INSIDE

Volume 4, Number 1 January 1993

Did You *Mean* That Literally?

A notion has been floating around Christian circles for some years now that would be downright humorous to any True Believer who knows Early Church history—if it weren't for its incredibly sinister downside. You've probably heard it eloquently propounded by some fervent proponent at one time or another. Some of you may even think you believe it, not knowing exactly to what you have acceded. I'm referring to that nebulous belief that masquerades as a legitimate and viable Christian doctrine under the rubric "literal interpretation of the Bible."

If you have uncritically accepted that belief in one of its more irrational, metamorphic stages where everything in the Old Testament can only be understood "literally," perhaps you'll think differently after a short survey of the history of biblical interpretation. Of course, you may be one of those so enamored by current tradition that you place no value at all on what the Early Church believed. In that case you should stop reading right now. You'll find little to interest you in this article.

Not only did Early Church leaders not hold such an absurd belief, they rejected it outright. Furthermore, belief in the validity of what is today known as "literal interpretation" held no widespread currency in the Church until just over a hundred years ago.

That's right, the absolute insistence on literal interpretation of the Scriptures is a relatively new idea as far as Christianity is concerned. So if you place any value at all on the beliefs of traditional Christianity, especially those held by the Early Church, you'd best look closely at what you have read or heard about literal interpretation. This particular tenet is not an outright lie, but in some of its current formulations, it's certainly a distortion of the Truth.

Traditionally Speaking

Before we begin our investigation into the history of biblical interpretation, a few words about tradition are in order. There are three things anyone seeking the Truth should keep in mind regarding tradition. The first is that, to some degree, we have all grown up as the intellectual product of our religious environment (or lack thereof). Most peo-

*See **Literally?** on Page 4*

The Origen of Folly

(This article is intended as a follow-up to the lead article in this issue—"Did You Mean *That Literally?" You should read that article first.)*

Before you get out your red marker to correct any misspelling in the headline above, let me explain. During the mid-to-late second century, Satan brought various forces to bear on the orthodox Church simultaneously. Political persecution and the worldly behavior of some Church leaders were just two of the pressures put upon it. The most devastating, yet least understood, satanic influence the Church felt was the corruption of *The Apostolic Teaching* by the teachings of heretics who interpreted the Scriptures for themselves. The threat posed by heresy contaminating the Truth led the Church into an ever-increasing reliance on the "rule of faith"—that is, an abbreviated doctrinal statement of faith—rather than complete reliance on the in-depth instruction of Believers in *The Apostolic Teaching*. Hence, over time, and as fewer and fewer Church leaders were thoroughly instructed in *The Apostolic Teaching*, more and more of *The Teaching* was lost and replaced by near-truth, half-truth, or outright lies.

Another obvious, but little recognized, development also occurred within the orthodox Church during that same time frame: Church leadership was becoming more and more the occupation of philosophers trained in the exegetical methods of interpretation used by the various schools of Greek philosophy. The philosophical baggage these men brought with them from their former tradition ultimately proved too much for *The Apostolic Teaching*, and it began to succumb to their intellectual speculation, the very thing for which the orthodox Church had earlier condemned the Gnostics. (See "Gnostic Beliefs and Early Church Teaching," ***The Voice of Elijah***, October 1991.)

*See **Origen** on Page 22*

THE VOICE of ELIJAH

Published Quarterly
by Voice of Elijah, Inc.

M. H. Clay,
Executive Editor
Sara Brooks,
Managing Editor

Volume 4
Number 1
January 1993

All correspondence should be addressed to:

Voice of Elijah, Inc.
P.O. Box 28201
Dallas, TX 75228

Subscription rates:
(1 year, U.S. Funds)

U.S.	$24.00
Canada	$30.00
Abroad	$50.00

Articles published
by permission of
The Elijah Project.

Except when otherwise noted,
Scripture taken from the
NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE,
© 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972,
1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988.
The Lockman Foundation.
Used by permission.

Bolded Scripture reflects the
emphasis of the author.

Letters to the Editor

1992 was a good year for all of us at ***The Voice of Elijah***. *Not All Israel Is Israel* was at the printer when the year began. In May, *The Advent of Christ and AntiChrist* was published and made available to Monthly Contributors. Shortly thereafter we were able to make available a condensed version of that book, *The AntiChrist*, to all subscribers. Those three books and the numerous articles that have come out this last year have given True Believers some meat in their diet. In addition, these publications—*The Advent of Christ and AntiChrist* especially—provided Larry with new insight into his calling and the ministry of ***The Voice of Elijah***. I encourage you to read "Questions & Answers" in this issue for more on that subject.

We are now looking forward to reaching out with God's Word in 1993 and beyond. One thing that you shouldn't expect to see from ***The Voice of Elijah*** this year is a "lightening up" of the articles. If you recall, last January we informed subscribers that The Elijah Project intended to, and I quote, "'lighten up' the content of the articles in the newsletter." Obviously, that didn't happen. The information Larry is presenting has proven to be too important for a superficial treatment. He has found it requires in-depth coverage just to convey the basic message. There is already so much that isn't being said because of time and space restrictions. I believe it would be unfair to those of you who are True Believers if we did "lighten up." Besides, more people have written to say they like the newsletter as it is than have to say they don't. Therefore, you can look forward to more articles with the same in-depth coverage you've learned to expect from us. They may take a little longer to read, but the benefits always exceed the cost.

God willing, 1993 should finally see the publication of *The Mystery of Scripture* (among other things). We received a letter just the other day asking about this publication:

> *I'm waiting for the book I ordered … I know that you said the book would be ready for mailing in the 4th quarter of this year, 1992. The book to which I refer, is,* The Mystery of Scripture.… *I'll be watching my mail box for the book!*
> *Neal M., Groveton, TX*

I know many of you are asking the same question, so I decided to include an excerpt from the letter Michael Clay wrote to our Monthly Contributors in the December 1992 issue of ***The Voice of Elijah Update***:

> *If you are growing as impatient to see a copy of* The Mystery of Scripture *as I am (and I'm sure many of you are), I can assure you the wait will eventually be well worth it. But as I've heard Larry say many times—"all in God's time." For the past several weeks, he has been wrestling with several hundred Old Testament texts that he must use to show you how Israel lost* The Teaching of Moses *concerning Jesus Christ. Just recently he told me a bit about the* meaning *of the two idi-*

oms "to walk in The Way*" and "to depart/turn aside from* The Way*," as well as other idioms that are related to those particular idioms.*

As I talked with Larry about his progress in writing The Mystery of Scripture, *I found myself amazed at the amount of information he has assembled. You tell me. What would you think* The Mystery of Scripture, The Way *of the Lord, Antiochus Epiphanes, and Clement of Alexandria have in common? After just a short conversation, I came away astounded by the sudden awareness that there is much more to the Scriptures than I would have ever imagined. And I've known about* The Teaching *for over ten years! That's why I'm anxious to learn all the details.*

From what I gather, Larry has a long way yet to go before he can put all the information into a form we can easily digest. Be patient. I believe you will eventually see a huge body of evidence that supports the premise that Israel (and the Church) lost knowledge of ("turned away from") The Teaching of Moses. *It will probably become so obvious to many of you that you begin to wonder why nobody has seen it before. Who would have thought the following verse contains two Hebrew idioms with precise* meaning*:*

"Therefore, you shall ***keep the commandments*** *of the Lord your God, to* ***walk in His ways*** *and to fear Him." (Deuteronomy 8:6)*

It may surprise you to learn that originally, The Mystery of Scripture *was slated for publication in January of 1991 (the same time* Not All Israel Is Israel *was to be published). Since the book is now nearly two years overdue, I thought you might be interested in knowing why it is taking so much longer than planned. So let me give you a summary of the project's evolution.*

When the idea of the book was conceived, I was going to write it. And it wasn't even going to be a book. It was intended to be just a booklet that presented selected passages from Jewish Apocalyptic literature, from the writings of the Gnostics, and from the Early Church Fathers. It would (hopefully) show you that The Teaching *of the Gospel of Jesus Christ hidden in the Old Testament was known to Israel prior to the revelation Jesus gave the Apostles in the first century. At first, we expected it to be fifty to seventy pages. However, before long I had assembled a large amount of relevant material, and a lot of it contained statements beyond my own ability to understand. Consequently, it soon became evident, as I discussed my research with Larry, that I did not have sufficient knowledge of* The Teaching of the Prophets *to write the book myself.*

That being the case, we decided to make the book a joint project. I would continue to do research and present my findings to Larry for review. He would edit any accompanying text I wrote and would also write a section dealing with the Old Testament prophetic message. We now believed the book would cover 150 pages or so, and the publication date was duly postponed to the second quarter of this year (until after Larry had finished Not All Israel Is Israel*). You should understand, however, that we were still thinking the only accompanying text would be a brief commentary providing the reader an historical context for reading the selected passages.*

Then came the information you found in the April 1992 issue of the newsletter. That was followed shortly thereafter by the publication of The Advent of Christ and AntiChrist. *The information in those two publications shocked all of us here at* **The Voice of Elijah**. *We have understood for several years that our role in the over-all plan of God is to assist Larry in the fulfillment of his calling. But, as Larry explained in the preface to* The Advent of Christ and AntiChrist, *we have never known the* ***why*** *of this ministry. When the information concerning the Antichrist came out this past spring, it brought home to us the reality of the imminent Return of Jesus Christ and the fact that every True Believer will soon have to make some crucial decisions concerning what they believe to be the Truth. The truly remarkable things Larry saw in the literature and history of the Intertestamental Period also helped us to identify and define some of Satan's goals in these final days. (See "Questions & Answers,"* **The Voice of Elijah**, *April 1992.) That abruptly changed the focus of our ministry and gave it new urgency.*

As you now know, if what we believe is true, The Advent of Christ and AntiChrist *contains information vital to any Believer who is serious about preparing for the Return of Jesus Christ. All of that information surfaced, however, only after Larry started looking closely at the Jewish Apocalyptic and Early Church literature himself in preparing to write* The Mystery of Scripture. *I doubt anyone else would have seen the* significance *of what Irenæus and Hippolytus had to say about the Antichrist. I had read the same material in the research I had done for* The Mystery of Scripture, *and I saw nothing of real value in what they had written. However, now that Larry has provided commentary on what they wrote, it all makes perfect*

sense. That's just like everything else I've learned so far: once the evidence is presented, the conclusions speak for themselves.

By the time The Advent of Christ and AntiChrist *was published, it was obvious to me that Larry was going to have to research and write the entirety of* The Mystery of Scripture. *If there were specific points to be drawn from the texts I had assembled, he was going to have to study those texts himself. So, I gave him the notes I had made, and we set a fourth quarter publication date. Well, now the fourth quarter is almost over, and we still have no final manuscript ready to print. From what I hear, the publication has now ballooned to more than 300 pages and could well be on its way to two volumes of 250 to 300 pages each.*

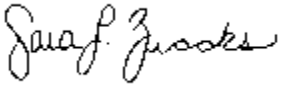
As you can see, our projected publication date has slipped more than a few times already, but I honestly expect to see a copy of the book(s) by next summer. I know the wait will be worth it, and as Larry said in the last issue of **The Voice of Elijah Update***:*

That's what true faith is all about—faithfully, patiently waiting for the One Who was, and is, in Himself the embodiment of the totality of The Teaching.
*(***The Voice of Elijah Update***, November 1992, p. 12)*

Again, that was taken from the December 1992 issue of ***The Voice of Elijah Update***. We sincerely apologize for the delay in releasing *The Mystery of Scripture*. However, it sounds like this particular publication is going to be exciting for all of us. But if you have grown tired of waiting for your copy, just write us, and we'll promptly return the money you sent.

As 1993 begins, those of us at ***The Voice of Elijah*** trust that, over the coming year, many more True Believers will gain access to this newsletter and the other publications we make available. We know the information we provide will become ever more important to True Believers who are seeking to overcome the world in these Last Days. That's why I was heartened that some of you gave gift subscriptions to ***The Voice of Elijah*** to those on your Christmas list. If you find value in what you read here, I encourage you to continue making this information available to others you know who might also recognize its value. Talk to them about ***The Voice of Elijah***. Let them read yours. Or, send us their names and addresses. We'll be glad to send them information about ***The Voice of Elijah***. We've added a new section to the order form at the back of the issue just for that purpose. With your help I know we can reach every True Believer with *The Teaching* before it's too late.

I can't close without briefly mentioning the subject matter of this issue—the interpretation of the Scriptures and the role it played in the Church's loss of *The Apostolic Teaching*. I think you will be amazed to learn how Satan has used individuals and their various methods of interpretation in his attempt to make an accurate understanding of the Scriptures impossible. Thankfully, he has failed. And now True Believers are going to understand the Truth in spite of all that he could do. Have a joyous New Year ("walking in" *The Light* of the Truth).



Literally?

From Page 1

ple are open-minded enough to admit that. It's rather difficult to deny inasmuch as the facts are rather obvious. Most Christians remain Christian in their beliefs, Jews remain Jewish, Muslims cling to Islamic doctrines, etc.

That predisposition holds true for various divisions within a religion as well. Therefore, the Catholic often remains Catholic, the Sunni Muslim remains Sunni Muslim, the Reformed Jew remains Reformed, etc.

All the above being the case, we can say generally that the tradition we learn first tends to determine what we believe. Therefore, if the religious belief system you now have includes literal interpretation as a foundational tenet, you may find it difficult to read this article. If you love the Truth, however, you'll just have to face the facts: The tare seeds sown in the Church by the Adversary can sometimes be found in the most unlikely places. Although fundamentalist Christian beliefs most nearly represent the historic Truth of Christianity, those beliefs are not entirely free from Satan's corruption.

The second point that should be obvious to any student of religion is that every religious tradition changes over time. There are at least two sources for the transformation of religious beliefs. There is, first of all, an external threat posed by new converts. Former religious beliefs and old social customs can sometimes prove hard to relinquish. That's why converts who switch from one religion to another often take with them a bit of their old mind-set. Consequently, you can find in the history of the Christian Church numerous cases where one individual or group of individuals produced a distortion of Christian tradition by syncretistically blending it with some other religion or using it for their own psychological gain.

Christianity, and Protestant Christianity in particular, being as missions oriented as it is, has had a fairly steady influx of new converts over the last three hundred years. Every convert has had the potential to take traditional Protestant Christian belief in some new direction.

"The Protestant tradition itself was established by men like Martin Luther (ca. 1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–1564) during the Protestant Reformation because they realized the Catholic Church had strayed from the tradition of the Early Church."

Many did just that. We'll find that to be the case with the different beliefs concerning interpretation of the Scriptures. (See "The Origen of Folly" in this issue.)

The second source of change can be an internal impetus originating within a particular Christian tradition. Adherents of a religion are sometimes influenced by the beliefs of another religion. Therefore, they can appropriate alien concepts which they integrate into their own religion in much the same way as new converts. We will find examples of this also in connection with the origin of the Church's varied beliefs concerning methods of biblical interpretation. For the most part, they borrowed their methodology from Greek philosophy and from the Jews.

Although the internal push for change can be detrimental to the integrity of the tradition, it has often had a positive effect. So we can also find adherents of Christianity who realized the Church had lost something. Seizing on that perceived deficiency, they set out to reform the tradition they *received* and *restore* the tradition of an earlier time. For example, the Protestant tradition itself was established by men like Martin Luther (ca. 1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–1564) during the Protestant Reformation because they realized the Catholic Church had strayed from the tradition of the Early Church. (See "The Protestant Confession: The Church Lost *The Teaching*," ***The Voice of Elijah***, January 1992.) Hence, they sought to reform the Roman Catholic Church from within, and they continued to work within the Church until they were finally forced to separate from their mother tradition. They then established churches that adhered to the reformed tradition of the new Protestant Church.

The Reformation mind-set of the founders of the Protestant Church is still an integral part of the Protestant heritage. That's why the Protestant Church has continued to spawn reform movements. Quite often these new Reformers have sought to recover more Truth than what was regained during the Protestant Reformation. For example, from the time of Johann Arndt (1555–1621), and especially since John Wesley (1703–1791), holiness-minded folk have argued True Believers should adhere not only to the Truth recovered during the Reformation, but should also return to an even earlier Christian tradition. (See "One Train. One Track. Two Rails." ***The Voice of Elijah***, January 1992.) That is the basic call issued in this article. Now is the time for all who love Truth to return to their Root(s).

"It should be obvious to all (but isn't) that all factions of the Holiness Movement … have now settled into a contented reliance on their traditional beliefs and Church norms."

The Fathers of the Protestant Reformation based their reform movement in large part on the writings of St. Augustine, a prominent theologian who lived around A.D. 400. However, John Wesley (1703–1791) sought to take his converts all the way back to the "New Testament Church." He failed. Yet nearly two hundred years later his ideas about holiness and sanctification were foundational to the Pentecostal movement's attempt at Church reform. That's why you see Pentecostal churches today bearing the appellation "Full Gospel Church." They thought what they found described in the Book of Acts was the totality of that other "something" the Early Church had lost. Not so.

The Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal movements were part of the last major attempt by the Holiness Movement to restore the original tradition of the Early Church. It should be obvious to all (but isn't) that all factions of the Holiness Movement of last century, including the Pentecostals, have now settled into a contented reliance on their traditional beliefs and Church norms. For many, Christianity has become nothing more than the ultimate "feel good" experience, with little if any of the Holiness Movement's original emphasis on the holiness of the Believer.

Although all the Reformers in the history of the Protestant Church who emphasized personal holiness failed to restore the tradition of the Early Church, they should be commended for recognizing the Church had lost more than what the Protestant Reformation was able to restore—a certain something that robbed the Church of the spiritual vitality of that first-generation Church.

The suspicion that the Church lacked something special most often came from True Believers' inner yearning for a fuller spiritual life than what they were able to experience by worshipping among those perfectly content to trust in a particular doctrinal or liturgical tradition rather than trusting in a personal relationship with the *Living* God.

Over the last fifty years the Protestant reform movement has faltered. Now Pretenders *talk about* "church renewal" as though more whitewash on the wall were the answer. In contrast to the thousands of new converts who joined the reform movements of past centuries, it has become increasingly more common for a small group of just a few poor souls to set out on their own, trying to reestablish the New Testament Church. Most have succeeded only in establishing a single independent church. Sadly enough, even these people soon grew weary of their quest for the Truth because they had no idea where to look.

Most often, even the most ardent reformers returned to established church norms. Unfortunately, along the way these "seekers" often fell prey to hucksters and charlatans who offered only the

"You see, God has a 'Way'—a tradition—to which He has always intended His people would adhere, but they never have."

widespread "feel good" religion you see all around you.

The third and final thing to remember about tradition is that God does not always have the same positive feelings toward it that we do. That is especially the case when it is nothing but the tradition of men. Isaiah warned us about blind adherence to tradition:

Then the Lord said,
*"Because **this people draw near with their words***
And honor Me with their lip service,
But they remove their hearts far from Me,
***And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote**,*
Therefore behold,
I will once again deal marvelously with this people, wondrously marvelous;
And the wisdom of their wise men shall perish,
And the discernment of their discerning men shall be concealed."
(Isaiah 29:13–14)

Jesus seconded that opinion in some of His statements to the Pharisees, leaving us little doubt that tradition founded on anything other than God's Truth falls far short of God's favor:

*And the Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, "**Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders**, but eat their bread with impure hands?" And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,*
'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS,
BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.
BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'
***Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men**." He was also saying to them, "**You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition**. For Moses said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER'; and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, LET HIM BE PUT TO DEATH'; but you say, 'If a man says to {his} father or {his} mother, anything of mine you might have been helped by is Corban (that is to say, given {to God}),' you no longer permit him to do anything for {his} father or {his} mother; {thus} **invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that**."*
(Mark 7:5–13)

"Tradition founded on anything other than God's Truth falls far short of God's favor."

We can see from these two passages that God does not have a problem with tradition as such, but with man's tradition when it differs from the Truth of the Word of God. We should keep that in mind. God's tradition is acceptable; man's tradition isn't. Isaiah said as much in another passage as well:

Seek the Lord while He may be found;
Call upon Him while He is near.
***Let the wicked forsake his way**,*
And the unrighteous man his thoughts;
*And **let him return to the LORD**,*
And He will have compassion on him;
And to our God,
For He will abundantly pardon.
"For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
***Neither are your ways My ways**,"*
declares the LORD.
"For {as} the heavens are higher than the earth,
*So are **My ways higher than your ways**,*
And My thoughts than your thoughts."
(Isaiah 55:6–9)

There are a few key words in that passage one needs to understand before the full import of Isaiah's statements is felt. But the only term *significant* for our purposes here is the term *way*. Although it isn't obvious, Isaiah has in mind one particular *way—The Way* of the Lord. (See *The Mystery of Scripture*.) For now, just think of *way* as *meaning* "tradition" and you'll come close to Isaiah's *meaning*.

You see, God has a *"Way"*—a tradition—to which He has always intended His people would adhere, but they never have. He established it in Israel through *The Teaching of Moses* at the time of the Exodus from Egypt. Israel constantly abandoned God's tradition, however, so God found it necessary to send His Prophets to restore it time and again during Israel's long history in the Promised Land.

The Jews "turned away from" God's tradition for good at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (167 B.C.). But God reestablished His tradition in the Church when Jesus Christ revealed *The Teaching* to His Apostles. Unfortunately, the Church soon "turned away from" God's tradition just as Israel had done so many times before. The current, prevalent belief in literal interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures is little more than mute testimony to that sad fact.

Interpretation, Smurpretation

Before 1850, the origin of a new Protestant denomination or doctrinal emphasis could often be traced to the separation of True Believers from cold orthodoxy after an outpouring of God's Holy Spirit. (See "The Protestant Confession: The Church Lost *The Teaching*," and "One Train. One Track. Two Rails." as well as the illustration on p. 8, ***The Voice of Elijah***, January 1992.) But from late last century until now, the

"Virtually no one in Protestant Christianity today bothers to base his interpretive methodology on the writings of anyone prior to the Protestant Reformation (1517)."

source of denominational division most frequently has been rooted in disagreement over doctrine. These disputes have invariably boiled down to a difference of opinion regarding whose method of interpreting Scripture was (or is) correct. And don't you know Satan loves the controversy.

The argument regarding the rectitude of one interpretive methodology or the other is interesting only because the basis for the claim regarding the orthodoxy of one position over the other seldom goes back more than a few hundred years. Lutheran theologians appeal to the writings of Martin Luther (ca. 1483–1546); Reformed theologians appeal to the writings of John Calvin (1509–1564); and Methodists appeal to the writings of John Wesley (1703–1791).

Virtually no one in Protestant Christianity today bothers to base his interpretive methodology on the writings of anyone prior to the Protestant Reformation (1517). Those who do rummage around in earlier writings of the Christian Church normally halt at the writings of Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225–1274), although a few will also throw a line around the views of John Chrysostom (A.D. 349–407) and Jerome (ca. A.D. 347–420).

The tendency to not venture back much beyond Aquinas is not surprising since the publication of Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* (1266–1273) provided the basis for modern theories of interpretation, including the literal interpretation theory. (Note the date well folks. That's twelve centuries *after* the Apostle Paul wrote his letters found in the New Testament. It's also nearly six hundred years *before* the literal interpretation theory gained widespread acceptance.)

Most people don't even bother appealing to the views of Thomas Aquinas because the theory of biblical interpretation he propounded in his *Summa Theologica* was not a strictly literal approach. It only emphasized that the literal sense of Scripture should be the basis for any of three other possible meanings.

However, the Protestant Reformers took the basics of Aquinas' interpretive methodology as it existed in their day and forged it into what has been called a "grammatical-historical" method. Unfortunately, that method was later distorted into a strictly literal method of interpreting Scripture.

The adamant insistence on the literal interpretation of Scripture is unfortunate because, unless you are able to set aside that theory as it is understood by many today and see things from the perspective of Early Church writers, many of the statements made by them appear to be plucked right out of thin air. Nothing could be further from the Truth.

"It would seem that if one is serious about one's claim to an orthodox method of biblical interpretation, one would base that claim on the method of interpretation to be found in the Early Church."

It would seem that if one is serious about one's claim to an orthodox method of biblical interpretation, one would base that claim on the method of interpretation to be found in the Early Church. I'm not *talking about* thirteenth-century Christianity (Aquinas), or even late fourth-century Christianity (Jerome and John Chrysostom). I'm *talking about* Christianity from the time of the Apostles to the late second century.

If we're going to be reasonable about it, let's be reasonable. Interpretive methods could easily have changed even by the end of the second century. Facts are facts. Two hundred years is a long time. But twelve hundred? Don't be ridiculous!

Therefore, let's say we are truly interested in determining whether a current tradition that pins its hopes on a strictly literal interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures is founded on the Truth of God's Word. Where should we begin?

The obvious place to start is by comparing the earliest written records left us by the Early Church with *The Teaching* we find in the Scriptures. Why so? Because even if the Early Church lost *The Apostolic Teaching* as I have repeatedly asserted (see "Jesus *Talks About* the Mystery," ***The Voice of Elijah***, January 1991; "Where Are Jesus' Disciples?" ***The Voice of Elijah***, April 1991; and "The Protestant Confession: The Church Lost *The Teaching*," ***The Voice of Elijah***, January 1992), it would probably have taken some time for that loss to occur.

Therefore, not only are the chances fairly good that some remnant of the Truth of *The Apostolic Teaching* could be found in the writings of the Early Church Fathers, it is even more likely that we could find some evidence of the method of biblical interpretation preferred by Early Church leaders. Let's take a look.

In this survey of the history of biblical interpretation, I have chosen for the most part to quote from R. Grant & D. Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, Fortress: Philadelphia, 1984; and K. Froehlich, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984. The bolding found in those quotes is my own (for emphasis). If you are interested in reading further on the subject, I recommend you read these two first. Then continue your study by reading any of the others listed in the bibliography on page 11.

The Big Three

Three Church Fathers have long been recognized as having stood firmly on the side of Christian Orthodoxy dur-

"These Early Church Fathers are unanimous in their belief that the only legitimate interpretation of the Scriptures is no interpretation at all."

ing the second century. These three are Justin Martyr (ca. A.D. 100–165), Irenæus (ca. A.D. 130–200), and Tertullian (ca. A.D. 155–after 220). However, we should also mention that Tertullian tarnished his reputation somewhat later in his life by quitting the orthodox Church in disgust and joining the Montanist Christians. As we will find later, he may well have had good reason. And contrary to what has been thought, that action may well represent his strong convictions that the Truth of *The Apostolic Teaching* he understood was being irretrievably contaminated by error taken over from Greek philosophy. (See "The Origen of Folly" in this issue.)

All three of these Early Church Fathers are unanimous in their belief that the only legitimate interpretation of the Scriptures is no interpretation at all. Did you get that? They believed that the solemn duty of the Church leaders of their day was not to "interpret" Scripture at all but to accurately "understand" and teach *The Apostolic Teaching*.

Furthermore, these three are unanimous in their belief that the only way to acquire an accurate "understanding" of *The Apostolic Teaching* was to be taught by a Teacher in the apostolic succession. By that they *meant* a Teacher who had been taught the Church's accurate understanding of Scripture by a teacher who was recognized and accepted as having been taught accurately:

> *Above all for Irenæus, who is defending the mainstream of Christian faith against able enemies, there is one standard of correct interpretation. The standard is the rule of faith as preserved in churches in the apostolic succession. …* ***The teaching of the apostles is the true understanding of the Bible, and if anyone wishes to learn this true understanding he should read the scriptures with the presbyters of the church, with whom is the apostolic doctrine … All other interpretations have fallen from the truth****.*
> *(Grant & Tracy, p. 50–51)*

Notice that the authors of this quotation, in spite of what Irenæus has written, want to view what he has written from their own perspective—that is, from the perspective that interpretation of Scripture was viewed as necessary and good by the Early Church. Taking that as their starting point, they believe Irenæus must have had some personal method of interpreting the Scriptures.

"Tertullian, who was writing some one hundred and seventy years after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (ca. A.D. 200), had no interest in interpreting Scripture for himself."

These scholars fail to understand that the "rule of faith" mentioned by Early Church writers had nothing at all to do with interpretation; it had only to do with the standard the Early Church applied in its quest for the recognition and rooting out of false teaching. Tertullian's view, like that of Justin Martyr, agrees with Irenæus:

> *Since the Lord Jesus Christ sent the apostles to preach, (our rule is) that no others ought to be received as preachers than those whom Christ appointed; for "no man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him." Nor does the Son seem to have revealed Him to any other than the apostles, whom He sent forth to preach—that, of course, which He revealed to them. Now, what that was which they preached—in other words, what it was which Christ revealed to them—can, as I must here likewise prescribe, properly be proved in no other way than by those very churches which the apostles founded in person, by declaring the gospel to them directly themselves, both* vivâ voce [Editor: i.e., by the spoken word] *as the phrase is, and subsequently by their epistles. If, then, these things are so, it is in the same degree manifest that* ***all doctrine which agrees with the apostolic churches—those moulds and original sources of the faith must be reckoned for truth, as undoubtedly containing that which the (said) churches received from the apostles, the apostles from Christ, Christ from God****. Whereas all doctrine must be prejudged as false which savours of contrariety to the truth of the churches and apostles of Christ and God. It remains, then, that we demonstrate whether* ***this doctrine of ours, of which we have now given the rule, has its origin in the tradition of the apostles****, and whether all other* doctrines *do not* ipso facto *proceed from falsehood.* ***We hold communion with the apostolic churches because our doctrine is in no respect different*** **from theirs***. This is* our *witness of truth.*
> *(Tertullian,* On Prescription Against Heretics, *21)*

You can see from this that Tertullian, who was writing some one hundred and seventy years after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (ca. A.D. 200), had no interest in interpreting Scripture for himself. He wanted to learn the Truth of the Old Testament Gospel of Jesus Christ from those who taught in churches established by the Apostles themselves. His arguments against the Gnostics clearly demonstrate he had no interest in interpreting Scripture for himself:

> *According to Tertullian, arguing with Gnostics about scriptural interpretation is useless. Even an agreed canon and common exegetical methods do not guarantee unambiguous results for*

"Not only did Irenæus believe the* meaning *of the Scriptures had been hidden, he also did not believe anyone could uncover that* meaning *by doing his own interpretation."

there is always room for heretical intentions to dictate the agenda. Thus, the true battlefield is not interpretation but the very right to use Scriptures at all. Apostolic Scriptures belong to the apostolic church. The Gnostics with their claim to secret traditions have no right to use them, for ***only the public succession of teaching in the apostolically founded churches can be the measure of apostolicity and therefore of correct interpretation …. We meet here a profound suspicion toward a professional exegesis which made the unending search for truth a methodological principle****. The Gnostics used Matt. 7:7 as their warrant: "Seek, and you will find." For Christians, Tertullian maintains, the search has ended; true faith has been found and must only be defended against its erosion by illicit curiosity.* ***For both Irenæus and Tertullian, illicit curiosity is the true danger of a Gnostic hermeneutics of inquiry.… The protest of the late-second-century fathers, however, could not stem the tide of the times. Professional, scientific hermeneutics was the wave of the future****.*
(Froehlich, p. 14–15)

Tertullian, like Justin Martyr and Irenæus, argued that the unity of belief exhibited by the apostolic churches was proof of their apostolic descent. All three saw the apostolic churches as the only legitimate repository of *The Apostolic Teaching*.

"Tertullian, like Justin Martyr and Irenæus, argued that the unity of belief exhibited by the apostolic churches was proof of their apostolic descent."

What then was these three men's understanding regarding that *Teaching*? Did they believe, as many believe today, that the message of Scripture could be easily understood by any Christian (scholar or unlearned layperson alike) who wanted to read and interpret Scripture on his own? Absolutely not.

All three of these men forthrightly state the message of the Hebrew Scriptures had been concealed in parables and enigmatic statements. Furthermore, they believed an understanding of that message was definitely known only in the churches founded and taught by the Apostles because Jesus had revealed the *meaning* of Scripture to the Apostles alone (Lk. 24:27, 44–45). Scholars have long recognized that, for Irenæus:

The Old Testament is full of types. The "treasure hidden in a field" (Matt. 13:44) is Christ hidden in the scriptures and made known through types and parables.
(Grant & Tracy, p. 48)

Not only did Irenæus believe the *meaning* of the Hebrew Scriptures had been hidden, he also did not believe anyone could uncover that *meaning* by doing his own interpretation:

The Old Testament texts themselves speak of hidden truth that must be unlocked. Jews are reading them but do not have the explanation. Christians possess the key in the coming of Christ which unlocks all the mysteries … from beginning to end …. The same argument refutes the Gnostics. If the Jews have no key, the Gnostics fabricate their own. Irenæus *first criticizes their hermeneutical principle: they cut up the beautiful mosaic of God's revealed economy and reassemble the pieces into their own myths …*
(Froehlich, p. 13–14)

The same belief in the hiddenness of the scriptural message was held by Justin Martyr:

By many passages of scripture, understood typologically, Justin shows that Jesus was … Messiah.
(Grant & Tracy, p. 45)

"All three of these men forthrightly state the message of the Hebrew Scriptures had been concealed in parables and enigmatic statements."

To give you some idea of the understanding of Old Testament prophecy that these men had, Justin Martyr says this:

"Again in Isaiah, if you have ears to hear it, ***God, speaking of Christ in parable, calls Him Jacob and Israel****. He speaks thus: 'Jacob is my servant, I will uphold him; Israel is mine elect, I will put my Spirit upon Him, and He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry, neither shall any one hear His voice in the street: a bruised reed He shall not break, and smoking flax He shall not quench; but He shall bring forth judgment to truth: He shall shine, and shall not be broken till He have set judgment on the earth. And in His name shall the Gentiles trust.'"*
(Justin Martyr,
Dialogue With Trypho, *cxxiii)*

Those of you who have read *Not All Israel Is Israel* can understand why Justin Martyr would say the Prophets refer to Jesus Christ as Israel. But even without that understanding it is obvious that Justin Martyr, like Irenæus and Tertullian, did not believe that God intended the prophecies of the Old Testament to be understood "literally" in the way many today

"There is an unstated assumption today that the Early Church, like us, had no certain understanding of the message of the Old Testament other than what we find recorded in the New Testament. That is not so."

claim. These three believed the Prophets made *parabolic statements* that were to be understood allegorically. That agrees with the Apostle Paul's statement concerning his understanding that the story of Sarah and Hagar had some sort of allegorical *meaning*:

> *Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise.* ***This is allegorically speaking: for these {women} are two covenants****, one {proceeding} from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. For it is written,*
>
> *"REJOICE, BARREN WOMAN WHO DOES NOT BEAR;*
> *BREAK FORTH AND SHOUT, YOU WHO ARE NOT IN LABOR;*
> *FOR MORE ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE DESOLATE*
> *THAN OF THE ONE WHO HAS A HUSBAND."*
>
> *And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him {who was born} according to the Spirit, so it is now also. But what does the Scripture say?*
>
> *"CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON,*
> *FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR WITH THE SON OF THE FREE WOMAN."*
>
> *So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.*
> *(Galatians 4:21–31)*

In explaining his understanding of this passage, Paul used the Greek term ***allegoroumena***, here translated "allegorically speaking." That term refers to a type of allegorical interpretation that was well known in his day:

> ***The word* meant allegorically *(*allegoroumena*) is from a verb commonly used by Greek interpreters, especially by Stoics who interpreted allegorically*** *and explained away the myths concerning the gods. According to these exegetes, some of whom were Paul's contemporaries, "saying one thing and signifying something other than what is said is called allegory." They proceeded to interpret Homer, for example, as if it were an allegory.* ***They looked for hidden mysteries under the outward forms****.*
> *(Grant & Tracy, p. 19)*

***"Many of the Old Testament passages with literal* meaning *describe historical events that were themselves orchestrated by God as* parabolic pantomime."**

It should be clear that Paul did not *mean*, by his use of that term, to imply that he used any allegorical methodology to interpret the Scriptures himself. Why would he? He plainly says he gained his understanding of the Old Testament by revelation:

> *For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but* ***I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ****.*
> *(Galatians 1:11–12)*

Note carefully what Paul says about preaching the things that had been revealed to him by Jesus Christ. The understanding he gained by revelation was not limited to the things he wrote in his letters to the churches. By no means! He taught the Early Church far more than those few things we find recorded in the New Testament Scriptures. That is an important point to keep in mind if you are seeking knowledge of the Truth.

There is an unstated assumption today that the Early Church, like us, had no certain understanding of the message of the Old Testament other than what we find recorded in the New Testament. That is not so. The New Testament had not even been written when Paul first started preaching.

Consequently, Paul taught from the Hebrew Scriptures because those were the only Scriptures available. And the message he taught the Early Church will soon be seen by True Believers to be both intricate and detailed. We will show how that is in future publications.

The point to be remembered here is not that the Apostles and Early Church Fathers understood the Scriptures to have no literal meaning at all, because they certainly did. The point is rather that they understood there was also, alongside passages with literal meaning, passages containing an allegorical *meaning* that was intentionally hidden in *parabolic images*—images that have long been called "types" even by those who insist on literal interpretation.

Moreover, many of the Old Testament passages with literal *meaning* describe historical events that were themselves orchestrated by God as *parabolic pantomime*. [See "The *Parabolic Pantomimes* of Jesus Christ," ***The Voice of Elijah***, January 1991; "The Passover Parable," ***The Voice of Elijah***, July 1991; and "They've Put God in a Box! (Or So They Think)" in this issue.] Consequently, those who want to insist on "literal interpretation" of the Scriptures while advocating "typological interpretation" are not only demonstrating their ignorance of the history of biblical inter-

pretation, they are also contradicting themselves.

The evidence for the Early Church belief in the *parabolic meaning* of Scripture is overwhelming. It is stated repeatedly throughout the earliest Christian writings. But you don't even have to go outside the New Testament to find that view expressed. The writer of the Book of Hebrews knew it to be so as well:

> *By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten {son}; it was he to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED." He considered that God is able to raise {men} even from the dead;* ***from which he also received him back as a type****.*
> *(Hebrews 11:17–19)*

The words here translated "as a type" say literally (if you want to insist on the literal sense of Scripture) "in a parable" (ἐν παραβολῇ). That is because the biblical account to which this passage refers sets forth a *parabolic pantomime* orchestrated by God just as many of the passages in the Old Testament record historical events that are *parabolic pantomimes*. (See the articles last referenced.) Along those same lines, the author of the Book of Hebrews also understood that the Tabernacle itself was part of a parable (παραβολη) ordered by God (Heb. 9:9).

From all this one can clearly see that for nearly two centuries the Early Church Fathers did not believe their task was to interpret the Scriptures. Instead, they were committed to teaching the understanding of the Old Testament that they knew Jesus Christ had revealed to His Apostles—*The Apostolic Teaching*.

Their testimony is equally clear as to their understanding that the Old Testament Gospel message concerning Jesus Christ had been hidden in parables. That does not offer much encouragement to those today who want to insist on a strictly literal interpretation of the Scriptures. As a matter of fact, it's enough to discourage anyone who seeks the Truth from offering his own off-the-cuff opinion as to the *meaning* of Scripture. But fools walk in.…

(Now, after this brief survey of the Early Church Fathers and the New Testament, we are ready to take a quick tour of Church history to see how we got where we are today. For that tour, see "The Origen of Folly" in this issue.) ■

Annotated Bibliography

Source	*Comments*
Bunyan, John, *The Annotated Pilgrim's Progress* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980)	✓ A good example of allegory.
Froehlich, Karlfried, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984)	✓ A fairly balanced investigation into Early Church interpretive techniques.
Grant, Robert & Tracy, David, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984)	✓ Possibly the best survey of the history of biblical interpretation in the Church.
Kaiser, Walter C., Jr., *Toward An Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis For Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981)	✓ This book and the article following provide a good introduction and insight into the difficulties encountered by conservative scholars who are seeking to understand the Old Testament.
_____, "Interpreting the Old Testament," *The Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1988), pp. 65–91	
Kugel, James L. & Greer, Rowan A., *Early Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986)	✓ A survey of the interpretion found in Early Church literature.
Longenecker, R.N., *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975)	✓ An excellent example of how *The Apostolic Teaching* is ignored by scholars.
Marsden, George *M., Fundamentalism and American Culture—The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980)	✓ A decent treatment of the recent origins of some fundamentalist Christian beliefs.
Rogers, Jack B. & McKim, Donald K., *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979)	✓ These two have a not-so-hidden agenda. Not good for hard facts.
McCown, Wayne & Massey, James Earl, Eds., *Interpretating God's Word For Today* (Anderson, Indiana: Warner Press, 1972)	✓ An example of an appeal to a specific Reformer's interpretive technique.
Wilken, Robert L., *John Chrysostom and the Jews* (Berkeley: University of Chicago Press, 1983)	✓ An excellent snapshot of fourth-century Christianity in and around Antioch.

Temple and Antichrist

Just for the sake of argument, let's say you were Satan and, by telling everyone they should interpret the Scriptures for themselves, you had successfully destroyed the unity *The Apostolic Teaching* provided the Early Church. Everybody had now begun using Origen's new allegorical methodology to come up with their own interpretation of key passages of Scripture. (See "The Origen of Folly" in this issue.) Therefore, the acceptance of your lie by Church leaders had, almost immediately, plunged the Church into complete confusion. Under those circumstances, what specific information would you want to discredit or bury so deeply that (you hoped) it would never be recovered? How about that part of *The Apostolic Teaching* which speaks specifically concerning you? Wouldn't you zero in on the understanding that you will eventually come in the person of the Antichrist as the messiah of the Jews and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem? Surely you would want to suppress that!

Think about it carefully. If you were Satan and you had no way of knowing exactly when Jesus Christ would return, but you knew that before He did, you would be cast out of Heaven with no place to go except into this realm as the Antichrist, wouldn't you be working to successfully orchestrate your final stand against God? (See Rev. 12:9, and *The AntiChrist* or *The Advent of Christ and AntiChrist*.) Certainly you could see your deception would depend on the Church being unable to recognize you and see through your charade. It seems logical that you would want Christians to completely discard the vital information they had concerning you.

Well, congratulations! You were successful. That is exactly what happened. The Church almost immediately rejected the coherent explanation Irenæus and Hippolytus had *received* from the Apostle John through Polycarp concerning how to recognize the Antichrist when he appears—that is, that he will destroy the rulers of Egypt, Libya, and the Sudan before rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem and taking his seat there, pretending to be the messiah of the Jews. That should come as no surprise. After Origen's novel theory of interpretation made Truth a matter of conjecture, "private" interpretations of the Books of Daniel and Revelation abounded.

Hippolytus, along with the understanding of *The Apostolic Teaching* he had, died sometime around A.D. 235. Less than forty years later (before A.D. 275), the anonymous writer or editor of the "Apocalypse of Elijah" offered the following ridiculous explanation as to how Christians would be able to recognize the Antichrist:

> *… the son of lawlessness will appear, saying, "I am the Christ," although he is not. Don't believe him! … He will multiply his signs and his wonders in the presence of everyone. He will do the works which Christ did, except for raising the dead alone. In this you will know that he is the son of lawlessness, because he is unable to give life. For behold I will tell you his signs so that you might know him. He is a … skinny-legged young lad, having a tuft of gray hair at the front of his bald head. His eyebrows will reach to his ears. There is a leprous bare spot on the front of his hands. He will transform himself in the presence of those who see him. He will become a young child. He will become old. He will transform himself in every sign. But the signs of his head will not be able to change.* ***Therein you will know that he is the son of lawlessness****.*
> *("The Apocalypse of Elijah," 3:1–18.*
> *From J.H. Charlesworth,* The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, New York: Doubleday, 1983)*

Amazingly, the writer of this bit of fantasy was apparently also aware that the Antichrist would rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem and take his seat there because he expects the appearance of Elijah and Enoch after the Antichrist "has revealed himself in the holy place." He says:

> *Then when Elijah and Enoch hear that the shameless one* ***has revealed himself in the holy place****, they will come down and fight with him ….*
> *(Charlesworth, "The Apocalypse of Elijah," 4:7)*

This writer's omission of any overt reference to the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem is *significant* because we know that, during the third century, Church leaders began to use the ruins of the Temple as evidence that God had abandoned the Jews and was now working solely with the Church. They were arguing (correctly) that the Church was the continuation of Israel, but their argument depended on the Temple in Jerusalem remaining in ruins. In other words, if the Temple were ever rebuilt, Church leaders would lose a major pillar in their argument concerning the Church's position vis-à-vis the Jews. Consequently, many Christians began to argue vehemently that the Temple would never be rebuilt. By the end of the third century A.D., the understanding that the Antichrist would rebuild the Temple had been turned completely upside down:

> *Christians knew that the first temple, the temple of Solomon, had been destroyed but that at a later time it was rebuilt. The destruction of the second temple, the one standing during the lifetime of Jesus was, however, thought to be different.* ***It would never be rebuilt; its destruction was permanent****…. Not all Christians agreed on the precise interpretation of the details, … but most agreed that Daniel 9 prophesied a permanent cessation of sacrificial worship in Jerusalem.… The interpretation of the prophecy in Daniel was confirmed by the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:1–2. "Jesus left the temple*

and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down." ***This warning of Jesus was taken to be a prophecy that the temple would never be rebuilt.… By the time that Julian became emperor in 361 … this interpretation of the temple in Jerusalem was firmly fixed in the Christian consciousness and handed on to new converts through the catechetical tradition.… The passage of time, by then almost three centuries, the ancient word of Daniel, the prophecy of Jesus, and the spread of Christianity supported the view that Jerusalem would never again belong to the Jews and that the temple would never be rebuilt****.*
(R.L. Wilken, John Chrysostom and the Jews, *Berkeley: University of California, 1983, pp. 137–38)*

In A.D. 361, history took a decided turn for the worse, as far as Christians were concerned—Julian became emperor of the Roman Empire. He ruled just over a year and a half, but during that time, he published a major refutation of Christian doctrine, and set out, in A.D. 363, to personally disprove the Christian belief that the Temple in Jerusalem would never be rebuilt. To do that, he decided to allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple:

The emperor Julian well understood the significance of the city of Jerusalem for Christian piety and the temple ruins for Christian apologetics. ***Raised a Christian, he had heard Christians speak about the temple in Jerusalem and the prophecies in the Scriptures that the temple in Jerusalem would never be rebuilt****. In his book … Julian offered a full-scale refutation of Christianity. … a close reading of the fragments of this book shows that his case against Christianity is intimately linked to the legitimacy of Judaism.*
(Wilken, p. 138)

The Temple was never rebuilt. Work began in the spring of A.D. 363, but Julian died in battle a few weeks later and, after his death, the project was dropped. However, Julian's actions are enlightening, because more than any other person in the ancient world, he fit the Early Church's description of the Antichrist. Yet Church leaders of his day seem completely unaware of that fact. Instead, they were thoroughly shaken because Julian had threatened their belief that the Temple would never be rebuilt. So complete was their loss of *The Apostolic Teaching* that:

In the Christian mind, the attempt to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem was a profound attack on the truth of Christianity.
(Wilken, p. 130)

These false beliefs were so firmly entrenched in the Church that in A.D. 386—just 151 years after Hippolytus died and twenty-three years after Julian's failed attempt—no less a leader than John Chrysostom himself stated:

"Christ built the Church and no one is able to destroy it; he destroyed the temple and no one is able to rebuild it."
(John Chrysostom, Jews and Gentiles, *16; 48.835, From Wilken, p. 131)*

Where do you suppose the Church got a doctrine that was so completely in contradiction to the clear and logical understanding of the Book of Daniel presented by Irenæus and Hippolytus? It originated with none other than that master of folly himself, Origen:

And any one who likes may convict this statement of falsehood, if it be not the case that the whole Jewish nation was overthrown within one single generation after Jesus had undergone these sufferings at their hands. For forty and two years, I think, after the date of the crucifixion of Jesus, did the destruction of Jerusalem take place. Now it has never been recorded since the Jewish nation began to exist, that they have been expelled for so long a period from their venerable temple-worship and service, and enslaved by more powerful nations; for if at any time they appeared to be abandoned because of their sins, they were notwithstanding visited (by God), and returned to their own country, and recovered their possessions, and performed unhindered the observances of their law. ***One fact, then, which proves that Jesus was something divine and sacred, is this, that Jews should have suffered on His account now for a lengthened time calamities of such severity. And we say with confidence that they will never be restored to their former condition****.*
(Origen, Against Celsus, *Book iv, Chap. xxii)*

What a piece of stinking garbage! Origen's argument is as phony as a three dollar bill. He wrote this (ca. A.D. 248) shortly after Hippolytus died (ca. A.D. 235). So, if he had any interest in learning *The Apostolic Teaching*, he had access to what Hippolytus had already written in his *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*. Moreover, Origen had heard Hippolytus lecture in Rome in A.D. 212. But Origen chose to disregard *The Teaching* of those who understood *The Apostolic Teaching* and come up with his own understanding of the Scriptures. That was more gratifying to this philosopher's obviously large and well-massaged ego.

If Origen's teacher, Clement of Alexandria, had sought to thoroughly master and teach only *The Apostolic Teaching* that Pantænus taught instead of wandering off into the writings of Philo of Alexandria, perhaps Origen would not have been able to so completely lead the Church astray. One thing is clear enough, however. The Church was on the right track when it attempted to convict him of heresy. If Marcion (see "The Origen of Folly" in this issue) was, as Polycarp called him, "the First-born of Satan," Origen was definitely his second son. ■

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: This has been an incredible year for all of us here at* The Voice of Elijah. *We've not only seen the publication of three books by The Elijah Project and been able to read the articles written for this newsletter, we've also seen the formation of a group of Monthly Contributors who are able to read even more information published every month in* The Voice of Elijah Update. *Those Monthly Contributors are now, at least in part, also helping us finance a videotape ministry that will allow us to present information more effectively through videotaped seminars. But that's all still to come. Looking back over the past year, what one thing would you say was the most* significant *event for you?

Elijah: That's difficult to say. So many things have had a definite effect on my understanding of the Scriptures, my calling, the history of the Jews and of the Church, etc. At the beginning of the year I had only a vague idea of what God had called me to do. Now I know more specifically what I am about. When the year began, I also had what I thought was a manageable task in writing *The Mystery of Scripture*. Now I'm trying to stay afloat in the deluge of information I have to somehow shoe-horn into that publication. And more information is surfacing all the time. The research I did for this issue raised all sorts of questions about the Early Church Fathers. I have to find answers to those questions before I can finish that book.

The year has gone by in such a blur that I don't actually remember many specific events. But I suppose one event that stands out above the rest is a letter you received from a subscriber sometime in February or March. As I recall, he asked several questions, including something about the Book of Daniel and the feasts of Israel. I also believe he asked the questions because he sincerely wanted to know. At least that's the way I took them. So I set out to incorporate those answers into articles for April's issue. Trying to answer those questions was the beginning of what has proven to be a continuous investigation into the psyche of Satan and the awesome wisdom of God.

Editor: Whoa! I can see where the information in* The AntiChrist *and* The Advent of Christ and AntiChrist *would give you some insight into Satan's personality, but you finished those books early this past summer; so you're obviously referring to something more than that. What do you* mean*?

Elijah: It isn't easy for me to explain because I still don't fully understand the implications of all that I see. Let me put it this way. If you think of God as the source of all Truth about Himself and Satan as the source of all lies, and if you understand just a little of the Old Testament Gospel of Jesus Christ hidden in the Hebrew Scriptures, you can then begin to analyze specific historical events in terms of the goals and objectives Satan obviously set out to accomplish over the past three to four millennia. The fascinating thing is how Satan worked not in terms of hours or days but in terms of centuries and millennia. If you keep all that in mind, you can usually identify one specific individual with whom some erroneous idea originated. You can then trace that concept as it was developed by a group of individuals whom Satan duped into believing a lie in order to achieve his desired results later on. That provides you absolutely phenomenal insight into Satan's method of operation. It's just like the Apostle Paul said: Satan disguises himself as a messenger of light because that which is most nearly true is sometimes the most effective lie. [Editor: 2 Cor. 11:14]

***Editor: In light of things you've written for this issue, you're probably* talking about *how the Church lost* The Teaching.**

Elijah: That's only part of what I see. The loss of *The Apostolic Teaching* is just one in a long series of skirmishes that often broke out into open warfare between Truth and error. The battle between the two began in the Garden of Eden with the Truth Eve had and the lies the Serpent told her. The conflict moved from there out into the world with the dispute between Cain and Abel, and through the Flood with the deliverance of Noah. Satan initiated his lies again after the Flood, and that resulted in the folly of Ham. (Incidently, there is a lot more to that particular event than meets the eye.) Then God responded with His ***promise*** to Abraham and Israel's Exodus from Egypt.

The point is, Truth and error have been constantly at war throughout history, not just in our own time. It is no casual statement that Jesus made when He said, "I am *The Way*, and *The Truth*, and *The Life*." [Editor: John 14:6] He was referring to Himself as the embodiment of *The Living Word* of God which is, when properly understood, *The Way*, *The Truth*, and *The Life*. [Editor: John 1:1–5] The conflict between *The Truth* of the *Living* Word of God and the lies of Satan is, in fact, the central question with which history is concerned from Satan's point of view. Obviously, God has a far different agenda. He intends to save a remnant of mankind through their belief in His Truth. But Satan is more myopic in his approach. His only question is: Will Truth triumph or will error? He believes error will win.

If you look around you, you can see why he would think that. Lies, half-truths, and confusion are everywhere. And it has been that way for most of the history of mankind. But ***the promise*** of God to us is that His Truth will ultimately prevail—not just the half-truth on which Satan thrives but pure, unadulterated Truth. That will be difficult for most in our time to accept. It's not surprising. If you are Satan's offspring—and most today are—half-truths are close enough to the Truth. But then, Satan is the ultimate fool. It's only logical he would engender fools.

Actually, I had several specific events other than the Church's loss of *The Teaching* in mind as well. There are more than two thousand years of conflict between God and Satan that people must understand before they can fully appreciate why an Early Church leader named Origen would rush head-long into using the allegorical method of interpretation first introduced by the Greek Stoic school of philosophy. It is true that what Origen did resulted in the Church's loss of *The Teaching*. But Satan had for centuries carefully crafted the lies inherent in the various schools of Greek philosophy. He planned all along to use at least one of them in response to any situation that might result from the coming of Jesus Christ. Then, as the Book of Daniel reveals, he worked, as he always has, behind the scenes to influence the course of history so that it turned out to his liking. [Editor: Dan. 10:13] He did that by working with specific individuals in the various countries of the ancient Near East. You have to understand that Satan has always had some knowledge of what God intends to do. But he has never had full knowledge. That is becoming more obvious to me with every new insight I gain into *The Teaching of Moses* and *The Teaching of the Prophets*. However, Satan has never believed that his ignorance *means* his fate is a foregone conclusion. But I have a hunch he is beginning to sense it is now.

Editor: Why do you say that?

Elijah: I'm only speculating about Satan's position here, so don't hold me to it. But Satan has obviously known all along God hid the Gospel message concerning Jesus Christ in the Old Testament. He also understood God had hidden that message in order to mock what the ancient Canaanites had done with their own mythological texts. I mention those texts because it's been clear to me for several years that the Ugaritic—the Canaanite—mythological texts that archaeologists discovered at Ras Shamra some sixty years ago had an intended *meaning* that went far beyond the superficial *meaning* of the text. I've spent countless hours going over those texts and reading the scholarly literature written about them, but I could never figure out how the Canaanites *meant* their poetic mythology to be understood. I've also known for nearly fifteen years that those Canaanite texts were playing with some of the same idioms you can find in the Old Testament Scriptures—idioms that I'll be explaining to your subscribers and/or Monthly Contributors over the next several years. But I still couldn't grasp what the Canaanite authors were doing with their poetry until I discovered that the founder of Greek Stoic philosophy—a man named Zeno—was a Phoenician. The *significance* of that is, *Phoenician* is just another way of saying "Canaanite."

In my research recently, I found that Zeno and several other Phoenician philosophers had migrated to Athens shortly after Alexander the Great made Greece the world power of the ancient world. These Phoenician philosophers preached a prophetic and paradoxical message in which they advocated that the Greeks

should interpret the Homeric myths as allegory. That's when I realized the Ugaritic mythological texts should be understood as having some sort of allegorical *meaning*. These Phoenician philosophers were simply telling the Greeks to treat the Greek poetic mythology the same way the Canaanites did theirs. In other words, the Canaanite priesthood had done much the same thing with their mythology as John Bunyan did in *Pilgrim's Progress* and C. S. Lewis did in his *Pilgrim's Regress*. They had concealed the *meaning* of their myths about the gods in allegory, never intending the texts to be understood literally.

Once I saw all that, I realized God had probably duped Satan into believing a lie. It appears that Satan has assumed all along that God had somehow hidden *The Mystery* of the Old Testament Gospel of Jesus Christ in allegories just as the writers of Canaanite mythology had done. That's why, over the centuries, Satan has tried to thoroughly discredit any understanding of the Old Testament that includes what people call "allegorical interpretation." He began by working through Origen to introduce the ridiculous notion that individuals could decipher the Hebrew Scriptures by using an allegorical methodology.

Over the past century and a half, however, Satan has been emphasizing to fundamentalist Christians—that is, those most likely to be True Believers—that "literal interpretation" is the only legitimate method of biblical interpretation. Unfortunately for him, he has also gone along more or less willingly while God has worked through various scholars since the Reformation to establish the validity of a "grammatical-historical" methodology. I assume that's because he thought the grammatical-historical methodology would be as useless as a strictly literal methodology in any attempt at understanding the Old Testament Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In other words, Satan has apparently believed for nearly twenty-five hundred years that by discrediting allegorical interpretation he could effectively put the message of the Old Testament beyond any hope of recovery. But he was taken in because he failed to understand that much of *The Mystery* hidden in the Old Testament is not sealed in allegory. It's sitting right out in full view, easily accessible even to those who want to insist on a literal interpretation of the Old Testament.

Stop and think for just a minute what all that *means*. The main reason Satan has insisted on a literal interpretation of the Old Testament is because he wants Christians to read the prophecies of the Old Testament and automatically understand every mention of "Israel" as "the Jews." That's crucial to what he has long been planning concerning the rebuilding of the Temple and the focusing of the worship of God on himself. [Editor: See *The AntiChrist* or *The Advent of Christ and AntiChrist*.]

Now consider this: I've already shown in *Not All Israel Is Israel* that, according to what the Apostle Paul understood, the Jews have been "cut off from Israel" and that only Jesus Christ remains as the sole remaining member "in Israel." Therefore, Jesus Christ is the only "Israel" that exists today. I showed that using nothing but an explanation of the idiom "cut off from Israel" and the literal *meaning* of the biblical text—with not much, if any, fancy exegesis. So Satan has already lost the one thing he has been fighting most desperately to conceal from True Believers: The Jews who have lived since Jesus Christ was crucified are not the *Corporate* Israel mentioned by the Prophets! Jesus Christ Himself is that "Israel" because all other Jews have been "cut off from" *Corporate* Israel. Consequently, they stand outside of *Corporate* Israel, on equal footing with unregenerate Gentiles, as far as God is concerned.

Satan is in for some even more incredible losses in the days, months, and years to come. For example, it can also be shown without any special exegetical technique that, even according to the foolishness of literal interpretation, the Old Testament contains specific, detailed information concerning the virgin birth of Jesus Christ as the Messiah of Israel who would, in Himself, become "all Israel." And most of that information isn't even in the Prophets! It's in the historical books! And everyone knows history books should be understood as having literal *meaning*. That information should, more than anything else, convince anyone who is honestly seeking to know the Truth that what I teach is true.

All this "exegetical" rigamarole that has long been advocated by the best and brightest of Christian theologians is mostly hocus-pocus anyway. You don't have to be any great exegete to understand the morning newspaper, so why should you have to do exegetical cartwheels in order to understand the Hebrew Scriptures? The only reason theologians have found it necessary to argue over which special exegetical technique should be used to interpret the Scriptures is because the Church lost its understanding of *The Apostolic Teaching*.

When theologians found they couldn't recover the *meaning* of the Hebrew Scriptures because they had been sealed, they started debating about which method of interpretation delivered the best guess. Now that the seals are being removed, however, the only valid method for "interpreting" the Hebrew Scriptures is go-

ing to be the same method you use for "interpreting" any other piece of literature: You won't need to do exegetical handstands to "interpret" it; you will just read it and understand it, provided you know what it's *talking about*. If it is historical text, you will read it like you would any history book. If it's poetry, you will read it like you would read poetry. If it's prophecy, you will read it like you would any other prophetic text. How that is will become apparent soon enough. Once you understand the idioms and images they use, the Prophets don't speak ambiguously most of the time.

Since much of the Old Testament is a historical account, it only makes sense to begin by reading those parts first. The only problem with that is the fact that even the historical text is full of Hebrew idioms and technical terms that are repeated over and over and over throughout the text, mockingly challenging the reader to unlock and comprehend their *meaning*. If you understand the *meaning* of those idioms and technical terms, however, you can generally understand what you read. But if you don't understand their *meaning*, you won't understand. It's that simple.

That's why the Early Church Fathers were so adamant about the understanding of the Old Testament they knew they had gained from the Apostles. It was obvious to them they had been instructed accurately as to the *meaning* of the Hebrew idioms, the *parabolic imagery*, and the various technical terms. It's also obvious from what they have written that they were right. It's even obvious from the Gnostic texts discovered at Nag Hammadi that some of the heresies making the rounds in the Early Church were based on a smattering of the Truth. That's what made them so threatening to *The Apostolic Teaching*. It all goes back to what I said about Satan masquerading as a messenger of light.

However, I've said all that just to say that the key to understanding the message of the Hebrew Scriptures doesn't lie in some elaborate theory of exegetical interpretation. It lies in the mind-set of the reader. That's why Luke says Jesus "opened their minds to understand the Scriptures." [Editor: Luke 24:45] He supernaturally gave His Apostles the mind-set they needed to be able to read the Old Testament with understanding. He didn't take the seals off the Scriptures at that time, however. They have remained sealed with seven seals, awaiting our own time. But now, once those seals have been permanently removed, reading the Hebrew Scriptures is going to be just like reading any other piece of technical literature. For example, I doubt seriously that the average person on the street could pick up and read an article discussing some arcane aspect of hypercalcemia or hypokalemia, the two major abnormalities associated with a defect in the renal concentrating ability of the kidneys. The reader must first have a basic understanding of medical terminology and the subject matter being discussed in the article. A specialist in kidney research could easily read such an article and fully understand what he or she read, whereas you and I would have difficulty grasping even the general concepts.

The same is going to be true of the Hebrew Scriptures. If you don't know what the Prophets are *talking about*, or you don't understand the technical terms they used, you certainly won't understand what they said. If you know what they are *talking about* and you understand the technical terms they used, however, the *meaning of what they wrote* will be obvious to you just by reading a literal translation of the Hebrew text. The translation doesn't even have to be all that precise. A general translation will get the point across well enough in most cases. That's why Justin Martyr thought the Greek translation he read was inspired—he understood what he read.

Also, you won't have to be some sort of intellectual giant to understand the Prophets. Look at the Apostle Peter. He was an uneducated fisherman, but he understood the message of the Greek Old Testament. He even wrote a couple of books of the New Testament in which he relates a few things about what he understood. Yet some of the statements he made have confused scholars for centuries. So contrary to what theologians today would have you believe, you won't need a Ph.D. to qualify to do any "exegesis" of the Scriptures. It's not going to be all that complicated. They just think it is because they don't understand what the Scriptures say. But then I seem to recall God promising to make fools of this world's wise men. [Editor: He's alluding to Isa. 29:9–14. See also 1 Cor. 1:18–21.]

Does that make sense? If you have the required mind-set, you will be able to read and understand a literal translation of the Old Testament. If you don't, you won't; not because it is sealed, but because you don't know what it's *talking about*. Providing the opportunity for True Believers to understand the things they need to know is part of my ministry: I'm here to "restore the hearts of the sons to the fathers." [Editor: He's alluding to Mal. 4:6 and the fact that the ancients thought the seat of the mind was the heart.] Only a few are going to accept what I have to teach, however, so only a few are going to understand. But from God's point of view those few are "the Many" who will have "insight" in the Last Days. [Editor: He's alluding to Dan. 12:3, 10.]

Editor: You've* talked about *idioms and* parabolic images *since the day I first met you over ten years ago. Can you give us some idea of how the message of the Old Testament could be hidden so completely yet still be so easy to understand once you understand the* meaning *of the idioms?

Elijah: Sure. An idiom is just an expression that says one thing and *means* something other than what the words literally say. The Russian comedian Yakov Smirnov has made a career out of taking English idioms literally. For example, he has joked about how we say, "I'm behind you all the way." He says something like, "In Russia we don't like people who are behind you all the way," referring to the fact that under communist rule the KGB followed people around.

We have hundreds, if not thousands, of idiomatic expressions in English. Every language has them. So even those who insist on literal interpretation would look like fools if they denied ancient Hebrew had them as well. It's clear from just a superficial reading of the text that you find idioms used throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. The only question that remains to be answered is what all those individual idioms *mean*. Scholars have worked on them for centuries, trying to precisely fix their *meaning*. Sometimes they have been successful. Sometimes they haven't.

You can often tell where scholars don't have a clue as to the *meaning* of an idiom simply because they have translated it literally. However, they have done that occasionally even when an idiom's *meaning* is obvious. Consequently, English-speaking people have been able to borrow idioms from the Hebrew Scriptures. For example, what does it mean to "steal someone's heart"? Obviously that expression can't be taken literally. It's an idiom. In English, we normally use it in the context of a romantic relationship between a man and a woman: "She stole his heart." In the Hebrew Scriptures, however, it *meant* to influence someone to be loyal to you rather than loyal to someone else. You can see that even though they translated the idiom literally. [Editor: 2 Sam. 15:6] Here's another romantic idiom we use: "He swept her off her feet." Should that be taken literally? Of course not. It's an idiom. And unless you understand the *meaning* of the idiom, you won't understand what has been said.

Can you imagine the ridiculous understanding people would have of the things we say and write if they took every idiom literally? I've been putting together a silly little story for some time now that strings several idioms together to illustrate the idiocy of anyone who would insist on a strictly literal interpretation of the idioms in any language. Try to take the idioms in the story literally. It goes something like this:

It was obvious to everybody in the small town that the boy gave the old couple headaches. The two had banged their heads against the wall for years, constantly walking on eggshells, knowing the boy would hit the ceiling at the least provocation. They kept hoping he would eventually get his act together and stand on his own two feet. He never did. High school hadn't been his cup of tea; so his heart hadn't been in it. He had looked down his nose at homework. He found it beneath him.

But the problem wasn't just with the boy alone. Rather than stand their ground, the old couple threw up their hands and stuck their heads in the sand. They let him use the family car. Consequently, he was always out burning up the road instead of carrying his own weight. Eventually, he dropped out of school and spent his days hanging around the pool hall, always looking for some poor sucker he could fleece. Fortunately for the old couple, war broke out. When the boy signed up, they patted themselves on the back and even threw a party when he left, not so much for him as for themselves.

Boot camp was hell for the boy, but before long he thought he knew the ropes. He started going on sick call every day, trying to get a medical discharge. He wasn't pulling the wool over anyone's eyes, however; they could see right through him. And it all went in his file. After he shipped out to the front, he should have seen the writing on the wall and realized his goose was cooked, but he didn't. He was always in the first wave to hit the beach because his commanders had no stomach for his shenanigans. Sure enough, his number came up. The poor stiff got out all right—six feet under.

After the boy bought the farm, the old lady immediately saw dollar signs. She thought she and the old man would live on easy street. But the old man had long been a pack rat, and the leopard wasn't about to change his spots. However, the old fellow kicked the bucket not long afterward, and that left the old woman with more dough than a bakery. The old man had firmly believed in term life. Consequently, from her point of view, he had kicked one big bucket full of cash her way, and she was determined to live high on the hog. It was all going to be icing on her cake. After all, she told herself, she had only put up with the miserly old codger all those years because society demanded it of her. He had long been an albatross around her neck, but she had paid her dues. Consequently, the fox was now in the hen house and ready for chicken dinner.

The town folk soon saw where the boy had gotten his lack of common sense. Rather than walking the straight and narrow, the old woman went wild. She

started throwing money around like she was crazy. Maybe she was. If she wasn't to begin with, she certainly was later on. She dropped a stitch one day that caused it all to come unraveled. After that she was clearly one brick shy of a full load.

The roof caved in after she went looking for something flashy she could use to tool around town with the kids. Imagine, a woman her age! Unfortunately, the dealer saw her coming a mile away, and he sold her a lemon. It was the most beautiful thing the woman had ever seen, and she savored the aroma of it, but it was lemon through and through. It wouldn't even peel out the way she thought it should. However, that wasn't the only fly in the ointment. She often found herself without transportation because her beloved lemon was always in the shop overnight for this or that. Therefore, she sat home sipping lemonade, longing to be out painting the town.

When the old woman finally realized she had been taken to the cleaners, and her lemon wasn't going to satisfy her pent-up appetite for the best this life had to offer, her devastation was total. It left such a bitter taste in her mouth that she spent the rest of her life shuffling around muttering something about sour grapes and rotten apples.

I've included colloquial expressions along with more formal idioms in this story just to show you that we don't restrict ourselves to speaking literally. Therefore, we can't honestly require that of the Prophets through whom God spoke. Also, I haven't played around as much as I could have with the various idioms. By contrast, the Prophets play around with the idioms of the Hebrew Scriptures all the time. They do it so much, in fact, that if you don't understand what they are doing, you won't have any idea what they are *talking about*, much less what they have said. The Prophets often do more or less what I did with the two idioms "kick the bucket" and "buy a lemon": They play with the literal image associated with the idiom. You can see from the story how that could mislead people who don't understand the *meaning* of the Hebrew idioms in the first place. They could easily be lead to believe the Prophets are *talking about* a literal "bucket" or "lemon" when in fact their statements relate to the *meaning* of the idiom.

Some of what the Prophets have done would be amusing except for the hard edge of mockery their words have for those who aren't interested in understanding the Truth. They knew the fools of this world, not wanting to understand, would have a field day distorting their statements, running off in all directions, making pious-sounding statements that are ultimately pure folly. When you begin to understand what the Prophets have said, however, you can see the seething wrath of God smoldering in their words. I pity anyone who understands the Old Testament message because of what I teach and yet still continues to teach others what they *think* the Scriptures say. God does not take His Truth so lightly. The Word of God is a double-edged "Sword" that will eventually slice the unlearned to pieces if they use it without understanding their solemn obligation to first learn how to "rightly divide" it. [Editor: He's alluding to Heb. 4:12, Matt. 24:51, and 2 Tim. 2:15.]

Another thing your readers need to know about idioms in general is the fact that they are quite often tied to the imagery of some particular custom. Therefore, their specific *meaning* is quickly lost when that custom ceases to be practiced. Also, idioms sometimes continue to be used with a *meaning* that has been expanded to include similar, but different, circumstances. There are, for example, three different English idioms that use the term *gauntlet*: "throw down the gauntlet," "take up the gauntlet," and "run the gauntlet." I venture to say most people today don't know the background and original *meaning* of these idioms. They only know how they are used today, if they are familiar with them at all. So you can see how one could easily use any one of the idioms to speak specifically concerning the original custom and leave people wondering what they *meant*. That is exactly the type of thing the Prophets of the Old Testament have done.

All three of these English idioms were originally tied to specific images related to customary practices of English-speaking people in past centuries. Yet we don't even use the term *gauntlet* today except in these idioms and as a technical term. There are, in fact, two different original *meanings* for the term. One refers to a part of a suit of armor worn by knights in medieval times. The other refers to two rows of men holding weapons and facing each other. You can see, therefore, that if your intent was to totally confuse someone, you could *talk about* both of those images at the same time.

Editor: We could go on with this at some length, but I want to ask you the question I mentioned in the July issue, even though some of our subscribers are not aware of the specific things you have written recently for The Voice of Elijah Update***, things that have happened almost immediately after they were published. How do you feel when you see things come to pass just the way you've written or said they would? Also, how does it make you feel when you see the list of things you have said would happen keep on growing?***

Elijah: It doesn't make me feel much one way or the other. I'm just giving people my best guess based on things I have read in the Scriptures. I don't claim to be a Prophet predicting current events. I've never spoken or written any of those things in the name of the Lord, and I've been wrong often enough. Even if I had claimed to be predicting things and they came to pass every time just as I stated, True Believers would find that fact to be totally irrelevant. They are more interested in learning the Truth of the Word of God. And that Truth has its own means of confirmation. They don't need me to provide some external sign to validate it for them.

The Word of God will handle the validation of its Truth all by itself just as it did in the Early Church. Contrary to what Satan assumed when he started spreading his lies among the Greek philosophers twenty-five hundred years ago, God had the conclusion already worked out and written down. All we're going to do now is show people how they can read it for themselves. If they believe what they hear from me, and then live according to what they learn from the Word, well and good. If they don't…? That won't be my fault. I will have done what I was called to do. Pretenders can and will fend for themselves.

For the benefit of your Monthly Contributors, I've been stressing in ***The Voice of Elijah Update*** that the understanding I have of God's purpose in these Last Days relates entirely to the message of the Old Testament concerning *The Way*. It is a most unfortunate circumstance that the Church turned away from *The Way* so long ago. But even more unfortunate is the fact that the normal response of True Believers today when they hear what happened is to deny it. Even those who will admit the evidence indicates it did happen, still won't accept responsibility for it. They want to attribute blame only to those individuals who influenced the Church so that *The Apostolic Teaching* was lost.

That is also unfortunate, but only because God does not view the situation as we do. The guilt of the Early Church was not individual; it was corporate. The entire Church—past, present, and future—became guilty because the leadership of the Church at that point in time ignored smaller problems until the accumulation of those smaller problems made it impossible for them to respond to the phenomenal challenge presented by the ignorant assertions of Clement of Alexandria and Origen. Nobody has that corporate mentality today. But they are nonetheless guilty, just as guilty as those who were directly responsible. To the minds of all today, the Church is nothing more than an eclectic gathering of individuals who get together on Sunday morning to worship God. The key word in that statement is "individuals." Everybody wants to maintain their independence, so they have no commonality with other Believers. The unity of the Church doesn't even exist except as literary fiction. How can it? Those who worship together don't all have the same concept of Who God is, or the same view concerning what He has done, so how can they even be said to worship the same God? I have no doubt God will rectify that situation, at least as far as True Believers are concerned, before the Return of Jesus Christ.

Before the Early Church lost *The Apostolic Teaching*, True Believers knew and agreed completely on their knowledge of the God Who is because they understood and believed the Gospel message the Prophets hid in the Hebrew Scriptures. And their belief that there was but one Truth to be found there provided them the basis for a unity that goes far beyond any that has existed in the Church since that time. Consequently, God performed marvelous works among them because of their unity. By contrast, many today who have but a small part of God's Truth are, I am sure, already being taken in by the lying signs and wonders of Satan as he prepares them for his appearance. [Editor: He's alluding to 2 Thess. 2:9.] Therefore, God must restore *The Teaching* as the basis for the Church's unity of belief before He begins working to restore the commitment of love and respect that True Believers should have for one another. It may be difficult to imagine that God could accomplish such a work in these days. Nonetheless, I have no doubt that True Believers will once again be able to state with confidence that they do indeed:

> *walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forebearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*
> *(Ephesians 4:1b–3)*

How can I be so certain? That's easy. The Apostle Paul goes on to tell you:

> *{There is} one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.*
> *(Ephesians 4:4–7)*

True Believers are individuals, but "grace has been given" to each one so that, as Paul goes on to say, we can all:

attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.
(Ephesians 4:13b)

That spiritual growth is possible only through an understanding of the Old Testament Gospel message that alone provides us the true "knowledge of the Son of God," the One Who said He was "*The Way*, and *The Truth*, and *The Life*." Despite the best that Satan can bring against it, *The Way* is going to be restored. And anyone who wants to "walk in *The Way*" will be able to do so. But whoever rejects it has thereby rejected *The Truth* and will never experience the fulness of *The Life* that God has to offer. I realize that first step is a giant step, but look at it logically: Anyone who is unwilling to admit the Church departed from *The Way* will have no reason to return to it.

There's a certain amount of corporate-mindedness that's necessary before anyone will be willing to admit they, as an individual, share in the corporate guilt of the Church. Yet without that admission of guilt, one can never return in humility, with a whole heart, to *The Way* of the Lord. That's why it's obvious that only True Believers will return to the Lord. Pretenders will be more interested in maintaining their individuality, following their own "way," finding their own "truth." They don't understand that Jesus Christ died to deliver us from that futility. The Prophet Isaiah stated it succinctly:

All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way*;*
But the LORD *has caused the iniquity of us all*
To fall on Him.
(Isaiah 53:6)

Isaiah wrote those words some twenty-seven hundred years ago concerning the waywardness of Israel, the *Corporate* Son of God, in his own day. Yet they apply equally as well to the Church, the Body of Christ, the *Corporate* Son of God in our own day. We are no different from them. We turned aside from *The Way* just as they did. In our case, however, God refused to send His Prophets to restore *The Way* because of His anger. Instead, He did just as Amos, speaking *parabolically*, said He would:

"Behold, days are coming,"
declares the Lord GOD*,*
"When ***I will send a famine on the land,***
Not a famine for bread or a thirst for water,
But rather for hearing the words of the LORD.
And people will stagger from sea to sea,
And from the north even to the east;
They will go to and fro to seek the word of the LORD,
But they will not find {it}."
(Amos 8:11–12)

The only appropriate response for those who are True Believers today is to pray as Daniel prayed, freely acknowledging that we have not, as the corporate repository of God's Spirit:

"obeyed the voice of the LORD *our God,* ***to walk in His teachings which He set before us through his servants the prophets****."*
(Daniel 9:10b)

"The Many" will do just that. And before long, those True Believers who repent as God requires will come to understand and experience what the Prophet Hosea spoke *parabolically* about our own time:

"Come, let us return to the LORD*.*
For He has torn {us}, but He will heal us;
He has wounded {us}, but He will bandage us.
He will revive us after two days;
He will raise us up on the third day
That we may live before Him.
So let us know,
let us press on to know the LORD.
His going forth is as certain as the dawn;
And He will come to us like the rain,
Like the spring rain watering the earth*."*
(Hosea 6:1–3)

Just tell your readers to think *parabolically*. Elijah brought the rain that ended the famine in the days of Jezebel, the whore who seduced the sons of Israel to worship gods of their own imagination in his day, before he fled to the Mountain of God. *Parabolically* speaking, it will be so again. And although it will take a while to prepare it all, ambrosia will again grace the "table" of the Lord that is being prepared so the Beloved of the Lord can "dine" in the presence of her enemies. [Editor: He's alluding to Psalm 23:5 and Deuteronomy 32:13.] Just tell them to remember Lot's wife. [Editor: He's alluding to Luke 17:32.] And remind them that once they start to flee from that great city—the "whore"—to the Mountain of God, not to look back. There's nothing worth remembering in Sodom. [Editor: He's alluding to the symbolism mentioned in Revelation 11:8.] ■

Origen

From Page 1

One of the first and most renowned Greek philosophers to become a Christian was Justin Martyr (ca. A.D. 100–165). To his credit, however, Justin appears to have submitted himself to the leadership of the Church and to have set about the task of learning *The Apostolic Teaching* from them. From his writings, it seems he did a fairly commendable job of it, even though one can still find in his writings traces of doctrine more characteristic of Greek Middle Platonic and Stoic philosophy than of *The Teaching*.

Justin Martyr's stature in the Early Church is amply demonstrated by the fact that both Irenæus and Tertullian (who detested philosophy) borrowed from his works. Justin's one obvious mistake, if indeed one could call it that, was to use his former training in the philosophical arts as a tool for defending Christian beliefs against those in the educated ruling class who considered Christianity more barbaric than Greek and Roman religions. But a more important result of his work appears to have been the establishment of philosophical training as a legitimate pursuit of Christian leaders.

Justin Martyr's most well-known work is his treatise *Against Trypho* (ca. A.D. 153). Church historians normally give it low marks as an apologetic work, however, in part because he does not explain his exegetical methodology. They fail to understand he had none. For Justin, the Scriptures were to be understood as they were explained by Church leaders who had been trained in *The Apostolic Teaching*, not interpreted according to some interpretive methodology.

"Well over a hundred and fifty years after Jesus Christ revealed the* meaning *of the Hebrew Scriptures to His Apostles, the leaders of the orthodox Church still had no clearly defined exegetical principles."

The Smoking Gun

Pantænus (A.D. 130?–200?) was one of the next philosophers to take up the mantle as resident Church philosopher after the execution of Justin Martyr in A.D. 165. Sometime around A.D. 185, Pantænus established a catechetical school in Alexandria, Egypt. That school became considerably more reputable under the leadership of one of his pupils, Clement of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 150–215). Consequently, by A.D. 200, Clement was hard at work training other Christians in "Christian philosophy."

Like Justin Martyr before him, Clement left us his own apologetic work (*Stromateis*) in which he had attempted to make Christianity more acceptable to the educated people of his day. The real *significance* of his work, however, is that in it he sets forth an exegetical methodology others could use for interpreting the Hebrew Scriptures.

No Church leader before Clement had ever sought to explain the interpretative methodology whereby they gained their understanding of the parables of Scripture. Church historians do not fully appreciate the fact that they had no exegetical methodology because they were not interpreting Scripture. Some scholars can even see that perhaps Clement was not trying to interpret Scripture:

> *It was Clement of Alexandria, however, who first among Christians undertook to justify and explain the meaning of the allegorical method. And yet his thought is hardly ever systematic. He is not attempting to construct a theological system in the light of his interpretation of scripture, but simply to use scripture to illustrate his already formed thought.* ***He had apparently come to Christianity through teaching which he accepted without much question. And when he tries to find this teaching expressed in the words of scripture he begins to develop a theory of the symbolism of the Bible****. He believes that all scripture speaks in a mysterious language of symbols … (Grant & Tracy, p. 55)*

That's interesting, isn't it? Clement may not have been trying to defend his own method of interpreting the Hebrew Scriptures at all. He perhaps only wanted to validate the understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures he had learned in the Church by appealing to an already established allegorical methodology.

However that may be, his work tells us that well over a hundred and fifty years after Jesus Christ revealed the *meaning* of the Hebrew Scriptures to His Apostles, the leaders of the orthodox Church still had no clearly defined exegetical principles. That's because they were not doing their own interpretation of the Scriptures. Their task, as they clearly explain in their writings, was the accurate transmission of *The Apostolic Teaching*. (See "Did You *Mean* That Literally?" in this issue.)

"Clement borrowed freely from the works of a Jewish philosopher who had been a contemporary of Jesus Christ."

Guess where Clement got the allegorical methodology he used? From the Jews! That's logical, isn't it? If the leaders of the Church had no exegetical methodology of their own, Clement would have had to go looking or else construct his own. Who outside the Church would have already developed an exegetical methodology that could be used for interpreting the Old Testament? The Jews, of course. They had been interpreting the Hebrew Scriptures for themselves ever since they lost their understanding of *The Teaching* at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes some 350 years previously. (See "Questions & Answers," ***The Voice of Elijah***, April 1992.)

To make his point concerning the logic he found in *The Apostolic Teaching*, Clement borrowed freely from the

"Clement understood the message of Scripture included allegory, and the Jews of his day were not particularly keen on the allegorical interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures."

works of a Jewish philosopher who had been a contemporary of Jesus Christ—Philo of Alexandria (ca. 30 B.C.–A.D. 40). We know Clement borrowed Philo's methodology because he often included lengthy passages from Philo's works in which he changed little, if anything at all:

> *The fact that Clement, particularly in the* Stromateis*, is dependent on Philo, was established … and has been reconfirmed by many modern studies. (A. Van den Hoek,* Clement of Alexandria and His Use of Philo in the Stromateis*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988)*

"For well over a century after the death of the Apostles, Early Church leaders understood that, according to* The Apostolic Teaching, *the Church, not* the Jews, *is Israel."

Clement didn't obtain his understanding of the Old Testament message by using the exegetical methodology of Philo. As he explains, he learned that from Pantænus, whom he respected and admired. However, he apparently tried to validate his understanding of *The Apostolic Teaching* by laying out a consistent allegorical methodology to show how the Church *could have* attained its understanding of the parables of Scripture. Even in that attempt we know he adopted Philo's exegetical methodology and, it seems, some of Philo's interpretations as well. That was a mistake.

Why do you think Clement found it necessary to borrow an allegorical methodology from a Jewish exegete who had lived in an earlier era? Why didn't he borrow the exegetical methodology of the Jews of his own time? Why? Because Clement understood the message of Scripture included allegory, and the Jews of his day were not particularly keen on the allegorical interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The Jews favored a literal interpretation of the Old Testament. That's not surprising. Church leaders had been arguing for more than a century and a half that, according to *The Apostolic Teaching*, the Church was allegorically (parabolically) the true Israel.

That is *significant*. For well over a century after the death of the Apostles, Early Church leaders understood that, according to *The Apostolic Teaching*, *the Church*, not *the Jews*, is Israel. Furthermore, for over sixteen centuries after that, the Church continued to believe *the Church*, not *the Jews*, was the chosen People of God. Doesn't that make you wonder how and when some came by the lie that the Jews are the continuation of Israel? It happened just over a hundred years ago. Now, isn't that interesting? You'd never suspect that was so to hear them tell it. But Satan has always had his agents. Or isn't it lying when people who don't know pretend they do and say things with no concern for whether or not they have ever been part of the historic doctrines of Christianity?

The Jewish view is understandable. They could hardly be expected to appeal to any methodology that could be used to prove they were not the legitimate continuation of Israel. That's just one of the reasons why Clement had to go back to the writings of a Jewish philosopher who had written well over a century before.

Another reason is that the Early Church's understanding of the Scriptures was, at least in part, *parabolic*. Since a parable is just a specific form of allegory (see "They've Put God in a Box! (Or So They Think)" in this issue), Clement appealed to Philo's method of interpretation because it was allegorical. That is also *significant*. If you want to understand the parables of Scripture, you have to think in terms of the types and symbols that are widely recognized as an integral part of allegory. (See "They've Put God in a Box! (Or So They Think)" in this issue.)

During Clement's tenure at the catechetical school in Alexandria, he had the good fortune (or misfortune—Church leaders read it both ways later on) to train a bright young student named Origen (ca. A.D. 185–254), a student who eventually replaced him as the school's teacher. That was unfortunate. Clement wanted to show how *The Apostolic Teaching* could have been gained from the Scriptures using the exegetical methodology of Philo. Origen had much greater ambitions.

Origen freely used the allegorical methodology he learned from Clement to interpret the Old Testament message for himself. He only felt compelled to abide by the expectation that his teaching remain within the limits of the abbreviated "rule of faith" the Church had developed as a safeguard against heresy. That left him plenty of room to interpret the Scriptures as he saw fit. And interpret he did. In fact, he opened the floodgates of speculation so wide that, over the next century and a half, the Church lost all but a bare minimum of its understanding of *The Apostolic Teaching*. (See "Temple and Antichrist" in this issue.)

At the same time that Clement of Alexandria was using philosophy to fuel the rocket and prepare the launchpad for the Church's all but instantaneous departure from *The Apostolic Teaching*, his

"Origen freely used the allegorical methodology he learned from Clement to interpret the Old Testament message for himself."

"Theologians slight the writings of those who understood at least some of **The Apostolic Teaching** *and latch on to the writings of a man who pulled ideas out of thin air!"*

contemporary Tertullian and other Church leaders were warning all who would listen about the dangers inherent in appropriating anything that philosophy had to offer. Fighting desperately to preserve the Truth, Tertullian and his brethren were instead looking strictly to *The Apostolic Teaching* for their understanding of the Old Testament:

> ***Tertullian set forth orthodoxy as the norm of the interpretation of scripture in the period before Origen became prominent****.... Tertullian detested philosophy and regarded it as the mother of heresy. The authoritative interpretation of scripture was intended to bypass the questions of philosophical interpreters.*
> *(Grant & Tracy, p. 77)*

You can see even in this quote the bias of the authors. They approve of the exegetical practices that Christian philosophers introduced into the Church. Consequently, they cannot understand why Tertullian and his fellow Believers had no interest in interpreting the Scriptures for themselves. They also fail to understand the havoc Origen wreaked by undermining the very foundation of the unity of the orthodox Church.

Tertullian and his kindred brethren must have recognized they were fighting a losing battle in their efforts to preserve the existence of *The Apostolic Teaching* in the Church. That may well have contributed to Tertullian's decision to quit the Church in A.D. 207 and join the Montanist Christians, perhaps believing them to be a better repository for *The Apostolic Teaching* he knew and loved. We probably will never know.

We do know, however, that Origen ignored the anti-philosophy wing of the Church and their loudly voiced warnings concerning the dangers of dabbling in Greek philosophy. He continued on his way undeterred. Unbeknownst to him, however, he unleashed the Baskerville hounds of Christendom. With poetic justice, the Church (mostly for the wrong reasons) later sought to have him posthumously tried on charges of heresy.

When the leaders of the Church accepted Origen's assertion that he knew of an exegetical methodology whereby individual Church leaders could interpret the *meaning* of the Scriptures for themselves, it sounded the death knell for the concept of one Truth in Scripture that had for nearly two hundred years remained inherent in *The Apostolic Teaching*. It also, almost overnight, destroyed the doctrinal unity that Justin Martyr, Irenæus, and Tertullian had so highly touted as a primary evidence that the apostolic churches still understood the Truth Jesus Christ had revealed to His Apostles. It is no wonder the Church has been plagued by schism and doctrinal controversy. Yet scholars still don't understand that Origen opened Pandora's box. Notice how the author of the following quote gives him his unqualified approval:

> *Origen's biblical writings had an immense impact on later theology.... **Searching the biblical texts for clues to their higher spiritual meaning became the normative task of the Christian exegete**, and with this task came the appropriation of the full arsenal of Hellenistic allegorical techniques: the philological study of words and phrases, etymology, numerology, figuration, natural symbolism, etc. One may deplore the "loss of spontaneity" . . . which this new emphasis entailed. Nevertheless, **Origen paved the road for Christian hermeneutics as a professional and scientific enterprise fully in tune with the scholarly standards of his time**. This was no small achievement. His successors built upon the foundations which he had laid ...*
> *(Froehlich, p.18)*

"Scholars still don't understand that Origen opened Pandora's box."

Foundations? What a joke! His was a foundation built on sand! [Editor: He's alluding to Jesus' parable about the houses built on rock and sand—Matthew 7:24–27.] It's little wonder that Christian leaders soon saw their primary responsibility to be the interpretation of the Scriptures rather than the transmission of *The Apostolic Teaching*. All too soon opinionated individuals everywhere felt fully qualified to put their own interpretation of the Scriptures above the remnants of *The Apostolic Teaching* that can still be found in the works of Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Tertullian, and even Origen's contemporaries—Hippolytus, the disciple of Irenæus (see *The Advent of Christ and AntiChrist* or *The AntiChrist*), and Cyprian, the disciple of Tertullian. Their disregard for the understanding these men had remains with us still today.

True to the muddled thinking so characteristic of sinful humanity, the writings of Origen are now widely praised as being more "scholarly" than the writings of those who came before him in the Church. Can you believe it? Theologians slight the writings of those who understood at least some of *The Apostolic Teaching* and latch on to the writings of a man who pulled ideas out of thin air! But that's understandable. He's one of their own.

Literal Interpretation? You're Kidding!

If Early Church leaders until the time of Origen believed the Old Testament should, at least in part, be understood allegorically, what was their view of those who interpreted the Scriptures by a strictly literal method? It was a most vehement rejection. That was so, however, not because the exegetical method-

ology stressed literal interpretation, but because it involved interpretation. The Early Church leaders rejected allegorical interpretation of Scripture as well, again not because it was allegorical, but because it had been gained by someone's "private" interpretation (2 Pet. 1:20). Their own understanding of Scripture was that some passages had literal *meaning* and others had *parabolic meaning*. Furthermore, they forthrightly claimed they had gotten that literal/*parabolic* understanding of the message of the Scriptures from the Apostles.

The first Christian exegete to use a strictly literal methodology in his own interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures was the (soon-to-be) heretic Marcion (A.D. 100?–170?) sometime around A.D. 140. He was charged with teaching heresy and excommunicated from the orthodox Church in A.D. 144.

Marcion immediately formed a separate "Church" based strictly on the belief that Paul was the only legitimate Apostle. (See "Did the Gnostics Really Know?" ***The Voice of Elijah***, October 1991.) Marcion's choice of the literal method of interpretation appears to have been prompted primarily by his aversion to the allegorical understanding of the Old Testament voiced by the orthodox Church leadership. That also confirms for us that the Early Church had an allegorical understanding of the Scriptures in his time:

> *Marcion not only rejected the Old Testament as a Christian book; he insisted on a literal interpretation of it in order to emphasize its crudity. It was not a Christian book, and in his opinion no allegorical exegesis could make it one.*
> *(Grant & Tracy, p. 43)*

Marcion's exegetical methodology does not legitimately represent those Christian theologians who in later centuries favored a more literal methodology to counter the disastrous effects of Origen's allegorical methodology. However, the grounds on which the Church rejected Marcion's method of interpretation certainly does not bode well for them. The Early Church rejected Marcion's literal interpretation of the Scriptures not because it was literal, but because it was his own personal interpretation. How do you think those Early Church leaders would feel if they knew the Church has been out flapping in the breeze for centuries because of Origen's folly?

"The earliest orthodox advocates of a literal interpretation of the Scriptures appeared in the late fourth century."

You can get some idea of Marcion's standing in the eyes of the Early Church from the moniker given him by Polycarp (A.D. 70/82–156/168), the godly patriarch of the Church at Smyrna. Polycarp called Marcion the "firstborn of Satan." (See addendums to "The Letter of the Smyrnæans" in *The Advent of Christ and AntiChrist, p. 28.*) That was because, by interpreting the Scriptures for himself rather than teaching *The Apostolic Teaching*, he was introducing heresy into the Church. What do you suppose Polycarp would have called Origen had he known what Origen accomplished? And what would he have thought of the ridiculous ideas being touted in the Church today with total disregard for whether or not they have ever been part of historic Christian beliefs?

"The first Christian exegete to use a strictly literal methodology in his own interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures was the (soon-to-be) heretic Marcion."

The earliest orthodox advocates of a literal interpretation of the Scriptures appeared in the late fourth century—only after Origen opened the doors of the Church to individual interpretation of Scripture. These literalists were, with the exception of the erudite scholar Jerome (ca. A.D. 347–420), adherents of the Antiochene school of interpretation. They seem to have favored a literal method of interpretation, at least in part, as a way to correct some of the obviously fantastic interpretations that were directly attributable to the allegorical methodology of Origen:

"Origen ignored the anti-philosophy wing of the Church and their loudly voiced warnings concerning the dangers of dabbling in Greek philosophy."

> *There can be little doubt that the hermeneutical theories of the Antiochene school were aimed at the excesses of Alexandrian spiritualism. Careful textual criticism, philological and historical studies, and the cultivation of classical rhetoric had been the hallmark of the pagan schools in the city. Christian exegetes followed in the same path. Modern biblical scholars have sometimes praised the sober attention given to the literal sense by the Antiochene exegetes as a model for today.*
> *(Froehlich, p. 20)*

Isn't that disgusting? Just as Clement of Alexandria and Origen had so many years before, these Church leaders got their interpretive methodology from Greek philosophers. Consequently, it was not a strictly literal methodology. They did admit to a higher sense in Scripture (*theoria*) which they were never able to completely differentiate from the allegorical sense (*allegoria*) stressed by Origen. However, it is also clear these Church leaders were moved in the direction of a more literal methodology by the large and influential Jewish population centered in and around Antioch:

"After Origen introduced his allegorical methodology, some of the interpretations Christian leaders offered for the Hebrew Scriptures tended to be more fantastic than realistic."

The earliest Antiochene exegesis which we possess, an interpretation of Genesis by Theophilus of Antioch, is largely derived from Jewish teachers.
(Grant & Tracy, p. 63)

Even Jerome (ca. A.D. 347–420), "the ablest scholar that the ancient Western Church could boast" (W. Walker, *A History of the Christian Church, New York: C. Scribner's Sons*, 1970, p. 158), was convinced by his Jewish teachers that he should reject the allegorical methodology of Origen and take up the literalist approach of the Jews. Note that the bias of the author in the following quote is toward literal interpretation:

Under the influence of his Jewish teachers Jerome turned from allegorization to an increasing respect for the literal meaning of scripture. And it is likely that wherever the influence of the synagogue was felt by the church the interpretation of scripture had a tendency toward literalism.
(Grant & Tracy, p. 63)

Jerome's most lasting impact on the Church proved to be his insistence that the Old Testament was to be interpreted literally. It should be noted here, however, that Jerome's contemporary and the favorite Father of the Protestant Reformers—St. Augustine—remained firmly in the allegorical camp:

Only when he discovered the allegorical method of interpreting the Old Testament was he able to become a Christian.
(Grant & Tracy, p. 78)

Over the next eight hundred years the literal method of interpretation had minimal influence on the Church:

The most important and characteristic method of biblical interpretation … was not literal but allegorical. In the late patristic period and in the Middle Ages, a system of allegorization was developed according to which four meanings were to be sought in every text. Sometimes there were as many as seven, but the more normal number of senses was four.
(Grant & Tracy, p. 85)

You can see from this how, without the understanding provided by *The Apostolic Teaching*, allegorical interpretation could allow lies and half-truths to run rampant in the Church. That is exactly what the Antiochene literalists reacted against. After Origen introduced his allegorical methodology, some of the interpretations Christian leaders offered for the Hebrew Scriptures tended to be more fantastic than realistic. It's no wonder the learned scholar Jerome opted for a literal methodology as well.

"Although the allegorical method of interpretation prevailed in the Church, from time to time there was a resurgence of the literal method, primarily when Jewish influence was brought to bear."

Although the allegorical method of interpretation prevailed in the Church, from time to time there was a resurgence of the literal method, primarily when Jewish influence was brought to bear on one individual or the other:

in the twelfth century there was some emphasis in Jewish and Christian exegesis on the historical sense of the Old Testament. This emphasis … permeates the work of Andrew of St. Victor. He constantly stresses the importance of the historical sense of scripture as his Jewish contemporaries have understood it.… At times Andrew's interest in Jewish interpretations led him to disregard the exposition of his Christian predecessors.
(Grant & Tracy, p. 84)

What a sad state of affairs! Not only did the Church turn away from and eventually abandon *The Teaching* Jesus had revealed to His Apostles, but they also turned again and again to the very religion whose understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures Jesus had rejected as nothing more than a "tradition" of men! (See the quotation of Mark 7:5–13 in "Did You *Mean* That Literally?" in this issue.) However, the Church's imbecilic trips to the broken cistern hewn out by the Jews didn't stop there. [Editor: He's alluding to Jer. 2:12–13.] They are still occurring in our own time.

The tendency of Christian scholars since the loss of *The Apostolic Teaching* has always been a willingness to appropriate Jewish methods of interpretation and accept the Jewish understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures to legitimize their own methodology and interpretation. Their actions are little more than a tacit admission that they believe the Church lost its own understanding of Scripture.

After all, they have reasoned, the Jews must have held on to a better understanding of the Old Testament than the Church did. Little do they realize the Jews have retained even less of *The Teaching* they were given than Christians have. At least the Church still understands Jesus Christ is the Messiah of Israel predicted by the Prophets. The Jews are still expecting another messiah!

Finally, a somewhat modified version of the literal method of interpretation found a most able proponent in the scholastic, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). Although Aquinas had no

inkling as to how the message of Scripture had been hidden in parables, his view regarding the *meaning* of Scripture is not far removed from that of Justin Martyr, Irenæus, and Tertullian.

Aquinas believed there was a fundamental literal sense to Scripture on which one could base an allegorical sense, a typological sense, and a spiritual sense. By contrast, the Early Church Fathers would and did insist that a particular passage of Scripture has but one *meaning*, either literal or *parabolic*. (See, for example, Irenæus, *Against Heresies*, 33:4; *The Advent of Christ and AntiChrist*, p. 94 ff.)

It had taken the Church just over one thousand years of "walking" in its own "ways" before it was finally able to reign in the ludicrous allegorical methodology first introduced to the Church by Clement of Alexandria. Of Aquinas' monumental work, *Summa Theologica*, it can be said with some relief:

> *This marks theology's declaration of independence from the allegorical method.*
> *(Grant & Tracy, p. 90)*

The Truth is, it hardly mattered. Whether one used an allegorical or literal method of interpretation, the *meaning* of Scripture would remain sealed to even the most inquiring minds until the time came for the seven seals of Scripture to be removed. (See "Did Jesus Leave a Will?" ***The Voice of Elijah***, July 1991.)

"It had taken the Church just over one thousand years of 'walking' in its own 'ways' before it was finally able to reign in the ludicrous allegorical methodology first introduced to the Church by Clement of Alexandria."

Jesus had given the Apostles *The Apostolic Teaching* through revelation because the *meaning* of the Hebrew Scriptures had been sealed. (See *The Mystery of Scripture*.) But the Church had long since turned away from its understanding of *The Apostolic Teaching*. Consequently, that *Teaching* could only be *restored* by one to whom God chose to give the same revelation He had given the Apostles, or else (as is now the case) by the removal of the seals so the Scriptures could be read like any other book. That solemn reality would not change even after the leaders of the Protestant Reformation recovered a smattering of the Truth of *The Apostolic Teaching* by reading the writings of St. Augustine and the New Testament. As you may recall, the New Testament Scriptures were never sealed (Rev. 22:10).

Since the Reformation

The Protestant Reformers' view regarding the interpretation of Scripture was a foregone conclusion. They needed the Scriptures as a final authority—an authority higher than that of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church. Hence, they saw the need for a somewhat literal, rather than the usual allegorical, understanding of Scripture:

> *The church was not to be the arbiter of the meaning of scripture, for scripture, the word of God, was the church's judge. Naturally the reformers insisted on an historical, literal, grammatical understanding of the Bible as they came to believe that a new authority must be set up to oppose the authority of the church.*
> *(Grant & Tracy, p. 92–3)*

Here we begin to see the original basis for the theory of literal interpretation. The theory originated in a desire to exclude allegorical *meaning* from the Scriptural message. And it is precisely on that point that one can show the theory ultimately flounders. If God has spoken in the Scriptures (and indeed He has), and if we can ourselves write allegorical compositions, we cannot say God would not also choose to speak in allegories (or parables) through His Prophets without some specific Scriptural statement to that effect. [See "They've Put God in a Box! (Or So They Think)" in this issue and *The Mystery of Scripture*.] In fact, we find exactly the opposite clearly stated in Scripture:

"Aquinas believed there was a fundamental literal sense to Scripture on which one could base an allegorical sense, a typological sense, and a spiritual sense."

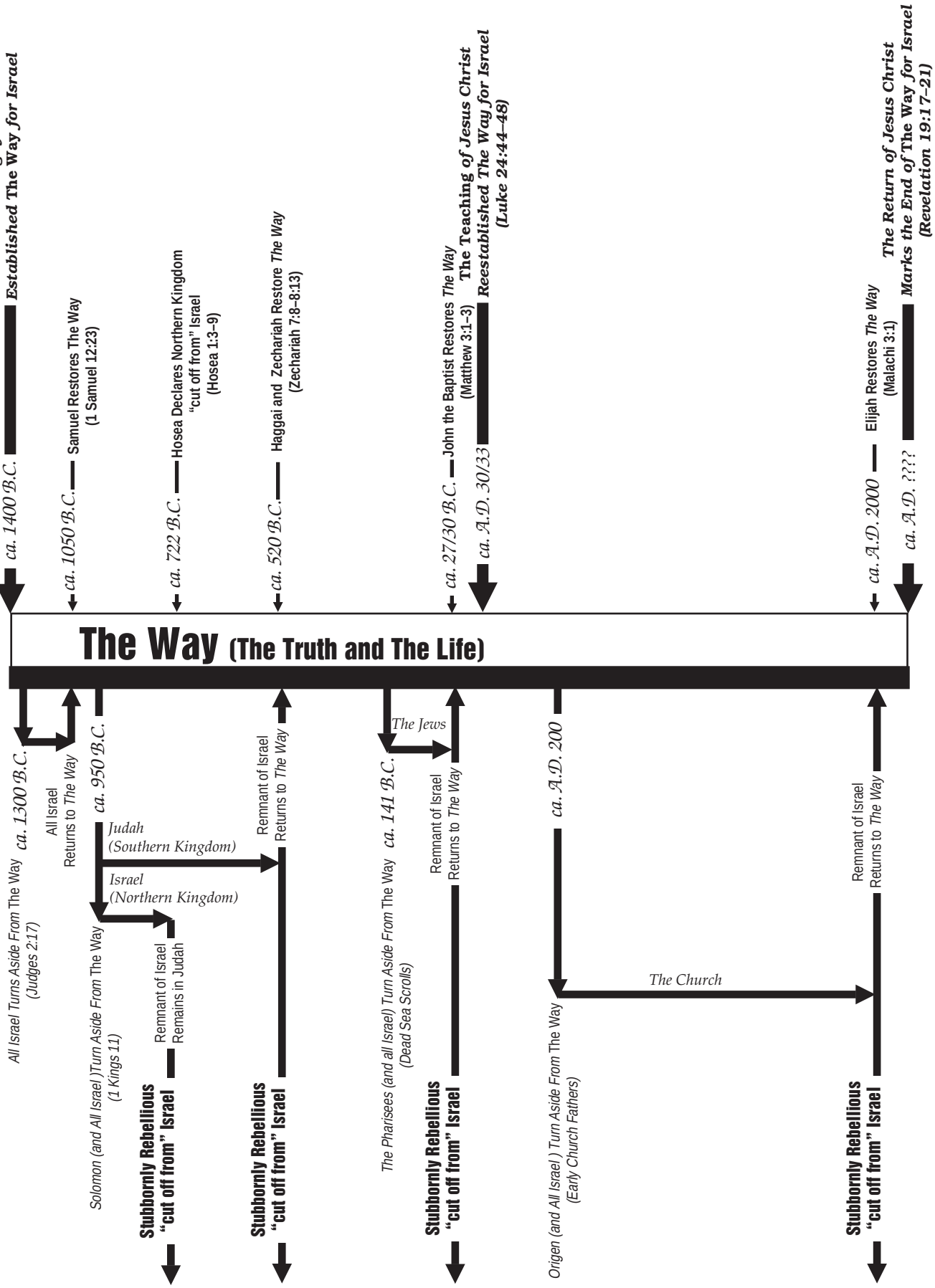
> *I have also spoken to the prophets,*
> *And I gave numerous visions;*
> *And* ***through the prophets I gave parables****.*
> *(Hosea 12:10)*

Furthermore, the total absence of allegorical *meaning* is not how all the Reformers viewed Scripture:

> *After 1517, when Luther definitely broke with the Roman church, he ceased to make use of allegorization, and insisted on the necessity of "one simple solid sense" for the arming of theologians against Satan. He admits the existence of allegories in scripture, but they are to be found only where the various authors intended them.*
> *(Grant & Tracy, p. 94)*

So for Luther at least, the problem of how to interpret the Scriptures centered on determining whether the original author intended his words to be understood literally or allegorically (*parabolically*). That is a far different thing than saying the Old Testament can only be interpreted literally.

In the centuries since the Protestant Reformation, however, biblical interpretation has come a long way. The rise of Rationalism saw an even greater emphasis on the need to determine the intent of the biblical author through a logical method of interpretation based on reason. Thus, scholars during this era


The Teaching of Moses Established The Way for Israel
ca. 1400 B.C.
ca. 1050 B.C.
Samuel Restores The Way (1 Samuel 12:23)
ca. 722 B.C.
Hosea Declares Northern Kingdom "cut off from" Israel (Hosea 1:3–9)
ca. 520 B.C.
Haggai and Zechariah Restore The Way (Zechariah 7:8–8:13)
ca. 27/30 B.C.
John the Baptist Restores The Way (Matthew 3:1–3)
The Teaching of Jesus Christ Reestablished The Way for Israel (Luke 24:44–48)
ca. A.D. 30/33
ca. A.D. 2000
Elijah Restores The Way (Malachi 3:1)
The Return of Jesus Christ Marks the End of The Way for Israel (Revelation 19:17–21)
ca. A.D. ????
The Way (The Truth and The Life)
All Israel Turns Aside From The Way (Judges 2:17)
ca. 1300 B.C.
All Israel Returns to The Way
ca. 950 B.C.
Solomon (and All Israel) Turn Aside From The Way (1 Kings 11)
Judah (Southern Kingdom)
Israel (Northern Kingdom)
Remnant of Israel Remains in Judah
Stubbornly Rebellious "cut off from" Israel
Remnant of Israel Returns to The Way
Stubbornly Rebellious "cut off from" Israel
The Pharisees (and all Israel) Turn Aside From The Way (Dead Sea Scrolls)
ca. 141 B.C.
The Jews
Remnant of Israel Returns to The Way
Stubbornly Rebellious "cut off from" Israel
Origen (and All Israel) Turn Aside From The Way (Early Church Fathers)
ca. A.D. 200
The Church
Remnant of Israel Returns to The Way
Stubbornly Rebellious "cut off from" Israel

"Scholars concluded the logical way to determine what any author* meant *was to take into account the grammatical principles of the language and the historical circumstances in which the literature had been written."

worked to construct a rational hermeneutic—method of interpretation—that could be applied not just to the Bible but to all other literature as well.

Scholars concluded the logical way to determine what any author *meant* was to take into account the grammatical principles of the language and the historical circumstances in which the literature had been written—that is, according to a "grammatical-historical" methodology. Amazingly, that is not far removed from the views of the Reformers themselves. It also agrees with the views of the Early Church Fathers.

After the Reformation, the refinement of the grammatical-historical methodology made great strides. The basic principles of that method of interpretation were set forth by William Ames (1576–1633) in a book on interpretive principles that was (during the seventeenth century) used as a textbook at Harvard. Ames argued, in agreement with the Early Church Fathers and the Protestant Reformers, that there could be but one *meaning* to any given biblical text. His work was continued by Johann Ernesti (1707–1781) who argued, quite logically, that the one *meaning* of a text ultimately had to be determined by what the original author *meant*.

Note that well. The advocates of literal interpretation are intent on prejudging what God may or may not have *meant* in any given passage of Scripture. They contend one must *presume* He has spoken literally unless overwhelming evidence forces them to admit otherwise. Consequently, they have made themselves the final judges of *The Word*. What do you suppose God would have us do when the judges are blind?

The emphasis on the necessity to determine what the original author *meant* later proved to be too much for what has now become the liberal wing of the Church. When some scholars began to sense they would never be able to pull back the veil of secrecy that covered the biblical text, they began to conjure up speculative theories that would allow them to practice their craft without the strictures placed on them by Rationalism.

Scholars until Johann Semler (1725–1791) were in agreement on the need for determining what the author of a text *meant*. Semler, however, emphasized that there were two *meanings* for any given text—what the author *meant*, and what the text *means* to the reader. Semler was followed immediately by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) who went further and said it doesn't matter what the author *meant*, it is only important what the written text *means* to the reader.

"The advocates of literal interpretation are intent on prejudging what God may or may not have* meant *in any given passage of Scripture."

You can see that Schleiermacher and Semler were trying to get back to Origen's allegorical methodology without the restrictions imposed by that methodology. If it doesn't matter what an author *meant*, the interpreter can say anything he thinks and use biblical text for support. If you see a lot of that nonsense going on today, you now know the source.

Satan wasn't through working to roll back the gains made by the Protestant Reformers, however. Toward the end of last century, he launched a massive attack on several fronts. First, liberal scholars began to explain away the biblical account of Creation and other miraculous events described in the biblical text. To do so, they built dubious hypotheses concerning the historical circumstances of the biblical text. The one that finally took root and grew like a weed was one in which the author of the biblical text was not, for example, really Moses or Isaiah, but some anonymous editor who compiled texts written by various unknown writers. These texts, they said, included myths, saga, legends, folk tales, the kitchen sink, and just about anything else that could be used to discredit the historical account given in the biblical text.

These bizarre liberal theories concerning the historical circumstances in which the biblical authors wrote the Scriptures were prompted primarily by the publication of Darwin's theory of evolution. After Darwin's theory was published, it became sort of a fad in academia for scholars to look for evolution everywhere and in everything. So before long, some knucklehead came up with a theory in which the historical account found in the biblical text evolved from saga, myth, heroic epic, and folk tale. The foolishness swept through the academic world like wildfire.

The amazing thing is, to this day, such theories remain foundational to the imaginary biblical history crafted by liberal biblical scholars. Consequently, many academic journals are little more than comic books filled with esoteric articles founded on theories that should have collapsed under their own weight long ago. You probably won't hear these fairy-tale theories expounded from the pulpit because if ordinary folk knew what many ministers today believe about the Bible, and why, they would surely die laughing. No, these rarefied theories are reserved primarily for the ears of students of seminaries and institutions of higher learning.

Liberal goofiness notwithstanding, conservative Christians who stood firmly in traditional Christian beliefs were shaken by the suddenness of the liberals' decision to build elaborate theories on the basis of Darwin's postulate concerning evolution. They found themselves scurrying to defend their beliefs by any and all means necessary.

To their credit, some scholars, primarily those associated with Princeton

" If you are seeking to know the Truth, you will find it only when you are willing to admit the Church has done exactly what the Old Testament tells us Israel did before."

Seminary around the turn of the century, continued to build on the common sense approach of the grammatical-historical method. Over the past century, the spiritual descendants of these scholars have established a rather solid hermeneutic based on rational principles. (See, for example, W.C. Kaiser, Jr. *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981.) Using grammatical-historical principles of interpretation, these scholars would have been able to determine the *meaning* of the Scriptures, had it not been for the seven seals God had placed on the text of Scripture and the blinders imposed by their slavish defense of the Christian tradition they received.

Other less learned members of the Protestant Church, however, went looking for other ways to defend their beliefs. Since these people were for the most part laymen, they were completely unaware of the basic issues at stake in the ongoing academic debate over the correct method of biblical interpretation. They were also unenlightened as to the views of the Protestant Reformers and the historic views of the Church. Consequently, they were totally ignorant of the fact that the consequences of their untaught pronouncement on the issue might have far-reaching and deleterious effects on future generations of Believers. In short, they were fertile soil for Satan's tares.

Guess what these folk found when looking for a ready defense against the idiotic notions of liberal professors? They found a literal method of interpretation similar to that espoused by the Jews! Amazing coincidence, isn't it? Sadly enough, it was also part of a system of biblical interpretation in which the Israel of the Prophets must always be the Jews, never the Church. That system, known as "Dispensationalism," promoted a tidy eschatology that would later fit together perfectly with Jewish expectations concerning their messiah.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the dispensational theory of biblical interpretation has had a strong influence on fundamentalist views concerning the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Never mind the fact that, until John Nelson Darby (1800–1882) promoted his Dispensational theory throughout North America, the Church had always considered itself to be the continuation of *Corporate* Israel.

Note that well; it's a fact. The belief that the Jews are still Israel has had wide currency in the Church only since the formation of the Niagara Bible Conferences in 1876. So if you place any value at all on the historic doctrines of Christianity, you have to suspect this particular doctrinal system is Satan's trojan horse.

"Satan has been working from within the Church to shape fundamentalist Christian beliefs so that they agree with Jewish expectations."

At about the same time that Christians went looking for some way to defend against the satanic onslaught initiated by novel liberal theories of the Scripture, the Jews were beginning to look forward expectantly to the fulfillment of their own "Zionist" interpretation of Scripture. (See the discussion of Jewish Zionism in "Touch Not the Lord's Anointed," ***The Voice of Elijah***, October 1990.) According to that understanding of Scripture, the Jews are the Israel the Prophets of the Old Testament predicted will be restored to the Promised Land before their messiah comes to rebuild the Temple.

Isn't that interesting? You can see how Satan has been working from within the Church to shape fundamentalist Christian beliefs so that they agree with Jewish expectations. If, after learning all this, you still think the convergence of all these erroneous ideas at one point in history is sheer coincidence, you no doubt also believe in Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny. Satan has his ways; and he isn't about to stop now.

Many fundamentalists today who do not otherwise hold to the dispensational system have uncritically accepted as fact the dispensational view regarding God's dealings with the Jews at the end of the "Church Age." They look forward to the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem as a good thing. As you can see from the writings of the Early Church, that belief will ultimately prove deadly. (See *The AntiChrist* or *The Advent of Christ and AntiChrist.*) No doubt much of what the Dispensationalists expect will come to pass in one way or another. But will that be in fulfillment of God's Truth, or will it be in accord with Satan's lie? You must decide, because you alone are responsible for what you believe.

If you are seeking to know the Truth, you will find it only when you are willing to admit the Church has done exactly what the Old Testament tells us Israel did before: They refused to follow God by passing along *The Apostolic Teaching* He had given them. (See *The Mystery of Scripture*.) That doesn't *mean* God ceased to work with the Church. It just *means* we who are True Believers in this generation are now standing in the midst of what is, for the most part, an apostate Church. No wonder you see such bickering and carrying on!

Wouldn't it be great to fellowship with True Believers who exhibit the unity of the Early Church? If you feel that way, keep one simple fact in mind: The Early Church had unity only because True Believers had but "one faith" —that is, one understanding of the Old Testament Gospel message of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the unity the Early Church knew would only be possible today if we could somehow regain *The Apostolic Teaching* that was the original basis for it. Not likely, is it? But who knows? The One who walked on the Sea once can certainly do it again should He decide. (That's intended *parabolically*.) ■

They've Put God in a Box!

(Or So They Think)

When at the first I took my pen in hand
Thus for to write, I did not understand
That I at all should make a little book
In such a mode; nay, I had undertook
To make another; which, when almost done,
Before I was aware, I this begun.
And thus it was: ***I, writing of the way***
And race of saints, in this our gospel day,
Fell suddenly into an allegory
About their journey, and the way to glory*,*
(John Bunyan, The Annotated Pilgrim's Progress,
Chicago: Moody Press, 1980, p. 13)

With those words John Bunyan (1628–1688) introduced his allegorical tale titled *Pilgrim's Progress,* in which he described an imaginary dream he had about his own (or the Christian's) conversion and spiritual walk with God. Throughout his work Bunyan used various images drawn from the Scriptures to symbolically represent Christ, conformity to external morality, the promises of God, etc.

Bunyan's allegorical fiction is part of a genre of literature known as "medieval allegory." Included in that same category is the 13th century *Roman de la Rose*, a French didactic (teaching) poem about the art of winning a woman's love, and Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*. More recent examples of allegorical literature include Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* (1850), Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), Albert Camus' *The Plague* (1948), and even George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945).

The popular Christian author C.S. Lewis, who was a specialist in medieval allegory, chose to describe his own conversion in an allegorical work with the title *Pilgrim's Regress* (1933)—a title based directly on Bunyan's work. Some even believe his seven volume work, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, is an attempt at teaching the Truths about Christianity through allegory. However, Lewis denied they were ever intended as such.

Oh! Your Box Has a Hole in It?

The very existence of a genre of literature known as allegory presents a serious problem for those who insist the Scriptures can only be interpreted literally. If men can create allegorical literature, how can anyone dogmatically assert that God would not choose to do the same? They can't. Neither can they prove He hasn't. Without some word from the author himself, we are easily left wondering whether or not a particular work is intended to be read as allegory. That has already been proven by Jonathan Swift's well-known *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). That work has perplexed scholars for centuries. Should it be taken as political allegory satirizing politicians of his own day? And if so, to what extent? The answer died with Jonathan Swift.

So those who insist on a strictly literal interpretation of the Scriptures have no leg to stand on. They want God to be their own personal jack-in-the-box—a god who will say only what they can readily understand—so they contend He could not have produced an allegorical work. However, the Almighty God is not so easily contained. He has decisively stated in Hosea 12:10 that the statements He made through the Prophets were *parabolic*. Since the parable is a specific type of allegory, God has told us the statements He has made in Scripture should, at least in part, be understood allegorically. Therefore, we already know the Scriptures contain allegory. The only questions that remain to be answered concern where, how, and the extent to which the Scriptures should be read as one would read allegory/parable. The answer, you will find, is rather remarkable.

Check Again; He's Not in There!

To some extent, I've just been playing devil's advocate in the articles for this issue in order to draw attention to the inane claim made by those who demand a strictly literal interpretation of the Scriptures. In truth, the grammatical-historical method of interpretation will produce results not much different than those obtained by the literal method of interpretation simply because it demands that historical texts be understood to have literal meaning. However, the grammatical-historical method of interpretation begins by insisting that the author's intent, rather than the reader's presupposition—for example, literal *meaning* only—must ultimately determine the *meaning* of any given text. Consequently, that approach allows for the possibility that the entirety of the Old Testament could be a uniquely written allegory/parable. And indeed it is.

Over the next few years I must, by God's design, show you how the Old Testament speaks specifically concerning the birth, life, and death of Jesus Christ, the Messiah of Israel. I will do so, all the while abiding by the rules of the grammatical-historical method of interpretation—that is, the same method you would use to read and understand any other literature. However, I cannot affirm I used that methodology to obtain my own understanding of Scripture because I'm not certain how I came by it. I doubt I'm intelligent enough to have figured it out on my own, yet I must have done so because I cannot tell you anyone ever explained it to me. But then, others won't see anything special in what I teach anyway, so what's the fuss? Just this: Those of you who find a basic logic in what I teach should

know the Truth. My insight into what God has concealed in the Hebrew Scriptures is inextricably intertwined with my calling. Since I don't fully understand either one as yet, I can only tell you the things you will see in the Scriptures have come to me over the past several years (and are still coming) in bits and pieces. I can definitely tell you, however, that those things did not come to me by revelation. There is no need for revelation in our own day because the Lamb of God is now removing the seven seals that have (until now) firmly sealed the Hebrew Scriptures (Rev. 5:1 ff.). All that aside, however, nothing changes the fact that those who come to the Scriptures with any presupposition, whether it be the literal interpretation theory or some other, have not come to listen and to learn but rather to speak their own minds. Such individuals are seeking to put God in a box of their own making. Consequently, they are, as the writer of the Book of Proverbs has so eloquently put it, fools. They will never understand the Truth.

Maybe You Need a Bigger Box?

Parable as a literary form is normally classified as allegory; but it is a specific type of allegory. The basic distinction between the two is important for an accurate understanding of the Gospel message of Jesus Christ that is hidden in the Hebrew Scriptures. An allegory is an extended metaphor—a metaphor crafted into a story. By contrast, a parable is an extended simile—a simile put in story form. To define that further, a metaphor is an *implicit* COMPARISON between two things, "flint-rock eyes"; whereas a simile is an *explicit* COMPARISON, "eyes hard as flint-rock." That tells us the parables recorded in Scripture do not carry just an *implicit* allegorical COMPARISON; they convey an *explicit parabolic* COMPARISON. Therefore, the parables of the Scriptures will not contain a vague and general COMPARISON of two things. Their COMPARISON will be found to be both detailed and specific.

One should also understand that a writer uses an allegory/parable to intentionally conceal, and at the same time cryptically reveal, his message. Hence, it is the ideal form to use when one wants to make statements in situations where the Truth is best left somewhat veiled. That was often reason enough for an author to write political allegory in ages past. Such writers found it wiser to state one's views enigmatically and live to write again than to state those same views forthrightly and face the executioner. We will discover the reason God chose to conceal the Old Testament Gospel of Jesus Christ in the symbolism so characteristic of allegory was to provide convincing validation of His message for those True Believers who seek to know and understand the Truth in our own day. You who are God's Own will eventually find that to be so because, as with any literature written as allegory, the message of the Scriptures is easily comprehended when the author's purpose is known and his allegorical/*parabolic* symbols are understood. Furthermore, the allegory/parable genre of literature has a fundamental didactic (teaching) purpose. If, in fact, the purpose of the Scriptures is to teach, what better way could God have chosen to accomplish His purpose than to use a literary genre specifically suited to the task?

The allegorical method of interpretation espoused by Clement of Alexandria and Origen—the dolt who followed in Clement's footsteps—appeared to them to be a method perfectly fit for interpreting the Scriptures. (See "The Origen of Folly" in this issue.) After all, *The Apostolic Teaching* they had opportunity to hear taught from the Scriptures to some extent resembled the Greek philosophy they learned elsewhere. It especially (by Satan's design) resembled the philosophical fabrication that supposedly had been derived from Greek mythology by the Stoic philosophers who interpreted myth as allegory. So these two bumpkins disregarded the obvious differences between the two genres and jumped in with both feet. But they ignored one simple fact: The Bible is not myth; it is history.

The insistence on literal interpretation arose last century among relatively unlearned laymen whose primary concern was to protect the distinction between myth and history. It did so, however, to the detriment of the grammatical-historical methodology that had, by that time, long been advocated by dedicated Christians who were also educators in institutions of higher learning. Consequently, the ignorant insistence on the literal interpretation of the Scriptures has long since done more harm than good.

Clement and Origen also failed to recognize one other crucial distinction between the Scriptures and mythology. The message of the Scriptures was not hidden in allegories/parables woven into its text. By no means! *The Mystery* of Scripture was hidden in parables that had been woven into the very fabric of time—parables acted out in historical events that were then recorded in Scripture as history. (See "The *Parabolic Pantomimes* of Jesus Christ," ***The Voice of Elijah***, January 1991, and "The Passover Parable," ***The Voice of Elijah***, July 1991.) Incidentally, the biblical text that records those historical events clearly has literal *meaning*—that is, the text *means* exactly what it says. The historical events themselves, however, give the text an allegorical/*parabolic significance*. And that *significance* can sometimes only be understood in the light of other biblical texts that tell you WHY those events are *significant*. In other words, the *significance* of the *parabolic pantomime* may or may not have been known to those whom God used to act it out.

Some Things Don't Fit in Boxes!

An accurate understanding of the *parabolic pantomimes* found described and discussed (by the Prophets) in the Scriptures revolves completely around the distinction I made in *Not All Israel Is Israel* (p. 112, 120 ff.) between the *meaning* of biblical statements and their *significance*. The *meaning* of a text relates directly to WHAT one finds written; the text's *significance* pertains to WHY God deemed it

important enough to ensure it was written. Historical events are WHAT we find most often recorded in the Scriptures, and the author clearly *meant* them to be understood as *literal* events. (Notice that comes close to stating—but doesn't—that the text must be understood *literally*.) However, quite often the reason WHY those historical events were recorded for us in the Scriptures has to do specifically with the fact that they were directed by God Himself in order to produce *parabolic pantomime*. Therefore, the reason WHY the historical events were recorded gives added *significance* to WHAT the text says.

In the Apostle Paul's remarks in the fourth chapter of Galatians we find an excellent example of how a *parabolic pantomime* should be understood:

> *Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise.* ***This is allegorically speaking****: for these {women} are two covenants, one {proceeding} from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. For it is written,*
>
> *"REJOICE, BARREN WOMAN WHO DOES NOT BEAR;*
> *BREAK FORTH AND SHOUT, YOU WHO ARE NOT IN LABOR;*
> *FOR MORE ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE DESOLATE*
> *THAN OF THE ONE WHO HAS A HUSBAND."*
>
> *And* ***you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise.*** *But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him {who was born} according to the Spirit, so it is now also. But what does the Scripture say?*
>
> *"CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON,*
> *FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR*
> *WITH THE SON OF THE FREE WOMAN."*
>
> *So then, brethren,* ***we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman****.*
> *(Galatians 4:21–31)*

Did I miss something? Isn't Paul COMPARING the Church—the Body of Christ—to Isaac, and the Jews to Ishmael? Isn't he saying the Jews have been "cast out" LIKE Ishmael was, and the Church—the Body of Christ—is now the sole ***heir of the promise*** LIKE Isaac was? Sure he is. And if you have read *Not All Israel Is Israel*, you already know WHY he would say that. The Jews have been "cut off from Israel" and Gentiles have been "grafted into Israel"—that is, into Jesus Christ, the sole remaining member of *Corporate* Israel. But what does Paul *mean* by stating the account in Genesis can be understood as "allegorically speaking" to show this to be so? To answer that, one needs to look at the historical events to which he refers. If you carefully scrutinize the account in Genesis, you will discover the events recorded there were thoughtfully orchestrated through God's direct intervention in human affairs. That tells us He intends us to understand He influenced those historical events so as to produce a *parabolic pantomime*. Consequently, the events themselves provide *parabolic imagery* that points us toward some specific historical event yet to come. As *parabolic pantomime*, the record provides a COMPARISON that will tell us how two different historical events are ALIKE. Let's see how that is.

As I mentioned in *Not All Israel Is Israel* (p. 14 ff.), the focus of the historical account describing the circumstances of the birth of Ishmael and Isaac revolves around the question, "Who will ***inherit the promise***?" We must keep that in mind as we study these two passages because it is precisely the point of Paul's discussion in Galatians as well. Therefore, we already know we are dealing with an *explicit parabolic* COMPARISON that is going to tell us exactly how Isaac's position as the sole ***heir of the promise*** is LIKE the position held by Jesus Christ as the sole ***Heir of the promise***. The COMPARISON will also tell us how Ishmael's exclusion from ***the promise*** is LIKE the Jews' exclusion from ***the promise***. We can only provide a brief explanation of the underlying *parabolic* COMPARISON here, but a more complete explanation will follow—eventually.

You'd Best Forget the Box!

In the historical account recorded in the Book of Genesis, we find, first of all, that God gave Abraham a ***promise*** (Gen. 12:1–3). Later, when Abraham became concerned about who would ***inherit the promise*** when he died, God ***promised*** him he would have a son who would ***inherit*** (Gen. 15:1–6). Next, Abraham had a firstborn son, Ishmael, who was born to Sarah's maidservant, Hagar. Abraham immediately assumed Ishmael would ***inherit*** God's ***promise***. Over Abraham's protest, however, God said ***the promise*** would go instead to a son yet to be born to Sarah—Isaac (Gen. 17:1–21). Finally, on the day that Isaac was weaned, Sarah demanded that Abraham ***disinherit*** Ishmael because of Hagar's contemptuous attitude towards her. Abraham was undecided as to what he should do until God intervened and confirmed Sarah's demand was in accord with His Own purpose (Gen. 21:8–12). From beginning to end, we find the historical events recorded in Genesis 12:1–21:12 were shaped and controlled by God. Consequently, they carry all the tell-tale signs of *parabolic pantomime*—historical events orchestrated by God to teach some specific lesson and, at the same time, show how one set of historical circumstances is LIKE another future set of historical circumstances.

Paul, looking at the account, knew full well that Jesus Christ was the sole ***Heir of the promise*** just LIKE Isaac had been in his own day. Paul also knew the Jews had lost possession of ***the promise*** by being "cut off from Israel." That was LIKE Ishmael being ***disinherited***—"cut off from" the people of God—in his own time. Therefore, Paul used the

parabolic pantomime God had provided in the Book of Genesis to make his point: "Don't you realize God has stated through the *parabolic pantomime* of Ishmael and Isaac that the firstborn son of Abraham (the Jews) who was born to the bondwoman (the Mosaic Covenant) would lose possession of ***the promise*** so that ***the promised Heir*** (the resurrected Body of Jesus Christ) born to the free woman (the New Covenant) would gain sole possession of ***the promise*** as God intended all along?" Paul used the account of Ishmael and Isaac to emphasize the point he stated earlier: "The Jews, who are counting on the covenant they made at Sinai, have lost ***the promise***. Jesus Christ, who is ***the Heir*** God ***promised*** Abraham, has retained it":

> ***Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "and to seeds," as {referring} to many, but {rather} to one, "and to your seed," that is, Christ****. What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.* ***For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.*** *Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator,* ***until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made.*** *Now a mediator is not for one {party only}; whereas God is {only} one. Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law.* ***But the Scripture has shut up all men under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.*** *But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor {to lead us} to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.* ***For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ****. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* ***And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.***
> *(Galatians 3:16–29)*

Trapped in Their Own Box!

If you have read and understood *Not All Israel Is Israel*, you can understand Paul's argument. You should also be aware, however, that Paul's purpose in writing his letter to the Galatians was to refute the claims of a group of Jews known as Judaizers. Those Jews insisted (since they believed the Church was *Corporate* Israel) that gentile Christians must be circumcised and observe the Jewish festivals in conformity to the laws of the covenant *Corporate* Israel made at Sinai. Paul was using the *parabolic imagery* provided by the account of Ishmael and Isaac to refute those who insisted Christians must be circumcised and become part of the physical descendants of Abraham. His argument is short and to the point: "Ignore the Judaizers. They are seeking to retain their outward identity as Jews, not realizing the Jews have lost possession of ***the promise*** by being 'cut off from Israel.' In that, they are just LIKE Ishmael. Jesus Christ and all who are 'in Him' now have possession of ***the promise***. You who are 'in Christ' are just LIKE Isaac and do not need the external rituals of the Mosaic law to impress upon you the Truth concerning Jesus Christ through their ***parabolic pantomime***. You now have the Spirit within you to accomplish that."

Paul's refutation of the Judaizers was blunt, to say the least. He claimed they—like those Jews who remained blatantly non-Christian—were still depending on their physical lineage—that is, their descent from their earthly mother Jerusalem (the Mosaic Covenant). Christians, however, have become members of the Body of Christ—the continuation of *Corporate* Israel—by being born of their heavenly mother Jerusalem (the New Covenant). They are members of Jesus Christ, the true Israel, and have no more need for the physical trappings of the Jews, who are depending on their physical descent from Abraham. Paul's warning to the Galatians was harsh: "If you choose to go along with the Judaizers and be circumcised, you are joining the Jews, and they have been 'cut off from Israel.' Therefore, to obtain salvation you must earn it by keeping the entire Law":

> *It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. Behold I, Paul, say to you that* ***if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you****. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. You have been severed from Christ,* ***you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace****. For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.*
> *(Galatians 5:1–6)*

Just a few things for future reference: Paul has taken the *parabolic imagery* concerning our *parabolic* "mother," the heavenly Jerusalem, from *parabolic statements* the Prophets made. That's WHY he quotes Isaiah 54:1 in Galatians 4:27. So the entirety of what Paul has said concerning the Jews and the Body of Jesus Christ won't be completely clear to you until you understand the *parabolic imagery* that lies behind the prophetic message concerning (1) the two women—the Virgin and the Whore; (2) the Body of Jesus Christ; and (3) the Mountain of God. But if you want to know the Truth, you will. All in God's good time. Unless you foolishly bring a box. ■

Why Not?

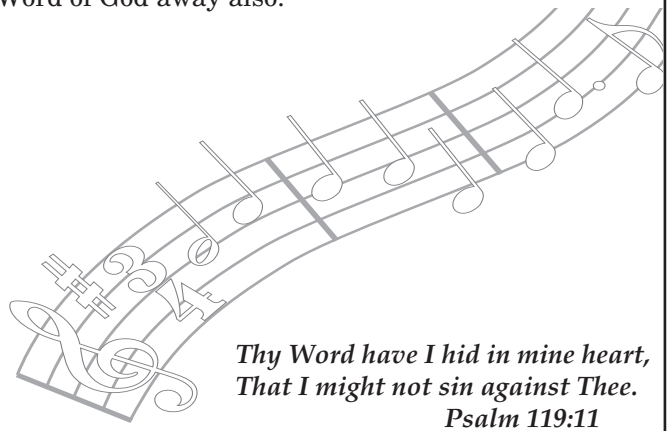
If you find ***The Voice of Elijah*** beneficial to you in your own walk with the Lord, won't you please join with us and make this ministry your own? Everybody can do something. Some can do more than others. Please do what you can:

- ☞ **Pray for our work.**
- ☞ **Tell others.**
- ☞ **Give a gift subscription to a friend.**
- ☞ **Give *Not All Israel Is Israel* to a friend.**
- ☞ **Give a one-time gift.**
- ☞ **Become a Monthly Contributor.**

Time is short. Much remains to be done. Please stand with us in this ministry. Contributions are tax-deductible. 100% of all contributions go to outreach. No salaries are paid.

Scripture Songs Volumes 1 & 2

The Word of God is easier to memorize when it has been set to music. That's why ***The Elijah Project*** has taken key passages from the Prophets and the Psalms, combined them with catchy melodies, and produced ***Scripture Songs, Volumes 1 & 2.*** Not only will they keep a song in your heart, they will help you hide the Word of God away also.



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

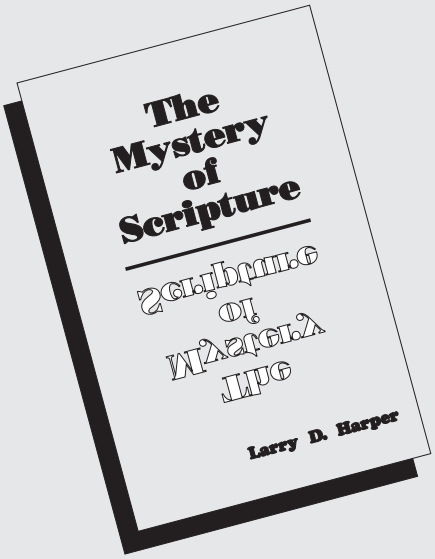
To Order, use the Order Form

What You Don't Know Can Sometimes Hurt You!

Did you know that for over one hundred and fifty years all the leaders of the Early Church understood there was but one correct understanding of the message of the Old Testament? Were you also aware that all Christians in the Early Church respected and recognized their leaders as having the God-given authority to teach the correct understanding of God's Word to His People? Can you believe none of these men interpreted Scripture for themselves?

Obviously, that doesn't describe the Church today. With a church on every corner preaching a different interpretation of Scripture and believers picking and choosing as they deem fit, it doesn't seem possible it could have ever been otherwise, does it? Yet it was a reality in the Early Church for well over a century. So, what happened?

If you thrive on the constant bickering and fighting found in the Church of today, that question isn't even relevant. Obviously, you believe you can go right on arguing your way to the Truth. But some of us don't.



- **If you look around you in the Church today, and things just don't seem quite right, this book is for you.**
- **And if you believe the Scriptures should have but one clear message, this book is for you.**
- **And if you believe it only makes sense that the Church took a wrong turn somewhere along the way, this book is for you.**

Things aren't right in the Church today. And there is but one simple message to be found in the Bible. And the Church did take a wrong turn quite some time back.

Around A.D. 200, the Church did exactly what the Old Testament tells us Israel did before: It turned away from *The Apostolic Teaching*. So, if you want to know the Truth, this book is for you. Order your copy now. Why should ***The Mystery of Scripture*** remain a mystery any longer?

To Order, use the Order Form

Who is Israel?

According to Scripture, Israel is the descendants of Jacob, heir to God's ***promise*** to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But did you know that Scripture also says an individual could be "cut off from" Israel?

Today, the nation of Israel—the Jews living in the land occupied by biblical Israel—claim to be Israel, heirs to ***the promises*** God gave to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But are they really?

What if all Israel was "cut off?"

John the Baptist warned it could happen. (Matt. 3:10)
The Apostle Paul said it did happen. (Rom. 11:11–24)

Here for the first time ever, in simple, easy-to-read English, one book finally explains this intricate message of Scripture hidden for so long in the Hebrew idiom. Read and discover for yourself how *Not All Israel Is Israel.*

To Order, use the Order Form