

Gospel Red Herring: Spiritualizing the Text

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Other books by the same author include *The Practice of Christian Mysticism, A Course in Biblical Mysticism* and *Biblical Morality*.

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Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

1. [Matthew 1:23](#)
2. [Matthew 2:6](#)
3. [Matthew 2:15](#)
4. [Matthew 2:18](#)
5. [Matthew 3:3](#)
6. [Matthew 4:6](#)
7. [Matthew 4:15-16](#)
8. [Matthew 8:17](#)
9. [Matthew 10:34-39](#)
10. [Matthew 11:10](#)
11. [Matthew 12:18-21](#)
12. [Matthew 13:14-15, 35](#)
13. [Matthew 15:8-9](#)
14. [Matthew 21:5](#)
15. [Matthew 21:42](#)
16. [Matthew 22:44](#)
17. [Mark](#)
18. [Luke 4:1-14](#)
19. [John 6:31](#)
20. [Acts 1:20](#)
21. [Acts 2:17-21](#)
22. [Acts 2:25-28](#)
23. [Acts 8:32-33](#)
24. [Acts 15:16-17](#)
25. [Romans 2:24](#)
26. [Romans 3:10-18](#)
27. [1 Corinthians 9:9](#)
28. [1 Corinthians 14:21](#)
29. [Galatians 3:10-12](#)
30. [Hebrews 2:6-8](#)
31. [Hebrews 7:1-2](#)
32. [James 2:23](#)

[Conclusion](#)

Introduction

If something grabs your heart and drives you beyond all reason, it may well qualify as a word from God for you.

In that moment, you realize that God takes you seriously and you feel driven to return the favor. The world fades into insignificance; at the same time, you realize a significant element in that drive to please God is a deep compassion for others. Perhaps you realize that most of the world will not take you seriously, but you can't let that stop you from pursuing God's glory.

In the midst of this, you will also find yourself driven to take the Bible seriously. If the God of the Bible touches you, it's obvious you need to draw closer to the Bible that tells us of Him. It won't much matter whether you take any other literature as seriously as you do Scripture, but you won't be able to treat the Bible with contempt. The difficulty, then, is making sure that you find Him there, not some false image that blinds you to the meaning of what's written there.

It should hardly surprise you that those who wrote that material were deeply worried it would be taken wrongly. So far as we can tell, the Apostle John penned the final words of the New Testament that closed the canon of Scripture. His Apocalypse is loaded with sadness tempered by joy at the final end. Most people catch the sense of sorrow at what his flock was going to face, particularly when he was gone, the last living apostle. What most people fail to grasp is the broader context from which this particular morose element arises.

The First Century church leadership struggled against the Judaizers. This was a group of teachers representing a movement that hoped to recapture for Judaism those who had converted to Christianity. These teachers ranged from pushy, overtly Jewish Pharisees to some very crafty folks pretending to be long-time followers of Christ, but they all had an agenda to bring the church back under Talmudic Law. A primary mark of the pretenders was teaching, either openly or slyly through unspoken assumptions, the same legalistic literary analysis used by the Pharisees. This was the influence of Hellenism and a drastic departure from the Ancient Hebrew way of looking at Scripture.

In essence, Hellenism is an appeal to objective truth as discoverable by human sensory data and reason. They never claimed it was necessary for every individual human to explore the entire realm of all that men could know. Someone who had done some exploration could save others time by abstracting, summarizing and teaching what they had experienced. This process was formalized in founding schools and collecting philosophers to teach others. The whole thing presumed a collection of rules for reasoning so that results would be fairly consistent. Eventually men would be able to point to an established body of human experience and reasoning as trustworthy, or so the theory goes. We could then devise ways to take advantage of this body of truth and build a better life, solve human problems, and obtain some golden age of human enlightenment.

This was the propaganda by which Hellenism was sold by the likes of Alexander the Great. It wasn't mere conquest, but he was spreading a truth that would save mankind from all ills. He was doing everyone a favor. A significant result of his efforts to sell this

outlook was the death of mysticism in all forms. It also meant trashing centuries of human study based on a mystical outlook. This gradual shift in intellectual assumptions also meant tossing out the entire intellectual background upon which Scripture stood. Alexander's conquest was some three centuries before Christ. It took awhile for the Jewish scholars to buy into the Hellenic approach, but by the time Jesus was born, the older Hebrew Mysticism was a quaint relic, nearly forgotten. The Pharisees were seized by the thrill of reason and logic, without noticing that at the very deepest level, the one thing that made it so delicious was that it placed man in control as his own god. Man could decide for himself what was good and what was evil. They forgot that this was the primary point behind the story of the Fall, that Adam and Eve surrendered to the temptation to be like God, reasoning for themselves what was good and evil.

While Jesus didn't bluntly say it, His disputes with the Pharisees was a call to denounce Hellenism and return to the Ancient Hebrew approach that placed man in utter subjection to God as the Creator and Judge of what was moral and right. Everything He said was inherently based on that ancient way. The Hellenizing influence had, in essence, allowed the Jews to develop such an alien image of Jehovah that it amounted to idolatry, only it was the idolatry of human reason over revelation. That's because God had intentionally created the Ancient Hebrew culture and intellectual traditions as a critical element in His revelation. Placing analytical reasoning and human intellect in the driver's seat was the root element of the Fall itself. Thus, our Western tendency to regard the Ancient Hebrews as somewhat primitive and barbaric is a senseless rejection of God's ways. Systematic arrangement of biblical teaching by analytical arrangement is not superior, but strips away the organic approach for which God designed us.

While the Apostles strove to resurrect this Ancient Hebrew intellectual approach in their teachings, they had to contend with Judaizers slipping in and knowingly undermining that effort. The Talmud was the result of Hellenized reasoning applied to the Books of Moses. Without the Hellenizing assumptions about the primacy of human reason, the Talmud would fall apart. It was all about the control, the elitism of understanding the Talmud that seemed so incomprehensible to others. They could point to it as a manifestation of objective truth, as if that were God, and bash people over the head with it. Having made their rational understanding their god, the Jews could not afford to let this competing message exist, not even among those who departed from their Jewish identity. Having a large population using the same Scriptures with an entirely different message was a serious threat to everything they thought they had. Accepting the idea that Hellenism was wrong meant that their entire Talmudic structure was also wrong, and that Jesus could only have been the Son of God, and the Jews His murders. So long as they used the analytical process of Hellenism, they could deny the validity of the Christian message.

John in his last days saw clearly that the Judaizers were winning. He saw that the broad sweep of historical shift favored the rise of this Hellenized cultural orientation and whatever came with it. He might not have understood why God was allowing this, but John placed the question in a much broader prophetic grasp that Satan was going to have his heyday before God crushed his works one last time. However, John was using the Hebrew approach and pointing out tendencies and influences, not offering a precise predictive narrative. Since those days, there have been brief flashes of scholarship recovering that ancient intellectual approach. I won't pretend that I represent any

significant element in John's prophecy for his future, but I do hope to at least raise his lament one more time. I say let's reexamine the common assumptions of mainstream Christian religion by reclaiming the vast treasure of Hebrew intellectual heritage.

This whole business of religion is a human effort to answer some higher calling. Our Hellenized culture rests entirely on the assumption that our highest authority is objective truth, as if God were accountable to something independent of Himself.

One of the most common accusations evangelicals make about those who aren't quite like them is [spiritualizing the text](#). They assert that this is twisting the meaning of a passage from Scripture by taking anything less than a legalistic literal approach. It's the same unspoken assumption that we must have some objective standard to which we can appeal as our truth. It's the same Pharisaical instinct, the same elitist assertion of control, a means to bludgeon questions into silence. It's the same subtle elevation of analytical reason to the godhead. Can't have people working out their own salvation with fear and trembling before God! That would threaten the system. Against this false allegation, our best answer is to show how the New Testament writers "spiritualized the text" quite often. How frequently did they find meanings that were not obvious, meanings that seemed to deviate from the apparent purpose of the Old Testament writer? We contend it was the most common use of Old Testament quotes, so we are merely following the example of Scripture. We also contend that the legalistic literalism leads to misunderstanding the Old Testament text in the first place, which was often spiritualized.

The folks who wrote the Bible tended to use human language in a far more flexible manner, because things that really mattered could not be easily transmitted by words. They understood clinical discussion of things, but seldom engaged in it, because it was inappropriate for ultimate matters of revelation. So we must approach Scripture with a bias in favor of symbolic, "spiritualized" meaning, yet prepared to recognize when things are literal, or perhaps when the text is both. In other words, you can't make it a science because the Bible came via the Holy Spirit, and must be read and understood by the Holy Spirit. How easily men forget that the Holy Spirit does not yield to human reason. The assumption that He cannot work outside of the intellectual constraints of Western thinking is an insult to God and the record of His redemptive work in humans.

The modern evangelical embrace of Pharisaical intellectual traditions manifests in many ways. These are the same folks who claim miracles have ended, that the gifts of the Spirit are no longer, and that canon had to be closed with the last Apostle. Behind this claim are variations on the notion that the Apostles had some special dispensation from God that no one else could have, as if they were each some kind of subordinate messiah. Notice how that plants the seeds of elitism. It's as if the whole thing was sort of magical, and the magic is gone now so you might as well forget how those men went about things. What is gone is what John saw dying, the kind of earnest hard work of maintaining the Hebrew outlook on things. What we can say honestly is that, at the very least, we cannot even know about the miracles of God and true prophetic revelations until we return to that ancient Hebrew approach. Until we do, we cannot possibly know what God will do in our time, but we do know He certainly doesn't work on the merely cerebral level of men.

Assigning a merely intellectual purpose for a given passage of Scripture is contrary to the whole objective in putting God's revelation into words. One need not nail down a rational

meaning in order to perceive a responsibility. The brain is not the anchor point of obedience in the human soul; the heart is that anchor. We have to understand the image of the heart – what it does and how it works – not from our Western mythology but from the Hebrew perspective.

If there is an element of Scripture meant literally, it is the Hebrew concept of the heart as a sensory organ separate from the brain, and superior to the brain. If we begin by assuming the brain has to grasp it first, we deny the very purpose and meaning – nay, the very existence – of the human spirit and spiritual faculty. The Spirit of God speaks first in the heart, which the Hebrew people thought of as the seat of the will, not like our Western concept of mere sentiment and emotion. The heart must be set free from the dominance of the mind, which God meant to serve the heart. Spirit and commitment precede understanding, and can proceed quite faithfully in defiance of understanding. The mind was given by God to implement what the heart knew He required of us in moral terms.

The Bible is for application, not interpretation. Scripture is best read with a spiritualized approach, because of its inherent spiritual obligation, not from an intellectual approach. You read the Word because you expect to obey it, not simply so you can understand it. We are not accountable for understanding, only obeying. If we are going to analyze the Bible, we have to use the analytical tools of the people who wrote it. That monumental task is covered in other books (see, for example, *A Course in Biblical Mysticism* by this author). What follows here is a sample of passages examining how the New Testament spiritualizes previous Scripture.

Let's examine some places where New Testament authors quoted from the Old Testament and spiritualized the meaning, precisely as the evangelicals complain we should not do ourselves. We will march through in canonical order for the sake of simplicity.

[Matthew 1:23](#)

The first one is easily the biggest and hardest to summarize. We note in passing that Matthew's Gospel is one of the most Hebraic works in the New Testament. His style is very Old Testament, even while he answers contemporary Jewish objections, so if anyone sets the tone for what's culturally appropriate, it's Matthew.

He quotes Isaiah 7:14. When we read that in its context, we realize Isaiah was referring to the threat to Judah from the alliance of Ephraim and Syria. He was saying something like this: Assume a young virgin marries today and conceives a son. By the time that boy is old enough for his Bar Mitzvah, so is the length of time it will take for God to reveal His deliverance from the kings of Ephraim and Syria. There is some dispute about the time frame meant by this, but the point is Matthew clearly does not use this passage as intended by Isaiah.

That is, unless you take a moment to consider that Matthew didn't suffer the Western Christian paranoia about the Virgin Birth. This one thing is easily the second item of faith dismissed by Western skeptics, right after they dismiss the Resurrection. It is thus one of the most sensitive topics for Fundamentalists – it's one of the Five Fundamentals. There

is this unique claim that Jesus was the Son of God, and Virgin Birth is part of that package. Given Matthew and the other Gospels go on to pointedly state Joseph kept Mary chaste until after Jesus was born, that Mary conceived without human sex, we aren't in any trouble if we simply realize Matthew wasn't emphasizing that *here*.

Typical of Hebrew thinking, this passage is loaded with subtle references, and justly so; the Hebrew God is addressing a Hebrew man in the Hebrew language. If you ignore all of that subtle mysticism inherent in Hebrew writing and culture, it's easy to be panicky about using this passage as a literalist support for the claim of Virgin Birth. That approach is awfully hard to reconcile with Isaiah's obvious intent. So how about approaching from the Hebrew perspective with all the Christianized magic? Isaiah's promise of deliverance from the kings north of Judah foreshadowed something much bigger; it was a parable, both literal fact and symbol. Hebrew thinking is typically multilevel. Those threatening kings eventually died in battle against Assyria, but then Assyria played rough with Judah until God killed Assyria's emperor, too.

On the one hand, Matthew's narrative shows God commanding Joseph to take no offense from Mary's pregnancy; she wasn't fooling around. God did this, so divorcing her would be unjust. "Be a good man and adopt the son she will bear." God connects that to the prophecy of Isaiah about how long it would take to bring about deliverance. The focus for Isaiah was prodding Ahaz back to the Covenant Law, by pointing out how well God keeps His end of the Covenant. So while this business of the Virgin was both literal and symbolic, it had more to do with the Law. Jesus came to fulfill the Law, something Ahaz and all the nation of Israel failed to do, despite the generous and patient deliverance God provided. Born purely by God's hand, yet under the Law (born of a Jewish woman), Christ would enter the world without the taint of sin. He was unfallen. He would be able to obey His Father and Joseph should keep his eye on the future Bar Mitzvah of his adopted son. Once that symbolic ritual comes, look for this boy to manifest beyond all doubt His destiny.

You could say all of that is devotional in nature and is not found in the historical-literal approach, but I counter this is precisely how a Hebrew mind would read it. It's almost funny how, if we see Matthew pulling out a radically literalist reading of Isaiah, it violates the historical-literal approach. If we read it all fuzzy and mystically, it makes perfectly good sense. God has a sense of humor.

[Matthew 2:6](#)

The narrative here is a quote of a quote. The Temple scholars had long known the Messianic flavor of Micah's prophecy. There was precious little dispute regarding the character and meaning of Micah. They quote accurately to the King the passage and its implications. Everyone knew the Messiah would be of the ancient royal household of Israel. In this case, the prophecy is quite literal: The Messiah will be born in literal Bethlehem.

When Samuel in the Old Testament came to Bethlehem to anoint David as king, the residents were quite worried he brought bad news. They were hardly important among the communities of the nation. There was no sharp distinction between noble and peasant,

but we would regard Jesse's family as upper peasant. That was about to change, and Micah's words capture the original sense of this nowhere little village – *Bethlehem*, “House of Bread” – which stood in a region known as *Ephrathah*, “Productive.” But we notice that Matthew, whether quoting the scholars or as a scholar himself, paraphrases the passage. The essential meaning is unchanged, but impertinent details are filtered out. It wouldn't matter whether Herod's scholars did this; the point is that paraphrasing accurately is just fine, does not dishonor God, and is treated the same as a word-for-word rendition.

As a bonus, we note that Micah's entire prophesy is aimed at the same evil practiced by the entire ruling class of Judah, which is the same batch of sins common to upper and middle classes throughout history in every nation, and which Jesus characterized as worshipping Mammon. Micah stands up for the peasants in what can only be taken as a condemnation of the wealthy and materialistic folks who dominate in every society. In modern terminology, Micah was a social reformer. Notice that he does not want government to confiscate and redistribute wealth; that would simply create a new class of wealthy and powerful. What he demands is that people return to the Covenant, in part by realizing that if they do not, God will stomp them into the ground. Want your nation to survive as a nation? Stop seeking the concentration of wealth and power; put people first. Micah would have no place among Western politicians. Neither conservatives nor liberals would tolerate his moral views.

Matthew 2:15

In this tiny little snippet is a classical example of spiritualizing the text. Matthew quotes Hosea in a reference to the Exodus. It is the disappointed voice of God, noting the very reason that there was an Israel is because God took them from slavery and led them to Mount Sinai. There He gave them a covenant that set them apart from all other nations on the earth. Then He sent them in to conquer and claim a land that could have been theirs, but they refused to finish the work. Still, they could have kept what they had, but refused to keep the terms under which that promise stood. Instead, they kept trying to resurrect the dead religions of the previous inhabitants that they drove out of that land. He kept sending prophets to call them back and they kept falling away.

Matthew takes this passage to apply to Jesus, who spent a part of His childhood in exile. This is not at all inherent in the message of Hosea. How did Matthew get that application? He was thinking in Hebrew mystical logic. If you don't think on the same terms, if you cling to Aristotle, Matthew makes no sense.

Jesus took over for Israel. That nation was called out for a reason. Not simply to live by this Covenant, but by this Covenant to reveal God to all mankind. They refused to obey it, much less reveal God to others. Indeed, they pointedly kept that revelation to themselves. But the job had to be done, and since Israel the Nation refused to be Israel the Mission, it would fall to the one Man who ever truly understood the mission and message, who truly understood the full implications of the Covenant. So in a symbolic fashion, He went back over all the major events in the life of Israel. His life was a symbol of what should have been the life of Israel the Nation. In that symbolic sense, Jesus

became Israel, but Israel the Mission. Thus, all He called to Himself would become the New Israel.

Israel was a mere clan when the Lord called her down to the Nile Delta to escape famine, so He could prepare His People to conquer the deeply sinful nations polluting the Promised Land (promised to Abraham). His People embraced the pollution itself. Jesus went down to Egypt to escape the pollution of a nasty king, very early in His life. He returned in time for His Bar Mitzvah. He didn't embrace the polluted Talmud that obscured the Law, but became a true Son of the Law, because He was the one Jew who understood it. Better, He lived to fulfill its whole purpose. He closed that Covenant, by issuing a spiritual Covenant of Blood.

So Matthew could take a literal meaning and show its spiritual implications. We can be sure, if not those very implications, he was thinking in his mind something similar. What he was trying to tell us in that seemingly abusive quotation from Hosea was that Jesus went back and corrected all the failures of His nation.

Matthew 2:18

Matthew once again violates modern Protestant interpretation principles. First, let's understand the context of this quote from Jeremiah 31. In his previous chapter, the Weeping Prophet sees the Lord allowing Israel to be carried away into exile. Then he rejoices in the Return and Restoration. It's a bit of dramatic oratory in writing. In verse 15, we have the symbol of sorrow for the Exile, contrasted in verse 16 with God comforting by removing the object of sorrow.

The image used is Rachel, the beloved second wife of Jacob-Israel. She died in Ephrath, not far from Bethlehem. Eventually there are some very tough times for Israel when her first son, Joseph appeared to have been murdered. Joseph was actually in Egypt, preparing to save the nation-to-be (see the symbolism?). Rachel is depicted here as haunting Ramah, a village in the tribal area of her beloved second son, Benjamin. It was used as a staging area for the Babylonians as they prepared to take their captives back to Babylon. She is weeping for the loss of that tribe. So in the next verse, the Lord consoles her, because He is bringing her children back.

How could this be used as a prophecy of the Slaughter of the Innocents? Matthew tells how Herod sent soldiers to gather and kill all the male children under two years of age in the village of Bethlehem, not far from where Rachel died some 2000 years before. The real question here is: How are they related? If we simply go by the mechanistic isolation of the words, it's not a problem, of course. But that's just silly, particularly for Hebrew literature.

If Rachel would be seen weeping for the exiles of Benjamin, then she mourns a horrific loss. But that was in Ramah, north of Jerusalem. The district of Ephrath was quite a ways south of there, more than 10 miles. Now, the male children of Bethlehem were all dead, and that's a sad thing. Meanwhile, Jesus is exiled as an infant to a distant land. We see two kinds of loss. When Judah was exiled, many were killed first, in battles and in executions after victory. We could see some similarities there.

But I wonder if that's how Matthew saw it? Given the fuller context of his Gospel, I have to wonder if part of Rachel's sorrow wouldn't be the great pile of sin that caused the Exile. Surely, that was on Jeremiah's mind, given that's the whole point of his prophetic book. They came back, according to God's promises, but only after they had been deeply twisted by the experience. They were exposed to a couple of pagan cultures and developed some really bad habits. Among them were the False Messianic Expectations.

Do you suppose Matthew was thinking how all of that had helped to make the Jewish leaders incapable of recognizing Jesus as the Messiah? Had they really ever returned to God, or just back to the Land? I wonder if he considered how it was all the disgusting, godless political maneuvering of the Post-Exile Period that put Herod on the throne in the first place. How much more suffering and bloodshed would it take before the Jews returned to God the way God had intended? What would it take to bring the nation back to the truth?

Isn't it funny how the Magi who came to visit Jesus were from ancient Babylon, with a lot of ancient religious learning born way back in the even more ancient Babylon – the astrological religion of the Tower of Babel? Do you suppose Matthew had that in mind, when he decided to say that the slaughter was connected with Jeremiah's prophecy? Maybe not, but I'm pretty sure Matthew was referring to the hardened hearts of the Jewish leadership, and the unspeakable cost of sin that makes Rachel cry.

Matthew 3:3

In ancient times, when an emperor was to visit some part of his empire, it was not to pull a surprise inspection. It was to cement the personal loyalty of the local vassals and population. So the various inspectors were sent ahead of time, informing the local leadership what needed to be done to demonstrate loyalty and put the emperor in a good mood. A critical element was always the matter of roads, insuring they were fit for the imperial entourage, with all the animals and wagons, etc. For quick trips, a herald would leave the moment the trip was decided, and he would simply run along making a loud warning, carrying the imperial standard as he traveled. The message was typically hyperbole, in that the locals were expected to do however much they could before the slow moving imperial train passed sometime later.

The Judeans would recognize the imagery Isaiah used (40:1-5). Their God was coming to visit and they should put forth an effort to welcome Him. Surely, he would expect them to repent of the sins Isaiah saw around him. Pushing so hard to make this passage fit only the Return from Exile requires intentional blindness. This is how God operates regardless of historical context. It was a warning that God would come to visit in the form of Babylon's invasion force. It was a celebration that God would return His people to the Land. It was the warning against, or celebration with, God's people anytime and at all times. The historical results would depend on how the herald was received. If, like Isaiah, the herald is ignored, mistreated, etc., you can be sure the emperor won't be happy, and things won't go well for the residents.

When John the Baptist came, he fulfilled the spiritual principle, warning of God coming in the form of His Son. He was the herald, and while some in his audience would surely

associate this with some aspect of their Return and Restoration, they would surely miss the point John was making. As we see how Jesus was received by His nation, we know what happened. Instead of a Restoration experience, it was more like an invasion. God came and took away their Land one more time, the final end of the earthly historical kingdom.

Had they embraced their Messiah, it would have turned out differently. Instead, earthly Israel ceased to exist in God's eyes, and their place was given to another. That is, when the Messiah came to move the Kingdom of Israel into its intended spiritual existence as the Kingdom of Heaven, they refused to see that Heaven was on a different level of existence. They demanded Heaven be planted on this earth, which could not be. Having rejected God's provision, when Israel was moved into its heavenly, spiritual destiny, the people of Israel mostly were excluded. The earthly manifestation of that was the eventual destruction of their City and homeland, and they were justly driven out. Their covenant was dissolved, and the New Covenant was in force. They had refused to join the Empire of Heaven.

Matthew 4:6

For once, it seems Matthew offers us a more literal rendering of a prophecy. That's because he's quoting Satan, who is misusing a quote from Psalm 91:11-12.

This section of Psalms begins with 90, by Moses, and we can safely assume the next few following are also from the same source. Thus, we have a continuing thread of thought. In 91, it's all about the faithful man of God. In typical Hebrew style, it's a mixture of dramatic symbolism, often in the form of hyperbole, along with more literal statements. The reader is expected to go with the flow, lose himself in the moment, and know instinctively what to make of it. Read enough Hebrew literature and you'll figure it out, but you have to adapt your reading to the Hebrew frame of reference.

So the two verses work out to standard Covenant promises. They are part of a context that combines verses 10-13. The part about angels is fairly literal, but how do you describe their work, since you typically don't see them? Even if you do catch them literally in the act, with your very human eyes, it would be far more important to understand their actions always as symbolic manifestations of something more important.

Satan is a fallen angel himself and correctly assumes that the angels were tasked with keeping good care of Jesus the man, who lived perfectly, well above the demands of the Law. The context is Satan trying to get Jesus to perform actions that the Pharisees would interpret as clear signs of the Messiah, following the False Messianic Expectations. One of those expectations specifically suggested the Messiah would jump down from the pinnacle of the Temple plaza – the point where the terrace had been extended far out from the original ancient site, and the southeast corner stood some 70 feet (21m) above the ground below. The Messiah was supposed to announce Himself by jumping down and landing safely, in part because of a misreading of this passage in Psalm 91.

Jesus says He refuses to be that Messiah. The act itself was not according to Scripture, but constituted flinging a challenge in the face of God. Such a demand is typical of the

literalist rendering of the Pharisees, and of the modern Pharisees among Protestant theologians.

Finally, Matthew quotes Jesus responding to this and another temptation by correctly quoting Deuteronomy 6, verses 13 and 16. Those were rather obviously meant literally in the first place.

Matthew 4:15-16

The initial months of Jesus' ministry, as reported in the Gospels, ranged from Cana in the west, to the eastern shore of Galilee. In ancient times, when the land was divided between the Twelve Tribes, that would put His work in the lands granted to Zebulun and Naphtali. Few in that time forgot that, before Israel invaded Canaan Land, there had been a well established highway running across the Plain of Megiddo to the Valley of Jezreel, which itself then ran down to the Jordan. The route crossed the Jordan and followed the east shore of Galilee north to Hazor. This route was called the Way of the Sea.

It's no mystery what Matthew meant by quoting Isaiah 9:1-2. Assyria was going to attack in the near future for Isaiah, and we know the invaders started in the north, working their way south. The main body of troops worked through what was then Zebulun and Naphtali, in part to cut off that Way of the Sea so Samaria could not easily escape. Another force followed on down the East Bank of the Jordan after crushing Damascus.

Isaiah foresaw that the initial thrust would fall on those hilly lands east of the sea, God's wrath in part because they had been prone to idolatry first (see previous verses in Isaiah 8). Their hearts were darkened and the spiritual darkness would be matched by the deep sorrow and terror of the initial march of Assyria. So dark, indeed, it would be given very early over to the local Gentile population still living there, whom those two tribes failed to drive out. Isaiah also saw that the Messiah would begin there in relieving that darkness. Eventually Jews would resettle some parts of this territory, but it was still dominated by Gentiles. Matthew pointedly notes that Jesus began there with the call to repentance.

Here we don't have much dispute with common evangelical interpretation, because the first seven verses of Isaiah 9 were considered Messianic well before Jesus was born. What matters is that we understand Isaiah's reference had nothing to do with the Restoration from Babylon. This is about the Northern Kingdom, which God pointedly promised was gone forever. In one sense, breaking from the House of David was justified. But breaking from Jehovah cannot be justified in any sense. They were no longer God's People, so they lost all Covenant protection, because they had forfeited their Covenant identity. Judah was quickly going the same route. While the House of David would survive, it would eventually be forgotten. That is, until the Lord Himself brought back the final Davidic King to rule, and in so doing, He would finish the work for which Israel as a nation had been called out of Egypt: This latter day King would take God's revelation to all nations.

What few want to recognize is that Isaiah himself intended his prophecy to be spiritualized. Had his readers in the Southern Kingdom seen this, they would be all smug

about the condemnation of Samaria, and this talk of David's throne reigning there once again. They didn't know it was not coming until long after their own Exile.

Matthew 8:17

A quote from Isaiah 53:4 pulls us into a look at the Suffering Servant. Isaiah's text is utterly symbolic and spiritualized. Evangelicals rightly poke at Charismatics about literalizing "by His stripes we are healed." Yet evangelicals still push a great many literalizations of Isaiah and other prophets elsewhere. The point here is the paradox of power meaning the power to suffer. Jesus was committed to the Cross before He was born, even as He sat beside His Father on the Throne. We just barely comprehend a small slice of that.

What we choke on is confusing how that comes out to physical healing for hundreds around the Sea of Galilee. Sure, it was the authority of the Son of God, but we fail to grasp that healing is not a matter of pure spirituality. In this context, it is a matter of Jesus restoring the Law to Israel. Those tragic cases of disability, sickness and demon possession were a matter of the Law perverted by Jewish leadership. Had Judah been faithful, as Isaiah had warned, those people would not have been in such bad shape.

The promise to protect from such things is bluntly stated in the Law of Moses. Restoring those blessings was a matter of purifying the people by the Law, a matter of applying God's justice to the situation. Thus, it was in support of Jesus' proper teaching of the Law that these signs were granted. This was a reclamation of souls and bodies lost by the perverted neglect of Jewish leaders up to that time. The miracles were the sign of fulfillment of all God had ever promised regarding the Messiah. The miracles were not simply on the basis of human need, but on the basis of the Covenant, a sign of God's authorization for the teaching. Miracles are an earthly manifestation of a divine moral principle at work.

A major element in Matthew's Gospel is understanding how Jesus came to radically reform the proper understanding of the Law of Moses. In so doing, Jesus restored all things to their proper place, and then sealed it all up. Once it was fulfilled, He moved the divine connotations of "Israel" into another realm. To be a citizen of Israel, to fulfill the Law of Moses, was to be a part of Him; it was to embrace His teaching. One cannot find any particle of Covenant blessing outside Jesus Christ.

Matthew 10:34-39

Jesus Himself shows the folly of complaining about spiritualizing the text. We understand easily the gist of this paragraph from Matthew's record of Jesus' teaching. Jesus set about restoring the symbolic meaning of the Law, which was frequently contradictory to the Pharisees' literal rendering. Jesus often discussed with the Twelve His claim to be Messiah, that restoring the Law and the Kingdom was a spiritual event, not one of earthly politics. He granted them authority under the restored Law to do what He had been doing with disease, disability and demons, but also commissioned them to preach this gospel message. That was the whole point in having authority over such things.

In the context of that commission, Jesus noted that the message would polarize. That was His intent. He was confronting the nation with a clarification of truth first. Truth makes its own path through the soul, so it was not a matter of changing the enforcement policies. It was the way of the Spirit to do His own enforcing. Whether by raising up dead spirits, or simply afflicting the conscience about the Law, it didn't matter. The call was to repent on the level one could understand, knowing that the Spirit would produce the results by His own whim. Whether by a change of spirit or simply a change of mind, it required rejecting what had been going on for the past several centuries.

In quoting Micah 7:6, it would seem Jesus was standing the prophet on his head. Micah wrote to condemn the sins of his nation. Things were bad and that passage was describing, among other things, a breakdown in social stability. Life wasn't supposed to be that way. Here, Jesus is saying He's going to *make* it that way! How could that make sense?

It does, if you engage Hebrew mystical logic, which is symbolic and generally paradoxical. Since the leadership of Judah had chosen the sins Micah condemned, God gave them over to those sins. You have to grasp that as the underlying assumption. So when Jesus introduces corrections, drawing people back where the Law intended they should be, a great many will not come. They'll be left behind to live in their perverted world. The divisions will break down households. God didn't really want that, but He granted Jews the choice. So, having chosen the destruction of their social stability, where households are divided by sin, surely the division will be even starker when any of them get right. Unspoken is the assumption Jesus would rather see whole households embrace Him, but knows it won't be that way in many cases. So He embraces their choice, in that sense, and rejoices at those who come to Him, at whatever price.

When God comes to visit, what He brings is wrath on sin. If you are looking forward to escaping your sins, it's quite a relief to see His thunderclouds form. If you cling to your sins, you won't see them until it's too late, and you will suffer greatly. But you get to choose.

Matthew 11:10

Jesus is discussing His cousin, John the Baptist. He quotes Malachi 3:1. There's not much controversy here what that passage means. Malachi has been hammering the Jewish leadership for straying from the intent of the Law of Moses. They talked endlessly about the Messiah coming to set things aright, and restoring their importance in the world as in the days of King David, but had no intention of setting their own lives in order. So Malachi begins chapter 3 quoting God, with a warning that there would be a messenger who would prepare the way. Jesus said that was the reference to John the Baptist.

That being the case, Jesus obviously refers to Himself as the Messiah for whom the Messenger came to prepare the path. John called for repentance. Jesus preached the same message: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." In the minds of most people, that meant the long sought restoration of the House of David. Jesus fulfilled that little part about being of the House of David, but He meant nothing of the earthly political changes the Jews were seeking since before Malachi. Thus, Malachi mentions the ultimate and

final Messenger of the Covenant, the Messiah, whom they were so longing to see. Jesus was saying He was that Messiah.

Then Malachi goes on to warn the Jews that they were not ready for Him, so it was rather odd they should claim to desire it. But He would purify the nation, as it were, and how painful it would be! Jesus did make things painful, in that He pointed out how utterly mistaken the Jewish leaders were about the Law and shredding their credibility. His teaching was a correction of their false, Hellenized and literalist interpretation, and the heretical Talmudic extensions. As they missed the point in Malachi's day, so they were hardly any better in Jesus' day. Malachi notes that if they were to embrace the teaching of this Messenger of the Covenant, they would be able to offer sacrifices God would accept. Was it God who moved? No, it was the Jews.

But somehow, most evangelicals want to jump from John the Baptist to Jesus in His Second Coming. That does violence to Malachi's message. There is nothing in Malachi's words to justify that, nor in the words of Jesus as He explained that the passage in Malachi was all about the Jewish nation of His day. When Jesus taught the Law, it was the Law as God had given it. That's not part of some eventual Second Coming without a First Coming; it was about His ministry during those three years on earth back around 30 AD. Does anybody want the blessings of the Covenant? Only in Jesus Christ can you have them, in particular His teaching of the Law – love God and respect your neighbor. Do that and you'll have, as Malachi promised in his eleventh verse, God rebuking whatever on earth devours the provisions and blessings He promised so very long ago. Indeed, Jesus would have called to mind the whole passage from Malachi 3 and 4. It prophesied what He did that very day.

Matthew 12:18-21

Jesus had healed on the Sabbath – while inside a synagogue, no less. The Pharisees had long before declared such a thing as breaking the Sabbath, because it was “labor.” That such an attitude was contrary to God's intent was so obvious, we have to wonder how they managed to say it with a straight face. Such a twisted notion is sheer madness. So, Jesus having pointed this out with impeccable Hebrew logic, but violating all Hellenized rules of analysis then ascendant among rabbis, the leaders of the synagogue began discussing how they might kill this troublesome fellow. Jesus, of course, was aware of this plotting, and simply took His ministry out of town.

Naturally, the people in need of healing and proper teaching of the Law followed Him. With such a large crowd, it became necessary to seek large open areas where teaching and healing could be managed. That sort of manpower gathered in one place could easily have started a revolution, and His disciples surely expected it. They still could not make the transition away from the Hellenized Messianic Expectations, calling for the Messiah to change the political system. The crowd was the same; they would have willingly followed Him back to the synagogue and tossed out the leadership, even to the point of executing them all. Then they could gather an even larger crowd of peasants and partisans and challenge the obviously corrupt Sanhedrin itself. It would be so very easy, even the Romans could not stop this powerful miracle worker.

Instead, Jesus told them not to even talk about it. It was not because He feared persecution, nor was He plotting anything in particular with savvy political thinking. The whole point was denying the importance of politics at all. It had nothing to do with His mission. Matthew quotes Isaiah 42:1-4 to explain. As usual, Isaiah was speaking symbolically. First, the prophet identifies this person concerned as the Chosen-Anointed (“Messiah”) who bears the very essence, the Spirit of God Himself. Isaiah paints an image of this quiet and unassuming Servant. It’s not as if Jesus never cried out or yelled, but it symbolized the lack of interest in what men typically sought. Instead, this one will carry God’s justice to the Gentiles, as Israel was supposed to do, and He won’t do it by seizing the government of Israel and reforming things.

A reed had certain uses, being very light and stiff. If you bend it in the middle, it’s not so useful. But Jesus wasn’t going to break off the bent reed of Israeli government. Flax was sometimes used as a wick in oil lamps, but if the oil ran dry, the flame would go out, leaving a smoking wick. The light of Israel had gone out, because they had ceased to draw on the spiritual flow of God’s revelation. Jesus would not bother to quench the stinking wick of failure, but would replace it by the light of God’s glorious incarnation – rather like sunlight over lamplight. So He wouldn’t bother to fix what was wrong with the political system of Israel, but would operate on a wholly different level. Bypassing the badly corrupted civil order, He would simply and absolutely establish God’s justice on a totally different plane, one that made no reference at all to human government. It would cover all the earth, because it would be rooted in a place earthly things cannot touch, but which surely touched earth.

Now, this is obviously not a place where literal rendering would make any sense, as even a Fundamentalist would admit. But too many of them would restrict analysis to simple allegory or metaphor. In so doing, they create a simplified, mechanistic – need I say, Hellenized – one-for-one equivalence that destroys the deeper richness of Hebrew symbolic associations. In so doing, they would miss the point entirely.

[Matthew 13:14-15, 35](#)

The context starts in verse 10, where the disciples ask Jesus why He consistently used parables. As background, we know the Hebrews understood God was ineffable, as was His truth. It was not out of reach, but only God could open it up, since all revelation is His wholly on His initiative, His free choice alone. You can know intellectually something about what God demands of fallen humanity, but you cannot really *know* God on that level. That’s just the starting point. It must of necessity be a mystical experience, a “knowing” from a different faculty somewhere beyond the boundaries of intellect. This is what lies under Jesus’ answer.

He tells His followers they have been granted by God the appropriate mystical insight, though we note they seldom engaged it until after the Resurrection. While the Greek text of Matthew uses the word we translate “mystery” (*musterion*), we might have a tough time reconstructing what that word might be in the common Hebrew tongue of that day. Assuming Matthew chose the best translation possible, we find ourselves facing a word that carries the image of shutting the mouth. It might mean something secretive, but it could also mean something for which there are no words – ineffable.

Either way, the term indicates something is not easily accessed. Given what we know of God and His declarations, we know this means that the initiative to reveal rests entirely with Him. Further, it always rests with His wise decision when, where and to whom revealing Himself is appropriate for purposes we can hardly grasp. Jesus goes on with parabolic speech, indicating His Father wanted to polarize things, to clearly divide between those who are enlightened, and those who are not.

There is a vast gulf between what the senses perceive and what the heart can decide it must do to serve God. The fundamental philosophical question is not what we are, nor what we do, but to what or whom we are committed. In the Hebrew mind, the heart is the seat of the will, that part of us which commits (because it's the only part that interacts directly with the moral realm). So it is the quote from Isaiah 6, the Call of Isaiah, warns him his mission will appear futile, because appearances were all the nation cared about. Their hearts excluded the inputs of the spiritual-mystical sources from which God spoke, the place where God touches people directly and personally. They had cut off the very voice of God, and the Law did them not a bit of good, because it was a mere manifestation of things far higher. This was tantamount to denying God, by denying the existence of things outside the grasp of mere intellect. This shift had begun subtly, well before the introduction of Hellenism.

Were they still spiritually attuned, the Jews of Jesus' day would have immediately recognized Him as Messiah. All the prophets had hoped for this final manifestation of God in the flesh, but the Jews were looking for a mere change in human government. While Jesus demonstrates in teaching His disciples that it is possible to help the spiritually aware with human language, it is not possible for words alone to create that awareness. Parables are a way of distinguishing between these two worlds. The mystical mind makes sense of parabolic language, because it is looking for something beyond the specifics of the narrative. Those who can't see beyond the narrative words will be driven away, unable even to fake it.

Matthew then records Jesus' explanation of the one parable, and adds three more parables that address the same basic subject of parable telling. There will always be fakers in any crowd of believers, and it takes an eternal viewpoint to distinguish. Eventually, the fakers will show themselves. But God can use the most insignificant things to move men across that barrier. Once so moved, perception expands beyond measure and changes everything.

Then Matthew explains things further with another quote, this from Psalm 78:2, written by Asaph. The point there was to note that the Law was a shadow, a "dumbed down" version of higher truths. If you can't grasp the mystical nature of things, at least God wants you to know what it looks like. The Law was a specific application to the circumstances of those people, in that land, in that time. But if you can't even embrace that, how can you hope to please God? There is a bit of sarcasm there, where Asaph is mocking the complaints of those in every generation who whine it's all too complicated and fuzzy. They demand spoon-feeding so they don't have to commit themselves fully; passivity is far less work. God does not operate on those terms. The mysteries of God are secrets only to the morally blind. The Law of Moses made perfect sense to those with a spiritual logic, a mystical mindset. Thus, repentance under the Law was the proper path to real faith for Jews, but they didn't really want to know the Law.

In the narrative, Matthew shows us Jesus continued working with them on the mystical logic of parables.

Matthew 15:8-9

What defiles a person before God? This is the fundamental question. The Law was symbolic, a set of prescriptions that served to indicate higher spiritual principles. The Torah used the term “defile” to point out how certain actions would make you ceremonially unclean, but the point was that such actions indicated something in your heart was unclean. However, the Pharisees would reject that mystical angle and demand literal application of the terminology, as if ultimate truth could be contained in mere propositions. Worse, they were so sure the literal rendering was the only one that they felt compelled to build a mass of hedges to prevent accidental transgression. So the Torah was highly extended, according to simple human logic, by a vast body of traditions now called the Talmud. In Jesus’ day, it was referred to as “the traditions of the elders” – often applied with more zeal than even literal interpretations of the Law.

A rabbinical delegation from Jerusalem (rather like today’s accreditation committees) came to check on Jesus up in the Galilee region. They observed His disciples did not keep the Talmudic tradition of ceremonial hand washing. The implication is that Jesus was lax as a rabbi, not training His disciples properly. This stuff was not in the Law, though. Jesus had grown weary of this silliness, so He lashed out at them for using the Talmud to twist the Law, often for purposes of simple greed. So they said something about flagrant a violation of the Talmud, and He struck back with their use of the Talmud to violate Moses. They claim the failure to wash in the prescribed fashion defiles a man when he eats. Jesus says their greedy excuse for not obeying the Law is more defiling. The reference is to a practice of assigning one’s property to the Temple treasury as a living trust fund. They still get to use their property for their own comfort while they live, but have an excuse not to help aging parents in a day and time when retirement funds didn’t exist. This is because the ancient ways required the extended household to provide for the common welfare as a single entity. The Pharisees were defrauding their parents of due support and destroying the requirements of the Torah.

Jesus quotes Isaiah 29:13, in which Isaiah notes that such evil had already begun in his day. He prophesied that the Torah had become for them a sealed book, in that they had embraced the joys of human wisdom, which led to a rejection of dependence on the Spirit of God to explain things. So we end up with a nation that barely understands the ritual and refuses to acknowledge its higher meaning, or that there even is a higher meaning possible. It’s a subtle blasphemy in which God becomes a slot machine.

Jesus goes on to talk about defilement with the crowd and says something that cannot possibly be true in the literal sense. Jesus was the fulfillment of the Law, and the Covenant of Moses stood until the Cross. He doesn’t actually repudiate kosher as a measure of the ritual law; He said law hardly matters if your heart is in the wrong place. So while you may be ceremonially unclean if you eat bacon, it won’t make any difference if you are the pig who won’t share what God has said you cannot own. That applies, of course, to all material property. If there is any passage where Jesus bluntly attacks the literal meaning, it is here.

Matthew 21:5

This story gets picked up as proof that the Gospels are inconsistent, so let's cover all the bases first. Jesus had pre-arranged with someone to offer a fresh, unriden onager colt for His ritual entry into Jerusalem. This scoops up the symbolism of something holy, dedicated to God, not (yet) used for any other purpose. Because it's young and unriden, it needs its mama. So they bring both of them. Jesus probably rode the mother onager until they got near the gate, and then switches to the colt. The mother is led in front of the colt to keep it on course.

We can be sure the crowd picked up on the symbolism immediately. They have been looking for the Messiah since at least as early as Zechariah wrote about Him some 400 years before. Why was it written? Zechariah was part of the tag-team with Haggai as prophets prodding the Returnees from Babylon to finish the Second Temple. Haggai was pointed and rather literal, whereas Zechariah was all mystical with visions of a coming Messiah who would return to that Temple, so they better get it in gear and finish it. Naturally, the already corrupted minds of the leaders took him literally, expecting some ruler to come along and fix their politics. Over the following centuries, the leadership of the Jewish people drifted farther and farther into literalism, until they bought into Hellenism (starting around 300 BC) and lost all contact with their ancient ways.

So when Jesus comes riding into town, the city recognizes the symbolism, but still expects a literal king. Zechariah had predicted the Messiah would enter the city on a colt, and Jesus took pains to act accordingly. He did it on purpose, knowing what it meant. Then He cleansed the Temple, another prophetic act – clearing the Court of Gentiles of the Bazaars of the Sons of Annas, a hideously corrupt business that overcharged for everything. They charged a premium price for offerings that were already marked acceptable and would pass the ritual examinations, but had nothing to do with whether it was something God actually accepted Himself. The point was Jesus warned everyone that the Gentiles were about to be included in God's redemption. Isn't it funny how the officials refused to acknowledge that part of it?

Jesus came not as some conqueror, riding on a charger, but a man of peace on the Common Man's ride, the symbol of loyalty and mild temperament. How could this not be anything but spiritualizing the meaning of Zechariah? And how could anyone take much of Zechariah literally in the first place? Yet Zechariah's style was as much the norm as Haggai's bluntly literal stuff.

Matthew 21:42

Jesus began His Parable of the Vinedressers, taken from Isaiah's parable on the Vineyard. The symbolism is that the Nation of Israel was the vineyard and the vinedressers are the leaders. But this is not an allegory, a literary device quite rare in Hebrew literature. A parable is much more flexible in meaning, with broad symbolism, because Jesus is not simply suggesting there will be a political revolution in the nation. It's not about the vineyard, but the fruit. The Nation of Israel produced none of the spiritual fruit expected. Thus, the mission of revelation would be taken from Israel, and given to a spiritual

nation. Everything Israel bragged about was part of the same package as the mission, and was theirs to make the mission possible.

In the midst of this, Jesus quotes another parable directly from Psalm 118:22-23. Scholars seem rather certain this refers to the Nation of Israel as the rejected people whom God used as the foundation of His revelation. This seems to be the reading Jewish scholars gave it, and we can safely assume Jesus thought of it in that light. But He turns it on its head in that He changes the context. It's obvious He refers to His teaching as the new cornerstone, a fresh foundation being laid, after the teaching was rejected by those leaders. Aside from the obvious rhetoric of anti-establishment, it symbolizes the wresting of things from their hands. Jesus meant that God had rejected them, specifically the leaders, but also what they had built. They bore no spiritual fruit, so God was angry and they would suffer the sentence they themselves enunciated.

In other words, Jesus spiritualizes on a spiritualized text.

Matthew 22:44

Matthew sets the context. There is a debate over whether Jesus has the authority to dissent from the establishment. Both the Jewish leadership and Jesus claim God's divine authority. Jesus offers a long parable about an emperor calling his vassals to the marriage supper, which doubles as a vestment ceremony for the imperial heir. Anyone could see Jesus is warning the Jewish leaders about rejecting God's call to embrace Him as Messiah. They counter that it is incomprehensible, since they have been walking in the laws of God handed down since Moses and the founding of the nation, never mentioning how far they have drifted from that origin. They seek to prove Him a sinner from within the context of their own system. Yet, even on their own turf, Jesus is able to defeat their arguments.

It's a tag-team match. Each party within the Establishment tries to find a flaw in His teaching. Jesus answers very publicly in ways that discredit them. Then, He quotes a very fine textbook answer establishing the principles underlying all of God's commands: God demands complete and utter loyalty to Him as suzerain, and proper respect for your fellow humans as the pinnacle of God's creation.

Despite snarky comments about His paternity, Jesus was regarded legally as a descendant of David. It had been well established in rabbinical teaching that the Messiah would come from the royal family. Jesus quotes Psalm 110, which had long been recognized as a prophecy of the Messiah. It paints the Messiah in terms of divinity, as a conqueror. If the Messiah was merely a man born of the royal household, how could He then be God's heir? How could David address his own descendant as God? Can a mere man be somehow God in flesh? This drags the leadership back to that nagging question of Jesus claiming to be divine. If the Pharisees are going to pedantically press the literal rendering of things, how can they deny on principle Jesus' claim? This forces them to debate the issue on other grounds, on grounds of whether His message is a more accurate rendering of the Scripture. They have nowhere to run.

Mark

Mark's Gospel adds nothing new to the discussion not already covered under Matthew. Luke adds new material, which first catches our eye in the Wilderness Temptation.

Luke 4:1-14

The debate here is quintessential spiritual versus literal. Without delving into all the implications of this passage, it's enough for now to note that Satan knows the Scripture, but also knows how it should be read. He's just playing games, trying to get Jesus to embrace the Messiah already expected by the Jewish leadership. That would require embracing literalism, the Talmud, politics, etc. Jesus came to wipe those things away.

When Satan suggested that those flat round desert stones looked like the common flat disks of bread in that part of the world, Jesus reminded him that it was better to starve to death than disobey the Father. He quotes from Deuteronomy 8:3. That context is where God reminds Israel that He forced them to become dependent on Him – “humbled them” – because His revelation was more important than the imperatives of human appetites. Notice how the quote says “every word,” but we already know man cannot adhere to the Law that way. That was the whole point; you can't take that literally.

And if Jesus had needed political power, it was hardly necessary to get it from Satan. After the Resurrection, it was His for sure, but to gain it in the flesh at that point would mean letting the Devil run the show, in the sense of giving him what he wanted. What the Father wanted was that all mankind should worship Him alone, regardless of the costs in this world. Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:13, but paraphrases it somewhat, since word-for-word was never that important in Hebrew thinking.

Finally, the Devil tries to convince Jesus to put on a spectacle, and uses a literalist rendering from Psalm 91:11-12. Anyone who reads that Psalm should realize it was never meant literally, but was one of the better samples of Hebrew poetry, full of symbolism. Yet, by this time in history when Jesus begins His ministry, the Jews were trying to find ways to take things literally and out of context. This was in the same mold. Jesus counter-quotes from Deuteronomy 6 again. Perhaps a better English rendering would be, “You shall not fling a challenge in the face of God.” In order for the prophecies to be fulfilled, it would require that the Father rescue His Son if He jumped off this 70-foot (21m) terrace drop.

It is Satan who plays games with the literal wording of Scripture, but Jesus – the Living Word – knew what it meant.

John 6:31

John's whole point is how the Kingdom of Jesus was a spiritual one. Thus, he shows how Jesus keeps pointing back to the otherworldly perspective. Having dealt with the crowd the previous day by feeding 5000 men plus, then walking on the stormy seas, the crowd chased Him down again. They were needy, for sure, but utterly worldly in their hopes. So when they mentioned a quote about bread from Heaven – manna – they showed just how

degraded the understanding of Scripture had become. They honestly believed the Messiah would solve all their worldly needs.

Jesus turned it upside down. He told them the True Bread of Heaven was the revelation of God, in the form of a person. Still thinking on the lower level, they thought that sounded great, but Jesus shocked them with His symbolic reference to being the Bread of Life. They were completely unable to process that. When a few finally caught on, they said He was surely not from Heaven, because they knew His family. Jesus didn't address that directly, but simply went on explaining it was not really up to Him to sell His gospel message and make it easy and palatable. The only people who could swallow the notion of His divine origin were people whom God the Father had touched. Furthermore, no one was going to see Heaven if they didn't get the symbols. The primary mark of a spirit raised from the dead is the ability to process parabolic language. Thus, Jesus ends by mentioning the symbols of His life and death – bread and blood – as necessities for that spiritual existence.

Quite pointedly He notes that manna was not really from Heaven in that sense, thought it was a gift of God. However, it fed only one kind of need. The people who were only concerned about that sort of food were all dead. People who were seeking the revelation and redemption of God would not care a whit about dying in this world, because they were seeking eternal life.

Acts 1:20

Luke quotes Peter, who is advising the first congregation of about 120 believers. He wants them to pray for guidance in replacing Judas, who had committed suicide. Peter quotes two passages from the Psalms.

First, he pulls a section from Psalm 69, where David laments how some major figures in his own nation harasses him for his devotion to God. What Peter quotes is not specific to Judas, but a general imprecation against anyone who works against those who serve the Lord. Peter pulls in a slice from a series of curses, which ends up with the troublemaker forgotten. The symbolism of a vacant tent means no one remembers who was there.

Then Peter quotes Psalm 109, in which David is complaining of some personal attacks. The imprecation is very individual, delivered in the singular. The passage is an even stronger request for this person to be forgotten, in some detail. Again, this was not a prophecy reserved for Judas alone, but a general moral principle. Judas became infamous, and Peter was determined to make sure no one missed him.

Acts 2:17-21

We find ourselves in the big middle of several problems with Peter's quote from Joel 2:28-32. Joel offers a rapturous vision of what life could be. It is the standard Hebrew hyperbole; no one in his right mind would take this literally. But the symbol provided by Joel's vision only touches on a few things, and in that sense is actually smaller than the reality it represents. It's not a full listing of things God could and would do, but a symbolic list that represents just a taste. Further, it's not a taste of life after the Second

Coming, but of life under the Law. We have to shed the Western bias. New Testament chatter about the severe and painful restrictions of the Law was actually a commentary on the ugly life under the Talmud. Joel paints life under the Law as joy and sweetness. It's not a restriction on human fun, but it's as good as life can be after the Fall. It really was a sweet vision because there were times when Israel did experience it, but had forgotten.

So this business of everyone a prophet is more about everyone encouraging everyone else to obey the Law. Why do we need prophets? At the core, a prophet is defined as someone with a peculiar sensitivity to God's moral character in His Creation, with a duty to talk about it. It's the blessing of moral intelligence, seeing reality as God sees it. The Law reflects that reality as God made it. If everyone were a prophet, everyone would have their own unique sense of how God works in this world, and could share their individual revelations so that the community at large would develop a lore of organic moral perception. The moral considerations of life would be everyone's primary curiosity. When you seek moral purity, Creation itself works with you to provide a rich and vivid life of joy as promised under the Law. It's not an austere duty, but a pleasure that outshines all others promoted in this life.

This kind of existence was rare enough during the Old Testament period, but with the rising perversion of the Hellenized Talmudic traditions, it was outright alien to the Jews of Jesus' day. So when the first church in Jerusalem begins to operate in the same power of living as promised in Joel, it comes off very strange to the folks who had long forgotten what life was supposed to be. This caused a ruckus; it looks bad because the typical cynical jaded Jerusalemite doesn't have a clue what "good" is.

Peter flexes his new moral leadership muscles and defends this demonstration. He quotes from Joel, trying to show that this is exactly what God said He could and would do. Some scholars make a big deal out of Peter adjusting his translation from ancient Hebrew into the ambient dialect of Aramaic used by Jews at that time, but it is not spiritualizing. Joel was the one spiritualizing in rapturous mystical visions, so there isn't a precise literal meaning. Keep in mind that Jesus hung around roughly forty days after His resurrection, so His Ascension was only a week or so before this event. (Even "forty days" was just a Hebrew figure of speech.) The church here is just getting started with a fresh understanding of all the ancient mystical treasures hidden behind the Talmudic teachings of the rabbinical schools. Peter's use of Joel's message is exactly what Joel had in mind.

[Acts 2:25-28](#)

Peter continues his Pentecostal defense of the ecstatic behavior of the Christians in Jerusalem, this time quoting David from Psalm 16:8-11. Once again, it is the Old Testament writer who spiritualizes. Not only does it leave the door wide open for Peter to do the same, but it rather requires he take liberties to apply it more widely than the mere literal meaning.

The core of David's poetry here is the unspeakable joy of moral purity, the sheer ecstasy of close communion with God and His entire Creation. This is the real deal that mere emotion counterfeits. True serenity in heart will produce emotion, but the emotional thrill is merely a symptom. David's choice of words is more of that old Hebrew hyperbole. He

doesn't fear that his adventures will get him killed, or that he will experience a sad existence akin to living death. For such a man, death is a friend who liberates, not some awful master eventually collecting the final payment. David has the joy of living during the calling of His God, and the even greater joy of seeing His face after he retires from that calling and this life. Peter spiritualizes this into a prophecy of the Messiah.

Our Western bias blinds us to the rich meaning in Hebrew culture of the term "sheol." We have good reason to believe that the Hebrew people used it as a literary term, in which only the most poorly educated would actually take the implied image literally. Suffice to say, the better educated Hebrews of the Old Testament knew that death was passage into the afterlife, and that one could go to be with God or could end up in eternal punishment. When Jesus refers to "Gehenna" as a derivative of "Hinnom Valley" where Jerusalem dumped their trash and then burned it, the idea of afterlife was not a rabbinical novelty. What was new was how specific the more recent rabbinical talk had become. Jesus had no quarrel with some of that. Our biggest problem is that the earlier Hebrew scholarship simply avoided pretending they knew enough about the afterlife to say much about it. Thus, any terminology is loose and flexible. Jesus frequently mocked the Hellenized rabbis by using their own assertions against them, quoting standard declarations to show their moral stupidity. This in itself was a standard Hebrew form of oratory, loaded with sarcasm and symbolism.

So it's not a question of Jesus going to "Hell" as we Westerners think of it, but that He was dead for a time, whereas Peter notes that David was very much still dead at that moment. Chasing the rabbits of literalism here will get you lost. The whole discourse is supposed to be a spiritualizing of poetic imagery. Peter carefully chose Old Testament passages familiar to his audience, which audience happened to include some of those Pharisaical rabbis scolding them for their un-Talmudic behavior. Answering them in terms they would understand, Peter comes very close to using some legalistic literalism to shoot down their legalism, as Jesus had demonstrated so often. However, the net effect is spiritualizing the text of the Old Testament, as evangelicals would view it.

[Acts 8:32-33](#)

In the prophetic literature of the Old Testament, Israel was characterized in many different ways. Sometimes the imagery referred to the land she occupied, or some of the fruit-bearing trees there, perhaps as a vineyard, various kinds of beasts based on alleged temperaments, and often as a daughter or wife of the Lord. The prophets also repeatedly used the image of Israel as God's own son, as noted previously in this book (Matthew 2:15).

Starting around chapter 49 of his prophecy, Isaiah paints a stirring image of Israel as the servant of God. We refer to these passages as the Suffering Servant image. The prophet confuses things intentionally. At times he is himself the Suffering Servant striving to bring Israel back, but it was Israel that was meant to be this loyal servant. That these passages became viewed as Messianic in character was due largely to Israel refusing to be that servant. The nature of parable is that the symbol is bigger than any specific application, because the image bears a strong moral importance. In this case, perhaps it would make the most sense to see the Suffering Servant as the divine mission. Thus, it

could be Israel the Nation if the nation was willing to become Israel the Mission. She was unwilling, so the fulfillment of God's will awaited someone who was so willing. There had to be a Messiah person because Israel refused to be the Messiah Nation. (Luke raises the issue more specifically in the later half of his chapter 13.)

The first church in Jerusalem had elders, mostly those who were already heads of extended families. One of the elders chosen to give family structure to the Diaspora Jews who had joined the church in Jerusalem was Philip. The Lord called him off to this special mission of meeting up with a high official from another country who had converted to Judaism. The man was riding in a carriage or large chariot and Philip hiked down some back roads to intersect this fellow as his vehicle went the long way around on nicer roads down from Jerusalem toward his home country on the northern coast of Africa. The man was reading from Isaiah in that Suffering Servant section, and Luke quotes a few verses to give us the context. As usual, this is a case of reverse spiritualization. Isaiah the prophet intended nothing literal from this quotation, but was pressing a moral vision of obedience to God, a willingness to suffer human oppression and just plain bad luck, in order to cling to God's revealed moral character.

That the passage was so close to literal in describing what happened to Jesus was the whole point of this part of Luke's account. Jesus fulfilled the mission of Israel, which mission Israel rejected. Thus, Jesus took the crown as God's Suffering Servant. For Philip to teach this official the meaning of this passage meant explaining how it was fulfilled in Jesus the man.

Acts 15:16-17

We need to remind ourselves what Luke's narrative was all about. His Gospel was to explain Paul's behavior to the Roman lawyers when Paul went before Caesar on charges of breaking the portions of Jewish law supported by Rome. Luke's account got the interest of some powerful person who commissioned him to continue the story. Luke's Gospel justifies Paul's decision to take the message to the Gentiles in the first place; Acts proves Paul was right in doing so. In the process, Luke hammers home how this was nothing more than fulfilling the Law of Moses, in that Israel was supposed to take the revelation to the Gentiles, but perverted the revelation into some secret magical lore to enslave the Gentiles.

When the Apostles and early church leaders come together for their conference in Jerusalem (the alleged "First Church Council") to discuss all of this, Luke includes enough of the story to help carry his point. James, the brother of Jesus and de facto head of the churches in Jerusalem, would normally be expected to represent the more conservative line. But while he lacked Paul's education and worldly sophistication, he was every bit the ancient Hebrew, rejecting the Hellenism of his day and clinging to the mysticism of His ancestors.

James recounts the experience of Peter. James was more or less the successor of Peter when the latter was driven underground by Jewish legal persecution. Jesus gave Peter the legendary Keys of the Kingdom. In Hebrew culture, a lord gave keys to some trusted servant who would let him back in when returning from a journey. Otherwise, the keeper

of the keys kept the door locked. Peter's job was to open the door when the Lord came back in the guise of the Holy Spirit falling on folks who weren't Jews. Peter's job was to recognize the divine Presence and notify others that here was God coming in to join and fellowship with them in His own home.

Such was the point of this conference. First, the Diaspora Jews were welcomed, with Peter no doubt speaking for the rest of the Apostles. Peter then was the first to open fellowship to Spirit-filled Samaritans, and then Gentiles, and welcomed them into the Covenant of Christ as equal family members. These people belonged in the church. James notes all this, and then quotes Amos 9:11.

Amos talks about that tent of meeting David had in the courtyard outside the door of his early castle there in Jerusalem (essentially he took over the old Jebusite stronghold). There was no palace and certainly no Temple. And David, with no Levite blood or priestly vestment, went in before the Ark of Covenant and was unharmed, because his holiness had nothing to do with ceremony, but was inherently moral in the most ancient standards. It was rather like Melchizedek, right there in the same old place where Melchizedek had lived. David was adhering to an older standard with prior claims on God's favor, still valid. God spoke through Amos warning that He would not treat the Temple as His home, but would meet with people somewhere else, somewhere simple and holy without all the rituals and pompous ceremony of the official corrupt priests and Levites. The Covenant of Moses was not nearly so important to God as the Jews imagined. But the point here is that Amos mentions that there were Gentiles called by God's name even before Moses.

James is tipping his hat to the Covenant of Noah, under which every Jewish scholar knew that Gentiles had a valid claim to God's promises. Who would imagine James or Amos was demanding a return to the literal tent David pitched over the Ark of Covenant? The Ark and the tent were themselves mere symbols of something far larger. You can't read this without spiritualizing the text.

Romans 2:24

In this case, the quote is not spiritualized. However, the context of Paul's quote goes to the very foundation of the question we examine in this book. He begins to hammer the Jewish Christians in Rome for clinging to their Talmudic mindset.

A critical element in the Fall is the decision to place human reason on the throne of the soul. Becoming one's own god is quite exhilarating. Well before the Exile, many among the national leadership of the nation had concluded that they had God over a barrel. Because the Temple – His House – stood in Jerusalem, He was forced to protect the city from enemies or embarrass Himself. It was sufficient in the minds of leaders to observe the rituals and pay lip service; what more could God demand of them? The Exile scarcely humbled them. While they did manage to cut out the idolatry on the side, in its place they idolized their own human wisdom. The rise of the synagogue system served only to enforce a new arrogance based on their deep expertise in the Law. So after the Return, when Alexander came marching through the region, evangelizing his Hellenism along the way, they were ripe for redoubling their self-idolization.

Aristotelian rationalism formalizes the evil choice of the Fall, making it a very forceful conscious decision to subject revelation to human judgment. The result of Jewish rabbis adopting Hellenism was the Talmud. This was a reassessment of the Law of Moses through literalism, semantic wrangling and legalism. Today you can find passages in the Talmud declaring that God was again over a barrel because of the superior Jewish reasoning about the way the words can be perverted, and how God is forced to honor the rabbinical poppycock.

Paul quotes Isaiah 52:5. The prophet in his own context had been castigating Judah, prophetically warning them of the Exile yet to come. He quotes God in the future tense, where He describes the captive Jews in Babylon subjected to taunting that their national deity was unable to save them from conquest. The problem was their arrogance against God. So where are these Talmudic Jewish Christians Paul addresses? They were in Rome, because their homeland is under yet another pagan imperial power. And while Romans may well taunt the cranky Jews about their impotent God, Paul refers to a related reason for blasphemy: The Jewish snarky behavior about God's moral standards. Talmudic Jews were known for playing word games with Covenant Law. Jesus called them on it, noting how they use twisted interpretations of the Law to justify the very moral failures the Law condemns. Paul notes that converting to following Jesus hasn't done much to change this attitude among Jewish Christians.

They still insist on their racist attitude toward the Gentile Christians. What was the whole point of their being chosen? Paul notes starting in Chapter 2 here in Romans that they were granted God's own personal account of His truth, whittling down a vast pile of lore that was often questionable in accuracy. On top of this, that very same God made them His earthly representatives, placing in their midst some semblance of His personal Presence. But because of their Talmud word games, excusing their immorality while condemning it in Gentiles, God was a laughing stock. This sort of crap is the direct result of insisting on literalism in reading Scripture.

Romans 3:10-18

Paul quotes a selection from Psalms 5:9, 10:7, 14:1-3, 36:1, 140:3, plus a bit from Isaiah 59:7-8 (not in that order). A few verses later Paul includes the basic thought behind Psalm 143:2. Does anyone doubt that the term "law" here refers to the all of the Law Covenants? Up until Christ, the revelation of God and His character was through Laws (specifically in the Ancient Near Eastern feudal sense of a ruler's known personal requirements and expectations, not in the Western sense of impersonal legislation). In essence, Paul quotes the Laws to establish their limits. Beyond all doubt, the Law Covenants establish that humans are fallen, unable to live righteously on their own power – all humans.

This is used largely within the argument of chopping down Jewish self-idolization and racism. Several chapters of Romans wrestle with this issue. The Jews had God's personal edition of the Law, but that same revelation condemned them along with the rest of humanity. They kept ignoring that part of the Law throughout their history, and Talmudic learning only made it worse by offering semantic excuses for it. Having God's revelation so clearly stated should have made them all the more humble, because they lost all the

excuses Gentiles had in their ignorance. Paul notes in passing that humble Gentiles who sought God's moral character without the Law were way ahead of arrogant Jews with their Law.

And by no means would this laundry list of scathing rebuke be taken literally. All of it is a classical example of Hebrew hyperbole. There were plenty of places where people in the Old Testament were called "righteous" under the Law. Paul does not contradict that, but intentionally leaves out the element of mercy because he's making the point that Jesus as a Person was the ultimate expression of the Law Covenants. If ancient law was a matter of getting to know the Lawgiver, then here we have the Law giving back to us a copy of the Lawgiver in the flesh. Jesus came under the Law to fulfill the purpose of the Law. He absorbed the penalty of the Law and allowed us to approach Him directly.

1 Corinthians 9:9

Is it not amusing how quickly evangelical clergymen seize on something that lines their pockets? This is one place where they don't seem to mind spiritualizing the text. Paul quotes Deuteronomy 25:4 where Moses forbids muzzling an ox from eating the grain it threshes. On purely behavioral grounds alone we could guess that if an ox knew it was allowed to eat some of the grain on the threshing floor, it would never resist the task. However, other points of Law note that animals warrant mercy, particularly when they do our hard work.

Paul is not contradicting the call for a merciful spirit. Do oxen go to Heaven? The point is not saving the animals, but learning to be generous. It's not about the ox, but about us and God's demand that we change; it's about creating a moral connection to God's Creation. If you know that divine justice requires you to be kind to animals, how does that not apply to your fellow humans? The divine moral principle of kindness is what matters here. Sacrificial love is global, sweeping in all of God's Creation. You cannot connect to God if you don't embrace His moral character. While we are here on this plane of existence, we are part of it, and so is His moral character. Conform yourself to His character in all things. That means you don't balk at contributing to the proper care of your church staff. If their ministry helps you grab hold of God's promises in this world, you owe it to God to share with others or you don't understand in the first place. The preacher shouldn't have to pass his own hat.

This applies to the same use of this quotation in 1 Timothy 5:18.

1 Corinthians 14:21

It would be easy to get a rise out of the Neo-Pentecostals and Charismatics on what they consider their turf here. The Corinthians were excessively hedonistic and treated speaking in tongues like a cheap thrill. Paul was trying to point out that glossolalia was the very entry level, not the pinnacle of experiencing God's power. The Corinthians had inverted the moral and spiritual value of things, as usual. Paul likens this to childish behavior.

Who hasn't experienced a smart-aleck kid arrogantly proclaiming something they just learned yesterday, which learning is inaccurate and lacking any nuance and depth? In the

immediate context of this verse, Paul warns them that there is nothing here to justify any kind of pride. He quotes from Isaiah 28:11-12, where the ancient prophet warns both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms that they are acting as arrogant children. On the one hand, we encourage children to learn. On the other hand, we endure a lot from their very unwise posturing. Were they actually children, it might be more tolerable, but God was sick of their refusal to grow up when it was centuries past their national childhood. Their petty human wisdom was intolerable arrogance before the God who made them. The beauty of how Isaiah artistically weaves together the images of prattling children with that of incomprehensible dialects of foreign conquerors often passes over the heads of Bible commentators. Isaiah's audience had inverted the value of things, calling God's wisdom childish and referring to their own human intellect as serious professionalism. You won't listen to God? Would you prefer a foreign empire that plunders and murders your whole kingdom?

This is the image Paul uses to slap some sense into the silly Corinthians. The excess of glossolalia was a sign they deserved God's wrath, because they were long past due for better things. For example, prophecy was a lot more useful in bringing glory to the Lord. Grow up, Corinthians. God grants the wow factor to folks who haven't had time to rise into a proper moral understanding. As long as you chase that wow factor, morally mature folks will consider you childish, at best. Meanwhile, outsiders wandering into the church meeting might be entertained by the speaking in tongues, but how does that help them find the call to repentance? Don't cultivate an experience that thrills you on that level or you'll stay there. Cultivate a taste for sacrificing your own human thrill for something that thrills on a far higher level. Meanwhile, we are highly amused by the semantic acrobatics of those who fail to get Isaiah's message, and thus fail to understand how Paul uses it here.

[Galatians 3:10-12](#)

Westerners tend to demand a semantic precision that is often absent in the New Testament. In this context, Paul uses the term "law" (Grk: *nomos*) in place of "covenant" – more precisely, he refers here to living under the Covenant of Moses as a whole. It's not just knowing and obeying the Ten Commandments or something like that, but a reference to the whole national identity under the Covenant of Moses. Thus, the word "law" is shorthand for "being Jewish." His point here is that Abraham was under a different sort of covenant entirely.

While the Covenant of Moses is a specific implementation of the more general Covenant of Noah, the Covenant of Abraham was not a law covenant, but a personal commitment of faith. We would certainly say that such a personal faith commitment is implied by the Law Covenants, but is actually far more demanding. Paul thus uses the word "faith" to indicate such a personal commitment – "being Abrahamic." You can stick with a Law Covenant or you can move above it into a Faith Covenant. The former will make you tolerable to God and bring a limited set of blessings. The latter connects you directly to God on a different plane of existence entirely.

Western Christians have a woefully poor understanding of covenants, frequently making mental substitution of contract law instead.

It's worth noting that Paul says the Covenant of Moses is just about good enough to keep slaves in line, but is hardly adequate to express genuine faith. Thus, he constructs a scandalous allegory in Chapter 4 that says those under Moses were never more than slaves, while those who actually embraced the faith of Abraham were God's own heirs. The Jews claiming to be children of Abraham were simply recipients of his DNA, not the heirs to his covenant.

[Hebrews 2:6-8](#)

Because of their poor grasp of covenants, Western Christians generally do not understand the Letter to the Hebrews. There is a load of Hebraic nuanced references and discussion that depends on a familiarity with the subtleties of Ancient Near Eastern feudalism.

In this context, the author explains how Jesus has fulfilled all Law Covenants, not just Moses. God put into place a moral covenant hinted at in those Law Covenants, pointing to things He wanted fallen mankind to have. However, those blessings did not come without requirements. The offer stood regardless of whether anyone even tried to meet those requirements. So in theory, the whole earth was under human authority, if humans met those requirements. The quote comes from Psalm 8:4-6. David is fully aware of all this, so he isn't saying that man held that authority, but was celebrating God's generous offer. There is plenty of room for thinking in terms of a sliding scale, having some measure of that authority because of a limited compliance. No one ever quite rose to that fully until Jesus came along.

That's the whole point of what the author is getting at: Jesus now is the sole agent of what God offers to mankind on this earth. You may not know His name or His story, but if you managed to reach for God's moral character as taught by Christ, you'll receive the same rich blessings in this life.

[Hebrews 7:1-2](#)

If you read this passage literally, you cannot possibly comprehend where the author is going with this concept. While he doesn't so much spiritualize the quote from the Old Testament, he uses it in a way that requires we spiritualize his own writing. It's not that he takes off in strange and unjustified paths with such a limited amount of information about Melchizedek, or that he brings in all sorts of undocumented Jewish traditions, but that he engages in Hebrew hyperbole to good effect.

Melchizedek does not serve here as some kind of holy avatar who had no family background, but the point is that it didn't matter. His priesthood was not hereditary as under the Law of Moses, but was by faith according to the same standard of personal faith Abraham claimed. Thus, his role was timeless, since it was anchored outside this realm of existence (see verse 21). Few people understand this is precisely how David was able to touch the Ark of the Covenant without dying; he was also participating in this covenant of faith. Notice that the roles of king and priest are combined in the divine calling on Abraham, Melchizedek, David and Jesus. A few are called to such service and it's not hard for those so served to recognize it.

But the point here is the masterful spiritualizing of the text the author shows us.

James 2:23

Most Christians fail to realize that James was hammering the Jewish Christians who clung to Pharisaical Hellenism. When some other writer says that we are justified by faith, it's a reference to commitment that results in action. James points that out from the other direction. The faith of Abraham was not theoretical.

He quotes from Genesis 15:6 where God approves of Abraham's faith because Abraham acted on it. In Abraham's world, there was no such concept of objective truth. You could not call it "faith" if you weren't faithful. Only among the Hellenized Jewish rabbis of Jesus' time did we see the silly semantic wrangling suggesting that you could call something "faith" as a theoretical concept devoid of action. The whole business of semantic analysis is foreign to Hebrew thinking, but became a trademark of Judaism after the introduction of Greek analytical philosophy. We owe it to James for pointing out so bluntly how Hellenism disemboweled Hebrew religion. Legalistic literalism is a failure.

Conclusion

We know that Christ will return to this world, that we will meet Him in the sky while He remakes all Heaven and Earth before our transformed and watching eyes. It is implied that what comes after that is a restoration of what the Garden of Eden was like before the Fall. We are also told the Tempter cannot return again to mess things up any more. However, we are also told that nothing anyone can say in any human language would do justice to what we will experience there at the End of Time. We are also told that in the meantime, we have a mighty mission from God to bring Him glory until that day comes, or until He takes us to be with Him pending The End. During that meantime, bringing Him glory means living such that we claim all the promises He made in Scripture about living in His Empire on this earth.

One of the biggest and most consistent sins of Western Christians in general, and evangelicals in particular, is twisting promises and prophecies to make them fit a false view of the Return of Christ. They use circular reasoning, insisting that all the prophecies must apply to that doctrine, then insisting they hold such a doctrine because it comes from those prophecies. In this, they are hypocrites for "spiritualizing" the moral demands of this life and the blessings attached. When one forthrightly examines Ancient Hebrew intellectual history without all the Postexilic nonsense of a badly broken Old Testament religion, it is impossible to justify any part of the Western obsession with End Times, Second Coming and Dispensationalism. All of that is an entirely modern fiction. Not the fact of Christ returning to earth and restoring His Father's original plans for Creation, but virtually the entire content they load into that promise is sheer nonsense.

The righteous and properly informed Hebrews of the Old Testament never dared to offer a description of anything beyond this world. Whatever it was they had to say on the subject was self-conscious symbolism. They would be shocked at the ignorant literalism of latter generations. Instead, they laid a heavy emphasis on what could be known about God's moral character as manifested in this world through solid moral reasoning. They

would also be shocked by our cultural insistence on living in one's mind, keeping the heart silent and refusing to even believe that it's possible to perceive with the heart. Instead, it is our culture that "spiritualizes" a rather literal dependence on the heart for knowing the will of God. The Ancient Hebrew talk of reasoning in the heart was not a metaphor. The problem is the depth of ignorance and sheer truculence of our modern cerebral culture.

What a ludicrous backwardness we find in modern Western Christianity! On the one hand, they turn all the promises God made regarding this world into some kind of allegory about some future world to come. They don't permit anyone to claim the full promises of the Ancient Hebrew morality expressed through the Law Covenants. They literalize the symbolic and spiritualize the concrete. Meanwhile, they support a hideous and immoral political obsession about enforcing a cultural mythology that clearly comes from outside the Bible as "God's will." We find ourselves back in the Pharisaical idolatry of human reason.

This book could have been a whole lot longer, but the preceding passages were chosen to prevent burying the truth under too many words. If you are a modern Western evangelical Christian, you might go to Heaven, but you'll have precious little from this life stored up as your spiritual treasures because you won't have a clue what it is that survives beyond this life. We desperately need a sane return to the Ancient Hebrew way of reading the Ancient Hebrew Scriptures.

Banking on human reason is what got us kicked out of the Garden of Eden.

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