



INSIDE

- A Letter From the Editor
- The Forecast
- Parables and Prophecy
- Questions & Answers
- Parabolic Imagery

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Where Are Jesus' Disciples?

When Jesus gave His disciples the Great Commission, He commanded them to continue His work by saying:

*"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and **make disciples** of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, **teaching** them to observe all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*
(Matthew 28:18b–20)

On another occasion, He told them:

*"Go into all the world and **preach the gospel** to all creation. He who*

has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned."
(Mark 16:15b–16)

These are not two variant accounts of the same event. Jesus issued the first statement, the Great Commission, on the side of a mountain somewhere along the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. By contrast, He made the second statement, reported by Mark, just before His ascension from the Mount of Olives to the east of Jerusalem.

The distinction between the two commands is crucial. While the Church has managed to "preach the gospel" and thus accomplish the task Jesus ordered

as related by Mark, it has failed miserably in accomplishing the Great Commission. To understand how, one must first understand what Jesus said.

The Great Commission contains two key terms, without which one cannot fully appreciate how far short the Church has fallen in its fulfillment of its charter. Those two terms—*disciples* and *teaching*—speak volumes to anyone who would dare to question the Church's unfounded assumption that all is well. These terms describe how Jesus Christ expected the Church to perpetuate the message He proclaimed.

Jesus intended that a qualified "Teacher" should "make disciples" and "teach" them *The Teaching* He had taught His Own "disciples." These new disciples were then expected to eagerly study His *Teaching* until they were qualified to teach it to other disciples.

Jesus desired the Church to be an unbroken chain of Teachers and disciples stretching all the way from His Own day until the time of His Return. But it hasn't happened that way.

Don't be deceived. If the history of the Church reveals nothing else, it clearly stands as mute testimony to the fact that *The Teaching of Jesus* was lost somewhere along the way. If not, why was it necessary for Martin Luther to recover and publish the most basic of all doctrines—Salvation by Faith—thus inciting the Protestant Reformation? (See "The Authority of Scripture," *The Voice of Elijah*, January 1991.)

The Mystery of Scripture

Apocalyptic Beliefs and the End of This Age

Toward the end of the Intertestamental Period, from about 200 B.C. to A.D. 70, many Jews readily acknowledged that the Old Testament contained a hidden message. They also actively sought insight into what they realized had long since become lost information.

These Jews viewed the events that shaped their world as ushering in the time foretold by the Prophets when God would restore the Kingdom of Israel and the Messiah would judge the Gentiles. This era produced the distinctive Jewish apocalyptic literature as well as the Dead Sea Scrolls—a body of literature that purports to unlock *The Mystery of Scripture* and reveal its *meaning* to the "faithful ones" who awaited the Messiah's arrival.

See Mystery of Scripture on Page 11

See Disciples? on Page 4

NEXT ISSUE

- The Mystery of Scripture
- Parables and Prophecy
- The Forecast
- Questions & Answers



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M. H. Clay,
Executive Editor

Sara Brooks,
Editor

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Letters to the Editor

A Letter From the Editor

It has been my distinct pleasure to serve as Managing Editor of this unique newsletter during the publication of its first three issues. After over ten years with The Elijah Project,

I'm still amazed when some new part of the Old Testament message comes into focus. I should be used to it by now. I've seen it happen over and over again these last few years. And now you, the Charter Subscribers to *The Voice of Elijah*, have been witnesses to one such event.

You have seen The Elijah Project venture into completely uncharted waters in an effort to share with others the exciting things we believe God is about in these Last Days. We have lauded this newsletter to convey to you our interpretation of those Scriptures most necessary for you to understand when, almost overnight, today's biblical prophecy becomes tomorrow's fast-breaking news events.

This is, for all of us here, a step of faith. But it is also a labor of love. We have, in the past, seen detailed interpretations of some of Jesus' parables literally fall into place before our eyes. It happened each time The Elijah Project came to understand some new facet of the intricately detailed message concerning Jesus Christ that lies hidden in the Old Testament Scriptures. That message revolves around phrases like "the House of Israel," "the Name of the Lord," "the Seed of David," "the Root of Jesse," and various other of the Prophets' *parabolic images* and idioms that Jesus used again and again in His Own *Teaching*.

In the "Parables and Prophecy" column of this issue, we have put together for you yet another example of how the Prophets used *parabolic imagery* to explain Jesus' purpose here on Earth. I believe you will find the explanation well worth extra study. But what we call "*The Teaching*" has served to explain for me much more than just the parables of Jesus. It has also increased my understanding of *parabolic images* found throughout the Scriptures. That's why I'm so eager to share it with you.

If you will take the time to fully understand the few simple principles on which the Scriptural interpretation of The Elijah Project is based, you too will see Scripture come alive in ways you would not have thought possible before. While you are not expected to decipher the words of the Prophets, you can readily see how they used the imagery and idioms of ancient cultures to weave the marvelous tapestry of God's message they concealed in their prophecies. Your anticipation of further insight cannot help but increase when you realize that, in their use of *parabolic imagery* and Hebrew idioms, the Prophets were making specific, detailed statements concerning God's plan of salvation in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Over the years I have scrutinized *The Teaching* continually, searching for some reason to say "it isn't so." I have found none. But I have also come to understand there is no possible way The Elijah Project could have ferreted out the simple, yet marvelously woven, message of the Old Testament were it not in God's plan. It just isn't possible. Scholars have tried for centuries and failed. But as Larry Harper, the head of The Elijah Project, has continually asserted, and as I believe, this is that to which God has called him, and God has provided the enabling. If such be the case, this newsletter is certainly a part of God's work in these Last Days. All the more reason for me to be zealous in my commitment and dedication to this, our labor on behalf of you, the Elect of God.

In the next issue we plan to include, for the first time, a "Letters to the Editor" column to respond to letters we have received from you, our subscribers. In subsequent issues we will try to answer your letters in this column. We would like you to

make this your newsletter as much as possible. I trust you will feel free to question the statements we make in these pages and communicate with us concerning those things you find to be most helpful, most confusing, most interesting, most controversial, etc.

Take just a moment now, if you will, to contemplate what I consider to be a validation of our work. I have listed below the quotes from the October and January issues that I believe serve to confirm the findings of The Elijah Project. These statements forecasted the events of the Gulf War that have occurred just as our understanding of Scripture had indicated they would. Most of you, as Charter Subscribers, were able to read about those events before the Gulf War even began.

In my interview with Larry for "Questions & Answers" in this issue, he *talked about* his distress concerning two other specific statements he made in those first two issues. He also expressed to me his dissatisfaction with the way he presented his interpretation of the Scriptural passages. For example, in one article he stated that Saddam Hussein would die "during the conflict" when the text does not necessarily demand that. He now realizes that "because of" would have been a more precise statement. But his concerns are, for the most part, just a matter of phrasing. In point of fact, the conflict is not even over, although the coalition has unilaterally ceased hostilities.

In those first two issues, we tried to show you how God spoke to the Prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah long ago to establish for these Last Days a *parabolic image* in the recent destruction of Iraq and the coming death of Saddam Hussein, an image He intends to use to speak to the Elect of God. To dramatically demonstrate that fact, we informed you of the events before they occurred. Even today, the benefit of hindsight has not changed the basic thrust of our essential message. It does little more than say we should have changed a few statements. To my mind, we have, to this point, accomplished exactly what we set out to accomplish.

Take a look at the following quotes from the first two issues. I consider them to be graphic illustration that The Elijah Project's detailed understanding of the Old Testament message provides an even greater understanding of how God is working in these Last Days. Keep in mind the fact that the statements from the October 1990 issue were written sometime last August or early September. They were based solely on our interpretation of the Old Testament text and on the greater understanding that God intends to use the destruction of Iraq as a *parabolic image* in these Last Days:

"Will Saddam Hussein back down or will there be war? There will be war. Moreover, the entire political, economic, military and technological infrastructure of Iraq are going to be completely devastated by a massive military bombardment..." (October 1990, p. 5)

"We are headed into the most incredibly violent war the

world has ever seen." (January 1991, p. 14)

"We are going to see it in our own homes, on our own television sets." (October 1990, p. 1)

"His [Hussein's] mistake? He has threatened military action against the nation of Israel and, in the foreknowledge of God, will carry out those threats." (October 1990, p. 12)

"God's vengeance requires the destruction of Iraq because of its attack on the modern nation of Israel." (October 1990, p. 4)

"When that coalition finally engages in full-scale assault against Iraq, the majority of its strength will be supplied by those nations located to the 'north' of Iraq (latitudinally) —the United States, Great Britain, and France." (October 1990, p. 5)

This attack will be the result "of yet another specific United Nations' resolution authorizing military force against Iraq." (October 1990, p. 4)

"The destruction of Iraq will be unimaginable even by modern standards, with entire areas destroyed by fire." (October 1990, p. 4)

"Whatever the devastation [of Iraq] proves to be, it will be tremendous." (October 1990, p., 6)

"The disruption of Iraqi communications ... the Iraqis are reduced to sending messengers because communications can't get through any other way." (January 1991, p. 14)

"The Iraqi military establishment will be reduced to nothing more than confused, isolated groups of individuals too afraid to come out of their bunkers." (October 1990, p. 4)

"The casualties on the Iraqi side most likely will run well into the hundreds of thousands." (October 1990, p. 6)

"The burden created on neighboring countries [from the escaping refugees] may well destabilize the entire region and create problems for years to come." (October 1990, p. 5)

"Iraq will be made to relinquish control of Kuwait." (October 1990, p. 4)

"Having endured the most massive airstrikes the world has known since the blitzkriegs of World War II, the Iraqi people will be forced to watch while their reparations help rebuild Kuwait and their own country lies in rubble." (October 1990, p. 7)

"This awesome tragedy could have been avoided but for this one man's failure to acknowledge a fatal miscalculation and back away from his arrogance when confronted by the rest of the world." (October 1990, p. 3)

I believe the statements speak for themselves. Let me know what you think. ■

Michael A. Long

Disciples?

From page 1

The Rabbi

The authors of the four Gospels confirm that Jesus was widely recognized as a "Rabbi." Those who addressed Him as such were varied: His disciples (Jn. 4:31; 6:25; 9:2; 11:8); Peter (Mk. 9:5; 11:21); Nathanael (Jn. 1:49); Mary (Jn. 20:16); the disciples of John (Jn. 1:38; 3:26); and Judas (Matt. 26:25, 49; Mk. 14:45).

If you add to that number those who reportedly used the Greek term for Rabbi instead of the Hebrew term, the scribes and Pharisees, tax-gatherers and other members of the public at large also recognized Jesus as a Rabbi (Matt. 8:19; 9:11; Mk. 10:17, 12:14; Lk. 3:12). Even Nicodemus, who was a Rabbi himself, addressed Jesus as "Rabbi" on one occasion (Jn. 3:2). But what exactly does that title tell us about Jesus' commission to the Apostles?

Rabbi is a Hebrew/Aramaic term which generally means "teacher," as John states in his Gospel (Jn. 1:38). But to leave it at that would be misleading. A "Rabbi" was not a teacher in the modern sense of the word. The Rabbi sought to recreate himself in each of his "learners"—which is the actual meaning of the term *disciple*.

Disciples followed their Rabbi for the specific purpose of learning his teaching. But they also sought to "imitate" (another key term) the lifestyle of the Rabbi under whom they studied. As Jesus said, the highest aspiration of the disciple was to become like his teacher:

"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master."
(Matthew 10:24–25a)

"A disciple is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher."
(Luke 6:40–41)

The teacher/disciple relationship that provided the basis for the practices of the Jewish Rabbis of Jesus' time actually originated with the philosophers of ancient Greece. Homer was considered by the Greek philosophers to be the "teacher of all Greece." Socrates, who came many centuries later, was called Homer's greatest "disciple," revealing that one need not learn directly from the teacher to become his disciple.

Socrates, however, disdained the application of the terms "teacher" and "disciple" to the relationship he had with his own students. He refused to apply the term "teaching" to his own dogma, although others did so because they could not accurately determine what he was about.

Socrates sought to institute a new order. He desired to develop in his students a commitment to the subject taught without the corresponding commitment to himself as their teacher. His methods

***"By the time of
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were ultimately to survive as the basis for the modern teacher/pupil relationship. But they have little in common with the normal teacher/disciple relationship of that time.

As you can see from Socrates' aversion to the label, the ancient teacher was more than a source of knowledge, he was also a model after whom the disciple patterned his life. And although Socrates found in Plato and Aristotle some rather famous advocates of his new practice, the older teacher/disciple relationship continued unabated in many circles in ancient Greece.

Sometime before the birth of Jesus, the Jewish Pharisees adopted the older Greek relationship of the teacher/disciple as a way to defend the Jewish religion

against the encroachment of secular Greek philosophy. It was a "fight-fire-with-fire" tactic. They adopted the practice of the very philosophers whose teaching they feared. The result was, by the time of Christ, the teacher/disciple relationship was a well-established part of Judaism.

The "scribes" mentioned in the New Testament Gospels were the Rabbis, drawing their disciples from the larger group, the Pharisees. But the scribes and Pharisees considered themselves to be disciples of Moses, whose *Teaching* they claimed to be perpetuating. As they said to the blind man who had been healed by Jesus,

"You are His disciple; but we are disciples of Moses."
(John 9:28b)

Eventually, the teaching of the Jewish Rabbis came to be written down in the Jewish Rabbinic literature—the Mishnah, the Tosephta, the Talmud, and the midrashim. Together, these writings form the basis for modern Judaism.

Many in Christianity today are enamored by what they find in Rabbinic literature; and they borrow from it just because of its Jewishness. They are apparently unaware that Judaism is at its very core still the religion Jesus vehemently attacked for its legalistic adherence to false doctrine. He saw in it a clear-cut case of the blind leading the blind (Matt. 15:14). It was—and still is—a religion based on the "precepts of men" as Jesus told the Pharisees when they challenged His *Teaching*:

"You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS THEIR DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'"
(Matthew 15:7–9)

In stark contrast to the Jewish Rabbis, who emphasized a strict adherence to a misinterpretation of Moses, Jesus taught a new *Teaching*, a *Teaching* unlike anything the scribes taught:

When Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at His teaching; for **He was teaching them as {one} having authority and not as their scribes.**

(Matthew 7:28b–29)

And they were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, **“What is this? A new teaching with authority!”**

(Mark 1:27a)

The Teaching

Unfortunately, Christian theology is no longer based on *The Teaching of Jesus*. It is based, in the main, on the Epistles of Paul and, to a lesser degree, on the other New Testament writings. It finds little to anchor it in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Many theologians who are intellectually honest enough to acknowledge these self-evident facts even speak of what appears to them to be a basic con-

tradition between *The Teaching* of Paul and that of Jesus, as though Paul sought to establish his own religion. Others con-

“Jesus was widely recognized as a ‘Rabbi.’”

trast the two Testaments, claiming the Old Testament pertains to the age of “law” and the New Testament to that of “grace,” thereby diminishing the need for Christians to fully understand the Old Testament message. But they do that only because they don’t understand the prophetic message from which Jesus drew His parables.

For whatever reason, modern Christianity does not view the parables found in the Gospels as a repository of *The Teaching of Jesus*. They see instead a compendium of pithy sayings from which to extract moral lessons. His parables have become, to many a pulpit pioneer, nothing more than a convenient

dropping off point from which to break new moral ground. Nothing could be further from the Truth.

The parables of Jesus are the very heart of His *Teaching*—*The Teaching* He taught His disciples and commanded them to *hand down* to others. Matthew and Mark both state clearly that Jesus taught multitudes throughout the length and breadth of the land of Palestine. They agree that he spoke openly to these people—openly, but in parables (Matt. 13:34; Mk. 4:33–34).

The Gospel writers also tell us that Jesus’ parables needed further explanation, and that He provided that explanation only to His disciples (Matt. 13:36; Mk. 4:34). I have discussed the implications of that fact elsewhere. (See “Jesus Talks About the Mystery,” *The Voice of Elijah*, January 1991.)

In conspicuous contrast to the neglect they receive today, however, Jesus considered His parables to be a veritable treasure trove of information. After completing a lengthy explanation of His parables, Jesus asked His disciples:

“Have you understood all these things?” They said to Him, “Yes.” And He said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a house who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old.”

(Matthew 13:51–52)

The expectation of every Rabbi in Jesus’ time was that his disciples would not only learn what he taught, but that they would also teach it to others exactly as he had taught them. Jesus taught His followers, however, that they were not to follow the pattern set by the scribes. That is, they were not to seek disciples for themselves to gratify their own ego:

“The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; because they say, and don’t do. ... But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylac-

Parables and Prophecy

The Image of the King as a Tree

In His parables, Jesus continually used the *parabolic images* and Hebrew idioms He found in the prophetic message of the Old Testament—a message hidden there in the wisdom of God to be used for His Own purposes in His Own good time. It is a detailed message concerning the mission of the Messiah here on the Earth.

Yet Jesus seldom mentioned the source of His *parabolic Teaching*. Thus the link between His parables and *The Mystery* of the Old Testament message has remained deliberately obscure. On one occasion, however, Jesus alluded to the specific prophetic text He had in mind:

He presented another parable to them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; and it is smaller than all seeds; but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants, and becomes a tree so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.”

(Matthew 13:31–33)

At this point we should set forth an axiom that holds true for all the parables of Jesus: Any time He mentions the “Kingdom of Heaven” or the “Kingdom

teries, and lengthen the tassels. And they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called by men, 'Rabbi.' But don't be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers." (Matthew 23:2-8)

"Paul realized ... The Teaching would be irreversibly contaminated."

Shortly before He ascended from the Mount of Olives, Jesus commanded His disciples to carry on His work by "preaching the Gospel." But He had previously outlined in the Great Commission the exact method they were to follow in *handing down* His Teaching.

Jesus expected His disciples to continue the teacher/disciple methodology He had used. They were to "make disciples," not disciples of their own, but disciples for Him—by "preaching the Gospel." They were, however, to "teach" these new disciples the things He had taught them, so that these new disciples, in turn, could master His Teaching and *hand it down* to others.

The New Testament indicates that, at first, the Early Church carried on the work as Jesus intended. But it also reveals that the process was already in serious peril even before the Apostles died.

The Revelation

Jesus equipped the Apostles for the task ahead of them by supernaturally revealing the message of the Old Testament to them before He ascended. (See "Jesus Talks About The Mystery," *The Voice of Elijah*, January 1991.) Luke relates how Jesus, after His resurrection, appeared to some of His disciples and:

explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.
(Luke 24:27b)

But the Apostles' understanding of the Old Testament message did not come from this explanation. It was a result of the fact that, some time later, Jesus:

opened their mind to understand the Scriptures.
(Luke 24:45b)

After receiving the complement of the enabling power of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the Apostles immediately went forth among the people, teaching the message of the Old Testament that they clearly understood (Acts 2:14 ff.). This clarity of understanding stands in direct contrast to the fact that, before the resurrection:

as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.
(John 20:9b)

In the Book of Acts, Luke repeatedly emphasized what was for him the essential ingredient in the life of the newborn Church. That ingredient was the Apostles' Teaching:

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.
(Acts 2:42)

In these first days of the Church, the focus of its leaders was clear. They set out to "make disciples" and teach. They were so effective that the Jewish religious leaders became concerned:

because they were teaching the people and proclaiming concerning Jesus the resurrection from the dead. (Acts 4:2b)

So these religious leaders summoned them and:

commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.
(Acts 4:18)

But after receiving a direct order from the messenger of the Lord who released them from prison, they went back to the Temple and "began to teach" (Acts 5:21).

Luke was careful to distinguish between "teaching" and "preaching" in the Book of Acts (Acts 5:42). Both he and Matthew did so in their Gospels as well (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 11:1; Lk. 20:1). Both of them understood the clear delineation between the two activities.

The role of the Teacher in the Early Church was intended to continue the teacher/disciple tradition. But *The Teaching* also provided the platform from which the Apostles preached the Good News of salvation to make new disciples. Without *The Teaching* there could be no preaching.

The Teaching of the Apostles was nothing more than a presentation of the hidden message of the Old Testament. Their preaching built on that foundation and included the call to believe the message of salvation.

The Church retains in the New Testament a mere scrap of the original Teaching that Jesus revealed to His Apostles. But that message is not fully

"Jesus had more than just twelve disciples."

understood today. Scholars are at a loss to adequately explain even the few statements of the Apostles that Luke included in the Book of Acts.

But on the basis of the small shred of Truth that God ensured would remain available, preaching of the Gospel has continued down through the centuries. It continues still. And God still honors the response of those few who answer the call to repent with an honest heart, seeking to know the Truth of *The Teaching*.

The Disciples

Like all Rabbis of His time, Jesus gathered around Himself numerous disciples to whom He taught His Teaching. But contrary to popular belief, Jesus had more than just twelve disciples. "The twelve," as these select few were often called (Matt. 26:14, 20, 47; Mk. 6:7;

9:35; Lk. 8:1; 9:12), were simply twelve of His disciples whom He also selected to be *Apostolos*, a Greek term which means “one sent” for a specific purpose (Mk. 3:13–19; Lk. 6:12–16).

In actual fact, the biblical text says that Jesus had “a multitude of disciples” (Lk. 19:37). Joseph of Arimathea was His disciple (Jn. 19:38), and possibly Nicodemus as well (Jn. 3:2; 19:39). It was from some one hundred and twenty of these other disciples (whom Peter calls “the Brethren”) that the leaders of the Early Church chose an individual to replace Judas as Apostle after he committed suicide.

The Early Church had many designations for themselves: “Brethren” (Acts 1:15), “Believers” (Acts 5:14), “Christians” (Acts 11:26), “the Church” (Acts 8:1) and those “of the Way” (Acts 9:2), to list a few. But the most telling of the lot is the term “disciples” (Acts 6:1, 7; 9:10, 25, 26).

The use of this one term removes any shadow of doubt concerning what the Early Church leaders were about. They were definitely following the teacher/disciple pattern just as Jesus had commanded. And in accord with His desires, the Apostles were not acting in the tradition of the Rabbis, “making disciples” *for themselves*. These new disciples were considered to be “disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1).

Like the other Apostles, Paul also *received* what he taught by revelation from Jesus Christ:

But I make known to you, brothers, (as to the Good News proclaimed by me) that it isn't in accordance with men, because I didn't receive it from a man; nor was I taught, except through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

(Galatians 1:11–12)—my translation

Paul emphasized in a letter to the Corinthians that he was careful to teach only what he had “*received*,” and that his *Teaching* was “according to the Scriptures”:

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to

you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

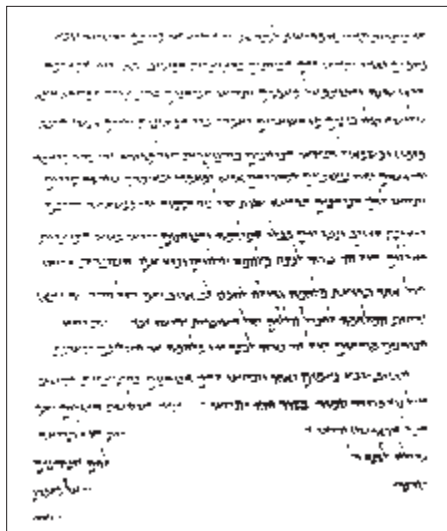
(1 Corinthians 15:1–4)

Paul also encouraged the Early Church to accept *The Teaching* just as it had been *delivered* to them:

So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.

(2 Thessalonians 2:15)

Paul repeatedly urged Timothy, who was one of his “disciples,” to teach other disciples what he had been taught and to avoid anyone who wanted to change *The Teaching*:



A Dead Sea Scroll fragment from the caves at Qumran. The Essenes who lived at Qumran had many beliefs in common with the Early Church, beliefs that were held by many other Jewish sects before the Birth of Christ. But like the Pharisees, the tradition of the Essenes prevented them from recognizing the Messiah when He came. God has always confounded the expectations of the masses. Is He intending to do the same thing again? Most likely.

Prescribe and teach these things.
(1 Timothy 4:11)

Teach and prescribe these principles. If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, ...

(1 Timothy 6:2b–4a)

Paul also commanded Timothy to carry on the same teacher/disciple tradition he had established with him:

And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

(2 Timothy 2:2)

Paul encouraged another disciple, Titus, by reminding him that the currency of false teaching already in the Church demanded that the leader of each local church must be one who holds fast:

the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach, for the sake of sordid gain.

(Titus 1:9b–11)

As is obvious in his warning to Titus, there were already, in Paul’s own day, false teachers in the Church who were teaching self-serving doctrines designed to gratify their own ego.

Paul realized toward the end of his life that *The Teaching of Jesus* would be irreversibly contaminated by the presence of individuals in the Church who wanted to be recognized as “Rabbis.” He wrote to Timothy:

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. (2 Timothy 4:3–4)

Over time, the teaching of these false teachers (2 Pet. 2:1) was bound to

“Jesus never intended the Scriptures to be interpreted. He intended them to be explained.”

mix with *The Teaching of Jesus* until confusion obscured the Truth. Accordingly, Paul warned the elders of the Ephesian church concerning what would soon happen in their own little band of Believers:

“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.” (Acts 20:28–30)

It happened just as Paul had warned it would. By A.D. 95, just sixty-two years after the crucifixion of Jesus, St. Clement of Rome wrote a letter to the Corinthians because:

*“a feud had broken out in the Church at Corinth. Presbyters appointed by Apostles, or their immediate successors, had been unlawfully deposed. A spirit of insubordination was rife.” (J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, p.11)*

In his letter, Clement’s argument for the legitimacy of the presbyters was

the fact that they had received “the Word of God” from the Apostles:

“The Apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ was sent from God. So then Christ is from God, and the Apostles are from Christ. Both therefore came of the will of God in the appointed order. Having therefore received a charge, and having been fully assured through the res-

urrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and confirmed in the word of God with full assurance of the Holy Ghost, they went forth with the glad tidings that the kingdom of God should come. So preaching everywhere in country and town, they appointed their first-fruits, when they had proved them by the Spirit to be bishops and deacons unto them that should believe.” (Lightfoot, p.31)

The efforts of legitimate Early Church leaders failed to keep impostors from adulterating *The Teaching of Jesus*. Less than a century after the death of Jesus Christ, it mattered little from whom one received teaching. By A.D. 200, it was no longer a matter of *handing down The Teaching* the Apostles had received from the Greatest Teacher of all time. The “learned” theologians of the Church had already decided they could find that *Teaching* for themselves; and they were busy arguing about the “right” way to interpret the Old Testament Scriptures. How little they knew.

Jesus never intended the Scriptures to be interpreted. He intended them to be explained—to be taught by a disciple who had been taught by a disciple who had been taught by a disciple, etc. Peter said this clearly:

But know this first of all, that no prophecy is a matter of one’s own

interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies. (2 Peter 1:20–2:1a)

The Church was supposed to have been nourished by a continuous chain of qualified Teachers who all taught *The Teaching of Jesus Christ*. It has not been so. That *Teaching* was lost within the first one hundred years.

Where once there was only one *Teaching*, what the Gospel writers call “His *Teaching*” (Matt. 7:28; Mk. 1:22; Lk. 4:32; Jn. 18:19), and Paul calls “*The Teaching*” (Tit. 1:9), now every pastor and lay person alike fabricates his own “teaching.” And not one of them agrees with the other.

That’s not surprising. The ruler of this realm is the father of lies and the father of liars. A liar lies to introduce confusion, so that the Truth cannot be discovered. If confusion reigns in the Church today, it is so because the Liar has been at work.

So where are Jesus’ disciples? If what you have read above is true, we now stand at the End of the Age, a Church without hope of ever being that Church “without spot or blemish” (Eph. 5:27) that Christ envisioned for His Own. Or do we?

Jesus said His *Teaching* had one very special quality that set it apart from the teaching of all other “Rabbis.” That characteristic alone will accomplish what God desires in these Last Days. Jesus said:

“My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself.” (John 7:16–17)

Let the one who has ears to hear pay close attention to what the Spirit is saying. ■



Cloudy: The “clouds of (nuclear) glory” in which Jesus will return have been on the horizon for almost fifty years, ever since the Manhattan Project produced the atomic bomb. Nuclear weapons stockpiles have the potential to destroy the world’s population many times over. At present, control of the Soviet Union’s vast capabilities hangs in a precarious balance between conservative hardliners and liberal pro-democracy advocates. This leaves the world a much more dangerous place than just two years ago when the Cold War held the status quo firmly in place.

You can expect military crackdowns and civil unrest in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe to add to and perpetuate the current instability. But don’t conclude that the image of Mystery Babylon’s destruction by fire points to a nuclear war. Current nuclear fusion research may well open a Pandora’s box, starting something it cannot contain. Peter certainly seems to have had something more cataclysmic than nuclear war in mind when he wrote the following:

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

(2 Peter 3:10)

Windy: The word translated “spirit” in both the Hebrew and Greek languages is “wind.” In countless biblical passages the Prophets used wind as a *parabolic image* to speak *parabolically* of the beings that inhabit the “spirit” world. Jesus was referring to the Prophets’ use of that *parabolic image* when He spoke to Nicodemus:

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is every one who is born of the Spirit.”

(John 3:6–8)

As we have moved into the final hours of this realm, these “powers and authorities” (Eph. 6:12) realize their time is limited. You have already seen evidence that their activi-

ties have increased exponentially in the past two decades. You can expect individual violence and the other acts of despicable degeneracy that they incite to continue relentless growth. Within a few years not many will venture out after dark because it will not be safe. Civil authority will likely break down further and perhaps even give way to military patrols in some U.S. cities. Another of their creations, war, is with us for the duration now. Peace has already been taken from the Earth. The only question is how widespread war will become.

Isolated Showers: The *parabolic image* of rain portrays rain as the source of “water” for the *parabolic* “plants” God has “planted” in His “garden.” Paul was using the *parabolic image* when he stated:

I planted, Apollo watered, but God caused the growth.

(1 Corinthians 3:6) —my translation

The reality to which the *parabolic image* of the “rain” points is the knowledge of Truth that God provides the plants in His “vineyard.” You can expect the “rain” to continue and become heavier as the Day of the Lord approaches.

Habakkuk came the closest of any of the Prophets to stating the *parabolic equivalency* of the *parabolic image* and thus revealing its *meaning*:

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

(Habakkuk 2:14)

Joel used the *parabolic image* and combined it with a word-play on the similar sounding Hebrew words for “teacher” and “rain” in the following:

So rejoice, O sons of Zion,

And be glad in the Lord your God;

For He has given you

the Teacher *for righteousness,*

And He has poured down for you the rain,

The early and latter rain *as before.*

(Joel 2:23)

Peter understood that *The Teaching* Jesus revealed to the Early Church Apostles was the “early rain” of Joel’s prophecy (Acts 2:14–21). But James, knowing that the “early rain” had already come, indicated that the “latter rain” would also come in due time before the Coming of the Lord:

Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

(James 5:7–8)

Storm Watch in Effect: The Prophet Jeremiah saw the *parabolic image* of “the Storm” that pertains to our own day clearly. He sarcastically denounced those who would today proclaim an “easy believe-ism” based on the unconditional love of God and with no knowledge whatsoever of “the Storm clouds” gathering:

*Thus says the Lord of Hosts,
“Do not listen to the words of the prophets
who are prophesying to you.
They are leading you into futility;
They speak a vision of their own imagination,
Not from the mouth of the Lord.
They keep saying to those who despise Me,
‘The Lord has said, “You will have peace”’;
And as for everyone who walks
in the stubbornness of his own heart, They say,
‘Calamity will not come upon you.’
But who has stood in the council of the Lord,
That he should see and hear His word?
Who has given heed to His word and listened?
‘Behold, the storm of the Lord
has gone forth in wrath,
Even a whirling tempest;
It will swirl down on the head of the wicked.
The anger of the Lord will not turn back
Until He has performed and
carried out the purposes of His heart;
In the last days
you will clearly understand it.
I did not send prophets,
But they ran.
I did not speak to them,
But they prophesied.
But if they had stood in My council,
Then they would have announced My words
to My people,
And would have turned them back
from their evil way
And from the evil of their deeds.”
(Jeremiah 23:16–22)*

From this passage the Apostle Paul derived his knowledge concerning the “false prophets” who would today be preaching “peace and safety” just before the Second Coming of the Lord. He thus reassured those who knew the Truth that the Day of the Lord would not come upon them without warning:

Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, “Peace and safety!” then destruction will come upon

them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief.

(1 Thessalonians 5:1–4)

Paul knew the plan of God was to provide insight to the Elect of God at the End of the Age. As Jeremiah had said, “**In the last days you will clearly understand it.**” Jeremiah emphasized the same point again, including the statement in a distinctly “New Covenant” context:

*Behold, the tempest of the Lord!
Wrath has gone forth,
A sweeping tempest;
It will burst on the head of the wicked.
The fierce anger of the Lord will not turn back,
Until He has performed, and
until He has accomplished
The intent of His heart;
In the latter days
you will understand this.
(Jeremiah 30:23–24)*

If, indeed, what you have read above is true, you can rest assured that the *parabolic* “latter rain” will accomplish its purpose. The Prophet Isaiah said it clearly:

*As heaven is higher than the earth, so
My ways are higher than your ways, and
My thoughts [are higher] than your thoughts.
Because just as the rain and the snow
will come down from heaven, and
it won’t return there until it:
saturates the earth, and
causes it to produce, and
gives seed for seeding, and
bread for eating;
Likewise shall be My Word
that will proceed from My mouth.
It won’t return to Me empty until:
it’s done what I’ve pleased, and
it’s successfully completed what I sent it for.
(Isaiah 55:9–11) —my translation*

Don’t be deceived. The *parabolic* “latter rain” has already begun. But be of good cheer; the “Redeemed of the Lord” have nothing to fear. Because:

*The rain falls on the Just,
And on the unjust fella.
But mainly on the Just,
Because the Unjust has the Just’s umbrella.
(Anonymous) ■*

Mystery of Scripture

From page 1

A Short History

To fully appreciate the impact that apocalyptic literature had on the Jews of the Intertestamental Period (ca. 400 B.C.–A.D. 70), one needs at least a general knowledge of the history of that period.

In 538 B.C., Cyrus, King of Persia, issued a decree that the captive Israelites could return from Babylonia to their homeland in Judah to rebuild the House of God (Ezra 1:1–3). Many captives returned and, by 516 B.C., the re-dedicated Temple had become, once more, the center of Jewish religious life.

But the following century saw the Jewish priesthood corrupted and individual devotion to God growing lax. By 400 B.C., prophetic activity had ceased altogether.

Over the next four centuries, Palestine was a battleground. In the fourth century B.C., the Greek armies of Alexander the Great overthrew the Persian Empire and, by 332 B.C., Alexander dominated the entire civilized world.

After Alexander’s death in 323 B.C., his generals divided his vast kingdom among themselves. In 301 B.C., Ptolemy I began ruling from Egypt, using

Palestine as his northern frontier. To the north in Syria, the Greek general Seleucus ruled as king over Asia.

Throughout the next century, the Jews were caught in the middle as the Seleucids battled the Ptolemies for control of Palestine. By 198 B.C., the Seleucids had finally gained the upper hand.

At first, the Jews had religious and political autonomy under the Seleucids. But when Antiochus IV Epiphanes came to power in 175 B.C., he quickly moved to restrict Jewish religious practices and to promote Hellenization—the adaptation of Greek culture—among the Jewish population.

Toward this end, he replaced the Jewish High Priest with a Hellenistic Jew and responded to Jewish resistance with persecution and open repudiation of their religion. His most infamous act was to sacrifice a pig on an altar to Zeus he had placed atop the Altar of Sacrifice in the Temple in Jerusalem.

Devout Jews saw these actions as apocalyptic events. This motivated militant Jews under the leadership of the priest Mattathias—who later became known as Judas Maccabeus, “the hammerer”—to revolt against Antiochus Epiphanes.

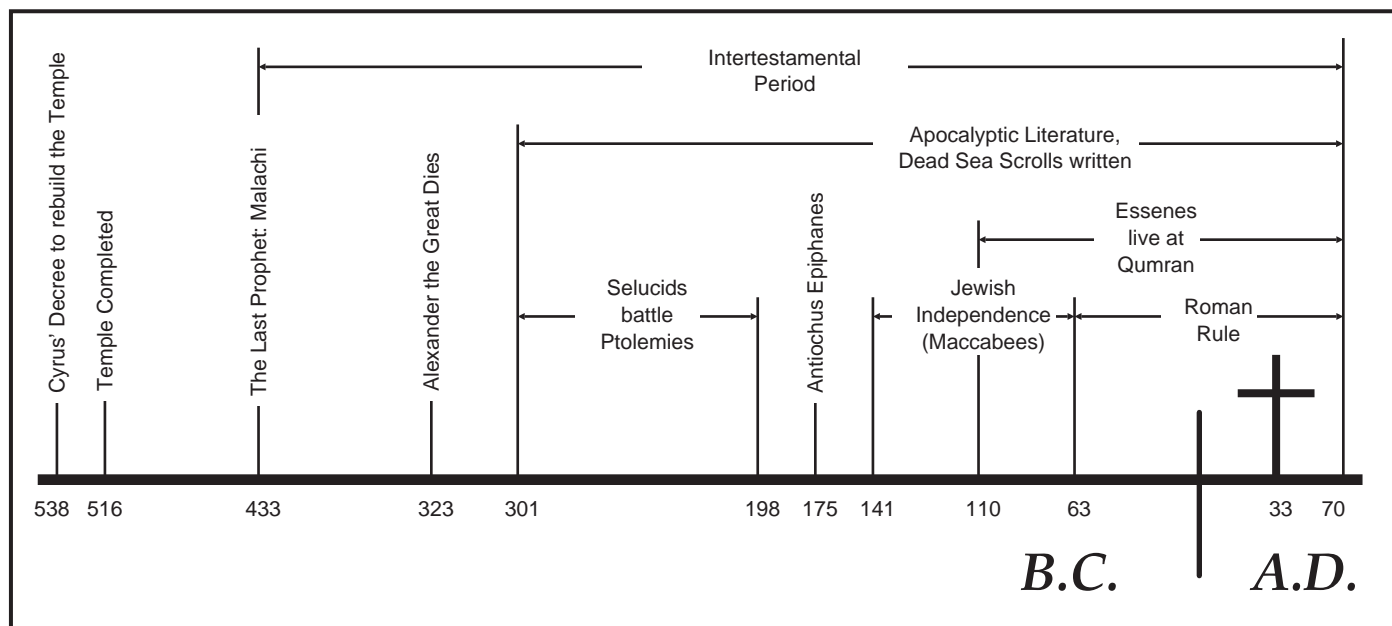
In 141 B.C. Judas established the Hasmonean dynasty, thus gaining autonomy for the Jews in Palestine. The last of the Hasmoneans, Alexander Jannaeus,

came to power in 104 B.C., and proclaimed himself to be both King and High Priest, contrary to the prescriptions of Scripture (1 Sam. 13:8–14). Consequently, the Pharisees denounced the move and civil war soon ensued. Although Jannaeus triumphed after nearly a decade, the war drew a bold line of difference between the Pharisees, who wanted an Israel faithful to the Law of God, and the Sadducees, who preferred a more tolerant approach to the world.

Hasmonean rule finally ended in 63 B.C. when Roman forces under Pompey entered the region. By 47 B.C., Rome had established the Herodian dynasty under guarantees of allegiance to Rome.

The Herods were to rule the Jews for over a century. The last of the Herods to reign in Judea, however, was Archelaus. He was the Herod who attempted to put the infant Jesus to death in Bethlehem (Matt. 2). Other Herods continued to rule over other territories in Palestine after that time, including the one who ruled Galilee at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus (Lk. 23:7–11).

By A.D. 7, however, Judea was under the control of Roman procurators, the most notable being Pontius Pilate (Matt. 27:1–24; Mk. 15:1–15; Lk. 23:1–25; Jn. 18:28–19:22). Roman procurators continued to govern Judea even after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But Jewish unrest gave way



to open rebellion in A.D. 66, and four years later the Romans destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem. With that event, all traces of Jewish independence came to an end.

Apocalyptic Literature

As you can see, the events of the Intertestamental Period (400 B.C. to A.D. 70) left Palestine in almost constant political and religious upheaval. To the devoutly religious Jews, events frequently appeared to fit patterns foretold by the Prophets. For example, the desecration of the Temple by Antiochus Epiphanes as mentioned above seemed to have been described by the Prophet Daniel (Dn. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11).

Many Jews of this era expected the Messiah to come immediately, thus vindicating the persecuted righteous in Israel. Firmly believing this to be so, they produced the Jewish apocalyptic literature in which they predicted that the end of the world and God's judgment on the nations would soon come.

The designation "apocalyptic" comes from the Greek term, *apokalupsis*, meaning "uncovered" or "revelation," because these works were intended to reveal God's plan for the End of the Age to the righteous while concealing it from the wicked. (See "Is Iraq Mystery Babylon?" *The Voice of Elijah*, January 1991.)

Obviously the authors of apocalyptic literature believed the Scriptures contained a *mystery*. If that were not so, they would not have sought to *reveal* its *meaning* through their apocalyptic writings.

Apocalyptic works were intentionally enigmatic, using language and symbolic images in much the same way as the Book of Daniel. To lend authority to their writings, the authors remained anonymous, frequently assigning authorship to persons mentioned in the Bible—for example, The Book of Enoch, The Apocalypse of Abraham, etc.

Because of its enigmatic character, an apocalyptic work required explanation by someone who already had insight into its *meaning*. Initially, this was probably the author. Recipients of the apocalyptic writer's explanation of *The Mystery of Scripture*, however, were expected to keep it secret from unbelievers while using it to prepare themselves for the coming judgment.

Scholars believe one of the first apocalyptic writings, The Book of Enoch, was written in the late third or early second century B.C. That would place it near the beginning of Seleucid rule over Palestine or possibly as late as the time of the Maccabean revolts. It may well have been a response to the outrageous acts committed by Antiochus Epiphanes.

Many also believe the Book of Enoch was written by four different authors; the first and third being contemporary with the Seleucid period, the fourth appearing near the end of the second century B.C., and the second in the first century B.C.

The first section of The Book of Enoch (Chapters 1–36), The Book of

Watchers, pretends to present the story of the "Sons of God" and the "Daughters of Men" from Genesis 6 in greater detail.

The errant "Sons of God" employed Enoch to plead their case before God after taking the "Daughters of Men" and making known to them the secrets of Heaven. Instead, Enoch became a witness of their coming judgment and denounced them.

Through this experience, Enoch came to understand the "secret things" and their *significance* to "far-off generations." He sought to convey them to the righteous through his book. Yet the book is filled with images having no obvious interpretation. In the beginning passages, Enoch describes:

a holy vision in the heavens, which the angels showed to me, and from them I heard everything, and I knew what I saw, but not for this generation, but for far-off generations which are to come.
(Chapter 1:2)

This passage also illustrates another characteristic of apocalyptic literature—the firm expectation of God's imminent return and the End of the Age.

The last division of the Book of Enoch (Chapters 85–90) is The Animal Apocalypse. It uses animals as symbols to depict End-Time events. The apocalyptic writer alludes to his belief that the *meaning* of the Scriptures was hidden (see Dan. 12). He also mentions a book that was sealed to be used later as End-Time events unfold:

And the book was read before the Lord of the sheep, and he took the book in his hand, and read it, and sealed it, and put it down.
(Chapter 69:71)

This same book was used in the judgment at the End of the Age:

and they took all the sealed books and opened those books before the Lord of the sheep.
(Chapter 90:20)

The Fourth Book of Ezra (2 Esdras), from the first century A.D.,



The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Woodcut by Albrecht Durer, 1497. Apocalyptic literature is characterized by the use of symbols to convey *meaning*. The four horsemen of Revelation 6 depicted above are typical apocalyptic symbols.

even better illustrates Jewish apocalyptic belief in the intentional sealing of Scripture's meaning. In one passage a messenger tells the author that Moses was told to conceal its meaning:

Then he said to me, "I revealed myself in a bush and spoke to Moses, when my people were in bondage in Egypt; and I sent him and led my people out of Egypt; and I led him up on Mount Sinai, where I kept him with me many days; and I told him many wondrous things, and showed him the secrets of the times and declared to him the end of the times. Then I commanded him, saying, 'These words you shall publish openly, and these you shall keep secret.'"

(2 Esdras 14:3-6)

In another, Esdras claims to have complete understanding of the mystery, but not the freedom to disclose everything:

and I will light in your heart [Esdras] the lamp of understanding, which shall not be put out until what you are about to write is finished. And when you have finished, some things you shall make public, and some you shall deliver in secret to the wise.

(2 Esdras 14:25, 26)

The following passages reflect the Jewish apocalyptic belief that, as Daniel 12 plainly says, God intends for some at the End of the Age to continue in their unrighteousness, without the knowledge of what He has planned:

behold, the days are coming when those who dwell on the earth shall be seized with great terror, and the way of truth shall be hidden, and the land shall be barren of faith.

(2 Esdras 5:1)

So also will be the judgment which I have promised; for I will rejoice over the few who shall be saved, because it is they who have made my glory to prevail now, and through them my

name has now been honored.
(2 Esdras 7:59-60)

The Dead Sea Scrolls

But the requirement that the initiate keep secret God's plan is attested not just in apocalyptic literature. The belief is best illustrated in the writings of the Essenes.

As civil war swept Palestine during the Maccabean era, many came to believe the travail would soon end. God would come to judge the unfaithful in Israel and vindicate those who had remained true to the Law of God. Among the most fervent believers were members of the Jewish religious sect called the Essenes.

The Essenes adhered to the requirements of the Law even more stringently than the Pharisees. The ancient Jewish historian, Josephus, described the oath an Essene proselyte took to gain entry into the community. The proselyte had to agree:

that he will neither conceal anything from those of his own sect, nor discover any of their doctrines to others, no, not though any one should compel him so to do at the hazard of his life.

(Josephus, Wars of the Jews, viii, 7)

"The Essenes firmly believed they would soon witness the End of the Age."

For centuries our only knowledge of this Jewish sect came from the works of Josephus and two other ancient historians, Philo and Pliny. But beginning in 1947, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in caves near Qumran brought to light a great body of literature now ascribed to the Essenes. These texts set forth the belief that secrecy concerning God's plan was essential.

One of the Dead Sea Scrolls discloses that the preferred behavior of a member included:

a modesty of behavior coupled with a general prudence and an ability to hide within oneself the secrets of what one knows.

(The Manual of Discipline, II — The Two Spirits in Man)

No one is to engage in discussion or disputation with men of ill repute; and in the company of forward men everyone is to abstain from talk about the meaning of the Law.

(The Manual of Discipline, III — The Rules of the Order)

The Essenes firmly believed they would soon witness the End of the Age. They considered knowledge of God's plan for the End Time to be essential if the Believer was to be prepared. This knowledge was not widely known, however, so they sought to conceal it from the uninitiated because:

this is the time when the way is being prepared in the wilderness; and it behooves them to understand what is happening. It is also the time when they must needs keep apart from all other men and not turn aside from the way through any form of perversity.

(Manual, III — Rules)

Another passage clearly reveals the Essene belief that the "hidden meaning" of the Scriptures would not be revealed to the wicked:

They pay no heed to the real hidden meaning of things, but divert themselves instead with all kinds of iniquitous arcane lore. They do not know the hidden meaning of what is actually taking place, nor have they ever understood the lessons of the past. Consequently, they have no knowledge of what is coming upon them and have done nothing to save their souls from the deeper implications of these events.

(The Coming Doom)

The Essenes believed only a remnant of faithful ones remained in Israel. Most had "gone astray" from the true

“Way.” Understanding of the actual meaning of the Scriptures was something God must reveal:

with the rest of them—that is, with those that held fast to His commandments—God ever made good this everlasting Covenant with Israel, revealing to them the hidden things concerning which Israel in general had gone astray.
(The Zadokite Document)

The Essenes, however, also believed that those who desired to be true to the Law of God must learn the Truth from someone sent by God. They believed God would send them a “Teacher of Righteousness” before the End of the Age:

all who give ear to him who imparts the true interpretation of the Law and who do not controvert the right ordinances when they hear them—all of these shall rejoice and their hearts shall be strong.
(The Zadokite Document)

Scholars contend that other Dead Sea Scrolls reveal the Essenes believed this “Teacher of Righteousness” had already come and that he had lead them to establish the Essene community at Qumran. A collection of hymns contain several that appear to be attributed to this individual. They too reflect the belief that insight into the meaning of Scripture was necessary to salvation:

Yet, Thou hast set me as a banner in the vanguard of Righteousness, as one who interprets with knowledge deep, mysterious things; as a touchstone for them that seek the truth, a standard for them that love correction.
(The Book of Hymns, II)

Behold, for mine own part, I have reached the inner vision, and through the spirit Thou hast placed within me, come to know Thee, my God. I have heard Thy wondrous secret, nor heard it amiss. Through Thy holy spirit, through Thy mystic insight, Thou

hast caused a spring of knowledge to well up within me.
(The Book of Hymns, XII)

Clearly, the Qumran community did not believe that superficial knowledge of the Old Testament was sufficient to prepare one to meet God in the judgment. But they also did not believe simply reading the Scriptures would yield insight into its mysteries. If God did not intervene, all would remain ignorant and there would be no understanding “for them that love correction.” That belief was probably inspired by the prophecy of Daniel. (See Daniel 12:8–10.)

The Essenes sought to live their lives in humility before God, using their knowledge of the Truth to accomplish that end. They saw no need to broadcast that knowledge. Any seeker of Truth could be admitted into their community if he willingly submitted his character to close scrutiny and sought total devotion to God. If he was

“Few today would even admit the possibility that the Hebrew Scriptures contain a hidden message.”

willing to submit to the teacher and “not controvert the right ordinances,” he was free to gain understanding from the teacher.

The principal characteristic of the Essene literature and other Jewish apocalyptic literature is its use of symbolic imagery to conceal meaning. These were Jews who believed God was to come soon to judge the unfaithful. But insight into His plan had been entrusted to only a few teachers of His choosing. These teachers imparted the meaning of the symbolic images to a faithful “remnant” of believers. Unbelievers were excluded from the circle of knowledge and were consigned to the judgment of God.

Summary

The survey above shows how, during the Intertestamental Period, apocalyptic writers increased Jewish expectations concerning the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on the Earth. It also illustrates the fact that, at the time of Jesus Christ, some of the Jews believed the meaning of Scripture was hidden. That is obviously a belief they derived from Daniel 12.

Although their interpretations of Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah proved incorrect, their understanding of the fact that the Scriptures contain a hidden meaning have not. Jesus Himself confirmed it in statements He made to His disciples. (See “Jesus Talks About the Mystery,” *The Voice of Elijah*, January 1991.)

As current events produce mounting evidence that the End of the Age is rapidly approaching, many are now expecting the Messiah to appear, just as many of the Jews did in Jesus’ time. But if God has indeed sealed the meaning of Hebrew Scriptures so that it might be understood now, in the “end time” mentioned by the Prophet Daniel (Dan. 12), there remains the distinct feasibility that few will be prepared when He comes (Matt. 25:1–13).

In direct contrast to its prevalence as a legitimate Jewish belief when Jesus first appeared, few today would even admit the possibility that the Hebrew Scriptures contain a hidden message. Their belief in that regard derives from the mistaken assumption that the Church is today what God intends it to be. Yet from even a cursory inspection it would appear the Church isn’t at all what God desires. (See “Where Are Jesus’ Disciples?” *The Voice of Elijah*, this issue.) If that be so, many who believe all is well are in for a rude awakening.

The Lord favor thee with insight into the eternal truth.
(The Formulary of Blessings—
from The Dead Sea Scrolls) ■

Q & A nswers

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

Editor: A lot has happened since the January issue. The Gulf War is today just a memory. How do you feel now that what you stated in last October's issue has come to pass?

Elijah: As I told you then, if what I say doesn't happen, people should ignore me. If it does happen, however, they need to consider what I have to say. At this point I am subject to a mixed review.

Editor: But things have happened exactly as you insisted they would.

Elijah: Most of it has. But some things haven't. And those that haven't show me I need to pay more attention to the subtle nuances of the prophetic text.

Editor: What do you mean?

Elijah: As I stated in the October issue, the prophecies concerning Babylon in Isaiah and Jeremiah contain at least two distinct referents—the *parabolic image* and the reality behind that image. The destruction of Iraq is the *parabolic image*, but the destruction of Mystery Babylon, that is, planet Earth, is the reality that lies behind that *parabolic image*. It's all too easy to confuse the two in some cases.

The *parabolic images* the Prophets used are all explained elsewhere in the Scriptures. I simply chose to apply one of the *parabolic images* in Jeremiah's prophecy to the *parabolic* fulfillment when it perhaps should have been applied only to the ultimate fulfillment. I made other mistakes as well. None of them change the basic claims I made regarding the prophecy, but it does say clearly that in the future I have to pay closer attention to the biblical text.

Editor: Give me an example.



Elijah: My remarks about Jeremiah's statements concerning the refugees who fled Iraq. I applied his statements about refugees to the residents of Iraq only. They actually refer both to the foreigners who left before the war began as well as to Iraqi residents who are now leaving Iraq.

There have already been several hundred thousand Iraqi refugees who have fled into Iran since January 17. Now they are beginning to flee into Jordan, Syria, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. That is only the beginning. Hundreds of thousands more will likely follow over the coming months and, perhaps, years. I could claim that as confirmation of what I wrote and leave it at that. But to do so would distort the *parabolic image*. If you read the text carefully, it's obvious that Jeremiah's call to flee refers to foreigners. The text clearly says, "... each will flee to his own land," and, "Abandon her so that each can return to his own country."

When I wrote that article last August, the foreigners in Iraq were already leaving. I didn't stop to consider that the prophecy was already being fulfilled. I simply assumed the text must be referring to some future event. But to be honest, I also didn't know at the time how intricately detailed God's use of the *parabolic image* of Iraq's destruction would be. Now that I understand, I have to correct the error. The call to the foreigners to flee the destruction of Mystery Babylon is a crucial part of God's *parabolic image* for these Last Days. It is, in fact, what your newsletter is all about—a call to the Elect to prepare themselves for the Return of Jesus Christ.

Had I understood that Iraq's destruction portended the destruction of this realm in such remarkable detail, I would have had no trouble realizing that Jeremiah's call to flee Babylon was a call to the Elect, a call to those who are "foreigners and aliens" in this land just as Abraham was. [Editor: See Heb. 11:8–10.] For almost ten years now I've understood the call to "Get out of Babylon" in the prophecies of Isaiah as a call to the Elect of God to abandon "the ways" of this world and reaffirm their total dedication to God. It's even the basis for one of the Scripture songs on the tapes you offer in your newsletter. Those songs were all written in 1983.

Editor: What about Israel's lack of retaliation?

Elijah: Jeremiah's use of historical Israel as a *parabolic image* is clear. It is a *parabolic image* of Jesus' return in the nuclear "clouds of glory." Thus the *parabolic image* of the

nuclear cloud that I mentioned in the January issue applies to the destruction of this realm in a nuclear holocaust. But it was not obvious to me that Jeremiah intended that *parabolic image* to speak only concerning the destruction of Mystery Babylon and not also concerning Iraq.

When I wrote those articles last year, I couldn't accept that Jeremiah would use the *parabolic image* of historical Israel to depict only the Return of Jesus Christ. I saw that Jeremiah had used the term "north" as a double entendre to refer to the attack of the coalition on Iraq as well as to the Return of Jesus Christ. Consequently, I took his mention of "Israel" elsewhere in the prophecy as a reference to historical Israel as well as a *parabolic* reference to Jesus Christ, the true Israel.

Editor: *Can you better explain that?*

Elijah: The Prophets of Israel used imagery taken from the mythology of the Canaanite god Baal to speak in *parabolic images* concerning the death, resurrection, enthronement, and triumphant Return of Jesus Christ in the "clouds of glory." Baal was a mythological Canaanite god who was overcome by the god(s) "Death" and/or "Sea" but triumphed over Death and rose again to become king. After having his "house built" (that's one of the idioms I key on in my research, for obvious reasons), Baal came forth victorious, riding on the clouds, bringing the rains.

Since the Canaanites believed they could enter the resurrection by worshipping Baal, God mocked their beliefs by patterning His own explanation of the plan of redemption after the imagery found in their mythology. The Prophets, in turn, used the images of the Baal myth to sarcastically contrast the futility of the backslidden Israelites' belief in Baal to the confident hope of resurrection offered by belief in Israel's coming Messiah, Jesus Christ.

According to Canaanite mythology, Baal lived on a cosmic mountain at the entrance to the other realm, the realm of the gods. That cosmic mountain was represented in this realm by a mountain called "Zaphon" located to the north of Lebanon. When Baal came forth victoriously announcing his resurrection and enthronement as king, he supposedly set out from the cosmic Mt. Zaphon located in the other realm, riding in the clouds, bringing the rains. The Prophets used these images to *parabolically* depict the activities of Jesus Christ after His resurrection, including His Return.

In contrasting the image of Baal's exploits to the reality of the work of Jesus Christ, the Prophets often used the image of Baal's Mt. Zaphon to represent the Mountain of God in the other realm where Zion, the Temple mount, is located. One of the most familiar verses using the image is Psalm 48:

*His Majesty is great, and praised exceedingly
In the city of our God, the Mountain of His Holiness.*

*A beautiful height, Mt. Zion
—The recesses of Zaphon—
Is the joy of all the Earth.
(Psalm 48:1b-2a) —my translation*

The name of Baal's cosmic mountain, *Zaphon*, is also the Canaanite/Hebrew word for "north." Consequently, not only Jeremiah, but also many of the other Prophets, used the Hebrew term *zaphon* as a double entendre. Jeremiah used it in his prophecy against Babylon to refer to the "people/nation from the north" (*literal* "north": *zaphon*) that would destroy the *parabolic* Babylon, Iraq, meaning the United States, Britain, and France. But he also used the term to refer to the ultimate destruction of Mystery Babylon—that is, planet Earth—by "the people from the Mountain of God in the other realm" (cosmic mountain: *Zaphon*). This refers to the army that accompanies Jesus Christ at His Return.

But that explains only one of the two parallel *parabolic images* in the prophecy that refer to the destruction of this realm at the Return of Jesus Christ. The other is the *parabolic image* of Corporate Israel. I now believe the *parabolic image* of Corporate Israel applies only to the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy. Although historical Israel could still attack Iraq if Iraq refuses to destroy its weapons of mass destruction as the United Nations has demanded, I doubt they will.

Let me explain why I found Jeremiah's use of the *parabolic image* of Corporate Israel confusing. I have already shown in *Not All Israel Is Israel* how Jesus Christ came to be the true Israel, consigning historical Israel to the fate of *parabolic imagery*. I saw that when Jeremiah referred to the destruction of Babylon by "Israel," he was definitely using the *parabolic image* of historical Israel to refer to the destruction of Mystery Babylon by Jesus Christ, the true Israel.

Since I knew Jeremiah had used the *parabolic image* of the "people from *zaphon*" to represent both the attack of the coalition and the Return of Jesus Christ, I took his mention of "Israel" as a *parabolic* reference to both historical Israel and the true Israel, Jesus Christ, in a similar fashion. That was a mistake. Otherwise, the article concerning Israel's retaliation against Iraq in the January issue contained accurate information with regard to the *parabolic images* of the Scriptures.

Editor: *But the forecasts in the October issue were absolutely incredible in the detail they provided! Most Bible teachers would be ecstatic to have had even one "prediction" come true, much less so many specific forecasts. I know you don't like the term prediction, but putting that aside for the moment, why don't you just ignore the errors? People forget. Why do you insist on talking about it?*

Elijah: Because I should have recognized the subtleties of the prophetic text. I've been in preparation for this particular endeavor for nearly a quarter of a century. I've been working with the *parabolic images* of the Prophets for over fifteen years. Whether anyone believes what I teach is irrelevant. I wasn't called to convince people. My purpose is to inform. I am obligated to One Person. If I do what He's called me to do, He will do with it as He desires. In making those errors I feel I have come short of His expectations.

Editor: *What about the death of Saddam Hussein? Are you still certain of that?*

Elijah: As certain as I can be. Unless Isaiah is speaking only of the ultimate fulfillment as Jeremiah did, the event has already been accomplished as far as God is concerned. I see no such indications in the text of Isaiah 14. At this point I would say Saddam Hussein has already been buried alive. It's just a matter of time.

Editor: *Why do you not like the term prediction? Why do you prefer the term forecast instead?*

Elijah: The term *prediction* implies some psychic powers of foreknowledge. I'm not a psychic. I don't know anything intuitively. I get what I understand about future events from the Scriptures. I'm just a "weather forecaster" who's trying to forecast a developing "Storm." The Gulf War was but a harbinger of the real thing. The events in the Persian Gulf established a detailed *parabolic image* of Jesus Christ's Return as the true "Desert Storm," coming in the "clouds of glory" accompanied by the "latter rain" that will ultimately destroy Mystery Babylon. That is all just *parabolic imagery* the Elect can use to understand the parables of the Scriptures that speak of His Return.

Editor: *You're saying that God is now using even seemingly minor details related to the Gulf War, like the "Desert Storm" name given to the operation, as part of the parabolic imagery?*

Elijah: Definitely. The detail is extraordinary. Even the "inner room" in which the Israelis took refuge from Saddam Hussein's attacks is a *parabolic image* in Isaiah. As you well know, I have used that *parabolic image* for seven or eight years now. But it's difficult to see how God intends to use some of the *parabolic imagery*. For example, the pitch-black sky you see over Kuwait on the television news each night is just a harbinger of a much greater disaster to come on the Earth when the sixth seal of Revelation 6 is opened and the sun turns black. I've been so busy I have not had time to research the image. It doesn't matter right now anyway. When the time comes, we'll know. And your readers will know about it before it happens.

I'm now speaking in terms of the *parabolic imagery* used by the Prophets. Jesus Christ's "House" is nearly complete, the "House" that Paul *talks about* in Ephesians 2—the "House" built on the "foundation" of the Apostles and Prophets. [Editor: Get it? The parable tells you what the reality is *LIKE*.] To use the full idiom, His "House" has almost been "built." When that has been accomplished, He will return victorious from the other realm as the true "Desert Storm" in the full fury of the "clouds of glory" bringing a torrential "rain."

In the *parabolic image*, God has had the economic embargo against Mystery Babylon in place for centuries. Amos *talks about* it. So does Joel. Now that His "Desert Storm" is beginning the final assault, its total force will fall on Mystery Babylon, methodically destroying the very infrastructure of this world. That "Storm" is, even now, signalled by the presence of the "clouds of glory" that Jesus *talked about*, and the "latter rain" spoken of by the Prophet Joel. The "wise man" who hears is going to "build his house" on the Rock. The "foolish man" will "build" his on the "sand." One "house" will withstand the "Storm," the other won't. Every one of these *parabolic images* has been in place for centuries, waiting for our time to come.

If what I have to say is true, that "Storm" is out there, already moving toward us in its full fury. We are currently receiving the initial "rain showers" associated with the "Storm." But when the center of the *parabolic "Storm"* reaches us, there will be absolutely no doubt in anyone's mind. I keep remembering that first night when the Gulf War began, watching and listening as John Holloman, Peter Arnett, and Bernard Shaw were reporting live from Baghdad. It will be *LIKE* that when the "wrath of the Lamb" begins. A lot of people suddenly will be living in sheer terror. That first night in Baghdad was just a *parabolic image*. Reality will be an absolute horror.

But I'm just a "weather forecaster." I'm not responsible for whether anyone prepares for the onset of the "Storm." That is their concern. I thank God I've not been called to establish a church, ask people for money, or travel all over the world preaching the Gospel. I'm only here to research and write—to warn the Elect that what they currently believe may be fatally flawed. The preparations they have made to enable them to meet Jesus Christ in victory may not be sufficient. God requires total commitment. In that regard, I'm thankful for what you are accomplishing by publishing your newsletter.

Editor: *What do you expect people to do with the information they read in The Voice of Elijah?*

Elijah: The Elect will know what God requires. The *parabolic image* in the Scriptures is one in which the True Believer "wakes up" and remains "awake" until the End.

Your newsletter provides the information necessary to wake them up, but they have the responsibility for remaining “awake.” How they do that will prove whether or not they are part of the Elect.

You must understand the Elect can be found in all denominations and churches throughout the world. They have but one thing in common—a valid salvation experience with God. But they do not now know they are, and always have been, a minority in the Church. They don’t realize the majority of their “Christian” friends have no idea what it actually *means* to be “born again.” The Elect are too naïve to recognize that simple fact. They assume that because they are who they say they are, everybody else is also. It isn’t so. Most “Christians” are on the road to destruction. It’s an eight-lane highway with no speed limit. “*The Way*” to Heaven is a foot-path grown up in weeds.

You must also understand that I haven’t been called to found a church, start a school, or gather people together so I can get some intangible “psychic income” (or even the usual financial income) from them. I have been called for one purpose—to alert the Elect of God so they can avoid the coming delusion. It may sound callous on my part, but I don’t want people to believe. I already know that most won’t because they have been taught to consider any teaching out of the mainstream as dangerous. They won’t stop to consider that when two contradictory opinions are taught as the Truth, logic alone tells you at least one of them must be wrong. So where is Truth?

The Elect’s relationship to God is the key. If God sent me, they will know it—because they know God. If God did not send me, they will also know that—because they know God. For those who don’t believe, the question is not, “Did God send me?” but rather, “Do they know God?” Obviously, I believe God called me. But that is no more valid a basis for argument than their claim that they know God. Down here confusion reigns supreme. That’s why most people follow tradition. It provides a false sense of security. But those chosen few whom the Lord loves want more than that feeling of security. They want the Truth. The Elect will believe. And those who believe will prepare themselves. Those who don’t, won’t. In the one case, you need only notify them of my message. You couldn’t convince the others if you tried.

Editor: *A different subject. I understand you read one of the more popular books on biblical prophecy and the Gulf War—Charles Dyer’s book, **The Rise of Babylon**. What is your opinion of the book?*

Elijah: I think it’s an excellent book. It provides background information your readers can use to fully understand the article in the October issue concerning Saddam Hussein’s intentions in reestablishing the ancient Babylo-

nian Empire. [Editor: See “Saddam Hussein: Heir to the Throne of Nebuchadnezzar?” *The Voice of Elijah*, October 1990.]

On the other hand, when Mr. Dyer makes statements concerning the future, he is merely repackaging traditional dispensational interpretation of the Bible. It’s obvious when he discusses the ancients building the Tower of Babel that he has not a clue regarding the true *meaning* of the Hebrew idiom “make a name.” He passes over it with the assumption that it *means* the same thing as the English idiom. Nothing could be further from the Truth.

He also treats a crucial passage in Zechariah 5 with the same deft sleight of hand. Yet that passage contains a parallel Hebrew idiom—the idiom “build a house.” Not understanding the *meaning* or *significance* of either of these two idioms, much less the *meaning* and *significance* of the passages in which they occur, Mr. Dyer then proceeds to make confident pronouncements regarding the rise of a future Babylon. Yet those two idioms together provide the basis for a major part of the Old Testament message regarding Jesus Christ. Knowing from this that he does not understand at all what God has already done, I can assure you that he understands very little about what God is about to do.

Editor: *That’s clear enough. Do you have anything you would like to say directly to **The Voice of Elijah** readers?*

Elijah: The articles in this and the last two issues have said all that’s necessary for now. Your readers, however, would do well to remember as they read your newsletter what has been said about the way we live down here:

“At every crossroad along the road that leads to the future, tradition has placed 10,000 men to guard the past.”

Whoever chooses to defend a tradition should make certain that tradition is worth defending. The New Testament does not teach that salvation comes by slavishly adhering to some tradition. Salvation comes by belief in the Person of Jesus Christ and what He has done. That’s the beauty of the Gospel. If the Church is not now what it should be and God is doing a completely new work to prepare His people, their tradition, whatever it may be, will not suffice. Quietly stand back from those “Christians” around you and observe. Do you see in them what you believe God intended His children to be? If not, they are probably not even His children. But He has not directed us to judge them either. Look out for yourself. Are you ready for Judgment Day? Simply “Do as they say, not as they do.” God judges individually, not in groups of two, or three, or a hundred. Everyone will stand alone on that Great Day. Whoever has an ear to hear will hear. ■

Parables/Prophecy

From page 5

of God,” you can automatically substitute the personal pronoun “I” or “Me” because He is referring to Himself. In the Old Testament, the Kingdom of Israel was the “Kingdom of God.” But as I have shown in *Not All Israel Is Israel*, Jesus Christ became the “Kingdom of Israel” when the other members of *Corporate Israel* were “cut off from” *Corporate Israel* just as John the Baptist warned the Pharisees and Sadducees they would be:

“You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father;’ for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut off and thrown into the fire.”

(Matthew 3:7b–10)

The phrase, “the birds of the air come and nest in its branches,” in the Parable of the Mustard Seed, is not an exact quote, but it is close enough for us to recognize that Jesus was referring to a prophecy of the Prophet Ezekiel:

This is what My Master, His Majesty, has declared: “Yet will I take from the pinnacle of the tall cedar, and I’ll give Him; I’ll pluck a Tender One from the top of its shoots, and I’ll plant Him on a high and lofty mountain. I’ll plant Him on a mountain (the height of Israel). He’ll bear branches and produce fruit. He’ll become a majestic cedar. All birds and winged creatures will dwell beneath Him.”

(Ezekiel 17:22–23)—my translation

In translating this passage, I have intentionally kept the translation *literal* so that you could see Ezekiel’s use of the

third person singular pronoun “Him” and better understand what the Hebrew actually says. There is no neuter pronoun “it” in Hebrew. I translated the pronoun “Him” because the passage in Ezekiel makes it clear that the *parabolic image* of the “cedar,” from which God *parabolically* takes the “shoot,” is actually the king of Israel. Ezekiel was referring to a Person in the royal line.

Ezekiel was prophesying concerning the future of the royal house in Israel. He was speaking *parabolically* concerning the Messiah, Jesus Christ. He saw the time when Jesus would be chosen from the royal lineage of the House of David to become the new king over the House of Israel.

“The new life of the tree indicated the resurrection of a deceased king.”

The Prophet Isaiah prophesied concerning the terrible tragedy that befell the “House” of Israel wherein all members of the “House” of Israel were “cut off from” *Corporate Israel*. Using the same *parabolic imagery* of the “tree” that John the Baptist used, he foresaw the event occurring just as John warned:

He shakes His fist at the mountain of the House of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem. Behold, the Lord, His Majesty of Hosts, will lop off the boughs with a terrible crash. Those also who are tall in stature will be cut down. Even those who are lofty will be abased. He will cut down the thickets of the forest with an iron. Even Lebanon will fall by the Mighty One.

(Isaiah 10:32b–34)

Isaiah immediately assures us, however, that after this devastation the tree of the royal House of David will come back to life. The new growth will come from the stump of a tree that has been “cut down”:

Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
(Isaiah 11:1–2)

This passage has long been recognized as a messianic prophecy, although its use of *parabolic imagery* has not been fully understood. Moreover, it has not been linked with the Parable of the Mustard Seed in Matthew 13 because the two would seem to have little in common. Yet, for the Prophets, the method by which the *parabolic* “tree” of the king was propagated was not the central issue.

It did not matter whether the life of the “tree” was attained by the planting of a seed, the rooting of a shoot, or the new growth of a stump. The “tree” coming to life was the only necessary part of the *parabolic image*. It also did not matter whether the tree was cedar, palm, sycamore, oak, or fig. It could even be a vine.

To the ancients, any tree, vine or bush was just as good as any other for the purpose they had in mind. Their only intent was to present the *parabolic image* of a tree that had gained new life. The new life of the tree *parabolically* depicted the resurrection of a deceased king.

The Tree That Reigns as King

Another passage in the Old Testament is more nearly an exact source of the phrase that Jesus used in His parable than is Ezekiel 17. In the fourth chapter of the Book of Daniel we read about a vision that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had:

Now {these were} the visions in my mind {as I lay} on my bed: I was looking, and behold, {there} was a great tree in the midst of the earth, and its height {was} great. The tree grew large and became strong. And its height reached to the sky, and it

{was} visible to the end of the whole earth. Its foliage {was} beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it {was} food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it. And all flesh fed themselves from it.
(Daniel 4:10–12)

wave over the trees?’ Finally, all the trees said to the bramble, ‘You come, reign over us!’ And the bramble said to the trees, ‘If in truth you are anointing me as king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, may fire come

Parables, Prophecy, and the Tree of Life

In order to understand the parables of Jesus, you must first realize that the message hidden in the Hebrew Scriptures conveys its *meaning* through *parabolic imagery*. The Prophets were the first to speak in parables; Jesus merely continued their tradition. But you must also realize that the message of the Old Testament is a sarcastic condemnation of humanity’s absurdly futile attempt to attain eternal life outside the One True God.

The Prophets borrowed their *parabolic imagery* from the mythology of ancient Israel’s neighbors—a mythology that held forth the possibility of resurrection from the dead. The ultimate irony of the Scriptural message is that what ancient religious leaders concocted in the vanity of their own mind, God established as a reality by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. God’s mockery of human religiosity has been and continues to be, “If you say that’s the way it is, that’s the way it will be, because I’ll make it so.”

The Prophets predicted the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ using *parabolic imagery* they appropri-

“The Prophets were the first to speak in parables; Jesus merely continued their tradition.”

You may be better able to understand the link between this passage and the passages discussed above if you read yet another passage where mention is made of this ubiquitous *parabolic* “tree” that provides its magnificent shelter for the birds of the air and the beasts of the field:

“Once the trees went forth to anoint a king over them, and they said to the olive tree, ‘Reign over us!’ But the olive tree said to them, ‘Shall I leave my fatness with which God and men are honored, and go to wave over the trees?’ Then the trees said to the fig tree, ‘You come, reign over us!’ But the fig tree said to them, ‘Shall I leave my sweetness and my good fruit, and go and

out from the bramble and consume the cedars of Lebanon.”
(Judges 9:8–15)

The youngest son of Gideon spoke this *parabolic* prophecy when the leaders of Shechem anointed his brother, Abimelech, as king.

Kingship is the common theme that links all these prophecies. The king is the “tree” in every case. In the Parable of the Mustard Seed, Jesus, the Messianic King, is the “Tree.” The same holds true for the prophetic parables in Ezekiel 17 and Isaiah 10–11. In Daniel 4, King Nebuchadnezzar is the “tree”; and now we have seen the *parabolic image* of the “tree” applied to another king, Abimelech. The question is, why?

Parabolic Imagery

Jesus’ ultimate *parabolic pantomime* was His death. As is well known, Jesus died as the Passover Lamb of God. But remember, God instituted the Passover when the sons of Israel left bondage in Egypt (Ex. 12). His reasons for doing so were none other than to establish an annual *parabolic pantomime* that mocked the mythology behind the ceremony of the ancient Egyptian coronation of the Pharaoh. The *parabolic imagery* of the Passover and Israel’s Exodus from Egypt is a fascinating study of how God ridiculed the ancient Egyptian mythology by which the Pharaoh ruled as the “son of god” here on Earth. (See “Parables and Prophecy” in future issues.)

It was not by accident that the King of Israel died hanging on a “tree.” The death of Christ on the cross was a *parabolic pantomime* of the reality of His coronation in Heaven as the King of Kings. The early Christians understood the *parabolic imagery* of His death on the cross as signifying that His “Tree” had been “cut off.” They called themselves *kladoi tou staurou*, “Branches of the Cross.”

Kingship provides the basis for the tree image in the Prophets’ message concerning Jesus Christ, and the *parabolic imagery* appears throughout the Old Testament. There are two Hebrew words for “tribe.” Both terms also *mean* “branch.” The Prophets used these terms when speaking of Jesus Christ under the image of the Twelve Tribes of Israel as “branches” of Israel, the tree that was “cut off” at His death.

One of these two Hebrew terms, the word *shevet*, was used by the Hebrews to indicate the king’s “scepter.” This usage derives from the Sumerian origin of the royal scepter as the branch of a tree, symbolically representing the king who held it as being himself a “branch” from the Tree of Life. The scepter was the instrument whereby the king imparted life. The other Hebrew word for both “branch” and “tribe” is the term *matteh*. It is the term used in Scripture to designate Aaron’s “rod” that “budded” in Numbers 17:8 ff. (God was again playing with the resurrection image.)

Ezekiel alludes to the Prophets’ *parabolic* use of both terms by placing them both side by side in his parable concerning *Corporate* Israel as the “vine” in God’s vineyard (Ezek. 19:10–14). □

ated from these ancient mythologies. How and why they did so provides silent testimony regarding the white-hot wrath of an angry God.

According to Sumerian mythology, after the god Dumuzi, king of the Sumerians, died, he achieved resurrection, coming back to life in the garden of the gods as the Tree of Life. In one account of the myth, he came back to life as a datepalm, in another as a cedar.

The newly crowned king of the Sumerians at his coronation became identified as the recipient of the spirit of the resurrected god Dumuzi. (Actually, he became the recipient of "The Name," but that concept needs further explanation.) Not surprisingly, therefore, the Sumerian king, like Dumuzi in his resurrection, is described in the Sumerian literature as a tree.

In some of the earliest literary records available, the Sumerian king Shulgi is glorified as follows:

Shulgi, the king, the graceful lord, is a datepalm planted by the waterditch.
(Witzel, *M. Keilinschriftliche Studien 5 III, p. 30, II 1.*)

In another instance, this same king is the object of the following praise:

Like a cedar rooted by abundant water, of pleasant shadow thou art.
(Witzel, *KS 5, p. 56: 16f.*)

King Shulgi says of himself:

"I am the scion of a cedar, A forest of hashur-trees."
(*Musee nationale du Louvre, Textes cuneiformes. xv Pl. 9, vi 10*)

"The Prophets were the first to speak in parables; Jesus merely continued their tradition."

The ancient Babylonians and Assyrians borrowed much from the mythology of the Sumerians, including the god Dumuzi. He became, for them, the god Tammuz. In this form he was worshipped even by ancient Israelite women whom Ezekiel saw in a vision weeping at the gate of the temple as part of a ritual designed to ensure the resurrection of Tammuz from the dead:

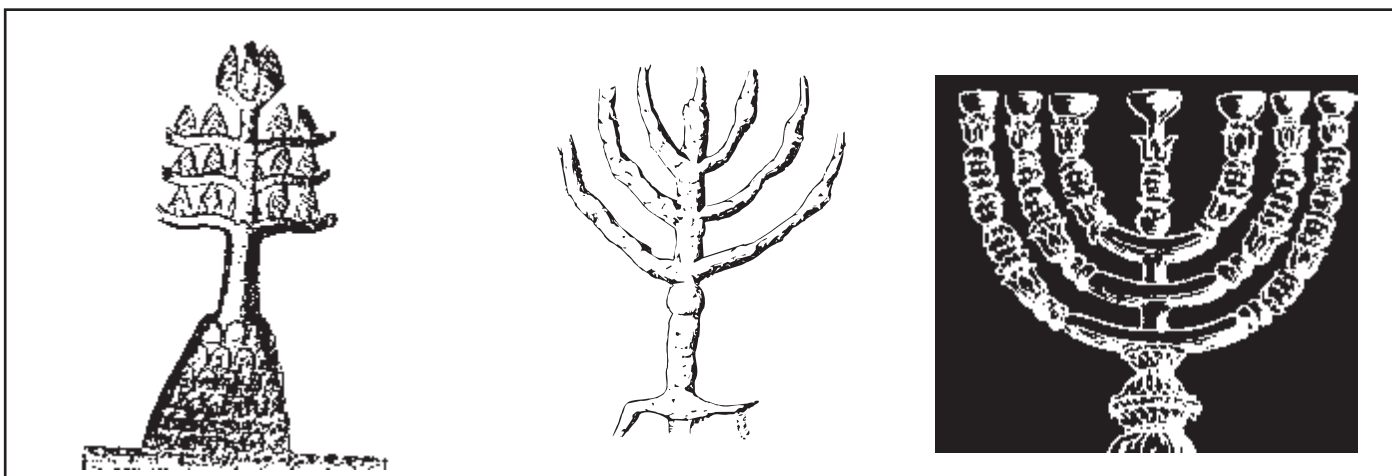
"women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz."
(*Ezekiel 8:14*)

The mythological concepts related to the Sumerian royal cult of Dumuzi were borrowed, developed, re-borrowed and re-developed over and over again in many

ancient Near Eastern cultures. The ideas provide the basis for the royal cults of the Egyptian god Osiris, the Babylonian god Marduk, and the Canaanite god Baal. They also underlie the mythology related to the Greek god Adonis, whom the Greeks borrowed from the Canaanites, where he had been worshipped as the god Baal.

From all these sources we gain bits and pieces of information necessary to understand the *parabolic imagery* of the Prophets. But the fundamental *parabolic imagery* related to resurrection from the dead comes directly out of the Egyptian myth of Osiris. According to the Greek author Plutarch (*De Iside et Osiride*), Egyptian mythology taught that after the death of the god/king Osiris, his coffin floated out to sea. The coffin eventually lodged in the branches of an Erica tree along the Mediterranean coast near the Canaanite city of Byblos. Over time, it became encased in the tree.

The king of Byblos eventually had the tree cut down and made into a magnificent pillar for his palace. When



Left: Sumerian representation of the Tree of Life (the resurrected king) standing in the garden of the gods on the cosmic mountain.

Middle: Lampstand taken from an ancient Jewish synagogue.

Right: Lampstand from Herod's Temple (from a relief on the Arch of Titus, Rome).

The lampstand God ordered made for the tabernacle was, in form, meant to represent a tree (Exodus 25:31-37). Comparison of the two

Jewish menorah above reveals this to be so. Yet further comparison with ancient Sumerian representations of the deceased king as the tree planted in the garden of the gods on the cosmic mountain shows almost identical features, thus disclosing the *parabolic image* that God was using. Jesus was referring to the *parabolic image* of the lampstand in the tabernacle when He said, "I am the light of the world." Note the birds in the tree. The concept of the king providing shelter for the birds (his subjects) was prevalent throughout the ancient world.

the wife of Osiris later extracted the coffin from the pillar and took it back to Egypt, Osiris was resurrected. He then became the god of the resurrection and the hope of all Egyptians who desired eternal life.

The myth that Plutarch related was intended to describe how the Egyptian myth of Osiris provided the pattern for at least part of the Canaanite Baal myth. The Babylonians appear to have borrowed these same ideas from the Baal myth and used them to fabricate their mythology concerning the god Marduk.

The ancient mythology that provided the underpinning for the Canaanite worship of Baal is complex and multifaceted. Here, I can present only a sketch of

“Jesus was the living ‘Tree’ in which the divine Spirit of God dwelt here on Earth.”

the outlines necessary for you to understand the Prophets’ use of its mythological imagery in sarcastic *parabolic* prophecy.

The Canaanites worshipped the god Baal as part of a royal cult in which the Canaanite king was considered to be the son of the resurrected god Baal. The primary reason why the people worshipped—or were forced to worship (1 Kings 18:4)—the god Baal was to ensure the continuation of the royal dynasty.

The Canaanite religion taught the Canaanites that when the reigning king died, Baal would not only ensure the resurrection of the dead king by his own triumph over death, he would also guarantee the continuation of the dynasty through the coronation of the dead king’s son as the next king.

Prior to the coronation ceremonies that accompanied the ascendancy of the new king to the throne, a living tree that had been identified in some specific way with the former king’s reign was “cut off.” Some part of it was then moved into the sanctuary as a “pillar” where it was “raised” during the coronation ceremony to become an object of divine worship as an Asherah. Asherah was the Canaanite goddess who ensured the resurrection of the god Baal.

When the dead king entered the resurrection, his “spirit” (for lack of a better term) entered into a living tree, to live there for as long as was necessary for requirements of the resurrection to be met. The tree appears to have been planted, transplanted or seeded in a special “royal garden” for the specific purpose of receiving the dead king’s spirit, and the tree containing the spirit of the deceased king was also worshipped as an Asherah during the reign of the king’s successor.

The Prophets borrowed these images from the Canaanite royal cult and used them as *parabolic imagery* to speak concerning the coming Messianic king, Jesus Christ. Daniel spoke clearly con-

cerning the death of the Messiah without surviving descendants using the *parabolic imagery* of the living tree that was “cut off.”

“Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have no one, ...”
(Daniel 9:26a)

I quoted the prophecy of Isaiah above concerning the new “shoot” that God said would sprout from the “stem of Jesse.” In the sarcastic *parabolic imagery* of the Prophets, that “shoot” was the new “tree” God prepared to receive the spirit of the deceased King, Jesus Christ.

Keep in mind also that the living Canaanite king was considered to be the “son of god” here on Earth. Here, too, we see the mockery of God in His use of the mythological imagery. Jesus Christ was the living “Tree” in which the divine Spirit of God dwelt here on Earth. He was, in Truth, what the Canaanite king could only pretend to be—the Son of God. Using the *parabolic image* of Himself as a “tree,” Jesus said:

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.”
(John 15:1)

But, you say, Jesus Christ was not a king here on Earth. So it would seem. And so it would be, were it not for His *parabolic pantomimes*. (See “The *Parabolic Pantomimes* of Jesus Christ,” *The Voice of Elijah*, January 1991.)

Working together with God the Father and John the Baptist, Jesus *parabolically pantomimed* the future reality of His coronation as the resurrected King by being baptized in the Jordan by John. His baptism portrays, through prophetic *parabolic imagery*, His triumph over death and His coronation as King.

To understand these *parabolic images*, you must understand that God was mocking the Egyptian religion that stands behind them. The divine pronouncement:

“this is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”
(Matthew 3:17b)

and the descent of the Spirit in the form of a dove, were God’s contribution to the *pantomime*. It was a mocking ridicule of the Egyptian/Canaanite coronation ceremony in which the king became the “son of god” when the god’s “name” took up residence in his body.

During the coronation ritual, the king was declared to be the divine son of god as portrayed by the Psalmist in a Psalm that scholars have long recognized as a messianic coronation Psalm:

*“I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord:
He said to Me, ‘Thou art My Son,
Today I have begotten Thee.’”*
(Psalm 2:7)

The *parabolic image* of the “tree,” as used by the Prophets and Jesus Christ, depicts the death of the King of Israel and His resurrection as the new King of Israel. After death, His spirit *parabolically* resided in the “tree” that God had “planted” for it, the “Tree” that was, for the ancients, the resurrected Son of God. That “Tree” has since grown into a majestic cedar that now provides shade for all who seek shelter in the King of Kings. ■

Why Not?

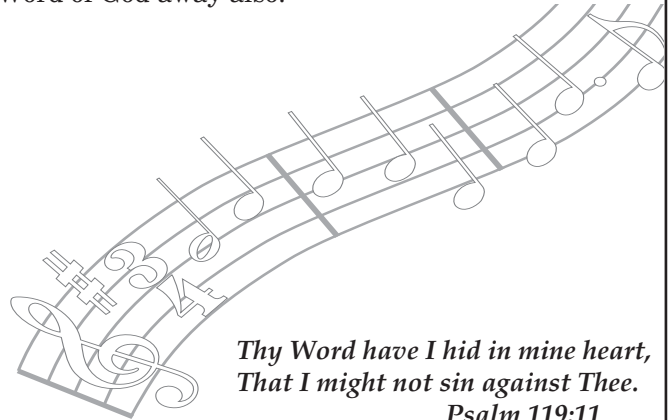
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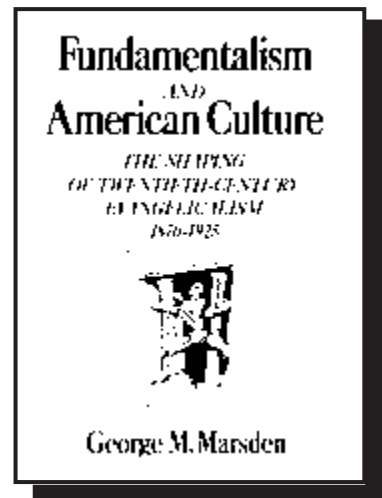


*Thy Word have I hid in mine heart,
That I might not sin against Thee.*
Psalm 119:11

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Where Did That Come From?

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



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What if all Israel was “cut off?”

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