

OLD TESTAMENT LAWS



STILL VALID TODAY?

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Foreword— Why This Booklet Was Written

Do the Old Testament laws apply to us today? How can we determine if they do, and to what extent? The answers to these questions require careful consideration of the Scriptures in order to fully appreciate why God gave these laws in the first place and what, if anything, they mean for us today.

When Jesus Christ came to this earth as a human being, He **revealed the spiritual intent** of God’s timeless Law; however, His death clearly abolished the literal application of certain *temporary* ritual provisions of Old Testament regulations. So then, those who correctly understand that Jesus Christ **did not** come to abolish the *entirety* of God’s “LAW,” must still determine WHICH portions of the LAW are spiritual and therefore still valid for us today.

In this booklet, we will address some selected “controversial” Old Testament laws, and we will explain, through the Scriptures, whether or not their literal application is still valid today.

First, we will briefly *summarize* in the **INTRODUCTION**, which particular Old Testament laws have already been discussed in other published booklets of ours, and we will tell you *where* you can find the discussion and what *conclusions* have been reached. Our four-part **APPENDIX** addresses additional “difficult” New Testament Scriptures which are sometimes used to justify the abolition of some of God’s timeless laws which are still valid today.

This booklet has been written to provide you with a *study guide* and to give you easy-to-find *references* to certain biblical passages and concepts. Our **TABLE OF CONTENTS** will also help you to locate the discussions of certain important subjects in this booklet.

Introduction

Christ did not come to abolish God's SPIRITUAL LAW. It is also sometimes referred to as God's "moral" law. However, when Christ died, He made obsolete Old Testament rituals, washings and sacrifices. But how are we to determine, then, in which particular way certain Old Testament regulations are to be viewed?

Valid—Ten Commandments

In many of our booklets, we have emphasized that *all* of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5), as well as the statutes and the judgments which define the Ten Commandments, are still valid today.

This includes, among others, the sixth commandment against murder in all of its forms and applications, including killing in war (see our free booklet, "*Should You Fight in War?*"). That commandment is as valid today as the seventh commandment against adultery (see our free booklet, "*The Keys to Happy Marriages and Families*"); and the fourth commandment to observe the weekly Sabbath (the time-span from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset) (compare, "*God's Commanded Holy Days*").

Valid—God's Annual Holy Days

We have also explained that we are under the further obligation to observe God's seven annual Holy Days (which are also called "Sabbath" or "Sabbaths" in Scripture), and we discussed several New Testament passages in our free booklet, "*God's Commanded Holy Days*," which are sometimes used incorrectly to say that God's laws regarding the weekly Sabbath and the annual Holy Days are no longer valid (including Colossians 2:16-17; Romans 14:5; and Galatians 4:10). In that regard, please refer also to our free booklets, "*Is that in the Bible—Man's Holidays or God's Holy Days?*"; "*The Meaning of God's Spring Holy Days*" and "*The Meaning of God's Fall Holy Days*"; as well

as our commentaries in booklet form on some of Paul's letters; i.e., "Paul's Letter to the Ephesians," "Paul's Letter to the Galatians," and "Paul's Letter to the Philippians").

Valid—Tithing

We have also addressed the ongoing duty to tithe in our free booklet, "Tithing Today?"

Not Valid—Physical Circumcision, Animal Sacrifices and Washings

On the other hand, we explained the biblical teaching that *physical circumcision, animal sacrifices and other ritual laws and washings* are no longer valid today. (See, "And Lawlessness Will Abound," as well as our free booklet, "The Sacrificial System and the Tabernacle in the Wilderness." Also, see chapter 8 of our free booklet, "Biblical Prophecy—From Now Until Forever.") Paul's letter or epistle to the Hebrews clearly states that the flesh and the blood of animals cannot forgive sins, and that *temporary* animal sacrifices were only given to *remind* the people of their sins (Hebrews 10:1-4, 11, 18; compare also Hebrews 9:9-10).

Not Valid—Old Testament Laws on National Warfare

We explained in our free booklet, "And Lawlessness Will Abound," that Old Testament laws to the nation of Israel on how to fight wars are no longer binding on us today: "Deuteronomy 20 contains laws and regulations about national warfare. These laws are clearly not binding for Christians today, as a Christian is not to participate in war (Matthew 5:44; 26:52; Romans 12:20; 2 Corinthians 10:3-4; James 4:1-2; 1 John 3:15)."

Not Valid—Physical Penalties, Levirate Marriage and Racial Prohibitions

We also addressed in our free booklet, "And Lawlessness Will Abound," that other temporary national laws are no longer binding for God's Church today, such as *the physical penalties for wrongdoing and the punishment of criminals, as well as the levirate marriage and the access of individuals of a certain ethnic and racial background to the community of Israel:*

"God gave Israel certain national laws, for instance in Deuteronomy

16 and 17, dealing with the *punishment and, in certain cases, the execution of criminals*. Converted Christians are servants of the New Covenant, which gives life (2 Corinthians 3:6). They are not to judge or condemn another person. Christ said that he who is without sin may cast the first stone (John 8:7). At the same time, we are told that nobody can claim to be without sin (1 John 1:8). Therefore, Christians are not to participate, for instance as jurors, in the judicial systems of this world. In addition, the Church today is not to carry out the death penalty, either. Rather, the ministry is to preach today reconciliation and eternal life (2 Corinthians 5:18–21).

“Another ‘national’ law, which is no longer in effect today, is listed in Deuteronomy 25:5–10. It is commonly referred to as the law of the *‘levirate marriage.’* It stated that if a married man died without children, his widow was to be married to his brother, so that the name of the dead brother ‘may not be blotted out of Israel’ (verse 6). One reason why this law is not in force for the Church today is that it may require a converted brother-in-law to marry an unconverted sister-in-law, or *vice versa*. This would be contrary to specific New Testament instructions in 1 Corinthians 7:39 and 2 Corinthians 6:14. Also, if the brother-in-law were already married, the application of the law would violate the New Testament teaching that a man is to be the husband of only *one* wife (compare 1 Timothy 3:2, 12).

“To just give one more example of an obsolete ‘national’ statute, turn to Deuteronomy 23: 1–8. This law excludes certain people with particular *racial or national backgrounds*, such as Ammonites or Moabites, or eunuchs, from access to the congregation. This distinction does not apply to the New Testament Church. True Christians may be from any nation and suffer any physical disability (Ephesians 2:19).”

Valid—Dietary Laws; Not Valid—Touching Unclean Animals or Carcasses

In order to determine whether a particular law was permanent or ritual in nature, we stated the following in our free booklet, “*And Lawlessness Will Abound,*” addressing in particular the dietary laws regarding clean and unclean meat:

“Another category of laws, which are no longer binding for Christians today are the *ritual laws of sacrifices and washings*. Again, certain

principles apply, showing us when a law is of a temporary ritual nature, or when it is still binding for us. For instance, the violation of a statute or a particular circumstance could make a person ‘unclean’ for a certain period of time. Following *ritual washings*, that person could become clean again. Clearly, these kinds of laws are strictly ritualistic in nature, as no violation of a binding law was automatically cured simply by lapse of time and ritual washings.

“... *laws prohibiting the consumption of unclean food are still valid* [Compare also in particular *Appendix C* and *Appendix D* of [this](#) booklet].

“... the laws declaring someone unclean who *touch*ed the body of an unclean animal *are not* [valid anymore]. This can be seen, as such a person was only unclean ‘until evening,’ and he became clean again after washing himself, showing the ritualistic character of these laws (Leviticus 11:24, 27, 31). On the other hand, the eating of an unclean animal did not bring about only ritual uncleanness that ended in the evening after washing. There is no scripture, which tells us that a person who *ate an unclean animal* became clean again in the evening, after ritual washings. Many Scriptures, however, tell us that a person who *touch*ed the carcass of an unclean or even a clean animal (Leviticus 11:39) became ritually clean again in the evening, after washings. This shows, then, the different nature of these two sets of laws.

“Another temporary ritual law of a similar nature can be found in Deuteronomy 23:9–11, stating that an individual who contracts some *ceremonial defilement* during the night becomes ritually clean again by the next sunset. [This is not to say, however, that there were no physical health benefits attached to such laws, such as the prevention of possible transmission of diseases—the underlying principle of physical cleanliness is still very much applicable today.]”

In this booklet, we will now proceed with the discussion of many Old Testament laws to determine whether or not they are still valid today.

Part 1

Sex and Marriage Regulations

As sexual relationships and the concept of marriage have become one of the most important and hotly debated subjects, especially in our Western societies, we are going to address in some detail the validity or temporary nature of several Old Testament statutes on that topic.

NO ADULTERY AND PREMARITAL SEX

The *seventh commandment* of the Ten Commandments prohibits *adultery* (Exodus 20:14). The commandment against adultery included not only a married woman who has had sexual intercourse with her husband, but also a virgin “betrothed” to her husband, prior to the consummation of the marriage. *Betrothal* in biblical times was a binding and enforceable contract, containing promises to marry each other. The Bible considered betrothed partners as husband and wife, and a betrothal could only be dissolved by a decree of divorce.

We read in Deuteronomy 22:23-24: “If a young woman who is a virgin is betrothed to a husband, and a man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry out in the city [thereby consenting to the adulterous conduct], and the man because he humbled his neighbor’s wife [even though she was only “betrothed,” and the marriage had not yet been consummated]; so you shall put away the evil from among you.”

Continuing in Deuteronomy 22, verses 25 through 27 point out, “... if a man finds a betrothed young woman in the countryside, and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her [i.e., the rapist] shall die. But you shall do nothing to the young woman; there is in the young woman no sin deserving of death [since the rapist forced himself upon her; there was no consent to this act by the woman], for just as when a man rises against his neighbor and kills

him, even so is this matter. For he found her in the countryside, and the betrothed young woman cried out, but there was no one to save her.”

In case there were no witnesses to the act of adultery, God had provided for a procedure to determine the guilt or innocence of an accused wife, if the husband so desired (compare Numbers 5:11-31; compare below).

In the New Testament, Christ warned His followers not to even look at a married woman with lust or evil thoughts—wanting to commit adultery with her—because such uncontrolled desire already constitutes adultery in the mind and heart (Matthew 5:27-28; compare Proverbs 6:23-35).

Fornication Between Two Unmarried Partners

In addition, we do find a remarkable difference in the Old Testament in the case of fornication between two unmarried young people.

We read in Exodus 22:16-17: “If a man entices a virgin who is NOT betrothed, and lies with her, he shall surely pay the bride-price for her to be his wife. If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money according to the bride-price of virgins.”

Deuteronomy 22:28-29 adds: “If a man finds a young woman who is a virgin, who is NOT betrothed, and he seizes her [this goes beyond mere enticement] and lies with her, and they are found out, then the man who lay with her shall give to the young woman’s father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife because he had humbled her; he shall not be permitted to divorce her all his days.”

The fine of the bride-price was steep, which was “meant to discourage young men from reckless behavior... This law warned young men that they would be made responsible for their actions” (*Nelson Study Bible*, comments to Exodus 22:16-17 and Deuteronomy 22:28-29).

Application for Us Today

These *principles* still apply today in God’s Church. There should not be ANY premarital sex between two unmarried partners. The Bible calls this fornication, and we are told to flee from it. But if two young unmarried people in the Church of God commit fornication (even though they should not do so and are sinning if they do), they should be aware that, excluding extraordinary circumstances (see, for instance

in ancient times, the exception mentioned in Exodus 22:17), they have a responsibility, before God, to complete their marriage responsibilities which they, in effect, already began through their conduct. If one party is not in the Church, then the situation is different, as 1 Corinthians 7:39 requires that a marriage in the Church should only occur “in the Lord”; that is, between two believers [see discussion below].

SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP IN MARRIAGE

Some teach that we must abstain from sexual relationship with our mate *on the Sabbath* or if we are “defiled” or “unclean” because of a *bodily discharge* as described in Leviticus 15:16-24. These concepts are incorrect.

Most of the laws in Leviticus 15 are only of a ritual nature and are no longer binding for us today. As mentioned in the *Introduction*, one way to determine whether laws are temporary or permanent is to look at the “penalty.”

As you will recall, the violation of a statute or a particular circumstance could make a person “unclean” for a certain period of time. Following ritual washings, that person could become clean again. Clearly, these kinds of laws are strictly ritualistic in nature, as no violation of a binding law was automatically cured simply by lapse of time and ritual washings.

Most of the laws in Leviticus 15 provide that the person was only *unclean until evening*. When the sun set, the person became clean again—after he or she had gone through *washing* and bathing (note, for example, verses 5- 8, 10-11, 16-19, 21-23, and 27).

In this context, Hebrews 9:9-10 tells us: “It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices were offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience—concerned only with foods and drinks [or food and drink offerings], *various washings*, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.”

As mentioned, violations of permanent laws were not automatically cured by lapse of time (“when evening comes”) and washings. This is not to say, however, that we should not, for hygienic purposes, cleanse our bodies, or even things with which our *sick* bodies came in contact.

Application for Us Today

Some of the laws listed in Leviticus 15 have a *permanent application*. Note, for instance, verse 25: “If a woman has a discharge of blood for many days, other than at the time of her customary impurity, or if it runs beyond her usual time of impurity, all the days of her unclean discharge shall be as the days of her customary impurity. She shall be unclean.” *During these times, sexual intercourse should not occur.*

Otherwise, there is not a biblically prescribed time for us to abstain from sexual intercourse with our mate, unless during the actual time of a *woman’s menstruation* (compare Leviticus 18:19; 20:18; Ezekiel 18:6; compare, too, Leviticus 15:25), or when both agree, so that they have time for individual prayer or fasting (compare 1 Corinthians 7:3-5: “Let the husband render to his wife the affection due to her, and likewise also the wife to her husband... Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”). *Otherwise, the Bible does not command us today to abstain from sexual relationships with our mates, and this applies also to the time before or on the Sabbath.*

NO HOMOSEXUALITY

The Old Testament instruction on *homosexuality* is clear. In Leviticus 18:22 it states that: “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination.” Two chapters later, in Leviticus 20:13, God again rejects homosexual conduct, when He states: “If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination.”

Application for Us Today

In the New Testament, we find the *same condemnation of this practice*. We read in the first chapter of Romans:

“Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also

the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting..." (verses 24-28).

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 clearly states that practicing homosexuals will not inherit the Kingdom of God:

"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God."

However, in verse 11 we read: "And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."

Notice what Paul said: "Such *were* some of you." This is a telling phrase. Paul cited the fact that there were some in the congregation who were formerly characterized in the catalogue of sinful conduct listed in verses 9 and 10. But Paul also makes it clear that there is hope for those who are willing to repent and turn from their evil ways. With the help of God, they can be washed, sanctified and justified, but only upon genuine, sincere repentance. This shows, then, that the practice of homosexuality CAN be repented of—it is not simply something one is born with, which cannot be overcome, even if one wanted to.

In the final book of the Bible, this same theme is repeated in Revelation 21:8, pointing out that those who refuse to repent, including the "sexually immoral"—including those who practice homosexuality and other unacceptable sexual conduct—will have their part in the lake of fire and brimstone.

NO POLYGAMY

God never promoted polygamy [one marriage partner is married to more than one partner] or intended that His followers should engage in that practice. Although the Old Testament records that several of the patriarchs practiced polygamy, it was never in accordance with God's Will and His intent for marriage. When a man took more than one

wife, curses and punishment were the consequence.

Abraham *sinned* when he had sexual relationships with Sarah's maid Hagar. In Genesis 21, it is recorded that Abraham sent Hagar away, as Hagar's and Ishmael's presence created problems for Sarah and Isaac. After the episode with Hagar, the Bible does not mention that Abraham had sexual relationships with any other women but Sarah, until Sarah's death.

Jacob took more than one wife (Leah and Rachel), and he *repeated the mistake* of his grandfather Abraham and produced offspring through the maids of his wives, but he was unconverted at that time. His conversion apparently took place when he wrestled with God, as recorded in Genesis 32:22-32.

Israel's first king, Saul, took more than one wife, and he thereby *sinned*, following the practices of the pagans all around him. He violated God's specific command to Israel's kings in Deuteronomy 17:17, not to "multiply wives for himself."

David *followed the practice of Saul* and other kings to multiply wives, against God's explicit commandment prohibiting such practice. David's son Solomon took seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, *transgressing thereby God's commandments*, and they turned away his heart. What Solomon did was "evil in the sight of the LORD" (1 Kings 11:6).

Application for Us Today

Christ explained, in Mark 10: 6-9, that God's intent for marriage was a relationship between *one* man and *one* woman. The "TWO" (verse 8) were to become one flesh. We don't read that the "three" or the "four" are to become one flesh.

Human marriage is a symbol of the spiritual marriage between Christ and His Church, as Ephesians 5:25-33 brings out. There, too, we read about the fact that "each one of you... so love his own wife as himself" (verse 33). We don't read about a husband loving his own WIVES as himself.

Christ will only marry ONE wife, not many wives. It says in Revelation 19:7: "His wife has made herself ready." It does not say: "His wives have made themselves ready." Christ's Church is a spiritual organism, consisting of all in whom God's Spirit dwells. But it is ONE

body (Colossians 1:18), not several bodies.

We read in 1 Timothy 3:2, 12 that a minister or a deacon must only have one wife. But this does not mean that unordained Church members are permitted to have more than one wife. God intends marriage to be a bond between one man and one woman. When addressing the requirements for ministers and deacons, Paul emphasizes God's teaching, not to have more than one wife, as he emphasizes other character traits required of ministers and deacons (such as, to be "temperate," "of good behavior," "not violent," "not greedy for money," etc.). This does not mean that these are just requirements for ministers and deacons, and that other Church members don't sin when they behave badly, or when they are violent or greedy for money.

MARRIAGE PROHIBITIONS

God created marriage as a union between a man and a woman, and, as discussed, homosexual relationships and polygamy are still prohibited.

Application for Us Today

However, the fact that God designed marriage as a union between one man and one woman does not mean that just any man-woman union is approved by God. For instance, *God did not intend religiously-mixed marriages* (when a "believer" marries an "unbeliever"; compare 1 Corinthians 7:39 and our discussion below, under "Divorce and Remarriage").

God did not intend *interracial marriages*—a union between clearly defined members of different races. God had originally separated the races and nations to prevent interracial marriages. According to Scripture, there are three different races—black, white and yellow. This means, a member of the white race should not marry a member of a black race, and so on. In our modern inter-connected world, this distinction has now become more and more academic, since the prohibition does not apply to members of mixed races who would be free to marry any member of a different race. That is, a descendant of a black mother and a white father could marry someone within the black or white community, etc.

In addition, the Bible *prohibits marriages today between brothers and*

sisters or between a man and his niece. However, at the time of Cain, he was allowed to marry one of his sisters or one of his nieces, which explains how he got his wife.

In Abraham's day it was still permissible to marry one's half-sister. Abram married his half-sister, Sarai (Genesis 20:12). Nahor married his brother Haran's daughter (Genesis 11:29).

In the book of Leviticus, at the time of Moses, we find clear instructions regarding prohibition of marriages between partners "near of kin" (Leviticus 18:6). The *Pulpit Commentary* explains regarding Leviticus 18:6-18:

"In the code before us, confirmed by that in Deuteronomy, marriage is forbidden with the following blood relations: mother (verse 7), daughter (verse 17), sister (verse 9...), granddaughter (verse 10), aunt (verses 12, 13...); and with the following relations by affinity: mother-in-law (verse 17...), daughter-in-law (verse 15...), brother's wife (verse 16...), stepmother (verse 8...), stepdaughter and step-granddaughter (verse 17), uncle's wife, or aunt by marriage (verse 14...)..."

The prohibition against marrying a woman and her daughter from a prior marriage should be viewed in the light of polygamy. Even though God had allowed polygamy in Old Testament times, He made it clear that even then, a man could not marry a woman and her daughter *at the same time*.

A similar prohibition is expressed in verse 18: "Nor shall you take a woman as a rival to her sister... *while the other is alive.*"

In considering the prohibitions of certain marriages, as listed in Scripture, we find that the Bible nowhere specifically prohibits marriages between cousins. In the past, *marriages between cousins* were not that unusual. Some have even concluded that Mary and Joseph were first cousins. Today, such a marriage is considered illegal in many countries.

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

When God binds a marriage, it is bound for life, unless one or both marriage partners engage in biblically defined inappropriate behavior.

In this context, how are we to understand and apply *Deuteronomy 24:1-4*, which reads:

"When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in

her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man's wife, if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife, then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance."

Application for Us Today

We need to understand several principles when dealing with questions relating to divorce and remarriage.

(1) Marriage between two truly converted Christian partners

Quoting from our booklet, *"The Keys to Happy Marriages and Families,"* page 2, "God wants our marriages to succeed. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16)... Two truly converted married Christians (as long as both remain alive and converted throughout their marriage to each other) must never divorce and subsequently marry somebody else! Their marriage, which has been bound by God, is for life (1 Corinthians 7:10-11; Romans 7:1-3; Luke 16:18)."

From this it follows that Deuteronomy 24:1-4 would *not* be applicable today, *IF* the (first) "divorce" occurred while both parties were converted and remained so, *in that* the converted husband could NOT unbind a valid marriage to a converted wife by writing her a certificate of divorce (compare Matthew 19:7-9). In God's eyes, such a "divorce" is not accepted, and husband and wife are still "bound" or married to each other (compare, again, 1 Corinthians 7:10-11). They can separate, but they cannot marry someone else. They either have to remain "single," or they have to unite again and continue their marriage relationship.

(2) Marriage between a truly converted Christian and an "unbeliever"

What about a situation when the mate becomes or is an "unbeliever"? We continue quoting from our afore-mentioned booklet:

"Even in such a case, divorce and subsequent remarriage is not Biblically permitted, unless the 'unbelieving mate' departs from the marriage, by not fulfilling his or her marriage duties, and the 'unbeliever'

is no longer willing to live with the converted mate (cp. 1 Corinthians 7:12-16). Such total departure from the marriage by the ‘unbeliever’ can be seen in serious continuous violations of his or her marriage duties and responsibilities, such as the sinful practice of ‘sexual immorality’ (Matthew 5:31-32; 19:9). But even then, counseling with one of God’s ministers is highly recommended, with the goal to restore, rather than to sever, the marriage.”

Applying this principle to *Deuteronomy 24:1-4*, if husband and wife divorced because the wife is or became an unbeliever and departed from the marriage (which might be indicated, in principle, by the fact that the husband found “some uncleanness in her”), *then* the husband is free to remarry. (The same would apply, of course, to a wife; that is, the wife would be free to remarry if the husband is an unbeliever and departs from the marriage.)

It needs to be emphasized that this would only be the case, however, if the unbelieving mate is no longer pleased to dwell with the believer and departs from the marriage relationship. Even if the unbeliever does not physically depart, but shows by his conduct that he has departed “spiritually” from the marriage relationship, the believer would be free to divorce and subsequently to remarry another believer.

As long as the unbeliever is *truly* pleased to dwell with the believer, the believer cannot sever the marriage. (The only exception would be “fraud at the time of the marriage,” fraud being when one partner conceals essential facts about him or herself from his or her future mate. Those facts could include a sexually transmittable disease, impotency, homosexuality or operative gender change, etc. In such a case, God would not bind a marriage to begin with, and the deceived mate, upon discovery of the fraud, would be free to leave such a relationship. Such departure, though, has to occur immediately upon discovery of the fraud).

Further, the converted mate would only be free to remarry “in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:39)—to a “believer” (compare Ezra 10:10-11—that is, to someone who has truly repented of his or her sins of transgressing God’s Ten Commandments; who has believed in the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ as payment for his or her sins; and who has become properly baptized as an outward sign of inner repentance). Unless the divorced wife, whose subsequent marriage has also ended

(see under No. 4), comes to or returns to the faith as a true believer, the first husband could not remarry her.

(3) Marriage between two unconverted partners

Let us suppose that the divorce took place while both parties were still unconverted. God looks at the status of the person when he or she is called into the truth. If a “divorced” person is called by God in that state of his or her divorce, he or she is not required to return to the former mate (who may not be converted and who may be remarried)—compare the principles described in 1 Corinthians 7:20-24. Rather, such a person, upon conversion, is free to marry a converted partner.

(4) Can the converted mate re-marry the (now) converted mate?

The question arises, in light of *Deuteronomy 24:1-4*, whether the converted husband is free to remarry the (now) converted wife (or *vice versa*), if the wife had been married in the meantime to another partner. Several biblical principles suggest that *he could* remarry his first wife, if she *is also* free to marry, and that therefore, *Deuteronomy 24:1-4* would *not be applicable* today in such cases.

Application for us today

The key principle in this discussion is that God wants a marriage restored, rather than broken up. Using a spiritual parallel to this example, although God makes it clear that He, as a converted husband, would not receive back His first unconverted wife, Israel, as long as she remains unconverted, “playing the harlot” (Jeremiah 3:1-5), He *WILL* marry her upon her repentance and conversion (since Christ will marry spiritual Israel upon His return).

Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and forever, is willing to take back His unconverted wife and “marry” her again, upon her conversion, even though she married other men and played the harlot in the meantime. This would show, then, that *a converted* husband is *free to remarry his converted wife, even though his wife was married to another man in the meantime, as long as the wife is also free to remarry her first husband (or vice versa)*.

(a) This is clearly the case when the second husband dies (*Deuteronomy 24:3*).

(b) This is also the case when the unconverted wife divorces from her

second unconverted husband *prior to her conversion* (see No. 3 above).

(c) This would *NOT be the case*, however, if the wife *becomes converted while married* to her second unconverted husband (see No. 3). With her conversion, God accepts her in the state in which she is—as a woman married to her second husband. Unless the second husband dies or is an unbeliever who is no longer pleased to dwell with his wife (see No. 2), the wife would not be free to sever that (second) marriage relationship to return to her first husband. This would be the case where *Deuteronomy 24:1-4 would still apply today*, in principle.

NO LAW OF JEALOUSY

In Numbers 5:11-31, God gave Old Testament Israel a supernatural means of determining whether or not a wife had committed adultery, although she had not been caught and no witness was present (Numbers 5:13). *This law is no longer valid for us today*. When “the spirit of jealousy” came upon the husband so that he suspected a transgression of his wife, the husband could bring his wife to the priest, and he had to bring at the same time the “grain offering of jealousy” (Numbers 5:15). The priest gave the woman “holy” or “bitter” water to drink after she had denied, under oath, any transgression. God then saw to it, that her belly would swell if she was indeed guilty.

Even though some commentaries assume that the guilty woman would be killed, the Bible does not say this. It only says that she “will become a curse among her people” (verse 27). This shows that God does not allow the execution of a person based on anything but the testimony of at least two witnesses (Circumstantial evidence was and is never considered to be sufficient in God’s eyes).

Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible adds that this law deals with a situation “not of certain adultery... but of her having committed it in the opinion of her husband, he having some ground of suspicion, though he could not be certain of it... [when the wife] goes into a private place with [another man], and stays so long with him that she may be defiled...”

Application for Us Today

We should not allow ourselves to be found in situations which could raise suspicion. We are to avoid even the appearance of evil

(1 Thessalonians 5:22, *Authorized Version*). But as the *New Application Bible* points out, “Trust between husband and wife had to be completely eroded for a man to bring his wife to the priest for this type of test. Today... pastors help restore marriages by counseling couples who have lost faith in each other. Whether justified or not, suspicion must be removed for a marriage to survive and trust to be restored.”

This is very true—and in general, the Church today has been given the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

Even if the wife was guilty of adultery, the righteous act of Joseph (who believed that his betrothed bride Mary had committed adultery) is described as such in Matthew 1:19: “Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.”

Apart from the fact that the practical application of the law of jealousy was apparently not available anymore at the time of Joseph, this Scripture shows that he would not have used it anyway, as he did not want to make Mary a public spectacle (which the procedure of the law of jealousy would have done), but that he was thinking about divorcing her *secretly*. Even at the time of Moses, a suspicious husband did not HAVE to have this law applied to his wife. But God *allowed* it because of the hardness of the people’s heart.

Part 2

Slavery Today?

Apart from issues relating to marriage and sex, there are other *social issues* regulated in Old Testament injunctions which we need to address. One of the issues is the question of why the Bible allowed slavery.

SLAVERY NEVER GOD'S INTENT

We can safely say that it was never God's intent for man to engage in the kind of slavery which has brought so much misery and pain on others. We can also say that it was never God's original intent that there should be any form of slavery. And we conclude that it will be very unlikely that there will be any slavery in the Millennium, when Jesus Christ will rule on the earth for 1,000 years.

To give an overview of the ORIGIN of slavery in the Bible, let us quote from *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, by James Hastings:

"The causes of slavery are at first sight manifold. It may be the result of capture in war; it may be the punishment for crime or debt; or a man who is starving may sell himself or his children to buy food. But, the more we examine the subject, the more we find that the primary cause is capture in war, particularly when the war is between different races..."

PRIMARY REASON FOR ANCIENT SLAVERY

As to the primary reason for slavery—capture in war—this concept won't exist anymore in the Millennium, as there will be *no more wars* in the Millennium (Isaiah 2:1-4). Also, since all will live in prosperity and there will be no more poverty, that reason for slavery won't exist anymore, either (Micah 4:1-4; Zechariah 3:10). Finally, "slavery" for punishment of crime or debt in the Millennium might likewise be non-existent, as people might not be allowed to actually carry out crimes or go into debt that would necessitate that kind of punishment or treatment (compare Isaiah 30:20-21).

We should also mention that it was never God's original intent that men should be poor in the first place (Deuteronomy 15:1-6). Nor was it God's original intent that men should go to war, as we explain in detail in our free booklet, *"Should You Fight in War?"* It was only when man decided that he wanted to fight, that God gave laws to regulate warfare and its consequences, mostly to prevent the kind of terrible abuses which were so prevalent in other ancient societies and which are still so prevalent today.

The *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, by James Hastings, continues: "Slavery existed among the Hebrews, as among all the peoples of antiquity, but it appears in milder forms and was inspired by a more humane spirit than in either Greece or Rome..."

It is indeed correct that the kind of "slavery," as described in Old Testament passages, cannot be remotely compared with the terrible curse of slavery which had been adopted by other cultures in ancient antiquity or which was later practiced and carried out by other cultures, including those of the "Christian" Western societies.

NO ABUSE OF SLAVES AND THEIR RIGHTS

As mentioned above, the Bible prohibited the abuse of slaves and required the punishment of the master or the freedom of the slaves in case of physical abuse (Exodus 21:20, 26-27).

Deuteronomy 21:10-14 describes the rights of a female slave who had been captured in war.

Deuteronomy 23:16 expressly prohibited that an escaped slave would be returned to his cruel master.

In 1 Chronicles 2:34-35, we find that an Egyptian slave became the son-in-law of his master.

Slaves could even become heirs to the property of their masters (compare Genesis 15:2-3).

Slaves were included in God's command of rest on the Sabbath, and they were exempted from forced labor on that day (Exodus 20:10).

Slaves were allowed to participate in the Passover, after they were circumcised (Exodus 12:44).

Slaves of priests were allowed to eat the food dedicated to the priests (Leviticus 22:11).

And in Job 31:13-15, we find Job's exclamation that a godly master

would respect the rights and causes of his male or female slave, pointing out that God had made them as well as Job.

WHY NO EXPLICIT CONDEMNATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

In this light, we need to examine why we don't find explicit condemnation of the concept of slavery in the New Testament.

The *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, by James Hastings, writes:

"There is no explicit condemnation of slavery in the teaching of our Lord. It would even be difficult to say how much He refers to it, as the Greek can mean 'slave,' 'bond servant,' or 'servant'... it is in the Epistle to Philemon that St. Paul's teaching is most clear. Onesimus was a runaway slave whom the apostle was sending back to his master Philemon... there is no condemnation of slavery..."

The *Nelson Study Bible* writes:

"At that time [when Paul wrote the letter to Philemon], the slave-master relationship was as common as the employee-employer relationship is today... In his letters the apostle Paul did not approve of slavery, but he also did not condemn it. He exhorted slaves to demonstrate Christian obedience and humility even to their masters... In turn, Christian masters were to treat their slaves fairly... Yet at the same time, Paul declared the equality of both slaves and free persons before Christ [compare Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11; 1 Corinthians 12:13], a principle that would eventually undermine the institution of slavery... The letter [to Philemon] is basically an earnest plea for a Christian love that would confront the cruelty and hatred embodied in the cultural institutions of that day..."

It might appear that Paul's approach in the letter to Philemon was in opposition to the explicit command in Deuteronomy 23:16, not to return a slave to his master. But this is only the case at first glance. If we review these passages more carefully, we find that Deuteronomy 23:16 prohibits the return of an abused slave against the slave's will. In the case of Paul, the escaped slave Onesimus [the Bible does not tell us WHY Onesimus ran away] perfectly agreed to return to his master Philemon, as Paul encouraged Philemon to receive his slave back with Christian love and to treat him as a brother in the faith.

In trying to explain Paul's approach, we find the following

comments in *The New Bible Commentary: Revised*:

“Although slaves are mentioned in several Pauline Epistles, in none does slavery appear so vividly as in [the letter to Philemon], since the whole Epistle revolves around a runaway slave. The question arises why Paul did not take the opportunity of pointing out in a more direct manner the evils of the whole system. Certain factors must be borne in mind before an answer is suggested. Slavery was so integral a part in the social system that a direct confrontation with the State to abolish it, even if it had been possible for the Christian church to embark on such a crusade, would have resulted in nothing short of revolution. Paul was certainly no revolutionary...”

“Although the Christian could not have hoped to make abolition of slavery a political platform, they could set an example to the world at large concerning the way in which Christianity... could mitigate its evils. This brief letter is a notable example of such an approach in that Paul argues that a new relationship must develop between Philemon and Onesimus, since both master and slave were now Christians...”

Application for Us Today

We must remember that Paul included several striking passages about “slaves” in New Testament times. Even though he demanded that Christian “slaves” work obediently and sincerely for their Christian or non-Christian masters (Ephesians 6:5-8), while exhorting those masters to treat their “slaves” fairly (Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 4:1), he did encourage slaves to sever the master-slave relationship, if that could be done (compare 1 Corinthians 7:21).

Paul also prohibited Christians from becoming voluntarily slaves of men (verse 22). These prohibitions also apply to us today in our “free” Western societies, even though the concept of “slavery” might not be that obvious at first sight; for instance, *a true Christian should not volunteer to join the military* and thereby become a slave of man.

Apart from these Christian principles regulating a master-slave relationship, we must understand that it has never been the role, function and responsibility of the Church of God to change the world now, or to undermine the systems and governments of this world. True Christians don’t participate in the wars of this world, nor do they vote in governmental elections, nor participate in any attempts to overthrow

the government. As explained in our free booklet, *“Should You Fight in War?”*, Christians are ambassadors of Christ and representatives of a better world—the heavenly kingdom—to be set up on this earth within a few years from now.

ARE CHRISTIANS TO “IMPROVE” SATAN’S WORLD?

Focusing on these facts, we might understand better WHY the New Testament or the apostle Paul did not condemn or even address the concept of slavery per se: This is presently NOT God’s world, but Satan’s (compare Matthew 4:8-9), and Christians are NOT here for the purpose of “improving” Satan’s rotten evil world (Galatians 1:4), of trying to make this evil world a better world. True Christians know that this world will be **REPLACED** by a better world (Daniel 2:44; Revelation 11:15-18), and any attempts to **IMPROVE** or change THIS Satan-ruled world for the better are doomed to fail. Christians are, however, to live in this world with its corrupt systems as Christ’s ambassadors—as lights—showing how they *CAN* live as Christians in this world **without** becoming a part of it, regardless of the circumstance they might find themselves in. Even when imprisoned, Joseph and Paul continued to live as true Christians.

Paul was not trying to change the system. He taught that we are to obey our governmental leaders (Romans 13:1-7), except when their laws or directives contradict God’s commands (Acts 5:29; 4:19). His letter to Philemon shows how one can live in the world and within its systems, and still be a Christian.

SLAVERY IN THE MILLENNIUM?

Based on the foregoing, we feel that it is highly unlikely that there will exist any slavery in the Millennium. But how are we to understand a Scripture like Isaiah 14:1-2, which deals with the Millennium and might suggest the existence of some form of slavery? The passage reads:

“For the LORD will have mercy on Jacob, and will still choose Israel, and settle them in their own land. The strangers will be joined with them, and they will cling to the house of Jacob. Then people will take them and bring them to their place, and the house of Israel will possess them for servants and maids in the land of the LORD; they will take them captive whose captives they were, and rule over their oppressors.”

Upon closer examination, this passage does not seem to teach that men will enslave others in the Millennium. Note how some commentaries explain this Scripture.

Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible writes:

“And they shall take them captive..’—That is, they shall induce them to become proselytes; to be willing to accompany them to their own homes, and to become their servants there. It does not mean that they would subdue them by force; but they would be able, by their influence there, to disarm their opposition; and to induce them to become the friends of their religion... This is one instance where the people of God would show that they could disarm their oppressors by a mild and winning demeanour, and in which they would be able to induce others to join with them. Such would be the force of their example and conduct, of their conversation and of their deportment...”

The commentary of *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* adds: “‘captives’—not by physical, but by moral might; the force of love, and regard to Israel’s God [compare Isaiah 60:14].”

Finally, *John Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible* states:

“... this will have... accomplishment in the latter day, when the Gentiles shall bring their sons and daughters in their arms, and on their shoulders, and on horses, and in chariots, to Jerusalem [Isaiah 49:21-23]... [They will choose] rather to be servants and handmaids to them, than to return to their own land, and who were a kind of inheritance or possession to the [Israelites]... It may be understood of Gentile converts..., who would willingly and cheerfully engage in the service of the church of God, and by love serve his people, and one another [Isaiah 61:5]...”

In conclusion, it was never God’s intent that there should be any kind of slavery in the first place—had mankind chosen to OBEY God. It is highly unlikely that God will use men to enslave others in the Millennium. This is not to say, however, that God won’t deal with uncompromising power and authority regarding individuals and nations who refuse to obey God, until they yield to God’s rule (compare Revelation 2:27; Zechariah 14:11-20; Ezekiel 38:18-23; 39:1-16).

In the meantime, Christians have to strive to *live within the laws of man*—whatever they might be—*unless they contradict the laws of God*. No matter what circumstance we might find ourselves in, we still can and should continue to live the way of God.

Part 3

Man's Animals, Cloth and Plants

Apart from marriage and slavery-related questions, there are practical questions which are sometimes raised in light of certain Old Testament regulations. Some of these have to do with our conduct toward our animals, our cloth and our plants.

CROSS-BREEDING, CROSS-DRESSING, DIFFERENT SEEDS AND DIFFERENT GARMENTS

What does the Bible say about cross-breeding, cross-dressing, different seeds and different garments? Are these provisions still valid for us today?

No Cross-Breeding

Leviticus 19:19 prohibits *cross-breeding* and *still applies to us today*: “You shall not let your livestock breed with another kind...” The word “kind” in the Bible applies oftentimes to “species” in our terminology today. Even though it is not really possible, through natural means, to breed a member of the cat kind with a member of a dog kind to produce offspring, scientists today are engaging artificially in such ungodly practices in their attempt to produce unnatural hybrids. God strongly condemns such conduct (As an aside, the same prohibition applies to sexual relationships between men and animals).

No Cross-Dressing

Leviticus 19:19 also prohibits *cross-dressing*, as does Deuteronomy 22:5—both prohibitions *apply to us today*. A man is not to wear women’s clothes and *vice versa*. This law deals with the biblically prohibited practice of *transvestism*; it is *not to be applied* to clothes especially prepared for women, such as jeans produced for women, or to Scottish kilts for men.

No Different Kinds of Seed

Another prohibition, which is *still valid for us today*, is Deuteronomy 22:9, which forbids sowing a vineyard with *different kinds of seed*. The principle is to plant seeds together that will each continue to reproduce after its own kind, in order to avoid substandard products or hybrids. There is nothing wrong, then, with planting peas or beans among corn, or planting two pasture grasses together. On the other hand, the Church of God has felt that cucumbers should not be planted with watermelons because they will cross and produce a perversion. Likewise, various members of the muskmelon and cantaloupe family should not be planted near pumpkins or certain types of squash, as they will mix.

Deuteronomy 22:11 prohibits, correctly translated, the *wearing of a garment “of different sorts, wool and linen mixed together.”* [The words, “such as” have been added and do not appear in the original Hebrew.] Leviticus 19:19 contains the same prohibition. Wool is an animal product, while linen is a plant product. Such products should not be combined, as an improper blend, as they produce clothes of lesser quality.

From the standpoint of practicality, mixing wool and linen together for the purpose of clothing degrades the quality. Today, we might consider the wearing of a wool suit coat over a cotton shirt adorned by a silk tie as an example of wearing diverse clothing that each are made of pure materials. *This is permitted*, as the products are NOT MIXED TOGETHER IN THEIR FABRICATION. The same would be true and permitted for wearing moccasins, made from wool, together with linen clothing.

In recent times different materials have been developed for making clothing. Nylon, polyester, spandex and acrylic are examples of petroleum-based synthetic materials that now make up some of our apparel. Also, rayon (or viscose) is a cellulose-based, semi-synthetic fiber made from wood pulp. Oftentimes these may be used with natural fibers—either as blends or as supporting parts.

As we are not to mix together animal and plant products, it would appear that linen (a plant product) should not be mixed together with an animal product. However, this prohibition does *not apply to artificial products*, so that combinations such as linen or wool with synthetic and semi-synthetic materials would not be problematic.

NO REQUIREMENT TODAY TO WEAR TASSELS

Another example of an injunction which is *no longer valid today* for Christians would be a law contained in Deuteronomy 22:12, commanding that tassels be made on the four corners of one's clothing. The reason is given in Numbers 15:38–40: "...that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the LORD to do them... and so be holy to the LORD." Today, God's Holy Spirit reminds us of God's law. Ancient Israel needed those physical reminders, however, as the Holy Spirit was not promised or given to them. Under the New Covenant, those physical reminders should not be necessary, as the law of God is being written on our hearts and minds.

God's Law in Our Hearts

God gave this commandment to carnal people who did not have a heart to obey Him (Deuteronomy 5:29), nor would they have been able to obey God according to the spirit (2 Corinthians 3:1-8). But even obedience according to the letter was lacking with the Israelites, and the original intent of tassels was, in time, greatly abused and perverted. Today, as mentioned above, a Christian is to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit (carnal Israel did not have access to God's Holy Spirit). So then, it is God's Spirit which reminds a Christian of God's law and enables him or her to keep the law in its spiritual sense (John 14:26; Galatians 5:16).

No Literal Tabernacles, Animal Sacrifices or Passover Lamb

This is why true Christians *do not build literal tabernacles or bring animal sacrifices*—which are Old Testament physical ritual injunctions—during the Feast of Tabernacles (Ezra 3:4; Nehemiah 8:14-15). They do, however, obey the spiritual intent of the law by keeping the days during the Feast of Tabernacles away from their home in temporary dwellings, such as hotels or vacation homes. At Passover, true Christians *do not eat a Passover lamb with bitter herbs and spices*, but they keep the Passover with the *symbols of bread and wine* (pointing figuratively at the abused body and shed blood of Jesus Christ).

It is interesting to analyze how tassels or fringes (*Authorized Version*) were ultimately used by the Israelites and especially the Jews at Jesus' time.

Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary states regarding Numbers 15:38:

"The fringes were not appointed for trimming and adorning their clothes, but to stir up their minds by way of remembrance..."

The Danger with Physical "Worship" Reminders

The tassels were "memory devices to keep the wearer focused on the commandments of God" (*Nelson Study Bible*, comment to Numbers 15:38). In time, their intended purpose, even for physical Israel, was abused and lost. This reminds us of the *brass serpent*, which, at one time fulfilled a godly-ordained purpose (Numbers 21:8-9; John 3:14), but which later was idolized so that it had to be destroyed (2 Kings 18:4). We might also recall the record of Gideon's ephod (Judges 8:27). Having physical "reminders" like these, in connection with the worship of God, can easily become a distraction and border on *idol worship*. The so-called adoration of the "Christian" cross or the worship of the statutes of "saints" would be additional examples, even though none of these pagan practices were ever permitted in Scripture.

The above-mentioned commentary also says that the tassels were used by the people to "proclaim... themselves Jews wherever they were, as not ashamed of God and his law."

This is not the purpose of God's ministers and disciples today. They are not to draw undue attention to themselves, but they are to proclaim the message of God's Kingdom. *Ministers are not to be called "Reverend"* (a term used exclusively for God; Psalm 111:9, *Authorized Version*), or "*Holy Father*" (another term exclusively used for God, Matthew 23:9); and they are *not to wear special clothing or robes* to lift themselves up as ministers (a custom derived from the Babylonian mystery religion; compare Matthew 23:12).

The *Pulpit Commentary* states regarding tassels:

"We quote again from the Jewish 'Class. Book:' 'Every male of the Jewish nation must wear a garment [not usually an undergarment] made with four corners, having fringes fixed at each corner. These fringes are called *tsetsis*, or, memorial fringes. In the synagogue, during the morning prayers, a scarf with fringes attached to it is worn, which is called *tollece*, "scarf or veil." These memorial fringes typically point out the six hundred and thirteen precepts contained in the volume of the sacred Law. They are also intended to remind us of the goodness

of the Almighty in having delivered our forefathers from the slavery in Egypt.”

The “sacred Law” was a collection from the *Book of Moses* and included *spiritual as well as ritual laws*. While the spiritual laws (the Ten Commandments, as well as statutes and judgments, which define the Ten Commandments) are still obligatory today, the ritual laws (including the sacrificial system and fleshly ordinances of washings) have been superseded by the death of Jesus Christ. If tassels were worn to remind us of all these laws, then the importance of Christ’s sacrifice would be missed.

Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah*, also recognizes the ritual character of the commandment to wear tassels. He states on page 414:

“Some even feel the need to justify ritual by attempting to connect each ritual act to some ethical value... ‘we wear fringes to remind us to be kind...’ This is misleading...”

In fact, even orthodox Jews do not wear tassels as described in Numbers and Deuteronomy. *Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible* states:

“... on this square garment, and the four corners or skirts of it, were the fringes put... and these were to be wore [sic] by them throughout their generations until the Messiah came, and they seem to have been worn by him, Matthew 9:20 [but see our discussion below]; however, it is certain they were worn by the Pharisees in his time, Matthew 23:5; at present this four cornered garment is not anywhere in common use among the Jews...” Instead, some wear it today as an under-garment of smaller size, especially during the morning prayer in the synagogue.

Superstitious Meaning

At Jesus’ time, and subsequently, some attached almost *superstitious meaning* to this temporary law. They went so far as to give tassels a magical importance. *Gill* explains:

“The observance of this law is of so much consequence with the Jews, that they make all the commandments to depend on it; and say, that it is equal to them all, and that he that is guilty of the breach of it, is worthy of death: they ascribe the like virtue to these fringes, as to their phylacteries, and think themselves much the better for the wearing them; and the Pharisees, because they would appear with a greater air of sanctity and devotion than others, made theirs larger...”

The *Wycliffe Bible Commentary* alludes to the superstitious feelings of Jews in regard to tassels and states that “Matthew condenses the account [of the healed woman in Matthew 9:20] but notes that Jesus made clear to the woman that faith, not the tassel, had obtained this cure.”

Tassels are also mentioned in Deuteronomy 22:12. According to *Gill*, “Though a different word is here used from that in Numbers 15:38, yet the same things are intended... Though there have been some, whom Aben Ezra takes notice of, who supposed that this is a law by itself, and to be observed in the night, as that in Numbers 15:38 was in the day; but these he warmly opposes, and calls them liars.”

Regardless, the principles expressed regarding Numbers 15:38 equally apply to Deuteronomy 22:12.

Did Christ Wear Tassels?

We cannot say for sure that Christ wore tassels because of the directives in Numbers 15:38 and Deuteronomy 22:12. The above-quoted passage in Matthew 9:20 says that the woman touched the “hem” of His garment. Compare Luke 8:44, where it is translated “border,” but the Greek word (“*kraspedon*”) is the same. *Strong*, No. 2899, states that its origin is uncertain, and that it has the meaning of “a margin,” and especially of a fringe or a tassel or a border or a hem.

Barnes’ Notes on the Bible says that this “garment was probably the square garment which was thrown over the shoulders... This was surrounded by a border or ‘fringe’; and this ‘fringe,’ or the loose threads hanging down, is what is meant by the ‘hem.’” Mark 5:27 only says that the sick woman touched His garment. In another incident, Matthew 14:36 makes further reference to the “hem” of His garment. As mentioned, Christ chided the Pharisees in Matthew 23:5 that they “enlarge[d] the borders of their garment.”

If Christ wore tassels pursuant to and in compliance with Numbers 15:38 and Deuteronomy 22:12, then, of course, He did not do so for the purpose of reminding Himself of God’s Law. He—the God of the Old Testament who GAVE the law in the first place—would not need to have physical reminders to impress on Himself the need to keep the Law. He would have simply been *obedient to ritual prescriptions* which had not *yet* been abolished—they *would be abrogated at the time of His death*.

He also commanded a cleansed leper to present himself to the priest to fulfill *passing ritual provisions* in the Law of Moses (Matthew 8:4); and He kept the Old Testament Passover by eating a lamb, before changing the symbols to bread and wine. Further, if He had worn tassels, He would have avoided unnecessary offense in an environment where tassels were worn (compare as another example, Matthew 17:24-27). At the same time, Jesus refused to obey hypocritical human customs which were not based on Scripture (Mark 7:1-13).

Application for Us Today

The same is true today. *Christians are not to participate in man-made (pagan) customs such as Christmas, Easter or Halloween activities.* Also, they do not follow and practice *superseded ritual laws.* Christians are under *no obligation to wear tassels today.* To insist that they need to do so in an environment where such tassels are NOT worn, would cause unnecessary offense, scorn and ridicule. As Christians, we are not to draw undue attention to ourselves, but instead, we are to direct people toward God and His Word, so that “by all means,” we might “save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22).

NO REQUIREMENT TO WEAR PHYLACTERIES

Another Jewish practice which is not required for Christians is the wearing of “phylacteries.” Some orthodox Jews wear leather boxes (“phylacteries”) which contain portions of Old Testament passages. They base this custom on Scriptures in Deuteronomy and Exodus.

One of those passages is Deuteronomy 6:6-8, which states, in connection with the pronouncement of the Ten Commandments:

“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall BIND them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as FRONTLETS between your eyes.”

Another passage used for the custom of wearing phylacteries is Deuteronomy 11:18, which states, in connection with the second giving of the Ten Commandments:

“Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and BIND them as a sign on your hand, and they shall

be as FRONTLETS between your eyes.”

How are we to follow these commandments in Deuteronomy? Are we to follow the example of the Jews at the time of Christ, or the example of some Jews today in wearing phylacteries?

Friedman, *Commentary of the Torah*, explains that the command to bind the law on one’s hand and to bind it between the eyes “came to be taken literally, requiring one to wear BOXES [in Hebrew *tephillin*; in Greek *phylacteries*] on one’s ARM and HEAD containing passages from the Torah [the five books of Moses]. In the Tanak [the entire Old Testament], however, this expression is meant figuratively, meaning to keep these teachings at hand... and right before one’s eyes.”

Let us note Matthew 23:5, where Jesus makes a reference to “phylacteries”:

“But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments.”

Christ did not approve of this custom, and He even used it as an example to point out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the scribes.

The *Ryrie Study Bible* says:

“... some Jews still wear phylacteries... BOUND on the forehead and on the left ARM above the elbow... A phylactery was a square leather box which contained four strips of parchment on which were written (portions from Exodus and Deuteronomy). During prayer one was worn on the forehead between the eyebrows and another on the left arm close to the elbow. They were held in place by leather bands, which the Pharisees made broad to attract more attention to themselves... phylacteries had only begun to be used by the ultra-pious in Christ’s day...”

According to some commentaries, the custom of wearing phylacteries began sometime after the Jews had returned from the Babylonian captivity. As an aside, IF the passages in Deuteronomy were to be understood literally as commanding the phylacteries to be worn “on your hand, and... as frontlets between your eyes,” the Jews would not have kept this command anyhow, as they were not wearing them on their HAND, but they did so on their left ARM.

Superstitious Application

In fact, these phylacteries had been given a superstitious application.

Dummelow writes in his *Commentary on the Holy Bible*:

“The rabbis held these phylacteries... in the highest veneration. They were to be kissed when put on or off... they were a preservative against demons, whence their name phylacteries, i.e. amulets (from a Greek word meaning ‘to guard.’). They were sworn by, by touching them.”

Young, *Analytical Concordance of the Holy Bible*, defines the word “phylactery” as “a guard, a charm,” and Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, writes:

“...any kind of safeguard... especially to denote an amulet... it was supposed to have potency as a charm against evils and demons.”

Apart from this very dangerous and ungodly development, the passages in Deuteronomy 6 and 11 were meant to be applied *figuratively*, not literally, and most certainly not in connection with phylacteries, as can be seen from the following passages:

We read in Exodus 13:7-10, 15-16:

“Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days. And no leavened bread shall be seen among you, nor shall leaven be seen among you in all your quarters. And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, ‘This is done because of what the LORD did for me when I came up from Egypt.’ It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the LORD’S law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt. You shall therefore keep this ordinance in its season from year to year...”

“And it came to pass, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all males that open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.’ It shall be as a sign on your HAND and as FRONTLETS between your eyes, for by strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt.”

Here the reference of “binding” certain passages on the forehead and on the hand applied to the historical situation pertaining to the death of the firstborn, the exodus from Egypt and the Days of Unleavened Bread. Jews claim that these passages are also to be contained in the phylactery boxes. But they do not include passages from the following sections:

Proverbs 3:3 says: “Let not mercy and truth forsake you; BIND them

around your neck, WRITE them on the tablet of your heart.”

Here mercy and truth are to be bound around one’s neck and to be written on the tablets of our heart—but Jews do not include this passage in their leather boxes.

Proverbs 6:21 states: “BIND them continually upon your heart; TIE them around your neck.” A particular law is to be bound upon one’s heart and to be tied around the neck. The context is the command and admonition against adultery, compare verses 20, 22-24, 27-29.

Proverbs 7:3 adds: “Bind them on the fingers; Write them on the tablet of your heart.”

A particular provision is to be bound on one’s fingers and the tablet of the heart, and the context is again the prohibition of adultery, compare verse 5.

Let us notice again that Deuteronomy 6:6, 8; 11:18 and Exodus 13:16 say that God’s law is to be “IN your heart” and that it is to be “AS a sign on your hand,” and “AS frontlets between your eyes.” This is clearly *figurative language*, which is not to be understood literally. This includes what we do with our hand and what and how we think.

The *Sabbath* is a good example. On it, we refrain from work with our hands, and we worship God with our mind. But we are warned that people will follow the false prophet (a religious leader) to receive the mark of the beast (a political leader) on their right hand or on their forehead (see Revelation 13:16-17), showing that they will work with their hands on the Sabbath and refuse to worship God on this day, while setting aside Sunday as a day of rest.

Application for Us Today

If we are true Christians, we do not need physical reminders such as phylacteries to remind us of God’s law. Today, God’s Holy Spirit in us reminds us of God’s law, and the law of God is being written on our hearts and minds [Romans 5:5 says that the love of God, which is defined as keeping the commandments (1 John 5:3), is poured out IN our hearts by the Holy Spirit].

Hebrews 8:10 describes the New Covenant, and true Christians—spiritual Israelites—are living already today under the conditions of the New Covenant:

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel

after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and WRITE them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

God’s Law on Our Doors?

God’s law must be written in our hearts—to wear physical boxes such as phylacteries in superstitious ways to “remind” us of the law is not what God intends us to do.

The same can be said for the requirement in Old Testament times to *write the law on the door posts of our houses* (Deuteronomy 11:18-20). That is *not necessary for us today*. Today, as mentioned above, God’s law is to be written in our hearts.

Part 4

No New Moon Celebrations

Some who understand that true Christians must observe today the weekly Sabbath and God's prescribed annual Holy Days, have concluded that they need to follow the Jews by keeping annual Jewish days (not prescribed in Scripture) or new moons once each month. These conclusions are incorrect.

According to the Hebrew calendar, a month starts with a new moon. While there are clearly expressed commandments in the Bible for us today to celebrate God's weekly Sabbath and His annual Holy Days, there are no such commands that enjoin us today to celebrate new moons—the beginning of new months. The early New Testament Church continued to keep and celebrate the weekly Sabbath and the annual Holy Days, but there is no biblical record indicating that they celebrated new moons. (As an aside, in Colossians 2:16, Paul does not speak about “new moons” in general, but about “a new moon,” referring specifically to the Feast of Trumpets, the only annual Feast day which falls on a new moon.)

In ancient times, some assembled on the occasion of each new moon with the blowing of trumpets, which signified the beginning of a new month (Numbers 10:10). The priesthood was entrusted with the responsibility to determine, and make known to the people, when a new month would start, as calendars were not available to everyone in ancient Israel the way we have them today.

Some form of ceremony took place on the day of a new moon to let the people know that a new month had begun. Some used the occasion to have a feast on that day (1 Samuel 20:5, 18, 24), although, as mentioned, the Bible nowhere commands that new moons must be celebrated in that way. We read that offerings were to be given on new moons (2 Chronicles 31:3; Ezra 3:5; Nehemiah 10:33), but such offerings—sacrifices—are no longer required today. Even in ancient

Israel, we do not find that God commanded the celebration of new moons per se—unconnected to the giving of sacrifices. On the other hand, we do find that the weekly Sabbath and the annual Holy Days were in force **before** the sacrificial system was introduced, and that they are to be kept today, even though sacrifices are no longer necessary. (Our free booklet, *God's Commanded Holy Days*, addressing the Sabbath and the annual Holy Days, proves this fact from the Bible.)

It was, however, necessary in ancient times to somehow mark the beginning of the month, as it was not always easy for everyone to independently observe the new moon, perhaps due to clouds or heavy rain.

By actually conducting a certain ceremony at the appearance of a new moon, the general population was sufficiently informed and enabled to prepare for any approaching seasons or annual Holy Days, which are counted and determined by the appearance of the new moon.

For instance, as mentioned earlier, the Feast of Trumpets is celebrated on a new moon (compare Psalm 81:3)—the first day of the month. Ten days later, the Day of Atonement is kept, and the Feast of Tabernacles begins fifteen days after the Feast of Trumpets.

It appears that in the process of time, the ancient celebrations of new moons had reached proportions that were not accepted by God. He tells us in Isaiah 1:14, “Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them.” Apparently, new moons were even celebrated in the same way as Sabbaths are to be kept, with prohibitions to engage in merchandising (compare Amos 8:5). However, such a prohibition for new moons cannot be found in Scripture.

WHY NEW MOON CELEBRATIONS IN ANCIENT TIMES?

God decreed that the Feast of Trumpets is to be kept at the first sighting of a new moon, but the determination of the beginning of Trumpets was and is not only based on observation, but also on calculation. (Today, the dates for Trumpets and all of God's Holy Days have been determined and fixed by the Hebrew calendar, as published by the Church of God.) In addition, God never ordered that there should be new moon celebrations (new moons were never viewed by God as Holy Days), but it is also true that Israelites and Jews began early on to observe and celebrate new moons with festivities. An article in

The Times of Israel (dated November 16, 2013) sheds some light on *how and why new moon venerations might have begun*:

“It’s easy to walk past the gray-brown slab of basalt in the Israel Museum’s archaeology wing and pay it no heed... But etched into the monumental stele’s pocked surface is a mysterious figure [a bull stele unearthed in Bethsaida] central to understanding the significance of the lunar god in ancient Canaan and the origins of the Jewish veneration of the new moon...

“The bull stele once stood atop an altar situated at the entrance to the ancient city of Geshur, the capital of an eponymous kingdom. It was one of several Aramaean kingdoms that ruled southern Syria and bordered the Israelites. Like the Israelites to the south, the Geshurites spoke a Semitic tongue, likely a blend of Aramaic and Hebrew... Scholars postulate that the altars were akin to those referred to as ‘high places of the gates’ in II Kings 23...

“King David married Maachah, the daughter of King Talmai of Geshur, forging a political alliance between Israel and its stronger neighbor. In 732 BCE, Assyrian King Tiglath-Pileser III embarked on a campaign of conquest and destruction in Canaan. Bethsaida, like many cities in the southern Levant, was put to the sword. The stele was smashed and cast down in ruin...

“In much of the ancient Levant, the bull was associated with storm deities, like the Canaanite Baal, or his Syrian cognate Hadad. A 15th century stele from Ugarit, in northwestern Syria, for example, shows a thunderbolt-wielding Baal adorned with bull horns... The bull’s head on the Bethsaida stele is surmounted by horns forming a clearly defined crescent moon, suggesting it may represent a lunar deity.

“Although the storm god [Baal] reigned supreme among the Arameans, as the Syrian kingdom fell under Assyrian influence, the moon god — particularly the new moon — found increased significance in the Aramean and Israelite pantheons... Nearly exact copies of the Bethsaida stele have been found at sites in Syria and southern Turkey — a staff topped by a bull’s head whose horns form the crescent moon.

“Scholars point to a lengthy tradition of theriomorphic... depictions of the moon god Sin-Nanna in Mesopotamian cultures. To the ancient Mesopotamians, the ‘horns of a bull or cow were seen to match the pointed curve of the waxing and waning crescents so exactly that

the powers of the one were attributed to the other, each gaining the other's potency as well as their own,' writes Jules Cashford in her book 'The Moon: Myth and Image.' Tallay Ornan of the Hebrew University's Institute of Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Civilizations argues that [the] Bethsaida stele intentionally conflates the bull and moon imagery in order to symbolize both deities...

"As for the Israelites and Judeans, she wrote in an email, seals unearthed at Jerusalem's City of David indicate that moon god worship intensified in Israel and Judea under Assyrian domination during the period of the Bethsaida stele and after its destruction. It is precisely during this time period — the late First Temple Era — under Aramean and Assyrian influence, that Israel and Judah began venerating the new moon... a fairly extra-biblical tradition that was bestowed with quasi-holiness in an otherwise season-driven calendar.

"The Jewish lunar month — Rosh Hodesh — traditionally begins with the sighting of the first sliver of the waxing moon and religious time governed ritual observance of Judaism's many holidays... The Talmud, codified centuries later, discusses in exhaustive detail the byzantine process of verifying eyewitness sighting of the new moon and the consequent declaration of the commencement of the new month..."

Ancient Israel and Judah were known for committing idolatry by worshipping the pagan sun-god Baal, who was pictured many times as a bull. But even though God clearly instructed how and when to begin with the celebration of the Feast of Trumpets, He never enjoined the Israelites to celebrate new moons. It appears that this practice may be rooted in or was adopted from paganism and the worship of the "moon" god or goddess. The famous female idol called "Astarte," also referred to in the Bible as the queen of heaven, was indeed a moon goddess. She was also known as Ishtar or Eostre—the modern name for "Easter" is derived from these designations.

Application for Us Today

Today it is not necessary to mark the beginning of each new month with feast celebrations, the blowing of trumpets, or an assembly. Calendars are available which list, well in advance, the dates of the appearance of each new moon throughout the year.

It is true that the Bible indicates that at the beginning of the Millennium, new moons will be kept in conjunction with the bringing of sacrifices (Ezekiel 45:17, 46:1, 3, 6; Isaiah 66:20-23). Why God will reintroduce a system of sacrifices in the Millennium, connected with some type of new moon ceremonies, the Bible does not explicitly say. Our free booklet, *“And Lawlessness Will Abound...”* suggests a distinct possibility on pages 38-39. (However, those ceremonies would most certainly not be rooted in or adopted from paganism, unlike ancient Israel’s elaborate new moon celebrations.)

It is clear from Scripture, however, that God does not command His people today to celebrate new moons.

Part 5

Consuming Meat and Milk Together?

A hotly debated issue deals with Jewish “kosher” regulations as allegedly derived from Old Testament laws. One of those regulations addresses the Jewish prohibition to consume milk and meat together. But is their reliance on certain Old Testament passages valid?

BOILING A YOUNG GOAT IN ITS MOTHER’S MILK

Exodus 23:19 states: “The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.” The identical prohibition is repeated in Exodus 34:26. We also find the following prohibition in Deuteronomy 14:21:

“You shall not eat anything that dies of itself; you may give it to the alien who is within your gates, that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner; for you are a holy people to the LORD your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.”

Some claim that this means that we must not consume any products consisting of milk and meat. Orthodox Jews today don’t eat a mixture of milk and meat. We should realize, however, that the Scripture itself does not prohibit the consumption of meat and milk per se; it only refers to the boiling of a young goat in ITS MOTHER’S milk. We find, for instance, that Abraham served his three guests—the LORD and two angels—“butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ATE” (Genesis 18:8). Abraham, a man who obeyed God’s statutes, obviously did not think that there was a prohibition against eating a mixture of milk and meat, and God and His angels did not choose to “reveal” to him such a prohibition, as it did not exist.

The verbatim translation of the Hebrew is: “You shall not boil a kid in the milk of its mother.” The key is the phrase, “in the milk of

ITS mother," or, "in ITS mother's milk," referring to the relationship between the kid and ITS mother—not just any mother.

Most commentaries agree that the command against seething or boiling a kid in its mother's milk was given because of pagan worship practices that Israel was prohibited from adopting (Deuteronomy 12:28-32). We should note that the command in Exodus 23:19 and 34:26 is clearly given in the context of God's annual Holy Days. The *Ryrie Study Bible* points out:

"Leaven was a symbol of corruption and evil (cf. Matt. 16:6). Boiling a kid in its mother's milk was a common Canaanite ritual involving *magic spells*."

The *Nelson Study Bible* adds, in discussing Exodus 23:19:

"You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk is a command that forbade the Israelites to imitate the cruel sacrifices of their pagan neighbors."

Regarding Deuteronomy 14:21, the commentary includes these additional statements: "Unlike the Canaanites who boiled young goats alive in the milk of their mothers as a sacrifice to fertility gods, Israel was to practice a more humane method of animal sacrifice. Israel was to be different from its neighbors—that is, holy."

The *New Bible Commentary: Revised*, agrees with that understanding and adds, in regard to Exodus 23:19: "The firstfruits are to be offered to God, for He gave them. The heathen practice referred to in 19b [i.e., verse 19, second sentence] was a vain attempt to increase fertility and productivity by magical arts." The following comment was added regarding Deuteronomy 14:21: "This unnatural custom was practiced superstitiously by the Canaanites, perhaps to promote fecundity."

Matthew Henry's Commentary points out, on page 98, that the Israelites "must not think to receive benefit by that superstitious usage of some of the Gentiles, who, it is said, at the end of their harvest, seethed a kid in the dam's milk, and sprinkled that milk-potage, in a magical way, upon their gardens and fields, to make them more fruitful next year."

A very insightful explanation can also be found in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 412, as follows:

"The interpretation of this rather strange prohibition against boiling a kid in its mother's milk illustrates the manner in which archeological

discovery illuminated Ancient Near Eastern cultural practices... Following the discovery and interpretation of the Ras Shamra literature, dating to approximately the fourteenth century B.C., this verse quite often has been interpreted as the prohibition of the Canaanite ritual in which a kid was boiled in its mother's milk: 'Over the fire seven times the sacrificers cook a kid in milk... [and] mint... in butter and over the cauldron seven times fresh water... is poured.'

The commentary adds the following statements in vol. 2, on page 244, discussing Deuteronomy 14:21: "The prohibition on boiling a kid in its mother's milk has long been a riddle for the interpreter. It occurs in Exodus 23:19 and 34:26 as well. Ugaritic texts have revealed a proscribed ritual of this kind related to 'milk magic.' This law, like the others, prohibits Israel's participation in rites of the heathen."

Application for Us Today

From the foregoing, we can see that the practice of boiling a kid in its mother's milk was associated with *fertility rites, magic and pagan sacrifices*, apparently associated with the belief that through magic and the intervention of demonic gods, the next harvest would be bountiful. God was clear that such pagan customs were not to be followed, pointing out, instead, how He was to be worshipped. This connection can be clearly seen in Exodus 23:18-19 and 34:25-26, where God speaks of His sacrifice (in Exodus 34:25, the sacrifice is identified as the Passover sacrifice), the bringing of the "first of the firstfruits" into the house of God, and the command against the boiling of a young goat in its mother's milk. The connection in Deuteronomy 14:21 might not be all that obvious, as the previous verses discuss the prohibition of eating unclean meat. However, the very next verse (verse 22) begins to state God's instructions regarding tithing principles related to God's annual Festival of the Feast of Tabernacles.

In any event, we can safely say that the Bible does not prohibit the consumption of a mixture of milk and meat, EXCEPT that we should not boil a kid in its mother's milk, as the Scriptures clearly say. This unusual custom is still practiced in some parts of the world today. James Hastings, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. 8, p. 635, relates the following in this context: "Among the Arabs flesh seethed in milk is still a common dish, yet the Hebrews were prohibited from

boiling a kid in its mother's milk." Hastings also explains how milk, all by itself, played an important role in superstitious pagan sacrifices. On page 634, it is even stated: "In the Christian Church it [milk] was substituted for wine in the elements of the communion. This was afterwards prohibited by canon law..., but it may be surmised that it originated as one of the surviving rites of ancient pagan religion."

"Boiling a young goat in its mother's milk" was clearly a *pagan practice to worship pagan gods*, and it was therefore prohibited by God. We should take the Scripture for what it says, rather than adding to its meaning by prohibiting the consumption of a mixture of milk and meat (except for boiling and subsequently eating a young goat boiled in *its mother's milk*).

Part 6

Old Testament Physical Penalties

One of the most misunderstood passages of Old Testament Scriptures deals with the concept of an “eye for an eye.” Apart from the fact that the physical *PENALTIES of Old Testament laws do not apply to the Church of God or individual Christians today*, these injunctions were never meant to be understood literally.

AN EYE FOR AN EYE

The well-known law of “an eye for an eye” has been grossly misunderstood by some, thinking that God actually required the maiming of an offender who was guilty of injuring another person. However, this is clearly not the intended meaning of the principle of “an eye for an eye,” and the Church of God has never taught otherwise.

The principle of “an eye for an eye” is commonly known as the “*lex talionis*,” which is Latin for the “law of retaliation.” It is mentioned in the Old Testament in Exodus 21:23-27; Leviticus 24:18-20; and Deuteronomy 19:21.

Rather than requiring the literal maiming of a guilty person, this law has been correctly understood as requiring *equivalent monetary compensation*. The law also made it clear that victims were to be compensated fairly, as determined by judges and magistrates. Victims were not to resort to “self-help” or private revenge.

The *Wikipedia Encyclopedia* states the following about the principle of “an eye for an eye”:

“The basis of this form of law is the principle of proportionate punishment, often expressed under the motto ‘Let the punishment fit the crime’... The Torah’s first mention of the phrase ‘an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot’ appears in Exodus (21:22-27). The Talmud... based upon a critical interpretation of the original Hebrew text, explains that this biblical concept

entails monetary compensation in tort cases. The same interpretation applies to this phrase as it appears in Leviticus (24:18-20). Personal retribution is explicitly forbidden by the Torah (Leviticus 19:18), such reciprocal justice being strictly reserved for the social magistrate (usually in the form of regional judges)... The Oral Law explains, based upon the biblical verses, that the Bible mandates a sophisticated five-part monetary form of compensation, consisting of payment for 'Damages, Pain, Medical Expenses, Incapacitation, and Mental Anguish'...

"However, the Torah also discusses a form of direct reciprocal justice, where the phrase 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot' makes another appearance (Deuteronomy 19:16-21). Here, the Torah discusses false witnesses who conspire to testify against another person. The Torah requires the court to 'do to him as he had conspired to do to his brother' (ibid. 19:19)... the court carries out this direct reciprocal justice (including when the punishment constitutes the death penalty). Otherwise, the offenders receive lashes... it is impossible to read 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth' literally in the context of a conspiratorial witness... the phrase is never meant literally in the Torah."

In a related article, the *Wikipedia Encyclopedia*, in quoting from the website of the Union of Orthodox Congregations, points out:

"The oral law of Judaism holds that this verse [Exodus 21:24] was, from the beginning, never meant to be followed literally... to follow the spirit of this law, it must be interpreted as applying to financial damages that are commensurate with the severity of the crime... Ah, you ask, how do you know the Torah means that, and is not to be taken literally? Because the Torah says, 'Do not take a ransom for the life of a Murderer, who is wicked to the extent that he must die'; for the murderer, there is no monetary amount that is sufficient to grant him atonement in the eyes of God! Only payment with his life will secure that atonement! But for other forms of injury, we will [inflict monetary damages on] the criminal..."

In addition, *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* state in their *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, pertaining to Exodus 21: "The law which authorized retaliation... was a civil one. It was given to regulate the procedure of the public magistrate in determining the amount of compensation in every case of injury, but did not encourage feelings of private revenge.

The later Jews, however, mistook it for a moral precept, and were corrected by our Lord."

The *Soncino Commentary* states the following in regard to Exodus 21:24-25: "In all these cases monetary compensation is intended. Strict justice demanded the principle of measure for measure..."

The *NIV Study Bible*, 1985, points out to Leviticus 24:19: "This represents a statement of principle. The penalty is to fit the crime, not exceed it. An actual eye or tooth was not to be required, nor is there evidence that such a penalty was ever exacted."

As mentioned earlier, the Church of God has taught consistently that the principle of "an eye for an eye" was not meant to be applied literally in the sense of maiming a person. A careful analysis of the Scriptures clearly confirms the accuracy of this conclusion.

For instance, we read in Exodus 21:22-25: "If men fight, and hurt a woman with [an unborn] child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm [to the woman] follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly [this shows, by the way, that in God's eyes, it is wrong to hurt or kill an unborn child] as the woman's husband imposes on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if any harm follows [to the woman], then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe." In other words, the specific, determined *value* of the life, the eye, the tooth, etc. had to be *paid*. The whole context of this passage in Exodus 21 is addressing COMPENSATION, not REVENGE or literal MAIMING. This can also be seen, when continuing in verses 26 and 27:

"If a man strikes the eye of his male or female servant, and destroys it, he shall let him go free for the sake of the eye [freedom from slavery compensated for the eye—that was the value of the eye in such a case]. And if he knocks out the tooth of his male or female servant, he shall let him go free for the sake of his tooth [again, in such a case, the value of the tooth was freedom from slavery]."

The same intent of having to pay just compensation can be seen when analyzing Leviticus 24:17-21:

"Whoever kills any man [intentionally and deliberately, with foresight and malice] shall surely be put to death. Whoever kills an animal shall make it good [or, make restitution, pay for the value], animal for animal. If a man causes disfiguration of his neighbor, as

he has done, so shall it be done to him [The *Soncino Commentary* points out that in the Hebrew, the words for “done unto him” literally mean “given unto him”; “he must pay the value of the damage in money that passes from hand to hand”]—fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has caused disfigurement of a man, so shall it be done [lit. given] unto him [that is, monetary compensation shall be given to the disfigured person]. And whoever kills an animal shall restore it [pay for its value]; but whoever kills a man shall be put to death [in the case of a deliberate malicious murder, no monetary compensation was allowed in lieu of capital punishment].”

Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah*, explains on pages 400-401 (in discussing Leviticus 24:20): “... the earliest postbiblical Jewish sources already understood ‘an eye for an eye’ to mean monetary, and not literal, compensation.”

Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible explains, in discussing Leviticus 24:19:

“And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbour’... Does him any hurt or mischief, causes any mutilation or deformity in him by striking him: ‘as he hath done, so shall it be done unto him’: not that a like damage or hurt should be done to him, but that he should make satisfaction for it in a pecuniary way; pay for the cure of him, and for loss of time, and in consideration of the pain he has endured, and the shame or disgrace brought on him by the deformity or mutilation, or for whatever loss he may sustain thereby...”

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ sometimes used figures of speech to stress a point, but He did not mean a literal application in those cases. For instance, He said in Matthew 5:29-30: “If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you... And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you...” Christ did not mean, of course, to apply this literally; rather, as the *Lamsa Bible* explains, these are Aramaic idioms, meaning that we are to stop envying [with our eyes] or stealing [with our hands].

In the same chapter, Jesus also addressed the principle of “an eye for an eye.” He stated, in Matthew 5:38-39:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist [forcefully, by resorting to violence and thereby injuring or killing] an evil person. But whoever slaps you

on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.”

According to the Lamsa Bible, the concept of “turning the other cheek” is another Aramaic idiom, meaning, “Do not start a quarrel or a fight.”

The *Wikipedia Encyclopedia* explains Christ’s saying in Matthew 5:38-39 as follows:

“The passage continues with the importance of showing forgiveness to enemies and those who harm you. This saying of Jesus is... interpreted [by some] as criticism of the Old Testament teaching, and often taken as implying that ‘an eye for an eye’ encourages excessive vengeance rather than an attempt to limit it... Most Christian scholars and commentators have agreed that such an interpretation is a misunderstanding of this section of Matthew. The ‘Expounding of the Law’ includes a series of six sayings in similar format, known as the ‘antitheses’. In each of them Jesus quotes the provisions of the... Law without criticism--indeed, the passage is prefaced by a ringing endorsement of the Law as [a] whole. However he then calls on his followers to go further than the [letter of the] Law demands, in order to ‘be perfect’. It seems clear Jesus was not criticising the Law, but calling on his followers not only to refrain from the abuses the Law condemns, but to go to the opposite extreme by exercising forgiveness and love—even when one has a just claim...”

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown clarify in their *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, that Jesus was not stating, in any way, that under Old Testament Law, offenders had to be maimed. Christ was addressing quite a different issue: “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, i.e., whatever penalty was regarded as a proper equivalent for these. This law of retribution—designed to take vengeance out of the hands of a private person, and commit it to the magistrate—was abused in the opposite way... [justifying in the minds of the people] a warrant for taking redress into their own hands, contrary to the injunctions of the Old Testament... (Prov. 20:22).”

Application for Us Today

Even though *the physical Old Testament penalties do not apply to the Church of God today, or to individual Christians*, we are admonished to *treat each other with fairness, and not to resort to violence and revenge.*

In order to prevent personal vengeance, as well as an unwillingness to forgive, to reconcile, and to live peaceably with all men, Christ continued to encourage His followers, in Matthew 5:40, to settle a claim with their adversaries out of court, without insisting on their “rights.”

Paul cautioned us in the same way in 1 Corinthians 6:1-7, especially when lawsuits before worldly courts involve spiritual brethren. He said, in verse 7: “... it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?”

Finally, in Matthew 5:41, when encouraging His followers to go the “extra mile,” Jesus referred to the Roman practice that “obliged the people not only to furnish horses and carriages [for government dispatches], but to give personal attendance, often at great inconvenience, when required. But the thing here demanded is a readiness to submit to unreasonable demands of whatever kind, rather than raise quarrels, with all the evils resulting from them” (*Jamiesson, Fausset and Brown, Commentary on the Whole Bible*).

In conclusion, the Old Testament “*lex talionis*” of an eye for an eye principle was never meant to be applied literally by actually maiming an offender. It was meant to outlaw personal vindictive “self-help” and to allow, instead, a magistrate or a judge to consider the case and render righteous judgment by ordering the offender to pay just compensation to the victim. Jesus Christ addressed a wrong understanding of His listeners who thought they could avenge themselves. He cautioned all of us to be forgiving and kind, and He encouraged us to avoid fights and especially violence, even, if need be, at the price of foregoing our legal rights.

NO MAIMING OF A WOMAN

A similar conclusion must be reached when considering Deuteronomy 25:11-12, which is clearly *not valid today* in any literal application. In certain Islamic countries, thieves and others are maimed by cutting off their hand. Was such a procedure ever condoned or even enjoined in the Bible, under any circumstances? The passage in Deuteronomy 25:11-12 states:

“If two men fight together, and the wife of one draws near to rescue her husband from the hand of the one attacking him, and puts out her

hand and seizes him by the genitals, then you shall cut off her hand; your eye shall not pity her.”

Was this command EVER to be applied literally?

Some commentaries think so (compare *Barnes' Notes on the Bible* and *Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*). Other commentaries reject the view of requiring or even allowing a literal application of this command. The *Soncino* commentary states:

“The interpretation is that she has to pay monetary compensation for the shame she caused the man... Even if she be poor she must pay the fine.”

This has to be the right view. Since we have established that the principle of “an eye for an eye” [discussed above] has been correctly understood as referring to *monetary compensation*, it would make little sense to inflict the punishment of maiming a woman for her immodest conduct in the heat of passion while coming to the defense of her husband. This conclusion is even more compelling when remembering the fact that Jesus used similar wording in the New Testament. He spoke of cutting off our hand which tempts us to sin, but He never meant this to be taken literally.

In addition to Matthew 5:29-30, discussed above, Jesus used similar wording in Matthew 18:6-9 and in Mark 9:42-48. In each case, He insists that we refrain from using our hands for the purpose of sinning. We are told in James 4:8 that sinners must cleanse their hands. Paul explains in Romans 6:13: “And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”

In Old Testament times, when dealing with carnal and unconverted people, a woman seizing another man with her hand by his private parts (*Living Bible*: “grabbing the testicles of the other man”; *New Revised Standard Version* and *Revised English Bible*: “seizing his genitals”), had to be fined in order to impress on her the need to refrain from using her hand in such an inappropriate way. Her hand was to be “cut off” figuratively, not literally; and compensation had to be paid for the misuse of her hand toward a member of the other man’s body, which was to be treated with respect (compare the principle in 1 Corinthians 12:23).

Application for Us Today

As mentioned, the Old Testament physical penalties do not apply to us today, but the principle of showing respect for our private parts and the private parts of others most certainly does.

Part 7

No Tattoos

One of the more common practices in many parts around the world has been the “fashionable statement” of wearing non-removable tattoos. Admittedly, taste is in the eyes of the beholder, but it must be emphasized that the Bible does not allow the tattooing of our bodies via an Old Testament law that is *still in force and effect* today.

As we will see, the prohibition against tattoos is in direct connection with the discussion regarding the “*lex talionis*” [“an eye for an eye”], as discussed above, as it describes a form of mutilation of the body. Apart from the temporary injunction of physical circumcision and a few cases of ear piercing for slaves [see above], there is NO example in the entire Bible which would in any way support self- infliction of pain or self-mutilation or the mutilation of others.

Although tattooing of the body is extremely popular among many peoples, even in our Western societies, including sailors, marines, teens and others, the *Bible clearly prohibits this practice*.

Leviticus 19:28 tells us:

“You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am the LORD.”

The translation “tattoo” is an accurate rendering of the original Hebrew. The *Authorized Version* states, “...nor print any marks upon you.” The intended meaning is “tattoo” or “tattoo marks.” The *New International Version* states, “Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourself.” The *Revised Standard Version* states, “You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh on account of the dead or tattoo any marks upon you.” The *Revised English Bible* states, “You must not gash yourselves in mourning for the dead or tattoo yourselves.” Compare, too, *Moffat, the New American Bible, the New Jerusalem Bible, and the Elberfelder Bible*.

The Hebrew word, translated as “tattoo,” is “*qa’ aqa*.” Strong defines

it under Number 7085 as an “incision” or “gash” or a “mark.” The *Interlinear Bible Hebrew-Greek-English* edition by Jay P Green Sr. uses the word “tattoo” as a literal translation of *Strong’s* Number 7085.

The *Ryrie Study Bible* comments on Leviticus 19:28: “Both cutting and tattooing the body were done by the heathen.”

Soncino remarks, “...nor imprint any marks,’ i.e. tattooing with a needle. The flesh should not have any marks other than the ‘sign of the covenant,’ circumcision.”

Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary has this to say about “tattoos”:

“A permanent mark or design fixed upon the body by a process of picking the skin and inserting an indelible color under the skin. The moral and ceremonial laws of Leviticus declare, ‘You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks upon you’ (Leviticus 19:28). Any kind of self laceration or marking the body was prohibited amongst the Hebrew people. Such cuttings were associated with pagan cults that tattooed their followers while they mourned the dead.”

The *Nelson Study Bible* adds, “The human body was designed by God, who intended it to be whole and beautiful. Disfiguring the body dishonored God, in whose image the person was created. Cutting one’s flesh for the dead and tattooing (or perhaps painting) one’s body had religious significance among Israel’s pagan neighbors. In Israel, such practices were signs of rebellion against God.”

Henry’s Commentary points out, “The rites and ceremonies by which they expressed their sorrow at their funerals must not be imitated... They must not make cuts or prints in their flesh for the dead; for the heathen did so to pacify the infernal deities they dreamt of, and to render them propitious to their deceased friends.”

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, Commentary on the Whole Bible, has this to say about the subject: “... nor print any marks upon you—by tattooing—imprinting figures or flowers, leaves, stars, and other fanciful devices—on various parts of their person—the impression was made sometimes by means of a hot iron, sometimes by ink or paint, as is done by the Arab females of the present day and the different casts of the Hindoos [sic]. It is probable that a strong propensity to adopt such marks in honor of some idol gave occasion to the prohibition in this verse; and they were wisely forbidden, for they were signs of apostasy;

and, when once made, they were insuperable obstacles to a return..."

The *Broadman Bible Commentary* adds, "The peculiar markings referred to in vv. 27-28 were all customary mourning rites practiced by the ancient world. Their intention was to make the mourner unrecognizable to evil spirits who might hover around a dead person. In Israel such deference to the presence and power of evil spirits was prohibited."

Some religious people, although they are aware of Leviticus 19:28, nevertheless claim that they tattoo their bodies just for decoration, without thinking about evil spirits, or mourning for any dead person. They feel Leviticus 19:28 only prohibits tattooing in the context of mourning for the dead.

We need to realize, however, that tattooing, even if it was originally done for the purpose of expressing sorrow for a dead person, had a somewhat permanent nature—the person would still continue to wear the tattoo long after his mourning for the dead had ceased. It is also important to consider the origin of a certain practice. If tattooing was originally done to placate evil spirits and to mourn for the dead, as most commentaries suggest, and was therefore prohibited, it would still be wrong to carry out such practice today, even if it was done for different motives. For instance, *members of God's Church don't keep Halloween*, because this festival is clearly of a pagan or demonic origin. This fact is not changed by the argument that most people keeping Halloween today don't do so for the purpose of placating or expelling demons.

In addition, Leviticus 19:28 contains two commandments. The first commandment prohibits cuttings in the flesh for the dead. The second commandment is broader than that. It says, "...and do not tattoo yourselves" (*New American Bible*). Although tattooing "for the dead" is included, it is not limited to it. According to Leviticus 19:28, all kinds of tattooing are wrong.

We need to realize, too, that tattooing is a form of "mutilation" (compare *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol.21, ed. 1959). A Christian is not to "mutilate" himself, except where it is expressly commanded or implied as permissible by God, such as in the case of circumcision. A Christian is to take care of his body in a right and cherishing way (Ephesians 5:29). He is to glorify GOD in his body, knowing that his body is the temple or dwelling place of God's Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19-20).

More proof on the background of this now popular activity of tattooing may be found in Deuteronomy 14:1 wherein God strictly forbids pagan practices about cutting or disfiguring oneself. Also, in the account of 1 Kings 18, Elijah confronts the false religious leaders of his day. Verse 28 states: "So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them." When Jesus confronted demon possessed people, one of the common manifestations was that these people mutilated themselves in destructive ways.

Tattooing has given rise to other forms of body mutilations that often prove to be permanent disfigurements. Right and true worship of God not only avoids these practices, but Christianity is a way of living in which individuals seek to honor God through the kind of obedience that is rooted in love—not body mutilation. On the other hand, if someone has tattooed his or her body, there is not much the person can do now, as the removal of tattoos is virtually impossible. God forgives upon repentance; but the command is not to engage in tattooing our bodies, once the truth has been understood.

Part 8

Provisions Regarding FRUIT Trees

Leviticus 19:23-25 prescribes what we are to do with newly planted fruit trees. This law, which is *still valid today*, states:

“When you come into the land, and HAVE PLANTED all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as uncircumcised (or: unclean). Three years it shall be as uncircumcised to you. It shall not be eaten. But in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, a praise to the LORD. And in the fifth year you may eat its fruit, that it may yield to you its increase: I am the LORD your God.”

These verses prohibit the consumption of fruit from a NEWLY PLANTED *fruit tree* for the first three years. The *Ryrie Study Bible* explains: “When they came to Canaan, they were not to eat fruit from the [newly planted] fruit trees [for a certain number of years].” To abstain from eating the fruit from the *newly planted* fruit trees for the first three years allows the trees to become established, and what little fruit may be produced during the first three years of a new tree, should be allowed to fall to the ground and to serve as manure or fertilizer. The passage refers to the AGE of the tree, not to the number of years it has borne fruit. We are to begin counting, when the tree is planted or rooted, or when it comes up.

In the fourth year, the fruit is to be used to praise God. In ancient times, the fruits were given to the Levites, together with the tithe. Today, the fruit could be given to the minister, or the equivalent of the wholesale value of the fruit—in the fourth year—should be sent to the Church. (In that case, the individual is of course permitted to eat the fruit during the fourth year). In the fifth year, and all following years, the fruit belongs to the individual, but the individual is still obligated to tithe on the increase.

This law only refers to newly planted fruit trees that bear fruit. It does not refer to *existing* fruit trees, which are older than three or four

years. *This means, if one plants a three-year old fruit tree, one does not start counting that year as year number one. Rather, it is already year number three.* Further, this law does not refer to *shrubs, bushes, grapefruits, or olive trees.* Those “trees” are described in the Bible as field crops, as they have a different production cycle.

The distinction is shown in the law of gleaning (Leviticus 19:9-10; Deuteronomy 24:19-22). It is also shown in the law of the Land Sabbath Rest (Leviticus 25:3-5; Exodus 23:10-11). Notice carefully that the law of gleaning and the Land Sabbath Rest [discussed below] does NOT refer to fruit trees.

Although some have forgotten this important distinction, it is clearly revealed in Scripture, and it has been the long-standing teaching of the Church of God.

Part 9

Land Sabbath, Sabbatical Year, Bankruptcy and the Year of Jubilee

As mentioned before, we must realize that there are ritual temporary laws (which are not in force for us today); spiritual eternal laws (which are immutable and always effective for man); physical and spiritual laws binding today for individuals; and laws which were given to the nation of Israel in the Promised Land, which were in force while God was their Supreme Ruler, and which may not presently be in force (although underlying spiritual principles might be).

Regarding the latter category, *physical penalties inflicted on individuals for wrong-doing* (including the death penalty or payment of certain monetary fines) were given to the *nation* of Israel and are of *course not to be administered or enforceable today* by the Church.

We need to ascertain in each case to which category a particular law belongs. In this case, are the injunctions pertaining to the *Sabbatical Year* and the *Jubilee Year* obsolete or are they still in force today?

THE LAND SABBATH

The first mention of *the Land Sabbath* (as part of the *Sabbatical Year*) can be found in Exodus 23:10-11, long before Israel entered the Promised Land. We read:

“Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its produce, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave, the beasts of the field may eat. In like manner you shall do with your vineyard and your olive grove.”

Please note that this provision is immediately followed, in verses 12-19, by the injunction regarding the (still valid) weekly Sabbath and the annual Holy Days.

The next reference to the *Land Sabbath* can be found in Leviticus 25:1-7, 18-22:

“And the LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: “When you come into the land which I give you, then the land shall keep a Sabbath to the LORD. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather its fruit; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the LORD. You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard. What grows of its own accord of your harvest you shall not reap, nor gather the grapes of your untended vine, for it is a year of rest for the land. And the sabbath produce of the land shall be food for you; for you, your male and female servants, your hired man, and the stranger who dwells with you, for your livestock and the beasts that are in your land—all its produce shall be for food...””

“So you shall observe My statutes and keep my judgments, and perform them; and you will dwell in the land in safety. Then the land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill, and dwell there in safety. And if you say, “What shall we eat in the seventh year, since we shall not sow nor gather in our produce?” Then I will command My blessing on you in the sixth year, and it will bring forth produce enough for three years, And you shall sow in the eighth year, and eat old produce until the ninth year; until its produce comes in, you shall eat of the old harvest.”

Some will advance the argument that this was a law which only applied to Israel *while in the Promised Land*. This point of view, however, has to be *rejected*. As we read, Israel was ordered in Exodus 23:10-11, long before entering the Promised Land, to keep the Land Sabbath (without any reference there to the Promised Land), and in the same context, they were ordered, in Exodus 23:12, to keep the [still valid] weekly Sabbath (again without any reference to entering the Promised Land). (We will explain below HOW, and to what extent, the Land Sabbath can be kept today.)

Leviticus 25:3-4 instructs us not to sow our *field*, nor to prune our vineyard during the year of the *Land Sabbath*. (Note that this passage does *not* refer to fruit trees.) We are also told, in verses 7 and 8, that the Sabbath produce of the land shall be food for us and our livestock and other beasts during the Land Sabbath year. While we must replace grain when we mow it down, this is not the case with hay, as hay will

grow back the next year. Whether hay is mowed or not, it goes back “as manure” into the ground in either case. To mow hay and let it lie on the ground is not the same as pruning our vineyard (note the distinction in Scripture) and does therefore not fall under that same kind of prohibition.

THE JUBILEE YEAR

Leviticus 25 shows that the *Land Sabbath* of the Sabbatical Year (the 7th Year) and the *Jubilee or Fiftieth Year* are closely connected.

We read in Leviticus 25:8-14:

“And you shall count seven sabbaths of years for yourself, seven times seven years; and the time of the seven sabbaths of years shall be to you forty-nine years. Then you shall cause the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement you shall make the trumpet to sound throughout all your land. And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family. That fiftieth year shall be a Jubilee to you; *in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of its own accord, nor gather the grapes of your untended vine.* For it is the Jubilee; it shall be holy to you; you shall eat its produce from the field. In this Year of Jubilee, each of you shall return to his possession. And if you sell anything to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor’s hand, you shall not oppress one another.”

In the *Jubilee Year*, according to *Matthew Henry’s Whole Bible Commentary*, “... besides the common rest of the land, which was observed every sabbatical year (v. 11, 12), and the release of personal debts (Deu. 15:2, 3 [Year of Release]), there was to be the legal restoration of every Israelite to all the property, and all the liberty, which had been alienated from him since the last jubilee... The property which every man had in his dividend of the land of Canaan could not be alienated any longer than till the year of jubilee, and then he or his [offspring] should return to it, and have a title to it as undisputed, and the possession of it as undisturbed, as ever...”

In Old Testament times, God established a system whereby the poor would not be in perpetual poverty. Notice that the *Jubilee Year*

began on the Day of Atonement. This annual Holy Day [still valid today] points at a future time when mankind will be released from the captivity of Satan and from the oppression of this present evil world. At the time of ancient Israel, the *Jubilee Year* designated a release from all debts and a repossession of the land which had been initially allocated to the debtor.

CANCELLATION OF DEBTS AND DECLARING BANKRUPTCY

Before continuing with the discussion of the Land Sabbath and the Jubilee Year, *as it pertains to the rest of the land*, let us briefly discuss here the related concept of declaring bankruptcy. There are numerous biblical passages which, judging by their spiritual implications, allow for declaring bankruptcy. These passages deal with God's institution for ancient Israel of the "Sabbath Year" or "Sabbatical Year" and the "Jubilee Year."

The Sabbath Year and the Jubilee Year did not only refer to the rest of the land, but also to the cancellation of personal debts. In other words, the Land Sabbath was part of the Sabbath or Sabbatical Year, but the Sabbath Year included additional provisions, which were not related to the rest of the land.

(1) On the "Sabbath Year," that is, at the end of every seventh year, "debts of fellow Jews [correctly: Israelites] were to be canceled" (*Halley's Bible Handbook*, 24th ed., p. 139). One needs to note that this was an *automatic release of debt*, by God-given law. It was not required that an agreement was reached between creditor and debtor, or that the creditor agreed to release the debt of the debtor. Quite to the contrary, the debts had to be released every seventh year, whether the creditor liked it or not. This was not just a postponement of debts, either; it was, rather, a cancellation of debts.

Notice Deuteronomy 15:1-3, 9: "At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts. And this is the form of the release: Every creditor who has lent anything to his neighbor SHALL RELEASE IT; HE SHALL NOT REQUIRE IT OF HIS NEIGHBOR OR HIS BROTHER, because it is called the LORD's release. Of a foreigner you may require it; but you SHALL GIVE UP YOUR CLAIM TO WHAT IS OWED TO YOUR BROTHER... Beware lest there be a wicked thought

in your heart, saying, "The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand, and your eye will be evil against your poor brother and you give him nothing [knowing that by the time of the seventh year, the lender or creditor would never receive back what he gave] and he cry out to the LORD against you, and it become sin to you."

References to the Sabbath Year or Sabbatical Year can also be found in Exodus 21:2, Nehemiah 10:31, and in Jeremiah 34:14. The release of debt was to occur automatically, without the necessity of an agreement between creditor and debtor. An interesting application of these principles can be found in Nehemiah 5:1-13.

(2) In addition to the Sabbath Year, every fiftieth year God's civil law for ancient Israel demanded that ANOTHER release be granted [during the Jubilee Year]. This was, again, not a matter of choice or agreement between creditor and debtor, but automatic. *Halley* points out on p. 139: "Jubilee Year was every 50th year. It followed the 7th Sabbatic Year, making two rest years come together. It began on the Day of Atonement. ALL DEBTS WERE CANCELED, slaves set free, and lands that had been sold returned."

The Year of Jubilee is mentioned in several places, for instance in Leviticus 25 and Numbers 36:4. It is associated with the proclamation of "liberty" (Leviticus 25:10) and referred to as the "Year of Liberty" in Ezekiel 46:17. In Leviticus 25:24, 28, 39-41, it is stated: "And in all the land of your possession you shall grant redemption of the land... But if he is not able to have it restored to himself, then what was sold shall remain in the hand of him who bought it until the Year of Jubilee, and in the Jubilee it shall be RELEASED, and he shall return to his possession... And if one of your brethren who dwells by you becomes poor, and sells himself to you..., [he] shall serve you until the Year of Jubilee. And then he shall depart from you—he and his children with him—and shall return to his family. He shall return to the possession of his fathers."

Application for Us Today Regarding Bankruptcy

The New Testament *does not abolish* the principles set forth in these Scriptures. In fact, Jesus came to preach liberty, as expressed in the Year of Jubilee, at His first coming (Isaiah 61:1-3; Luke 4:17-21), applying it to total freedom of God's people, including freedom from all

sickness, disease, sin, death, and every curse (compare, for example, Edward Chumney, *The Seven Festivals of the Messiah*, p. 147). It is true that there are New Testament Scriptures describing how creditors freely forgave their debtors (compare, Luke 7:41-42; 16:5-8). These additional Scriptures do not negate the *principle*, however, that debts can be forgiven by law and in God's sight, regardless of whether the creditor is agreeable to such cancellation or not. In conclusion, the concept of declaring bankruptcy is biblical under certain circumstances.

So we saw that the Sabbath or Sabbatical Year—as well as the Jubilee Year—contained provisions regulating cancellation of debts *and* the rest of the land. We saw that the *principle* of declaring bankruptcy, based on the provisions regarding cancellation of debts, is still applicable today. What then about the *rest of the land*?

THE LAND SABBATH REST DURING SABBATICAL YEAR AND JUBILEE YEAR

The Sabbatical Year, including the Land Sabbath, as well as the Jubilee Year, were laws for the nation of Israel. They are of course not enforceable today, on a grand scale, as every nation today has its own laws which may differ in regard to cancellation of debts, long-term “employment” relationships, transactions of real property, or even the cultivation of farm land. Still, as will be explained below, the Church of God has consistently taught that certain PRINCIPLES can and should be applied as much as possible by Christians today.

Application for Us Today Regarding Rest of the Land

In a letter by the Personal Correspondence Department of the Worldwide Church of God, the following was stated:

“The question naturally arises, then, how can a Christian apply these laws of God now? Obviously, an individual cannot observe all the details of these laws, since they would require national legislation. An individual cannot release his own debts, and there is no divinely appointed inheritance for each family today. But these laws are all for man's good, so we ought to observe them to the extent that this can be done in the present system. Even where a law cannot be practiced in the letter, it should be kept in the spirit...

“A farmer who owes money to banks probably cannot let all his

land rest every seven years, since he owes mortgage and other loan payments that must be made each year. In such a case, it is suggested that the land be rested in rotation so that each field receives its rest sometime during a seven-year period. If one is able to rest the whole farm at once, so much the better. He can reckon his seventh year from the time of baptism or from the time that the knowledge comes to him regarding the land rest...

“Virtually all agricultural colleges know the benefits of crop rotations and of ‘resting’ land by putting it in pasture or cover crops periodically. Good soil conservation measures should also be practiced.”

In a letter by the Global Church of God to a reader in the UK, dated September 10, 1996, the following was stated:

“Since God’s laws are not being observed nationally, there is no set year in which the land Sabbath is observed today. Can anyone today prove conclusively that he knows the original cycle which began the 7th year after Israel entered the land in about 1400 B.C.? But an individual can obey the biblical directive by resting his land one year out of every seven. The land sabbath is a wonderful law which teaches stewardship, ecological principles, economics and social responsibility, as well as lessons in living by faith (by trusting God to perform a miracle in the sixth year so that there would be sufficient bounty to carry over the rest year, and on until the new crop comes in after that).

“The Global Church of God believes, as did the Worldwide Church of God under Mr. Herbert Armstrong’s leadership, that a person should rest his land, whether he is a farmer with acreage or a backyard gardener. However, few of God’s people ‘work the land,’ as many more did just a few decades ago, and so, today, there is little discussion of such matters. Even without a national observance, the land Sabbaths can be observed on one’s own seven year cycle, just as brethren pay their third tithe on their own cycle (from the date of baptism or from the feast [of tabernacles] nearest to their baptism...)

“Even though the land Sabbaths are important and should not be diminished by omission or neglect, they are not the primary focus of God’s Word...”

This is indeed correct. “For the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking [or physical matters related thereto], but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17). For example, the

[still valid] laws pertaining to clean and unclean meat, as well as to the Land Sabbaths, are dealing first and foremost with physical matters. They are physical injunctions for our physical good and for our health. They DO become spiritual, however, when we refuse to obey those laws and principles, although we know better, because we don't care for God's Word or because we want to live in defiance and rebellion against Almighty God.

In a subsequent letter, dated April 16, 1997, Evangelist Colin Adair wrote the following for the Global Church of God:

"It is simply not possible for the Church as a whole to impose the seventh year land Sabbath on its members. We are not living in a physical nation today as a Church. For instance, farmer members come into the Church at different times. If the Church imposed a particular year on everyone, then some farmers would be keeping a land Sabbath any time in a series of seven years.

"The Church is a spiritual body today, not a physical nation under a physical government. However...the Global Church does teach that farmers and gardeners should keep a land Sabbath because it is a physical law of God. Land does need rest... the general principle is that we obey the physical laws given to Israel as much as we can, living under our circumstances. But there are some laws God gave Israel which we cannot follow because they need a priesthood."

Since it is our teaching and understanding that the principles of the Land Sabbath ought to be adhered to today, as much as possible, how are they to be applied in particular?

HOW to apply?

In the April 1969 edition of *The Good News*, the following was explained in an article, titled, "A Sabbath Rest for the Land!":

"Many think the word 'REST' means let the soil lie IDLE! Some have even wondered if the farmer should sell his stock (if he has any), padlock the gates and either go for a long holiday, or get himself a job. This is a totally WRONG impression!!

"The seventh YEAR of rest is typified by the seventh DAY of rest, and you know that you are NOT commanded to observe the weekly Sabbath by climbing into bed and lying perfectly still for the 24 hours!... Likewise a YEAR of rest is the time when we physically recharge our

soil and lay the foundation for success during the coming six years!...

"HARVESTING is the key to the Sabbatical Year! Crops are NOT to be planted for harvesting. Lev. 25:5 shows that the principle involved is not one of refraining from planting or growing. The growth of plants is actually encouraged during the Sabbatical Year!... the command is only against the harvesting of commercial crops. We are told that the poor can come and take whatever their immediate needs may be...

"Then what is the specific PHYSICAL purpose of the Sabbatical Year? It refers to the principle of building up large reserves or organic residues, both in and on the soil. The diligent farmer will take full advantage of his one-in-seven-year opportunity... if you're just a home gardener, the principles outlined here are as applicable to you as to any farmer with a large field...

"The most efficient way to GIVE the maximum amount of dead plant matter to the soil is certainly not by refraining from planting crops during the seventh year. We should refrain from planting anything we INTEND TO HARVEST... harvesting of crops [is] the focal point behind the Sabbath Year...

"If this extra plant growth is not to get widely out of hand and produce a massive seeding of less desirable plants, it must be 'topped' regularly with some type of mower. THIS IS NOT HARVESTING! No, not even if you take some of it away to compost it – providing it is returned to that area. We left the 'topped' portions of our pastures to decompose right where they fell from the mower..."

The Bible also speaks of cattle or livestock and beasts in the land grazing the ground during the *Land Sabbath* (Leviticus 25:6-7). The ensuing manure contributes, of course, to soil fertility.

The principle should be clear. Let the land "rest" (understood in the right way) the seventh year as best as you can, by refraining from harvesting commercial crops (recall for example that fruit trees are *excluded*, but vineyards and olive yards are included), while using the time to build up large reserves or organic residues.

As we have pointed out, in this day and age, the regulations of the *Land Sabbath* and the *Jubilee Year* can only be applied *in principle* by the Church and its members, as the Church has no legal authority and jurisdiction over many of these provisions. However, when Jesus Christ returns and RULES, the provisions of the Land Sabbath and

the Jubilee Year will be restored and literally applied within the spirit of the Law. Man will be taught what is best for him and, in time and for the most part, he will accept God's truth.

Part 10

Surety for Others

Even though we might sometimes be tempted to become surety for another person, especially a Church member, a close friend or a relative, the Bible contains strong warnings against such conduct. These *warnings are still valid* and binding for us today.

Proverbs 6:1-5 reads:

“My son, if you become surety [margin: guarantee or collateral] for your friend, If you have shaken hands in pledge for a stranger, You are snared by the words of your mouth; you are taken by the words of your mouth. So do this, my son, and deliver yourself; For you have come into the hand of your friend: Go and humble yourself; Plead with your friend. Give no sleep to your eyes, Nor slumber to your eyelids. Deliver yourself like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, And like a bird from the hand of a fowler [margin: one who catches birds in a trap or snare].”

The Bible *warns against* becoming surety for both a “friend” and a “stranger.” According to the *Ryrie Study Bible*, the word for “stranger” is a neutral term and simply designates the borrower. The *Soncino Commentary* explains that the word “stranger” refers to another person, and that it is identical with neighbor.

This means, then, that Proverbs 6:1-5 cautions us against becoming surety for a friend AND a stranger; that is, for ANYONE. The *Ryrie Study Bible* states:

“The master teacher warns against becoming liable for the financial obligations of another. The one solution he offers is, deliver thyself.”

The *New Student Bible* explains: “Proverbs warns against ‘putting up security’ for a neighbor--something like co-signing a loan for a friend who doesn’t otherwise qualify. Proverbs supports generosity, but not open-ended charity in which the amount you must give and the timing are determined by circumstances beyond your control. Too often it leads to disaster.”

Fritz Rienecker states in his *Commentary of the Bible*: “The Book of Proverbs warns strongly against becoming surety for another... Each surety... remains uncertain for both parties, as the future is not within the control of men. That is why only God can truly be surety (Job 17:3).”

It is widely understood that the biblical term for “surety” includes co-signing for the debt of another. The *Ryrie Study Bible* defines “surety” as “a cosigner, one responsible for a debt should the borrower default.”

The *Nelson Study Bible* points out:

“These verses [in Proverbs 6:1-5] warn against putting up surety... or cosigning a loan. This does not mean we should never be generous or helpful if we have the means, only that we should not promise what we cannot deliver... inability to pay a debt is still a form of bondage and can be a serious problem...”

As many commentaries recognize, the biblical warning refers foremost to becoming surety for more than one is able and willing to pay. We know that in New Testament times, Church members sold their possessions outright and gave the proceeds to the Church (compare Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-37). They sold what they could sell—they did not sell what they did not have. By the same token, they did not promise to pay someone else’s debts, if they did not have the means to do so.

Matthew Henry’s Commentary points out:

“It is every man’s wisdom to keep out of debt as much as may be, for it is an encumbrance upon him, entangles him in the world, puts him in danger of doing wrong or suffering wrong. The borrower is servant to the lender, and makes himself very much a slave to the world. A man ought never to be bound as surety for more than he is both able and willing to pay, and can afford to pay without wronging his family.”

In addition, Proverbs 11:15 explains:

“He who is surety for a stranger will suffer, But one who hates being surety is secure.”

Soncino comments that the better translation of this passage is “for another,” rather than, “for a stranger.” The commentary continues to explain: “There is no limitation implied. The practice is condemned unreservedly.”

Proverbs 17:18 states:

“A man devoid of understanding shakes hands in a pledge, And

becomes surety [margin: guarantee or collateral] for his friend.”

Commentaries like *Rienecker* point out that the practice of shaking hands in a pledge confirmed the surety. Job 17:3 also makes reference to such a practice. Today, the equivalent to shaking hands in a pledge would be signing a surety or guarantee agreement.

Proverbs 22:26-27 adds the following caution:

“Do not be one of those who shakes hands in a pledge, One of those who is surety for debts; If you have nothing with which to pay, Why should he take away your bed from under you?”

Soncino remarks that the phrase “for debts” literally means, “for (another man’s) loan.” The warning expressed is abundantly clear: We are not to become surety for the debts of another, for IF WE HAVE NOTHING WITH WHICH TO PAY at the time of the borrower’s default, we will be in deep trouble. This is not to say, of course, that the Bible prohibits *husbands and wives* to co-sign for a house loan. In God’s eyes, husbands and wives are no longer two persons, but “one flesh,” compare Matthew 19:4-6. In this context, please read our free booklet, “*The Keys to Happy Marriages and Families.*”

Application for Us Today

Sometimes, we desperately may want to help others in need. And we should—but we must do so by following God’s Way and directives. To become surety, guarantee or collateral for another person by co-signing for his or her debt, is generally not in accordance with God’s wise principles of right living. Even though we may have the means to pay when we cosign, we don’t know what the future brings (compare James 4:13-16), and whether we can pay the borrower’s debt when he defaults. Although it may seem right to us to become surety for another person, the Bible and experience caution us against such conduct.

Concluding Remarks

In this booklet, we have discussed some selected Old Testament regulations to determine either their ongoing or temporary validity. There are, of course, many more regulations that we could have included, and we might publish additional booklets on those topics in the future, if the need arises. The material covered in this booklet should help one see the rationale as to why certain provisions are still valid and how they should be applied today, while other provisions may be obsolete.

Ultimately, God looks at the heart and He will judge us based on what we know, not on what we don't know. But when He offers us His understanding, it is our responsibility to accept it, embrace it, and to act accordingly.

Appendix A

2 Corinthians 3:3-11 and the Ten Commandments

Does *2 Corinthians 3:3-11* teach that the Ten Commandments have been abolished?

For some, *2 Corinthians 3:3-11*, and especially verse 7, teaches that the Ten Commandments, which were written on *tablets of stone*, “ceased to be in force and effect when Jesus Christ died on the cross.” However, a careful reading of the entire passage does not uphold such an erroneous teaching.

Let us review the entire passage of *2 Corinthians 3:3-11*, in context:

“(3)... clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart. (4) And we have such trust through Christ toward God. (5) Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, (6) who has also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (7) But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, (8) how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? (9) For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. (10) For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. (11) For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.”

It is important that we carefully analyze this passage, so that we do not come to wrong conclusions. Quoting from pages 14 and 15 of our free booklet, *“And Lawlessness Will Abound”*:

“... God made a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. We read in Exodus 24 that the covenant was sealed with blood. When that happened, the covenant was final and could not be altered. The law of the covenant was written in a book, the ‘Book of the Covenant’ (verse 7; compare Hebrews 9:19-20). At that time, the sacrificial system was not a part of the law—those ritual provisions had not been given yet—and they were not written in the Book of the Covenant. The only sacrifice that is mentioned as a required sacrifice is the Passover (Exodus 23:18; Exodus 12). Yet, even this Passover sacrifice found its fulfillment in the death of Jesus Christ. Christians do not now offer lambs in sacrifice for Passover—rather, Paul shows: ‘For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us’ (1 Corinthians 5:7)... The covenant at Horeb originally did not include the sacrificial system. Neither did the Book of the Covenant contain such ritual regulations. But as time went on, *ritual laws were added, including the laws regarding the Levitical priesthood and penalties or curses for violations of God’s spiritual law*, and those did find their way into the Book of the Covenant, which is also called the Book of the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 28:58, 61; 29:20-21, 27, 29; 31:9). This Book of the Law was placed outside or beside the ark of the covenant (Deuteronomy 31:24-26). The tablets with the Ten Commandments, however, were placed inside the ark (Deuteronomy 10:4-5; Hebrews 9:4).

“Later, all the laws that had been written by Moses into the Book of the Law were *engraved on massive stones* (Deuteronomy 27:2-3, 8; Joshua 8:30-32, 34). The laws that were written on the stones included the Ten Commandments, along with the statutes and judgments, and *also* the rules and regulations regarding sacrifices and other rituals. We find a reference to those stones and the laws that had been engraved on them in 2 Corinthians 3:7-8, ‘But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious... how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?’

“The reference to the ministry of death includes the death penalty for violating God’s spiritual law. The penalties were first written in the Book of the Law of Moses and then engraved on massive stones. Since Christ died for us, we don’t have to pay the death penalty, if we repent of our sins and obtain forgiveness. In addition, the ritual sacrificial laws, which were among the laws written on stones, could not forgive

sins—they only reminded the sinners of their sins. The Levitical priesthood was, in that sense, a ministry of death, as people would still not be able to obtain eternal life, even though they brought sacrifices.”

With this background, let us again carefully review verses 3 and 7 of 2 Corinthians 3. In verse 3, reference is made to the Ten Commandments, which were written “*on tablets of stone.*” Christians today are to keep the Ten Commandments in their hearts. It is not sufficient to possess tablets of stone which include the Ten Commandments, *nor is it required to write the Ten Commandments on the doorposts of our houses* as ancient Israel was required to do. Rather, we are to internalize the Commandments—write them in our hearts and obey them “*from the heart.*”

Verse 7, however, does NOT refer to the Ten Commandments. As stated above, the “ministry of death, written and engraved on STONES,” refers to *massive stones* (compare again Deuteronomy 27:2-3, 8; Joshua 8:30-32, 34), on which ALL of God’s laws were written—not just the Ten Commandments, which are spiritual and eternal, but also temporary ritual laws regarding washings and sacrifices. *While the two tablets with the Ten Commandments did not include any penalties, the subsequent massive stones did.*

Let us compare the different Greek words which are used in verses 3 and 7 in describing the “tablets of stone” and the “ministry of death... engraved on stones.” The Greek word for “of stone,” in verse 3, is “*lithinos*” (Strong’s *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, No. 3035), and means, literally, “made of stone” or formed out of stones. The word is used in Revelation 9:20, describing idols made out of stone. The Greek word for engraved “on stones,” in verse 7, is “*lithos*” (Strong’s No. 3037), and it describes complete stones—not something made of stone. It is also rendered as “millstone” in Luke 17:2. The tablets with the Ten Commandments were taken from stones—the tablets did not constitute complete stones. But later, all of God’s laws—permanent as well as temporary rules--were engraved on complete, massive stones. To reiterate: **The Ten Commandments were written on TABLETS OF STONE—the laws of the Book of Moses, including the penalties for sin, were engraved on COMPLETE, MASSIVE STONES.**

The Ten Commandments, as well as other permanent and temporary laws, were WRITTEN in a book—the Book of the Law of Moses. Verse

7 makes reference to this fact when it says, "...WRITTEN and engraved on stones." Quite literally, the meaning is that all of the laws were first "reduced to writing" ("*en grammasin*" in Greek) and then "engraved" ("*entupoo*" in Greek) "on stones" ("*en lithos*" in Greek).

2 Corinthians 3:7-8 could be paraphrased as follows, to clarify the intended meaning:

"But if the ministry of death, which was first written in the Book of the Law of Moses and later engraved on massive stones, was glorious, even though it would cease one day—so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance (after he saw God's form), which glory also passed away—how will the ministry of the Spirit, which will endure forever, not be more glorious?"

God's true ministers today do not administer the death penalty for sin—they don't fulfill the ancient Levitical priesthood's role and function of a "ministry of condemnation" (2 Corinthians 3:9). Rather, God's true ministry today teaches that sinning man can receive forgiveness of sin, through the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ. God's ministry today also teaches that man must keep the Ten Commandments. Man can only do this, however, through the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling within him, which is received after repentance, belief and baptism. In other words, God's ministry is a "ministry of righteousness" (2 Corinthians 3:9), teaching man how to obtain righteousness and how to live righteously. For further information on this critically important subject, please read our free booklet, "*Baptism—A Requirement for Salvation?*"

2 Corinthians 3:2-11 does not teach that the Ten Commandments are abolished. Quite to the contrary, the passage teaches that the Ten Commandments must be kept today. However, they must be kept in the Spirit; that is, they must be applied in our lives with their spiritual intent, as Christ clearly explained in Matthew 5-7. In doing so, we can escape death and inherit eternal life. If we refuse to do so, Christ's warning in John 3:36 is still applicable for us today: "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him (*Revised Standard Version*)."

Appendix B

1 Corinthians 9:20-21 and the Ten Commandments

Does *1 Corinthians 9:20-21* teach that we are free from the law of the Ten Commandments?

One of the Scriptures that has been used by some for the support of their false claim that Paul no longer taught obedience to God's law of the Ten Commandments is found in *1 Corinthians 9:20-21*. This is, however, not at all what Paul was saying here.

Let us read, in context, the entire passage of *1 Corinthians 9:19-23*:

“(Verse 19) For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; (verse 20) and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; (verse 21) to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; (verse 22) to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. (verse 23) Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.”

Just what did Paul mean in *1 Corinthians 9:20-21*?

The New Testament makes it clear that certain SACRIFICIAL laws are no longer binding today. Paul calls them “a tutor” in *Galatians 3:24*. This ritual law, which is referred to as a “LAW,” “was added because of transgression” (*Galatians 3:19*). Sin is the transgression of the Law (*1 John 3:4*), the Ten Commandments (*James 2:8-12*). We see, then, that the Ten Commandments—the “LAW”—had to be in effect BEFORE the sacrificial law system was added, as it was added BECAUSE OF transgression. (For a thorough explanation, please read our free booklet, “*Paul's Letter to the Galatians*.”)

While it is no longer necessary to abide by the sacrificial system with its ritualistic rules, it would NOT be SINFUL to keep it while in the presence of Jews, as long as it was not kept for wrong motives and with a false understanding that it was still obligatory. Therefore, when Paul was with Jews, he would not offend them by refusing to keep their customs. He would not keep those customs, of course, when he was with Gentiles, as these customs or ritualistic laws are no longer binding. Paul DID make clear, however, that he DID teach and keep the spiritual LAW of God (Romans 7:14) that IS still binding, including ALL of the Ten Commandments (Matthew 19:17-19).

Paul never taught others to sin, and he was careful that he did not sin, either. He would have never disobeyed God by breaking His law, only to “win” the Gentiles. He was NOT without God’s law, although he no longer preached as binding and mandatory physical circumcision or other sacrificial rituals, as those temporary laws had been abolished by God in the New Testament. At the same time, he did not offend his Jewish audience by violating their customs and traditions, as long as he could keep them without sinning against God.

“UNDER THE LAW”

Finally, although he was not “under the law,” he became as one “under the law,” so that he might win those under the law. As we explain in our booklet, *“And Lawlessness Will Abound...”* the term “under the law” refers to its penalty. When we sin, the penalty of sin—death—is hanging over us like the sword of Damocles. Through the sacrifice of Christ, our repentance and our belief in and acceptance of His sacrifice, we can have forgiveness of our sins; that is, we won’t have to die anymore. The death penalty is no longer hanging over our heads. In order to win those who had not yet accepted Christ’s Sacrifice, Paul became as one of them. He showed them compassion and sympathy, rather than condemning and offending them. He became as one under the penalty of the law [even though he was not], as he understood what it was like to live in sin, being cut off and separated from God.

Paul never taught that any of God’s abiding laws could be broken. Those who want to REFUSE to keep God’s spiritual law, twist certain Scriptures and invent arguments to justify their sinful conduct. They do this, however, “to their own destruction” (compare 2 Peter 3:14-16).

Appendix C

Mark 7:18-19; Acts 10; 1 Timothy 4:1-5 and Unclean Meat

Do *Mark 7:18-19* and *Acts 10* and *1 Timothy 4:1-5* do away with the distinction between clean and unclean animals?

Many try to use these passages to “prove” that we are allowed today to eat whatever man in his twisted mind has decided to devour—including the meat from pigs, dogs, monkeys, rats, cats, squirrels, as well as frogs, snails, ants, scorpions, snakes, lobster, shrimp, shellfish and oysters, just to name a few. However, this is most certainly not what the aforementioned passages convey.

In our booklet, “*And Lawlessness Will Abound*,” we make the following general comments regarding clean and unclean animals:

“...the laws of clean and unclean meat were already in existence at the time of Noah—they did not come into existence at the time of Moses. Noah was specifically told by God to take with him into the ark ‘seven each of every clean animal, a male and a female; two each of animals that are unclean, a male and a female’ (Genesis 7:2. Compare also verse 8). Noah offered a burnt offering to God ‘of every clean animal and of every clean bird’ (Genesis 8:20).

“The covenant that God made later with Israel had no effect on the laws of clean and unclean animals—they were already in force long before that covenant was made. And nowhere does God teach us that we are now permitted to eat unclean animals. Notice the curse that God pronounces over those who, at the time of Christ’s return, eat swine’s flesh (Isaiah 66:17; 65:3-4).”

MARK 7:18-19

Jesus Christ did not abolish the distinction between clean and unclean animals. Some refer to *Mark 7:18-19* as meaning that Christ

made all animals clean and proper for consumption. However, the context of this passage is that the Pharisees criticized Christ's disciples for eating food with "unwashed hands" (verse 2); that is, without washing their hands first "in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders" (verse 3). Christ said in verses 18-19: "... Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?"

This passage does not teach, as some erroneously claim, that Christ made all foods clean. Rather, the word for "purifying" is "*katharizo*," meaning "cleansing." It is used in James 4:8, where sinners are told to cleanse their hands. The *Authorized Version* translates Mark 7:19 as, "... and goes out into the draught, PURGING all meats."

Christ was addressing a situation where a little bit of dirt might have been attached to our hands or the CLEAN food. When we eat this, it does not defile us inwardly, as it is eliminated out of the body into the draught. The clean food will be 'cleansed,' in that little particles of dirt will be eliminated out of the body. To use the passage in Mark 7 and say that Christ made all unclean animals clean is a willful and deliberate distortion of Scripture.

ACTS 10

Others claim that Acts 10 teaches that God made all food clean. In that passage, Peter had a vision, seeing a great sheet of clean and unclean animals, and a voice asking him to eat. Peter refused and did not eat, although the voice told him that he should not call common what God had cleansed (verse 15). Subsequently, Peter went to the Gentiles—normally treated as common or unclean by the Jews—and baptized them. When confronted by the disciples, who were, at that time, exclusively of Jewish background and descent, Peter explained the meaning of the vision. It had nothing to do with declaring unclean animals as appropriate for human consumption. Rather, Peter said, in verse 28: "... God has shown me that I should not call any MAN common or unclean." And so, the disciples recognized the purpose of the vision—to show the New Testament Church that God had "granted to the GENTILES repentance to life" (Acts 11:18).

1 TIMOTHY 4:1-5

Another Scripture used by some in an attempt to “prove” that there is no longer any distinction between clean and unclean animals is *1 Timothy 4:1-5*. But note that this is not what that passage says.

1 Timothy 4:1-5 reads, in context:

“(Verse 1) Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, (verse 2) speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, (verse 3) forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. (Verse 4) For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; (verse 5) for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.”

Some false demonic-inspired preachers prohibited marriage (saying it was defiled or polluted and not as holy as celibacy), and other deceiving teachers said that one must abstain from FOOD which God has created to be received with thanksgiving (compare verse 3). But God never created unclean animals for food. As we have seen, the distinction between clean and unclean animals already existed under Noah, long before Moses. It still existed long after Christ’s death when Peter refused to eat unclean meat, and it will still exist at the time of Christ’s return, as God will punish those who consume the flesh of pigs and other unclean animals, calling such a practice “abominable.”

In 1 Timothy 4:1-5, Paul is not permitting the consumption of the meat of unclean animals, but rather, he addresses those false preachers who teach against the consumption of meat of CLEAN animals for religious reasons. Paul is condemning the concept of that version of vegetarianism that is taught by people believing that they must not eat meat because they perceive it to be holy. (We might think of the belief in “holy” cows in certain parts of the world.) God says through Paul that every creature CREATED FOR FOOD (verse 3) is good and can be eaten, AS IT IS SANCTIFIED BY THE WORD OF GOD (verse 5). God’s Word, the Bible, never sanctified or set aside for consumption unclean animals, but it DOES sanctify or set aside for consumption the meat of every CLEAN animal. We are permitted to eat the flesh of clean animals with thanksgiving, for we believe God and His Word,

and we know the truth (verse 3). And such consumption is good (verse 4) and also sanctified by prayer (verse 5), as we thank God (verse 4) and ask Him to bless the food and to set it aside for the nourishing of our bodies.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible recognizes that the statement in verse 4, "For every creature of God is good," can be grossly misunderstood and misinterpreted, when taken out of context; and so the following is stated:

"Nor does it mean that all that God has made is good 'for every object to which it can be applied.' It is good in its place; good for the purpose for which he made it. But it should not be inferred that a thing which is poisonous in its nature is good for food, 'because' it is a creation of God. It is good only in its place, and for the ends for which he intended it. Nor should it be inferred that what God has made is necessarily good 'after' it has been perverted by man."

The creation of unclean animals, even though it is described as good in the first chapter of the book of Genesis, did not occur for the purpose of consumption through man. But a clean animal is "good" for consumption.

Clarke's Commentary on the Bible adds:

"For every creature of God is good - That is: Every creature which God has made for man's nourishment is good for that purpose, and to be thankfully received whenever necessary for the support of human life; and nothing of that sort is at any time to be refused."

A similar explanation is given by *Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*:

"... to abstain from meats: not from some certain meats forbidden by the law of Moses... but from all meats at some certain season of the year, as at what they call the Quadragesima or Lent, and at some days in the week, as Wednesdays and Fridays; and this all under an hypocritical pretence of holiness, and temperance, and keeping under the body, and of mortification; when they are the greatest pamperers of their bodies, and indulge themselves in all manner of sensuality: the evil of this is exposed by the apostle..."

For instance, it is well-known that ultra-orthodox Catholics refrain from eating meat on Fridays, especially on "Good Friday," claiming that they do so in remembrance of Christ's crucifixion. They prefer to eat fish on that day. But apart from the fact that Christ was not cruci-

fied on a Friday, but on a Wednesday [for proof, read our free booklet, *“Jesus Christ—a Great Mystery”*], the Bible does not prohibit us to eat the meat of a clean animal on the day of His crucifixion.

However, God still requires that we abstain from consuming the meat of UNCLEAN animals. But this does not necessarily include the use of medicines, vitamins and mineral supplements derived from unclean animals, and the use of gelatin products, which might be derived from parts of unclean animals; while the prohibition of eating certain parts of clean animals, such as food, fat and blood, is still valid for us today.

Appendix D

Hebrews 13:9 and Unclean Meat

Does *Hebrews 13:9* teach that we are free to eat whatever “meat” we want?

Hebrews 13:9 states:

“(9) Do not be carried about [away] with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods [or meat] which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.”

Paul addresses the fact that certain “rules”—various and strange doctrines—had been added by the refinements of Jewish rulers and by tradition. These rules did not originate with God’s law, but with human traditions and ideas.

We need to emphasize that Paul is addressing “various and strange” doctrines. In the final analysis, doctrines pertaining to the distinction of clean and unclean meats, or even to the sacrificial system, were not “strange” to God or the Hebrews. Rather, the Jews were very familiar with these teachings, so that it is doubtful that Paul was addressing any of these Old Testament laws. It is much more likely that Paul was addressing traditional Jewish teaching (outside the pages of the Old Testament) and the concepts of pagan or “Gnostic” teachers who were trying to convince the Hebrews to adopt “new” or “strange” ideas regarding food or meat, or their habit of eating and drinking.

Paul was addressing concepts in Hebrews 13:9, which had not originated with God, but with men. God gave ancient Israel the law regarding clean and unclean meat, as well as the sacrificial system. While the law pertaining to clean and unclean meat is still in effect, the law pertaining to the sacrificial ceremonial system has indeed been superseded by Christ’s supreme Sacrifice. Still, all these laws originated with God, and Paul could not possibly have referred to them as “strange.”

What was “strange”—even in the eyes of God—were doctrines and concepts originating with men.

Men, under demonic influence, had added the concepts of rejecting some meats that God created as clean or proper for human consumption (1 Timothy 4:1-3), while allowing the consumption of animal flesh that God has specifically prohibited.

In regard to “strange doctrines,” *Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible* states:

“... strange doctrines may design such as were never taught by God, nor are agreeable to the voice of Christ, nor to be found in the word of God; and which are new, and unheard of, by the apostles and churches of Christ; and appear in a foreign dress and habit: wherefore the apostle exhorts the believing Hebrews not to be ‘carried about with them’...”

In conclusion, it is very clear from the entirety of Scripture that Hebrews 13:9 does not teach that the distinction between clean and unclean animals has been abolished. It is apparently focusing on new and strange doctrines which uninspired people (Jews and Gentiles) were teaching to detract from the supreme Sacrifice of Jesus Christ (compare 2 Peter 2:1-3).

The following booklets are available, upon request:

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