BIBLE STUDY SERIES

THE ISRAEL OF GOD TODAY

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On occasion, I have inserted italics and brackets in Scripture quotations to enhance understanding, not to change the meaning.

May God bless you as you study this fascinating topic! Larry Wilson

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The Israel of God Today

"For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children." "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

God's Use of Trustees

God's plan to redeem sinners is intricate and beautiful. His plan involves two aspects of salvation: Justification and sanctification. Justification is an administrative process. God justifies sinners and when they appear in his courtroom, they appear to be clean and sinless just as though they never sinned. On the other hand, sanctification is a lifelong process that transforms a rebellious sinner and enables him to come close to God and live among the holy angels.

There is no question that God loves every person on Earth. We are His creation. The plan of redemption is huge, intricate, beautiful, and has enormous transforming power and purpose. God determined from the beginning of sin that billions of human beings would exist on Earth and certain people, whom He has chosen to be trustees of His gospel, would broadcast His gospel to the world. This is why God

¹ Romans 9:6-7

² Galatians 3:29

determined His trustees would be well-informed representatives of His plan and His love.

God Established a Trust

In simple terms, a living trust is an arrangement in which one person (the grantor) transfers something of value to a second person (the beneficiary) through the efforts of a third person (the trustee). Trusts are used to distribute assets for a variety of reasons. If a grantor is too busy with other matters, out of the country, or too ill to take care of activities, he can establish a living trust and turn the distribution of his assets over to his trustee. Of course, when a trustee agrees to serve a trust, he makes a promise to the grantor to carry out the grantor's wishes. Usually, the grantor's desires are clearly stipulated in the trust so there can be no misunderstanding between the grantor and trustee. Typically, a trustee is well paid for his services because the fiduciary responsibility imposed upon the trustee is significant.

A living trust is different from a testamentary will. A testamentary will is a document in which one person declares his assets are to be given to another person or persons after he dies. The major difference between a testamentary will and a living trust is that a will takes effect upon a grantor's death, whereas a living trust can become effective immediately while the grantor is alive.

I have presented the essential differences between a testamentary will and a living trust so that you can see why God established the plan of redemption as a trust instead of a will.

God designed the plan of redemption as a living trust for two reasons. First, God is changeless¹ and His gospel is eternal.²Although faith in God is expressed in different ways and at different times, the foundation of redemption never changes. Faith in God is an eternal prerequisite because there is no other way finite beings can honor, love, and worship an infinite God.³God established the plan of redemption as a living trust so the enormous blessings and benefits of his eternal gospel could be disbursed immediately to all mankind (the beneficiaries).

The eternal gospel is as a comprehensive body of knowledge that includes the truth about the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, their love for created beings, their judicial processes, the offer of redemption, and the principles underlying the wise and righteous laws of almighty God.

Second, God, in His infinite wisdom, foreknew that "servant leadership" was the best way to disburse the light of His eternal gospel to those in darkness. Servant leadership occurs when one brother (that is, an

¹ Malacchi 3:6

² Revelation 14:6

³ Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3; Hebrews 11

enlightened trustee) serves another brother (the beneficiary who lives in darkness) on behalf of a grantor (God). It was God's plan for the whole world to witness a practical representation of His love, as well as a proclamation of light through His servants (trustees). God wanted the world to discover that whenever people see one of His humble trustees, they see a glimpse of God.1 To make His living trust viable, God gave His trustees many advantages (intellectual, spiritual, and physical). He also paid them well and gave His trustees wealth to carry out their task. From the beginning of sin, God has used trustees to disburse the benefits of His gospel to His beneficiaries who are in spiritual poverty and darkness.2 Unfortunately, Bible history indicates that as a body of people, God's trustees have been very poor performers. They typically degenerate into a hopeless state of arrogance and ignorance.

Before we explore this topic, please keep this thought in mind. This study consists of two segments. The first segment focuses on God's use of trustees. The second segment focuses on the importance of being an heir of Abraham. These two topics are intimately related and very important. They are much easier for most people to understand if the "big picture" concerning trusteeship is told first, making the concept of God's elect easier to understand. Therefore, the first part of this study concerns God's use of trustees.

¹ Philippians 2:11-15; Daniel 12:3

² Isaiah 42:6-7

Look at the list below and notice seven groups of trustees. After sin is destroyed and Earth is made new, the redeemed of all ages will serve as trustees of God's eternal gospel. In other words, the benefits that God (the Grantor) wants distributed to His beneficiaries (the whole universe) will never end and the trustees who will deliver God's assets to the universe will be those who overcame the temptations of the world through faith in God!

Seven Groups of Trustees

- 1. The patriarchs
- 2. The family of Abraham
- 3. The nation of Israel
- 4. The Christian church
- 5. The Protestant movement
- 6. The 144,000
- 7. The redeemed of all ages

1. God Starts With Patriarchs

Ironically, the first trustee of the plan of redemption was Adam, the same man who brought sin and condemnation upon all mankind! God revealed to Adam the essential elements of redemption. In turn, Adam was commissioned to teach his offspring about sin and God's plan for redemption. The firstborn male of each generation inherited the privilege of becoming a servant leader of the gospel. If each trustee carried out his responsibility, every household on Earth

would hear the gospel and benefit from its provisions. Unfortunately Cain, Adam's firstborn son, did not want to be a servant leader. Cain was arrogant and he followed the inclinations of his carnal heart. Cain showed disrespect for God by deciding, for himself, how God should be worshiped. He offered fruit instead of the prerequisite lamb and God showed no respect for Cain's offering. When God acknowledged Abel's offering, Cain was outraged that God gave Abel higher honor than the "firstborn of mankind." Later, Cain killed his younger brother out of jealousy.

When Adam and Eve were 130 years old, Eve gave birth to Seth.¹ By studying Adam's descendants to the time of Noah and the flood, we learn that, with the exception of Cain, the trusteeship of the gospel was passed down to the firstborn of each generation. These trustees are called the patriarchs (or elders) because a patriarch is respected as a person of experience, a person having acquired wisdom and understanding. Evidently, many of Adam's offspring followed in Cain's footsteps.² The Bible indicates that the trustees began to preach the Word of the Lord (that is, they began to preach to those who should not have been living in darkness) when Enosh was born to Seth.³ Corporately speaking, the behavior of the world went from bad to worse. By the time Noah was

¹ Genesis 4:27; 5:3

² Genesis 4:17

³ Genesis 4:26

born, most of the people on Earth wanted nothing to do with God or His redemption. When the flood occurred, only one trustee remained on Earth and ironically, Noah's family was the only beneficiary.¹

Notice the lineage of the ten patriarchs who lived between Adam and Noah's flood:

Adam - Seth - Enosh - Kenan - Mahalalel - Jared - Enoch - Methuselah - Lamech - Noah

Two interesting facts emerge about the patriarchs' trusteeship. First, there were ten patriarchs. According to the genealogical records given in Scripture, the lifetimes of these ten men covered a period of approximately 1,656 years. Ten linear trustees suggest that the Earth's population before the flood was quite small – perhaps a few hundred thousand.

The second element that stands out about the trusteeship of the patriarchs is the significance of being a firstborn son. Evidently, God used the special joy and affection given to the firstborn son as an object lesson to teach mankind that one day, His only begotten Son, the faithful and true Trustee of Redemption, would come to Earth and redeem us. As a practical matter, the firstborn son was especially honored. In Bible times, it was understood he would be more experienced and wiser than his siblings, so the family respected the eldest son.

¹ Hebrews 11:7

God Abandons the Patriarch Policy

Noah was the last of the pre-flood patriarchs. As far as we know. Noah's sons did not walk as faithfully with God as their father did. It is astonishing that within a mere 150 years after the flood, Noah's descendants built a tall tower to protect themselves from another deluge. It seems inconceivable the people did not believe God's promise to never again destroy the world with water, even though the sign of the promise, the rainbow, was frequently displayed for all to see. God saw the rapid degeneration caused by man's rebellion and He deliberately separated the people of Earth into groups by language. This simple act caused mankind to disperse throughout the world. Shortly after the dispersion, God divided the Earth. He pulled one land mass into several continents further isolating mankind one from another.1

The Bible traces the birth of Abraham from Noah through Shem, Japheth's younger brother.² If I have calculated correctly, Abraham was about seven years old when Noah died. If Noah lived out the remainder of his life in the area around the mountains of Ararat, then it seems likely Abraham did not meet the ancient patriarch. Noah died at the age of 950 years, and so did the trusteeship and legacy of the patriarchs that began with Adam.

¹ Genesis 10:25

² Genesis 10:21

2. God Starts Over With Abraham

After Noah's flood, God skipped over nine generations descending from Noah to start over with a new set of trustees. He looked down on the Earth and found an open-hearted man named Abram who favorably responded to God's call and invitation to be a trustee. It is important to also note that Abram (later called Abraham) was not in a biological line to receive a trusteeship passed down to the firstborn. In fact, it is highly doubtful that Abraham was the firstborn of his father, Terah; but God was starting over and Abram was, for the most part, an honest man.²

Abraham walked with God and he became a friend of God. After testing Abraham's faith, God purposed to make Abraham's "non-existing" descendants into a family of trustees. In other words, God "dusted off" the trusteeship of the eternal gospel he originally gave to Adam and implemented it again. This time, however, the trusteeship would not be passed along to the firstborn son; it would instead be passed along to Abraham's family. Abraham can be called "the father of the faithful" because every descendant who trusted in God as did Abraham would be considered a trustee of the gospel. Faithfulness was far more important to God than genealogical order. Notice the progression of trustees traced from Abraham. These

¹ Genesis 12:1-4

² Genesis 20

were Abraham's seven sons. Ishmael was not considered a trustee:

Abraham – Ishmael – Isaac – Zimran – Jokshan – Medan – Midian – Ishbak – Shuah

His Wives:

(Hagar) (Sarah) (Keturah)

The trusteeship was not passed to Isaac's firstborn son:

Isaac – Esau – Jacob

The trusteeship skipped over Reuben, Simeon, and Levi and passed down to Judah:

Jacob – Reuben – Simeon – Levi – Judah

The trusteeship was not passed to Er, the firstborn of Judah, for God killed Er.

Judah – Er

Even a casual study of Bible history reveals the degenerating consequences of sin. In a sin-filled world, it is unnatural to have faith in God. Beginning with Abraham and Sarah, we read how they became weary of waiting on God for a son. They took matters into their own hands and Ishmael was the result. Esau was Isaac's firstborn, but Jacob tried to steal the birthright through deceit only to discover that God would not accept his treachery. Reuben, Jacob's firstborn son, was emotionally unstable and he did not conduct

himself in a way worthy of the sacred trust granted to the firstborn. Jacob denied him the birthright for his sexual promiscuity. Jacob also denied the privileges of birthright to his next sons, Simeon and Levi, because of their violence and cruelty. So, Jacob gave paternal rights and the sacred trust to his fourth born son, Judah. In the next generation, God killed Judah's firstborn, Er, for his wickedness. From that time, God's efforts to have Abraham's family deliver the plan of redemption to the inhabitants of Earth fell apart.

When trustees fail to discharge the terms of the trust set by the grantor, the beneficiaries cannot receive the assets or gifts the grantor wants them to have. As a consequence of their delinquency, God sent Abraham's family into Egypt. It is ironic that Joseph, a faithful great-grandson of Abraham, was the one who set the stage for his family to become slaves.³ Because of faithless living, God permitted Abraham's descendants to become slaves of Pharaoh and they lost the exalted opportunity to serve as trustees of the gospel for the next 400 years.

3. God Starts Over With Moses

One day at a burning bush in the Arabian Desert, God called Moses to be a trustee of the gospel.⁴ Moses

¹ Genesis 49:4; 35:22

² Genesis 38:7

³ Genesis 47:21

⁴ Hebrews 3:5-4:2

was neither the firstborn of his family nor was he a member of the tribe of Judah. At this time, lineage no longer mattered because God was starting over. Adam and the patriarchs had failed. Abraham and his immediate descendants had failed. However, God, in keeping with His promises to Abraham, started over with a distant descendant of Abraham. He needed a man to deliver the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage so He could start over. So, Moses, the murderer turned shepherd, became a trustee of the eternal gospel.

At Mount Sinai, God offered the nation of Israel the opportunity to become trustees of the plan of redemption and they accepted. Meanwhile, the population of the world had multiplied significantly since the flood. Many tribal nations were scattered around Earth, and most of them did not know about the God of heaven nor His amazing gospel. So, working through His newly appointed trustees, Moses and his brother Aaron, God set out again to make Abraham's descendants trustees of His gospel.

At Mount Sinai, God also promoted the tribe of Levi to be a group of special trustees. After a few centuries, however, it became impossible to tell who was leading who. The Levites were no different than members of other tribes. They did the same evil things in the sight of the Lord. Time after time, God sent prophets to the kings and priests of Israel to remind the nation the con-

¹ Exodus 19:4-8

ditions required for God's blessings, but the Israelites hated the prophets and killed most of them. Century after century, the prophets chastised and rebuked the Israelites for their rebellion. In 605 B. C., God sent the whole nation to Babylon as captives for their rebellion, but the captivity did not produce repentance. Six centuries later, the story of Israel ended on a sad note. God tried everything possible but His trustees did not measure up to the terms and conditions of being trustees of His gospel. Finally, God sent the Roman army against Jerusalem and completely destroyed the nation. All this happened just as He had warned from the very beginning.¹

4. God Starts Over Again With Christianity

After Jesus was on Earth, He concluded that Israel was beyond redemption, so He created a new covenant with a new group of trustees. Jesus chose men who already knew God's ways and character. This allowed the gospel of Jesus to spread rapidly throughout the world. He chose twelve men who, when the time was right, would step out of Judaism and become known as Christians. It is amazing, given the failure of previous trustees that all but one of the original twelve disciples lived up to His calling!

The trusteeship Jesus gave to Christians does not have any qualifications *except* faith in Christ. Biological lineage, paternal rights, race, and culture are

¹ Deuteronomy 28; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16

all meaningless. Remember, the ultimate purpose of a living trust is to benefit the beneficiaries. Therefore, God opened the floodgates after the cross and anyone who wants to be a trustee of His gospel can do so. There are many titles describing this new arrangement, but Christians generally call it the "priesthood of the believer." In effect, it means that any person, male or female, Jew or Gentile, can now serve as a trustee of the gospel.¹

Remember, the duty of a trustee is to carry out the wishes of the grantor. God still wants the world to hear and witness the power of His gospel. God wants the world to know about His efforts to save mankind from the penalty for sin. God wants everyone in the world to know that victory over sin is possible. God wants the world to know that lasting joy, happiness, and peace will come if men and women obey His laws and commands. God wants His trustees to be living examples of His gospel because "seeing is believing."

The history of the Christian Church is not wholesome or glorious. About 500 years after Jesus returned to heaven, the Christian Church morphed from the "persecuted" into the "persecutor of the saints." Corporately speaking, the Christian Church repeated the rebellious history of the Jewish nation. Christian leaders became focused on power and wealth. They forgot

¹ Galatians 3:28-29

God and they hated those who loved His gospel. During the Dark Ages, the Christian Church destroyed many people who firmly stood for God's truth. Sin consistently ruins God's trustees, because the carnal nature is hostile toward the eternal gospel. The carnal nature is self-seeking. Bible history confirms that God's trustees always fail because mankind is cursed with the carnal nature. When the carnal nature rules, there is an irresistible temptation to redirect the assets and hoard the wealth that belongs to the grantor's beneficiaries. Hoarding the assets prevents the grantor from being a humble conduit through which the wealth flows.

5. God Starts Over With Protestantism

The iron grip of the Roman Catholic Church in Europe was finally broken in 1798, and the resulting freedom allowed a new group of people to take the gospel commission seriously. Just as Christianity arose out of the cradle of Judaism, Protestantism arose from the soil of Catholicism. Once again, God renewed and extended the privilege of trusteeship to anyone willing to proclaim and demonstrate his eternal gospel. Keep in mind that the basic trust remains intact. The Grantor (God) wants everyone in the world (the beneficiaries) to benefit from His eternal gospel. To do this, the Grantor continues to search for faithful trustees who will accomplish the terms and conditions of his trust.

Unfortunately, Protestantism has also floundered and become derelict in fulfilling its God given duties. Protestantism has lost its vision and purpose. It has grown indifferent to the eternal gospel because of materialism and humanism. Prosperity has robbed Protestantism of its momentum. The spiritual awakening that propelled 18th century Protestantism is dead. Many people still claim they are protestors, but few Protestants remember the protest.

6. God Will Start Over Yet Again

Just in case you have forgotten, a living trust is an arrangement whereby a grantor transfers something of value to his beneficiaries using the services of a trustee. We are now living 2,000 years after Jesus lived on Earth, and Catholics and Protestants combined represent only one-third of the world's population. The world now has more people living on it than at any other time in history. As a percentage of people on Earth, few people within Christianity actually know and understand the terms and conditions contained in the eternal gospel.

Soon, the seven trumpets of Revelation will sound and the whole world will discover God's great displeasure with mankind. Jesus will select and empower a new group of 144,000 individuals as trustees of the eternal gospel before the Great Tribulation begins. These faithful men and women will come from

all nations, languages, and religions. Jesus will give the 144,000 an understanding of the eternal gospel and He will empower them with Holy Spirit power so they can tell the world about redemption. This group of 144,000 people will accomplish in 1,260 days all that God desires. The 144,000 will confront each person in the world with the eternal, unchanging gospel of Jesus Christ and every person will have to make a decision. The 144,000 will not fail. They will accomplish all the Lord wants done.

7. God's Final Trustees Will Live Forever

This study on God's trustees does not end with the Second Coming. The people who are redeemed will serve as trustees of the eternal gospel throughout eternity. They will serve God as priests and kings. Because the redeemed have shown themselves to be faithful and obedient to the King of kings, Jesus will greatly honor them in the ages to come just as they honored Him on Earth. It is interesting that the redeemed are the seventh and final group of trustees. As the number seven signifies a full and complete number, so the redeemed will testify forever of God's endless love.

Trustees Reflect the Light of the Gospel

When sin began, God implemented the plan of redemption as a living trust. God determined "enlightened brothers" should humbly labor for their "brothers in darkness." God also determined His trustees should be living examples of living by faith, displaying His love and grace. The foundations of the eternal gospel never change although expressions of faith do change. In other words, there is no other way to please an infinite God than through faithful obedience. Through the ages, God's trustees have proven to be a failure. This is why the final trustees of the eternal gospel will have their carnal natures removed (sealed) before they begin their work. This will enable the 144,000 to accomplish all that God wants. Hopefully, this study illuminates the fact that God's trustees are only that - trustees. They are not the Grantor of redemption. In fact, trustees cannot save anyone and cannot condemn anyone. This is Jesus' work. The only element God's trustees have to offer is enlightenment. Their lives, through word and action, will reflect the light of the eternal gospel. Because salvation does not come through a church or a tribe, a numberless throng of saints will sing together on heaven's shore: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."1

Before moving on to the next part, I need to address a matter I am questioned about often. What does Romans 11 mean by *All Israel will be saved?*

Will All Israel Will Be Saved?

"I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be con-

Revelation 7:9-10

ceited: Israel [was chosen by God, but she] has experienced a hardening [of the heart] in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, [to the kingdom. The Gentiles will fill the kingdom of God and Israel will be envious of those who are not a nation; and Israel will be angry at a nation that has no understanding1 because God has redefined Israel. Those who believe in Jesus are the heirs of Abraham.] [Because we know that not all who are descended from the loins of Israel are part of Israel, nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children, therefore it is not the natural children who are God's children. All who are born again are regarded as Abraham's offspring,] and in this way all Israel [everyone who is grafted into the cultivated olive tree] will be saved. As it is written: 'The deliverer will come from Zion [New Jerusalem]; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. [He will take away the carnal nature from His people.]"2

Many Christians use Romans 11:25-26 improperly to support a conclusion that has nothing to do with Paul's intent. Here are three examples:

- 1. Improper use of Scripture to support a paradigm
- 2. Superficial treatment of subject material
- 3. Lifting words out of context and/or imposing a theological construct

¹ Romans 10:19

² Romans 11:25-26, insertions mine

1. Improper Use of Scripture to Support a Paradigm

Malachi, the last book in the Old Testament, was written about 450 years before Jesus was born. Consider Malachi's final words: "See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction."

The Bible indicates that Elijah was taken to heaven in a fiery chariot around 850 B. C.² During the time of Christ, Malachi's prediction fueled the idea that Elijah would appear before Messiah could appear. We see this anticipation when John 1 records the story of John the Baptist: "Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, 'I am not the Messiah.' They asked him, 'Then who are you? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.'... [Then] 'Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' John [the Baptist] replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'I am the voice of one calling in the desert, "Make straight the way for the Lord." "3

¹ Malachi 4:5-6

^{2 2} Kings 2:11

³ John 1:19-23, insertions mine

John's parents were well known because his father, Zechariah, was a priest. The facts about John's miraculous birth were also well known. The inquiry into John's identity is important because one of the strongest arguments the Jews used against Jesus was the prophecy of Malachi. The Jews concluded that Messiah could not appear until Elijah arrived.

Because Malachi's "Elijah prophecy" was often used against Jesus, "The disciples asked him [Jesus], 'Why then do the teachers of the law say [keep saying] that Elijah must come first?' Jesus replied, 'To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.' Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist."²

Jesus could say that John was Elijah because spiritually speaking, John the Baptist was a parallel of Elijah. The Holy Spirit enabled Elijah to be a mighty prophet and the same Holy Spirit enabled John the Baptist to be a mighty prophet. In fact, Jesus said no prophet was greater than John the Baptist.³ Both men were heralds of God's efforts to establish His kingdom on Earth. Because the Jews misunderstood

Luke 1

² Matthew 17:10-13, insertions mine

³ Matthew 11:11

Malachi's prediction, they rejected Jesus. Their failure also illustrates how an improper use of Scripture can be devastating.

2. Superficial Treatment of Subject Material

Many wonderful Bible themes are given superficial treatment today. "Sound bites" are simplistic, and worse they can produce a concept that is totally wrong. For example, consider the role and importance of the Ten Commandments. Are the Ten Commandments a religious relic, or a declaration of God's will which lives in perpetuity? Of course, this question cannot be addressed in this short article, but I wish to use this to illustrate a point.

If the Ten Commandments were abolished at the cross, then there is no law against idolatry (the worship of images), taking God's name in vain, lying, adultery, murder, or stealing. Many Protestants will respond that there are laws against these behaviors after the cross because nine of the Ten Commandments are mentioned in the New Testament. So, many Protestants want to believe that only the fourth commandment was abolished at the cross. They simply do not want to observe God's seventh day Sabbath; instead, they would rather protect an ancient tradition of Sunday observance. In spite of what many Protestants believe, all of the Ten Commandments are mentioned in the New Testament including the fourth.¹

¹ Genesis 2:1-3 with Hebrews 4:4, 9-10

To prove their claim that the Ten Commandments were abolished at the cross, Protestants will sometimes resort to a superficial treatment of Bible texts. For example, Romans 10:4 says, "Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes."

What does Paul mean when he says that 'Christ is the culmination of the law'? The key question is: Is a sinner declared righteous in God's sight after the cross because there is no law, or is a sinner declared righteous in God's sight after God covers him with the righteousness of Christ? Paul did not contradict himself in the book of Romans. Paul understood the Ten Commandments were obligatory after the cross and this is why he wrote, "Do we, then, nullify the law [the Ten Commandments] by this faith [in Christ]? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law."

When Paul wrote 'Christ is the culmination [Greek: teleos] of the law' he meant that Jesus met the goal of the law. The law could not find any imperfection in Him. Christ's perfect life is so important because He had to live a perfect life, overcoming every temptation before He could even go to the cross. The Father required Jesus to live a perfect life so that Jesus could transfer the "righteousness of Christ" to His believers. Then, after Jesus had established the righteousness needed for our salvation, the Father sent Jesus to the

¹ Romans 3:31, insertions mine

cross so that our death sentence could be transferred to Him. There is nothing within this process that required the Sabbath commandment to be abolished.

Romans 10:4 perfectly aligns with Romans 1:17: "For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness [which a sinner cannot achieve or create, a righteousness] that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'" Jesus created this righteousness by overcoming every temptation. Sinners receive this righteousness through salvific faith (faith that results in salvation) through obeying the demands of the Holy Spirit without regard for the consequences! No sinner can enter heaven and enjoy the wedding banquet unless he first receives and wears the righteousness of Christ!²

I have used Romans 10:4 to illustrate how a Bible text can be distorted and used in a superficial way to support a tradition. Remember, the Bible says that if anyone willingly and knowingly distorts the Word of God, God will deal harshly with that person.³

3. Lifting Words Out of Context and/or Imposing a Theological Construct

A sentiment widely held by Christians today is that after a pre-tribulation rapture occurs, the Jews will

¹ Romans 1:17, insertion mine

² Matthew 22:11-13

³ Hebrews 10:31; Revelation 22:18-19

become believers in Jesus. They will repent of their rebellion and recognize Jesus as the Son of God and "all Israel" will be saved at the Second Coming. Because this view is a theological "house of cards," we need only consider one doctrine that ruins the construct although several could be provided. How does the Bible describe the heirs of Abraham?

It teaches that all believers in Christ are Abraham's seed.¹ "'If you were Abraham's children,' said Jesus, 'then you would do what Abraham did.'"² Paul reaffirms that it is not the natural children who are heirs of Abraham.³ The book of James teaches early believers in Christ considered themselves to be part of the twelve tribes of Israel.⁴ And last but not least, "Jesus replied [to Nicodemus], 'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.'"⁵

Before the cross, Jesus made an important declaration that John recorded in John 3. If we work backwards to the days of Abraham, the following declaration makes perfect sense just as it reads: "For not all who are descended from [the loins of Jacob] Israel are [part of] Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, [Abraham fathered Ishmael, but God

¹ Galatians 3:29

² John 8:39

³ Romans 9:8

⁴ James 1:1; 2:1

⁵ John 3:3, insertion mine

said] 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' In other words, [God makes this perfectly clear,] it is not the children by physical descent [biological children] who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise [those who live by faith as did Abraham] who are regarded as Abraham's offspring."

Who are the children of the promise who will inherit Earth made new? One answer could be, "The children of the promise are the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," but this would be incorrect. Abraham had two sons and only one son, Isaac, participated in the promise. Isaac had two sons and only one son, Jacob, participated in the promise! Then, Jacob (Israel) had many sons with four women, and Paul said of them "not all who are descended from Jacob are Israel." So, "Who are the children of the promise?" Jesus defined the heirs of Abraham when he said to Nicodemus: "No one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

Given what Jesus said in John 3 and John 8, as well as what Paul wrote in Romans 9, it is necessary to take a closer look at Romans 11:26 to determine what Paul meant when he wrote, "all Israel will be saved." Paul had something very different in mind than what millions of Protestants have in mind today when they read Paul's words.

¹ Romans 9:6-8, insertions mine

² John 3:3

Notice the whole phrase, "And in this way all Israel will be saved." Paul is not postulating a new idea in Romans 11 when he says all Israel will be saved. Paul has already said in Romans 9 that not everyone descended from the loins of Jacob are part of Israel and it is not the natural children who are Abraham's offspring. To prove these two points, Paul quotes from Isaiah: "'The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,' declares the Lord. 'As for me, this is my covenant with them,' says the Lord. 'My Spirit, who is on you, will not depart from you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will always be on your lips, on the lips of your children and on the lips of their descendants—from this time on and forever,' says the Lord."

This is the problem. Since Adam and Eve sinned, salvation has always had these qualifications: God's people are people who obey His Word, believe his promises, and repent of their sins. All individuals who choose to be God's people are the heirs of Abraham. Thus, all Israel will be saved and Isaiah confirms this!

Paul wrote the book of Romans and sent it to both Jew and Gentile believers in Rome to clarify the true constituency of Israel. If we compare Paul's words in Ephesians 2 with Romans 9-11, there is perfect harmony. After the Levitical code was abolished,² Gen-

¹ Isaiah 59:20-21

² Colossians 2

tiles no longer were required to "become Jews." They can be grafted directly into the family of Abraham through faith in Christ! Long ago, Isaiah and Hosea predicted this wonderful development! There is no longer a distinction between Jew and Gentile because of Christ! All that matters to God is going forward in obedience, faith, and repentance.

Romans 11 has been grossly distorted today, and if Paul were alive he might write Romans 11:26 this way: "Soon, all of God's children – those within every religious system on Earth – will be saved because God promised Abraham long ago that he would be the father of many nations."

Heirs of Abraham

Now that we have considered the concept of a living trust, we can examine another important topic. Many Christians do not realize the necessity or importance of being counted an heir of Abraham. They read this verse, "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed [Greek: sperma], and heirs according to the promise" without understanding the profound importance of the verse. Here is the problem: Long ago God promised to give the world to Abraham and his descendants. If Christians are not counted as heirs of Abraham, then Christians will have no place to spend eternity.

¹ Isaiah 19, 56; Hosea 1

² Galatians 3:29, insertion mine

Consider this illustration. When two people get married, it is said that six people are involved:

The guy he thinks he is. The guy she thinks he is. The guy he really is.

And...

The girl he thinks she is.

The girl she thinks she is.

The girl she really is.

Normally, after two years of marriage, only two of the original six people remain alive: The guy he really is and the girl she really is. The death of four people is announced one solemn day when one spouse says to the other, "You have changed! You are not the person I married!" I have used marriage to demonstrate that two spouses can appear to be six different people. Similarly, two groups of people, sheep and goats, can be described as twelve different types of people in God's sight! With this thought in mind, consider the following definitions and notice the name of the variable that identifies each group because these variables will be used throughout this study:

Jews

JHSL = A Jew (an individual who descended from Abraham, loves God, lives by faith – Holy Spirit Led)

- **JNON** = A **Jew** (a **nonreligious** individual who has Jewish parents, heritage, or culture)
- JZEL = A Jew (a religious zealot who is an ignorant, arrogant, unloving, hardheaded individual whose God is his religious opinion)
- JALL = Israel (corporately speaking, all Jews)

Christians

- CHSL = A Christian (a born-again Jew or Gentile who loves Jesus, lives by faith Holy Spirit Led)
- CNON = A Christian (a nonreligious individual who has no interest in God but has Christian parents, heritage, or culture)
- **CZEL** = A **Christian** (a **religious zealot** who is an ignorant, arrogant, unloving, hard-headed individual whose God is his religious opinion)
- CALL = Christians (corporately speaking, all Christians)

Gentiles

GHSL = A Gentile (an individual like Cornelius whose knowledge of the truth about God is nonexistent or limited, but for all he knows, loves God and walks obediently

with God according to the Holy Spirit who guides him – he lives up to all that he knows to be right and true – Holy Spirit Led)

- **GNON** = A **Gentile** (a **nonreligious** individual who has no interest in God)
- GZEL = A Gentile (a religious zealot who is neither Christian or Jew, who is ignorant, arrogant, unloving, a hardheaded individual whose God is his religious opinion)
- GALL = Gentiles (corporately speaking, all who are not Jews and Christians)

God Looks on the Heart

We need to examine these twelve definitions because there is a great deal of confusion about the end time role of modern Israel. Many Christians inherently accept these twelve definitions without giving them much thought. For example, when you hear someone say, "I believe there are sheep and goats in every religious body," that person is affirming he believes God primarily looks upon the heart and what matters most to God is honesty, integrity, fidelity, love, and faithfulness. To be frank, I do not find anything in Scripture concerning an end time role for modern Israel. There is an Israel of God during the end time, but it is not the modern nation of Israel. We will learn further into the study that the end time Israel of God

consists of JHSL + CHSL + GHSL. This explains why the twelve definitions of sheep and goats are important. The words "Christian," "Jew," and "Gentile" are used throughout Scripture. Knowing which definition is appropriate within a given text is highly important if you want to reach the intended meaning of Scripture.

Example 1: Selections from Romans 9 and Romans 2

Paul wrote, "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel. [JALL]. [In other words, I would forfeit eternal life if it would mean that my people would receive Christ and be saved. Look at the gifts that God has generously bestowed on JALL:] Theirs is the [promised] adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory [the Shekinah glory that dwelt within the Most Holy place], the covenants [the offer of serving as trustees of the eternal gospel], the receiving of the law [at Mount Sinai], the temple worship [with its ceremonial shadows,] and the promises [of earthly recognition spoken through the prophets]. Theirs are the patriarchs [Abraham, Moses, and David], and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

"[There is no question that JALL has been blessed above all nations, therefore JALL's rejection of Christ is devastating.] It is not as though God's word [His promises] had failed [because all Israel (JHSL+CHSL+GHSL) will be saved.]. [However, we must consider the problem that JALL's rebellion has created for the eternal gospel and God's solution to this problem. First, remember that | For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. [That is, JNON and JZEL are not counted as sons of Jacob.] Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. [God used Abraham's firstborn son to demonstrate this point. God declared that Ishmael was unacceptable in His sight as Abraham's heir even though he was Abraham's firstborn son. God rejected Abraham's request that Ishmael be counted as his heir and inheritor of God's promise, but God said:] On the contrary, 'It is through Isaac [the child that came when it was humanly impossible to conceive, the child that came through patience and enduring faith] that your offspring [JHSL] will be reckoned.' In other words, it is not the [natural born] children by physical descent who are [counted as God's children, but it is the children of the **promise** [that is, people who believe God's promises and wait upon the Lord as Abraham did] who are regarded as Abraham's offspring [heirs]."1

¹ Romans 9:2-8, insertions mine

God rejected Ishmael as Abraham's firstborn because Ishmael came as a result of abandoning faith in God. From the beginning, God wanted the impossible birth of Isaac to parallel the impossible birth of Christ. Contrary to what some people claim, God did not reject Abraham's firstborn son, Ishmael, because the child was born out of wedlock. If this were the case, there would not be twelve tribes in Israel. The twelve tribes of Israel came through two marriages and two slave women. Jacob's first wife, Leah, produced six sons and his second wife, Rachel, produced two sons. Bilhah, Leah's slave woman, produced two sons from Jacob and Zilpah, Rachel's slave woman, also produced two sons for him.¹

In Romans 2, Paul confronts some Jews [JZEL's] who were causing trouble among early Christians in Rome. These Jews [JZEL] were trying to merge Christianity into Judaism. Paul wrote: "Now you, if you call yourself a Jew [that is, if you consider yourself the elect of God]; if you rely on the law [to demonstrate that you are righteous] and boast in God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those [GALLs] who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of

I Genesis 35:23-26

knowledge and truth-you, then, who teach others, [why] do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, [so why] do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, [so why] do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, [so why] do you rob temples [and take their gold and silver]? You who boast in [obeying] the law, [so why] do you dishonor God by breaking the law? [You well know that Israel [JALL] has a terrible reputation among the Gentiles as an arrogant and rebellious people. Israel has a long history of being hated and scorned by its neighbors because of the way it exalts itself as the elect of God and yet, treats the Gentiles as though they were less than dogs. As a people [JALL], the Old Testament constantly condemns them.] As it is written: 'God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.'

"[Let us reason together for a moment.] Circumcision has value if you [believe that obedience will produce salvation. You conscientiously] observe the law, but [you should know that] if you break the law [just once], you have become as though you had not been circumcised [because the penalty for one sin is death and how can you recover from the penalty of sin after committing one sin? Circumcision will not save you from death!]. So then, if those who are not circumcised [and uninformed like Cornelius – GHSL] keep the law's requirements [out

of a deep desire to walk with God], will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised [by God]? The one who is not circumcised physically [and knows nothing about the written code] and yet obeys the [intent of the] law [which is love, because love is written in his heart through the Spirit, He] will condemn you who, even though you [are a Jew, JALL, and] have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker. [Be assured. God reads the heart and in His sight] A person is not a Jew [JHSL] who is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew [JHSL] who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from people, but from God."1

"[Consider God's treatment of sincere Gentiles [GHSL] who know nothing about Him.] Indeed, when Gentiles [GHSL], who do not have [any knowledge of] the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have [knowledge of] the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, [even in the absence of the written code, they [GHSL] know through the Holy Spirit what is right from wrong because] their consciences [influenced by the Holy Spirit] also

¹ Romans 2:17-29, insertions mine

bearing witness [in matters of right and wrong], and their thoughts sometimes accusing them [that is, their thoughts producing guilt when they violate the Spirit] and at other times even defending them [that is, their thoughts producing peace when doing what is right according to the Holy Spirit]."

Example 2: Ephesians 2 and Galatians 3

"For we [all mankind, CALL + JALL + GALL] are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth [GALL] and called [the ignorant and] 'uncircumcised' [dogs] by those who call themselves [the enlightened and] 'the circumcision' [JZEL] (which is done in the body by human hands)—remember that at that time [prior to hearing the gospel of Christ that] you were separate from Christ, [and as pagans [GALL] you were] excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace [He is our means to reconciliation because He], who has made the two groups [JHSL and GHSL into] one [church body — CHSL] and has destroyed the [religious]

¹ Romans 2:14-15, insertions mine

barrier [that kept us apart], the dividing wall of hostility [religious antagonism], by setting in his flesh the [Levitical] law with its commands and regulations. [When God abolished the Levitical system, He destroyed Judaism [JALL]. As a race of people, we no longer have a valid religious system that uniquely separates us from the Gentiles [GALL]. Our religious system, delivered by Moses, has been made void.] His purpose [in doing this] was to create in himself one new humanity [CHSL] out of the two [groups of people – Jews, JHSL and Gentiles, GHSL], thus making peace [between us], and in one body [of believers, that is, the church – CHSL] to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He [Jesus] came and preached peace [reconciliation with God through faith] to you who were far away [GALL] and peace [reconciliation with God through faith] to those [of us] who were near [JALL]. For through him we [JHSL + GHSL] both have [equal] access to the Father by one Spirit.

"Consequently, you [born-again Gentiles – GHSL's] are no longer foreigners and strangers, but [now you are] fellow citizens with God's people [JHSL's] and also members of his [unified] household [CHSL], built on the foundation of the apostles and [Old Testament] prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole

building [the church – CHSL] is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord."

"[God planned to justify the Gentiles through faith from the beginning.] So also Abraham: 'believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' [The Scripture says that God's righteousness 'was credited to him,' because the righteousness credited to Abraham did not exist when Abraham was alive. The righteousness of Christ was produced when Jesus lived on Earth. He overcame every temptation and His righteousness is imputed to every person who lives by faith. This is why the righteousness of Christ was credited to Abraham.] Understand, then, that those who have faith [as Abraham believed] are children of Abraham [and this now includes Gentile believers]. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.' So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. For all who rely on the works of the law [to achieve righteousness] are under a curse, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.' Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because [all have sinned] 'the righteous will live by faith."22

¹ Epesians 2:10-21, insertions mine

² Galations 3:6-11, insertions mine

The two examples above illuminate four topics that should become clearer as this matter unfolds.

From God's perspective, there are three kinds of Jews (JHSL + JNON + JZEL). Paul says that some Jews are considered the offspring of Abraham (JHSL) and the others (JNON + JZEL) are not.

From God's perspective, there are three kinds of Gentiles (GHSL + GNON + GZEL). Paul says that even though GHSLs may know nothing about the true God, they are considered His children because they honestly live up to all they know to be right and true. Living by faith means doing what is thought to be pleasing to God and leaving the consequences with Him.

When Jesus came to Earth, he abolished the Levitical code¹ which terminated Judaism. He established a new covenant and appointed new trustees.

Speaking to Jewish and Gentile believers, Paul made clear that it was Christ's purpose to unite JHSL and GHSL to create CHSL. Of course, as time progressed, CHSL fractured into corporate Christianity (CALL) which has nothing to do with living by faith. God views the sheep and goats as twelve distinct groups of people.

Abraham's Inheritance

Currently, Christians (CHSL) are counted as heirs of Abraham because God made three unilateral prom-

¹ Colossians 2:14-17

ises to Abraham. A unilateral promise is a standalone, one-sided promise, whereas a bilateral promise has two sides. Marriage is a bilateral promise: where two people promise to love, honor, and cherish each another for as long as they live. If one party in the marriage fails to keep the vow, the covenant is broken and it becomes void. Conversely, nothing is required of a person when a unilateral promise is given to him. When God promised all mankind that He would never destroy the world with a flood again, it was a unilateral promise. Mankind is not required to do anything for this promise to be fulfilled.

Now you can better appreciate the three unilateral promises God made to Abraham:

"He [God] took him [Abraham] outside and said, 'Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.'" "The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God." God said,] "Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing

¹ Genesis 9:11

² Genesis 15:5; Revelation 7:9

³ Genesis 17:8; Revelation 21:7

what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

Of course, God knew that Abraham would not live long enough to see these promises fulfilled,² but God's view of the future is not limited. God foreknew that he would resurrect Abraham someday and at the appointed time, these three promises would be fulfilled. Abraham also realized that he would not live long enough to see the promises fulfilled and this is why he looked forward to a city whose Builder and Maker is God.³

If a majority in Israel (JALL) had been faithful to God's covenant, Plan A would have been fulfilled and the promises God gave to Abraham would have been fulfilled long ago. But Israel (JALL) fractured, and JHSL became a minority. Corporately speaking, Israel became unfaithful and God implemented Plan B. Christianity has mirrored Israel's footsteps. Corporately speaking, Christianity is unfaithful. Therefore, God will raise up 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel (JHSL + CHSL + GHSL)!

God will fulfill the unilateral promises he made to Abraham with these three groups of people on a scale that is larger and more glorious than Plan A could have ever been! With God, Plan B is always larger and better! Consider how God fulfilled each promise to Abraham under Plan B.

¹ Genesis 18:18-19; Revelation 1:6; 5:10

² Genesis 15:13

³ Hebrews 11:10

Unilateral Promises Fulfilled

God promised Abraham that he would be the father of many nations and his offspring as numerous as the stars. At the end of the 1,000 years, the faithfull saints (children of Abraham = JHSL + GHSL + CHSL) will be as numberless as the stars! How many nations down through history will be represented? Hundreds, if not thousands!

God promised the land of Canaan to Abraham. If a majority in Israel had been faithful (JHSL), Plan A would have been fulfilled. Jesus would have established the kingdom of God on Earth after his death and over time, the whole land of Canaan would have become "the land promised to Abraham." Since Israel [JALL] became rebellious and unfaithful, God had to implement Plan B. At the end of sin's drama, the "promised land" will fill the "whole Earth." Jesus will create a new heaven and new Earth. The holy city, New Jerusalem (whose Builder and Maker is God) will descend. God will move His throne to Earth and dwell here with Abraham and his descendants [JHSL + GHSL + CHSL] forever!

Finally, God promised Abraham that all nations on Earth would be blessed through him. In the Earth made new, the people who are redeemed will see the fulfillment of this promise. The saints will see a previously barren man with more descendants than he can count – a barren man who received a son by faith and through this son, Jesus came. Through Jesus all nations have been blessed (JHSL + GHSL + CHSL). Throughout the endless ages of eternity, the nations will rejoice to see and worship Jesus. The saints will cast their crowns before Him and marvel at His amazing love for sinners. They will never tire of singing, "Salvation belongs to the Lamb who came to Earth through the seed of Abraham and redeemed us with His blood!"

When these three promises are fulfilled, I am sure Abraham will weep for joy as he worships at Jesus' feet. Abraham looked for a city whose Builder and Maker is God, but he never dreamed the city would be 1,420 miles cubed with walls 216 feet thick. He never dreamed the world would someday become "the promised land!"

I hope the importance of being an heir of Abraham makes sense now. If a person is not counted as an heir of Abraham [JHSL or GHSL or CHSL], he has no future and no place to live!

¹ Revelation 7:10

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