THE VOICE of ELIJAH

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INSIDE

Did Jesus Leave a Will?

One basic principle governs the outcome of any scientific or legal inquiry: You'll never get the Truth until you ask the right question. But an old adage regarding the questioning of witnesses sometimes also applies: Never ask a question if you don't already know the answer. Having said that, I ask just one simple question: Did Jesus leave a will?

That may seem like a rather ludicrous question to many. After all, everyone knows that Jesus had nothing for anyone to inherit. He said as much Himself:

"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Matthew 8:20)

Greek Testaments

But a hasty answer to an unusual question is not necessarily the correct one. My reason for asking the question in the first place is a passage in the Book of Hebrews. The author of that unique book answers our question with a resounding: Yes! Jesus did leave a will. Look at what he has to say:

But Messiah, having arrived as High Priest of the coming good things, by means of the greater and more complete tent, not made with hands (that is, not of this creation), entered once for all into the Holy place (not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of His Own blood), obtaining eternal redemption. Because, if the blood of goats, bulls and ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled purify with regard to purity of the flesh, how much more will the blood of the Messiah, Who (by means of the Holy Spirit) offered Himself unblemished to God, cleanse our conscience from dead works to serve the Living *God. Because of this,* ***He is mediator of a new testament, so that*** *(a death having taken place for the ransom of those who transgressed against the first testament)* ***those who have been invited might receive the eternal inheritance. Because where there is a testament, the death of the testator must be endured! Because only a testament of the dead is valid. It has no meaning whatsoever while the testator lives.***
(Hebrews 9:11–17)—my translation

See ***Jesus' Will?*** *on Page 4*

Parables and Prophecy

The Passover Parable

Jesus constantly spoke in parables, dramatizing His message in *parabolic pantomime*. (See "The *Parabolic Pantomimes* of Jesus Christ," ***The Voice of Elijah***, January 1991.) In so doing, He was merely continuing the practice of the Prophets of Israel whom God often directed to state their message *symbolically* in *pantomime* (Jer. 51:63; Ez. 4; Hos. 1:2).

The *parabolic pantomimes* of Scripture vary, but all have one thing in common. Whether it be the offering of Isaac as a sacrifice by his father Abraham (Gen. 22), the death of Moses (Num. 27:12–14), or the confrontation of the prophets of Baal by Elijah (1 Kings 18), they were all conducted at God's behest.

The greatest of Scripture's *parabolic pantomimes*, however, is the intricately detailed set of directives that God issued through Moses to the people of Israel before, during, and after their Exodus from Egypt. Viewed as a complete image, this pantomime appears to be nothing more than a mockery of the ancient Egyptian belief in the Pharaoh's triumphant journey through death, resurrection from the dead, and ascension from the top of the primeval Mountain of God, the pyramid.

Considered in detail, however, the *parabolic pantomime* of the Passover Parable is an incredibly labyrinthine message concerning Jesus Christ, the coming King of Israel. Unlike the Pharaoh who could never actually triumph over death, Jesus

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Letters to the Editor

With this issue, we conclude our first year of publication. Its release allows us the opportunity to look back and reflect on how quickly time passes. Last October was a long time ago. Yet we have been so busy that it seems like only yesterday.

If writing, editing, and publishing the newsletter were not enough to keep us busy, we are also in the midst of a direct mail campaign to gain new subscribers. We are now seeing 20 to 50 new subscribers each week. For a small organization with limited funds, we feel that's a phenomenal growth rate.

Just last month we sent out renewal notices along with a questionnaire to those of you who subscribed last fall. Your overwhelmingly positive response has shown us that many have been seeking substantial teaching. We will continue to provide that for you. You can count on it. We trust that those of you whose subscription begins with this issue also find spiritual nourishment in what you read.

With What Measure You Have Received …

If you feel you gain spiritually from reading ***The Voice of Elijah***, I encourage you to help us find others who will benefit. Expenses related to our subscription drive are nearly $33 for each new subscriber. That means that even after we receive the $18 for the subscription it still costs us $15 for each new subscriber. Fortunately, everyone who helps us publish ***The Voice of Elijah*** donates their expertise. Our only expenses, other than the costs of printing the newsletter and the books, are the costs related to our subscription campaign.

We already have a few faithful contributors who provide the funds necessary to continue this ministry. But your contribution will make it possible for us to reach more people in less time. If you find our ministry beneficial to you in your spiritual walk with God, please consider us for donation. That way you will be giving something you consider valuable to someone else. All contributions are tax-deductible.

What Do I Believe?

Since the last issue, many of you have responded to my appeal to write. I appreciate your letters. As I expected, some wrote to express a reaction against our message. But I was heartened by the largely positive response. It appears that you realize the Church today is in a desperate condition and you are willing to listen to more than just a restatement of the same old Christian clichés.

But the preponderance of you who wrote were interested in the same thing: What do we believe? I can only answer that question for myself, but I know that all who help us in our ministry feel the same way. We believe we have found a *Teaching* that, rather than contradicting what we believe, actually explains why it is true.

Let me explain what I believe by telling you a little about myself. I grew up in Southern California but was converted in a small church in Louisiana after hearing the Gospel message in 1972. The new-birth experience radically transformed my life. I responded to the desire to learn more about God's Word by attending and graduating from a small Christian college in North Texas. In 1980, I began graduate studies in the San Francisco Bay Area at a Christian college in San Francisco.

In 1981, while still in California, I heard the Passover Parable explained for the first time—somewhat the same opportunity you have in this issue. I was convinced immediately, as some of you will be, that this message had the ring of Truth. Having learned much more of the hidden message of the Old Testament in the past ten years, I am even more convinced now than I was then. Consequently, I also believe The Elijah Project and this newsletter are something God is about in these Last Days. (See "Questions & Answers" in this issue.)

But there is an amazing thing about the message I have had the opportunity to hear these last ten years. It has not required me to change my basic "fundamentalist" beliefs concerning salvation, it has only given me knowledge of a God Who is seeking to work in my life every day. It has also made me realize just how many people who call themselves "Christian" actually have little or no commitment to God at all. In that regard, *The Teaching* has made me much more circumspect in my own spiritual life.

As I mentioned above, I am basically a "fundamentalist." The twelve volumes of *The Fundamentals: A Testimony of the Truth* (1910–12) set forth the "fundamental" beliefs that define who is and who is not a fundamentalist. Those essentials are: the virgin birth of Christ, the physical resurrection, the inerrancy of the Scriptures, the substitutionary theory of the atonement, and the imminent, physical Return of Jesus Christ. I can assure you I believe all these to be essential to the faith, but I would not argue with anyone who chooses to believe otherwise.

I have no particular identification with specific denominational teachings. I have come to the conclusion over the past ten years that the list of *adiaphora* is much longer than I would have previously thought. I am also now of the considered opinion that those who seek to argue with, or verbally attack, someone because of what they believe are of a contentious spirit. They seek only to cause further controversy and are best ignored.

The Voice of Elijah is a non-denominational publication and will remain so. The corporation is not a Church and is not associated with any church. That lack of affiliation allows us to speak freely on topics where many denominations would seek to silence our voice, a voice that we believe is "crying in the wilderness."

Interpretation or Explanation?

We received letters on other topics as well. Here's one with a valid point concerning the April 1991 issue:

*I have just become a subscriber to your publication "***The Voice of Elijah***." I am appreciating it very much. However, I have a concern for which I would appreciate your comments.*

In Volume #2 on Page 8 there is a statement in Column 2 at the beginning of the last paragraph. The statement has been lifted out and appears in bold type. "Jesus never intended the Scriptures to be interpreted. He intended them to be explained." Great, but I have a concern—my concern is with the following statements as to whether or not they are in correlation with this statement and those that are found in the article "A Letter to the Editor" which appears on Pages 2–3 in the same issue:

"We have launched this newsletter to convey to you <u>our interpretation</u> of those Scriptures most necessary"—in second paragraph.

"Seen detailed interpretations of some of Jesus' parables literally fall into place …" — in third paragraph.

"Simple principles on which the Scriptural interpretation of The Elijah Project …" —in sixth paragraph.

"In the way he presented his interpretation of the Scriptural passages" —in tenth paragraph.

Please comment.

William C., Independence, MO

I think this letter points out a flaw in my use of the word *interpretation* in last issue's "Letters to the Editor."

Interpretation is a noun, not a verb. The *meaning* I intended was, "the result of interpreting." I also intended the possessives *our, his* and *of The Elijah Project* to indicate just that—possession. It's common knowledge that every form of communication requires interpretation. But I did not mean to imply that our or his *interpreting* (a verbal noun) was the source of our understanding of the hidden message of Scripture.

The interpretation we have is in our possession, and because we believe it, it's ours. But as that same issue of ***The Voice of Elijah*** makes clear, we also believe it to be *The Teaching*—the interpretation of Scripture that Jesus taught. If that be so, the question becomes: How did it come to be in our possession if we didn't do the interpreting? I don't mean to evade that issue; but since I got my understanding of the message from Larry, I think he should answer that question. (See "Questions & Answers" in this issue.)

Your point is well taken, however. I should have used the term *explanation* instead of *interpretation* in "Letters to the Editor" so that it would correspond with the statement in the article.

Whence Cometh the Translation?

"What version of the Bible do you use? We have the King James or Authorized Version and the scriptures you quote do not match up with it."
Wallace J., Hodgen, OK

If we quote an already existing translation, most often we use the New American Standard Bible because it provides a more literal translation than most. But since the Bible was originally written in Hebrew and Greek, Larry does not use any one particular translation, preferring instead to read the text in the original languages. Therefore, when he explains a particular passage, he will sometimes provide his own translation.

Jesus' Will?

From page 1

The author of the Book of Hebrews has given us here but a brief glimpse into one of the key links between the message of the Old Testament and that of the New. He passed over it quickly, assuming that his readers were fully aware of this particular part of *The Teaching of the Apostles.*

"The sacrifice of an animal provided the meat consumed at the covenant meal."

Knowledge of the Old Testament message concerning *The Inheritance of the Believer* was considered by the Early Church to be such a fundamental part of *The Teaching* that it went without saying. Nowhere in the New Testament will one find all the necessary information concerning this essential part of *The Teaching* of the Early Church. For that, you must go back to the Book of Genesis and trace the message all the way through the Scriptures. (See *Not All Israel is Israel*.)

If you compare my translation of Hebrews 9:15–17 with other translations, you will find that all the other translations treat the Greek word *diatheke*—which can *mean* either "covenant" or "testament"—differently. The King James Version translates the Greek term as I have, always using the English term "testament." The New American Standard, on the other hand, always translates the term as "covenant." The Revised Standard Version does a flip-flop, translating it "covenant" up to the point where the text mentions the "testator." But when it becomes obvious that *diatheke* refers to a "testament," the RSV then opts for the more common English term *will*.

The confusion of the translators concerning exactly what the writer of the Book of Hebrews intended by his use of the term *diatheke* is understandable. Their confusion stems from the fact that God in His wisdom knew beforehand the unique circumstances of the "fulness of time" into which our Savior would come. Consequently, He had, nearly two thousand years previously, begun the process of salvaging a remnant from this abominable world by "cutting a covenant" with the Hebrew patriarch, Abram.

Even then, God knew full well that when the Greeks translated the Hebrew Scriptures into their own language, the translators would choose to translate the Hebrew term for "covenant" with a Greek term that had no *meaning* other than "testament." Why they did so has puzzled scholars for centuries. The answer to the conundrum is simple, yet adds nothing to its ultimate solution: In the wisdom of God, it would be so.

The end result of the Greek translators' choice of words is that the Greek term *diatheke* has both a specific and a general *meaning* in the New Testament. Therefore, in those instances where the New Testament writers, who were also writing in the Greek language, used the same Greek term *diatheke*, their *meaning* has remained deliberately obscure.

Commentators now come away puzzled after studying those passages in which the word occurs. What did the writer intend? Was he referring to the term's *meaning* as it was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament? There it refers to one of the many "covenants" that God made with men. Or did he intend it to carry the specific legal *meaning* "testament," which is what the term *meant* in the Greek language of Jesus' time? The answer is again, in the wisdom of God, both.

Hebrew Covenants

The Greek translators used the Greek *diatheke* to translate the Hebrew *berith*. *Berith* is commonly found translated as "covenant" in the English translations of the Old Testament. A more precise definition of the word is actually "legal agreement." And in the ancient Near East, as now, legal agreements were of various types.

The Hebrew term *berith* could refer to as simple an agreement as the one between Abraham and Abimelech (Gen. 21:22–34), which stipulated that both parties to the agreement would recognize Abraham's ownership of the well around which the village of Beersheba later grew up. Likewise, Jacob and Laban's agreement that they would not seek to harm one another (Gen. 31:43–55) is also called a *berith*.

The most frequent use of *berith* in the Hebrew Scriptures, however, is in reference to the agreement between God and the people of Israel (Ex. 20–24). In that case, the type of legal agreement to which *berith* refers has long been recognized by scholars as a treaty between two kings.

Amazingly enough, the Book of Deuteronomy, representing as it does a second ratification of the covenant/treaty between God and *Corporate* Israel, has exactly the same form as many of the treaty texts excavated at various archaeological sites in the Middle East.

"The Greek term diatheke ***has both a specific and a general*** **meaning** ***in the New Testament."***

The Hebrew noun *berith* ("legal agreement") derives from the Hebrew verb *barah*, which *means* "to eat." That is because a legal agreement at that time was ratified by the parties eating a meal together. Just as for many years in the United States, a handshake was all that was necessary to formalize a legal agreement, so also legal agreements in the ancient Near East were normally solemnized by a covenant meal.

The sacrifice of an animal provided the meat consumed at the covenant meal. For that reason, the Hebrew idiom *meaning* "to make a legal agreement" literally says "to cut a *berith*." The "cutting" involved was the butchering of the sacrificial animal eaten at the covenant meal.

The sacrifice of the animal often took on symbolic *significance* when either of the parties to the agreement took a solemn oath vowing to adhere to the terms of the agreement. In so doing, the oath-taker formally accepted the fact that he deserved a fate identical to that suffered by the sacrificial animal should he fail to keep the terms of the agreement.

The oath-taker's acceptance of the symbolic fate of the sacrificial animal makes God's use of the *parabolic image* of sacrifice and the covenant meal in the parables of the Scriptures much more *significant*. We will discuss the implications of His use of the *parabolic imagery* related to sacrifice in future articles in this publication.

***"The Greek term translated 'codicil' however, had one specific* meaning *in the Greek language. It* signified *an addendum to an already existing* will."**

The participants in an ancient Near Eastern *berith* often included a written text or other form of documentation as a part of the agreement. The written documentation of the legal agreement was not essential, however.

Although the tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written have long been recognized as a copy of the written agreement between God and *Corporate* Israel, other legal agreements were formalized by a covenant meal unaccompanied by written agreement (Gen. 21:22–34; 31:43–55).

The Testament of God

The crucial but unrecognized element in the Old Testament's use of the term *berith* is the fact that one of the legal agreements it designated was what we ordinarily call a "*testament*" or "*will*." There is also no small irony in the fact that the Christian Bible has two parts—the Old and the New *Testaments*. That is, in fact, what God intended them to be: Legal documents, testaments, what we ordinarily call "*wills*." They set forth in some detail the specifics concerning who is and who is not qualified to ***inherit*** God's estate.

The covenant God *cut* with Abraham as recorded in Genesis 15 is nothing more or less than a *will*. Examine the text for yourself. The legal agreement that God provided Abraham on that particular occasion was in response to a singular question that Abraham asked God concerning the Promised Land:

> *"How may I know that I will* ***inherit*** *it?"*
> *(Genesis 15:8b) —my translation*

What was God's response? He made a *will* and designated Abraham as His ***heir***. But, you say, God can't die! That's true, as Spirit, He can never die. But what about God incarnate? Not only could He die, He did die. The question I have asked here is, when He died on a cross between two thieves, whom had He *legally* designated as His ***heirs***? But I am getting ahead of myself.

In explaining how Gentiles came into possession of ***the promise*** that had previously been the ***heritage*** of the Jews, the Apostle Paul tells us clearly that God made a *testament* in which He designated Abraham as His ***heir***:

> *Christ bought us back from the curse of the Law (having become a curse on our behalf), because it's been written: "EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE IS CURSED!"* ***so that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles*** *(in Christ Jesus); so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Brothers, (I speak in accordance with man) nobody declares even a ratified* ***testament*** *of a man invalid or adds a* ***codicil*** *to it! But* ***the promises*** *were spoken to Abraham and to his "Seed." It does not say, "and to seeds" (as of many), but (as of One), "and to your Seed" (which is Messiah). But I'm saying this: The law that came four hundred and thirty years later doesn't void* ***a testament ratified by God*** *so as to nullify the promise. Because if the* ***inheritance*** *is from law, it isn't any longer from* ***promise****. But* ***God had given it freely to Abraham through a promise****.*
> *(Galatians 3:13–18) —my translation*

Three legal terms in this passage clearly indicate that Paul believed the plan of God was to convey salvation by means of a *will*. Those terms are *testament*, *codicil*, and *inheritance*. All three are Greek legal terms relating specifically to the disposition of an estate under the terms specified in a will. The only exception might be the term *diatheke* which, as explained above, the Greek translators used to translate the more general Hebrew term *berith*.

The Greek term translated "codicil" however, had one specific *meaning* in the Greek language. It *signified* an addendum to an already existing *will*. That term by itself clearly confirms Paul's usage of the term *diatheke* as *meaning* "will."

The will to which Paul refers is God's will—a will in which God left His entire estate to Abraham and His "Seed" "four hundred and thirty years" before the Law was given at Mt. Sinai. Abraham then passed title to ***the inheritance***

"The 'covenant' God 'cut' with Abraham as recorded in Genesis 15 is nothing more or less than a 'will.'"

on to Isaac; Isaac passed it on to Jacob, etc. But you can read all about that for yourself. (See the explanation in *Not All Israel Is Israel*.)

When the incarnate God died, His will became a valid testamentary document. That's the way it is with wills. As the writer of the Book of Hebrews tells us:

> *Only a* ***testament*** *of the dead is valid. It has no meaning whatsoever while the* ***Testator*** *lives.*
> *(Hebrews 9:17) —my translation*

Technically speaking, God's *testament* is not the *testament* of Jesus Christ. On the one hand, it is; on the other hand, it isn't. As Jesus said, "I and the Father are One" (Jn. 10:30). But centuries of theological discussion have added little of value that could further elucidate the hypostatic union of God and man in the Person of Jesus Christ. So we can leave the resolution of that issue as it was decided by the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 324.

But since God made His will nearly two thousand years before the birth of Jesus Christ, one has to say God's will would not actually qualify under Roman law as a will that Jesus made. So we still haven't answered our question: Did Jesus leave a will?

The New Covenant

Shortly before His death, as was His constant wont, Jesus orchestrated a detailed *parabolic pantomime* of the Old Testament covenant meal ritual with His disciples. (See "The *Parabolic Pantomimes* of Jesus Christ," ***The Voice of Elijah***, January 1991.)

"*Technically speaking, God's* testament *is not the* testament *of Jesus Christ.*"

To ensure that the reader understood that *pantomime* was intended to *parabolicly* evoke the sacrificial imagery of the Old Testament, all four of the Gospel writers mention that the occasion for the *pantomime* was the Passover meal (Matt. 26:17–19; Mk. 14:12–16; Lk. 22:7–13; Jn. 13:1). The synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—all claim that Jesus openly identified Himself as the Passover sacrifice for this New Covenant meal:

> *And while they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." And He took a cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is shed on behalf of many for forgiveness of sins."*
> *(Matthew 26:26–28)—my translation*

The *parabolic imagery* Jesus evoked on this one occasion through His words and actions span the total spectrum of the *parabolic imagery* of the Scriptures. The *parabolic image* of the Tabernacle, with its priesthood and sacrificial ritual is easy to see. But Jesus' use of the Greek term *diatheke* raises the question: Did He *mean* "covenant," or did He *mean* "testament"? The Truth is, He intended both.

In His *parabolic pantomime*, Jesus pointed directly to that first Passover, the inaugural event in Israel's Exodus from Egypt (Ex. 12). And just as God had spoken the Ten Commandments from the top of Mt. Sinai (Ex. 20) as the terms of

> *{Jesus}, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God, rose from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, girded Himself about. Then He poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. And so He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now; but you shall understand hereafter." Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all {of you}." For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean."*
> *(John 13:3–11)*

Ford Madox Brown (1821–1893), "Christ Washing Peter's Feet" — Jesus did many things as *parabolic pantomime*—symbolically mimicking the ancient beliefs the Prophets mocked. In washing His disciples' feet at the Passover meal, He was mocking the purification ritual the ancients thought necessary to qualify one for the resurrection. Jesus told His disciples, "What I do you do not realize now; but you shall understand hereafter" (Jn. 13:7). They did understand, but not until "He opened their mind to understand the Scriptures" (Lk. 24:45).

Jesus explained the basic principle of humility that could be seen in what He had done. But He said no more about the symbolic "cleansing." Only after His death did His disciples understand the image of baptism. ■

the Old Covenant, Jesus also announced the terms of His New Covenant as He ate the Passover meal with His twelve disciples, those who stood as representatives of the twelve tribes of the True Israel—the Messiah:

> *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another."*
> *(John 13:34)*

But the covenant God made with *Corporate* Israel at Mt. Sinai is not the only covenant that provides the *parabolic imagery* for Jesus' *parabolic pantomime*. He also intended to evoke the memory of a much earlier "covenant," the *testament* that God "cut" with Abraham when He made him His ***heir***.

Under the terms of that *testament*, God took upon Himself the solemn obligation of fulfilling its terms (Gen. 15:8–11). In spite of the fact that He can never die, God readily acknowledged He would someday suffer the fate of the covenant sacrifice when the time came to transfer the Promised Land to Abraham's ***Heir*** as an ***inheritance***.

"Four requirements determined whether a will was valid in the time of Jesus Christ."

Through His *parabolic pantomime*, Jesus pointed to God's earlier *testament* and publicly proclaimed that the time had indeed come for the incarnate God to die so that His estate could then transfer to His ***heirs***. Since the original ***heir***, Abraham, had long since died, there was also a concomitant necessity to determine who Abraham's ***heirs*** were.

Paul's discussion of God's *testament* in the Book of Galatians leaves no doubt those ***heirs*** were still alive, but they were not the Jews as one would assume. Paul wrote this to *Gentiles*:

> *If you are of Christ, you are seed of Abraham, **heirs** in accordance with **promise**.*
> *(Galatians 3:29) —my translation*

The Testament of Jesus

The Passover meal Jesus ate with His disciples just before His death was a *parabolic pantomime*. But the will He had made earlier was anything but pantomime.

Jesus' will was, in some ways, nothing more than a necessary formality to ensure that the will God had previously made could never be challenged under Roman laws of succession. Those laws governed ***inheritance*** at the time when Jesus, the incarnate God, died. Otherwise, the testament of Jesus Christ had no new terms to add to the will God had made previously.

Jesus made an oral will. It was, however, supplemented by an already existing written one. All three of the synoptic Gospels record the event. Matthew's account is the most complete:

> *While He was speaking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and His brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him. And someone said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You." But He answered the one who was telling Him and said, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, "Behold, My mother and My brothers! For whoever shall do the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother."*
> *(Matthew 12:46b–50)*

Mark's account is much the same:

> *His mother and His brothers arrived, and standing outside they sent to Him, and called Him. And a multitude was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You." And answering them, He said, "Who are My mother and My brothers?" And looking about on those who were sitting around Him, He said, "Behold, My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother."*
> *(Mark 3:31–35)*

***"The Passover meal Jesus ate with His disciples just before His death was a* parabolic pantomime."**

Do these accounts describe the occasion on which Jesus made His will? Judge for yourself. Four requirements determined whether a will was valid in the time of Jesus Christ:

1. The testator had to be a Roman citizen because:

> *Only a Roman citizen … could make a will which was valid according to Roman Law.*
> *(A. Watson,* The Law of Succession in the Later Roman Republic, *Oxford, 1971, pp. 11–12)*

The Gospel of Luke makes much of the fact that Jesus was born just in time to be enrolled in a census of the Roman Empire (Lk. 2:1–7). Enrollment in that census made Him a Roman citizen.

2. The will of a Roman citizen was normally given *orally*, most often accompanied by a written *testament*:

> *The whole will could be given orally and there need be no writing on tabulae … though it seems that in many or even most cases where provisions of the will were given orally there would also be writing.*
> *(Watson, pp. 11–12)*

The *oral* will that Jesus made was, in fact, supplemented by a rather lengthy written *testament*—the entire Old *Testament*.

3. Three witnesses could establish the validity of an *oral* will, but:

Those taking part in the ceremony had to be present for the whole time. (Watson, p. 12)

The biblical text is careful to state that a "multitude" was there when Jesus made His brief *oral testament.*

4. The naming of the heir(s) was the single necessary statement in an oral will made under Roman law:

The heredis institutio *was paramount and* ***the sole essential provision*** *of a will. (Watson, p. 40)*

Jesus' oral will met all four of these requirements. But when He named His ***heir(s)***, Jesus made special concessions to the demands of Jewish laws of succession as well.

If a person died without children under Jewish law, his estate became the property of his nearest living relatives. That meant Jesus' estate would have been divided among His immediate family.

Roman law had similar provisions, but required the testator who wanted to name other heirs to first ***disinherit*** his family before he could name the other heirs.

"The written testament *of God had seven* parabolic *'seals' on it."*

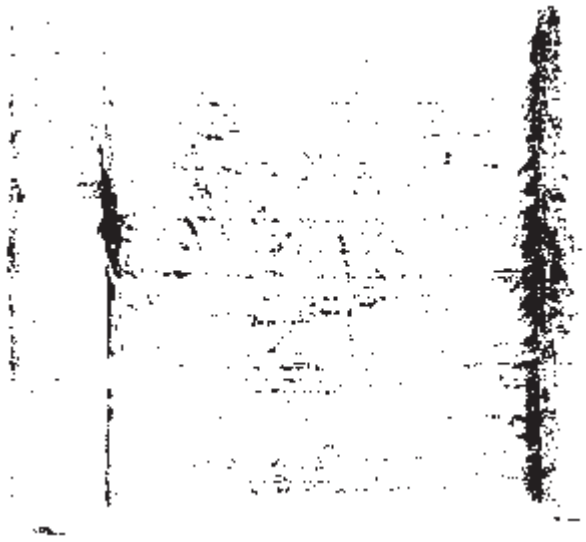
So that He could leave His estate—***the promise*** of God's salvation—to True Believers outside His immediate family, Jesus first ***disinherited*** His immediate family by declaring they were not His closest relatives. (See the explanation in *Not All Israel Is Israel*.) He then named others—those who met the required stipulations of the will—as His ***heirs*** by claiming them to be His nearest relatives. Thus He met the demands of both Jewish and Roman law.

The fact that Jesus first disavowed His mother, sisters, and brothers did not *mean* His family could not participate at all in ***the inheritance*** of His estate, however. Roman law allowed those who had been ***disinherited*** to be reinstated later as ***heirs*** under the terms of the will. The law simply required that the testator disinherit his legal heirs first to show that his intentions were to include others outside his own family.

Another legal technicality that has serious implications regarding the validity of Jesus' will is the circumstances of His death. The Gospel writers are careful to document that Jesus was not, in fact, found guilty and condemned to death under Roman law. It was only at the insistence of Jewish leaders that Pilate sentenced Jesus to death. Pilate did so only after three times declaring Him innocent (Lk. 23:13–22).

This distinction is crucial because:

The will of a person condemned to death on a capital charge and who was in fact executed was void. (Watson, p. 23)



Papyrus Rolls like the open one above were used in New Testament times to record all types of written information. It is thought that many of the New Testament books were originally written on papyri. In normal practice, a literary roll did not exceed thirty five feet. That probably explains why Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke and The Book of Acts as two separate publications. A papyrus copy of the Gospel of Luke would have been about thirty feet long.

It was customary to tie a papyrus scroll with one or more cords to keep it from unrolling and to seal each knot with a clay seal (examples on right). The unique characteristic of the seven seals on the scroll in John's vision (Rev. 5:4–5) is that they could not be removed. The symbolism in that reveals the scroll was no ordinary scroll.

Another unique characteristic of the scroll in John's vision is that although the scroll was sealed, some of the writing was visible and could be read from the outside because the scroll had been written "on the back." Scrolls did not ordinarily have writing on the back because the construction of the roll made it more difficult to write on the back.

In the case of the scroll that John saw — the Old Testament — the writing on the back represents that part of the Old Testament message that can be read and understood by anyone. How much of its message is actually open to be readily understood, however, depends on the length of the scroll. Since the entire scroll symbolically represents the total message of the thirty-nine books, it would appear that little of its total message is understood today. ■

Twelve Tribes, Seven Seals

In the final hours of this era, two additional peculiarities of Jesus' will are central to a comprehensive understanding of God's plan for these Last Days. God intends that His ***heirs inherit*** all that has heretofore belonged to Him. As Paul said, to this point those ***heirs*** have only had a *pledge of that* ***inheritance***:

> *You were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as* ***a pledge of our inheritance****.*
> *(Ephesians 1:13–14)*

Two distinctive features of Jesus' will make the distribution of ***the inheritance*** to God's ***heirs*** incontestable in court of human law. The first of the two is the twelve-fold division of God's estate.

It was not by accident that ***the promised inheritance*** of Israel in the Old Testament was divided into twelve parts and held in trust by the twelve tribes of Israel. (See *Not All Israel Is Israel*.) That is but one more bit of evidence to the ***heirs of the promise*** that the omniscient God knew beforehand the laws of the "fulness of time" that would govern the distribution of His estate.

Under Roman law it was:

> *traditional to divide the estate into twelfths.*
> *(Watson, p. 47)*

As a matter of fact, any will containing such a twelve-fold division was incontestable in a court of law.

Since Jesus held title to ***the promise*** of all that had been ***promised*** to *Corporate* Israel, His estate had already been divided into twelfths. (See *Not All Israel Is Israel*.) After His death, *the Twelve*—those disciples who were also Apostles—merely stood as trustees for the twelve divisions of His estate (Matt. 19:27–29). (See "Where are Jesus' Disciples?" ***The Voice of Elijah***, April 1991.)

Yet a second idiosyncrasy made the testament of a Roman citizen incontestable in a court of law. This peculiarity is of utmost importance for ***the heirs of the promise*** to understand what God is about in these, the Last Days:

> *A Roman will, when written, had to be* ***sealed seven times*** *in order to authenticate it.*
> *(The Expositor's Greek Testament, Vol. 5, p. 383)*

Sometime after the death of the testator, when the time came to divide the estate, the seven seals were then removed and the will read so that the ***heirs*** could ***inherit*** their share of the estate.

"Under Roman law it was traditional to divide the estate into twelfths."

The written *testament* of God has had seven *parabolic* "seals" on it for the more than twenty-five hundred years it has been in existence. Each *parabolic* "seal" seals and conceals a portion of the message contained in that testament. The time has now come, however, for the public reading of that will. Therefore, the *parabolic* "seals" must be removed.

The Apostle John described that occasion for us in apocalyptic symbolism:

> *At the right hand of the One seated on the throne I saw a scroll that had been written on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. I also saw a powerful messenger proclaiming in a loud voice: "Who is worthy to open the scroll and do away with its seals?"*
>
> *Nobody (either in Heaven, on Earth, or under the Earth) was able to open the scroll or to look into it. I started to weep uncontrollably because nobody was found worthy to open the scroll or look into it.*
>
> *Then one of the elders said to me, "Don't cry! Look! The Lion (Who is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David!) He has conquered, so as to open the scroll and its seven seals."*
> *(Revelation 5:1–5)—my translation*

John then goes on to describe in apocalyptic symbolism some of the events that occur as the seven seals are opened one by one (Rev. 6–8).

The prospective ***heirs*** of God are already receiving an invitation to hear the provisions of His will read and explained. As Jesus described the event in parable:

> *And when one of those who were reclining {at the table} with Him heard this, he said to Him, "Blessed is everyone who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!"*
>
> *But He said to him, "A certain man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many; and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.'*
>
> *"But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.' And another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.' And another one said, 'I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.'*
>
> *"And the slave came {back} and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.'*
>
> *"And the slave said, 'Master, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.'*
>
> *"And the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel {them} to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.'"*
> *(Luke 14:15–24)*

The one who has ears to hear will hear. ■

The Forecast

The Prophets of Israel used imagery taken from the religions of their ancient Near Eastern neighbors to speak in parables that mocked the beliefs of those ancient peoples. In this column we try to unravel for you some of the *parabolic images* used by the Prophets and explain how their prophetic message relates to current events.

Overcast: Jesus used the *parabolic images* of the Prophets both in His parables and in His *parabolic pantomimes*. He understood, as did they, the hidden message of the Pentateuch that stands behind those *parabolic images*. But one purpose of Jesus' ministry here on Earth was to explain to His disciples how those *parabolic images* had been used by the Prophets. Therefore, after He had spoken in parables to the multitudes, Jesus often took His disciples aside to explain the message hidden in the *parabolic images* He used in His parables. Luke tells us, however, that Jesus' disciples did not fully understand what He had taught them until He "opened their mind to understand the the Scriptures" after His resurrection (Lk. 24:45).

The *parabolic imagery* of "*The Light*" that Jesus used in His parables ultimately derives from the ancients' use of the sun as a symbol to represent the god who passed through the realm of the dead providing light to those who were following "*The Way*" through the darkness as they sought to attain resurrection from the dead. (See "The Passover Parable" in this issue.) The Prophets spoke of a time when the true God—the God of Israel—would enter this world, the realm of the dead, and provide *parabolic* "light" to those who chose to follow "*The Way*" to attain resurrection. Understanding the prophetic message, Jesus claimed to be the God who came into this realm when He said:

> *"While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."*
> *(John 9:5)*

Of all the Prophets, the words of Isaiah concerning "*The Light*" are probably the most familiar:

> *But there will be no {more} gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated* ***the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali*** *with contempt, but later on He shall make {it} glorious,* ***by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them.***
> *(Isaiah 9:1–2)*

Matthew tells us that Jesus, on the basis of this passage, moved from Nazareth to Capernaum and began His ministry there:

> *Now when He heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. {This was} to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, "****The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light, And to those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, Upon them a light dawned." From that time Jesus began to preach*** *and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*
> *(Matthew 4:12–17)*

Matthew's point is, at Capernaum, Jesus began His *parabolic pantomime* of the mythological sun-god who entered this realm, the realm of the dead, to "shine" by speaking the Truth concerning God's salvation—"*The Light*" that will allow the Redeemed of the Lord to see "*The Way*" through this present "darkness." Believers in the Early Church alluded to their knowledge of this particular *parabolic image* in the hidden message of the Scriptures by using specific *parabolic imagery* based on Jesus' *parabolic pantomime* of the Prophets' message concerning "*The Light*." They called *The Teaching of the Apostles* "*The Way*" (Acts 9:2; 18:25; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). Jesus, of course, also claimed to be "*The Way*," but that is a complete discussion in and of itself. He said:

> *"****I am the Way****, and the Truth, and the Life; nobody comes to the Father, except through Me."*
> *(John 14:6b) —my translation*

He was referring to the Prophet's *parabolic image* of Himself as the "Word" of God that comes down from Heaven like the rain. (See "The Forecast," ***The Voice of Elijah***, April 1991.) John played with the same *parabolic image* in the opening verses of his Gospel:

> *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*
> *(John 1:1)*

Scholars have written hundreds of volumes about the use of the Greek *logos* ("word") in the New Testament and Early Church literature. For the most part, they have opted to understand its use as a philosophical statement, never realizing the New Testament writers used it as they found it used by the Prophets—as a *parabolic image*. The Psalmist's use of the term in extolling *The Teaching of Moses* is the most direct:

Thy word is a lamp to my feet,
And a light to my path.
(Psalm 119:105)

The Apostle Paul's use of *parabolic imagery* has been passed over for centuries as simply metaphorical. Nothing could be further from the Truth. Although not understood by scholars today, Paul continually used *parabolic imagery* to refer to specific points in the hidden message of the Old Testament. He assumed his readers were as well aware of that message as he was. Most of them were. He had taught them himself directly from the Old Testament. His epistles were therefore intended for readers who knew and understood *The Teaching*. Paul used the *parabolic image* of "*The Light*" in his epistles to speak to his informed readers, especially in passages like the following:

But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief*; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.*
(1 Thessalonians 5:4–6)

giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in ***the inheritance of the saints in light****. For He has delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.*
(Colossians 1:12–13)

In other passages, Paul's focus is on this world as the realm of the dead from which True Believers escape by means of "*The Light*" that Jesus provides:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly {places}, in Christ Jesus, …
(Ephesians 2:1–6)

Clouds have long obscured "*The Light*" that once shined through the gloom of this present "darkness." And although it is still overcast now, the haze is clearing rapidly. And soon those who are "Children of Light" will be able to "walk" through the "darkness," completely protected by the brilliance of His "*Light*." The one who has ears to hear will hear.

Windy: The Hebrew and Greek terms for "spirit" are words that *mean* "wind." Therefore, the Prophets used the *parabolic image* of wind to speak in parables concerning our own time. (See "The Forecast," ***The Voice of Elijah***, April 1991.) The "winds" completely control our realm—unseen, yet with an unacknowledged power that is absolutely awesome. In the last issue I mentioned violence as but one example of something you can expect to continue its increase until the End.

The "winds" are currently working to recreate the basic characteristics of the ancient cities of Sodom and Babylon. They will ensure that a dominant characteristic of this final generation is homosexuality. Estimates as to the number of homosexuals will dramatically increase from current levels of one in ten men and one in thirteen women until the End. That is but one reason for the impending destruction. This generation has provoked the wrath of God because of our lack of shame. We have become like Sodom:

The expression of their faces bears witness against them.
And they display their sin like Sodom;
They do not {even} conceal it.
Woe to them!
(Isaiah 3:9a)

Therefore, the *parabolic image* of the ancient city of Sodom has already been applied to our day. (See "Is Iraq Mystery Babylon?" ***The Voice of Elijah***, January 1991.) Mystery Babylon is:

"the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt."
(Revelation 11:8b)

The "winds" totally dominate the minds of men using "vectors." As an example of how they use vectors, consider Hegel, Marx, and Lenin. They were vectors Satan used to bring about the horror of Communism. Homosexuality has recently gained an increasing number of outspoken vectors. Consequently, it is no longer considered shameful to be gay or bisexual. Those espousing this "alternate lifestyle" have so effectively distorted the biblical message that the Apostle Paul's denunciation of them no longer resounds with the awesome thunder it once had. Yet he vehemently rejected the activities of those whom God has given "over to a depraved mind," and he also said the wrath of God burns against those who:

although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice those things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.
(Romans 1:32) ■

Questions & Answers

The Voice of Elijah *publishes articles based on the findings of The Elijah Project, a private research group headed by Larry D. Harper. In this column we seek answers to general-interest questions concerning the findings, purpose, and philosophy of this project.*

Editor: We have received several letters recently asking what we believe. I have already dealt with that question in "Letters to the Editor," but it arises because of articles that have already appeared in the newsletter. Since you have written most of those articles, the question is valid for you to answer as well. So, what do you believe?

Elijah: If one is looking for a label to pin on me, the only one that fits perfectly is "Christian." I have not found any major creed of the Christian Church with which I am not in agreement. The Councils of the Church did not just contribute valuable discussions concerning vital Church doctrines. Their decisions concerning what did and did not constitute heresy were absolutely essential to the continued existence of the Christian Church.

As for other labels? … I've been called "iconoclastic" by students of mine in the past, back when I was teaching at the University of California. And I am. I see no reason to hold to some venerated doctrine or practice simply for the sake of tradition. In that respect, I can identify with the Greek Orthodox Church. Leo III was the original iconoclast. His attempt to purge the Church of the superstitious veneration of icons in A.D. 725 contributed to the separation of the Greek Church from the Church at Rome.

I happen to side with the Eastern Church on that one, not just in that specific case, but also in general. The modern Western Church is still, figuratively speaking, filled with all sorts of superstitious icons. There are today, for example, the revered doctrinal tenets that you hear stated over and over until they begin to sound like a broken record. Beyond that one point of identification with the Eastern Church, however, I remain with the Western Church, whatever its other flaws.

I also believe the Protestant Reformation was absolutely essential and divinely ordained in its origins. The abuses of the Papacy demanded it. In that regard, you can identify me as a Protestant. But as I wrote in one of the articles for the January issue, I believe the Roman Catholic doctrine against the lay interpretation of Scripture had some basis in historical fact. (Editor: See "The Authority of Scripture," ***The Voice of Elijah***, January 1991.) But I don't believe the priests were (or are) any more qualified to interpret Scripture than the layperson. That is because God never intended the Scriptures to be interpreted; He intended the Truth to be handed down *orally*.

The major shortcoming of the Protestant Reformation has to do with its appeal to the writings of Augustine. It should have gone back to the writings of earlier Church Fathers as well. Justin Martyr, for example, who was much earlier than Augustine, has some major contributions to make, as do Irenæus and Hippolytus. But I honestly believe the Reformation accomplished what God intended, so who am I to question?

In and among the various formulations and doctrines that have led to the plethora of Protestant denominations in existence today, I have found none with which I can fully identify. You could call me a "fundamentalist" in the denotative rather than the connotative sense of the term. But I doubt other "fundamentalists" would agree.

I don't think you could call me "Evangelical," but then I don't actually know what that appellation *means* even after graduating from a leading "Evangelical" seminary. Most of what I see happening in Evangelical circles since the Fundamentalist Controversy is a "pseudo-academic" reaction intended to "defend the historic faith" (whatever that *means*) against "liberal speculation." But hidden in all that liberal speculation is a veritable gold mine of hard facts and

relevant information that Evangelical scholars tend to ignore because they read it with the blinders of their particular tradition firmly in place.

At the same time there has been, among rank and file Evangelical Church members, a gradual assimilation of the most abhorrent doctrine of the "liberals" that the Fundamentalist Movement fought against. The "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life" message—now so prevalent among Evangelicals—is nothing less than what the "liberals" were saying at the end of last century. It's a far different message than that conveyed by Wesley, Edwards, Finney, and the other great Evangelists of the Protestant Church. It also disagrees with Paul's admonition to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling."

The doctrine of God's "unconditional love," if you can call it that, has been successful in bringing millions of people into the Church, but all those millions have done is recreate in the Church the lowest common denominator of the belief system of the person on the street. Many, if not most, of those new converts are interested in the Church primarily as a social organization. They have no real interest in a relationship with God or in comprehending the message of the Scriptures. I certainly don't identify with that. It seems to me that Evangelical scholars have defended the front door of their "historic faith" with all sorts of academic arguments while Satan has walked right in the back door and taken over the house.

I'm sure many of your readers have a genuine concern about the beliefs that prompt some of the things they read in your newsletter. In my estimation, that's a healthy response. They have a "want to know" attitude that questions where the writer is so they can figure out where he is going in regard to what he writes. In that regard, what I have to say to you now will probably leave them disappointed. Although I agree with the basic beliefs I have just stated, I don't have some apologetic agenda that seeks to defend any particular belief. On the contrary, I believe the Truth needs no defense. I also believe the message of Scripture. Where am I going? I simply intend to explain the various threads of that message from their beginning to their end.

Some of your readers will probably want to know what I believe for no other reason than to be able to pin a label on me. My tendency in that regard is to keep them guessing. I heard television commentator Harry Reasoner once say that labels are a convenient way of pigeonholing people so that one has no need to consider them further. Everyone does that to some degree or another. It helps us to simplify an incredibly complex world. And that's an especially legitimate exercise with regard to what you are publishing in ***The Voice of Elijah***.

Your newsletter isn't for everyone. But I think you've stated that from the outset. It isn't even for one percent of everyone. My personal recommendation to most people is that they pass it up to read the Sunday Comics. The Comics will be more edifying. And for the more than 99 percent of everyone that seeks a reason to dismiss what I have to say, I can provide a very convenient label they can pin on this particular donkey. Just call me a "religious fanatic."

Editor: You say that sort of tongue-in-cheek, but also with an "I don't really care what they think" attitude. Why is that?

Elijah: Because I don't. I've watched "Christians" over the last thirty years, as the United States has become a much more pluralistic society. Over that period of time and still today, that pluralism has challenged their basic assumptions and presuppositions concerning the relationship between society and their religion. It has destroyed the basic "Christian" value system in our society. In my view, that's neither good nor bad. It's just a fact that has to be before the End will come. What is done in public now was done privately before anyway. But the change has been, and continues to be, bewildering to many "Christians" who relied on and were comfortable with the façade of public morality that was the old societal norm.

I can remember the concern that the election of John Kennedy caused among Protestant "Christians." He was a Catholic. Having a non-Protestant as President was threatening to their WASP mentality. After his assassination, I observed their reaction to the "death of civil religion" and the era of "free love." I saw the activities of the "Christian" segment of society as they desperately searched for a substitute for their old civil religion and its fiction of a "Christian America."

I saw religious leaders running for political office, organizing Political Action Committees, praying for a revival in our country, and hoping to "bring America back to God." Finally, Ronald Reagan called for a revitalized belief in the United States as the divinely ordained "Promised Land."

Now, just since the Gulf War ended, I've watched on TV as the "revivals" of what appears to be a new civil religion have been held throughout the country. Various localities have been celebrating its

rebirth with a renewed pride in America as the military comes home. The majority of our pluralistic society seems to have been included in this new civil religion. "Christians" will probably readily accept it as a substitute for their old civil religion although it contains none of the public morality inherent in that old civil religion. I hope it survives. Perhaps it can provide a basic unity for the various segments of this new pluralistic United States. But I doubt it will. Too many conflicting opinions and deeply held beliefs are waiting their turn to be heard.

Under those circumstances, why should I expect that what I have to say will be heard, much less believed? Christians today are, for the most part, interested in appearances. If only a few listen and fewer still believe, I'll have accomplished what I have been called to do. I'm not expecting some review board to ascertain whether or not I'm successful. I'm perfectly content to leave that in the hands of God.

Editor: Another question about what you believe: A reader asked about a fairly obvious discrepancy between the use of the word "interpretation" in "Letters to the Editor" and the article you wrote in the April issue [Editor: See "Letters to the Editor" in this issue and "Where Are Jesus' Disciples?" The Voice of Elijah***, April 1991.] I hope that I cleared up the discrepancy concerning terminology, but there is still an underlying issue you need to address. If, as you said in April's issue, God did not intend the Believer's knowledge of Scripture to be a matter of "private interpretation" but a matter of learning the one true*** **Teaching** ***as explained to them by someone who had been taught that*** **Teaching,** ***you seem to have painted yourself into that proverbial corner I've heard you mention. You teach a specific interpretation of Scripture. If you weren't taught it by someone who was taught it, etc., you must have interpreted the Scriptures yourself. Therefore, your interpretation is just another "private interpretation." Your own words condemn you.***

Elijah: I can accept that.

Editor: That's all you have to say?

Elijah: What do you want me to say? That I'm a Prophet? That I've had some supernatural revelation from God? I can't do that. Even if I did, it wouldn't be valid. Someone once said that, I'm just quoting. [Editor: Jesus did—in John 5:31] God has never told me directly what I'm about; and I don't expect He will. He called; I answered. I was equipped, and I was sent. For what? To whom? Nobody ever told me in so many unambiguous words. I have some definite beliefs in that regard. I can give you events, places, and dates. But I only know for certain what I read in the Scriptures. So now we're back to "private interpretation" aren't we?

But you're not asking me anything new. I've been through this argument a hundred times in my mind. That's why I'm competing with biblical scholars on their own turf. I can give you specific hermeneutical principles on which the "interpretation" of the Scriptures that I teach is based. [Editor: Hermeneutics is the study of the general principles of biblical interpretation.] And I can give you rational arguments as to why those principles are the only valid principles. I can give you evidence as to why what I teach is true. I can give you a long list of bibliographic sources that support specific points in the explanation that I teach. But I can't tell you that I used any of these to "figure out" the message of the Scriptures. That's because I didn't. I only used them to verify it. But I can't prove that. So we're back again to "private interpretation" aren't we?

The question your readers should ask is not, "Where did it come from?" but rather, "Is it true?" If they think it is true, they should believe it. If they don't, they shouldn't. I'm not asking or expecting anything but a fair hearing for the message. If they have heard, I've done my part. God will handle the rest. But I've said it before, and I'll say it again. If anyone accepts any part of the message I teach, they should also know that I claim it has been given for the purpose of preparing the Elect for the coming delusion.

I'm flying by instruments. But I'm not at all sure that I know what all the instruments *mean* right now. So if your readers have a problem with that, I can understand. I have a problem with it myself. But I also stated something in the same article that your reader referred to, something that I firmly believe. If what I teach is in fact *The* one true *Teaching*, those who are seeking God with an open heart will know it—because of *The Teaching*.

Editor: But anyone who believes anything could say the very same thing.

Elijah: I know. That's what makes what I've been called to do so interesting. The issue of "one Truth and only one Truth" has always been there, but people don't want to address it. It takes away their feeling of security. But if you read the Scriptures carefully, you

will find that God has always tested those He has called. What better way to test a person's true intentions than to leave them in a land of liars for awhile? Those who really want to hide from His Truth can believe anything they hear that sounds pious and still lets them do what they really want to do. That way they can feel they're covered coming and going. But then, as Jesus said, "many are called, few are chosen."

Editor: Speaking of believing, what about the death of Saddam Hussein? That hasn't happened yet. Have you reconsidered what you wrote concerning that last fall?

Elijah: I've looked over the passage a couple of times since then. I wouldn't change much of what I wrote. My general understanding of that passage of Scripture remains the same, but I have noticed some specifics I think are probably more relevant to what is eventually going to happen. Let me read one part that I have reconsidered:

"The seed of those who do evil won't be named forever!
Prepare for his sons a slaughtering place
(According to the iniquity of their fathers);
They won't arise to inherit the Earth
Or to fill the surface of the Earth with cities.
But I'll rise up against them," declares the Lord of Hosts.
"I'll cut off from Babylon name, remnant, posterity, and progeny! I'll make it an inheritance for a porcupine and a watery marshland. I'll mop it with a mop of annihilation!"
(Isaiah 14:20b–23a) —my translation

Last fall, I applied those statements to all of Iraq as a prophecy of the destruction that was coming during the Gulf War. But since the ending of hostilities in March, I've begun to realize that the Prophet was probably speaking more specifically concerning the extended family of Saddam Hussein.

Editor: You expect some sort of mass extermination of Hussein's family?

Elijah: The text seems to indicate that's what's coming. It's hard to say when, so I won't even try. I made the mistake of not looking at the biblical text closely enough before and got into trouble because I didn't pay attention to its temporal indicators. I would rather avoid the same mistake again. The indicators are in this passage as well, I'm sure; we just won't see them clearly until after the fact. I would assume the assassination of Hussein's relatives in his hometown of Tikrit is in there somewhere also.

Editor: Why? Why would this happen now? Who would collaborate in Hussein's assassination? The conflict is over as far as the United States is concerned.

Elijah: The United States government is probably the best friend Saddam Hussein has at this point. The United States would hardly want to alienate the Saudis by participating in the overthrow of a government that the Saudis still view as a buffer between themselves and the radical fundamentalist government in Iran. But there are countries other than Saudi Arabia who would prefer to have Hussein gone at all costs. His own citizens want him out as well.

The only real refuge Saddam Hussein has now is in the old adage, "blood is thicker than water." His survival is crucial to the survival of others in Iraq. That means the coup, when it comes, will be a bloodbath. It will be carefully coordinated, probably by operatives from Israel and other countries, and it will be carried out with brutal precision. Under the current circumstances existing inside Iraq, the operation will take some time for preparation. But I still expect it to come, probably sooner rather than later.

Editor: I want to quote what you said in the January 1991 issue of The Voice of Elijah ***and get your comments on it. You said:***

"Right now, the major upcoming development the world faces is an increasing shortage of farm produce.… We are going to see a dramatic rise in the price of all types of agricultural commodities in the next three to five years.… The recent freeze in Southern California and the drought there and in other parts of the country and world are typical of what we can expect as a common phenomenon.

"These developments may or may not be linked to the 'greenhouse effect' or the burning of the rain forests, but ***unpredictable weather patterns*** *are going to reduce crop production throughout the world for the next few years. I don't see famine as the central issue, although it is certainly there in many parts of the world already. For the most part, I'm* talking about *a shortage of produce that results in increased food costs. That probably* means *increased inflation and whatever else might be involved in the economic ripple effect." [Editor: Emphasis mine.]*

What are your comments?

Elijah: If disaster relief and famine relief organizations were to furnish all the food needed around the world, and the world also supplied the agricultural produce needed

by the Soviet Union, the drawdown on world stockpiles will be tremendous. Add to that a poor harvest in one or more of the major agricultural producing nations. Then include a repeat of the Soviet's performance last year where they let their best crop in years rot in the fields. You have a ready-made formula for disaster.

Hundreds of dry-land farmers in the Midwestern United States have already plowed under thousands, if not millions, of acres of wheat that was not worth harvesting. Thousands of others have already harvested or are now harvesting light crops. Also, the drought is not over in California's Central Valley. And it's not just green vegetables that are being lost. My understanding is that whole orchards are dying for lack of water. Those will take years to replace. Grasshoppers are decimating orchards in Florida. Just watch the prices in the supermarkets beginning this fall. I expect them to start climbing and go up, up, up from there.

Editor: You were rather cryptic in that interview as to the Scripture from which you derive this particular expectation. Do you have anything to add to what you said in that interview?

Elijah: Not really. If it happens, it happens. That one event doesn't prove anything one way or another. But if it doesn't happen, your readers can ignore everything else I have to say with confidence that I'm wrong on other counts as well.

Editor: You mentioned "unpredictable weather patterns" in the quote I just read. I know you believe those are already developing. Can you tell us more about that?

Elijah: Since that interview, two major environmental developments have transpired that scientists expect will cause a disruption in weather patterns like the one I forecasted in the January 1991 issue. The one is the Kuwaiti oil fires; the other is the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo in the Philippines.

The May 27th issue of *Time* magazine had an article with "How Kuwait's inferno could cause drought and starvation" as the byline in the Table of Contents. The article describes how the oil cloud could force the monsoon belt to shift south and disrupt current weather patterns in that part of the world, leading to reduced crop production.

Then I heard on ABC News a few days ago that the volcanic ash from Mt. Pinatubo is expected to stay in the atmosphere for as long as three to five years, also causing changes in weather patterns. We can watch the beautiful sunsets and sunrises the ash will cause in the meantime but it should be just one more reminder that He is indeed "coming in the clouds."

I'd also like to comment here in another regard. The eruptions from Mt. Pinatubo and Mt. Unzen have ominous undertones. I expect more such activity from volcanoes all around the Pacific "Ring of Fire" in the next few years. You may not be aware of the fact that since the time of Christ there have only been fifteen recorded volcanic blasts like the two recent ones in Japan and the Philippines. Four of those fifteen recorded blasts have occurred just since 1980. All four were in the Pacific "Ring of Fire."

I've wondered for quite a few years how the absolutely terrifying earthquakes and volcanic eruptions that Scripture says will occur before the End could take place within the next few years. Now I think I know. I expect small to medium range earthquakes to become weekly events along the fault lines that make up the Pacific Ring of Fire. They will actually just be tremors preceding the devastating ones later on. [Editor: This part of the interview took place before the recent earthquake in Southern California.] I expect one or more later on will exceed 9 on the Richter scale. It, or they, will be felt literally halfway around the world.

Editor: You mentioned in that same interview for the January 1991 issue that you expected an "exodus" of Jews from South Africa to Israel. That hasn't happened yet. But there has been an unexpected airlift of over 15,000 Jews from Northern Africa. What is your reaction to that?

Elijah: In comparison to the influx of Jews from the Soviet Union, the few thousand from Ethiopia were just a temporary blip on the screen. I expect the immigration of Jews from all over the world to continue. The only reason for that belief is that the Prophets' *parabolic image* of the restoration of Israel demands it, just as the *parabolic fulfillment* of the "Babylonian prophecies" demanded the destruction of Iraq. The restoration of historic Israel is just a harbinger, a symbolic fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the restoration of True Israel that is, even now, just beginning to take place. As far as South Africa is concerned, I have no specific expectations in that regard—none that are mentioned in Scripture anyway.

Editor: We have had letters questioning what you think about such things as the "pre-trib" position, the "rap-

ture," and "dominionist kingdom now" theology. I know you don't use such terms, but how would you respond to inquiries like these?

Elijah: Toward the end of my final year in seminary, I listened to and observed acquaintances of mine with whom I had discussed theology over lunch for three years as they were suddenly confronted by the reality that if they intended to be ordained in a particular denomination, they had to have all their eschatological ducks in a row. I heard these men, who are now, I might add, of an age to be movers and shakers in their particular denomination, openly admit that they had no idea whether pre-trib, post-trib, mid-trib, or no-trib was true. They just had to convince themselves of the Truth of the position held by the denomination they were planning to enter. Those individuals are by no means in the minority.

Most of the people preaching from pulpits today don't really know why they believe what they believe concerning eschatology. They believe what is expedient and convince themselves it is right, or else they believe it because it is the first and sometimes only view they were ever taught. Rank and file Christians, on the other hand, by and large believe what they have read in best-selling books on prophecy or have heard from the pulpit.

I have had the opportunity to sit under the teaching of Dispensationalists, Pre-millenialists, Post-millenialists, Covenant theologians, "Promise theology" advocates, Catholic priests, and Jewish Rabbis. I can honestly say I learned a lot from all of them; and I appreciate what I learned. But while I was learning, I was observing. What I observed in them all is that the open mind closes whenever and wherever tradition says it must.

I had opportunity to sit under one of the most brilliant Jewish scholars of this era at the University of California. His body of work is an unending flow of insight into the laws of the Pentateuch. But scholarship demanded that he hold to and frame all discussions within the ludicrous, and to my mind, completely outdated, view that four or more editors compiled the information you now read in the first five books of the Bible. Consequently, he did. Therefore, the one passage of Scripture with the most potent evidence for the validity of his theories concerning the role of the Levites in connection with the Tabernacle remains off-limits to him. That's because the academic tradition that now prevails in major American Universities demands that he use only the evidence he finds in the parts of the Pentateuch they call the "Priestly Code."

The scholar's dilemma in seeking the Truth is, and always has been, the result of an acceptance of tradition for tradition's sake. Most scholars willingly accept some tradition in order to gain a forum in which to be heard. Most would never admit that as a fact, and they probably don't even realize that's what they've done. But peer pressure doesn't suddenly disappear after the teenage years. Everybody is expected to jump through somebody's hoop throughout their entire lifetime.

That's why I'm researching and writing independently. I couldn't teach anywhere even if I wanted to. The major reason for that is I can't, in good conscience, jump through the required "hoop," and that makes people nervous.

But to respond specifically to your question, I am not "pre-trib" or any other "trib" when it comes to eschatology. My particular view is that you will never fully understand what God is going to do tomorrow until you understand all that He did yesterday. And I'm not there yet.

Editor: I know you realize that challenging people's traditional religious views can evoke vehement attacks on your own. I also know that you expect that and sometimes say things in a particular way just to make people stop and think, regardless of how any dyed-in-the-wool traditionalist might respond. I've heard people call you "arrogant" because you express things with a certainty that others shy away from. Many might even call you "dogmatic." Knowing what you have been called to do, I hardly think either term applies. But those who disagree with you probably will. Having said that, we received a letter from someone, not a subscriber, who read your article "Where Are Jesus' Disciples?" in the April 1991 issue. The person evidently felt her beliefs threatened by what you wrote. She wrote,

*"Paul told people to IMITATE Jesus (***mimeomai***) NOT to be followers of Jesus like being followers of Marx."*

I mention this particular statement because I recall you mentioned the term* mimeomai *in a conversation we had while you were writing that article. Remembering that conversation, I would think it must be frustrating to you to hear comments like this.

Elijah: Actually, I appreciate the opportunity to read any letter from your readers. It helps me to keep focused

on those to whom I am writing. But I can understand the anger that comes when deeply held beliefs are challenged. I had to give up one of my most firmly held convictions in 1973 because I could not honestly believe it agreed with what I understood to be the message of the Scriptures. At the time, I was furious with God. How could He allow me to believe a lie?

My reaction to this sudden undermining of my "faith" was to immediately begin trying to construct, if you can believe the idealism of it, a complete epistemology. [Editor: Epistemology is the study of how we know what we *think* we know.] I read and studied books that I can't even remember the titles of now. I wanted to know how I could know anything for certain. But I kept coming back to the same fly in the ointment. You have to begin with some kind of presupposition, whether it be that the mind begins as a blank slate and must learn absolutely everything, or that a basic knowledge of God exists in every person and must just be "unmasked."

The major result of that study was that I began to realize that on every issue in life where a definite Truth exists, somebody has to be wrong, and that "somebody" could easily be me. I also concluded that the Truth concerning God and the message of the Scriptures was not a gray area. It had to be black and white, and God had to have revealed it. Since that time, I've been much more tolerant of other people's beliefs. But I also believe a lot of people have developed sincerely held convictions on the basis of lies they have heard and not reasoned through. What is that old saying— "The road to hell is paved with good intentions"? Perhaps that applies.

Concerning the quote you read: Writing articles for your newsletter is somewhat frustrating. But I have to write because God has called me to write. Yet every article is the same experience for me. I have more than enough to write, but can't express it all because I don't write quickly. Then the deadline comes, and I have to let things remain unsaid because I don't have time to write them all down, not to mention editing them over, and over, and over. I had planned to include a discussion of Paul's use of that particular term in the article in the April issue, but I ran short of time.

The point your reader made is valid. Paul did use the Greek word *mimeomai,* which is usually translated "imitate." But the Truth is, words can carry both connotative and denotative *meaning*. The word *fundamentalist* is a good example in this context. The original denotative *meaning* of the term was anyone who believed that the beliefs essential for salvation were the fundamentals set forth in a series of writings between 1910 and 1915. But over the years since, the term has picked up additional "connotative" *meaning*. It is now used by some with the basic *meaning* of "uneducated" or "unsophisticated" to derogatorily dismiss anyone who believes in the inerrancy of the Scriptures.

My point is this. You can sometimes pick a word in English that will translate the denotative *meaning* of a word in the original languages of the Scriptures, but one that will leave the intended connotative *meaning* behind. Even worse, you can translate using a word that carries over the denotative *meaning* from the source language but adds connotative *meaning* from the destination language. The English term *spirit* is, in my estimation, a word that has now lost much of its usefulness for conveying the original scriptural *meaning* because of connotative *meaning* the English term has accumulated over the years. I believe it would be better to just transliterate the Hebrew as *ru'ach* and the Greek as *pneuma*. That would completely eliminate the confusion introduced by the connotative *meaning* of the English term *spirit*.

The Greek term *mimeomai* does, denotatively, *mean* "to imitate." But a better translation, because of the word's connotative *meaning* in the Greek language, would be "to pattern oneself after as a disciple." The development of the connotative *meaning* of *mimeomai*, as contrasted with its purely denotative *meaning* "to imitate" or "to mimic," was strongly influenced by the Greek philosopher Plato who used the term in his development of the concept that the other realm was a "pattern" for this one.

The *meaning* that Paul intended was the connotative one the term had gained from its everyday use in describing the teacher/disciple relationship. The true disciple was expected to "pattern" his life after his teacher by learning what his teacher taught and, in turn, by teaching it to others. In actual fact, Paul's use of the term proves exactly the opposite of what your reader has written. Paul was admonishing his readers to continue in the teacher/disciple relationship that Jesus intended.

Unfortunately, those who were willing to follow the plan laid out by Jesus weren't able to make it work. They had to contend with the "learned scholars" of their own time. That's the way it is down here—everyone has a "scholarly" theory they want to be heard. So fallacy and fact walk hand in hand with tradition; and nobody pays any attention. ■

Parables/Prophecy

From Page 1

Christ would triumph. He would arise in the resurrection and, in *parabolic pantomime*, ascend from a mountain into the sky, just as the Egyptians believed the Pharaoh did after death. But as the Passover Lamb He would also give His life to protect those whom He leads out of bondage, through death, and into the resurrection.

"To understand the message that lies hidden in the Passover Parable, you must begin to think like an ancient Egyptian."

The Passover Parable provides the underpinning that ties together not only the message of the Pentateuch but the entire message of the Scriptures as well. It reveals that, just as Jesus stated in His challenge to the Jews who were persecuting Him:

> *"if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me." (John 5:46) —NASB*

To understand the message that lies hidden in the Passover Parable, however, you must begin to think like an ancient Egyptian. For that is exactly how the ancient Israelites who came out of Egypt thought, and they fully understood the message of the Passover Parable.

Hebrews, Canaanites, or Egyptians?

Lay Christians sometimes speak of the people of Israel who came out of Egypt and accepted the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai as though they were "Jews."

That is a common misnomer. But the Jews as a people, and Judaism as a religion, came into existence nearly one thousand years later during the diaspora, after Nebuchadnezzar had sacked and burned Jerusalem in 587/6 B.C. and had taken the Israelites captive to Babylon. Only then did the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob actually give up idolatry and seek the God of their fathers alone. With that, Judaism and the people known as the Jews were born.

Another common misconception is that the sons of Israel who lived in Egypt prior to the Exodus (Ex. 1–11) worshipped the God of the Bible in the same way as they did after the divine revelation came through Moses. That is a misconception only because prior to the giving of the Law at Sinai, these people had no definitive knowledge of the God Who is. God's revelation of Himself to the patriarchs was not for the purpose of establishing a religion; it was to give them ***the promise*** of a future ***inheritance***. (See *Not All Israel Is Israel*.)

So what did the people of Israel whom God delivered from Egypt actually believe? The answer to this question is not only pertinent, it is absolutely crucial. Only after answering it can we fully understand what God did in establishing *the Law of Moses* at Mount Sinai as the precepts of an entirely new religion (Ex. 20).

Nearly seventy percent of the names in that census list contain either El or Shaddai as prefix or suffix. Consider these names: Elizur, Zurishaddai, Nathanel, Eliab, Elishama, Gamaliel, Ammishaddai, Pagiel, and Eliasaph (Num. 1:5–15).

But what did these people actually know about El Shaddai, the God Who had appeared so briefly to their ancestors four hundred years earlier? Little, if anything, in actual fact. They knew from the Canaanite religion that the God El was the head of the Canaanite pantheon (M. Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts,* 1955).

They also knew that Jerusalem was the principal city where the Canaanite god El had been worshipped by the Jebusites in Abraham's day (Gen. 14:17–24). Even the writer of the Book of Hebrews agrees that the god worshipped by Canaanites in Jerusalem was, in fact, God Himself (Heb. 7).

It was not coincidence that the God of the Bible revealed Himself to the patriarchs by identifying Himself as a god with whom they were already familiar — El, the chief god of the Canaanite pantheon. He was simply speaking to them in terms they could understand. But He did so fully intending to use imagery from the Canaanite mythology to teach their descendants, the Israelites, truths about Himself.

"The Passover Parable provides the underpinning that ties together not only the message of the Pentateuch but the entire message of the Scriptures as well."

Scholars have customarily used the names that ancient people gave their children to determine what gods they worshipped, since the ancients often gave their children theophoric names containing the name of their favorite god.

If you look at the personal names in the census list found in the first two chapters of Numbers, it's obvious that the allegiance of the descendants of Israel who came out of Egypt was firmly fixed on El Shaddai, the name by which God revealed Himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen. 17:1; 26:23–25; 28:3–4; 35:9–12).

Was God actually the chief god among many other Canaanite gods? Of course not. He plainly states there are no gods other than Him (Dt. 4:35, 39). But it is always easier to take something that is known and understood and use that to teach about something that is not known or understood. That is exactly why God identified Himself to the patriarchs as the Canaanite god El. Having done that, He could teach the Israelites four hundred years later how He differed.

To the Canaanites, the god El was the creator of all things, "the creator of Heaven and Earth." He was the "father of the gods." He ruled over all the gods as the "eternal king" or "king of eternity." His title as king was "Bull El."

His authority included the right to depose other gods and establish as king those gods he favored. Only at El's decree could the god of wisdom, Kothar-wa-Hasis, "build the house" (an idiom with specific *meaning*—see future volumes in The Resurrection Theology Series) of the Canaanite god of the resurrection, the storm-god Baal.

The Myth of Osiris

For over three thousand years Osiris, the god of the blessed dead, was the Egyptians' most important god. From the Pharaohs who built the massive pyramids as their tombs, down to the ordinary peasant villager buried in a pauper's grave, every pious Egyptian was concerned with attaining resurrection from the dead. And all together looked to the god Osiris as their great hope.

"The people of Israel were familiar not only with the doctrines of Canaanite religion, but also with Egyptian religion."

According to Canaanite mythology, El lived in a tent on a mountain, at or near which was a river that served as the place for the judgment of the dead. The "assembly" of the gods met on this mountain, in El's tent. There they discussed matters relevant to his reign as king (E.T. Mullen, *The Assembly of the Gods*, p. 147). After the gods had discussed an issue, El made his decree from the mountain. His decree then became the law of the gods.

At the time of the Exodus, however, the people of Israel were familiar not only with the doctrines of Canaanite religion, but also with Egyptian religion. For over four hundred years they had lived in Goshen (Gen. 45:10; Ex. 8:22), an area in the northeastern Nile delta where the culture and religions of both Canaan and Egypt were in constant flux. The gods of both Canaan and Egypt were worshipped there.

Although they had continued to worship the Canaanite god El as the personal god of their clan for over four hundred years, the people of Israel who came out of Egypt were all too familiar with the gods and goddesses of the Egyptian religion. So it should not surprise us to discover that in revealing Himself to the people of Israel, God not only used the images related to the Canaanite god El, He also compared Himself to, and contrasted Himself with, the principal god of the Egyptian religion as well.

The primary sources of information concerning Osiris are the Pyramid Texts (texts found written on the tomb walls in the pyramids), the Coffin Texts (texts found written on coffins) and the Book of the Dead (a burial papyrus prepared for a high-ranking Egyptian official).

The purpose of these texts was to assist the dead in their travels through the realm of the dead, and thereby improve their chances for entry into the resurrection. Their primary concern, therefore, is with the events that take place between the time of one's death and the moment of resurrection. They do not provide a coherently written myth about the exploits of Osiris. For that, we must look elsewhere.

The only knowledge we have of an Egyptian mythology that stands behind the above-mentioned texts comes from Greek writers. The Greek writer Plutarch, about the middle of the first century A.D., produced the most complete account of the myth. Plutarch's purpose in writing was to provide Greeks with information that would help them understand the Egyptian preoccupation with death and resurrection.

According to Plutarch, Osiris was an ancient Egyptian king who was murdered by his enemy, Seth, who sealed him in a box and dumped the box into the Nile. The box floated out to sea and eventually washed ashore along the coast of Lebanon. But Isis, Osiris' wife, searched for the box, and after finding it, brought the body of Osiris back to Egypt.

Soon afterward, however, Seth found the corpse and cut it up into fourteen pieces, scattering them throughout the land. When Isis began gathering the members of Osiris, her son Horus engaged his father's murderer in battle.

Isis soon completed the task of gathering Osiris and Horus defeated Seth. Horus then applied the magic necessary to (as the texts say) "open the mouth" of his father Osiris, thus providing him entry into the resurrection. Thereafter, Osiris ruled in the west as king of the resurrected dead.

Egyptian Symbolic Ritual

Only recently have Egyptologists begun to appreciate the sophistication of ancient Egyptian theology. Not so long ago, many scholars thought it should be categorized as the product of some Stone Age-like "prelogical" thinking (W.F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, p. 122 ff.). The unstated premise was that mankind's ability to engage in logical thinking somehow began with the Greeks in the fifth century B.C.

"According to Canaanite mythology, El lived in a tent on a mountain."

As recently as 1961, a leading scholar in the field of Egyptology rather scathingly termed the Egyptian religious tradition a:

> *"vast accumulation of mythological rubbish inherited from the past."* *(A.H. Gardiner,* Egypt of the Pharaohs, *p. 227)*

His remarks are a comment on the fact that the Egyptians never seemed to

discard any formulated religious thought, no matter how much it might appear to contradict some other religious conception.

The sky, for example, was depicted in artists' renderings as supported by a goddess who looks much like she is doing push-ups. In other depictions, however, the sky was shown as being held up by four pillars at the four corners of the Earth. If you didn't like either of these explanations, there were others.

But the postulations of scholars in past years are demeaning to the accomplishments of the ancients and without basis in actual fact. They stem from their misunderstanding of the intentions of the ancient Egyptian theologians.

The Egyptians had already concluded that the other realm was a "tremendous mystery." (V. Tobin, *Theological Principles of Egyptian Religion*, p. 21 ff.). It was beyond intellectual comprehension. In that, they seem to agree with modern philosophers who contend that it is impossible to even think about God without placing limitations on Him.

Since the ancient Egyptians thought an intellectual understanding of the other realm was not possible, they used symbols to represent it. So the sky could be supported by a goddess, or it could be held up by four pillars. It didn't matter that the symbols appeared to contradict one another because the only purpose of the symbol was to describe some particular feature of the unknown by means of the known.

Having understood the purpose of the Egyptian symbols, Egyptologists now realize that, when combined, the two distinguishing characteristics of ancient Egyptian religion—ritual and symbol—explain far more about the beliefs of the Egyptians than has heretofore been recognized. That's because the Egyptians believed that by conducting symbolic religious rituals, they could influence the outcome of events in the other realm.

An appropriate example of the Egyptians' use of ritual and symbol is the burial ritual conducted after the death of the Pharaoh. After the body of the king had been embalmed and mummified to protect it as much as possible against decay, it was carried in procession down to the Nile and placed on a boat. The boat then carried the body across to the western bank of the Nile.

"Since the ancient Egyptians thought an intellectual understanding of the other realm was not possible, they used symbols to represent it."

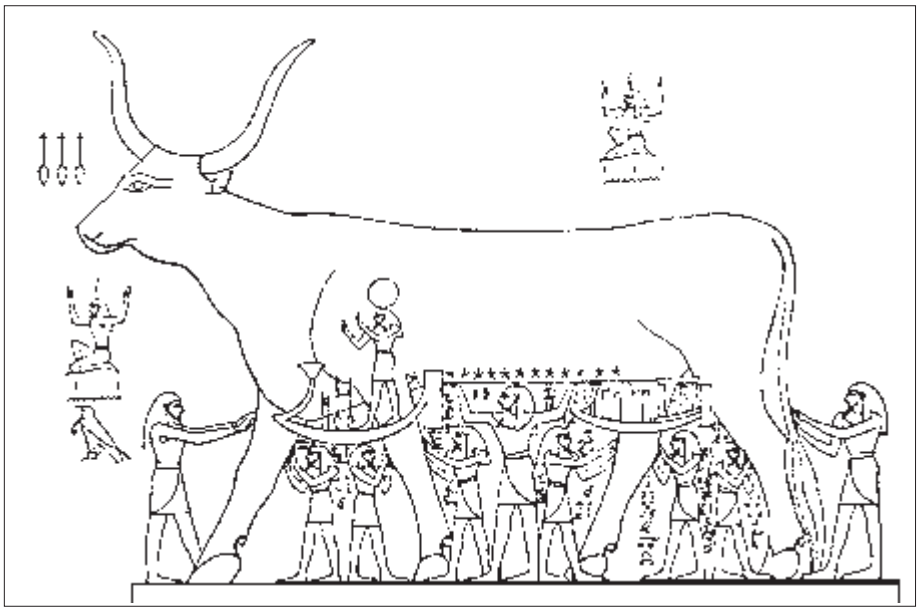
Once across the Nile, the body was led in procession to the base of the Pharaoh's pyramid tomb where priests conducted enigmatic magical rites that were supposed to "open the mouth" of the deceased king. These rites enabled him to be resurrected.

Finally, they laid the mummified body of the king to rest in the pyramid. There it awaited the reunion of spirit, soul, and body after the soul had successfully made its way through the realm of the dead (A. Erman, *Life in Ancient Egypt*, p. 320 ff.).

The ceremonial symbols of this ritual include, among other things, the Nile, the boat, the magical rites, and the pyramid. These were all intended to represent geographical features and events in the other realm. But to fully understand them, you must first understand the theology of Osiris as it pertained to the Pharaoh.

Pharaoh—Son of God

The ancient Egyptian Pharaoh was, in this life, revered as the son of god. He was Horus, son of Isis and Osiris. When he died, he passed into the realm of the dead with the setting sun. He passed through the underworld, the Egyptian version of hell, to the foot of the Mountain of God, where he was judged.



The Egyptian theologians also conceived of the sky as the underside of the Cow of Heaven, the goddess Hathor. In this depiction, the cow's belly is supported by the air-god, Shu. The sun-god Re is standing in his solar boat as it moves through the stars of the heavens.

The reason the ancients thought the sun-god made his circuit through the heavens and the underworld in a boat was because they conceived of the Earth as surrounded by water — the sea above and the sea below.

In keeping with this widespread belief, the Hebrew word in the Old Testament that is normally translated "Heaven" is a compound word that literally means "Sea of Waters." Likewise, the Hebrew word for the realm of the dead —*sheol* — is also a compound word. It *means* "Sea of El."

The Prophets of God mocked this ludicrous conception in their prophecies concerning the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. ■

After being found guiltless, the Pharaoh ascended the Mountain becoming one with his father, Osiris, who then ascended to Heaven to assume the throne as the King of Heaven.

"The deceased Pharaoh … proved himself to be Osiris, the firstborn of the gods, by … killing all other firstborn in the realm of the dead."

According to Egyptian mythology, the deceased Pharaoh always attained the resurrection. He thus provided opportunity for resurrection to ordinary Egyptians who sought resurrection in and through him. Any believer who successfully attained the resurrection did so by becoming one with Osiris, the Pharaoh who had died and had been resurrected.

In the burial ritual described above, the Nile represented the obstacle presented by the "sea" in the underworld. By transporting the deceased king's body across the Nile, the priests intended to ensure that his soul safely crossed the "Sea of Reeds" in the underworld. The boat that carried the body corresponded to that of the divine boatman whose services the deceased's soul must acquire when it reached the "Sea of Reeds."

The magical rites performed at the base of the pyramid represented the corresponding rites that must take place in the other realm after the deceased's soul crossed the "Sea of Reeds." Only after Horus, the recently deceased Pharaoh, had defeated Seth, the serpent or monster that lived in the sea, could he "open the mouth" of his father Osiris.

Finally, the pyramid represented the primeval Mountain of God from which the newly resurrected king ascended to take his place among the stars of Heaven as king of the blessed dead.

The Journey Through Death

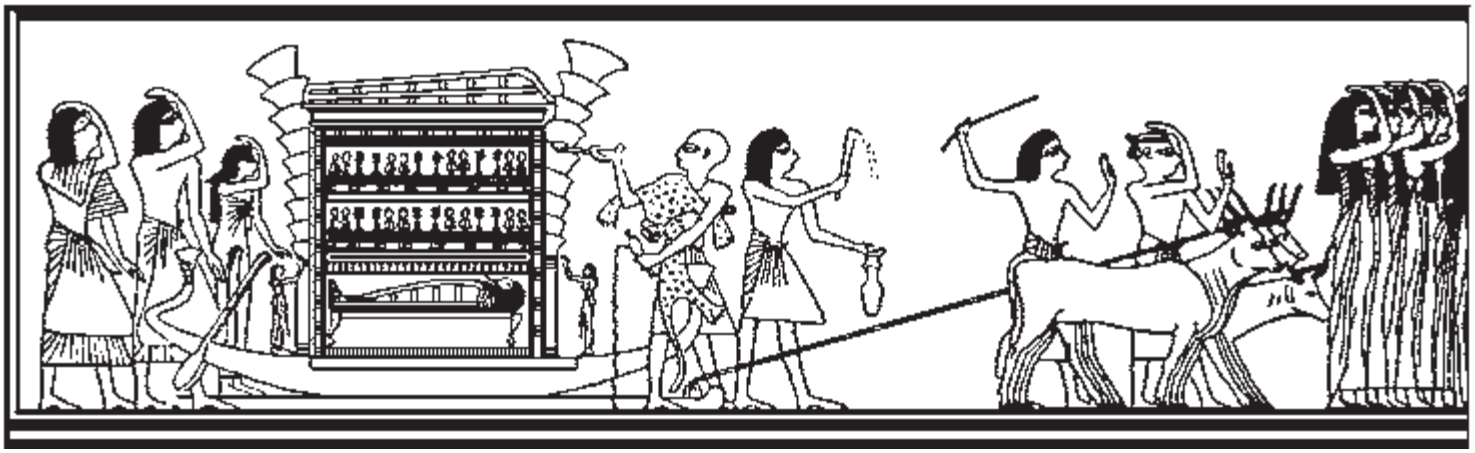
There was apparently no definite sequence to the events that the Egyptians thought took place in the realm of the dead. So for ease of understanding we will use the sequence God used in the Passover Parable.

By conducting the ritual burial of his body in this life, the Egyptians sought to ensure the safe passage of the deceased Pharaoh's soul through death. But they still believed that the journey was fraught with danger all along the way.

During his journey through death, the deceased Pharaoh, who was Horus, son of Osiris while alive, proved himself to be Osiris, the firstborn of the gods, by hunting down and killing all other firstborn in the realm of the dead. As you can see from the following, the Pharaoh (Unas in this particular text) was assisted in this by other gods:

> *Unas hath weighed his word with the hidden god who hath no name, on the day of hacking in pieces the firstborn.… Khonsu the slayer of the wicked cutteth their throats and draweth out their intestines for it is he whom Unas sendeth to slaughter; and Shesmu cutteth them in pieces and boileth their members in his blazing caldrons of the night. … The mighty ones in heaven light the fire under the caldrons where are heaped up the thighs of the firstborn … Unas is the firstborn of the firstborn gods.*
> *(E.A. Wallis Budge,* The Book of the Dead, *p. 94)*

This ritual killing of the firstborn seems to have been identified with the destruction of the damned in the realm of the dead. That was accomplished soon after midnight (Budge, p. 144).



The drawing above replicates one found on the tomb of a high Egyptian official at the beginning of the 19th Dynasty (ca. 1300 B.C.). The deceased is depicted as the god Osiris lying on the boat and held upright in front of the funerary stela at the tomb. The scene depicts the actual burial ritual, but also symbolically represents events that must occur in the afterlife. The priest holding the mummy upright before the funerary stela, for example, is dressed as the dog or jackal-god Anubis who was the guardian of the tomb. Anubis protected the mummy against the evil forces of the night.

The crossing of the Nile in the boat is not shown in this drawing but is depicted in other similar drawings. The mountain shown rising out of the picture to the right of the pyramid-like tomb is intended to represent the cosmic Mountain of God from which the deceased will ascend into the resurrection.

After killing all other firstborn, the soul still required assistance to successfully navigate the underworld since:

> *The only certain means of traversing the Dead-land in safety was to obtain the services of some benevolent god or gods, who knew the roads, and could act therefore as trustworthy guides …*
> *(Budge, p. 256)*

The underworld was, in some parts, a hot, dry desert; in other parts, it was swampy marshlands. But even though the divine guide led the deceased soul along the "right way" through the realm of the dead, the soul must always pass through a treacherous region known as the "Sea of Reeds" or the "Field of Reeds."

The "Sea of Reeds" was a marshy area subject to flooding, so its designation varied depending on its condition at the time the soul of the dead arrived. If the water level was low, the guide would lead the dead soul along the only way through the "Field of Reeds" (Pyramid Text 822).

But when the area was flooded, it became the "Sea of Reeds," and the deceased soul required the services of a god who could provide a ferry or a boat for crossing (Pyramid Text 1188). An alternate means of passage, however, was by the "parting of the waters," so the deceased could cross unharmed (J. Towers, "The Red Sea," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 18, 1959, p. 152, n. 19).

"According to Egyptian mythology, the deceased Pharaoh always attained the resurrection."

As he moved through the "Sea of Reeds," the recently departed soul bathed in its waters, performing a baptismal ceremony to purify himself of uncleanness. While doing this, he was required to recite:

> *I am the essence of a god, the son of a god, the messenger of a god; I have come that I may bathe in the Field of Rushes and that I may go down to the Field of Kenzet. The Followers of Horus cleanse me, they bathe me, they dry me, they recite for me "The Spell for Him who is on the Right Way," they recite for me "The Spell of Him who ascends" and I ascend to the sky.*
> *(Pyramid Text 920–22)*

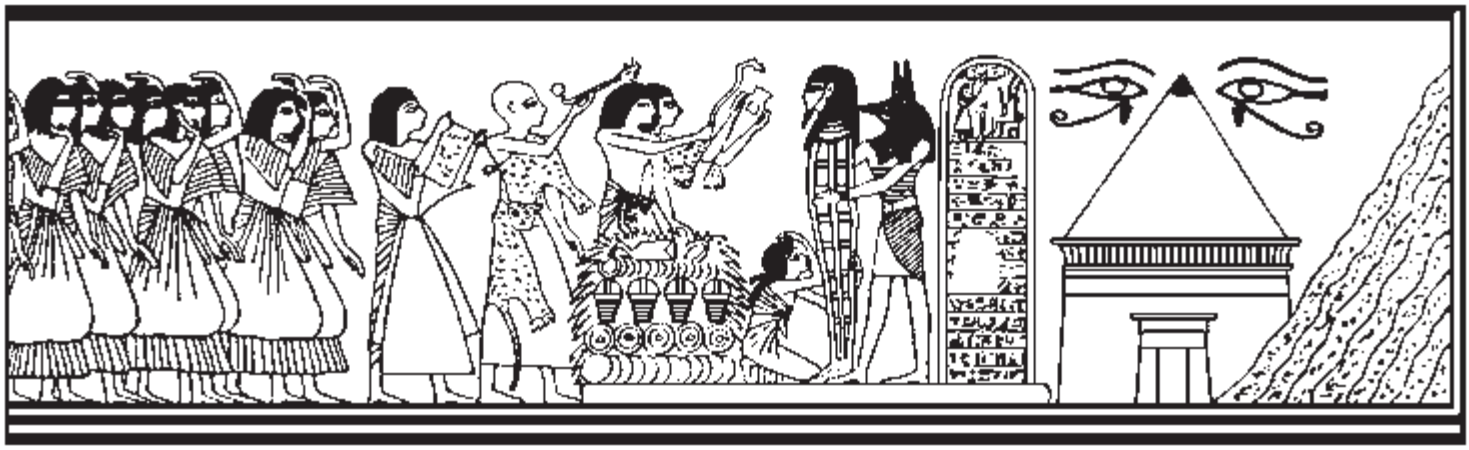
As this passage alludes, just beyond the "Sea of Reeds" lay the desired destination of the deceased, the "House of Osiris." This "House" corresponded to the temple at the base of the pyramid in this life. But as we stated above, the pyramid represented the primeval Mountain of God in the next.

So the "House of Osiris" in the realm of the dead was at the base of the cosmic Mountain of God. And only by being judged righteous could the deceased Pharaoh gain entry to the "House of Osiris." But having gained entry, he could then climb the mountain and ascend to Heaven from the top of the Mountain of God.

The Passover Parable

The ancient Egyptian burial ritual and the Egyptian theological concepts concerning the death and resurrection of the Pharaoh combine to provide the basis for the *parabolic pantomime* of the Passover Parable.

In directing the *parabolic pantomime* of the Exodus and wilderness wandering of the people of Israel who came out of Egypt, God intentionally conducted much more than just a gigantic mimicry of the Pharaoh's burial procession. It was a mocking, taunting denial of



The two eyes over the tomb were meant to symbolically represent that the two eyes of Horus — the sun and the moon—had been restored after the "eye of Horus" —the moon—was lost in Horus' battle with Seth, the enemy of his father Osiris. Only after the moon had been restored could the deceased enter into the resurrection. God used the loss of the moon, i.e., the three day "dark of the moon," to speak concerning the "three day" interval between the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

That Moses also knew of God's intention can be seen by his mention of Israel's need to make a three day journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to their God (Ex. 8:27). In actual fact, the journey to Mt. Sinai took the Israelites at least two months (Ex. 19:1). The three day journey between time of death and resurrection also lies behind Jesus' statements concerning the "sign of Jonah" (Matt. 12:39; 16:4). I will discuss the connection between this belief and sacrifice in future articles. □

all that pious Egyptians believed concerning the possibility of the Pharaoh's resurrection to new life after death.

Focusing His wrath on the ancients' belief in resurrection, God first told Moses to publicly proclaim to the Pharaoh that Israel, not their famed god Osiris, was the "firstborn of god:"

> *"Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord, "Israel is My son, My firstborn." So I said to you, 'Let My son go, that he may serve Me'; but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your firstborn.'"*
> *(Exodus 4:22–23)*

In having Moses make this declaration to the Pharaoh, God was announcing that He, not Osiris, was the Supreme Ruler of the realm beyond. It was a direct challenge to the Pharaoh's divinity as Horus, son of Isis and Osiris.

But then God demonstrated in symbolic ritual—*parabolic pantomime*—that "all Israel" was the firstborn of the god of the dead by destroying all the firstborn in Egypt except Israel (Ex. 12:29–30). This happened at midnight, at the time when the Egyptians thought the killing of the firstborn took place in the realm of the dead.

It is obvious that "all Israel" together is considered to be God's "firstborn" since Moses sternly warns the sons of Israel that:

> *"none of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning. For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite."*
> *(Exodus 12:22b–23)*

Why must every Israelite stay inside when only firstborn are being killed? The youngest female child in an Israelite family should not have been threatened by the destroyer. She could never be a firstborn. The answer is because "all Israel" together, not individual Israelites, was God's firstborn. It was just as Moses told Pharaoh:

> *"Israel is My Son, My Firstborn."*
> *(Exodus 4:22b)*

Therefore, any member of Israel would qualify as part of the "firstborn" targeted by the destroyer.

After the annihilation of the firstborn proved that Israel alone was the divine "firstborn of the firstborn" who qualified for resurrection, God presented Himself to Israel as the divine guide Israel needed to show them the "right way" through the realm of the dead (Ex. 13:21–22). And just as the Egyptian theology stated, by following the guidance God provided, Israel soon came to the "Sea of Reeds" (Ex. 13:18; 14:2).

Many students of the Bible are not aware that the original text of the Scriptures states that the sons of Israel crossed the "Sea of Reeds," not the "Red Sea." That's because the "Red Sea" has maintained its currency in translations since it first appeared in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Yet it could hardly have been in the original Hebrew since even the Latin *Vulgate* has the correct "Sea of Reeds" translation.

Speculation abounds as to what body of water the Israelites actually crossed when coming out of Egypt. It is not my purpose here to propose a definitive answer. Whatever or wherever the "Sea of Reeds" was, however, it was obviously one of the many sacred lakes throughout Egypt that represented the underworld "Sea of Reeds." That is demonstrated by the fact that God tells Moses to:

> *camp in front of Baal-zephon, opposite it, by the sea.*
> *(Exodus 14:2b)*

Baal-zephon can hardly be anything but a sacred area dedicated to the Canaanite god Baal, a god who, like Osiris, was believed to have died and risen again. The second part of the compound—*zephon*—is actually the name of Baal's mountain, *Zaphon*. (See "Questions & Answers," ***The Voice of Elijah***, April 1991.) That fact indicates that there was a mountain, or at least a small rise that could represent a mountain, in the vicinity of the "sea" that Israel crossed. That mountain was intended to represent the cosmic Mountain of God belonging to the god Baal that lay beyond the "Sea of Reeds" in the realm of the dead.

In accordance with the unique Egyptian theological tradition concerning the deceased's crossing of the "Sea of Reeds," God parted the waters so that Israel passed through unharmed (Ex. 14). Yet instead of continuing the *parabolic pantomime* with Israel at the mountain of Baal near the "Sea of Reeds," God ignored the mountain of the god Baal associated with the sacred "Sea of Reeds" Israel had just crossed. He led Israel on to Mt. Sinai, a mountain in the desert meant to represent His Own mountain, the cosmic Mountain of God on which the ancients believed the gods dwelt.

In bypassing Baal-zephon, God also dismissed Baal's claim to the title of "god of the resurrection." He would later, through the Prophets, make much of this initial contemptuous affront to Baal's power and ability to effect the res-

"The annihilation of the firstborn proved that Israel alone was the divine 'firstborn of the firstborn' who qualified for resurrection"

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"The Passover Parable is a powerful statement of God's purpose in His incarnation in the Person of Jesus Christ."

urrection on behalf of his worshippers. But at the time of the Exodus, it was enough to simply ignore the patron deity of the sacred "Sea of Reeds" through which He had just led His People.

The Tent of El

The Passover Parable is a powerful statement of God's purpose in His incarnation in the Person of Jesus Christ. But we have here only sketched with large strokes its basic outlines.

In leading Israel out of Egypt, through the "Sea of Reeds" and on to the Mountain of God, God made one simple but powerful statement in the symbolic language of the religion that the Egyptians knew and understood:

> *"When Israel, My Firstborn Son, dies, it is He, not your Pharaoh, Who will triumph over death, hell, and the grave, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. He will then declare His triumph over death by ascending from the Mountain of God to become King of Heaven."*

The only part of this statement that remains to be shown is how Jesus Christ came to be Israel. I have explained how in the first volume in The Resurrection Theology Series: *Not All Israel Is Israel*.

We have dealt briefly with just a few of the images that God used to teach the Israelites about Himself and His plan of salvation. Those images were taken from the Egyptian beliefs concerning resurrection. But when the Israelites reached Mt. Sinai, God began to correct their beliefs concerning this doctrine as well as their assumptions concerning Himself as the Canaanite god El.

Through Moses, God taught the Israelites the requirements that must be met if they intended to enter the resurrection. He did so not just with symbolic imagery from Egyptian religion, but also with images taken from Canaanite religion. One of those images was the Tabernacle.

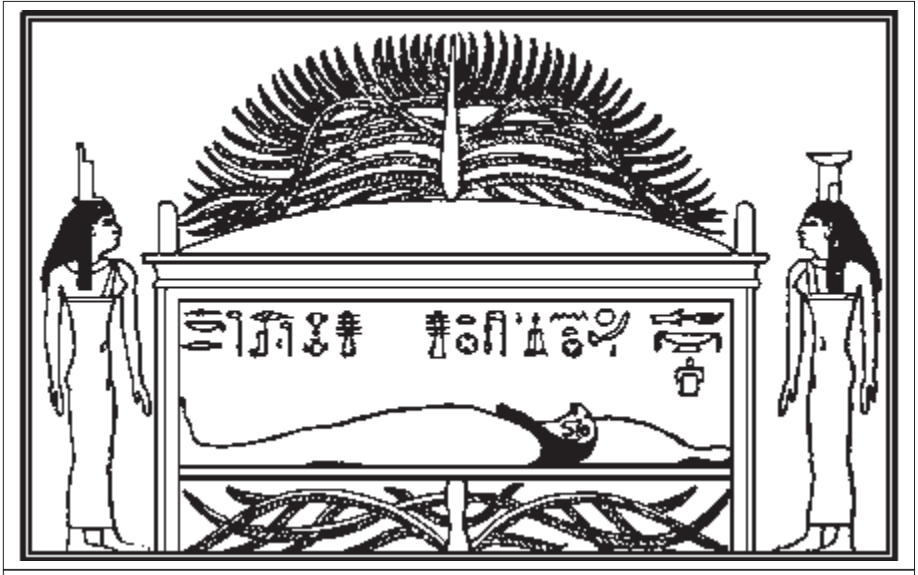
God had already identified Himself to the Patriarchs as the Canaanite god El. But at Mt. Sinai He set out to teach the Israelites more about Himself as the one true God, the God He had revealed Himself to be through the name *Yahweh* or *Jehovah* (Ex. 3:13–15).

Since the Canaanite god El lived in a tent on the Mountain of God, however, the tent in which the Assembly of the gods met, God told Moses to construct a tent, a tabernacle if you will, like the one he saw on the mountain. God told him:

> *You must erect the tabernacle according to its design that was shown you on the mountain. (Exodus 26:30) —my translation*

It is clear that God intended the Israelites to view this tent as the equivalent of the tent of the Canaanite god El in which the Assembly of the gods met. It is called the "Tent of Meeting." The Hebrew/Canaanite term translated "meeting" in this phrase is also used to describe the "meeting" of the gods in the tent on El's mountain in the Ugaritic literature from Ras Shamra.

But the "Tent of Meeting" is only one of many symbols in the Old Testament that God used to communicate His message to the ancient Israelites. When fully understood, that message describes in amazing detail the Person and work of



The deceased Pharaoh is depicted as the god Osiris lying in his Funeral Coffer beside the Erica tree. The goddesses Nephthys and Isis stand at either end as the protector goddesses of coffins and canopic jars.

The Erica tree represented the "flourishing" of the god Osiris in the resurrection. Different kinds of trees were planted around the pyramid complex as symbolic representation of the Pharaoh's resurrection and new life on the Mountain of God.

The resurrected king was thought to dwell on the Mountain of God in the Garden of God as the Tree of Life. (See "The Image of the King as a Tree," ***The Voice of Elijah***, April 1991, and also G. Widengren, *The King and the Tree of Life in Ancient Near Eastern Religion*, 1951.)

The belief that the soul of the deceased came back to life in a tree was a prevalent belief throughout the ancient Near East [see A. J. Evans, "Mycenean Tree and Pillar Cult and its Mediterranean Relations," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 21 (1901), 99–203]. The soul of the deceased was thought to live in a tree planted by the tomb. Sacred groves and stone slabs (the original tombstones) were often associated with the worship of the dead.

The ancient Israelites engaged in such idolatrous worship and the Prophets of God condemned them for it. Jeremiah is the most direct, condemning those Israelites:

Who say to a tree, "You are my father," And to a stone, "You gave me birth." (Jeremiah 2:27a) ■

Jesus Christ—the true Israel, the Firstborn of God. We will see just how that is in future articles in this publication.

Conclusion

The people of Israel understood the Passover Parable because it spoke in the religious symbolism they knew and understood. Moses also explained to them what God was doing (Num. 12:6–8).

Perhaps the most striking indications that the Israelites understood the *parabolic pantomime* of that first Passover can be found in Miriam's "Song of the Sea":

> *"Thou wilt bring them and* ***plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance****, The place, O Lord, which Thou hast made for Thy dwelling, The sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established. The Lord shall reign forever and ever." (Exodus 15:17–18)*

Miriam understood the *parabolic imagery* of that first Passover and the Exodus from Egypt. The people of Israel expected to continue on to the cosmic Mountain of God where the deceased king, Israel, would be "planted" as the living Tree of Life in accordance with the understanding common to all ancient Near Eastern religions. (See "The Image of the King as a Tree," ***The Voice of Elijah***, April 1991.)

Unfortunately for those who came out of Egypt at that time, God had other plans. For when they reached God's mountain, God told them they could not even touch the mountain, much less climb it to ascend in the resurrection (Ex. 19:10–15).

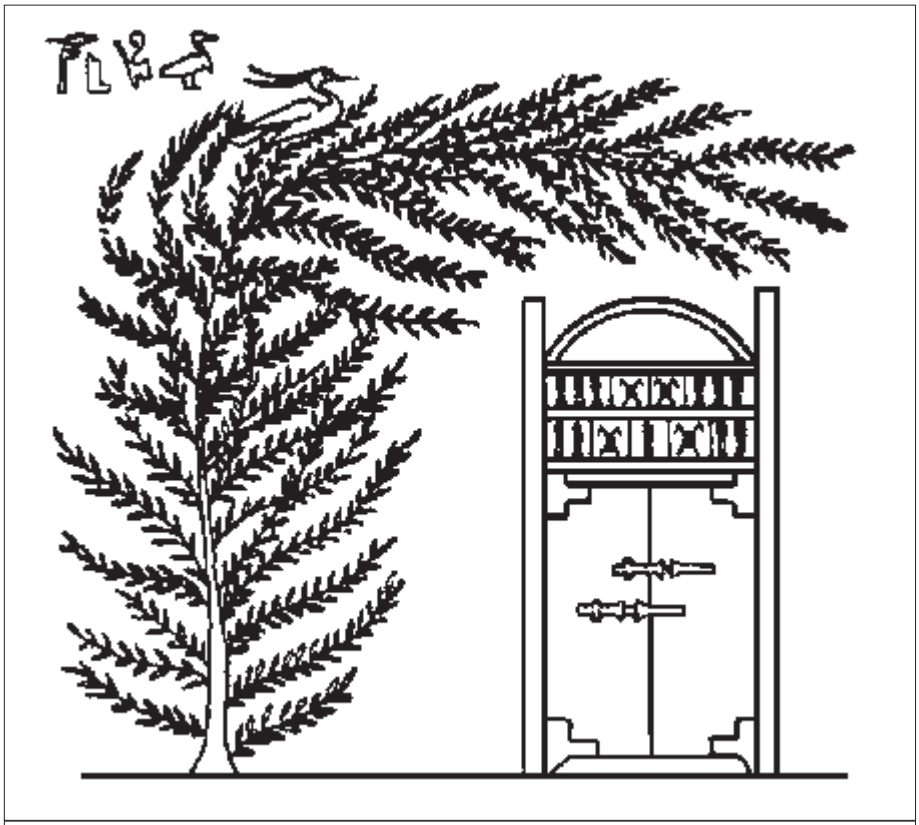
Then God began to teach them the requirements that must be met if one intends to enter into the resurrection from the dead. That "Teaching"—the Torah (*Torah means* "teaching")—provided *The Teaching* that informed the Early Church through the revelation of the Old Testament's concealed message that Jesus gave His Apostles (Lk. 24:45). (See "Where Are Jesus' Disciples?" ***The Voice of Elijah***, April 1991.)

"The people of Israel understood the Passover Parable because it spoke in the religious symbolism they knew and understood."

Moses told the sons of Israel to pass along to future generations *The Teaching* they had heard (Dt. 6:4–15). But they failed to do so because rebellious individuals went their own way and distorted God's *Teaching*, teaching instead things that came from their own minds.

Jesus Christ *restored The Teaching of Moses* by revealing it to the Apostles, telling them to pass it on to the next generation and even establishing the method whereby they were to accomplish that. (See "Where Are Jesus' Disciples?" ***The Voice of Elijah***, April 1991.) But the Church did exactly what *Corporate* Israel had done. They distorted the Truth concerning God's works and His Word. Less than a century after the death of the Apostles, *The Teaching* was again lost.

God is now at work "*restoring* all things" concerning *The Teaching*. But He is not requiring that we pass it along to the next generation. It is much too late for that. As Jesus said, "This generation will not pass …" (Matt. 24:34). Those who hear must use what they hear to save themselves. Those who have ears to hear will hear. But remember Lot's wife. ■



The symbolic depiction of the deceased Pharaoh as a tree can be seen in the above artist's rendition taken from a tomb. The bird in the branches of the tree is the normal hieroglyphic representation for the soul. Above the bird-soul is written the title "Soul of Osiris" in hieroglyphic writing, to indicate that the soul dwelling in the branches of the tree as a bird is the soul of Osiris.

The Prophet Ezekiel used the image of the soul as a bird to speak concerning the provision Jesus Christ as the Tree of Life makes for the Redeemed souls who dwell in His branches like the birds of the air (Ez. 17:22–24). (See also "The Image of the King as a Tree," ***The Voice of Elijah***, April 1991.) ■

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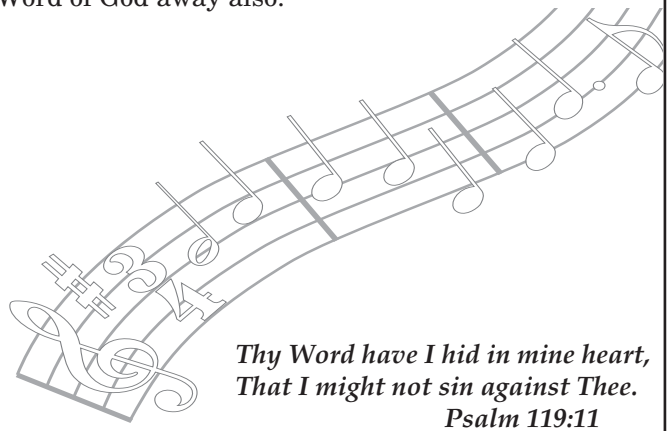
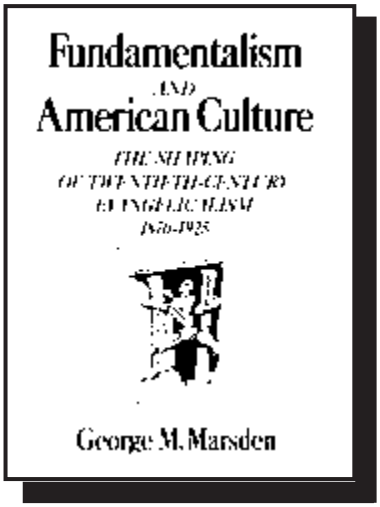


Thy Word have I hid in mine heart,
That I might not sin against Thee.
Psalm 119:11

To Order, use the Order Form

Where Did That Come From?

- ✣ How did the novel notion that God loves everybody find its way into fundamentalist beliefs?
- ✣ Where did Dispensationalism originate?
- ✣ How did it come to be a part of fundamental doctrine?
- ✣ How did Fundamentalism become identified with ignorance and narrow-mindedness?
- ✣ What did William Jennings Bryan, former Democratic Party leader, presidential candidate, and Secretary of State for Woodrow Wilson, contribute to the fundamentalist image?



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What if all Israel was "cut off?"

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