God

(Copyright 2023) by Zac Poonen (Bangalore, India)

A spiritual leader will first and foremost, have a calling from God. His work will not be his profession, but his calling.

No-one can appoint himself as a spiritual leader. "He has to be called by God for this work" (Hebrews 5:4 - TLB). This is a principle that cannot be changed. The next verse goes on to say that even Jesus did not appoint Himself as our High Priest. The Father appointed Him. If that be the case, *how much more* this should be true of us, in our calling.

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The tragedy today is that the vast majority of “*Christian workers*” in India are working to *earn their living*. It is a profession for them. *They have not been called by God.*

There is a lot of difference between “*a profession*” and “*a calling*”. Let me explain what I mean. Suppose there is a sick child in a hospital and a nurse looks after it for 8 hours on her shift-duty. That nurse then goes home and forgets all about that child. Her concern for that child was only for 8 hours. Now she has other things to do, such as going to the movies and watching television. She does not have to think about that child again until the next day when she goes back to work. But the *mother* of that child does not work 8-hour shifts! She cannot go to the movies when her child is sick. That is the difference between *a profession* and *a calling*.

“Paul not only imparted the gospel of God to those Christians but his life as well.”

If you apply that illustration to the way you care for the believers in your church, you will discover whether you are *a nurse* or *a mother!*

Paul said, in *1 Thessalonians 2:7*, “*We proved to be gentle among you as a mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well pleased to impart you not only the gospel but also our own lives because you have become very dear to us.*”

Paul not only imparted the gospel of God to those Christians but his *life* as well. Any ministry that is not done in this way is not really a Christian ministry. Paul served God like that because he had a *calling* to the ministry. He did not take it up as a profession.

It is wonderful to serve the Lord. It is the greatest thing in the world. Nothing on earth can be compared with it - but only if you are *called*. It cannot be reduced to a *profession*.

God called me to serve Him (full-time) on May 6, 1964, when I was an officer in the Indian Navy. I handed in my resignation then to the naval authorities. But it was like Moses asking Pharaoh to let the Israelites go! The Indian Navy would not release me. It took two years and repeated applications before they finally released me - miraculously - *in God's perfect time*.

Being called of God has made all the difference in my life.

First of all, it does not matter to me now, what people think about me or my ministry, because *Someone Else* is my Master and I have to answer only to Him.

Secondly, I can trust God to stand by me and give me grace whenever I face any trial or opposition in my ministry - and that happens often.

Thirdly, it does not matter to me whether I receive any money or not, and whether I get any food to eat or not. If I receive food and money, well and good. If I do not get any food or money, that is fine with me too. I cannot stop serving the Lord, just because I did not get money or food - because God has *called* me.

I cannot get rid of my calling. I am not a salaried employee who can stop working when I am not paid or fed! It is like the case of the mother and her child. A nurse will stop working if her salary is not paid one month. But a mother can never stop. She does not get a salary in any case! And she will look after her baby even if she does not get any food or money! That is how the apostles served the Lord.

What a glorious thing it is to be called of God!

See Zac Poonens other articles at:
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Why Hanukkah?

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WHAT IS IT? DID THE MESSIAH OBSERVE HANUKKAH?



HANUKKAH: TWO OTHER NAMES

FEAST OF DEDICATION (most often translated feast of "dedication")

FEASTIVAL OF LIGHTS (Tradition that a cruse of oil burned 8 days instead of one day.)

NOT SANCTIONED BY THE BIBLE:

"...Hanukkah is the only major holiday that has no basis in the Bible." (*The Jewish Holidays, A Guide and Commentary*, Strassfeld, p. 162)

ORIGIN:

Memorial of the cleansing of the temple and dedication of the altar after Antiochus Epiphanes polluted it (I Macc. 1:54,59; 164 B.C.);

"...Judas [Maccabaeus] and...the whole congregation of Israel ordained...the days of the dedication of the altar...with mirth and gladness." (I Macc. 4:59; *The Apocrypha*) Note this was not ordained by Yahweh, but by the congregation of Israel. It became a *tradition of the Hebrews*. (Mk. 7:8-9)

WHEN:

"...year to year by the space of eight days, from the five and twentieth day of the month Casleu [*ninth month*: v. 52; "*Kislev*"-Hebrew calendar; also v. 56]." (I Macc. 4:59)

2022 Date: December 19-26

MIRACLE OF LIGHTS DID NOT HAPPEN: OBVIOUS OMISSIONS EYE WITNESS ACCOUNTS ARE PROOF:

The eye witness accounts in I and II Maccabees make **no mention** of a miracle that a one day's supply of a cruse of oil lasted eight days.

NEITHER JOSEPHUS:

Josephus, highly respected first century Christian Era Jewish historian, **never mentions** any such miracle.

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“LOST” FOR ABOUT 600 YEARS:

The legend of the miracle is never mentioned *until about 600 years later [500 A.D.]* in the Babylonian Talmud [designated “Talmud”]: “...we find virtual silence in the Mishnah about Hanukkah. Only in the Gemara (the later rabbinic material that together with the Mishnah makes up the Talmud) do we find the long-lost miracle of Hanukkah.” (Strassfeld, p. 163)

CONCLUSION: THE MIRACLE OF LIGHTS DID NOT HAPPEN. IT IS A MYTH.

YAHSHUA, THE MESSIAH DID NOT OBSERVE HANUKKAH: WHAT ABOUT JOHN 10:22-23? Some claim these verses prove He observed Hanukkah:

“At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem; it was winter, and Yahshua [Jesus; NAS] was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon.”

CLOSER LOOK:

No mention is made of Yahshua celebrating this feast. Jews confronted Him there asking if he was the Christ (v. 24). Notice what He said: “But you do not believe [who he was, v.v. 24-25]

BECAUSE YOU ARE NOT OF MY SHEEP.

MY sheep hear my voice...and *THEY FOLLOW ME!*” (Jn. 10:26)

Clearly the Jews were not following Him; believing what He taught. If He observed the Feast of Dedication with them, they **would have been His sheep.**

AND He and the Jews were *constantly at odds during that festival* (John 9:16, 29; 8:59; 10:20, 31, etc.) on *many issues*; including the traditions of Hanukkah.

BEWARE OF TRADITIONS:

“Neglecting the commandment of Yahweh [“God” NAS], you [Pharisees and Scribes; v.5] hold to the tradition of men...You...set aside the commandment of Yahweh [“God” NAS] in order to keep your tradition.” (Mk. 7:8-9)

See Gary C. Miller’s other articles at:

Miller, Gary C. – Church of God, Bismarck (church-of-god-bismarck.org)

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<http://www icyahweh.org/>

Standing Against Wolves

(Copyright 2023) by Dwight Fleming (Oroville, California)

Have you ever been attacked by a pack of wolves or even a pack of dogs?

A pack of wolves will circle around its intended prey. They wait for the right moment for one of them to initiate the attack by running in toward the victim’s blindside. Then another wolf attacks and another and another till their victim is torn to pieces.

The apostle Paul gave this dire warning to the church at Ephesus upon his departure:

“Keep watch over yourselves and the entire flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be **shepherds** of the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure, **savage wolves** will come

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in among you and will not spare the flock" (Acts 20:28-29).

Jesus also warned, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of **wolves**. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16). "Beware of **false prophets** [news reporters]. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are **ravenous wolves**" (Matthew 7:15).

There are four-legged wolves and there are two-legged wolves. Obviously, the above scriptures are talking about two-legged wolves. Want to see some two-legged wolves in action?

Then watch this short video where Mike Johnson, Speaker of the House, is attacked by two wolves who appear so righteous with their snarky and scathing questions. The first reporter asks some decent questions about the upcoming vote for avoiding a government shutdown.

But after the Speaker confirms his support of Donald Trump, LOOK OUT! Then a wolf in sheep's clothing takes over with his attack [dressed up as an interview]. Then another wolf [news reporter] after him. Just like wolves, they gang up on their victim. After quelling the attack for his support of Donald Trump, the Speaker is then attacked again. The next attack is for his praying in Congress.

You have to witness Mike Johnson's heroic response to their vicious attacks. He is the epitome of "wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove." The Holy Spirit must be providing him with such disarming words which powerfully convey the truth with great conviction.

GOD BLESS Mike Johnson! We need more spiritual soldiers like him to fight the good fight of faith! Speaker Mike Johnson is a good shepherd of the House of Representatives and for America.

Link to Speaker Johnson's heroic response: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccfGzt1cdek&t=11s>

See Dwight Fleming's other articles at:
[Fleming, Dwight – Church of God, Bismarck \(church-of-god-bismarck.org\)](http://church-of-god-bismarck.org)

The Temple REVEALED
(Copyright 2023) by Dwight Fleming (Oroville, California)

Where is the correct location of Solomon's and Zerubbabel's temples? Some believe that they were in the City of David located south of The Temple Mount. As I have mentioned before, this can be easily refuted by videos that you can find online.

The majority of those expecting a third temple to be built in Jerusalem believe that the Dome of the Rock on The Temple Mount is the correct location. As I have also said before, building a third temple anywhere on The Temple Mount is not possible at this time. Not to say that circumstances won't ever change to allow it to happen.

Even then, tearing down the Dome of the Rock to build a Jewish temple would certainly "throw gas on the fire" between Israel and the Muslim world. But if a destructive force, either natural or manmade, destroyed the Dome of the Rock, then perhaps that would pave the way for the building of a third temple.

However, would that be the exact spot where the first and second temples stood? Is there another possibility that needs to be investigated?

As mentioned before, I recently read a book, entitled, "The Temple Revealed: The True Location of the Jewish Temple

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Hidden in Plain Sight" by Christian Widener. This book names landmarks which will help us to identify the correct location of Solomon's temple. Remember, Solomon built the temple on the **threshing floor** that his father, David, bought from Ornan (Araunah) the Jebusite. See 2 Chronicles 3:1.

Does a threshing floor still exist today on The Temple Mount? Does the large rock (al-Sakhrah) under the Dome of the Rock look like a threshing floor?

NEWS FLASH!!!

I just found a video on YouTube which gives a good summary of Widener's book on the site of Solomon's temple. If you don't want to obtain and read the book, then, by all means, watch the video for some good details on where a third temple should be built.

Actually, the author made a second video similar to the first one with more details. Watch them both to get the best perspective on the author and his intriguing book. Here are the video links:

The Temple Revealed, one: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aWN0RVII1MA>

The Temple Revealed, two: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJH1bJ2iWkQ>

See Dwight Fleming's other articles at:

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World News Update 11-3-23 – Torah Family dot.org
(Copyright 2023) by James Steinle (Swanville, Minnesota)

<https://torahfamily.org/world-news-update-11-3-23/> 12 min. video on reports of around 50 men (no women) in unmarked tour bus in southern U.S., got stuck on a road in woods (photos); very suspicious.

I saw another recent report by southernprepper1 (YT) who has been receiving reports of foreign men buying or stealing ammo from large stores. He suggests it may not be just trouble in the large cities.

See James Steinle's other articles at:

[Steinle, James – Church of God, Bismarck \(church-of-god-bismarck.org\)](http://church-of-god-bismarck.org)

The Second Seal (Video Part 2)
(2023) Sent by James Steinle (Swanville, Minnesota)

Approaching The 2nd Seal of Revelation (Part 2) by Tom Kerry

<https://thecogmi.org/video/approaching2.htm> 1 hour 15 min. (Part One can be found on their website also if wanted.)

See James Steinle’s other articles at:

[Steinle, James – Church of God, Bismarck \(church-of-god-bismarck.org\)](http://church-of-god-bismarck.org)

Iron Sharpening Iron

New American Standard Bible (Proverbs 27:17)
As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

In regard to: Sabbath Rest

Article by James McBride
Comments by Avram Yehoshua (Tulsa, Oklahoma)

Good article, but as both Laura and Darwin Lee present, if “Christians are not “legally bound” to keep the Sabbath law (though they joyfully embrace it),” as Mr. McBride writes, why keep it?

The problem with Mr. McBride’s statement is his heretical theology that he has accepted from the Church: He’s not a Jew and so he doesn’t have to keep the Law. What he doesn’t realize is that he is part of the “Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16), and as such, all the laws and rules of Moses that apply to him (for there are many of the laws of Moses that apply to only women, or farmers, or Levites, etc., that don’t apply to him), but all the rules that apply to him, he is commanded by God to keep. Aside from various other laws that may or may not apply to you, there are Five Pillars of Mosaic Law that apply to all of us:

1. Love of the God of Israel and Man
2. The 7th Day Sabbath
3. The Feasts of Israel
4. The Mosaic Dietary laws
5. Tithing

Gentile Christians have been invited to come into the Commonwealth of Israel (Eph. 2:11f.; cf. Rom. 11:11f.), and as such, as bound by all the rules of Moses as their Christian lifestyle. This is not a question of salvation by keeping Mosaic Law, but once saved, does it matter if one sins? Why, of course it does. That’s not just my opinion, but also the Apostle Paul’s.

Scripture says that Jesus never sinned (John 8:46; 2nd Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1st Peter 2:22; 1st John 3:5; cf. 1st Pet. 2:21-25), and it was Mosaic Law that judged Him sinless. Christians agree that Jesus never sinned. First though, to establish that I am not saying that Christians need to keep Mosaic Law to be saved, I want to state that there is nothing we can do to add to the Finished Work of Jesus on the Cross for our salvation. We can’t even say something like we’ll (also) keep the great commandment, to love God with all our heart. Only faith in Jesus can save us. Nothing can be added to His Finished Work. Anything added to it nullifies our salvation (cf. Gal. 5:4). Once saved though, does it matter if we sin? Paul is emphatic about that, saying,

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?” (Romans 6:1-3 NKJV)

“Grace” is not a license to sin. Contrary to the Church, Paul teaches Two Streams of thought concerning Mosaic Law. One deals with salvation by faith in Jesus and the other deals with our Christian lifestyle. The Church only sees the former. Paul though, writes of the two Streams in Romans 3:20, but before we go there, my question to you is; “What is

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the New Testament’s specific definition of sin?” No one seems to know. Do you? If not, you might want to ask your pastor or other Christian friends, as a sort of quiz to see if they know because if we don’t know the New Testament’s specific definition of sin (after the Resurrection, as the Church teaches that Mosaic Law was nullified at the Cross for Christians), we can certainly be sinning in ignorance against the One we love, and most Christians are. Paul states in Romans 3:20:

“Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, FOR BY THE LAW IS THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN.” (Romans 3:20 NKJV)

The first phrase reflects Paul’s First Stream: No amount of good works, which Paul calls the “deeds of the law,” can justify a man, but once justified, the Law comes to the forefront as God’s Christian lifestyle, because Paul says “for by the law is the KNOWLEDGE of sin.”

In other words, without the Law and it saying to keep the Sabbath day holy and to celebrate Passover, and not to eat unclean animals such as the pig, one is left without that divine knowledge of what is sin in God’s eyes. Interestingly enough the word for knowledge in Greek is gnosis, but Paul places a prefix on it (epi) to make it epignosis, which means “FULL knowledge.” In other words, according to the Apostle Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13), without Mosaic Law’s rules, ordinances, and commandments, etc., Christians are walking in less than the full knowledge of what God considers sin and consequently, what God considers a holy Christian lifestyle. Remember, Jesus was judged sinless according to Mosaic Law. That was God’s Standard for His Son, and it’s our Standard also, despite the Church teaching against Mosaic Law. Paul said in Greek, “for by the Law is the FULL knowledge of sin.”

Christians know not to steal or murder, and to love God and neighbor with all their heart, but without the Law they transgress the Sabbath and the Feasts of Israel, and they eat foods that were sin for Jesus, and according to Paul, are sin for us. Paul confirms this Second Stream on Mosaic Law in the same Letter to the Romans by saying that the Law is holy and spiritual:

“Therefore the law is HOLY, and the commandment holy and just and good...For we KNOW that the law is SPIRITUAL, but I am carnal, sold under sin” (Romans 7:12, 14 NKJV).

Why would Paul do that and not say that we don’t have to keep it, if what the Church teaches is true? I’d like to suggest that you read two short (2 page) articles of mine, a longer article, and my free online book on this issue of Christian lifestyle:

1. A Snapshot of Church History and Mosaic Law at <http://seedofabraham.net/A-Snapshot-of-Church-History-and-Mosaic-Law.pdf> and
2. The Two Triangles of the NT at <http://seedofabraham.net/The-Two-Triangles-of-the-NT.pdf>
3. Law 102 at <http://seedofabraham.net/Law-102.pdf> and my book,
4. The Lifting of the Veil—Acts 15:20-21 at <http://seedofabraham.net/The-Lifting-of-the-Veil.pdf>.

A further point I want to make concerning the New Testament and Mosaic Law is that in Jeremiah 31:31-34, the only place in all the Old Testament that literally speaks of the “New Covenant,” the Lord declares that He wants to place Mosaic Law on our hearts and minds:

“But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” (Jeremiah 31:33 NKJV)

The Hebrew word for “law” in Jer. 31:33 is Torah, which is Mosaic Law; not just the Ten Commandments. This is confirmed twice in the New Testament in Hebrews 8:10 and 10:16:

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My LAWS in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Hebrews 8:10 NKJV)

and

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“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My LAWS into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them.” (Hebrews 10:16 NKJV).

See Mosaic Law and the Ten at <http://seedofabraham.net/Mosaic-Law-and-the-Ten.pdf> from another perspective as to why it's Mosaic Law and not just the Ten Commandments)

God's definition of disobedience is found in Mt. 5:17-19; Rom. 3:20 and 1st John 3:4. Mosaic Law is God's Way for Christians to walk out their faith in His Son. It's only through Mosaic Law that one can FULLY know what is sin and consequently, what is God's lifestyle for us, as it was for Jesus and all His Apostles including Paul, who said,

“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1st Corinthians 11:1 NKJV; cf. 1st John 2:6).

You cannot imitate Christ without keeping Mosaic Law as your Christian lifestyle.

The New Covenant is for Israel. There were no Gentiles mentioned in Jeremiah 31:31-34, but they are mentioned in Isaiah 49:6. In relation to the Father speaking to His Son, He says,

“It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant too raise up the Tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel. I will also give You as a Light to the Gentiles that You should be My salvation to the ends of the Earth.” (Isaiah 49:6)

The Gentiles are part of Israel, and as such, they need to follow all the rules of Moses that apply to any one of them, just as we Jewish Christians do, except for Gentile circumcision, which is the only rule of Moses that male Gentile Christians must not follow. For why that is, please see my article, Gentile Circumcision? at <http://seedofabraham.net/Gentile-Circumcision.pdf>.

After all, we don't want to be like the Pharisees. Jesus said of them, “All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition” (Mark 7:9). Most Christians today are Pharisaic Christians; keeping the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church, watered down by the Protestant churches, but traditions none the less, of both theology and practice, that nullify God's New Testament lifestyle for them.

In regard to: Why Hanukkah?
Article by Gary C. Miller
Comments by Laura Lee (Bismarck, North Dakota)

From Gary's Article:

WHAT IS IT? DID THE MESSIAH OBSERVE HANUKKAH?

HANUKKAH: TWO OTHER NAMES

FEAST OF DEDICATION (most often translated feast of “dedication”)

FEASTIVAL OF LIGHTS (Tradition that a cruse of oil burned 8 days instead of one day.)

NOT SANCTIONED BY THE BIBLE:

“...Hanukkah is the only major holiday that has no basis in the Bible.” (*The Jewish Holidays, A Guide and Commentary*, Strassfeld, p. 162)

Laura writes:

Hanukkah is not a Holy Day so as such it is not listed as a Holy Day in the Law of God. However, “dedication” in the Old Testament is Strong's #H2597 or #H2598 and is spelled “Chanukkah”. In the New Testament it is called The Feast of

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Dedication in John 10:22. The dedication of a temple generally took 7 or 8 days.

From Gary’s Article:

ORIGIN:

Memorial of the cleansing of the temple and dedication of the altar after Antiochus Epiphanes polluted it (I Macc. 1:54,59; 164 B.C.).

“...Judas [Maccabaeus] and... the whole congregation of Israel ordained...the days of the dedication of the altar...with mirth and gladness.” (I Macc. 4:59; *The Apocrypha*) Note this was not ordained by Yahweh, but by the congregation of Israel. It became a *tradition of the Hebrews*. (Mk. 7:8-9)

WHEN:

“...year to year by the space of eight days, from the five and twentieth day of the month Casleu [*ninth month*: v. 52; “*Kislev*”-Hebrew calendar; also v. 56].” (I Macc. 4:59)

2022 Date: December 19-26

MIRACLE OF LIGHTS DID NOT HAPPEN: OBVIOUS OMISSIONS EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS ARE PROOF:

The eyewitness accounts in I and II Maccabees make **no mention** of a miracle that a one day’s supply of a cruse of oil lasted eight days.

NEITHER JOSEPHUS:

Josephus, highly respected first century Christian Era Jewish historian, **never mentions** any such miracle.

Laura writes:

Just because there is no witness to something or no one wrote it down, does not mean the miracle, whatever it is did not happen. In my own life I have witnessed many miracles with only me there to see it or know it happened and most of them I never wrote down anywhere. So, you can’t dismiss a miracle just because no one witnessed it or wrote it down.

From Gary’s Article:

“LOST” FOR ABOUT 600 YEARS:

The legend of the miracle is never mentioned **until about 600 years later [500 A.D.]** in the Babylonian Talmud [designated “Talmud”]: “...we find virtual silence in the Mishnah about Hanukkah. Only in the Gemara (the later rabbinic material that together with the Mishnah makes up the Talmud) do we find the long-lost miracle of Hanukkah.” (Strassfeld, p. 163)

CONCLUSION: THE MIRACLE OF LIGHTS DID NOT HAPPEN. IT IS A MYTH.

YAHSHUA, THE MESSIAH DID NOT OBSERVE HANUKKAH: WHAT ABOUT JOHN 10:22-23? Some claim these verses prove He observed Hanukkah:

“At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem; it was winter, and Yahshua [Jesus; NAS] was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon.”

Laura writes:

The problem I see here is are you talking about a celebration similar to Christmas? I know many messianic jews celebrate Hanukkah as if it were a Christmas celebration and I don’t see Christ ever attending that kind of a celebration but there would be nothing wrong with Christ or anyone else attending the dedication of a temple or an alter as was done in the old testament.

Some do have a set time for Hanukkah because it is a Christmas like celebration, but on the other hand a dedication of a temple or alter can take place at any time of the year.

This dedication in the Old Testament was in the seventh month.

2Ch 7:8 Also at the same time Solomon kept the feast seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great congregation,

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from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of Egypt.

2Ch 7:9 And in the eighth day they made a solemn assembly: **for they kept the dedication of the altar seven days, and the feast seven days.**

2Ch 7:10 And on the three and twentieth day of the seventh month he sent the people away into their tents, glad and merry in heart for the goodness that the LORD had shewed unto David, and to Solomon, and to Israel his people.

And the dedication in the New Testament was in the winter.

Joh 10:22 And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter.

Since they kept these dedications at different times of the year for example whenever they needed to dedicate a temple or an altar and since Christ was clearly in the Temple at the time of the Feast of Dedication in the New Testament and did not seem to say anything against it, then it was probably just simply a dedication of the temple or an altar.

From Gary’s Article:

CLOSER LOOK:

No mention is made of Yahshua celebrating this feast. Jews confronted Him there asking if he was the Christ (v. 24). Notice what He said: “But you do not believe [who he was, v.v. 24-25]

BECAUSE YOU ARE NOT OF MY SHEEP.

MY sheep hear my voice...and **THEY FOLLOW ME!**” (Jn. 10:26)

Clearly the Jews were not following Him; believing what He taught. If He observed the Feast of Dedication with them, they **would have been His sheep.**

Laura writes:

Here is the problem with that line of reasoning. Since the temple at the time of Christ was Jewish run and if they were not His sheep why was Christ ever even in the Temple at all. Christ went to the temple daily to teach.

Luk 21:37 And in the day time he was teaching in the temple; and at night he went out, and abode in the mount that is called *the mount* of Olives. **Luk 21:38** And all the people came early in the morning to him in the temple, for to hear him.

Some of the people that came to hear Christ teach were Jews.

Christ had no problem tipping over the money changers tables in the temple, so why wouldn’t he have a problem with the Feast of Dedication if it was wrong or if it were similar to a Christmas celebration.

From Gary’s Article:

AND He and the Jews were *constantly at odds during that festival* (John 9:16, 29; 8:59; 10:20, 31, etc.) on *many issues*; including the traditions of Hanukkah.

Laura writes:

All those verses prove is that they did not believe Christ was God. None of them prove that they had a dispute with Christ over Hanukkah (Feast of Dedication).

Joh 9:16 Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them.

Joh 9:29 We know that God spake unto Moses: *as for this fellow*, we know not from whence he is.

Joh 8:59 Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

Joh 10:20 And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him?

Joh 10:31 Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him.

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From Gary’s Article:

BEWARE OF TRADITIONS:

“Neglecting the commandment of Yahweh [“God” NAS], you [Pharisees and Scribes; v.5] hold to the tradition of men...You...set aside the commandment of Yahweh [“God” NAS] in order to keep your tradition.” (Mk. 7:8-9)

Laura writes:

What Christ disagreed with the Pharisees on were all the things they added to God’s Law. The Pharisees knew the law and taught the law but they did not keep the law for the most part.

Mar 7:8 For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do.

Mar 7:9 And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.

As far as traditions go, Christ was only blasting them for the traditions of men they kept. We all have traditions, and they are not all bad. When you keep the weekly Sabbath and the Annual Holy Days those are all traditions. If your family lived through a traumatic experience at some point, you may put that on your calendar and acknowledge it in some way each year so that you can celebrate how thankful you are that that worked out and is now behind you.

So, in conclusion, if people dedicate the temple of God or an altar of God, there is nothing wrong with that and it is still called (Chanukkah) in the Hebrew. A temple or an altar to God can be dedicated at any time of the year as scripture proves.

As far as no one witnessing the miracle of the oil or writing it down, it does not mean that it did not happen. Most miracles in my life happened when there was no witness available or at a point when no one knew it was a miracle until the end of it was shown. Most of these miracles I had happen to me I never said anything to anyone for years because I was afraid people would think I was crazy. I mean really how do you tell someone that something in your vehicle grabbed your steering wheel and turned your car in a direction you were not planning to go, yet that happened to me numerous times over a two or three year period, everytime there was an auto accident on the road I was going to take. My steering wheel was turned to a country road that was the long way to get to my daughter’s day care and as I am being steered by a miracle of God, all the traffic from the accident is being detoured and coming toward me in the other lane of a road with little to no traffic most of the time. This happened long before I ever heard of the Worldwide Church of God.

Whether or not the oil lasted as long as they say is not up to you to say they lied unless you were there and knew it didn’t happen. It seems like there are some similar accounts of miracles in the bible that are recorded, such as the fish and the bread etc.

Deu 5:20 Neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbour. (Take note the Jews are closer than your neighbor, they are your brothers and your sisters.)

Prayer Requests

Prayer Request for Sharon Zehrung (December 23, 2023)

Dear Brethren,

Sharon’s November CT scan has revealed that her cancer is worsening in her bones. Having been stable for more than two years, her cancer is once again active. Advanced-stage metastatic Breast Cancer cannot be cured by the medical profession, but there is much that can be done to add to her comfort and quality of life. Her oncologist has determined it wise to prescribe all new medications for her as her red and white blood cell counts have become too low. The new regimen of drugs has proven to be hard to tolerate so far. Her pain is bearable at this time, but she is having to take a prescription drug for nausea. Your outpouring of prayers to God, and the personal notes of love and encouragement you have sent mean more to us than we can tell you! Please continue to keep Sharon in your prayers because God receives all the credit!

Parthia and Jesus' Birth (Part 7) (Copyright) by Rich Traver (Clifton, Colorado)

While the story of the Magi making the long journey to Jerusalem to acknowledge the Birth of Jesus ("He who is born King of the Jews", as they said), is commonly related at a particular season of the year, yet few worshippers are remotely aware of the real story behind these Potentates and what their Ultimate Interest was.

There's a segment of world history that's extremely relevant to the Biblical Faith. It remains curious that reputable denominations are reluctant to investigate what's so readily available. There's an enduring affinity for that cute little story of the Magi's visit to Jerusalem to worship Him who was born "King of the Jews", as they claimed. Among the matters overlooked are the complicated political considerations of this notable engagement.

Disregarding the Knowable

Why is it that people just don't want to investigate certain things, and will casually dismiss what is knowable? Well, there is a reason, it being perhaps one of many, and it has to do with the perceived obligation to keep the laws of God. It's alleged that the Jews retain certain obligation in that regard, but Gentile peoples by and large do not.

There are some among the churchgoing genre who are aware of the difference, that not all Israelites are Jews, though all Jews are Israelites. Such a claim is made where it legally obligates Jews, leaving aside the obvious question, that there are more Old Covenant peoples in the world than just that one ethnicity. Why wouldn't the other Ten Tribes be just as obligated as are the Jews? This is the 'third rail' of religion. 'We shan't go there' as my old Sunday School teacher would say.

Long Together / Long Not!

At one time, all of Israel was a single nation. That was the case for some 250 years. After the reign of King Solomon, the nation was split, ¹ with ten tribes opting to separate politically, with two tribes remaining faithful to the dynasty of their former Kings David and Solomon. Ten tribes formed the northern kingdom retaining the name: House of Israel, while the two remaining tribes of the southern kingdom became known as the House of Judah. These would remain as separate kingdoms all through history. (See Ezekiel 37:15-22)

By the time of what we refer to as "the Nativity" the peoples of the northern kingdom have largely been 'lost' from the historic record. At least, so far as modern history is concerned. Being severed from their original form of religion, their true ethnic origin was easy to lose track of. Even more so after losing their empire in the early third century AD.

That's not to say the peoples in that region in the first century didn't know who the descendants of the House of Israel were. Historians such as Josephus certainly knew. ² And without doubt, the Roman world did too. That would include King Herod, who must have had a sense of who the peoples of Parthia were. Not only the people but the Dynastic Line of the ruling class of that nation.

While the average person of that day might not have been aware, the rulers of nations in the Middle East were quite aware, and the Magistanses themselves certainly knew who they were descendants of.

Political Posturing

In the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew chapter 2 we're given a glimpse into some political intrigue taking place between two major powers of the day. Those powers were of course, the Roman Empire and the Parthian Empire. The two being military equals, having been engaged to the death on many battlefields over recent years, though they were at peace at that time. Modern churchgoers read the account of this exchange in Matthew 2, not realizing the subtle political interplay that was taking place.

¹ This split was God ordained. See 1st Kings 12:15 & 24.

² In his *Antiquities of the Jews, Book 11, Chapter 5*, Josephus states: "...while the Ten Tribes are beyond Euphrates til now, and are an immense multitude, and not to be estimated by numbers..." This of course referred to greater Mesopotamia.

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It isn't well-known that it was only a few decades before that Parthia had conquered Judaea,³ then installing a vassal king, who reigned until 37 BC, he being deposed by Herod when taking back the region for himself! For whatever reason, the Parthians opted to let it happen, giving up their territorial interest there to the Romans. It could have been on account of the political situation back home.⁴

Restoring the Kingdom?

This casts light on the Disciples question in Acts 1:6 where they asked, “*Will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*” It was Israel (the House of Israel) that had relinquished Judaea to the Romans not all that long before. It shows that the political situation in Judaea was on their minds. Their query was not in reference to the Millennial Kingdom! The word ‘restore’ bears evidence of that!

Our first introduction to the Magi (from Magistanes) is when the alarm in Jerusalem over their presence necessitated their audience with Herod to explain to him their quest. Their presence, with military escort, as would be necessary for such high officials of the empire, left a question as to their real intentions. Were they an advance party spying out the situation ahead of a reinvasion? The whole city was very much alarmed!⁵ Word spread like wildfire!

What concerned Herod the most was what he'd heard that they'd seen “His star”. Such was no small matter in that day. The implications of that were taken seriously. An internet assessment has this: “*So, were these just “smart” men who happened to be looking up at the sky one day and observed something unusual and decided to investigate? No and no. The magi were elite members of a governing class in Parthia or modern-day Iran. They were powerful, educated and extremely wealthy, and knew astronomy and prophecy, even Bible prophecy. They were from a special cast called Magoi, from whence the name Magi comes, with no connection to magic. But because of their knowledge of astronomy and prophecy, they were considered a mystical priesthood... The delegation of the Magistanes would have included possibly dozens of magi, a large entourage of servants, and a vast army to protect them. They would have traveled in grandeur and style, and the sight of them would have inspired not only awe but fear. There was no way Herod dared to lay a finger on them.*” (Remember, Herod had taken his throne only after their Parthian-installed king in Judah had been deposed by him.)

Just Innocent ‘Worship’

The situation was somewhat defused by their claim of being there to worship the King of the Jews. In other words, we're here to pay homage to one of your guys. That may seem innocuous to average churchgoers, just consider what the reaction would have been if they'd said ‘King of Israel’ instead? (in other words, one of ours’). So, they defused one issue by changing focus, but then raised another!

You see, Herod thought HE was King of the Jews! To hear of another, one with Biblical authorization and an extraordinary astronomical event, would have concerned him greatly! So, the ruse was posed, that he wanted to worship this newborn king himself. We know how that might've worked out.

Effort was made to locate the child, after the Magi had snubbed Herod by leaving by some alternate route. (Their doing so posed high risk for them-selves and posed political implications.) The day was saved in that the priests knew the prophecy, being able at least to identify the town: Bethlehem.

A Back Story!

But let's ask ourselves, what was the Magi's real interest here? This is a story in its own right. You see, the political climate in Parthia at that time was somewhat unsettled, even desperate. To maintain unity at home, they needed a strong and stable king. That was not what was the case. The intrigue at the highest levels saw the regicide of one after another, even dispatching legitimate heirs to the Parthian Throne. It was a highly unstable time back east.

Perhaps the Judeans were aware of this. There's no better way in the world of that day (and for that matter even today)

³ In 40 BC the Parthians invaded Palestine, civil war broke out, and Herod was forced to flee to Rome. The senate there nominated him king of Judaea and equipped him with an army to make good his claim. In the year 37 BC, at the age of 36, Herod became the unchallenged ruler of Judaea, a position he was to maintain for 32 years until his death in 4 BC.

⁴ For reference, see Josephus: *Antiquities of the Jews, Book 14, Chapter 13, para. 9-10*)

⁵ Matthew 2:3

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to solidify one’s rulership than to return home from battle victorious. Did they see the possibility behind the Magi’s visit? Them ‘scoping it out’ to see if such a re-invasion was feasible?

It’s noteworthy to recall the massive slaughter of the Roman Army by Parthia at the battle of Carrhae in 53 BC. It was only a dozen years after that that Parthia invaded the “Holy Land”.

It’s interesting that there wasn’t a similar response among the people to “worship their newborn king” as Herod claimed he sought to do. Then again, let’s realize that this event was months after His birth, not within days as the usual portrayal has it. Is that because the people, who knew, kept the matter close to their vests lest they expose Him to danger? Had His birth and location been known, why didn’t they advise the Magi? Even Herod didn’t know, (but some priests did)! At least the city didn’t know. It took a special ‘star’ to lead the Magi to the specific house. That speaks volumes as to there being any general awareness of His location.

The Line of David

What was addressed earlier is the reality that Jesus was in fact a potential heir to the Parthian Throne!⁶ That’s the factor left out of the usual retellings. The Magi knew this. It was one of their direct responsibilities to appoint the kings of the Empire.

While only a remote possibility, they saw it as essential for them to pursue the possibility. And we can see the potential implications of this had the issue come up in the audience with Herod. You see, it could imply reunification of the two Houses of Israel should this King be installed. A king of Israel ruling the kingdom of Judah? What a prospect!

And does such a consideration reflect on the disciples’ question, “*Will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*” Picture the implications of that on the world scene of that day.

So even using the term “King of the Jews” though technically inaccurate, softened the impact of their mission in what had been a hostile environment only a generation before.

It’s one thing for the ordinary citizens of Parthia to be present in Jerusalem on the High Days, as they were well-known for doing,⁷ but another for elite political potentates to come there unannounced for reasons unstated.

Diplomacy isn’t just a modern phenomenon. The risk of provoking an ‘incident’ between their Empire and Rome’s was there, let alone the risk at home of creating strains between themselves and their king (actually a queen mother, co-ruling with her son) who had just ascended the throne in Parthia by murdering the previous king.

If there was anything that would grab Herod’s rapt attention it would be such an announcement, made by high-ranking officials from the greater segment of Israelitish peoples: the House of Israel! Any prospect of a political alliance with his Judeans spelled frightening implications to world stability and particularly that of Rome. Beyond that, what criticism would Herod be under IF things went sour with Parthia? There already existed an affinity among and between these peoples: his and theirs’. It wouldn’t take much for them to ally themselves and throw off Roman rule!

And that disregards the ultra-high political tensions already present in his realm. Herod was not a favorite among the Pharisees nor the Sadducees. The High Priests were political appointees, not placed by legitimate means. Resentments ran deep!

So, what we read in Matthew the second chapter tells a far broader story than meets the casual eye. We see not only a situation that could have destabilized the whole region, but also a situation that emphasizes that Jesus was far more than just “King of the Jews”!

So why is all this ignored in the churches today? Likely it’s because they don’t really want to know who the Ten Tribes of Israel are. You see, there’s a problem with this identification. It has to do with the obligation to keep God’s Law. It’s acknowledged that the Jews are so obligated, but Gentiles are not. That of course sidesteps an obvious question. Since

⁶ His genealogy was known and is cited in Matthew 1 and Luke 3. He being a direct descendant of David.

⁷ See Acts 2 and see who’s mentioned first.

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the Ten Tribes are not actually Jews (that name applies to the southern House of Judah) what's the situation with regard to the northern House of Israel? Wouldn't they be equally obligated as are their Jewish counterparts?

That's really the question that Christian denominations want to leave off the table!

See Rich Traver's other articles at:

Traver, Rich – Church of God, Bismarck (church-of-god-bismarck.org)

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Expect the Unexpected (Part 4)

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Random Prophetic Verses to Consider

Matthew 23:37 O **Jerusalem, Jerusalem**, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Matthew 23:38 Behold, **your house is left unto you desolate**.

What is the immediate future of Jerusalem? What will leave Jerusalem desolate? Finally – after all desolation, Jerusalem will know what Jerusalem is supposed to be – God's City.

Matthew 24:4 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.

God has been rejected – especially by modern-day Judah. Truth has gone out of the land. The enemy is now coming after the Jews – how long before the true Christians?

Matthew 24:10 And then **shall many be offended**, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.

The Church of God will soon be perceived by all in the world as the false faith - enemies who will not go along to get along. America is being broken and destroyed – right before our eyes. Anti-Semitism has become the order of the Day. Many are inciting anti-Semitic attacks across the United States.

Only the **very elect** will be able to discern the times. (Matthew 24:24, 2Thes 2:11)

Matthew 24:12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of **many** shall wax cold.

Matthew 24:36 But of that day and hour knows no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

Matthew 24:37 But **as the days of Noah were**, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

Genesis 6 – what was it like in Noah's day?

There was an ideology of Corruption over all the earth

Genesis 6:5 And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that **every imagination of the [creative] thoughts of his heart was only evil continually**.

Like when Hamas attacked Israel mercilessly. Hamas does not take care of the dire needs of the Palestinians – No, they are bent on killing every Jew! They are **violent people**.

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Genesis 6:6 And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.
Genesis 6:7 And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.

The earth will be filled with Hamas—unbridled violence.

Genesis 6:11 The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was **filled with violence** [Hebrew *cHamas*].

Brethren, look at how bad it is about to become!

Genesis 6:12 And God looked upon the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for **all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth**. Genesis 6:13 And God said unto Noah [and **God is saying this to us now**], The end of all flesh is come before me; for **the earth is filled with violence** through them; and, behold, **I will destroy them with the earth**.

Open Border Islamic Terrorism is here!

The word *hamas* in the Old Testament also appears in the contexts of sin and injustice against God and one's fellow-man, judicial affairs, structural **violence**, and the theodicy problem.

In the last two years our borders have become wide open to terrorists – so that the same thing that happened in Gaza will be upon us.

The noun *chamas* occurs sixty times in the Old Testament. The virtually constant and sometimes exclusive translation of c~n as "violence" in Old Testament commentaries, concordances, theological dictionaries, translations of the Bible and Hebrew lexicons, frequently does not do justice to the contexts in which the word is used.

Matthew 24:38 For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, Matthew 24:39 And knew not until the flood came, and **took them all away**; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

So, the modern state of Israel will completely wipe out every Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihadist **terrorist** in Gaza.

Then what? Iran supports “resistance forces” which act independently. Israel will completely wipe out all proxy forces like Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Then what? Iranian foreign policy with nuclear weapons will keep coming and coming – not only in the Middle East but in the West – including the USA.

Allahu Akbar is a phrase meaning ‘the God of Islam is **greater** than the True God’, used by Muslims in prayers and when killing Jews. Allahu originated as a pagan moon god and is none other than Baal – the false god of the Old Testament.

Zechariah 14:1 Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil [of the Jews] shall be divided in the midst of thee.

Islam Rapes Jewish Women

Zechariah 14:2 For I will gather all nations **against Jerusalem** to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall **not be cut off** from the city.

Islam will not be totally successful in riding Jerusalem of Jews.

Zechariah 14:3 Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. Zechariah 14:4 And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward

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the south.

God condemns **Judah for their unfaithfulness**, but He also condemns Judah’s surrounding neighbors for their improper attacks and persecutions on Judah.

Notice God’s judgment on those who violate His covenant.

Ezekiel 1– 13 is God’s judgment on the **House of Israel**.

Ezekiel 14 – 25 is God’s judgment on the **House of Judah**.

What does God say about the threat of radical Islam—like Hamas? Amos 1 (in the end-time)

Amos 1:6 Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of **Gaza** [Edomites], and for four [Hamas has clearly gone overboard this time], I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they carried away captive the whole captivity, to deliver them up to Edom:

There is ancient rivalry and hostility between Esau and Jacob.

Amos 1:7 But I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza, which shall devour the palaces thereof: [God Himself will destroy Gaza – a remnant of the Philistines who are enemies of Israel!]

The Iranians are Persians who have been subjugated by Muhammed Arabs. The true Persians have historically been friends with Judah and Cyrus.

Amos 1:8 And I will cut off the inhabitant from Ashdod, and him that holdeth the scepter from Ashkelon, and I will turn mine hand against Ekron [leader of Gaza]: and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish, saith the Lord GOD.

Jeremiah – we’ll see God’s view of what has happened in Gaza on the Last Great Day 2023 – Compare Matthew 24:

Mark 13:12 Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents and shall cause them to be put to death.

Jeremiah 11:9 And the LORD said unto me, A **conspiracy** is found among the men of Judah, and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. [there are Jews who are enemies of the State]

It is the difference between the true Covenant people, the Covenant promises, and modern Zionism. Modern Judah is not the religion of the Covenant people of the Old Testament. Orthodox Jews keep the Sabbath – but totally reject Jesus Christ.

History is Repeating Itself

Jeremiah 11:10 They are turned back to the **iniquities** of their forefathers, which **refused to hear my words**; and they went after **other gods** to serve them: the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant which I made with their fathers.

Ancient Israel went into captivity for Sabbath breaking and **idolatry**. Make no mistake, the house of Israel and the house of Judah are the USA and English-speaking nations, including the modern state of Israel who are pagans, atheists and increasingly Communist Socialist by ideology.

No Escape

Jeremiah 11:11 Therefore thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon them, which they shall not be able to escape; and though they shall cry unto me, I will not hearken unto them. [It is too late to pray for intervention]

Jeremiah 11:12 Then shall the cities of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem go, and cry unto the **[false] gods**

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unto whom they offer incense: but they shall not save them at all in the time of their trouble. [Jacob’s trouble is coming soon]

Ezekiel 12 70 times in Ezekiel God says then, “ye shall know that I am the LORD.”

Ezekiel 12:16 But I will leave a few men of them from the sword [only a few will escape to declare all their abominations], from the famine, and from the pestilence; that they may declare all their abominations among the heathen whither they come; and **they shall know that I am the LORD.**

Ezekiel 12:20 And the cities that are inhabited shall be laid waste, and the land shall be desolate; and **ye shall know that I am the LORD.**

God’s Assessment of Judah’s Sins

Jeremiah 11:13 For according to the number of thy cities were thy [false] gods, O Judah; and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem have ye set up altars to that shameful thing, even altars to burn **incense unto Baal.** [picture the Abomination of Desolation]

Do Not Pray for Judah

Jeremiah 11:14 Therefore **pray not** thou for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them: for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble. Jeremiah 11:15 What hath my beloved to do in mine house, seeing she hath wrought lewdness with many, and the holy flesh is passed from thee? when thou doest evil, then thou rejoicest.

The Jews – the original Covenant People – do not represent God in any way.

World sentiment will soon be in favor of Hamas and against Israel until:

Luke 21:20 And when ye shall see **Jerusalem compassed with armies**, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Luke 21:21 Then let them which are in Judaea **flee to the mountains**; and let them which are in the midst of it **depart out**; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. Luke 21:22 For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.

Abomination of Desolation

Matthew 24:15 When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Matthew 24:16 Then let them which be in **Judaea flee into the mountains**: Matthew 24:17 Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house: Matthew 24:18 Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. Matthew 24:19 And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! Matthew 24:20 But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day: Matthew 24:21 For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. Matthew 24:22 And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.

Israel is a Wasteland

Jeremiah 12:4 How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of every field wither, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein? The beasts are consumed, and the birds; because they said, He shall not see our last end.

The Lord Answers Jeremiah – it is going to get a lot worse as the world collapses around us.

Jeremiah 12:5 If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan? Jeremiah 12:6 For even thy brethren, and the house of thy father, even they have dealt treacherously with thee; yea, they have called a **multitude** after thee: believe them not, though they speak fair words [lies all] unto thee.

This is where we are today

Jeremiah 12:7 I have forsaken **mine house**, I have left mine heritage [Israel]; I have given the dearly beloved of

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my soul [Judah – Wow!] into the hand of her enemies. Jeremiah 12:8 Mine heritage [the House of Israel and Judah] is unto me as a lion in the forest [seeking to devour me]; it cries out against me: therefore have I hated it. Jeremiah 12:9 Mine heritage is unto me as a speckled bird [A chicken with spots will be **pecked to death** by the others], the birds round about are against her; come ye, assemble all the beasts of the field, **come to devour**. Jeremiah 12:10 Many pastors [shepherds and leaders of Judah] have destroyed my vineyard, they have trodden my portion under foot, they have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness. [Zionism is not Godliness and does not produce godly fruit.] Jeremiah 12:11 They have made it desolate, and being desolate it mourns unto me; the whole land is made desolate, because no man lays it to heart.

The Sword of the LORD Calls for Repentance

Jeremiah 12:12 The spoilers [like Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis] are come upon all high places through the wilderness: for the sword of the LORD shall devour from the one end of the land even to the other end of the land: no flesh shall have peace. [Modern Israel nearly wiped off the map]

Matthew 24:22 And except those days should be shortened, there should **no flesh be saved alive**: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

No Wonder Jesus Cries for Jerusalem

Jesus Weeps for Jerusalem

Luke 19:41 And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and **wept over it**, Luke 19:42 Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. Luke 19:43 For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and **compass thee round**, and keep thee in on every side, Luke 19:44 And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another, because thou knew not the time of thy visitation.

How many terrorist sleeper cells are in the USA now – hundreds? Perhaps thousands? There were only 19 terrorists who pulled off 9/11/01.

1.7 billion Muslims want only to destroy. Compare their culture of **death** with the inventiveness for **life** in medicine and health by 12 million Jews!

Lament over Jerusalem

Matthew 23:37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often **would I have gathered thy children** together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, **and ye would not!** Matthew 23:38 Behold, **your house is left unto you desolate**.

Jeremiah 12:13 They have sown wheat but shall reap thorns: they have put themselves to pain but shall not profit: and they shall be ashamed of your revenues because of the **fierce anger of the LORD**.

God Will Finally Remove Radical Islam from the Promised Land

Jeremiah 12:14 Thus says the LORD against all mine evil [Islamic Muslim] neighbors, that touch the inheritance which I have caused my people Israel to inherit [the Promised Land]; Behold, I will pluck [the Muslim gentiles] out of **their land** and **pluck out the house of Judah** from among them. Jeremiah 12:15 And it shall come to pass, after that I have plucked [the Arab gentiles] out **“I will return”** [says Jesus Christ], and have **compassion** on [Israel], and will bring them again, every man to his heritage, and every man to his land.

If Islam will Repent and Turn Around

Jeremiah 12:16 And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my [Covenant] people, to swear by my name, **“The LORD lives”**; the same way that they taught my people to swear by Baal [*Allahu Akbar*]; then **shall they be built** in the midst of my people.

If Islam Repents Not

Jeremiah 12:17 But if they will not obey, I will utterly pluck up and **destroy that nation**, says the LORD.

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Romans 14:11 For it is written, **As I live, says the Lord**, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.

See Warren Zehrung’s other articles at:

[Zehrung, Warren – Church of God, Bismarck \(church-of-god-bismarck.org\)](http://church-of-god-bismarck.org)

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Holy Days 2024

Passover – April 23, 2024 (Observed at Sunset the Evening Before)

Passover/Unleavened Bread – April 23-29, 2024

Pentecost – June 12, 2024

Trumpets - October 3, 2024

Atonement – October 12, 2024

Tabernacles –October 17, 2024, to October 23, 2024

Last Great Day – October 24, 2024

Notes

Notes