



THE VOICE of ELIJAH

A Tribute to
Susan Dara Webb Clay



On the night of March 28, 2000, Susan Dara Webb Clay shed her mortal body and went home to be with the Lord. She left behind two teenage sons and a multitude of bewildered family members and friends as well. Susan had just turned 43 three days before she died. While her untimely demise was absolutely devastating to all who knew her, it was immediately obvious from the circumstances of her death that the Lord had decided He need

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not test Susan's faith any longer. She died instantly in a head-on collision with an out-of-control tractor-trailer hauling 38 tons of lead. The entire weight of that heavy load came to rest right in her lap.

Those of us who knew Susan best cannot help but envy her, not only because the Lord intentionally took her but also because of the way she died. Even in the midst of such violence God did not allow her to suffer. And as Paul says, we would all "prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). Yet even in deep sorrow we realize our desires are selfish. We must continue on without her in the work we have been assigned.

All who labored in the Lord alongside Susan continue to miss her greatly—not only for the truly unique person she was, but also for the sorely needed expertise she provided. For the past five years, she was Managing Editor of *The Voice of Elijah*® and *The Voice of Elijah*® Update. However, she had been actively involved with The Elijah Project as an editor for well over 15 years. Consequently, her editorial imprint can be found on every article, book, and translation of Scripture produced by The Elijah Project.

Susan was an extremely well-organized and meticulous person. She was also exceptionally competent not only as an editor but also as an accountant, financial consultant, and mother. Although she worked part-time for three businesses in addition to editing *The Voice of Elijah*® and *The Voice of Elijah*® Update, none of her employers or co-workers could fully appreciate how efficient she was at what she did because she made it all look so easy. But they realized her worth fairly quickly once she was gone. To date, it has required two full-time (and two part-time) employees to do the work she did.

We will never be able to replace the person that was Susan—the laugh, the smile, the willingness to do whatever needed to be done. But, fortunately, we have been able to replace her editing expertise. Two very capable women—Faye Chandler and her daughter, Janet Lohman—have volunteered to pick up where Susan left off. To them we say, "Welcome aboard. Susan would have loved working with you." And you can be sure she would have. That's just the way she was.

Farewell, Susu. Hope to see you soon.

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A Note From the Editor

If you have been reading *The Voice of Elijah*® any length of time, you know that we do not agree with much of what is espoused in the Church today. Over the past nine and a half years, we have provided substantial evidence from the Scriptures that exposes many of the Church's current beliefs for what they are—half-truths and outright lies that were never part of The Apostolic Teaching the Early Church believed. If that sounds like a harsh criticism of the modern Church, it is. But don't assume that we are being critical just for the sake of being critical. Our criticism is rooted in a strict concern for the Truth and for the spiritual well-being of born-again Believers within the Church who need to hear the Truth.

The only interest we have in organized Christianity lies in the fact that born-again Believers can still be found there. Therefore, we confront erroneous Christian doctrines because these doctrines are leading True Believers down the broad way that leads to destruction (Matt. 7:13). If we fail to confront false doctrines, not only will these Believers be destroyed, but their blood will be on our hands (parabolically speaking). That's because the warning God issued to the Prophet Ezekiel nearly 2500 years ago still applies to anyone called to proclaim His Word:

"Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from My mouth, warn them from Me. When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die'; and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet if you have warned the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered yourself."
(Ezekiel 3:17-19)

If you consider yourself a born-again Believer, you would be wise to think twice before rejecting what we teach. Chances are, you took a series of wrong turns long ago and ended up on Wicked Way without even knowing it. That's just another way of saying you are most likely on the road to destruction because you chose to follow "the way of the wicked" rather than "The Way" of the Lord. In case you haven't listened to *The Way, The Truth, The Life* seminar tapes, "The Way" of the Lord is a parabolic image of the Truth of The Teaching of Moses, while "the way of the wicked" parabolically depicts the lies that the wicked have chosen to believe.

If you are offended by the suggestion that you might be one of the wicked, you need to understand who "the wicked" are in God's eyes. From God's perspective, "the wicked" are all those who reject the Truth of His Word and cling to lies that make them feel good about themselves so

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that they can do what they want to do and still feel comfortable with the sin in their life. If you are pinning your hope of eternal bliss on the half-truths and blatant lies that prevail in the Church today, you, like all the other wicked, are headed for destruction. So don't ignore this warning if it has stirred any kind of conviction in you.

We do agree with a few doctrines of the Church, although not necessarily with the specifics of those doctrines. Take, for instance, the belief that Christians have assurance of salvation. Although we agree that God offers True Believers assurance of salvation, we disagree with the Church's once-saved, always-saved teaching. We believe the assurance God offers born-again Believers is not the guarantee that they can never lose their salvation, but the promise that if they continue to believe the Truth of His Word and hold firmly to it, they will be saved. This is how Jesus stated the matter:

*The Jews therefore gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these bear witness of Me. **But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given {them} to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch {them} out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.**"*

(John 10:24–30)

You should be able to see the assurance of salvation that Jesus promises His "sheep"; but do you see the conditions He attached to that assurance? His "sheep" are those who listen to His voice and follow Him, and He in turn knows them. If you think a simple "profession of faith" (whatever that's supposed to mean) on your part meets these conditions and assures you of salvation, you fail to realize that Jesus is talking about an intimate, ongoing relationship

between Himself—the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14)—and His "sheep." That relationship begins with a miracle, the miracle of the new birth, not with a simple "profession of faith."

The relationship God demands is parabolically described in John 10:1–18 and can be summed up this way: True Believers are expected to listen to the voice of Christ—the Word of God (John 1:1 ff.)—continually and not the voice of "strangers" (false teachers), lest they stray from the Truth and "the wolf" (Satan) "snatch" them and scatter the "flock." That's just another way of saying that if True Believers listen to, learn, believe, and hold firmly to the Word of God—The Teaching—they have been taught, they are assured (by God) of eternal life. If they choose to listen to the soothing lies of false teachers, they have no such assurance. Instead, they run the risk of being "devoured" by the "roaring lion" (1 Pet. 5:8) who stalks every Believer who strays from the Truth. If you think that's not true, it's because you are listening to the voice of "strangers" and not to the voice of Christ. Let him who has ears hear.

As I stated in the last issue, we were seriously considering the possibility of holding another seminar later this year since last year's seminar proved so worthwhile. In light of Susan Clay's tragic and untimely death (see "A Tribute to Susan Dara Webb Clay"), we have abandoned all plans to hold a seminar this year. It is difficult to put on a seminar under the best of circumstances, and we decided not to take on the challenge under difficult circumstances. So all plans are off for this year—but not for the years to come. Look for more seminars down the road.

The Elijah Project still plans to produce last year's seminar, *The Isaiah Seminar*, as a video series when time permits. Since this seminar was not originally videotaped, it will have to be reproduced in its entirety in front of video cameras. When completed, this video series will be offered in lieu of the original audiotapes, which didn't turn out as clear as we had hoped. At this point I have no idea when the videotaping will be completed, so the best I can do is keep you posted.

Allen Friedman

I've Got to Hand It to You; You Have No Idea How Much You Need It

The Early Church Fathers specifically assert that the Prophets and Apostles spoke cryptically in parables and enigmas so that nobody could understand what they had said unless someone explained it to them. Yet nobody has ever taken what they said seriously—until now. Unfortunately, anyone who sincerely desires to understand the biblical message must begin with the knowledge that the *meaning* and *significance* of every prophetic passage in the Hebrew Scriptures has been sealed up in the *parabolic imagery* and the Hebrew idioms that the Prophets intentionally used to conceal the message they had been given. One of the earliest mentions of that is in this passage from *The Epistle of Barnabas*:

But what saith knowledge? Understand ye. Set your hope on Him who is about to be manifested to you in the flesh, even Jesus. For man is earth suffering; for from the face of the earth came the creation of Adam. What then saith He? Into the good land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Blessed is our Lord, brethren, who established among us wisdom and understanding of His secret things. For the prophet speaketh a parable concerning the Lord. Who shall comprehend, save he that is wise and prudent and that loveth his Lord?

J.B. Lightfoot, "The Epistle of Barnabas," *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1891).

The Christian apologist Justin Martyr says much the same thing in his "Dialogue With the Jew Trypho." (See my commentary on this work in *The Voice of Elijah® Update*, November 1995–June 1999.) The following excerpt is but one example of the many times he refers to that fact, either directly or indirectly:

And it was prophesied by Jacob the patriarch that there would be two advents of Christ, and that in the first He would suffer, and that after He came there would be neither prophet nor king in your nation (I proceeded), and that the nations who believed in the suffering Christ would look for His future appearance. And for this reason the Holy Spirit had uttered these truths in a parable, and obscurely.

Justin Martyr, "Dialogue With the Jew Trypho," Chap. lii, in Roberts and Donaldson (Eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (1867), Vol. 1.

One could, perhaps, dismiss the claim that the Prophets concealed the message of the Scriptures by speaking in parables if those were the only two sources where inferences to it can be found. The Truth is, various Church Fathers—True Believer and Pretender alike—make that claim. They also insist that it is absolutely impossible for an unregenerate person to understand the *parabolic* message of the Scriptures and that a Believer cannot understand it until someone who understands it explains it to him. For example, Justin Martyr alludes to that belief when he says this:

And I replied, "I would not bring forward these proofs, Trypho, by which I am aware those who worship these [idols] and such like are condemned, but such [proofs] as no one could find any objection to. They will appear strange to you, although you read them every day; so that even from this fact we understand that because of your wickedness, God has withheld from you the ability to discern the wisdom of His Scriptures; yet [there are] some exceptions, to whom, according to the grace of His long-suffering, as Isaiah said, He has left a seed of salvation, lest your race be utterly destroyed like

Sodom and Gomorrah. Pay attention therefore, to what I shall record out of the holy Scriptures, which do not need to be expounded but only listened to."

Justin Martyr, "Dialogue With the Jew Trypho," Chap. lv, in Roberts and Donaldson (Eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (1867), Vol. 1.

When faced with the overwhelming evidence, only an extremely close-minded individual could dispute one self-evident fact: Early Church leaders not only believed Jesus Christ had, of necessity, revealed the *meaning* of the Hebrew Scriptures to the Apostles because those Scriptures had been sealed; they also believed they were *handing down* that understanding of the Scriptures as an *oral tradition*.

In this, and at least the next, issue of *The Voice of Elijah*®, I plan to show you some of the places where the Church Fathers openly *talk about* such things. We will begin by looking at some statements made by Irenæus in his monumental work, "Against Heresies."

"Against Heresies," Book I

TEXT: Chapter X—

**Unity of the Faith of the Church
Throughout the Whole World.**

1. **The Church, though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith:** [She believes] in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and His [future] manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father "to gather all things in one," [Eph. 1:10] and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race, in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Saviour, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father, "every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess" [Phil. 2:10–11] to Him, and that He should execute just judgment

towards all; that He may send "spiritual wickednesses," and the angels who transgressed and became apostates, together with the ungodly, and unrighteous, and wicked, and profane among men, into everlasting fire; but may, in the exercise of His grace, confer immortality on the righteous, and holy, and those who have kept His commandments, and have persevered in His love, some from the beginning [of their Christian course], and others from [the date of] their repentance, and may surround them with everlasting glory.

COMMENTARY: A great many segments of the Church today would no doubt agree with the broad outlines of what Irenæus sketches as "this faith." And in so doing, they would probably take great comfort in the fact that they still believe the same things the Early Church believed. Yet no matter what our modern mind-set would lead us to believe, one sad fact still remains. This second-century Church Father is not explaining what one must believe in order to be saved from the eternal wrath of God. Rather, he is outlining the distinctive doctrines that set the Church apart from all the pagan religions of his day. To be even more specific, he is keying on only those orthodox beliefs that Christian Gnostics had modified or rejected because they found them objectionable.

Take a closer look at the doctrines that Irenæus mentions. A diagram of his Apostle-Paul-like sentence turned into a paragraph makes it easier to see the relationship that exists between them:

[She believes]

1. *in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and*
2. *in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and*
3. *in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets*
 - a. *the dispensations of God, and*
 - b. *the advents, and*
 - c. *the birth from a virgin, and*
 - d. *the passion, and*
 - e. *the resurrection from the dead, and*
 - f. *the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and*

g. His [future] manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father

- (1) "to gather all things in one," [Eph. 1:10] and
- (2) to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race, in order

- (a) that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Saviour, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father, "every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and
- (b) that every tongue should confess" to Him [Phil. 2:10–11], and
- (c) that He should execute just judgment towards all;
- (d) that He

- 1) may send "spiritual wickednesses," and the angels who transgressed and became apostates, together with the ungodly, and unrighteous, and wicked, and profane among men, into everlasting fire; but
- 2) may, in the exercise of His grace, confer immortality on the righteous, and holy, and those who have kept His commandments, and have persevered in His love, some from the beginning [of their Christian course], and others [from the date of] their repentance, and
- 3) may surround them with everlasting glory.

If you were paying close attention to what you just read, you probably already know that Irenæus is describing nothing more than the basic outlines of the Gospel. Only a mindless moron would assume—completely arbitrarily—that Irenæus intended his reader to understand that he is providing the total content of *The Apostolic Teaching*. Even Paul's short epistle to the Galatians contains more specific details concerning *The Teaching* than Irenæus does here. If all that one needs to believe to be saved are the general beliefs that Irenæus mentions, where are all those details that Paul refers to in his epistles supposed to fit in? Maybe we

should just ignore them. Or maybe we should—like the ignorant mental sluggard described in the Book of Proverbs—pretend they aren't all that important.

Did you see how Irenæus delineated the differing roles of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? The Father is the Creator; the Son is the Saviour, and the Holy Spirit is the One "who proclaimed through the prophets" all the things that he mentions. That last fact should, in and of itself, tell you he believed the Gospel message could be found in the Old Testament. So if you don't know where, when, how, and why Isaiah, Jeremiah, and all those fellows laid out the plan of God for all the Ages, you might want to reconsider the precarious perch on which you have chosen to roost. Otherwise, you could wake up to find your goose has already been cooked. (That's an English idiom. The Hebrew language has lots of idioms like that one. Remind me to explain them to you some time.)

TEXT: 2. As I have already observed, the Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although scattered throughout the whole world, yet, as if occupying but one house, carefully preserves it. She also believes these points [of doctrine] just as if she had but one soul, and one and the same heart, and she proclaims them, and teaches them, and hands them down, with perfect harmony, as if she possessed only one mouth. For, although the languages of the world are dissimilar, yet the import of the tradition is one and the same. For the Churches which have been planted in Germany do not believe or hand down anything different, nor do those in Spain, nor those in Gaul, nor those in the East, nor those in Egypt, nor those in Libya, nor those which have been established in the central regions of the world. But as the sun, that creature of God, is one and the same throughout the whole world, so also the preaching of the truth shineth everywhere, and enlightens all men that are willing to come to a knowledge of the truth. Nor will any one of the rulers in the Churches, however highly gifted he may be in point of eloquence, teach doctrines different from these (for no one is greater than the Master); nor, on the other hand, will he who is deficient in power of expression inflict injury on the tradition. For the faith being ever one and the same, neither does one who is able at great length to discourse regarding it, make any addition to it, nor does one, who can say but little, diminish it.

COMMENTARY: I trust you were able to grasp the *meaning* and *significance* of what Irenæus said. He is *talking about* the *oral tradition* the leaders in the Church *received* from the Apostles and were diligently trying to *hand down*—*orally*—just as they *received* it. I only mention that because Satan has the power to filter the *meaning* and *significance* of what the fools among us read and hear so that they sometimes miss even the most obvious point. Some of them probably marveled at how well Irenæus' description fits the Church today. Unfortunately, it doesn't fit at all.

If you are awake enough to be able to see through the fog in which Satan has completely enshrouded our generation, consider this: In what he says here, Irenæus makes no mention at all of the written text of the Scriptures. That is because his focus is entirely on the *oral tradition* that Teachers in the Church *received* from the Apostles and were busy *handing down* from generation to generation. He did refer to the Old Testament Scriptures earlier in this chapter however. Perhaps you missed it. He said the Holy Spirit had "proclaimed through the prophets" all of the things he mentions. That alone should tell you he placed no great emphasis on the books of the New Testament. But when you stop to think about it, why should he? He was able to read and understand the things that the Prophets hid in the Old Testament. He mentions that a bit later. So I won't bother to substantiate that claim here.

Since Irenæus wrote these words quite some time before Church leaders felt the need to establish the New Testament canon, we can be sure that although the books of the New Testament were being read in the churches, they were not yet considered to be a part of the Scriptures. That should give you an additional bit of insight into the reality which Irenæus faced.

The issue with which Irenæus is concerned is not which Teacher is best equipped to *interpret* the Scriptures; it is which one is best able to explain *The Apostolic Teaching* and thereby *hand down* the *oral tradition* the Church had *received* from the Apostles. If you cannot see how starkly that reality contrasts with what is going on in the Church today, I pity you. What you see all around you are drunken fools eating the putrid vomit that comes spewing out of the mouth of some other drunken fool. They have been at that abominable practice for so long now that none of them have any taste at all for the food that comes out of the mouth of

God. I didn't say that. I just paraphrased how the Prophet Isaiah *parabolically* describes what ignorant men were doing in his own day:

*And these also reel with wine
and stagger from strong drink:
The priest and the prophet reel with strong drink,
They are confused by wine,
they stagger from strong drink;
They reel while having visions,
They totter {when rendering} judgment.
For all the tables are full of filthy vomit,
without a {single clean} place.
(Isaiah 28:7-8)*

Isaiah immediately goes on to contrast the Truth of *The Teaching* with the mandragora wine preferred by inebriated dimwits. But to understand what the Prophet says about those things, one needs to realize he is speaking *parabolically* concerning the seven sealed messages the Prophets hid in the Hebrew Scriptures:

*"To whom would He teach knowledge?
And to whom would He interpret the message?
Those {just} weaned from milk?
Those {just} taken from the breast?
For {He says,} 'Order on order, order on order,
Line on line, line on line,
A little here, a little there.'"
Indeed, He will speak to this people
Through stammering lips and a foreign tongue,
He who said to them,
"Here is rest, give rest to the weary,"
And, "Here is repose," but they would not listen.
So the word of the LORD to them will be,
"Order on order, order on order,
Line on line, line on line,
A little here, a little there,"
That they may go and stumble backward,
be broken, snared, and taken captive.
(Isaiah 28:9-13)*

The *parabolic* drunkards of our own day will vehemently deny that the shoe fits them perfectly. But how would they know whether it does or not? The point is, they are ignorant of the Truth. The Prophet who wrote the Book of Proverbs aptly described their grasp of *The Teaching* this way:

{Like} a thorn {which} falls into the hand of a drunkard,
So is a proverb in the mouth of fools.
(Proverbs 26:9)

Unfortunately, their Day is coming. You may not be able to do anything to prevent others from falling into the Pit along with the blind guides you see and hear everywhere today, but you can certainly take steps to avoid that fate yourself. If you don't, you will find yourself awakened from the dust of the ground on Judgment Day to face the fact that you allowed an incredibly amazing opportunity to pass you by:

*Awake, drunkards, and weep;
And wail, all you wine drinkers,
On account of the sweet wine
That is cut off from your mouth.
(Joel 1:5)*

If you need confirmation that Joel was speaking in terms of Judgment Day when he said that, listen to what he says a bit later in that same context:

***Alas for the day!
For the day of the LORD is near,
And it will come as destruction from the Almighty.
Has not food been cut off before our eyes,
Gladness and joy from the house of our God?
The seeds shrivel under their clods;
The storehouses are desolate,
The barns are torn down,
For the grain is dried up.
How the beasts groan!
The herds of cattle wander aimlessly
Because there is no pasture for them;
Even the flocks of sheep suffer.
To Thee, O LORD, I cry;
For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness,
And the flame has burned up all the trees of the field.
Even the beasts of the field pant for Thee;
For the water brooks are dried up,
And fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.
Blow a trumpet in Zion,
And sound an alarm on My holy mountain!
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,
For the day of the LORD is coming;
Surely it is near,
A day of darkness and gloom,***

***A day of clouds and thick darkness.
As the dawn is spread over the mountains,
{So} there is a great and mighty people;
There has never been {anything} like it,
Nor will there be again after it
To the years of many generations.
A fire consumes before them,
And behind them a flame burns.
The land is like the garden of Eden before them,
But a desolate wilderness behind them,
And nothing at all escapes them.
(Joel 1:15–2:3)***

To understand what the Prophet Joel is describing in that passage, one needs to know that translators have concealed the Truth by translating the original Hebrew text as “the land” rather than “the earth.” The Truth is, the Prophet is *talking about* the same thing that the Apostle Paul mentions here:

*Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him, that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one in any way deceive you, for {it will not come} unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he may be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains {will do so} until he is taken out of the way. And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; {that is,} the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.
(2 Thessalonians 2:1–12)*

The time has come for all those who still retain a love for the Truth to return to *The Apostolic Teaching* that was being *handed down* in the Church as an *oral tradition* at the time when Irenæus wrote. If, after having had an opportunity to hear the Truth, you choose not to believe it, you will have no one to blame but yourself.

TEXT: 3. It does not follow because men are endowed with greater and less degrees of intelligence, that they should therefore change the subject-matter [of the faith] itself, and should conceive of some other God besides Him who is the Framer, Maker, and Preserver of this universe, (as if He were not sufficient for them), or of another Christ, or another Only-begotten. But the fact referred to simply implies this, that one may [more accurately than another] bring out the meaning of those things which have been spoken in parables, and accommodate them to the general scheme of the faith; and explain [with special clearness] the operation and dispensation of God connected with human salvation; and show that God manifested longsuffering in regard to the apostasy of the angels who transgressed, as also with respect to the disobedience of men; and set forth why it is that one and the same God has made some things temporal and some eternal, some heavenly and others earthly; and understand for what reason God, though invisible, manifested Himself to the prophets not under one form, but differently to different individuals; and show why it was that more covenants than one were given to mankind; and teach what was the special character of each of these covenants; and search out for what reason "God hath concluded every man in unbelief, that He may have mercy upon all;" [Rom. 11:32] and gratefully describe on what account the Word of God became flesh and suffered; and relate why the advent of the Son of God took place in these last times, that is, in the end, rather than in the beginning [of the world]; and unfold what is contained in the Scriptures concerning the end [itself], and things to come; and not be silent as to how it is that God has made the Gentiles, whose salvation was despaired of, fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers with the saints; and discourse how it is that "this mortal body shall put on immortality, and this corruptible shall put on incorruption;" [1 Cor. 15:54] and proclaim in what sense [God] says, "That is a people who was not a people; and she is beloved who was not beloved;" [Hos. 2:23; Rom. 9:25] and in what sense He

says that "more are the children of her that was desolate, than of her who possessed a husband." [Is. 54:1; Gal. 4:27] For in reference to these points, and others of a like nature, the apostle exclaims "Oh! the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God; how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" [Rom. 11:33] **But [the superior skill spoken of] is not found in this**, that any one should, beyond the Creator and Framer [of the world], conceive of the Enthymesis of an erring Æon, their mother and his, and should thus proceed to such a pitch of blasphemy; nor does it consist in this, that he should again falsely imagine, as being above this [fancied being], a Pleroma at one time supposed to contain thirty, and at another time an innumerable tribe of Æons, **as these teachers who are destitute of truly divine wisdom maintain; while the Catholic Church possess one and the same faith throughout the whole world, as we have already said.**

Irenæus, "Against Heresies," Book i, Chap. x, in Roberts and Donaldson (Eds.), The Ante-Nicene Fathers (1867), Vol. 1.

COMMENTARY: It is tempting to disagree with Irenæus when he says this:

It does not follow because men are endowed with greater and less degrees of intelligence, that they should therefore change the subject-matter [of the faith] itself, and should conceive of some other God besides Him who is the Framer, Maker, and Preserver of this universe, (as if He were not sufficient for them), or of another Christ, or another Only-begotten.

His point is that just because one Teacher is a bit more intelligent than another, that does not give him the right to change *The Apostolic Teaching*. However, my tendency is to consider that the opposite possibility might, in fact, be true: Someone would have to be rather stupid to change what is true and think that he has somehow crafted something that is even more true. But the hard, cold fact is, Irenæus was right. Intelligence has very little to do with whether anyone accepts or rejects *The Teaching*, much less whether or not they change it to suit themselves. The only contributing factor in that regard is ignorance. That is, ignorant people do dumb things, not because they lack intelligence, but because they lack insight into the Truth.

Ignorance and intelligence are two things that people tend to get confused. That is, intelligent folks are not generally considered to be ignorant. Yet some of the most intelligent people I have ever met have also been the most ignorant. You see, intelligence does not in and of itself overcome ignorance. Only a knowledge of the Truth can do that. Sadly, unregenerate people who refuse to repent and believe the Gospel are unable to acquire knowledge of the one thing that would help them to overcome their ignorance. But their inability in that regard is not because they are unintelligent; it is because they are unregenerate. As the Apostle Paul puts it:

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual {thoughts} with spiritual {words.} But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.
(1 Corinthians 2:12–14)

To understand what Paul meant by what he wrote to the Corinthians, it helps to know what a “spirit” is. But even lacking that, his point is still fairly clear: Most folks are completely unable to understand *The Teaching*. So the next time you hear someone who claims to be a “Christian” disagree with the things that you have heard, understood, and believed—that is, the things you have learned from *The Voice of Elijah*®—you can mentally print up a big label that reads **PRETENDER** and slap it on him. Don’t tell him you can see through his pretense. Just let him blindly stagger off into the Pit of Hell, all the while thinking he has a God-given lock on the Truth. Lest you think I am cold and uncaring, I should point out that is precisely what Jesus said we should do with such folks:

He presented another parable to them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprang up and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. And the slaves of the landowner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow

good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ And he said to them, ‘An enemy has done this!’ And the slaves said to him, ‘Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No; lest while you are gathering up the tares, you may root up the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.”’”
(Matthew 13:24–30)

Lots of folks think they have been born again. The Truth is, not many have. Those who think they have but haven’t are Pretenders. And because they have chosen to believe Satan’s lie concerning their standing with God, they have a rude awakening coming on Judgment Day. Jesus described their fate this way:

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’”
(Matthew 7:21–23)

Knowing that such a fate awaits the completely unsuspecting, you might want to verify your new-birth experience now rather than waiting until it’s too late.

“Against Heresies,” Book II

TEXT: Chapter XXV—

God Is Not to Be Sought After by Means of Letters, Syllables, and Numbers; Necessity of Humility in Such Investigations.

1. If any one, however, say in reply to these things, What then? Is it a meaningless and accidental thing, that the positions of names, and the election of the apostles, and the working of the Lord, and the arrangement of created things, are what they are? — we answer them: Certainly not; but with great wisdom and diligence, all things have clearly been made by God, fitted and prepared [for their special purposes]; and His word formed both things ancient and those

belonging to the latest times; and men ought not to connect those things with the number *thirty*, but to harmonize them with what actually exists, or with right reason.

Nor should they seek to prosecute inquiries respecting God by means of numbers, syllables, and letters. For this is an uncertain mode of proceeding, on account of their varied and diverse systems, and because every sort of hypothesis may at the present day be, in like manner, devised by any one; so that they can derive arguments against the truth from these very theories, inasmuch as they may be turned in many different directions. But, on the contrary, they ought to adapt the numbers themselves, and those things which have been formed, to the true theory lying before them. For system does not spring out of numbers, but numbers from a system; nor does God derive His being from things made, but things made from God. For all things originate from one and the same God.

COMMENTARY: Did you see how squarely this ancient, “primitive” man hit the nail on the head? He could do that easily because ignorant folks in his day were doing exactly the same stupid things that ignorant folks in our day are doing—speculating concerning how, where, and why the Prophets hid the Truth in the Hebrew Scriptures. Yet the only thing their speculation can ever produce is some ridiculous theory that explains whatever warped notion they have concocted in the dank, dark recesses of their darkened mind.

TEXT: 2. But since created things are various and numerous, they are indeed well fitted and adapted to the whole creation; yet, when viewed individually, are mutually opposite and inharmonious, just as the sound of the lyre, which consists of many and opposite notes, gives rise to one unbroken melody, through means of the interval which separates each one from the others. **The lover of truth therefore ought not to be deceived by the interval between each note, nor should he imagine that one was due to one artist and author, and another to another, nor that one person fitted the treble, another the bass, and yet another the tenor strings; but he should hold that one and the same person [formed the whole], so as to prove the judgment, goodness, and skill exhibited in the whole work and [specimen of] wisdom.** Those, too, who listen to the

melody, ought to praise and extol the artist, to admire the tension of some notes, to attend to the softness of others, to catch the sound of others between both these extremes, and to consider the special character of others, so as to inquire at what each one aims, and what is the cause of their variety, never failing to apply our rule, neither giving up the [one] artist, nor casting off faith in the one God who formed all things, nor blaspheming our Creator.

COMMENTARY: Irenæus is talking about how neatly God has fitted together *The Teaching* that explains the seven sealed messages the Prophets hid in the Hebrew Scriptures. He knows it doesn't matter whether one looks at the Truth from the perspective of “*The House*,” “*The Way*,” “*The Light*,” “*The Name*,” or *The Bride*. The Prophets were merely describing the working of the Word Who came down from Heaven to accomplish the work for which God sent Him. The impeccable harmony of their long-dead voices is indeed remarkable. And if you have difficulty accepting the fact that you cannot arbitrarily twist and distort that Word to make Him sing and dance in sync to your funky tune, that's your problem. The Apostle Peter clearly explained that Scripture is not a matter of your “private interpretation”:

And {so} we have the prophetic word {made} more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture 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.

(2 Peter 1:19–21)

The Scriptures *mean* exactly what God *meant* to say. Nothing less. Nothing more. There is—and can be—but one true *meaning* to the message of the Scriptures. But nobody seems able to comprehend that nowadays. They would rather flippantly dismiss the possibility that someone might, in fact, know the Truth by saying, “That's your interpretation.” Oh, boy! Do they ever have a surprise headed their way!

TEXT: 3. If, however, any one do not discover the cause of all those things which become objects of

investigation, let him reflect that man is infinitely inferior to God; that he has received grace only in part, and is not yet equal or similar to his Maker; and, moreover, that he cannot have experience or form a conception of all things like God; but in the same proportion as he who was formed but to-day, and received the beginning of his creation, is inferior to Him who is uncreated, and who is always the same, in that proportion is he, as respects knowledge and the faculty of investigating the causes of all things, inferior to Him who made him. For thou, O man, art not an uncreated being, nor didst thou always co-exist with God, as did His own Word; but now, through His pre-eminent goodness, receiving the beginning of thy creation, thou dost gradually learn from the Word the dispensations of God who made thee.

COMMENTARY: That's a difficult one for ignorant folks to get their arms around, isn't it? It's sort of like trying to hug that proverbial fat lady who is supposed to sing the closing song but never gets around to it. Nonetheless, if we could all just get down off our perpetually polished pedestal long enough to embrace a love for the Truth, ignorance could vanish overnight. Unfortunately, everyone likes to think that his own two cents are worth a trillion and one should never take other folks' two cents at face value. The Truth is, one good, honest opinion and a brand-spanking-new dollar bill won't even buy a good cup of coffee.

"The Word" that Irenæus mentions is not the Scriptures, as folks today are wont to believe. Nor is it "the word" that Greek philosophers in the second century considered God to be. They thought "the word" of God was the innate reason that each of us supposedly possesses. By contrast, Teachers in the second-century Church taught that the Word is *The Teaching* that Moses and all the other Prophets of Israel hid in the Hebrew Scriptures. At least they taught that until that part of *The Teaching* lost out to the goofiness that Justin Martyr and his "Christian philosopher" pals foisted off on the Church.

Have I explained what the Prophets said would happen when the Word finally comes out of hiding? No? If I haven't, I have certainly been derelict in my duty. Some folks don't even know that God has hidden His "face" from us. No matter. He did. The Hebrew Scriptures plainly say so:

*"And the LORD saw {this,} and spurned {them}
Because of the provocation of His sons and daughters.
Then He said, 'I will hide My face from them,
I will see what their end {shall be;}
For they are a perverse generation,
Sons in whom is no faithfulness.'"
(Deuteronomy 32:19–20)*

Actually, I was just joshing when I said "plainly." Moses is speaking *parabolically* in that passage. And a parable never says anything "plainly." It always speaks *parabolically*. Moses is telling us how one thing—God hiding His face—IS LIKE something else. I'll let you figure out what that other "thing" is. But I will tell you that you don't want to be standing on the wrong side of God when He finally comes out of hiding. Things are going to get real nasty in a hurry. The Prophet Jeremiah describes those events this way:

*Thus says the LORD of hosts,
"Behold, evil is going forth
From nation to nation,
And a great storm is being stirred up
From the remotest parts of the earth.
And those slain by the LORD on that day
shall be from one end of the earth to the other.
They shall not be lamented, gathered, or buried;
they shall be like dung on the face of the ground.
Wail, you shepherds, and cry;
And wallow {in ashes,} you masters of the flock;
For the days of your slaughter
and your dispersions have come,
And you shall fall like a choice vessel.
Flight shall perish from the shepherds,
And escape from the masters of the flock.
{Hear} the sound of the cry of the shepherds,
And the wailing of the masters of the flock!
For the LORD is destroying their pasture,
And the peaceful folds are made silent
Because of the fierce anger of the LORD.
He has left His hiding place like the lion;
For their land has become a horror
Because of the fierceness of the oppressing {sword,}
And because of His fierce anger."
(Jeremiah 25:32–38)*

The Apostle John also mentions the fact that the quality of life here on Planet Earth is scheduled to take

a precipitous dip when the Word has finally come fully out of His hiding place. He says this:

And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, WHO CREATED HEAVEN AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE EARTH AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE SEA AND THE THINGS IN IT, that there shall be delay no longer, but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets.
(Revelation 10:5-7)

TEXT: 4. Preserve therefore the proper order of thy knowledge, and do not, as being ignorant of things really good, seek to rise above God Himself, for He cannot be surpassed; nor do thou seek after any one above the Creator, for thou wilt not discover such: For thy Former cannot be contained within limits; nor, **although thou shouldst measure all this [universe], and pass through all His creation, and consider it in all its depth, and height, and length, wouldst thou be able to conceive of any other above the Father Himself.** For thou wilt not be able to think Him fully out, but, indulging in trains of reflection opposed to thy nature, thou wilt prove thyself foolish; and if thou persevere in such a course, thou wilt fall into utter madness, whilst thou deemest thyself loftier and greater than thy Creator, and imaginest that thou canst penetrate beyond His dominions.

COMMENTARY: Irenæus is still *talking about* the Word. So don't be misled by his tendency to drift off into pleonastic assertions. His point is actually quite easy to understand: If you think like God, you must be LIKE God. But if you only think you think like God when everyone who has the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16) can see that you don't have the foggiest notion of how God thinks, you are obviously as loony as two loonies singing off tune. Nevertheless, when it comes time to pay the fiddler—that's an idiom—you will find that you have been keeping perfect time.

TEXT: Chapter XXVI—
"Knowledge Puffeth Up, but Love Edifieth."

1. **It is therefore better and more profitable to belong to the simple and unlettered class, and by**

means of love to attain to nearness to God, than, by imagining ourselves learned and skilful, to be found [among those who are] blasphemous against their own God, inasmuch as they conjure up another God as the Father. And for this reason Paul exclaimed, "Knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth." [1 Cor. 8:1] not that he meant to inveigh against a true knowledge of God, for in that case he would have accused himself; but, because **he knew that some, puffed up by the pretence of knowledge, fall away from the love of God, and imagine that they themselves are perfect, for this reason that they set forth an imperfect Creator,** with the view of putting an end to the pride which they feel on account of knowledge of this kind, he says, "Knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth." Now there can be no greater conceit than this, that any one should imagine he is better and more perfect than He who made and fashioned him, and imparted to him the breath of life, and commanded this very thing into existence. It is therefore better, as I have said, that one should have no knowledge whatever of any one reason why a single thing in creation has been made, but should believe in God, and continue in His love, than that, puffed up through knowledge of this kind, he should fall away from that love which is the life of man; and that he should search after no other knowledge except [the knowledge of] Jesus Christ the Son of God, who was crucified for us, than that by subtle questions and hairsplitting expressions he should fall into impiety.

COMMENTARY: Did you catch what Irenæus said about folks who "conjure up another God as the Father" and in the process "imagine that they themselves are perfect, for this reason that they set forth an imperfect Creator"? If you don't think folks are still doing that today, put one of the Pretenders in the Church to this simple test: First, confront him with the fact that his goofy god of unconditional love is pure fiction. Then, tell him the angry God of Israel holds an abject hatred for all sinners. Finally, you must explain that if he does not submit himself completely to the will of the One true God instead of counting on the imaginary benevolence of the fictitious god of grace that men have crafted in their own image, the God Who is will destroy him.

After your unsuspecting quarry has gotten over his initial hostile reaction to the Truth and quieted

down a bit, listen carefully to what he says. See if he doesn't tell you that the God you have described is a whole lot less than perfect. He may ramble on incoherently for awhile, but he will get around to it sooner or later. Just wait, ... and listen. Then consider the logic of what you have heard: The angry God of Israel cannot hate sinners. If He does, He is not living up to the same standard that He set for men. Ergo, He cannot be perfect. It doesn't occur to fools that exactly the opposite is true: God could never be perfect if He were subject to His Own or any other law.

Since every pious Pretender duplicitously thinks he is living up to the impossibly high standard that God set for men, he must consider himself to be more perfect than the God Who is. Think about it. But don't think too hard; you might strain something.

TEXT: 2. For how would it be, if any one, gradually elated by attempts of the kind referred to, should, because the Lord said that "even the hairs of your head are all numbered," [Matt. 10:30] set about inquiring into the number of hairs on each one's head, and endeavour to search out the reason on account of which one man has so many, and another so many, since all have not an equal number, but many thousands upon thousands are to be found with still varying numbers, on this account that some have larger and others smaller heads, some have bushy heads of hair, others thin, and others scarcely any hair at all, —and then those who imagine that they have discovered the number of the hairs, should endeavour to apply that for the commendation of their own sect which they have conceived?

Or again, if any one should, because of this expression which occurs in the Gospel, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and not one of them falls to the ground without the will of your Father," [Matt. 10:29] take occasion to reckon up the number of sparrows caught daily, whether over all the world or in some particular district, and to make inquiry as to the reason of so many having been captured yesterday, so many the day before, and so many again on this day, and should then join on the number of sparrows to his [particular] hypothesis, **would he not in that case mislead himself altogether, and drive into absolute insanity those that agreed with him, since men are always eager in such matters to be thought to have discovered something more extraordinary than their masters?**

COMMENTARY: Is Irenæus nitpicking? I don't think so, but I've been wrong about such things before. If you think he is, would you please drop me a line and tell me what a "nit" is? Also, I would sincerely appreciate it if you included a few suggestions as to how to pick a good one.

I have a hunch our good Church Father is (like me) just being sarcastic. It is easy to slip off into that vein when one stops to consider the absolutely astounding amount of mindless speculation that masquerades as deeply intellectual "theological discussion." The staying power of men's ignorance being what it is, it is not surprising that his final question concerning the proverbial fool is just as apt in our own day as it was in his:

Would he not in that case mislead himself altogether, and drive into absolute insanity those that agreed with him, since men are always eager in such matters to be thought to have discovered something more extraordinary than their masters?

To tell the Truth, Irenæus is way ahead of me on the issue of people who discuss the fact that God counts hairs and enumerates birds. The only time I ever considered God counting the hairs on my head was when the thought occurred to me that perhaps He had intentionally stopped counting.

TEXT: 3. But if any one should ask us whether every number of all the things which have been made, and which are made, is known to God, and whether every one of these [numbers] has, according to His providence, received that special amount which it contains; and on our agreeing that such is the case, and acknowledging that not one of the things which have been, or are, or shall be made, escapes the knowledge of God, but that through His providence every one of them has obtained its nature, and rank, and number, and special quantity, and that nothing whatever either has been or is produced in vain or accidentally, but with exceeding suitability [to the purpose intended], and in the exercise of transcendent knowledge, and that it was an admirable and truly divine intellect, which could both distinguish and bring forth the proper causes of such a system: **if, [I say,] any one, on obtaining our adherence and consent to this, should proceed to reckon up the sand and pebbles of the**

earth, yea also the waves of the sea and the stars of heaven, and should endeavour to think out the causes of the number which he imagines himself to have discovered, would not his labour be in vain, and would not such a man be justly declared mad, and destitute of reason, by all possessed of common sense? And the more he occupied himself beyond others in questions of this kind, and the more he imagines himself to find out beyond others, styling them unskilful, ignorant, and animal beings, because they do not enter into his so useless labour, the more is he [in reality] insane, foolish, struck as it were with a thunderbolt, since indeed he does in no one point own himself inferior to God; but, by the knowledge which he imagines himself to have discovered, he changes God Himself, and exalts his own opinion above the greatness of the Creator.

COMMENTARY: I still can't shake the feeling that perhaps Irenæus is using this counting nonsense as a subterfuge. He seems to be painting a ridiculous caricature of all those birdbrains among us who would deign to leave their lofty perch long enough to speak for God so the rest of us might gain a wee bit of insight into what the Almighty thinks, feels, and reckons us "unskilful, ignorant, and animal beings" need to know. I only say that because he appears to be using slash-and-burn tactics when he says things like this:

Would not such a man be justly declared mad, and destitute of reason, by all possessed of common sense?

**TEXT: Chapter XXVII—
Proper Mode of Interpreting Parables
and Obscure Passages of Scripture.**

1. A sound mind, and one which does not expose its possessor to danger, and is devoted to piety and the love of truth, will eagerly meditate upon those things which God has placed within the power of mankind, and has subjected to our knowledge, and will make advancement in [acquaintance with] them, rendering the knowledge of them easy to him by means of daily study. **These things are such as fall [plainly] under our observation, and are clearly and unambiguously in express terms set forth in the Sacred Scriptures. And therefore the parables ought not to be adapted to ambiguous expressions. For, if this be not done, both**

he who explains them will do so without danger, and the parables will receive a like interpretation from all, and the body of truth remains entire, with a harmonious adaptation of its members, and without any collision [of its several parts]. But to apply expressions which are not clear or evident to interpretations of the parables, such as every one discovers for himself as inclination leads him, [is absurd.] For in this way no one will possess the rule of truth; but in accordance with the number of persons who explain the parables will be found the various systems of truth, in mutual opposition to each other, and setting forth antagonistic doctrines, like the questions current among the Gentile philosophers.

COMMENTARY: The tendency of modern readers is to think that Irenæus, in what he says here, is referring only to the parables of Jesus. But he isn't. He has in mind also the parables of Moses and the other Prophets of Israel. That will become evident from what he says in the next chapter. We have already seen that Irenæus believes the Prophets explain all of the basic Christian beliefs concerning Jesus Christ. In this chapter, he is merely affirming that the *meaning* of the parables they used should be clear and self-evident to anyone to whom they have been thoroughly explained.

It is obvious from what Irenæus says that he did not understand the nature of the threat the Church faced in his day. Consequently, he did not realize he was fighting a diversionary battle in a war that the Church had already lost. Irenæus was one little piggy valiantly trying to keep the Wolf from blowing down the front door when the Wolf had no intention of coming in that way. He had long since picked the lock on the back door, and his pups were holed up in the closet, quietly putting on sheep's clothing.

Although the Church in his day still retained a general understanding of the parables that one finds in the Hebrew Scriptures (which are what *The Apostolic Teaching* explains), the details had long since become vague and uncertain in the minds of many Christian Teachers. That lack of clarity would prove to be the secret ingredient in a recipe for disaster. And disaster would strike even before Irenæus passed from the scene. Once the details of *The Apostolic Teaching* had been lost, it was only a matter of time before ignorant men came to believe they could retrieve them through the idiocy of theological discussion. Within a decade,

the imbecile Clement of Alexandria and his equally ignorant protégé, Origin the Idiot, would initiate Satan's crusade to convince Church leaders that they should forget about *handing down The Apostolic Teaching* as an *oral tradition* and try to retrieve what had been lost by allowing everyone to interpret the Scriptures for themselves. Ominously, Irenæus unknowingly describes what the Church would become after Church leaders accepted Satan's lie:

But to apply expressions which are not clear or evident to interpretations of the parables, such as every one discovers for himself as inclination leads him, [is absurd.] For in this way no one will possess the rule of truth; but in accordance with the number of persons who explain the parables will be found the various systems of truth, in mutual opposition to each other, and setting forth antagonistic doctrines, like the questions current among the Gentile philosophers.

TEXT: 2. According to this course of procedure, therefore, man would always be inquiring but never finding, because he has rejected the very method of discovery. And when the Bridegroom [Matt. 25:5 ff.] comes, he who has his lamp untrimmed, and not burning with the brightness of a steady light, is classed among those who obscure the interpretations of the parables, forsaking Him who by His plain announcements freely imparts gifts to all who come to Him, and is excluded from His marriage-chamber.

Since, therefore, the entire Scriptures, the prophets, and the Gospels, can be clearly, unambiguously, and harmoniously understood by all, although all do not believe them; and since they proclaim that one only God, to the exclusion of all others, formed all things by His word, whether visible or invisible, heavenly or earthly, in the water or under the earth, as I have shown from the very words of Scripture; and since the very system of creation to which we belong testifies, by what falls under our notice, that one Being made and governs it, —those persons will seem truly foolish who blind their eyes to such a clear demonstration, and will not behold the light of the announcement [made to them]; but they put fetters upon themselves, and every one of them imagines, by means of their obscure interpretations of the parables, that he has found out a God of his own.

For that there is nothing whatever openly, expressly, and without controversy said in any part of Scripture respecting the Father conceived of by those who hold a contrary opinion, they themselves testify, when they maintain that the Saviour privately taught these same things not to all, but to certain only of His disciples who could comprehend them, and who understood what was intended by Him through means of arguments, enigmas, and parables. They come, [in fine], to this, that they maintain there is one Being who is proclaimed as God, and another as Father, He who is set forth as such through means of parables and enigmas.

COMMENTARY: Pay close attention to how Irenæus begins this second section of the chapter:

According to this course of procedure, therefore, man would always be inquiring but never finding, because he has rejected the very method of discovery.

In saying "this course of procedure," he is referring back to the theological methodology he described immediately before that:

But to apply expressions which are not clear or evident to interpretations of the parables, such as every one discovers for himself as inclination leads him, [is absurd.] For in this way no one will possess the rule of truth; but in accordance with the number of persons who explain the parables will be found the various systems of truth, in mutual opposition to each other, and setting forth antagonistic doctrines, like the questions current among the Gentile philosophers.

Irenæus is obviously saying the Truth cannot be attained by speculation. But if he does not accept theological discussion as a valid method of attaining the Truth, the logical question is: How does he expect anyone to attain such knowledge? The answer should be obvious to anyone not beguiled by the Serpent: He expects the True Believer to listen intently while someone who knows the Truth explains it to him. He does not state that explicitly, but it is certainly implied by his reference to the Parable of the Ten Virgins:

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the

bridegroom. And five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and {began} to sleep. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet {him.}' Then all those virgins rose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the prudent answered, saying, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you {too;} go instead to the dealers and buy {some} for yourselves.' And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. And later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' But he answered and said, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour."

(Matthew 25:1–13)

The point of that parable is completely lost on the person who does not know that "oil" is a *parabolic image* of *The Apostolic Teaching*. Irenæus refers to the parable only because he is explaining what will happen to those born-again Believers who do not purchase enough "oil" from "the dealers"—that is, what will happen to those Pretenders who do not gain sufficient understanding of *The Teaching* from legitimate Teachers—prior to the appearance of Jesus Christ: They will be rejected. But notice the description with which Irenæus concludes that section of the chapter:

They come, [in fine], to this, that they maintain there is one Being who is proclaimed as God, and another as Father, He who is set forth as such through means of parables and enigmas.

He is *talking about* the doctrines of the Christian Gnostics. As I have explained elsewhere, the Gnostics made the mistake of thinking *The Apostolic Teaching* they heard in the Church was a *literal* description of spiritual reality rather than a *parabolic* description. In so doing, they essentially re-mythologized the *parabolic imagery* of *The Teaching* and created a pagan religion. The nonsense that Irenæus describes here is nothing more than the logical result of their ridiculous mistake. The *parabolic images* in which God is depicted not only

as the Father and as the Son, but also as the Holy Spirit are just that—*parabolic images*. Nothing more. Fools will deny it; but the Truth is, the new birth is a *parabolic image* the Prophets and Apostles used to describe how True Believers can take on the *parabolic image* and likeness of God the Father through belief in *The Teaching*.

TEXT: 3. But since **parables admit of many interpretations, what lover of truth will not acknowledge, that for them to assert God is to be searched out from these, while they desert what is certain, indubitable, and true, is the part of men who eagerly throw themselves into danger, and act as if destitute of reason?** And is not such a course of conduct not to build one's house upon a rock [Matt. 7:25] which is firm, strong, and placed in an open position, but upon the shifting sand? Hence the overthrow of such a building is a matter of ease.

COMMENTARY: Irenæus has just made a point that one should not overlook; so make a note of it: The nature of God is carefully and painstakingly described in the historical record that one finds in the Hebrew Scriptures. Therefore, it would be pure folly for anyone to take the *parabolic imagery* of the Prophets and Apostles and use it to craft a god other than the angry God of Israel. Nonetheless, that is exactly what the Church has done.

Christians today view God through the prism of the *parabolic pantomime* in which the *Living Word* of God took the form of a man, lived under *The Law of Moses*, and died on a cross to ransom sinners condemned to certain death. They continue to do that in spite of the fact that the Hebrew Scriptures paint an incredibly detailed picture of God, one in which He is an angry, jealous, vengeful God of wrath—a God Who is completely above the Law He gave to Moses. Therefore, you should pause briefly the next time you hear someone going on ecstatically about how much love his goofy god of unconditional grace has for everyone—even for those whom He is going to consign to eternal damnation in the Pit of Hell. Then ask yourself: Why would such folks readily believe that lie "while they desert what is certain, indubitable, and true," and "eagerly throw themselves into danger, and act as if destitute of reason"? Good question. No obvious answer. Such is the power wielded by the prince of the power of the air. "The wind blows"

**TEXT: Chapter XXVIII—
Perfect Knowledge Cannot Be Attained in the Present
Life. Many Questions Must Be Submissively Left in
the Hands of God.**

1. **Having therefore the truth itself as our rule, and the testimony concerning God set clearly before us, we ought not, by running after numerous and diverse answers to questions, to cast away the firm and true knowledge of God.** But it is much more suitable that we, directing our inquiries after this fashion, should exercise ourselves in the investigation of the mystery and administration of the living God, and should increase in the love of Him who has done, and still does, so great things for us; but never should fall from the belief by which it is most clearly proclaimed that this Being alone is truly God and Father, who both formed this world, fashioned man, and bestowed the faculty of increase on His own creation, and called him upwards from lesser things to those greater ones which are in His own presence, just as He brings an infant which has been conceived in the womb into the light of the sun, and lays up wheat in the barn after He has given it full strength on the stalk. But it is one and the same Creator who both fashioned the womb and created the sun; and one and the same Lord who both reared the stalk of corn, increased and multiplied the wheat, and prepared the barn.

COMMENTARY: Irenæus has chosen some really neat analogies, don't you think? Too bad they aren't analogies. They are *parabolic images*. He is alluding to what the Prophets and Apostles have said the Resurrection IS LIKE. For example, he has passages like the following in mind when he mentions the *parabolic image* of Light:

"For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the LORD of hosts, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear My name the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. And you will tread down the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing," says the LORD of hosts.
(Malachi 4:1-3)

Irenæus is referring to the same *parabolic imagery* that John the Baptist used to describe the Resurrection of the Righteous when he mentions God gathering grain into His barn:

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "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 down and thrown into the fire. As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. And His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

(Matthew 3:7-12)

You probably already knew that Jesus used the same *parabolic image* in His parable concerning the fate of the tares that Satan has sown in the Church:

He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprang up and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. And the slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' And the slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No; lest while you are gathering up the tares, you may root up the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn."'"

(Matthew 13:24-30)

It is difficult to explain the mythological source of that particular *parabolic image*. So I'll let that go for now.

However, I can tell you that Moses was the first of the Prophets to use it:

*"Is it not laid up in store with Me,
Sealed up in My treasuries?
Vengeance is Mine, and retribution,
In due time their foot will slip;
For the day of their calamity is near,
And the impending things are hastening upon them."
(Deuteronomy 32:34–35)*

It is, indeed, unfortunate that the translator of those two verses chose to translate the original Hebrew as "treasury" rather than as "storehouse"—like it is elsewhere. The Truth is, various things of value were stored in the "treasury." It is obvious that gold and silver would have been stored there, but clothes and grain are some of the other things that are mentioned as having been locked up in a storehouse as well. For example, Joel uses exactly the same term that Moses uses when he mentions grain stored in a storehouse:

*The seeds shrivel under their clods;
The storehouses are desolate,
The barns are torn down,
For the grain is dried up.
(Joel 1:17)*

The Prophet is obviously referring to the fact that grain was stored in the "treasury." Malachi implies the same thing by his use of the term:

*"Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed Thee?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation {of you!} Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows. Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it may not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast {its grapes}," says the LORD of hosts.
(Malachi 3:8–11)*

The only reason that I mention the Prophets' use of this particular Hebrew term is because they depict *The Teaching* as various things of value that one would

store in a storehouse. One time it is a garment; the next time, gold and silver. But by far the most interesting and flexible *parabolic image* is the one wherein *The Teaching* is grain. However, it doesn't matter all that much whether you view *The Teaching* as a garment, as gold and silver, or as grain in the *parabolic image* that Moses had in mind when he said this:

*"Is it not laid up in store with Me,
Sealed up in My treasuries?
Vengeance is Mine, and retribution,
In due time their foot will slip;
For the day of their calamity is near,
And the impending things are hastening upon them."
(Deuteronomy 32:34–35)*

When *The Teaching* is finally extracted from the "storehouse" in which God has "stored" Him, believe me, you would not want to be one of those whose "foot will slip." One never knows what Pit you might slide back into. You should keep that in mind the next time you hear someone making the canned spiel that Satan prepared for false teachers in our generation. The Hebrew Scriptures plainly tell us the angry God of Israel is not at all like the goofy god of unconditional love that fools want to believe He is. So you would do well to heed the admonition of Irenæus:

Having therefore the truth itself as our rule, and the testimony concerning God set clearly before us, we ought not, by running after numerous and diverse answers to questions, to cast away the firm and true knowledge of God.

TEXT: 2. If, however, we cannot discover explanations of all those things in Scripture which are made the subject of investigation, yet let us not on that account seek after any other God besides Him who really exists. For this is the very greatest impiety. We should leave things of that nature to God who created us, being most properly assured that the Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God and His Spirit; but we, inasmuch as **we are inferior to, and later in existence than, the Word of God and His Spirit, are on that very account destitute of the knowledge of His mysteries.**

And there is no cause for wonder if this is the case with us as respects things spiritual and heavenly, and such as require to be made known to us by revelation,

since many even of those things which lie at our very feet (I mean such as belong to this world, which we handle, and see, and are in close contact with) transcend our knowledge, so that even these we must leave to God. For it is fitting that He should excel all [in knowledge]. For how stands the case, for instance, if we endeavour to explain the cause of the rising of the Nile? We may say a great deal, plausible or otherwise, on the subject; but what is true, sure, and incontrovertible regarding it, belongs only to God.

Then, again, the dwelling-place of birds—of those, I mean, which come to us in spring, but fly away again on the approach of autumn—though it is a matter connected with this world, escapes our knowledge. What explanation, again, can we give of the flow and ebb of the ocean, although every one admits there must be a certain cause [for these phenomena]? Or what can we say as to the nature of those things which lie beyond it?

What, moreover, can we say as to the formation of rain, lightning, thunder, gatherings of clouds, vapours, the bursting forth of winds, and such like things; or tell as to the storehouses of snow, hail, and other like things? [What do we know respecting] the conditions requisite for the preparation of clouds, or what is the real nature of the vapours in the sky? What as to the reason why the moon waxes and wanes, or what as to the cause of the difference of nature among various waters, metals, stones, and such like things? **On all these points we may indeed say a great deal while we search into their causes, but God alone who made them can declare the truth regarding them.**

COMMENTARY: It may not be obvious to the one who does not know the Scriptures, but Irenæus is merely summarizing what God said to Job when He rebuked Job for insisting that He was wrong for testing him. (See “God Did a Job on Job, Didn’t He?” *The Voice of Elijah*®, April 1996.) Irenæus is making one simple point: God knows things that we don’t know, and the only way we can ever attain a knowledge of those things is if He decides to reveal them to us. Lots of folks claim the Scriptures are revelation. But none of them have ever stopped to consider the fact that they might not be able to understand the Scriptures because the Prophets sealed up the Truth as soon as they revealed it. Too bad for them if that should turn out to be true. Unfortunately, time changes all things, even the way

God deals with His People. And woe be on the fool who doesn’t know “the book” has long been scheduled to be unsealed shortly before “the end time”:

*“Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands {guard} over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace {and} everlasting contempt. **And those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. But as for you, Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the book until the end of time; many will go back and forth, and knowledge will increase.**” Then I, Daniel, looked and behold, two others were standing, one on this bank of the river, and the other on that bank of the river. And one said to the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, “How long {will it be} until the end of {these} wonders?” And I heard the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, as he raised his right hand and his left toward heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half {a time;} and as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people, all these {events} will be completed. As for me, I heard but could not understand; so I said, “My lord, what {will be} the outcome of these {events?}” And he said, “Go {your way,} Daniel, for {these} words are concealed and sealed up until the end time. Many will be purged, purified and refined; but the wicked will act wickedly, and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand.”*

(Daniel 12:1–10)

I trust you understand what I am *talking about*. If you don’t, perhaps you need to go back and read the things I have written to this point. In this case, you would do well to read what Hippolytus wrote about the Antichrist. (See “That’s Why He’s Called AntiChrist!” *The Voice of Elijah*®, April 1992.)

TEXT: 3. If, therefore, even with respect to creation, there are some things [the knowledge of] which belongs only to God, and others which come within

the range of our own knowledge, what ground is there for complaint, if, in regard to those things which we investigate in the Scriptures (which are throughout spiritual), we are able by the grace of God to explain some of them, while we must leave others in the hands of God, and that not only in the present world, but also in that which is to come, so that God should for ever teach, and man should for ever learn the things taught him by God?

As the apostle has said on this point, that, when other things have been done away, then these three, "faith, hope, and charity, shall endure." [1 Cor. 13:13] For faith, which has respect to our Master, endures unchangeably, assuring us that there is but one true God, and that we should truly love Him for ever, seeing that He alone is our Father; while we hope ever to be receiving more and more from God, and to learn from Him, because He is good, and possesses boundless riches, a kingdom without end, and instruction that can never be exhausted.

If, therefore, according to the rule which I have stated, we leave some questions in the hands of God, we shall both preserve our faith uninjured, and shall continue without danger; and **all Scripture, which has been given to us by God, shall be found by us perfectly consistent; and the parables shall harmonize with those passages which are perfectly plain; and those statements the meaning of which is clear, shall serve to explain the parables;** and through the many diversified utterances [of Scripture] there shall be heard one harmonious melody in us, praising in hymns that God who created all things.

If, for instance, any one asks, "What was God doing before He made the world?" we reply that the answer to such a question lies with God Himself. For that this world was formed perfect by God, receiving a beginning in time, the Scriptures teach us; but no Scripture reveals to us what God was employed about before this event. The answer therefore to that question remains with God, and it is not proper for us to aim at bringing forward foolish, rash, and blasphemous suppositions [in reply to it]; so, as by one's imagining that he has discovered the origin of matter, he should in reality set aside God Himself who made all things.

COMMENTARY: To fully grasp his point, one needs to keep in mind the purpose for which Irenæus was writing. He was seeking to refute the teachings of the

Christian Gnostics. Those poor fools were the victims of various Sad Sacks who had taken the Truth and, like so many others before and since, twisted it to their own ends. Church leaders claimed that Jesus Christ had *delivered* to the Apostles the *oral tradition* that was being *handed down* within the Church. The Gnostics did not bother to refute that claim. They merely claimed that Christ had explained additional "secret" things to some of the Apostles and neglected to explain those things to the others. Of course, they asserted that they were the true Church since these "secret" things had been *handed down* to them from the Apostles.

It should be undeniably obvious to anyone who has taken the time to read the literature of the Early Church that it was generally understood the Prophets had hidden the Truth of *The Apostolic Teaching* in the parables of Scripture. I have repeatedly pointed that out in *The Voice of Elijah® Update*, where I have commented on not only the works of the Apostolic Fathers but also the works of Justin Martyr. (See *The Voice of Elijah® Update*, November 1993–the present.) However, that is not the belief that Irenæus is trying to refute. His concern is that the Gnostics claimed to have secret insight into the *meaning* and *significance* of the parables of the Prophets and Apostles. In refuting that asinine claim, Irenæus says this:

All Scripture, which has been given to us by God, shall be found by us perfectly consistent; and the parables shall harmonize with those passages which are perfectly plain; and those statements the meaning of which is clear, shall serve to explain the parables.

The Truth is, the *meaning* and *significance* of everything in the Scriptures revolves around one solitary set of events—the birth, life, and death of Jesus Christ in the image and likeness of the Man and His subsequent Resurrection in the image and likeness of God. The Scriptures tell us how the entire span of history is—*parabolically* speaking—captured in the vortex of that brief span of time.

TEXT: 4. For consider, all ye who invent such opinions, since the Father Himself is alone called God, who has a real existence, but whom ye style the Demiurge; since, moreover, the Scriptures acknowledge Him alone as God; and yet again, since the Lord confesses Him alone as His own Father, and knows no other, as I shall

show from His very words, —when ye style this very Being the fruit of defect, and the offspring of ignorance, and describe Him as being ignorant of those things which are above Him, with the various other allegations which you make regarding Him, —consider the terrible blasphemy [ye are thus guilty of] against Him who truly is God.

Ye seem to affirm gravely and honestly enough that ye believe in God; but then, as ye are utterly unable to reveal any other God, ye declare this very Being in whom ye profess to believe, the fruit of defect and the offspring of ignorance. Now this blindness and foolish talking flow to you from the fact that ye reserve nothing for God, but ye wish to proclaim the nativity and production both of God Himself, of His Ennoea, of His Logos, and Life, and Christ; and ye form the idea of these from no other than a mere human experience; not understanding, as I said before, that it is possible, in the case of man, who is a compound being, to speak in this way of the mind of man and the thought of man; and to say that thought (ennoea) springs from mind (sensus), intention (enthymesis) again from thought, and word (logos) from intention (but which logos? for there is among the Greeks one logos which is the principle that thinks, and another which is the instrument by means of which thought is expressed); and [to say] that a man sometimes is at rest and silent, while at other times he speaks and is active.

But since God is all mind, all reason, all active spirit, all light, and always exists one and the same, as it is both beneficial for us to think of God, and as we learn regarding Him from the Scriptures, such feelings and divisions [of operation] cannot fittingly be ascribed to Him. For our tongue, as being carnal, is not sufficient to minister to the rapidity of the human mind, inasmuch as that is of a spiritual nature, for which reason our word is restrained within us, and is not at once expressed as it has been conceived by the mind, but is uttered by successive efforts, just as the tongue is able to serve it.

COMMENTARY: It is somewhat difficult for the modern mind to grasp the essence of the matter with which Irenæus is concerned—since Satan has duped us into believing that a “spirit” is an ethereal being that hangs around haunted houses and celebrates Easter on Halloween. The Truth is, the Greek-speaking world—Gnostics included—believed God to be a word (*logos*).

Irenæus is merely pointing out the fact that the Gnostics have made that simple *parabolic image* much more complex than it needs to be.

TEXT: 5. But God being all Mind, and all Logos, both speaks exactly what He thinks, and thinks exactly what He speaks. For His thought is Logos, and Logos is Mind, and Mind comprehending all things is the Father Himself. He, therefore, who speaks of the mind of God, and ascribes to it a special origin of its own, declares Him a compound Being, as if God were one thing, and the original Mind another. So, again, with respect to Logos, when one attributes to him the third place of production from the Father; on which supposition he is ignorant of His greatness; and thus Logos has been far separated from God. As for the prophet, he declares respecting Him, “Who shall describe His generation?” [Is. 53:8] But ye pretend to set forth His generation from the Father, and ye transfer the production of the word of men which takes place by means of a tongue to the Word of God, and thus are righteously exposed by your own selves as knowing neither things human nor divine.

COMMENTARY: Irenæus is continuing to *talk about the parabolic imagery* related to Jesus Christ, the *Living Word of God*. Fools—being what they are—will never be able to comprehend how God the Father can be One and the same not only with Christ the Son but also with the Holy Spirit. So one should never try to explain to them how all Believers can—in Christ—be One with the Father. It would indeed be an exercise in futility. How could anyone in whom the Word does not dwell ever understand the marvelous release that the True Believer felt at the moment when his childlike belief in the Truth of the Gospel message drove him to repentance? Some things are best left unsaid.

TEXT: 6. **But, beyond reason inflated [with your own wisdom], ye presumptuously maintain that ye are acquainted with the unspeakable mysteries of God;** while even the Lord, the very Son of God, allowed that the Father alone knows the very day and hour of judgment, when He plainly declares, “But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, neither the Son, but the Father only.” [Mark 13:32]

If, then, the Son was not ashamed to ascribe the knowledge of that day to the Father only, but declared

what was true regarding the matter, neither let us be ashamed to reserve for God those greater questions which may occur to us. For no man is superior to his master. [Matt. 10:24; Luke 11:40] If any one, therefore, says to us, "How then was the Son produced by the Father?" we reply to him, that no man understands that production, or generation, or calling, or revelation, or by whatever name one may describe His generation, which is in fact altogether indescribable. Neither Valentinus, nor Marcion, nor Saturninus, nor Basilides, nor angels, nor archangels, nor principalities, nor powers [possess this knowledge], but the Father only who begat, and the Son who was begotten.

Since therefore His generation is unspeakable, those who strive to set forth generations and productions cannot be in their right mind, inasmuch as they undertake to describe things which are indescribable. **For that a word is uttered at the bidding of thought and mind, all men indeed well understand. Those, therefore, who have excogitated [the theory of] emissions have not discovered anything great, or revealed any abstruse mystery, when they have simply transferred what all understand to the only-begotten Word of God; and while they style Him unspeakable and unnameable, they nevertheless set forth the production and formation of His first generation, as if they themselves had assisted at His birth, thus assimilating Him to the word of mankind formed by emissions.**

COMMENTARY: Have you ever had the misfortune of having to listen to a windbag whose sole claim to fame was his exquisite ability to use hundred-dollar words to deliver his two cents? No? Well, I have. More than once. And Irenæus obviously did too. The more ridiculous among that class of dimwits have the ability to state the obvious and make dodos believe they have heard something completely new. Those who are more obscene can even convince otherwise intelligent people that something patently false is the God's honest Truth. How do you think we all came to believe that idiotic "leap of faith" nonsense? (See "Satan's Fools Are Satan's Tools," *The Voice of Elijah*®, April 1994.) Irenæus evidently had the forebearers of Søren Kierkegaard in mind when he wrote this:

For that a word is uttered at the bidding of thought and mind, all men indeed well understand. Those, therefore, who have excogitated [the theory of] emissions have not

discovered anything great, or revealed any abstruse mystery, when they have simply transferred what all understand to the only-begotten Word of God; and while they style Him unspeakable and unnameable, they nevertheless set forth the production and formation of His first generation, as if they themselves had assisted at His birth, thus assimilating Him to the word of mankind formed by emissions.

His point is, fools think they understand the Word of God just because they can see the *parabolic imagery* the Prophets used to describe Him. The Truth is, the *Living Word of God* has to be *experienced* before you can fully understand Him. That's how conceptual knowledge of the Truth becomes part of one's *being*.

TEXT: 7. But we shall not be wrong if we affirm the same thing also concerning the substance of matter, that God produced it. For we have learned from the Scriptures that God holds the supremacy over all things. But whence or in what way He produced it, neither has Scripture anywhere declared; **nor does it become us to conjecture, so as, in accordance with our own opinions, to form endless conjectures concerning God, but we should leave such knowledge in the hands of God Himself.**

In like manner, also, we must leave the cause why, while all things were made by God, certain of His creatures sinned and revolted from a state of submission to God, and others, indeed the great majority, persevered, and do still persevere, in [willing] subjection to Him who formed them, and also of what nature those are who sinned, and of what nature those who persevere, —[we must, I say, leave the cause of these things] to God and His Word, to whom alone He said, "Sit at my right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool." [Ps. 110:1] **But as for us, we still dwell upon the earth, and have not yet sat down upon His throne.**

For although the Spirit of the Saviour that is in Him "searcheth all things, even the deep things of God," [1 Cor. 2:10] yet as to us "there are diversities of gifts, differences of administrations, and diversities of operations;" [1 Cor. 12:4–6] and we, while upon the earth, as Paul also declares, "know in part, and prophesy in part." [1 Cor. 13:9]

Since, therefore, we know but in part, we ought to leave all sorts of [difficult] questions in the hands of Him who in some measure, [and that only], bestows

grace on us. That eternal fire, [for instance], is prepared for sinners, both the Lord has plainly declared, and the rest of the Scriptures demonstrate. And that God foreknew that this would happen, the Scriptures do in like manner demonstrate, since He prepared eternal fire from the beginning for those who were [afterwards] to transgress [His commandments]; but the cause itself of the nature of such transgressors neither has any Scripture informed us, nor has an apostle told us, nor has the Lord taught us.

It becomes us, therefore, to leave the knowledge of this matter to God, even as the Lord does of the day and hour [of judgment], and not to rush to such an extreme of danger, that we will leave nothing in the hands of God, even though we have received only a measure of grace [from Him in this world]. But when we investigate points which are above us, and with respect to which we cannot reach satisfaction, [it is absurd] that we should display such an extreme of presumption as to lay open God, and things which are not yet discovered, [Gen. 40:8; Deut. 29:29; Ps. 131] as if already we had found out, by the vain talk about emissions, God Himself, the Creator of all things, and to assert that He derived His substance from apostasy and ignorance, so as to frame an impious hypothesis in opposition to God.

COMMENTARY: To put it bluntly: If you don't know what you are talking about, sit down and shut up. But ignorance being what it is, the ignorant have no idea that they don't know what they are talking about—yet. That's why they are still ignorant. And the absolutely pure-dumb, stupid ones think they have somehow got the biblical message all figured out, so they keep on talking—telling us how the Scriptures say this or how they say that. Such are the depths of ignorance. In case you missed the hardball nature of my position, I have just told you why you should not bother listening to my explanation of the *parabolic imagery* and Hebrew idioms in which Moses and all the other Prophets of Israel concealed *The Mystery* of Scripture.

TEXT: 8. Moreover, they possess no proof of their system, which has but recently been invented by them, sometimes resting upon certain numbers, sometimes on syllables, and sometimes, again, on names; and there are occasions, too, when, by means of those letters which are contained in letters, by parables not

properly interpreted, or by certain [baseless] conjectures, they strive to establish that fabulous account which they have devised. For if any one should inquire the reason why the Father, who has fellowship with the Son in all things, has been declared by the Lord alone to know the hour and the day [of judgment], he will find at present no more suitable, or becoming, or safe reason than this (since, indeed, the Lord is the only true Master), that we may learn through Him that the Father is above all things. For “the Father,” says He, “is greater than I.” [John 14:28] The Father, therefore, has been declared by our Lord to excel with respect to knowledge; for this reason, that **we, too, as long as we are connected with the scheme of things in this world, should leave perfect knowledge, and such questions [as have been mentioned], to God, and should not by any chance, while we seek to investigate the sublime nature of the Father, fall into the danger of starting the question whether there is another God above God.**

COMMENTARY: It is becoming fairly evident from what Irenæus says that the Church had already lost insight into the *significance* of the *parabolic* nature of the biblical message by the time he wrote this. God had one perfectly logical reason for speaking through the Prophets and Apostles in terms of the *parabolic imagery* that Moses appropriated from ancient myth: He had no intention of telling us what He *IS*; His only purpose was to tell us what He *IS LIKE*. That is, the *parabolic imagery* of the Prophets does not explain what spiritual reality actually *IS*; it only describes what it *IS LIKE*. And if you don't think *literalists* will have a difficult time accepting the fact that God spoke through the Prophets in parables, think again. Satan has them securely bound up in his cocoon. But they will certainly not fly like a butterfly on Resurrection Day.

Text: 9. But if any lover of strife contradict what I have said, and also what the apostle affirms, that “we know in part, and prophesy in part,” [1 Cor. 13:9] and imagine that he has acquired not a partial, but a universal, knowledge of all that exists, —being such an one as Valentinus, or Ptolemæus, or Basilides, or any other of those who maintain that they have searched out the deep things of God, —let him not (arraying himself in vainglory) boast that he has acquired greater knowledge than others with respect to those things which are invisible, or cannot be placed under our

observation; but let him, by making diligent inquiry, and obtaining information from the Father, tell us the reasons (which we know not) of those things which are in this world, —as, for instance, the number of hairs on his own head, and the sparrows which are captured day by day, and such other points with which we are not previously acquainted, —so that we may credit him also with respect to more important points.

But if those who are perfect do not yet understand the very things in their hands, and at their feet, and before their eyes, and on the earth, and especially the rule followed with respect to the hairs of their head, how can we believe them regarding things spiritual, and super-celestial, and those which, with a vain confidence, they assert to be above God? So much, then, I have said concerning numbers, and names, and syllables, and questions respecting such things as are above our comprehension, and concerning their improper expositions of the parables: [I add no more on these points,] since thou thyself mayest enlarge upon them.

Irenæus, "Against Heresies," Book ii, Chaps. xxv–xxviii, in Roberts and Donaldson (Eds.), The Ante-Nicene Fathers (1867), Vol. 1.

COMMENTARY: Did you notice how Irenæus succinctly states the three major areas on which he has focused his refutation of heretical beliefs? He says:

So much, then, I have said concerning numbers, and names, and syllables, and questions respecting such things as are above our comprehension, and concerning their improper expositions of the parables.

Consider the implications of that statement: Irenæus is refuting the beliefs of the Gnostics, a religious group that Satan had molded into a counterfeit Christianity. In this section of his work, he has been challenging the methods the Gnostics used to attain their *gnosis*—that is, their supposedly secret knowledge of God. He rejects the notion that anyone can learn anything about God by using numbers, names, or syllables to speculate concerning the *meaning* of the Scriptures. Those who are enthralled by biblical numerology and typology would do well to heed what this pillar of the Early Church says concerning their ignorant speculation. If it wasn't valid then, what makes them think it is any more valid today?

After rejecting any and all baseless speculation concerning the *meaning* of the Scriptures that is based on numbers, names, and sounds, Irenæus then asserts that some things about God will always remain beyond our understanding. But we should not for that reason reject the things that are stated plainly and postulate a second god above God. Isn't that interesting? Here we are 1800 years later and most segments of Christianity have still not gotten the message—one cannot attain a true knowledge of God if they are unwilling to accept the picture which the Hebrew Scriptures paint of Him. He is an angry, jealous, vengeful God Who is going to utterly annihilate His enemies. And His enemies include all who reject the Truth of the Word of God which He is.

Finally, Irenæus alludes to the real crux of the problem he has with the Gnostics: Their entire belief system was built on the assumption that the parables of the Prophets are a *literal* description of spiritual reality rather than just a *parabolic* one. That is, Satan had convinced those poor misguided dupes that the Scriptures should only be interpreted *literally*. Consequently, they rejected the angry God of the Old Testament in favor of a fictitious god who would never do them any harm. If that belief system sounds slightly familiar to you, it is hardly any wonder. The same lying spirit who herded them into the Pit of Hell has been assiduously peddling a similar foul-smelling tripe to unsuspecting Believers over the past two centuries.

If you are soundly convinced that easy-believism will get you to Heaven, I can only remind you that Jesus once indicated such is not the case. He said this:

"Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it. Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn {bushes,} nor figs from thistles, are they?"
(Matthew 7:13–16)

Jesus is speaking *parabolically*, as Matthew tells us He always did (Matt. 13:34). He is using a *parabolic image* in which *The Teaching* is depicted as a narrowly defined body of Truth. His point: If you listen to false prophets, you will wander outside that Truth. 'Nuff said. ■



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

*Editor: In the "Questions & Answers" section of the October 1999 newsletter you mentioned a sermon delivered by Jonathan Edwards in 1741 titled **Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God**. You said you were struck by the fact that Jonathan Edwards found it unnecessary to defend his belief concerning God's wrath and the fires of Hell because he presumed his listeners knew these things were part of the Gospel message that every Evangelist preached. Your point was that people today seldom, if ever, hear about God's wrath and subsequently have little, if any, fear of God or of going to Hell.*

Your assessment was apparently right because a recent cover story on the subject of Hell in U.S. News and World Report (January 31, 2000) stated that fewer and fewer people actually believe in the existence of Hell, much less think they are going there. While these nonbelievers rightly scoff at those who say Hell is a place of literal fire and brimstone, they wrongly assume Hell is a figment of Christian imagination since it is often described as a "lake of fire and brimstone" (Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14, 15; 21:8).

What scoffers and literalists alike fail to realize, of course, is that "fire" and "brimstone" are nothing more than parabolic images that describe what the reality of Hell is like. Although you have discussed some of the parabolic images that relate to Hell in the past, would you mind going over a few of these things again for the

sake of recent subscribers? Also, can you tell us why Hell is alluded to as the "second death" in the Book of Revelation (Rev. 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8)?

Elijah: In *The Passover Parable*, I explain a bit about the ancient mythology which claimed it was possible for the average Egyptian to be resurrected in the person of the Pharaoh. I also told you that mythology is the source of the *parabolic imagery* that Moses and the Prophets used to cryptically explain God's purpose in the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. If you were able to accept the things that I explained in *The Passover Parable*, it should come as no surprise when I tell you that the Prophets not only used that *parabolic imagery* to describe the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, they also used it to describe the death and resurrection of everybody else.

If you want to understand what the Scriptures have to say about death, Heaven, or Hell, you must begin by taking on the mind-set of Moses and all the ancient Hebrews who listened to him when he explained *The Teaching* to them in terms of the myths that they believed. That simply *means* you need to view death, Heaven, and Hell the same way the ancient Egyptians did. Understanding the Egyptian myth in which Horus died and was resurrected as Osiris is a necessary first step in that direction. After that, you also need insight into the *meaning* and *significance* of the Ugaritic cuneiform texts that describe the death and resurrection of the Canaanite god Baal. Those texts tie the ancient Egyptian myths concerning Horus and Osiris directly to the statements of the Prophets by telling us how Baal—an Osiris wannabe—managed to get the god of wisdom to "build a house" for him.

From reading the extant hieroglyphic texts that deal with the resurrection of Osiris, one can gain a fairly good idea of how the ancient Egyptians viewed the reality that we will be forced to face after the death of our physical body. It is clear that they believed it to be, for the most part, an arid wilderness shrouded in a ghastly darkness. But the texts also indicate the realm of the dead had distinctive topographical characteristics. The most terrifying of these were the Sea of Reeds and a barren wilderness, which was infested with snakes. Chief among these was the god of death himself, the serpent Seth. Since the spiritual realm (the dimension) of the dead is the normal habitat of evil spirits, it only makes sense that we should also be able

to learn something about it if we pay close attention to what they have said. Luke tells us this:

*And when He had come out onto the land, He was met by a certain man from the city who was possessed with demons; and who had not put on any clothing for a long time, and was not living in a house, but in the tombs. And seeing Jesus, he cried out and fell before Him, and said in a loud voice, "What do I have to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me." For He had been commanding the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had seized him many times; and he was bound with chains and shackles and kept under guard; and {yet} he would burst his fetters and be driven by the demon into the desert. And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. **And they were entreating Him not to command them to depart into the abyss.** Now there was a herd of many swine feeding there on the mountain; and {the demons} entreated Him to permit them to enter the swine. And He gave them permission.*

(Luke 8:27–32)

From that account, we know that the abyss is a place in the spiritual realm. We can also see that it must be a place where nobody would want to go. But there is nothing in the passage to tell us what or where the abyss is. Some of that information can be gleaned from what John says about it in the Book of Revelation. But translators have further concealed the Truth he hid there by arbitrarily translating *abyss* as "bottomless pit" the first two times that John uses the term. Your guess is as good as mine as to why they did that:

*And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of **the bottomless pit** was given to him. And he opened **the bottomless pit**; and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit.*

(Revelation 9:1–2)

John mentions the abyss in three other passages:

*They have as king over them, the angel of the **abyss**; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon.*

(Revelation 9:11)

*And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the **abyss** will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them.*

(Revelation 11:7)

*"The beast that you saw was and is not, and is about to come up out of the **abyss** and to go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth will wonder, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come."*

(Revelation 17:8)

If you were paying close attention when you read Revelation 9:1–2, you already know that the abyss is a burning pit. That is obvious from the way it is described there. And the following verses—where the same term that is translated *pit* in Revelation 9:1–2 has been translated *well*—make it just as obvious that the term *pit* was used to designate nothing more than a hole in the ground with water in it:

*And He said to them, "Which one of you shall have a son or an ox fall into a **well**, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?"*

(Luke 14:5)

*She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the **well** is deep; where then do You get that living water? You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the **well**, and drank of it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?"*

(John 4:11–12)

John's use of the term reveals that it actually means "well." In light of that, there is one other thing you need to know about the *parabolic imagery* that the Prophets used to describe the abyss. The Jews who created the Septuagint by translating the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek around 250 B.C. understood that the abyss was "the deep"—that is, a bottomless pit with water in it—which is mentioned repeatedly in the Hebrew Scriptures. That is especially interesting since Moses begins his account with the implicit assumption that his reader already knows what "the deep" is:

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was formless and void, and **darkness** was*

over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.
(Genesis 1:1–2)

Moses goes on to say various other things about “the deep.” In so doing, he lets us know “the deep” is the opposite of a place called “heaven.” For example, he tells us Jacob said this right before he died:

*“From the God of your father who helps you,
And by the Almighty who blesses you
{With} blessings of heaven above,
Blessings of the deep that lies beneath,
Blessings of the breasts and of the womb.”*
(Genesis 49:25)

Now that we know “the deep” is *parabolically* the opposite of “heaven,” it becomes possible to understand one rather peculiar thing that the Apostle Paul says in his letter to the church at Rome. Paul says this about “the word” that he is preaching:

But the righteousness based on faith speaks thus, “DO NOT SAY IN YOUR HEART, ‘WHO WILL ASCEND INTO HEAVEN?’ (that is, to bring Christ down), or ‘WHO WILL DESCEND INTO THE ABYSS?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).” But what does it say? “THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART”—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus {as} Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.
(Romans 10:6–9)

It is impossible to understand what Paul says in that passage if you are not thinking in terms of the *parabolic imagery* in which Jesus Christ is the Word of God. But even then, it would not be immediately clear why Paul would change the Old Testament passage he is quoting by replacing the clause “who will cross the sea” with the clause “who will descend into the abyss.” In case you were not aware that Paul did that, take a look at the passage he quotes:

“For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may

observe it?’ Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’ But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it.”
(Deuteronomy 30:11–14)

Did you see how Paul changed “the sea” to “the abyss”? It is obvious that he did that intentionally since the Septuagint translation agrees with the original Hebrew text. But why would he do something like that? He did it because he knew that Moses and the other Prophets of Israel used those two terms—“the deep” (the abyss) and “the sea”—to refer to exactly the same thing. That can be seen from the fact that “the sea” and “the deep” (the abyss) are used as synonyms in this passage from the Book of Job:

*“But where can wisdom be found?
And where is the place of understanding?
Man does not know its value,
Nor is it found in the land of the living.
The deep says, ‘It is not in me’;
And the sea says, ‘It is not with me.’”*
(Job 28:12–14)

That is by no means the only place in the Hebrew Scriptures where “the deep” (the abyss) and “the sea” are identified as synonyms by Hebrew parallelism. (Hebrew parallelism is a poetic device in which one stich of a distich or tristich uses synonyms to repeat the meaning of the stich preceding it.) It is just one of the more obvious. Incidentally, the author of the Book of Job is merely making the point that you won’t find wisdom here on Earth or in the abyss. You have to get it from God through *The Teaching*.

In Psalm 69, the psalmist provides additional confirmation that “the deep” actually is the abyss. He does that by telling us “the deep” is synonymous with “the pit”:

*But as for me, my prayer is to Thee,
O LORD, at an acceptable time;
O God, in the greatness of Thy lovingkindness,
Answer me with Thy saving truth.
Deliver me from the mire, and do not let me sink;
May I be delivered from my foes,
and from the deep waters.*

*May the flood of water not overflow me,
And may the deep not swallow me up,
And may the pit not shut its mouth on me.*
(Psalm 69:13–15)

It is important to remember that the Prophets were not only mocking ancient mythological beliefs concerning death and resurrection when they spoke in terms of “the deep,” “the pit,” and “the sea.” They were also using those terms to speak *parabolically* concerning the *meaning* and *significance* of the death and Resurrection of Christ. The *parabolic imagery* appears throughout the writings of the Prophets, not just where those three terms appear. However, all three terms occur together in the following passage from the Book of Ezekiel, where the Prophet is mocking the ancient Egyptian belief that the Pharaoh would automatically be resurrected just because he was the god Horus, son of Osiris.

To understand what Ezekiel says, one needs to know that he is using the Pharaoh as a *parabolic image* to describe what is going to happen to Satan after he fails to accomplish what he desires as the Antichrist. (It is also helpful to know that “the sea” that Ezekiel refers to is the Sea of El and that the “Sea of El” is hidden behind the common Hebrew construct *Sheol*.)

“Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘On the day when it went down to Sheol I caused lamentations; I closed the deep over it and held back its rivers. And {its} many waters were stopped up, and I made Lebanon mourn for it, and all the trees of the field wilted away on account of it. I made the nations quake at the sound of its fall when I made it go down to Sheol with those who go down to the pit; and all the well-watered trees of Eden, the choicest and best of Lebanon, were comforted in the earth beneath. They also went down with it to Sheol to those who were slain by the sword; and those who were its strength lived under its shade among the nations. To which among the trees of Eden are you thus equal in glory and greatness? Yet you will be brought down with the trees of Eden to the earth beneath; you will lie in the midst of the uncircumcised, with those who were slain by the sword. So is Pharaoh and all his multitude!’ declares the Lord GOD.”
(Ezekiel 31:15–18)

Ezekiel is *parabolically* describing exactly the same thing that the Apostle John describes this way:

And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is {the book} of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one {of them} according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.
(Revelation 20:11–15)

If you were so inclined, you could extrapolate from verse 13 and conclude that the dead reside in three places: “the sea,” death, and Hades. But it would make no sense to say that the dead reside anywhere else but in a state of “death.” So John must be up to something. The Truth is, he is slyly drawing attention to the fact that Hades, which is (*parabolically* speaking) the place where dead people experience the reality of the state of death, is not the same as “the sea” of El. That subterfuge was necessary because confusion concerning the true *meaning* of the Hebrew *Sheol*, that is, “the Sea of El,” led the Jews to translate that Hebrew construct as “Hades” in the Septuagint. However, in the *parabolic imagery* of the Prophets, the entire realm of the dead, which was called “Hades” in Greek, is not precisely the same as “the Sea of El,” which is the abyss that exists within the realm of the dead. That is why John says “the sea,” death, and Hades all give up the dead that are in them, yet only death and Hades are cast into the Lake of Fire. He knows that the Lake of Fire is the same as the abyss. That is, it is the Sea of El, which gave up its dead along with death and Hades. Logic alone tells you the Sea of El could not very easily be cast into itself.

The *parabolic* Lake of Fire, that is, the abyss or Sea of El, derives its designation as “the second death” directly from the ancient mythology which the Prophets used as *parabolic imagery* to describe the realm of the dead. The ancients thought that as a dead soul made his trek through the realm of the dead, he had to cross the Sea of El—that is, the Lake of Fire or the abyss—to get to the Mountain of God. Once he had

triumphed over the abyss—Prince Sea—he could be resurrected and dwell forever on the Mountain of God—provided he had someone to “build a house” for him. Lacking that, he would succumb once again to the god Death. The Apostle John is merely speaking *parabolically* in terms of that *parabolic imagery*. But one should definitely not make too much of that parable since the function of a *parabolic image* is to tell us what the reality of death IS LIKE rather than what it actually is.

Editor: While we are on the subject of death, can you explain what happens (parabolically) to a person’s soul immediately after they physically die? We have all heard eulogies or seen movies that suggest a deceased person’s soul goes immediately into Heaven or Hell at the time of death. What does The Teaching say about this? How is physical death described in The Teaching and what parabolically happens to a person’s soul immediately after they die? Perhaps this would be a good time to ask what happened to Jesus’ soul during the brief time between His death and Resurrection?

Elijah: Let me first point out that you asked me to “explain what happens (parabolically) to a person’s soul immediately after they die physically.” I appreciate the fact that you did not ask me to explain what happens (parabolically) to a person immediately after they die physically. That would be a much more involved explanation since the soul is but one of the eight parts of a person with which the Prophets are concerned.

According to the *parabolic imagery* the Prophets used to explain such things, the experience to which the soul of a person is subjected after they die depends on the things their soul has been willing to believe prior to death. If the person has heard and believed the Truth of *The Teaching of Moses*, that Truth IS LIKE a light—“*The Light*”—that illuminates a path—“*The Way*”—that allows their soul to cross over the Sea of El (the abyss) unharmed and reach the foot of the Mountain of God. If the person has not heard and believed the Truth of *The Teaching of Moses*, their soul can do nothing other than wander aimlessly around in the realm of the dead until Judgment Day. As the Apostle John implies by what he says in Revelation 20:11–15, some of those unfortunate souls even become mired in the Pit.

In response to your question concerning the soul of Jesus Christ, I can only point you to what the psalmist says concerning His experience:

*A Psalm; a Song at the Dedication of the House.
{A Psalm} of David.*

*I will extol Thee, O LORD, for Thou hast lifted me up,
And hast not let my enemies rejoice over me.*

*O LORD my God, I cried to Thee for help,
and Thou didst heal me.*

*O LORD, Thou hast brought up my soul from Sheol;
Thou hast kept me alive,
that I should not go down to the pit.*

*Sing praise to the LORD, you His godly ones,
And give thanks to His holy name.*

*For His anger is but for a moment,
His favor is for a lifetime;*

*Weeping may last for the night,
But a shout of joy {comes} in the morning.*

*Now as for me, I said in my prosperity,
“I will never be moved.”*

O LORD, by Thy favor

*Thou hast made my mountain to stand strong;
Thou didst hide Thy face, I was dismayed.*

To Thee, O LORD, I called,

And to the Lord I made supplication:

What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the pit?

Will the dust praise Thee?

Will it declare Thy faithfulness?

Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me;

O LORD, be Thou my helper.”

Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing;

Thou hast loosed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness;

That {my} soul may sing praise to Thee, and not be silent.

O LORD my God, I will give thanks to Thee forever.

(Psalm 30:1–12)

In that psalm, the psalmist is speaking from the perspective of Jesus Christ on Resurrection Morning (“at the Dedication of the House”). Christ is looking back on His trek through the realm of the dead. To understand His experience, however, one needs to keep in mind the fact that He gave up *The Teaching* just prior to His death. Therefore, since He had nothing to guide Him through that spiritual realm, He *parabolically* descended into the abyss and suffered torment until God resurrected Him under the terms of the New Covenant. Consequently, Christ’s experience of death is not the same as what the True Believer can expect.

Although you did not ask me to explain what happened to the *Spirit* of Christ (after His Resurrection), I remind you of what Peter said in that regard:

For Christ also died for sins once for all, {the} just for {the} unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but *made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits {now} in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through {the} water.*
(1 Peter 3:18–20)

Peter is speaking *parabolically* in terms of “the riddle in a mirror” that Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 13:12. He is surreptitiously reminding his readers that the Word Whom Noah proclaimed in the days before the Flood is the same Word—“Spirit”—that Jesus Christ became when He was resurrected. If Peter’s explanation fails to make a whole lot of sense to you, it may be because you are trying to understand it *literally* rather than *parabolically*. The *parabolic image* in which the resurrected Word of God (the Spirit of God) goes back to the Beginning of Creation to start the process all over again is intended to help us understand what spiritual reality IS LIKE when viewed from God’s perspective. Only modern fools and the Christian Gnostics would be stupid enough to say “That’s what is.” A parable only tells you what “is” IS LIKE.

Editor: I read a commentary recently that said each of the ten plagues that God brought on the Egyptians in Exodus 7:14–12:30 was directed at some particular Egyptian god or goddess. I know this has an element of truth to it because I heard you say something similar to this one time. What can you tell us about the ten plagues and God’s reason for bringing them upon the Egyptians? Since each plague appears to qualify as a parabolic pantomime, what are we expected to learn from them? Are we supposed to look at them separately or as a whole to understand their significance?

Elijah: It would have been impossible for Moses and Aaron to have done anything with the staff of God in ancient Egypt that was not, in one way or another, “directed at some particular Egyptian god or goddess.” Those folks considered most animate and inanimate objects sacred in one way or another. The Greeks and Romans even scorned the Egyptians for the “primitive” nature of their religion. If you know anything at all

about Greek and Roman religion, you have some idea of how “primitive” the Egyptian religion was.

A good example of how the plagues were directed at the gods and goddesses is Moses and Aaron turning the Nile River into blood. The Nile was considered to be the bloodstream of the god Osiris. So one could easily claim that plague was ridiculing the god Osiris. And perhaps it was. But whether it was or not actually makes little difference one way or the other. If one does not understand the overall *meaning* and *significance* of the Passover Parable, the subtle nuances of the plagues hold no relevance to anything whatsoever. They become little more than biblical trivia that one can use to impress others in Sunday School discussions.

The individual plagues become *significant* only within the larger context of the Passover Parable. As I have explained, the Exodus of the sons of Israel from Egypt was a *parabolic pantomime* which depicts the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, I have already mentioned the fact that the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ was also a *parabolic pantomime*. The *meaning* and *significance* of that particular *parabolic pantomime* has to do with the Serpent being impaled on a pole at the End of the Age. That is, it *parabolically* describes the destruction of Satan in the person of the Antichrist. Therefore, you should be able to see that the Passover Parable itself must ultimately point to that as well. That is, the Exodus of the sons of Israel from Egypt must also be a *parabolic* depiction of the End of the Age. In that *parabolic pantomime*, the Pharaoh depicts Satan. (Now you know why Ezekiel often uses the Pharaoh as a *parabolic image* of the Antichrist.) Moses and Aaron represent the two witnesses who will stand against the delusion of the Antichrist:

“And I will grant {authority} to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.” These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. And if anyone desires to harm them, fire proceeds out of their mouth and devours their enemies; and if anyone would desire to harm them, in this manner he must be killed. These have the power to shut up the sky, in order that rain may not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.
(Revelation 11:3–6) ■