

The Networker



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INTERNATIONAL



THE NETWORKER

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PO Box 5822

Cleveland, TN 37323 USA

Phone: 423-479-4249

[www.RestorationFellowship](http://www.RestorationFellowshipInternational.org)

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Purpose of RFI

RESTORATION: The renewed interest throughout the body of Christ to rediscover and restore its biblical heritage and especially its first century roots and foundations in Christ, the apostles, and the earliest believers for faith, fellowship and practice, has prompted RFI to establish a trans-denominational association of ministers, ministries and churches to assist in bringing people together for meaningful fellowship, dialogue and cooperation. We respect, value and appreciate the efforts of all churches and wish to network with them for Christ-honoring purposes.

FELLOWSHIP: In essence RFI provides an umbrella, or forum, for ministries and congregations to be networked together for mutual promotion, support and celebration. This allows for creativity, latitude and autonomy within ministries and congregations. We believe this to be the first century New Testament model.

INTERNATIONAL: It is our purpose to build and maintain an international network of ministers, ministries and congregations that have a common interest in working together to advance the gospel of Christ and His restoration work within the church in our generation.

Vision / Mission

VISION: Our Vision Statement is three-dimensional. We seek to assist the body of Christ in —

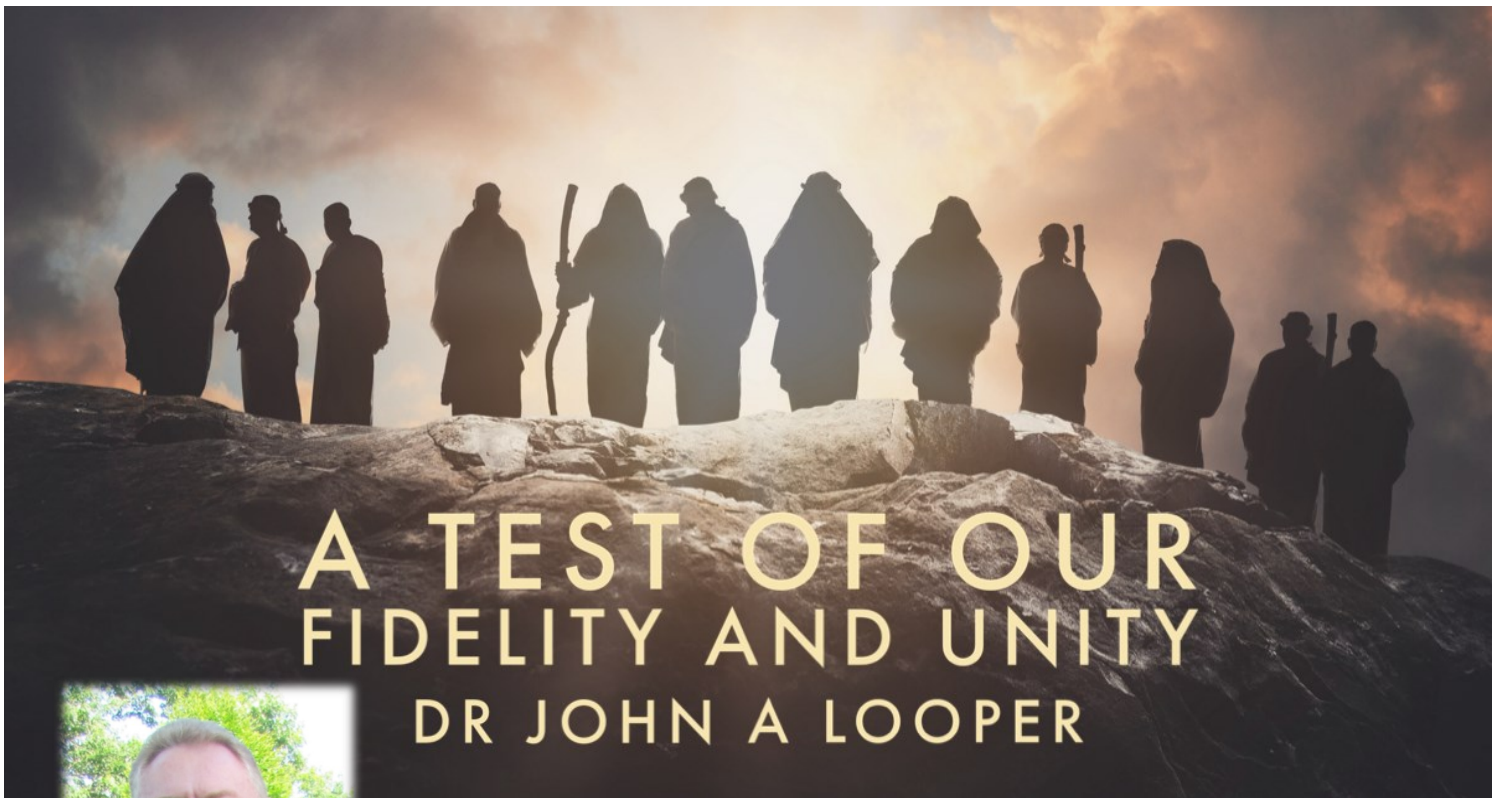
- Restoring the individual through Christ and to growth in Christ.
- Restoring and building godly homes and marriages through the biblical model.
- Restoring, practicing and celebrating the New Testament order of the Judeo-Christian faith of Christ, the apostles and the earliest believers, through praise, worship and service.

MISSION: Our Mission is —

- To proclaim the Gospel and Lordship of Jesus Christ to all mankind.
- To provide New Testament ministry and discipleship for all believers.
- To assist in networking the body of Christ together for authentic biblical fellowship and mutual cooperation.

Business Information:

Restoration Fellowship International and its offices are officially incorporated in the State of Tennessee. RFI is also a non-profit organization with a 501 (c) (3) IRS designation.



Dr. John A. Looper
Executive Director

2 Corinthians 13:5-6 (TLV) “*Test yourselves*, to see whether you are in the faith. *Examine yourselves!* Or don’t you know yourselves—that Messiah Yeshua is in you? *Unless of course you failed the test.* But I hope that you will realize that we haven’t failed the test.

An exegesis of the two letters of the Apostle Paul to the local churches in Corinth, which was one of the significant Roman cities of the First Century (which we do not have room to consider here) would clarify for us, that apart from this technology age, the Jews/Christians, the Corinthians, the Romans, and the Greeks at large, all lived in a pluralistic religious and social world, not so different from the world we find ourselves in post-

Modern times.

In every century and age of the body of Messiah Jesus, his Church, there have been intrusions into the covenant company of believers, by the insistence of the powers that be, to Christianize and make accommodations for the aberrant society in which it has found itself existing. Also, biblical errors have occurred in every generation, which the Scriptures referenced as “doctrines of demons” in various contexts.

In every century and age of the body of Messiah Jesus, his Church, there have been intrusions into the covenant company of believers, by the insistence of the powers that be, to Christianize and make accommodations for the aberrant society in which it has found itself existing.

Such woeful teachings were alluded to in the New Testament, and by the post-First Century writings of the Apostolic Fathers and Antiochian fathers of the Church, such as: Gnosticism and the Antinomianism of Marcion. Another major heresy was addressed by John the Apostle’s writings recorded in the Book of Revelation. He referred

to it as the “Spirit of Jezebel.” This propheticess and her ministry cohorts taught the servants of God to commit fornication. This heresy came from their human lust, and their reasoning that being in a marital covenant with Christ and each other, they could have promiscuous sexual relations that were no longer deemed as biblical fornication. Century after century the list and challenges goes on and on.

As announced by the Apostle Paul in our text verses, how does one test themselves to see if they are in

Messiah or not? First, there must be an absolute belief that the Word of God, the Bible, has miraculously come down to us through the ages as the (“Exhaling”) or the “inspired” revelation of

God to humankind. Men are imperfect and all translations from the original languages of the Scriptures have their strengths and weaknesses, but contain within them the indisputable truth of Elohim, the Creator, about himself (Theology), Christology, Creationism, Anthropology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, Eschatology, as well as moral and ethical righteousness.

We are witnessing what the Apostle Paul wrote about in 2 Thessalonians 2, regarding the last times that would experience an “Apostasy,” a great falling away from the immutability of the Holy Scriptures so that the “spirit” and “man” of anti-Torah (anti-Law) might be revealed. The Apostle Paul, James the Bishop of Jerusalem, and the Apostle John wrote in tandem about the necessity of our faith being tested by God (Deuteronomy 8), being tested by the world (Revelation 7:9-17), being tested by our own fleshly desires (James 1), and being tested by our total submission to Christ, his gifting and call upon our lives.

Throughout history, fermented beverages, metallurgy, chemical litmus tests, or a thousand and one other things, must pass muster. A bottle of wine, by law, lists its alcohol “proof” or percentage of alcohol. They know if it is 15%, 25%, etc., when they fire its vapors, and

the color of the flame determines its alcohol “proofing.” How often does the Bible use the analogy or metaphor of the Lord’s people being tested and purged by fire? You get the picture. “Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, to test you as though some strange thing has happened to you,” Peter said.

We are witnessing what the Apostle Paul wrote about in 2 Thessalonians 2, regarding the last times that would experience an “Apostasy,” a great falling away from the immutability of the Holy Scriptures so that the “spirit” and “man” of anti-Torah (anti-Law) might be revealed.

Never once in my Christian walk and ministry has the Lord asked me my opinion about what should be allowed morally and theologically regarding the constant pressures against the body of Christ to be more accommodating of those who wish to rewrite the rules of biblical revelation to appease the times and to Christianize sin. In this context, many believe that the Bible is an anti-

quoted book so out of step with modern science and intellectualism. Therefore, the Creator, Christ the Messiah, the Apostles Doctrine, and the Holy Writ must be revised in the name of “equity” and by an all-encompassing love that includes everyone under the banner of Messiah, not by our repentance and transformation, but by our remaking God and the Bible in our image and likeness.

Restoration Fellowship International seeks to network ministers, ministries, and

congregations who are willing to stand unequivocally upon God and the immutable truth of the Bible, his word. This does not make us the most popular networking association, but one of the most biblically safe and rewarding, existing among many Godly counselors.

TEST YOURSELF AND SEE-WHETHER OR NOT YOU ARE IN FAITH.

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THE WAY OUT OF PSEUDO-CHRISTIANITY

Rev. Deanna Stephens

Once the London Times asked several prominent authors to write on the theme, “What’s wrong with the world?” G. K. Chesterton, the Christian writer and humorist wrote this reply:

“Dear Sirs, I am. Sincerely Yours, G.K. Chesterton.”

Certainly, those who have been grafted in and have an authentic relationship with Jesus know very well what is wrong with the world. It needs a Savior. The Savior has come. Yet, still, there are many people in this world who refuse to accept this truth. Despite being aware of the truth and even having a visceral experience, many choose to turn away from Jesus. Much of the world is at war with the truth. This is a tragedy, for Jesus is the only way to salvation. Without Him, people are without hope and are eternally lost.

Christians are to be emboldened with the truth, God’s truth, to effectively carry out one’s calling and the great commission. For the truly born-again Christian God’s truth should be an innate characteristic. The

confronting issue for the body of Christ is that being called a Christian has become adaptable. Adaptable to an individual’s feelings, opinions, current trends, and outright apostasies. People are watching what Christians do and they are watching to see if Christians sincerely live out what they say they believe from God’s Word. This does not mean that Christians are to be little robots that never make mis-

There is a pseudo-Christian lifestyle being lived out in the open without conviction, apology, or shame.

takes. It means being a Christian who has intentionally surrendered their whole heart to the Lord. Once upon a time, Christian ministers and the church were highly respected. Now, the church is not only disrespected, but many would be quite satisfied to see the church wiped out of existence. When the sincere Christian is faithful and resilient as led by the Holy Spirit and lives out the truth of the Gospel then this will cause the world to recognize that there truly is a God who not only loves them but has made the way

for each flawed human being to experience true love, redemption, peace, and much more.

“He feeds on ashes; a deceived heart has turned him aside. And he cannot deliver himself, nor say, “Is there not a lie in my right hand?” Isaiah 44:20

There is a pseudo-Christian lifestyle being lived out in the open without conviction, apology, or shame. Thayer’s Greek Lexicon tells that pseudo is, “in a broad sense, whatever is not what it professes to be: so of perverse, impious, deceitful precepts and of idolatry”. The most frightening aspect of this is that so many individuals who profess to be Christians do not recognize that they have embraced the pseudo-Christian lifestyle. There are truths that many claiming to be followers of Christ are denying, not always with their mouths but within the dark hidden chambers of their hearts. This is made evident by the things that are said and the way life is lived. There seem to be deep levels of pride held within the heart in being an idolatrous, self-governing

individual and all the while not realizing that it is not the Christian life being lived but it is a humanistic lifestyle that, if not careful, can indeed become a full-blown atheistic lifestyle while still declaring to be a Christian. This ideology stretches from the pulpit to the no longer attending church service individual.

Something needs to change. With so many church buildings being shut down, pastors leaving the ministry for several different reasons, congregants not going to service and not growing in their relationship with the Lord, and many church congregations are abandoning God's truth for the way of the world, there is a call on every true Christian to stand up for what is right, speak up with the truth, and lift up the name of Jesus all with Holy Spirit direction. In what area of your life do you forget who you are in Christ? Where do you just kind of go with the flow? Maybe you are not a wholehearted pseudo-Christian, but, perhaps there might be certain sectors of your heart that Jesus is not welcome to enter into. Sure, He can have the Sunday morning and Wednesday night Bible study part of your heart, but what about the other areas? You see, if you dare to keep Jesus blocked out of one area then it becomes easier for another area to be blocked, and then another and another. Please ask yourself these questions, In what areas of my heart am I living a pseudo-Christian lifestyle? What areas in my heart need to be transformed by the Holy Spirit so that my whole heart is surrendered to God?

The Shema (hear), taken from Deuteronomy 6:4-9 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with *all* your heart and with *all* your soul and with *all* your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign

on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

The word all is not a complicated word, not in the spelling of the word itself nor the meaning. It is clear and concise and even in Hebrew, it is the same - kol. All and kol meaning, the whole. The whole, nothing left out, concerning everything, throughout, entire, complete, continually, forever, and wholehearted. There is to be no confusion in the understanding of "all your heart" from Deuteronomy 6:4-9 means that every true Christian is ready and willing to love God with everything within them. The importance of regularly searching your heart with the leading of the Holy Spirit and God's Word is very beneficial not only for you but for everyone your life touches.

If every Christian would take to heart Deuteronomy 6:4-9 then being a follower of Christ would be even more impactful. Here is the other problem, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Matthew 22:37-40, Luke 10:27-28 are not emphasized enough in the average congregation. They might be mentioned but these verses are not taught or embraced. What does it mean to love the Lord with all of your heart? The depths of the answer to this question cannot be discussed in this one article, but in basic terms, you are to steward the life He has given you and to make Him the priority in every area of your life. Stewardship is not an option for the Christian. God gives, you receive, and do all to the glory of God. You take responsibility for the stewardship of who God has created you to be and all He has given you. You steward relationships, time, gifts, talents, money, thoughts, words, motivations, and all else that pertains to your life. Steward to the glory of God and do not go off on a self-governing, humanistic bunny trail to find yourself no longer resembling anyone who is Christ-like. Let's take a look at some key factors that will help anyone who professes to be a Christian to live a Christ-like life authentically.

cally.

The heart of man who can know it? No one but God, no one but God. Man looks to what he can see with his naked eye, but, God looks at the heart.

Consider your heart. Have you lately, considered your heart? Why not? Its range is extensive! Extensive!

The heart (lebab) is used to describe the innermost part of your being. 1 Samuel 16:7 says, "But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." From Strong's Concordance, we learn that the heart is the entire disposition of the inner person that God discerns. It is where He finds us to be devoted, totally committed, where we seek the Lord, and so much more. Do you purpose to be totally devoted, committed to, and to seek the Lord in every area of your heart? This question is extremely important because there can be times when the Lord might ask you to do something so extraordinary that if your heart is not in the right condition instead of saying, Here am I, Lord, you might say, No, I can't do that. Think of Elijah, Mary, Paul, and others from the Bible. Think of Jesus.

Who are you? Do you know? Possibly your identity is based on who your family of origin says you are or who society says you are or you live the persona of a diagnosis that the medical community says you are. But, do you know who God created you to be? Being secure in your Christ-like identity is of utmost importance to being an authentic Christian. Your identity cannot ebb and flow with the current of the presenting tide. You must be fully aware of and understand clearly that you have vital breath, the breath of life from God. You have an eternal soul, your distinct identity, a unique personhood with which you have an inherent holy purpose to fulfill in this dark and fallible

world. In Christ you are loved, a child of God, redeemed, new creation, established, accepted, forgiven, complete, never alone, confirmed, reconciled, fruit bearer, made right, more than a conqueror, free, and the identity markers do not stop here. There is not one person or anything that can mark you like God. Value who God has created you to be. Value the breath of life that He has allowed you to have in order to live this life. Take a deep breath in through your nose and let it flow out through your mouth. Feel that breath throughout your body. You see if you do not value the breath of life God has given you then you will most likely not be able to sincerely appreciate or value your identity in Christ. The breath of life is a foundational piece of your very being. Thank God every day for your breath of life. Your breath of life is a reminder that you are created in the image of God. It is a reminder of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in your life. It is a reminder of your true identity in Christ.

"The Spirit of God has made me, And the breath of the Almighty gives me life." Job 33:4 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." John 14:6

The way of Jesus is the way of truth. Through Jesus, every Christian has been given the Spirit of truth. You are not to walk in the futility of your mind or to be darkened in your understanding. No, you have been given a measure of understanding by God so that you do not have to live any type of pseudo-lifestyle, a life of ignorance. Do not allow your heart to be hardened in any area of your life. Instead, intentionally grow in your knowledge and understanding of the truth. Open your

heart to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and let Him lead you in the truth. Take an inventory of your heart to see where you might not be living in truth according to God's standards. Fall in love with God's truth and make sure it is stamped on your heart because the truth of this world can do nothing but fail you. God's truth endures forever and will sustain you through any circumstance that this world can throw your way. Keep your ears and your heart continuously on God's truth always and live the fully authentic life that he has given you.

"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." John 1:14

Rev. Deanna Stephens has served for the glory of God as a minister, biblical counselor/discipler, leadership trainer, conference developer, and biblical teacher for over thirty-five years, including the past eight years as co-Founder and President of Whole Heart Believer Ministries. WHB is currently based in Saint Johnsbury, Vermont, serving the local community and beyond. Rev. Stephens is ordained with RFI and serves as a member of the Board of Advisors for Restoration Fellowship International.



MESSIAH IN LIFE PODCAST

JUSTIN D. ELWELL, TH.D.



THE AARONIC BLESSING AND PETER

PASTOR CHRISTIAN HADLOCK, BSN

"May the Lord bless you and keep you, may the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace" (Num. 6:24-26).

We are faced with fear in this day and age, seemingly, around every corner. Whether it is wars, rumors of wars, disease, illness, or even death, we are continually in the face of fear. During Jesus' time, they faced the same kinds of fears that we face today; as Solomon says in Ecclesiastes, there is nothing new under the sun (Eccles. 1:9). The enemy uses the same tricks and traps to keep us away from the way, the truth and the life. I want to share what has been placed on my heart about Peter and the Aaronic Blessing, and how we are to walk in this daily in the face of our fears (Matt. 14:24-33).

"And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were

terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and

As the disciples traveled, there was a storm upon the sea and yet the disciples are not said to have been fearful until they see Yeshua/Jesus walking on the water. Their fear was because they thought He was a ghost. Then Yeshua said to them to have courage, "I am. Don't be afraid." Peter questioned "if it is You,"

beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." (Matt. 14:25-30 ESV).

As the disciples traveled, there was a storm upon the sea and yet the disciples are not said to have been fearful until they see Yeshua/Jesus walking on the water. Their fear was because they thought He was a ghost. Then Yeshua said to them to have courage, "I am. Don't be afraid." Peter questioned "if it is

You," command him to come out on the water. At His word, Peter was able to walk on the water towards Yeshua. When he took his eyes off of Yeshua, and saw the storm surrounding him, he succumbed to the fear, and he began to sink into the depths. He cried out for Yeshua to save him, and Yeshua grabbed him and lifted him up from the depths. When he climbed into the boat, and the storm subsided, Yeshua rebuked Peter for his lack of faith, and he saw Yeshua for who He was: the Son of God (Matt. 14:31-33).

How many times do we fall into the same situation that Peter finds himself in? Whether it's dealing with illness, disease, suffering or even death, many times we find ourselves looking to the "storm" and not the Savior.

Let us go a step further in the story of Peter and apply the Aaronic Blessing. When the disciples were in the boat during the storm, and saw Jesus walking on the water, He blessed them by saying the Greek

word θαρσέω/tharseo, which means to have courage, be of good cheer (comfort). He proclaimed to them, “it is I” or “I am” and “be not afraid.” This was Jesus showing them that He was keeping them safe, no matter what circumstances or trials they were facing. When Peter spoke to Yeshua, His grace was upon Peter as he was looking to his Master for guidance and safety. I believe when Peter stepped out onto the water, he wasn’t looking at the water, he was looking into the face of Yeshua. It was when he took his eyes off of Yeshua and saw his circumstance, that he began to sink. The light of His face that was causing Peter to walk upright and holy was replaced by the darkness of the abyss that was swallowing him up. Then with His hand, He grabbed Peter and was pulled to safety once again in the light of His face. Yeshua’s countenance was upon Peter and they entered the boat. The circumstance had diminished, and they were at peace. Peter was able to see clearly what he was missing in the moment he started to go under, the Son of the Living God. Peter would have died if not for Yeshua. Our Savior rescued him from the darkness of the abyss.

When pronouncing the Aaronic blessing, Rabbi Justin Elwell has explained that the Lord lifting us up is like a father with his child raised above his face. When we experience this blessing spiritually, we are looking directly into the eyes of our Savior and cannot help but smile. We smile because we are held up, lifted up in safety by the loving arms of our Father, the same arms that pulled Peter to safety. Yeshua is the Word made flesh and when the Aaronic blessing was given, it was always about Yeshua (Lk. 24:50-51).

Now let’s apply this to our lives today. We all have some trial or tribulation that we are enduring. The wind and waves that some people are enduring right now can be tumultuous and seem unending. In the flesh, we may try to handle things on our own, and not admit that we

need help. Yes, for a time you can try and struggle through this, but you sink into the water, deeper and deeper.

Now apply the Aaronic blessing to your situation. When these circumstances arrive, and they will, know that if you are one of His children, that you are blessed. He will never leave you nor forsake you. He is and will always be keeping you in the palm of His nailed scarred hands. No matter what you face, you are never alone, you are not abandoned. The same power that conquered the grave lives within you. Do not let the waves and winds distract you from the light of His face. He is calling you unto Himself, “Come, to me all who are weary, and I’ll give you rest.”

It is too difficult to bare the weight of our circumstance, and we are commanded not to do so. We are to cast all our cares upon Him, for He cares for us. We need to stop trying to limit the power of God moving in our lives. Remember, we are blessed, we are kept, the light of His face is upon us. That light drowns out the darkness because when Peter was looking at the light of Yeshua’s face, he didn’t see the dark abyss beneath him: he was able walk upon it. It does not matter what you are going through, His grace is sufficient for you. Let His grace fall upon you and your circumstance, His grace is sufficient to see you through to the end. Keep looking into those eyes filled with fire, and the unquenchable flame that is set apart and holy. Let Him pick you up with His strong arms and feel His countenance fall upon you. He is lifting you from the circumstance that you were facing, because you look to His face, and not the face of the circumstance. Then peace that passes all understanding will fill the circumstance with calm, as the wind and the waves die down in your life.

Let the Prince of Peace comfort you as a Father does a child who has been hurt or suffered. He has overcome your circumstance in the power of the Cross. Walk in faith knowing that the One who died for

you is in the circumstance with you, just as Yeshua was with Peter on the water.

Pastor Christian Hadlock, and his wife Nora, live in Central New York State with their four children, both Chris and Nora work in the medical field. Currently Christian is working on a Master of Divinity degree with Biblical Life College and Seminary. The Hadlock family attend services at Messiah Congregation, where Chris also plays drums on the worship team.



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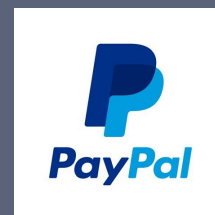
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PO Box 5822
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THE STRATEGIC NATURE OF THE CONFLICT BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL

By Charles Gardner

MICHAEL K. LAKE, TH.D.

¹⁷ “Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸ But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. ¹⁹ Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, ²⁰ and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, ²¹ whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

Acts 3:17-21 (NKJV)

God views the temporal dimension (linear time) differently than we do. We see in the moment. We may see the years or decades regarding the Kingdom of God if we are insightful. However, God sees beyond the millennia. The Almighty’s interaction with His people (both in ancient Israel and the historical

Body of Messiah) is strategic, measured, and multidimensional. I used to think that the times of restoration began at the beginning of the Reformation in the 1500s. And to a certain degree, this perception was correct. When God touched the heart of Martin Luther with the revelation that “the just shall live by faith,” a restoration process began that spanned over five hundred years. As the Church emerged from one thousand years of spiritual darkness (also called “The Dark Ages”), the Holy Spirit went to work to begin restoring everything that had been lost through the countermeasures of the priesthood of darkness that rendered the Church spiritually powerless.

My paradigm regarding this supernatural conflict and restoration process was expanded shortly after publishing my first book, *The Shinar Directive*. A series of interviews for my book found me at the Prophecy Watchers studio in Oklahoma City.

After recording several interviews, Gary Stearman and I enjoyed a coffee and talked shop. We were discussing our belief in a gap between Genesis Chapter One Verses 1 and 2 (known theologically as “The Gap Theory”). In that exchange, Gary turned to me and said, “Isn’t it amazing that God’s response to the rebellion of the angels was to repair the earth and then create mankind? In the redemption of mankind, God would take care of the angelic rebellion, sin, and the fall of humanity.” (Please note, this may not be word for word. I am working from memory.) It was at that moment that the light came on in my thinking. The restoration of all things started in Gen. 1:3 and stretches to the New Heaven and New Earth in Rev. 21! The seven days of creation were the beginning of God’s divine restoration plan.

After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, the apostolic leadership realized their

place in the restoration process. The apostle Peter informed the world (and the kingdom of darkness) that Jesus would remain in Heaven and not return as Messiah ben David until all things were restored.

God Strategically Restores in Stages

⁹ "Whom will he teach knowledge?
And whom will he make to understand the message?
Those just weaned from milk?
Those just drawn from the breasts?

¹⁰ For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept,
Line upon line, line upon line,
Here a little, there a little."

Isaiah 28:9-10 (NKJV)

I have always enjoyed studying the prophets of Israel. This fascination went beyond their prophetic words. I loved examining the very nature of the prophets (as well as what made them prophets). Another word used in ancient Israel for prophets was "seers." At the action of the Holy Spirit, these men were enabled by God to hear His voice, see into the Third Heaven (as well as the Spirit Realm), and even view time beyond its linear nature. We also see this dynamic with the apostle John in the book of Revelation. John was taken outside of linear time. Not only did this apostle visually witness the future, but he interacted with a glorified saint and confused him with Jesus!

¹⁰ And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me,
"See *that you do not do that!* I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

Revelation 19:10 (NKJV)

There was one ancient prophet of Israel whose prophetic visions gave him unique insights into God's nature and how the Almighty interacts with space-time in this cosmic conflict. This prophet's name was Isai-

ah. Isaiah's name in Hebrew is *Yesha'yahu, which means "Yahweh is salvation."* In Isaiah Chapter Twenty-Eight, Verses 9 and 10, Isaiah saw the strategic nature of the restoration progress (working out His salvation plan) that the Almighty used to restore all things. Since God instructed Moses to begin writing, He has restored divine truth to His creation. With each precept and line established by God, there is a nail driven into the coffin of the kingdom of darkness, and a chain is weakened that enslaves humanity. We see this concept of line upon line and precept upon precept, even in developing the Word of God.

Torah
Writings
Prophets
Gospels
Historical Book of Acts
Epistles
Book of Revelation

It takes the entire Bible and the truths presented therein to bring the Body of Messiah to the spiritual maturity needed to overcome the final onslaught of the kingdom of darkness. Agents of darkness have convinced many segments of the Church to jettison the Torah of God or even the entire Old (First) Testament. The result of this rejection of divine special revelation is that the spiritual foundations of those movements have been destroyed by their flawed theologies. Error is then compounded with error until their movements have been reduced to a powerless religion.

Moves and Countermoves

We need to remember that in this supernatural conflict that spans all three heavens, two diametrically opposed kingdoms are represented. Each domain has spiritual power, members of the elder race or angels (both faithful and fallen), and human agents that put feet and hands to God's plans and the machinations of the gates of Hell. When Heaven would move, Hell would always countermove. As

God works to build His strategic plan on the earth, there are times of intense conflict and release of supernatural power. One example would be God sending a man named Moses back to the most powerful nation on the planet at the time with nothing but His name, a shepherd's staff, and anointing him as an apostle (Moses was the first apostle in redemptive history). God would use Moses to bring this nation to its knees, free His people, and begin the first lines of His special revelation to humanity – the Torah. The second spiritual weapon of mass destruction to the enemy was the sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross and the resurrection. It took several centuries for the kingdom of darkness to calculate an effective countermeasure to the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

The Development of the Roman Catholic Church

For nearly three hundred years, the primitive Church was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and suffered great persecution from the Roman government. The Ante-Nicene period was not without controversy. As the Jewish leadership within the primarily Gentile Church began to wane, various Greek/Pagan concepts slowly crept into Christian thought. In three centuries, a lot of spiritual drift had occurred. Marcion, Origen, and others labored to unhinge the Gentile Church from the Torah and the entire First Testament. Clement of Alexandria wrote:

"Philosophy has been given to the Greeks as their own kind of Covenant, their foundation for the philosophy of Christ ... the philosophy of the Greeks ... contains the basic elements of that genuine and perfect knowledge which is higher than human ... even upon those spiritual objects." (*Stromata* 6. 8)

Later, there was a Roman General who became the new Emperor of Rome: his name was Constantine. According to the historian Theo-

doret (393-458), Constantine wrote:

"It was, in the first place, declared improper to follow the custom of the Jews in the celebration of this holy festival, because, their hands having been stained with crime, the minds of these wretched men are necessarily blinded. By rejecting their custom, we establish and hand down to succeeding ages one which is more reasonable. ... Let us, then, have nothing in common with the Jews, who are our adversaries. ... Let us with one accord walk therein, my much-honoured brethren, studiously avoiding all contact with that evil way. They boast that without their instructions we should be unable to commemorate the festival properly. This is the highest pitch of absurdity. For how can they entertain right views on any point who, after having compassed the death of the Lord, being out of their minds, are guided not by sound reason, but by an unrestrained passion, wherever their innate madness carries them."

One of Constantine's titles as the new Emperor of Rome was Pontifex Maximus. The **pontifex maximus** (Latin for "supreme pontiff") was the chief high priest of the College of Pontiffs (*Collegium Pontificum*) in ancient Rome. This was the most important position in the ancient Roman religion. . . . It does not take much research into the life of Constantine to realize that he had confused Christ as another version of Mithra. As the Pontifex Maximus over the new state's version of Christianity, he unhinged Roman Catholicism (universalism) from the First Testament. He proved a thin Christian veneer for the Mystery Religions to hide. In less than a couple of hundred years, Europe found itself at the beginning of an age of darkness that would last one thousand years.

The Reformation – Why Start with the Just Shall Live by Faith?

The Reformation began in the 16th Century when Martin Luther posted his 95 theses on the door of his Church. The Holy Spirit had touched his heart, and Romans 1:17 exploded with meaning.

¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "*The just shall live by faith.*"
Romans 1:17 (NKJV)

As men and women found faith in Christ, the Reformation was nothing short of a revolution. The Reformation was established on five truths:

Sola Scriptura (Scripture alone)
Sola Fide (Faith alone)
Sola Gratia (Grace alone)
Sola Christus (Christ alone)
Soli Deo Gloria (To God be the glory alone)

The Almighty had established five precepts of truth that began to drive back the darkness. The countermove of Hell was to persecute and kill all of those who had discovered these five truths. Men and women placed their lives on the line to establish the Reformation. When William Tyndale translated the Word of God into English, the Roman Church hunted him down, tried him for heresy, and burned him alive at the stake. The restoration of truth in this era was costly on a personal level and cannot be compared to the Western world today. No one sat in anonymity behind a keyboard in cyberspace fighting and bickering (also called "variance" or "debate" in the Bible and is considered a work of the flesh – Rom 1:29) with other believers over either minor differences in doctrine or the supremacy of their portion of restored truth. These men and women of the Reformation suffered torture and painful deaths to declare that faith in Christ alone was needed for salvation and to bring the Word of God back into the hands of the people.

When reading the Reformers' writings, the honor they gave to the commandments of God was pro-

found. The commandments of God revealed and defined the nature of sin. Understanding the commandments produced a need for repentance and opened the door to the preaching of the Gospel. Today's Church (including the Hebraic Heritage Movement) is indebted to the devotion and sacrifice of the Reformers.

Christ Must Be Preeminent and the Enemy's Countermoves

¹⁹ Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner *stone*, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:19-22 (NKJV)

In Ephesians Chapter Two, Verses 19-22, the apostle Paul reveals an important truth: Jesus is the chief cornerstone of the Kingdom. The apostles and prophets he referred to that established the foundation were ancient in his day. Hebraically, the first prophet was Abraham, and the first apostle (one sent) was Moses. The Torah, the Writings, and the Prophets of the First Testament were the foundational stones that lined up with the Chief Cornerstone – Christ. The entire Second Testament is established on the foundation of the First. It has been the duty of those functioning within each restoration movement of God to ensure that Jesus remains the Chief Cornerstone of truth. Any movement or group that abandons the central message of Christ is either a countermove of the enemy or a movement that has yielded to the enemy's machinations and been derailed.

Since the Reformation, God has been adding line upon line of truth.

While there was some vigorous debate among the various groups, there was also respect. At the turn of the 20th Century, the enemy planned its countermove: exclusivity. Each group that God used to restore a forgotten truth would have the seeds of exclusivity sown among them by members of the priesthood of darkness. They would then create their theological box and judge everyone and everything by their line or precept of restored truth. They would be raised in pride, and then reject all the lines and precepts of truth that God established before them. Their pride causes them to tear up the foundation that the Almighty has already established and start afresh with their selective truth, which now serves as the cornerstone (many times replacing Christ).

I purposely read broadly in my theological/devotional studies. I will spend time each year reading portions of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, the Reformers, modern Evangelical Christian theologians, and even Jewish scholars, such as Abraham Heschel. My first goal is to ensure that Christ remains the chief cornerstone of my theology and practical doctrines. At the same time, I want to ensure that I have not missed a crucial precept or line of truth that the Holy Spirit labored to restore in the Body. Because Heaven moved to restore all these

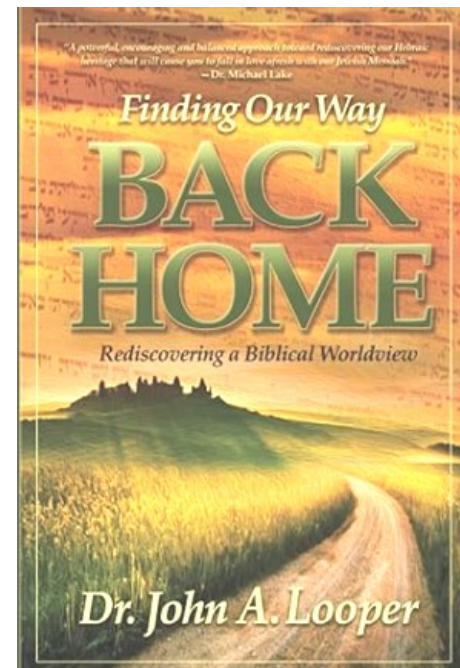
truths, they are strategic and critical for the end-time Church.

Since the beginning of the Reformation, each generation has been visited by Almighty God to restore several truths into the collective consciousness of God's people. The Remnant warrior must appreciate and learn those truths to prepare for the days ahead.

Strategically in warfare, the high ground is where you want to be in a fight. Low places or valleys can quickly become killing zones that provide little protection. Almighty God has spent thousands of years since Moses placing the Body of Messiah on the high ground of restored truth for the final conflict (a place of great advantage). However, if we fall for the tactics of the enemy by rejecting what God has so graciously restored, we may find ourselves in the valleys or worse, pits of our own making, and become easy prey for the kingdom of darkness.

Michael K. Lake, Th.D., D.R.E.

Scholar-in-Residence, Strategic Remnant Learning Center – Biblical Life Assembly, Best-selling Author of *The Shinar Directive*, *The Sheeriyth Imperative*, *The Kingdom Priesthood*, and *The Kingdom Warrior*.



This book is for you; written for both Christian and Jew alike, this compilation provides a modern perspective on rediscovering the Hebraic roots of a Biblically-based faith.

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Dr. Looper has served the body of Messiah since the days of his youth. He was fortunate to have become a part of an international movement, which has defined his career. His partnership,

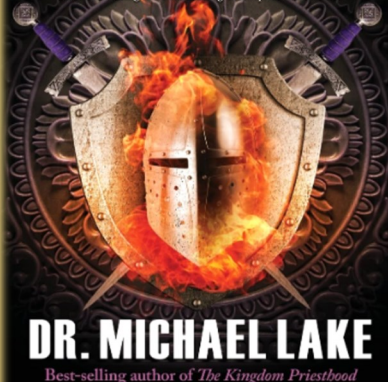
with a vision for the restoration of all things, has been with men and women of god who are searching for better ways to communicate the redemptive, prophetic, restorative, and eschatological truths so pertinent to this generation. A major part of this vision is the determination to restore the Church's Hebraic roots and heritage back to the Christian faith. One might say that we are committed to finding the way back to the faith once and for all delivered to the saints, by **Finding Our way Back Home!**

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Barbara Allen Garrett was born and raised in Cleveland, Tennessee. Barbara always says she was taken to church “nine months before she was born” — referring to the fact that her parents attended church regularly during the entire pregnancy.

Barbara was reared in the nurture and admonition by her parents who believe “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”

Barbara understood from an early age the importance of living life through the lens of an ethical worldview and the commitment to a Biblical walk.

The King James Version of the Bible heavily influenced the core values on which her foundation of faith has been laid. She has learned from and lived out many a rhema which His Word has provided.

In The Spotlight



Barbara was married and has two grown children. She also has a grandson, Damion (whom the local church has adopted as its own!) Barbara has always gravitated

to participation by way of service as a choir member or Sunday school teacher, running sound or visual equipment, from co-leading training ladies or prayer ministries to director of Vacation Bible School. Each opportunity has matured her relationship with God.

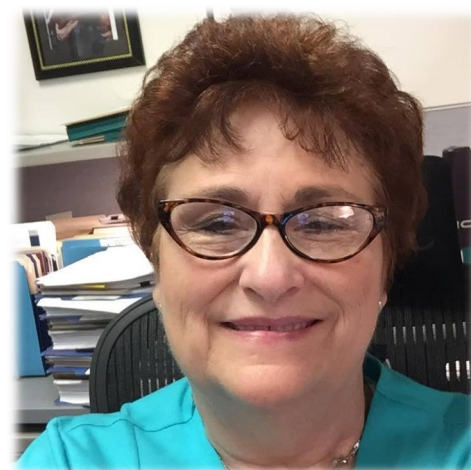
As a non-traditional student, Barbara enrolled in college when her children graduated. After seven years of continuous study, Barbara graduated with honors holding a Masters of Education in teaching and learning.

Currently, Barbara is the Media Coordinator and the Women of Faith Assistant Leader at Restoration Fellowship Family Worship Center. She also does Family Training as needed.

gree at Liberty University.

Lampkin is keenly interested in teaching believers to rebuild learning and thinking pathways to be in alignment with first century community as the Lord established it.

Bob and his wife Sharon reside in Gastonia, North Carolina.



Mary Frances Begley is a newly-ordained RFI minister. Mary and her husband James live in Windsor, Virginia.

Mary holds a Bachelor's degree in Pastoral Leadership and Christian Education from Maranatha College of Christian Ministries; Master's Degree in Ministry Leadership from Southwest Christian University; and a Master's Degree in Contracting from Florida Institute of Technology.

She is a doctoral candidate from Biblical Life College and Seminary and is a second doctoral candidate from School of Divinity, Regent University.

Mary also works as a Certified Official Court Reporter Verbatim, at the West Virginia Court of Appeals.

Mary looks forward to fellowshiping with believers of like precious faith.

Welcome to RFI, Mary! We're blessed to have you.

MEET SOME OF OUR NEWEST RFI MINISTERS



Pictured is Rev. **Bob Lampkin** from North Carolina. Lampkin is a versatile and bi-lingual communicator with experience in leading diverse teams and facilitating cross-cultural dialogue. He is a compassionate

and empathetic leader who values the dignity and well-being of every individual. He is a knowledgeable and ethical theologian with a strong foundation in the principles and practices of Biblical faith traditions.

He is the founder of *Hammer Faith Ministries*, leader of two prayer groups totaling 2,000 people, and teaching a readership totaling 35,000. He is also a praise team musician at City Church in Gastonia, NC.

Bob has graduate degrees and certificates in education as well as biblical languages, and is currently working on a Master of Divinity De-

Rev. Floyd Spatafore

Rev. Floyd Spatafore, a minister with RFI, passed away last month. His obituary is below.

RFI expresses sincere sympathy to his wife, Francene, over the loss of her husband.



**November 4, 1938 -
December 26, 2023**

Floyd Spatafore, 85, of Fairmont, West Virginia, passed away on Tuesday, December 26, 2023. Floyd was born on November 4, 1938, the son of the late Floyd

Spatafore and Anna Fazzini Spatafore.

Floyd is survived by his loving wife of 62 years, Francine Lee Amuso Spatafore; children Jennifer (Gerald) Tritle of Springfield, OH, and Samuel (Kathryn) Spatafore of Roundrock, TX; sisters Maryann Pizatella of Columbus, OH, and Cindy (John) Toothman of Monongah, WV; grandchildren Father Jediah Tritle, Josiah Tritle, Sarah Tritle, Rebecca Spatafore, and Joshua Spatafore.

Floyd was preceded in death by his parents Floyd and Anna Spatafore.

Floyd Spatafore was a graduate of the Biblical Life College and Seminary, and has a degree in biblical counseling. He also has a master's degree in psychology and a bachelor's degree in business administration. He worked for the Department of Defense, retiring in 1993. Upon his retirement, he worked as a licensed professional, mental health counselor. He was a United Methodist Pastor, and he enjoyed playing golf, and counseling.



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ORDINATION SERVICE

Bishop Edwin and Juanita Felicie traveled to New Temple Grove Ministry to officiate at the ordinations of Rev. Maggie Mitchell and Mary Frances Begley at New Temple Grove Ministry, pastored by Rev. Connie McDonald.





DESTINATION: JERUSALEM

RABBI JUSTIN D. ELWELL, TH.D.

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all the nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands.

— *The Apostle John, Revelation 7:9*

The Final In-Gathering

At the outset of the most terrifying prophetic language found in the canon of Scripture, the message of the Book of Revelation to those believing is one of encouragement and hope: the Messiah is in our midst, our Emmanuel. Still, the unfolding background imagery is striking: the mighty voice as of a trumpet/shofar (Rev. 1:10), the Messiah, the menoroth, the stars, the sealing of the tribes (Rev. 7:1-8), the temple and altar (Rev. 11:1-2), the Ark (Rev. 11:19), Mt. Zion (Rev. 14:1), and the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2). John does not exclude Jewish archetypal themes and symbols from his vision, which scholars date to around 90 CE. If this date is accepted, then John authored Revelation approximately twenty years after the destruction of Jerusalem, and the Holy Temple. Yet, he continues to employ Jewish language and imagery

among the elements of this cataclysmic prophesy.

The moment depicted in Revelation 7:9, easily overlooked in light of the alarming and often confusing narrative John is developing, no longer seems out of place when we consider closely what he is describing. Pictured in this single verse is the final feast of ingathering (Deut. 16:16), Tabernacles, /תּוֹבֹטִּי *Sukkot* (Lev. 23:33-43). Following the sealing of the 144,000 of the children of Israel (Rev. 7:4-8), “who is able to stand” (Rev. 6:17), John envisions the eschatological people of God “of all the nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues” dressed in white robes, waving palm branches (Lev. 23:40; cf. Jn. 12:13), an ancient act celebrating victorious rulers, standing before the throne and the Lamb. This Johannine prophesy pictures the final feast of ingathering (Rev. 7:9) as the great harvest of the chosen (Rev. 14:14-16) standing before the throne and the Lamb, the redeemed from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue. John beholds the one new man in Yeshua/Jesus, the Bride of Christ, celebrating a feast of the Lord, often referred to as “Jewish feasts,” after the great tribulation (Rev. 7:14); feasts said to be obsolete.

To a Jewish apostle, an expectation of the redeemed from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue celebrating Tabernacles was not prophetically problematic; rather, it was the fulfillment of a long hoped for promise, “And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, all to keep the Feast of Tabernacles” (Zech. 14:16; cf. Zech. 8:22-23; Mic. 4:1-2). This vision becomes problematic if one accepts that the Gospel of Messiah, and those professing faith in Jesus, have been unhitched from law of Moses and its obsolete practices.

Yet, this is the commonly held position. That the law of Moses, the Torah, and all associated with it, including the Jewish people, have been set aside under a new faith paradigm called the Church. However, this would beg the question, was John, the last living apostle when he penned Revelation, incorrect as to the theological implications of the Gospel on Jewish and Gentile identity, soteriology, and the goal of the law of Moses within the New Covenant faith paradigm? Revelation, given by the Father (Rev. 1:1), recorded a time yet to come. John, directed to record

“what you see” (Rev. 1:11), does so without the aid, or rather, impediment of later theological constructs and biases interfering with the plain meaning of either the prophetic vision, or the text recorded. It is certain then, that the eschatological and ecclesiological vision of Revelation 7:9 is set within the prophetic arc of the feast of Tabernacles - the final feast of ingathering in the biblical festival cycle, and the final feast of ingathering at the end of the age.

Still, we should ask why? This vision is the summation of the ages, the ingathering of the saints, the presentation of the Bride to the Groom, but also the fulfillment of two specific promises. The first to David, as we read, “When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (II Sam. 7:12-13; cf. 14-16). David will see the eternal throne promised by God established, and the promised Son set upon it. The second promise is to Abraham.

A Father of Nations

“Now the LORD had said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, From your family And from your father’s house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’”

In Genesis 17:5 the Lord says to Abram, “No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations.” Abram (אַבְרָם) will now be Abraham (אַבְרָהָם), a change of name indicating a change of nature, purpose and relationship. Abraham believed the Lord, as we know from Genesis 15:6, it was accounted to him for righteousness. He believed for the promised son, through whom the multitude of nations would come (Gen. 15:4-5). He willingly gave unto the Lord this promised son in whom the promise rested, Isaac, as a burnt offering, who was rescued in anticipation of the coming Lamb (Gen. 8; Jn. 1:29), by the sub-

stitutionary ram caught in the bush by its horn, with which the shofar/trumpet is made (Gen. 22:13; cf. Rev. 1:10).

Abraham was called out from his father’s house (Gen. 12:1), and by his obedient response, not only would the Lord bless him with a family, then becoming a nation, but the Lord would bless a multitude of peoples from nations called, chosen and adopted by the same faith demonstrated by Abraham (Gen. 12:2-3). With this adoption, through the Holy Spirit, the spiritual sons and daughters of Abraham from the nations are: “in Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29; cf. Ro. 8:15-17; Gal. 4:5).

The Apostle Paul will utilize the archetypal figure of Abraham to elucidate his theology of Gentile inclusion in the ecclesia of God in Galatians (3:6-9) and Romans (4:1-25). He stresses that it is faith, like that of Abraham, that confers status in the household of God, not works (Gal. 3:6-9; cf. Eph. 2:8-10). Paul then connects the announcing of the Gospel directly back to the calling of Abraham, “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed’” (Gal. 3:8). Paul expounds on this,

For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised (Ro. 4:10-12).

Abraham believed while in uncircumcision. The Lord set a seal in his flesh as a sign of the covenant in operation between them. Following Paul’s logic, Abraham is then father to both the circumcised and uncircumcised in faith. The seal, now serving as the sign of covenant, is the seal of the Holy Spirit as a pledge knitting togeth-

er the renewed and circumcised heart of Jewish and Gentile disciples of Messiah (Eph. 1:13-14). The Spirit of adoption causing those sealed to cry out “Abba, Father” as a witness to heavenly paternity (Ro. 8:15-16), and to bring forth fruit (Gal. 5:22-23). Furthermore, Paul will conclude in Galatians, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything - but a new creation” (Gal. 6:15). What will the new creation in Messiah do? “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters” (I Cor. 7:19; cf. I Cor. 7:17-24, Paul’s rule for all churches). Is this a denigration, or replacing of circumcision commanded by God to the Jewish people? No. Paul recognizes that those renewed in Messiah keep the commandments of God by faith, not by circumcision. Faith-obedience was never based on circumcision, as we note with Abraham, but trusting in the Lord. Therefore, those in Yeshua/Jesus, are accepted by his faithfulness, and not their flesh.

“Abraham rejoiced to see My day”

The covenant made with Abraham cascades from Genesis 12:1-3, to Genesis 15, to Genesis 17 and finally to Genesis 22. The out-called Hebrew promised a seed, a nation, and to be a blessing to nations, believed God when doubting would have been easier. He put the mark of covenant in his flesh, and ultimately trusted that the Lord would resurrect his freely offered, promised son in order to fulfill the covenant promise of blessing to the world, to the circumcised and uncircumcised. How would the Lord renew what had been broken? The Abrahamic covenant was guaranteed not by the death of Abraham or his son for covenant breaking; the Lord promised that He would bear the guilt, and therefore the death penalty for the broken covenant, as demonstrated at the covenant between the portions. It was not Abraham who walked between the cut animals, but the fiery presence of God (Gen. 15:17). The Lamb the Lord provided would bear the guilt (Gen. 22:8; cf. Ro. 8:1-2), and by resurrection, he would inaugurate the renewal of faith-obedience in covenant; not empowered by human effort, but by the indwelling Holy Spirit. By his enablement, those called to his Son would live the high calling of

Messiah, to love each other as he has loved us. By His redemptive work, Christ refreshed and fulfilled what had been promised to Abraham, by a new a living way (Heb. 10:20).

The new inaugurated by Messiah was the rejuvenation - the refreshing of vigor - of what the Lord began with his friend Abraham. Abraham was glad to see the day of Jesus (Jn. 8:56) as it meant that his descendants would not bear the guilt of broken covenant; but God himself, in the person of his Son, would rescue and restore relationship with his descendants, both natural and spiritual, all adopted as sons into the household of the Father in heaven. The fullness of this prophetic picture, beautifully depicted in Revelation 7:9, on the feast of Tabernacles when the Father and the Lamb make their permanent tabernacle among their people (Rev. 21:22).

The Great Commission

Eleven Jewish apostles stand upon a mount in the Galilee (Matt. 28:16). As Messiah is preparing to ascend into heaven, He is preparing them to "go out," just as the Father called Abraham to go out from the house of his father. Where would they "go out" to, and for what?

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even to the end of the age.*" Amen. (Matt. 28:19-20).

The purpose of this global evangelism would be to disciple those chosen and called by God to His Son, who were now being drawn near to Him (Eph. 2:11-22); gentiles, drawn near to God, and to His covenants of promise. This to the religious ear of a first century Jew seemed impossible. Yet, this is the power of the Gospel unto salvation, "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Ro. 1:16). Gentiles, no longer "strangers and foreigners" (Eph. 2:19) in Paul's theology, through faith in Jesus, have become part of the household of God, joined with Jewish believers in the promise, being knit together "for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:22). Still, the language Paul

uses can be easily overlooked, as Gentiles "were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise" (Eph. 2:12). Gentiles *were*, but no longer *are* strangers to Israel or the covenants, plural, of promise. Paul is not speaking of Gentiles forming some new body apart from Israel, but rather a joining in the commonwealth of the covenant people of God. Most controversial of all, doing so apart from circumcision, by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8), as sons in the pattern of believing, but yet, uncircumcised Abraham (Ro. 4:10-12). With this, Paul and the apostles were entering uncharted theological territory. Where do they begin?

"... you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8b). Herein lay the missiological map of the apostles. From Jerusalem, their base of operations, they expanded to Judea and through Samaria, even to the ends of the earth (Acts 9:31). By the enabling of the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4), the apostles would be empowered to set out on such an audacious mission. Nevertheless, for the first period of years after the ascension of Messiah, the apostles in first century Jerusalem continued to participate in the accepted Jewish practices of the time, to include circumcision of their sons (Acts 21:21). Continued, and strong Jewish identity is evidenced in the life of Peter when he hesitates to enter the house of Cornelius in Acts 10:28 (Ex. 34:15-16); as it was not lawful for him to do so under normal circumstances, for fear of ritual impurity. Yet, having been prepared for that moment by a vision from heaven (Acts 10:9-16), Peter then enters to share the gospel. This has been a point of criticism by some, arguing that the apostles were not yet on the mission of the great commission. This, however, is not what we find as we consider the text of Acts.

The house of Cornelius, Acts 10, was not the first instance of Gentile conversion apart from circumcision found in the Book of Acts. While the apostles had yet to embark much past the historic borders of Israel, they were making disciples from among the nations, and they did so following the command of Jesus in Acts 1:8: to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea,

Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Luke carefully notes that Philip entered Samaria, a region often avoided by observant Jews, to proclaim Messiah (Acts 8:5), after the apostles invested years establishing their messianic community in Jerusalem and Judea. Then, in Acts 8:26-39, Luke records an even more radical conversion resulting from the Gospel being shared by Philip with an Ethiopian eunuch. This eunuch had traveled to Jerusalem to worship, and was confused about Isaiah 53:7-8, a prophetic text leading to the Lord's inclusion of Gentiles and eunuchs in Isaiah 56. Still, at the time he was in Jerusalem, as a eunuch, he could not convert to Judaism (Deut. 23:2, which is a guard against mutilation of boys), and was probably turned away from the Holy Temple. Knowing that he would likely be turned away in Jerusalem, why travel there?

He was seeking. When Philip hurriedly approached the chariot, he was faced with someone who was utterly different than himself: a sexually altered African. Not someone that a religiously minded Jew would ordinarily chase after. The eunuch could not become a convert to Judaism, but as Philip ministered the Gospel of Messiah, beginning at Isaiah 53, he would minister about the one who was, "despised and rejected by men," just as the eunuch had been rejected. This eunuch, having forsaken family, would be given a name "better than sons and daughters" (Isa. 56:5), through the suffering servant his "burnt offerings and sacrifices" would be accepted (Isa. 56:7) in the House of Prayer for all peoples (Isa. 56:7). Luke carefully documents this slow outward progression of the apostles to the wider world with the message of the Good News. They moved as the Lord provided opening and opportunity. To do otherwise would be presumptuous. Even so, while the Gospel was spreading into the nations, the apostles in Jerusalem were engaged in Jewish life and worship, with the Temple still in view (Acts 21:17-25); and as the Gospel spread among Gentiles in the Roman Empire, it also penetrated the Jewish Diaspora, as Luke indicated, largely by the efforts of Paul.

Paul's usual practice was to go to the Jew first and then to the Gentile. Although several of the apostles would

minister among Gentile populations, for Paul, this would become his primary mission field. As he explains in Galatians, to Peter was given the ministry of the Gospel to the circumcision, while he received the ministry of the Gospel among the Gentiles (Gal. 2:7-8). He proclaimed a message of Messiah that was accessible to Jews who expected Him (Acts 28:24), while clear and approachable enough for Gentiles who needed to hear it (Acts 13:48). Paul was not ashamed of the message entrusted to him, as he wrote, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Ro. 1:16).

Strangers No More

The prophets envisioned a time when the nations would seek the Lord in Jerusalem, and ten men “from every language of the nations” would take hold of the fringes, */תצטצית*, of a Jewish man and say, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you” (Zech. 8:21-23). Of interest here is that ten men take hold of the fringes of *the* Jewish man’s garment. The command for fringes, */תצטצית*, is found in Numbers 15:37-41. It is commanded following the testimony of the ten spies (Num. 13:26-29, 31-33) who emphasized the obstacles of entering the Promised Land over the promises of God, thus leading the nation into a forty year judgment of wandering in the wilderness. Ten men of the nations take hold of the promises of God, when ten men of Israel denied his promise with its fruit in their hands (Num. 13:23).

/תצטצית are an affixed reminder on the garment of a Jew of all that the Lord has commanded, and promised, his covenant people, so that His people will remember, and do His commandments. In Zechariah, those from the nations take hold of the fringes, and therein the remembrance of His commandments. */תצטצית* is from the root */צצץ* meaning blossom. Tzitzit, while translated as fringes, can be rendered blossoms as well, as a picture to understand the maturation of His promises in covenant life. */תצטצית*, as a remembrance of His commands, are as blossoms or potential fruit in the lives of the faithful that ripen by faith-obedience. The

fringes served as reminders of the fruit of God’s Word when mediated on, and applied (Ps. 1:2-3). Jesus, as a faithful Jew wore fringes, and people reached out and touched them for healing (Matt. 9:20-21; 14:35-36), fulfilling the promise of Malachi that the “Servant of righteousness will arise with healing in His wings” (Mal. 4:2). The word translated wings, */כנף* *kanaph*, can also be translated corner, to which the fringes, */תצטצית*, were affixed. How did the Gentile men “hear” the Lord was with the Jewish people? The fruit of his presence.

The indication that the time for the Gentiles to be included in the redemptive plan of God was revealed by Jesus himself. While he ministered on earth, Jesus focused primarily on the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:5-6; 15:24), as one might expect; even as Gentile God-fearers were already involved in the story of Israel. Yet, after his resurrection, He directs His apostles to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). This, as we note in the lives of Peter and Paul, did not discontinue the messianic mission to the Jewish people, it extended the mission to the nations fulfilling prophetic vision (Zech. 8:21-23; cf. Isa. 56:7), while also provoking Jews to jealousy (Ro. 11:11; cf. Matt. 21:33-43) with ripening righteous fruit (Matt. 21:43) from the */תצטצית* they took hold of (I Jn. 5:2-3), fruit indicative of covenant relationship with God through Messiah; fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).

Destination: Jerusalem

The Gospel is still reaching to the ends of the earth, with yet unreached people groups in some of the most remote places on the planet. Even while the great commission continues to unfold, there is a redirection happening. The Gospel that went out to the Gentiles, is now reaching not only the Jewish Diaspora, but also the modern nation of Israel, even the streets of Jerusalem. As Messiah said, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself” (Jn. 12:32). Why all peoples? Once again, the promise given to Abraham as we have previously considered. This drawing is not only for people adopted from among

the nations, but also, as Paul writes, “my brothers after the flesh” (Ro. 9:3). Paul’s desire and prayer for Israel is her salvation (Ro. 10:1). As the Gospel has gone out in power, so it will return to the streets of Jerusalem in power. Why? It is the very place where the Messiah will once again set His feet: “Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father’s name written on their foreheads” (Rev. 14:1). And as the angels told the disciples on the Mount of Olives, He would return in the same way that they saw Him depart (Acts 1:10-12). There will be, however, a remnant faithful in Jerusalem to welcome Him.

The testimony of Scripture is that the Lord will save His remnant people. The Word of God has not failed, neither will it fail. The view of the final in-gathering of Revelation 7:9 assures us that His salvation by grace through faith in Messiah Yeshua/Jesus is still active, effective and working among the Jewish people. To Jerusalem, */ירושלים*, the city of peace that has never known peace, the Prince of Peace will come to establish an everlasting peace. The mission started in Jerusalem, and it will return to Jerusalem: the mission of His Good News. You are part of the enduring hope being announced to Jew and Gentile alike.

For nearly two millennia, many of the prophetic words regarding Israel seemed unlikely to be fulfilled. How, and why would Jesus return to a land the Jewish people are exiled from? May 14, 1948 was a date of seismic shifts in theological and political expectations, when Israel became a nation state once again. The Lord demonstrated faithfulness to His promise, even after so many generations. May we never forget that Israel is “beloved for the sake of the fathers.”

Rabbi Justin D. Elwell,
Th.D.

Messiah
Congregation

themountain-mensch.com





"He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of
John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes,
Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him,
"Tend my sheep."

John 21:16

R e s t o r a t i o n F e l l o w s h i p I n t e r n a t i o n a l