

# Messenger

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Fulfill Your Destiny

Winter 2026

Mysteries of the Bible  
Free To Be Lawless?  
Applying God's Law Under the  
New Covenant  
In Prosperity Beware!  
How to Study and Understand  
the Bible

# MESSENGER Magazine

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The Gospel, sometimes called a mystery, contains the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. The gospel, God's word, the Bible, **is indeed a mystery**. Though said to be the most widely distributed book in history, the Bible's teachings are properly understood by, relatively speaking, only a handful of people. Many specific truths are revealed in the Bible, that are themselves mysteries, even though, ironically, they are explained clearly in the Bible. Why is the most widely published book in the world a mystery? Why are its teachings mysteries? It is not, as some have alleged, that God does not want us to understand. In fact, God emphatically wants everyone, **you included**, to understand the Bible and its mysteries. But how many of us **really want to understand**? And how may one come to **really understand the Bible**? In this edition are answers you may have been looking for.

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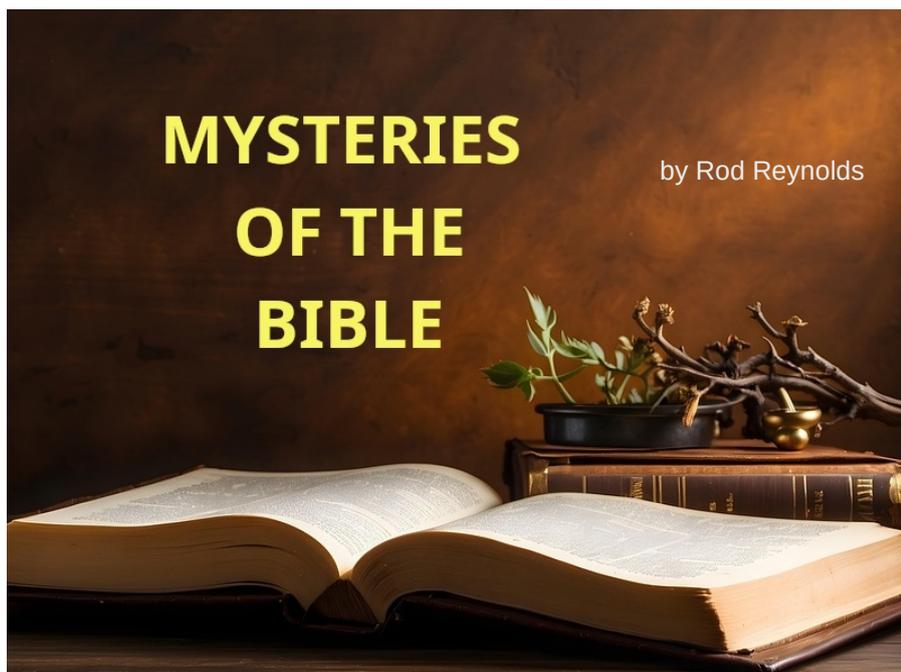
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The Gospel, sometimes called a mystery, contains the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. In this article we will survey some of the mysteries of the Bible. Each of these could take a full article of itself, or perhaps even a book, to thoroughly explain. But for the purpose of this article some of them are covered in a summary fashion, along with a discussion about why **the Bible itself is a mystery** to most people.

The gospel, God's word, the Bible, **is indeed a mystery**. Though reputedly the most widely distributed book in history (guinnessworldrecords.com), its teachings are properly understood by, relatively speaking, only a handful of people. Many specific truths are revealed in the Bible, that are themselves mysteries, even though, ironically, they are explained clearly in the Bible.

Why is the most widely published Book in the world a mystery? Why are its teachings mysteries? To help us understand, let's look at the word mystery itself, as used in the Bible, and discuss its meaning.

The word "mystery" used in its singular or plural form twenty-seven times in the New King James translation of the New Testament, is translated

from the Greek word *musterion*. In essence, the word means that which is understood only by initiates, or a select group.

Some of the comments explaining the word *musterion* from *Vines' Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* are as follows:

"In the NT it denotes, not the mysterious (as with the Eng. word), but that which, being outside the range of unassisted natural apprehension, can be made known only by Divine revelation, and is made known in a manner and at a time appointed by God, and to those only who are illumined by His Spirit. In the ordinary sense a 'mystery' implies knowledge withheld; its Scriptural significance is truth revealed. Hence the terms especially associated with the subject are 'made known,' 'manifested,' 'revealed,' 'preached,' 'understand,' 'dispensation.' The definition given above may be best illustrated by the following passage: 'the mystery which hath been hid from all ages and generations: but now hath it been manifested to His saints' (Col. 1:26, RV). It is used of: (a) spiritual truth generally, as revealed in the gospel, 1Cor. 13:2; 14:2 (cp. 1Tim. 3:9)."

The "mystery" of the gospel has been

described as an "open secret." It is a "secret" that has been openly proclaimed, yet few believe it, and even fewer take the time or put in the effort to actually understand it.

The "mysteries" of the gospel, or God's word, the Bible, are the spiritual truths contained therein.

"Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the **mystery of the faith** with a pure conscience" (1 Timothy 3:8-9).

Note the reference to the "mystery of the faith." Faith simply means belief. "The faith" of which Paul speaks is the system of belief contained in God's word. The "mystery of the faith" is everything encompassed in the teachings of God's word, because that's what comprises the true faith.

Jesus said, quoting Scripture, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

Included in the mysteries of the Bible are, among other things, knowledge concerning the nature of God as a family; God's eternal purpose for mankind, including both Israelites and Gentiles; calling, election and salvation by grace through faith; conversion through the indwelling of the Father and Jesus Christ by repentance and obedience through faith; the resurrection from the dead; the Church in the eras of the Old Testament and the New Testament; the mystery of iniquity; the mystery of the harlot empire. A number of other specific doctrines could be referenced as well.

The mystery of the gospel is revealed through the word of God, preserved in the Bible. But, as noted earlier, it and its various features are not understood by most people in this age. It is not that God does not want people to understand his word. He does want mankind to understand, but there are prerequisites to understanding. Notice what Moses said to the Israelites as they were about to

enter the promised land:

"Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore **be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding** in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and **understanding** people'" (Deuteronomy 4:5-6).

Scripture reveals, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; A good **understanding** have all those **who do His commandments**. His praise endures forever" (Psalms 111:10).

Note that understanding would come for the Israelites with obeying the laws God had given them. The principle that **spiritual understanding depends on obedience to God's word, his laws**, is confirmed many times in Scripture:

"My son, if you receive my words, And **treasure my commands** within you, So that you incline your ear to wisdom, And apply your heart to **understanding**; Yes, if you cry out for discernment, And lift up your voice for **understanding**, If you seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures; Then you will **understand** the fear of the Lord, And find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and **understanding**; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly; He guards the paths of justice, And preserves the way of His saints. Then you will **understand** righteousness and justice, Equity and every good path" (Proverbs 2:1-9).

"My son, **do not forget my law**, But let your heart **keep my commands**; For length of days and long life And peace they will add to you. [Note that peace results from keeping God's commands, his law.] Let not mercy and truth forsake you; Bind them

around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart, And so find favor and high esteem In the sight of God and man. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And **lean not on your own understanding**; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:1-6).

"Hear, my children, the instruction of a father, And give attention to **know understanding**; For I give you good doctrine: **Do not forsake my law**. When I was my father's son, Tender and the only one in the sight of my mother, He also taught me, and said to me: 'Let your heart retain my words; **Keep my commands**, and live. Get wisdom! **Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth**. Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; Love her, and she will keep you. Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get **understanding**'" (Proverbs 4:1-7).

"My son, **keep my words, And treasure my commands** within you. **Keep my commands** and live, And **my law** as the apple of your eye. Bind them on your fingers; Write them on the tablet of your heart. Say to wisdom, 'You are my sister,' And call **understanding** your nearest kin" (Proverbs 7:1-4).

"Does not wisdom cry out, And **understanding** lift up her voice? She takes her stand on the top of the high hill, Beside the way, where the paths meet. **She cries out by the gates**, at the entry of the city, At the entrance of the doors: 'To you, O men, **I call**, And my voice is **to the sons of men**. O you simple ones, understand prudence, And you fools, be of an **understanding** heart. Listen, for I will speak of excellent things, And from the opening of my lips will come right things; For my mouth will speak truth; Wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are with righteousness; Nothing crooked or perverse is in them. **They are all plain to him who understands**, And right to those who find knowledge.

Receive my instruction, and not silver, And knowledge rather than choice gold; For wisdom is better than rubies, And all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her. I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, And find out knowledge and discretion. The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverse mouth I hate. Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom; **I am understanding**, I have strength. By me kings reign, And rulers decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, All the judges of the earth. **I love those who love me, And those who seek me diligently will find me**" (Proverbs 8:1-17).

"Wisdom has built her house, She has hewn out her seven pillars; She has slaughtered her meat, She has mixed her wine, She has also furnished her table. She has sent out her maidens, **She cries out from the highest places of the city**, 'Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!' As for him who lacks **understanding**, she says to him, 'Come, eat of my bread And drink of the wine I have mixed. Forsake foolishness and live, And go in the **way of understanding**'" (Proverbs 9:1-6).

Note there is a **way of understanding**. Obeying God's commandments leads to understanding. Understanding requires a willingness to meet the requirements that will enable one to have understanding of the mysteries of the Bible. And most people who have been exposed to the word of God have not demonstrated such a willingness in this age.

Nevertheless, it is **God's will that you, and all people, understand these mysteries**.

"...we ...do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual **understanding**..." (Colossians 1:9).

"For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have

not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and **attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ**, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:1-3).

It is our responsibility as God's Church to come to understand the mysteries of the gospel, and proclaim them, making the Bible plain, so that anyone who is willing may believe, understand and obey the gospel.

"Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and **stewards of the mysteries of God**" (1 Corinthians 4:1).

Paul asked that those he served pray for him: "...that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the **mystery of the gospel**" (Ephesians 6:19).

According to Paul, Jesus said to him when he was struck blind and led to conversion: "I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, **to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light**, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me" (Acts 26:16-18).

Paul's writings, and other Scriptures, are preserved in the Bible so we may continue the commission to preach the gospel, and make it known plainly to mankind, that their eyes may be opened to the truth. We know that, as in ancient Israel and Judah, most will not be willing to receive the message of the gospel in this age (cf. Jeremiah 6:17; 44:16; Ezekiel 3:7; Matthew 7:13-14). One openly proclaimed se-

cret, however, that few understand, is that God will rectify the circumstance of the spiritual blindness of the vast bulk of mankind in another age.

The word mystery tends to evoke a certain kind of wonder, perhaps awe. Someone who claims to be able to explain a mystery, if he is believed, is likely to be looked up to. Many impostors and religious frauds have come along claiming to have knowledge of spiritual or religious mysteries, including mysteries of the Bible. And they have come up with fanciful explanations of various mysteries. Many have followed them. But they are their own explanations, their own interpretations of the Bible's secrets. And many have been deceived by them.

No Scripture of the Bible is of any private interpretation. Men should not be reading their own ideas into Scripture. "...no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation" (1 Peter 1:20). The Bible explains its own mysteries. Sometimes historical information is needed as a supplement. But any explanation of Biblical truth that runs counter to or is inconsistent with the Bible's own explanation, is false, and fraudulent. Do not be fooled by impostors who teach falsehoods fabricated by themselves about the doctrines of the Bible.

The purpose and plan of God is revealed in outline form in the annual festivals and holy days God himself ordained and commanded (cf. Leviticus 23), but few have kept them or understand their meaning. Many of those who did keep them in the Old Testament era understood salvation in a general sense.

For example, the Jews understood the seventy bulls offered during the Feast of Tabernacles as representative of the seventy original nations of the world, as enumerated in Genesis 10. It's likely that the Jews and Israelites who kept the feast understood the calling and conversion of the Gentiles that was to occur in the Messianic age, and their inclusion among God's people at that time. But

they did not generally foresee the calling of Gentiles in this age, the age of the New Testament Church beginning with Christ's crucifixion and resurrection and leading up to his second coming.

Indeed, while they expected the coming of the Messiah, they did not expect the Messiah to come in the manner of his first coming. They did not expect a Messiah who would come, rebuke them, and be crucified, although prophecies of the Old Testament predicted these things.

Many of the details of God's purpose and how he is working it out are revealed in the New Testament, details that had not been plainly revealed prior to Christ's coming. Paul refers to this in Ephesians:

"For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was **given to me for you**, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, **when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ**), which in **other ages was not made known** to the sons of men, as it has **now been revealed** by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: **that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel**, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and **to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery**, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be **made known by the church** to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the **eternal purpose** which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Ephesians

3:1-11).

Adam Clarke states in his commentary on “dispensation” (verse 2, above): “The word *οικονομία* [*oikonomia*], which is the same as our word *economy*, signifies..., ‘the plan which the master of a family, or his steward, has established for the management of the family;’ it signifies, also, a plan for the management of any sort of business: and here it means the dispensation of the Gospel, that *plan* by which God has provided salvation for a lost world; and according to which he intends to gather all believers, both Jews and Gentiles, into one Church under Jesus Christ, their head and governor” (*Clarke’s Commentary* on Ephesians 1:10).

Note that the “dispensation” given to Paul for their benefit, was the knowledge of God’s plan of salvation, which he shared with them, and which they could understand by reading what he had written about it. Paul was sent preaching to the Gentiles that all might see, or understand, the eternal purpose of God which was accomplished first in Jesus Christ, who was resurrected into divine glory.

Note that the conversion of the Gentiles and the eternal purpose of God are associated with a mystery that had been hidden, but was now to be made known by the Church for all to see. This knowledge, as revealed to an extent in the Old Testament, and explained in greater detail in the New Testament, is available for anyone to see who is willing to see and believe.

**The mystery of the gospel had been revealed so it could be known by all nations!** “Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but **now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations**, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith -- to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen”

(Romans 16:25-27).

In the apostolic age the gospel was preached to every corner of the earth. “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight -- if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, **which was preached to every creature under heaven**, of which I, Paul, became a minister” (Colossians 1:19-23).

The gospel was preached to every creature under heaven, in other words, every human being had access in some way to the gospel message at that time. We don’t know all the details about how this was done, but Christ’s commission to his apostles was:

“...Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned [or judged, not necessarily condemned]” (Mark 16:15-16).

The mystery of which Paul wrote in Ephesians 3 includes the knowledge that God is a family, and is preparing the Church, now married to Christ, to be with him in his kingdom. “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. **For I have betrothed you to one husband**, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:2).

The word translated “betrothed,” is a form of *ἁρμόζω* (*harmozō*), meaning to join, as to join in marriage, or to espouse (KJV) or betroth. As it says in Easton’s Bible Dictionary, “Betroth,” “From the time of betrothal the woman was regarded as the lawful

wife of the man to whom she was betrothed.”

Note that the Church is **now** “married,” by way of analogy, to Jesus Christ. Later, as in Hebrew tradition, will be a “wedding feast,” as it’s referred to symbolically, to celebrate and consummate the marriage.

“For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. **For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones**. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. **This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church**” (Ephesians 5:29-32).

Scripture reveals the **mystery of godliness**. It reveals that we are to become like Christ, like God, as Christ dwells in us through his Spirit. “And without controversy great is the **mystery of godliness**: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory” (1 Timothy 3:16).

Christ is the **first of the firstfruits**. The first to attain the resurrection. **“But now Christ has risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruit of those who slept [i.e., had died]” (1 Corinthians 15:20**, Green’s Modern King James Version). The Greek for “firstfruit” in verse 20 is singular, and is properly translated “firstfruit” as in the version quoted and some other translations. And through Jesus Christ we have the same potential (compare James 1:18; Revelation 14:4). “...the **mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints**. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this **mystery** among the Gentiles: which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory**” (Colossians 1:26-27).

The gathering to himself of all things, including all peoples, in the dispensa-

tion of time, is a mystery few understand. According to traditional belief among most professing Christian denominations, most people will wind up in "hell," eternally cut off from God (cf. "Are the 'Lost' Predestined to Hell?" at [cogmessenger.org](http://cogmessenger.org)).

But the Bible reveals that all human beings will have the opportunity to know God and that most will ultimately be in his kingdom: "...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the **mystery of His will**, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the **dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ**, both which are in heaven and which are on earth--in Him" (Ephesians 1:4-10).

Note that the "predestination" spoken of here is not exclusive, as many have assumed, but is inclusive in the sense that it's God's will that he might gather together all things, including all peoples, in Christ. Yet, the Bible makes it plain that not all are being gathered in this age, as they will be, as Paul wrote, "in the **dispensation of the fullness of the times.**" For now, although God gives the world an opportunity to hear the truth, most are blind to it.

Jesus explained this: "Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: 'Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was

up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!' And the disciples came and said to Him, 'Why do You speak to them in parables?' He answered and said to them, 'Because **it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven**, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, **nor do they understand.** And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: "Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive; **For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed,** Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them." But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. Therefore hear the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. But he who re-

ceived seed on the good ground is he who **hears the word and understands it**, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" (Matthew 13:3-23).

Note that the problem **is not** that the word has not been made available. The problem **is not** that the seed has not been sown. The problem for the world today **is not** even that the teachings were in parables.

Jesus often taught in parables. A parable is essentially just an analogy, or simile, where one thing is compared to another for sake of illustration. Much of the Bible is written in parable, or symbolic language.

But the Bible interprets its own symbols. Jesus explained the meaning of the parable of the sower and the seed to his disciples. And the explanation of its meaning is recorded in Scripture, just as are the meanings of other parables and symbols used in Scripture.

**The problem is that the hearts of the people are dull, or insensitive, unreceptive, to the message, their ears are hard of hearing, they refuse to hear, and they have closed their eyes to the truth. If not for that, they could see, hear and understand the message, and be healed, or converted** (cf. "Are 'Many' or 'Few' Called in this Age?" at [cogmessenger.org](http://cogmessenger.org)).

Paul explains further the **blindness in part that pertains to Israel.** And he explains that it is in God's plan to save all Israel eventually, that is, not every single one, but the vast majority, because there will be some incorrigibles who will refuse salvation, and thus suffer the "second death," utter and permanent destruction (Revelation 20:14-15; 21:7-8; cf. Matthew 10:28).

"For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel **until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.**

And so **all Israel [hyperbole—i.e., the vast majority] will be saved**, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.’ Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. **For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.** Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?’ ‘Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?’ For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11:25-36).

“Committed” (Romans 11:32) is explained by A. T. Robertson in his commentary *Word Pictures in the New Testament* as follows: “*Hath shut up* (συνεκλεισεν) [*sunekleisen*]. First aorist active indicative of *συνκλειω* [*sunkleiō*], to shut together like a net (Lu 5:6).

.....

“This is a resultant (effective) aorist because of the disbelief and disobedience of both Gentile (Romans 1:17-32) and Jew (Romans 2:1-3:20).”

God has **committed them to unbelief because of their unbelief**, but with the idea of later bringing them to repentance and salvation.

“Until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in,” (Romans 11:25) is speaking of the completion of the Gentile era, culminating with the final resurrection of the Beast empire, and the great tribulation, during which they will tread Jerusalem, and the Church of God, and the nations descended

from Israel (Jacob), underfoot for three and a half years (Luke 21:24).

“Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, ‘Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months” (Revelation 11:1-2).

At the end of that time, Christ will come a second time, and bring the peoples descended from Israel, including those of the “lost” tribes of Israel, out of the tribulation, and they will be converted.” Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Although I have cast them far off among the Gentiles, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet I shall be a little sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone.”’ Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “I will gather you from the peoples, assemble you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. And they will go there, and they will take away all its detestable things and all its abominations from there. Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God. But as for those whose hearts follow the desire for their detestable things and their abominations, I will recompense their deeds on their own heads” says the Lord God” (Ezekiel 11:16-21; cf. “The United States and Britain in Prophecy” at [cogmessenger.org](http://cogmessenger.org)).

The understanding of the mysteries of God's word is granted with the help of God's spirit. The carnal mind is unable, by itself, to understand the mysteries of God's word.

“However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers

of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the **wisdom of God in a mystery**, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ But God **has revealed them to us through His Spirit**. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who [which] is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. ‘who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?’ But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:6-16).

Upon repentance, one can receive the Spirit of God, and begin to have real insight into the mysteries of the Bible.

“Turn at my rebuke; Surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you” (Proverbs 1:23). “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

Some other featured mysteries of the Bible include the resurrection, the mystery of lawlessness, the mystery of the harlot empire, the mystery of the Church. Details concerning these

are discussed to one degree in other material we have published, and more in depth material on these and other little understood doctrines of Scripture may be forthcoming at a later time.

Meanwhile, we be thankful that God has through his word revealed knowledge affecting the life of every human, and made that knowledge available to those willing to meet the conditions for understanding. As a Church, it is our duty to be faithful

stewards of the understanding of God's mysteries. It is our duty to do all in our power to support the preaching of the gospel, so that those mysteries can be made plain to others ready and willing to receive them.

**The “Magna Carta,” and “Bill of Rights,” give testimony to the fact that Americans, and Britons, especially, have historically treasured the ideal of “freedom.” But despite such historic love of freedom, are we really free?**

Of all the nations in history the United States, perhaps more than any other, has committed itself to the ideals of personal freedom and liberty. Our Declaration of Independence declares, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” The preamble to our constitution states that among the purposes for its adoption is that of securing “the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.”

In pursuit of the principle of freedom our nation won its independence from Great Britain in a bloody war. Over 10,000 Americans sacrificed their lives in the name of liberty to win that war.

While freedom was won for this nation by the vision of its founding fathers and the heroics of its early patriots, along with the intervention of Divine Providence, Americans of other generations have also been required to defend with their lives the ideals of freedom and liberty. A bloody civil war, rooted in conflict over the evil institution of slavery in the United States, led to the deaths of an estimated 620,000 men in the line of duty (“Civil War Casualties,” *civilwar.org*).

On D-day, June 6, 1944, British, American and allied soldiers stormed

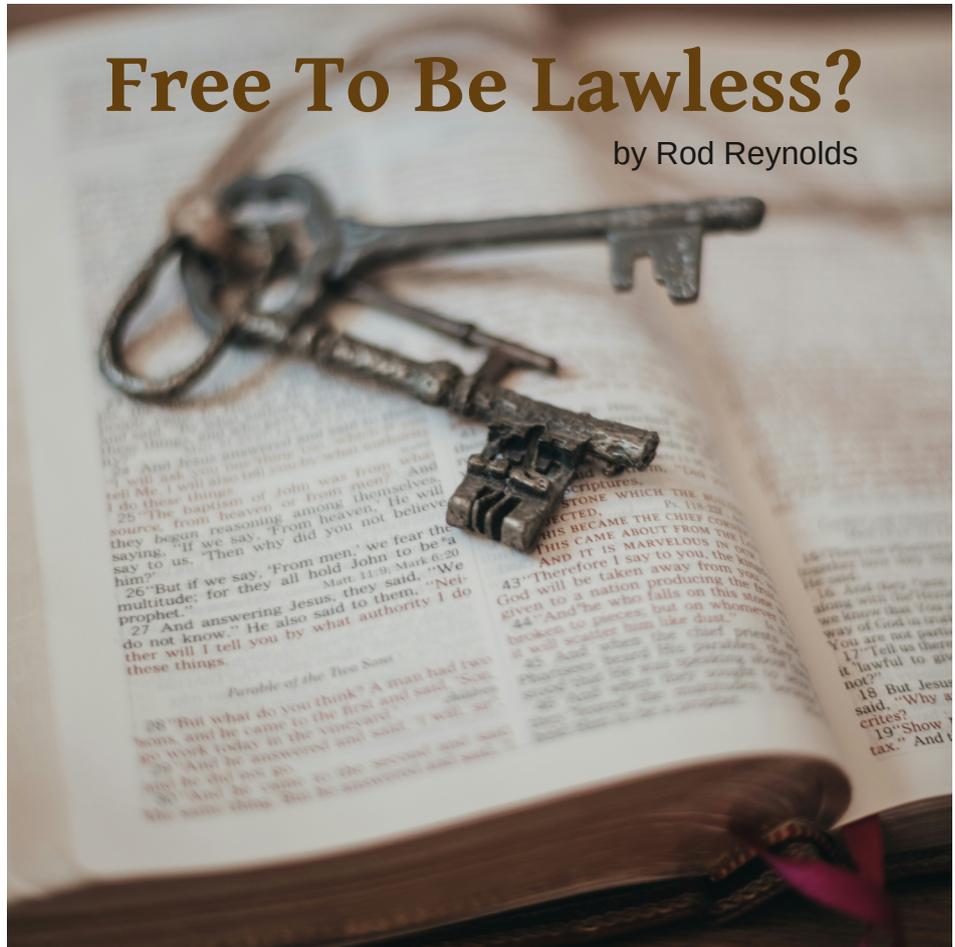
the beaches of Normandy to liberate Europe from the grip of Nazi oppression. This was part of a years long struggle against Axis nations who sought to conquer and enslave the world. And these are only a few examples of the struggle for freedom among Americans, Britons, and people of other nations who have cherished the ideal of freedom.

Despite the historic British and American love of freedom, despite the sacrifices Americans, Britons, and others have made to secure and defend freedom, though, are we really free?

To many Americans and Britons, both

## Free To Be Lawless?

by Rod Reynolds



in the past and especially in the present, freedom means being free from the restraint of law, especially God's laws. Even many Christians believe that freedom in Christ means freedom from the commandments of God, because that's what their ministers have taught them.

Often the teaching is very subtle, implying that the principle of love overrides any requirement to obey more specific commandments. For example, we find this statement from a publication of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.: “The man who really loves God and his neighbor doesn't need any laws or

rules to tell him what to do or not to do..." (cited in *Baal or God*, Herman J. Otten, p. 261). An article which appeared in *Campus Encounter*, a publication of the United Campus Christian Fellowship, states in part, "...we would not qualify freedom by demanding responsibility" (cited in *Baal or God*, p. 262). The authors of the material cited above sanction premarital and extramarital sex in the name of love. And the latter also advocates bisexual relations.

Does freedom in Christ imply lawlessness? Do we have freedom in Christ to neglect and violate the commandments of God, as some who claim to be Christian believe and teach? What did Jesus Christ himself say? "Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed in Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free'" (John 8:31-32). Notice the implications of Jesus' words.

(1) First, not everyone who claims to be a disciple of Christ—a Christian—is indeed (or truly, as the Greek may be translated) a Christian, but those who abide in Christ's word. To abide in Christ's word is to hold fast to it, to keep it, to live by it. Anyone can profess to believe in Christ. But as Biblical scholar A. T. Robertson comments, "Continuance in the word (teaching) proves the sincerity or insincerity of the profession. It is the acid test of life" (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 5, p. 149).

(2) Second, Jesus said of those who are truly his disciples, "...you shall know the truth...." The real disciples of Jesus do not live under deception and ignorance but in the light of truth. What is truth? Jesus said God's word is truth (John 17:17). God's word includes his commandments. The Psalmist wrote, "You are near, O Lord, And all Your commandments are truth" (Psalm 119:151). And Jesus is the very personification of truth (John 14:6). Jesus obeyed the will of God (John 5:30), and he lived a perfect life of obedience without sin (1 Peter 2:22).

Paul wrote that the knowledge imparted by the gospel is veiled to those "whose minds the god of this age has blinded" (2 Corinthians 4:4). But a true disciple of Jesus has shining in his heart "the light of the gospel"—"the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:4, 6). What does this mean in practical terms?

Paul is drawing a parallel between Jesus Christ and Moses. When Moses had received the commandments from God which were attached temporarily to the physical covenant with Israel, his face shone with the glory of God (Exodus 34:29, II Corinthians 3:7). Something of God's nature was reflected in Moses' face after he had come down from Mount Sinai. But the Israelites were afraid to look on the glory of his countenance. And a veil was placed over his face, symbolizing the veil of spiritual blindness which afflicted most of the Israelites (Exodus 34:30-35; II Corinthians 3:7-15).

However, a true disciple of Jesus sees with spiritual eyes the glory of God, the nature of God, in the face of Jesus Christ, "who is the image of God" (II Corinthians 4:4). And seeing clearly the image of God in Christ, through his word (II Corinthians 3:16-17), true Christians "with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (II Corinthians 3:18). In other words, with the power of God's Spirit, real disciples of Jesus Christ become like him—imitating the sacrificial love and obedience of Christ, knowing that he left "us an example, that you should follow His steps" (1 Peter 2:21).

About 1445 B.C. the people of Israel had become slaves in Egypt. God had determined to free the Israelites, to liberate them from bondage (Exodus 3:7-8). And so, following a series of supernatural plagues on Egypt, whose Pharaoh had refused to release the Israelites from bondage,

God led them out of slavery (Exodus 12:51; Numbers 33:3-4).

When God (in the person of Jesus Christ—1 Corinthians 10:1-4) led Israel out of bondage he did not leave them in ignorance of his will. He revealed to them the Passover, the commandments, the Sabbath and the Holy Days. As Nehemiah wrote, God gave his "good Spirit to instruct them" through the teaching of their prophets (Nehemiah 9:20). He gave them a government and a ministry to lead them in an organized fashion.

Moses said to Israel, "For this commandment which I command you today, it is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it" (Deuteronomy 30:11-14).

If God did all this for Israel under the Old Covenant, would he do less for spiritual Israel under the New, a better covenant? Jesus promised his disciples that the Spirit of God would "guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

One who is truly a disciple of Jesus then has a broad knowledge of God's truth, revealed through Christ's word and Spirit. As he obeys the things God reveals he gains more understanding because "A good understanding have all those who do His commandments" (Psalm 111:10).

All real disciples of Jesus Christ do not have exactly the same level of knowledge or spiritual maturity of course. But all who are and expect to remain disciples of Jesus will "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). "Sanctify [set apart to God's holy purpose] them by Your truth," Jesus prayed to the Father (John 17:17). It is said that "Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it, that

He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:26-27).

The word “disciple” comes from the Latin word *discipulus*. *Discipulus* means learner, or student, as does the English word “disciple.” The Greek word μαθητής (*mathētēs*) used by the writers of the New Testament means the same. A real disciple of Jesus is eager to learn from his word, and God in turn actively reveals to him the understanding of the truth through his Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:6-16; Ephesians 1:17-19). The life of a true disciple of Jesus is not a life of spiritual darkness and blindness, but of spiritual growth and vitality, living in the light of God’s word, including his commandments.

(3) Jesus went on to say that whoever keeps on committing sin, who lives in sin, the transgression of God’s law (1 John 3:4, KJV), is a slave of sin (John 8:34-35). “Com-

mits,” (Greek: ποιέω [*poiéō*]), is in the present participle form, meaning to keep on sinning, practicing sin as a way of life, as opposed to repenting and seeking to overcome. “Note the use of ποιων (present active participle, continuous habit or practice)” (Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*).

As long as one continues to habitually and willfully break God’s laws, or neglects to keep them, he is not free, he is a slave to sin.

(4) But, Jesus explained, “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). What are we made free to do, live in sin? No. Jesus had just said he who lives in sin is not free, but a slave. He said a disciple of Christ must live by his word, and that the truth, God’s word, as we live by it, makes us free. What Christ delivers us from is not the commandments of God.

Christ, through God’s Spirit, and through his own blood, delivers us from the law of sin and death, the carnal nature that is hostile and contrary to God (Romans 7:22 – 8:4; 7:14; 8:7-8).

Christ through his sacrifice and the giving of his Spirit sets us free from sin and death. He empowers us, if we are truly converted, to bear the fruits of holiness. That does not mean that we never sin. But it does mean that we do not consent to the presence of sin in our lives. It means living in a state of repentance, with an attitude of mind geared toward obeying God out of a pure motive of love.

Many have stumbled thinking that Christ frees us from the obligation to obey God’s commandments, thereby guaranteeing that they will remain slaves to sin. I hope that you won’t make that mistake.



Above is pictured a Torah scroll and a silver pointer (*yad*) used in reading. It is the Yanov Torah rescued from the Holocaust as presented to seminary students at Inter-Sem 2009 in Malibu, CA. The Yanov Torah is a hand-written copy of the Torah assembled from the individual sheaves of Torah manuscripts, smuggled into the Janowska concentration camp during the Holocaust in World War II. Additional information about the history of this document is available on the Yanov Torah page on the Wikipedia website. The image by Wikipedia user Valley2city is used here under the Creative Commons CC By-SA 3.0 license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>).

Some may wonder why we teach an obligation to keep some laws of the Old Testament, such as the ten commandments and the law of clean and unclean meats, but not some other laws of the Old Testament, such as the “ritual after childbirth.”

The purification regimen following childbirth (Leviticus 12:1-8) was part of the service of the physical temple and Levitical priesthood. They, and the entirety of the Old Covenant system, were a “form of... truth” (Romans 2:20). That is, they established the “form” or general pattern of God’s way of life based on the precepts of his spiritual law. They, and in particular the tabernacle and the ordinances of divine service under the Levitical priesthood, served as “the copy and shadow of heavenly things” (Hebrews 8:5; 9:1, 24; 10:1).

A shadow or model may provide an outline or convey a sense of what the object it pertains to is like, but it is not itself the object. The physical temple and priesthood, and the ordinances of divine service pertaining to them, were symbolic (Hebrews 9:9). The

means of purification and reconciliation, in particular, under that system were symbolic, being “concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation” (Hebrews 9:10).

That does not mean a heartfelt, truly spiritual approach was not possible under that system, as there are many examples of such in the Old Testament itself. But the emphasis in the ordinances of divine service under the Levitical system was, as Paul implies, on the food and drink offerings involved in the sacrificial system (Leviticus 1-6; 23:13, 18, 37; Numbers 6:13-17; 15:1-29, etc.), on purification by physical sacrifices and washings (as in the case at hand), and related “fleshly ordinances.”

These were not an end in themselves, but served as a model or illustration of a greater spiritual reality, as Paul explains in Hebrews 7-10. The Old Covenant, with its physical temple and priesthood, served several purposes, but among them was an educational purpose. As Paul wrote elsewhere, “the law [meaning the Old Covenant system, which is what Jews often meant by the term “*torah*” or law (Greek: *nomos*; cf. Galatians 4:21-24)] was our tutor to bring us to Christ” (Galatians 3:24).

The physical washings, animal, plant and drink offerings of the Temple service are illustrative of the necessity of spiritual purification, but are not sufficient of themselves to accomplish that end (Hebrews 9:1-4). Under the New Covenant God has established a more perfect way, namely, sanctification through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:10), and purification of the heart through faith (Acts 15:9). Hence, the physical washings and sacrifices of the Levitical system are not required to be literally applied under the New Covenant, although the principles behind them do apply.

The death of the Messiah, at the end of his three and a half year ministry, brought an end to the necessity for the Levitical sacrifices and offerings (Daniel 9:27; Hebrews 10:9). And the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D.

ended even the practical possibility, for the time being, of a literal application of most of those ordinances involved in the Temple service, including the “ritual after childbirth.”

### Law Magnified

The introduction of the New Covenant brought about certain changes in how the precepts of God’s spiritual law are applied. But it should be understood that the New Covenant does not do away with those precepts given limited expression in the Old Covenant. In reality, the basic precepts of God’s law are actually broadened under the New Covenant. And the New Testament (which would be better termed “New Covenant”), was largely written not to codify God’s statutes—as that had already been accomplished in the first five books of the Bible—but to show how the law had been changed (magnified—Isaiah 42:21) under the New Covenant.

While there are numerous examples of this in the New Testament, we are not given details of how every known law of God is to be applied in its expanded form. But we are given enough that with careful attention to the instructions of God’s word, along with the guidance of God’s Spirit (John 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:11-13), we can come to an understanding of how all are to be applied. Thus Paul wrote to Timothy, “... from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:15-17; cf. Proverbs 1:23; 2:1-9).

A sizable portion of the New Testament consists of quotations or paraphrases of the Old Testament. Paul and the other writers of the New Testament continually referred to the law of the Old Testament as the source or authority behind what they were teaching.

As a case in point, in 1 Corinthians 9 Paul shows that he had authority to take use Church funds (tithes and offerings) for his support. To prove his point, he says “For it is written in the law of Moses ‘You shall not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treads out the corn.’ Does God take care for oxen? Or says he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written...” (1 Corinthians 9:3-10). Notice that Paul used a specific law from the Law of Moses, the Old Covenant, as his authority to receive support as a minister of the gospel under the New Testament. Note that this specific law is a very minor one, at least seemingly. Surely if any laws of the Old Testament are to be ignored, this one would be. Yet from this apparently minor law of the Old Covenant Paul has induced a tremendous spiritual principle giving him authority to receive support—living expenses—from the Church.

The principle behind this law of the Old Covenant, taught by Christ as well as Paul, is that “The laborer is worthy of his reward” (1 Timothy 5:18; Luke 10:7). And this principle applies with equal force to oxen, ministers, plumbers, or what have you. And Paul says this law was specifically written for our sakes! This could as well apply to the entire Law of Moses. It was all written for our sakes!

Paul’s enemies of his own day accused him of teaching against the Law—just as his modern ones do (Acts 21:21, 28). Note Paul’s answer to his accusers, “Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. But this I confess until you, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the prophets” (Acts 24:13-14). Notice Paul had not cast away the Old Testament, but said he believed all of it, though called an heretic because he actually lived by its precepts as magnified in the New Covenant. To the end of his life, Paul still “expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the Law of Moses, and out of the Prophets, from morning till evening” (Acts 28:23, KJV).

Paul wrote that the gospel “now is made manifest, and by the *scriptures of the prophets*, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations, for the *obedience of faith*” (Romans 16:26, KJV). There are countless places where principles revealed in the Old Testament are shown being applied in the New Testament—not in some ethereal, *so-called* “spiritual” sense—but in concrete, everyday situations. Just a few for reference are: Romans 12:19-21; Ephesians 4:28; 6:1-3; Colossians 3:9.

### Unchanging Purpose

The fundamental *purpose* of the ten commandments is to define godly love in concrete terms. That purpose has not changed (Matthew 22:36-40; John 14:21; Romans 13:8-10; 1 John 5:3). The ten commandments not only apply literally, but even more broadly in their full spiritual force under the New Covenant (Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28).

Now why were the laws concerning clean and unclean meats given? It's clear that these laws predated the Old Covenant, although they were incorporated into it (Genesis 6:21; 7:2, 8; 8:20). The purpose for the statutes concerning clean and unclean meats is stated very clearly, “... to distinguish between the unclean and the clean, and between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten” (Leviticus 11:47). Although there are a few New Testament Scriptures that are twisted out of context in an attempt to prove the opposite, there is no credible evidence that the purpose of these statutes, or their application, has changed under the New Covenant.

The nature of animals did not change with the introduction of the New Covenant, nor with the destruction of the Temple and the suspension of the Levitical system, nor has the nature of physical human beings changed. Today, as in ancient times, eating unclean animals is a frequent cause of disease and death.

Under the New Covenant there is still a contrast between that which is spiritually clean on the one hand or un-

clean on the other (1 Corinthians 7:14; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Ephesians 5:5; 26). There is also a difference between clean and unclean animals (Revelation 18:2). The lesson in Acts 10 is not that unclean animals were somehow cleansed, but that no man should be regarded as inherently unclean because of his Gentile descent (contrary to prevailing sentiment among Jews of the day, Acts 10:28, 34-35; 11:1-18). Isaiah prophesied of the time of the Messiah's return (Isaiah 66:15), when he will consume with fury and indignation those consuming idol sacrifices, and unclean animals (Isaiah 66:17). Thus it is clear that the laws forbidding the consumption of these things apply literally under the New Covenant.

Although there is a spiritual facet to the laws regarding clean and unclean meats, they have a very strong, practical application in terms of preventing disease, as well. “Nearly all the food laws have their hygienic aspect” (*Encyclopedia Americana*, 1949 edition, vol. 16, “Jews and Judaism -- Food and Health Laws,” p. 123). The spread of numerous parasites and diseases can be effectively prevented by observing the food laws of Scripture, including avoiding the eating of unclean animals or food defiled by them, as well as avoiding eating blood and avoiding cooking with or eating animal fat (except as occurs naturally in lean cuts of meat).

Paul warned of some in the latter days “... commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer” (1 Timothy 4:3-5). Note that Paul speaks of foods, including animal foods, created to be eaten with thanksgiving by those who *know and believe the truth*. He is writing of foods *sanctified by the word of God!* Sanctified means to be set apart. Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 tell us which animals are set apart, or sanctified, by God's word from the others as being suited for human food.

Many commentators, though they may make excuses for ignoring these laws, recognize them as identifying animals that are not fit to be used as food for humans. For example, *Matthew Henry's Complete Commentary on the Whole Bible* states in commenting on Leviticus 11, “Most of the meats forbidden as unclean are such as were really unwholesome, and not fit to be eaten....” Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown (JFB) in their commentary state on Leviticus 11, “...there is no doubt that the flesh of many of the animals here ranked as unclean... is less wholesome and adapted for food than those which were allowed to be eaten.” John Gill in his commentary points out in commenting on Leviticus 11:2, that a reason the laws were given was “for the sake of their health, and to preserve them from diseases.” The *Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge* states on Leviticus 11:45 as a reason for the giving of these laws, “Because those [animals] prohibited were innutritive and unwholesome; as the swine, the flesh of which being strong and difficult to digest, affords a very gross aliment, and produces, especially in hot climates, cutaneous, scrophulous, and scorbutic disorders, as the itch, leprosy, etc.”

“Scripture and medical research agree that modern lifestyles lived without reference to God's laws and design shorten life and hasten death” (Rex Russell, M.D., *What the Bible Says About Healthy Living*, p. 31). In discussing various technical details about the health qualities of clean animals for human consumption, Dr. Russell states, “The flesh of clean animals such as beef, and fish that have fins and scales, is ideal for the health of humans -- just as we would expect from the hand of a loving Creator” (p. 145). In commenting on a study done at Johns Hopkins University on the toxic effects of various kinds of animal flesh, Dr. Russell summarizes, “Note that the flesh of animals and fish given to us by God for food are all nontoxic, but all forbidden animals lie in the toxic range” (p. 150). Dr. Russell comments further on the many diseases associated with the consumption of unclean animals, as well as the breeding of such animals for food. In commenting on

swine for example, he says, "The 1942 Yearbook of Agriculture reported that 50 diseases were found in pigs, and many of these diseases were passed on to humans by eating the pig's flesh" (p. 155).

As Christians we are to separate ourselves from unclean practices (2 Corinthians 7:1; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 4:17-20; 5:3-5; Colossians 3:5). We are to take care of our bodies as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:17). We are to be holy as God is holy (Leviticus 20:25-26; 1 Peter 1:15-16).

Some have been confused by false teaching concerning another New Testament Scripture: "He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks" (Romans 14:6). Dr. Russell explains, however, that this Scripture has nothing to do with the subject of clean and unclean meats as discussed in Leviticus 11 and other passages of Scripture defining which animals were created to be eaten. "The argument in Romans 14 was about 'clean' meats some Christians considered to be defiled be-

cause it had been offered to idols. The fact is, early Christians observed the biblical distinctions between clean and unclean meats at least until A.D. 70" (pp. 144-145).

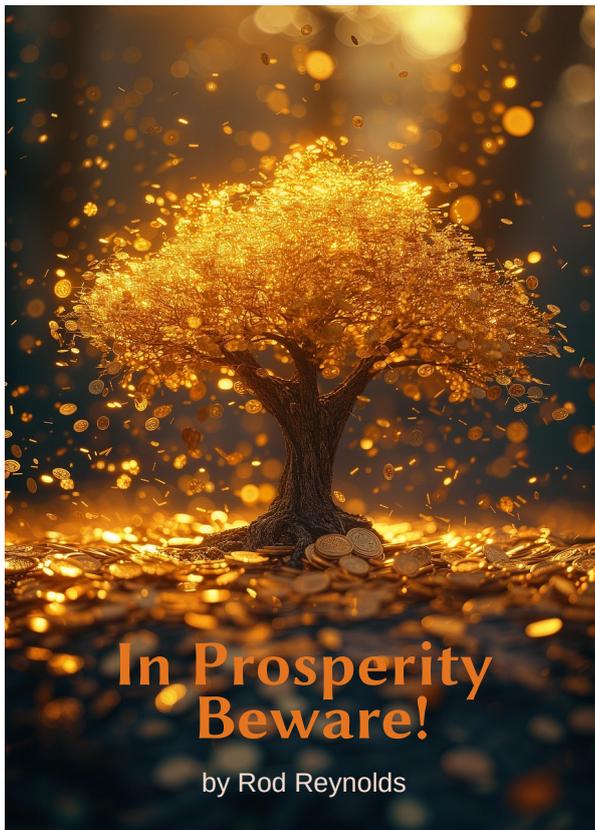
Actually the question in Romans 14 has to do with the idea of some that they must not eat meat at all (Romans 14:2), as even "clean" meat purchased in a market, for example, may have been contaminated by idols without their awareness (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:25). Eating food one positively knows has been offered to idols is still forbidden to Christians (1 Corinthians 10:18-22, 28). But a fuller discussion of that aspect of the subject is for another article.

The prohibition against eating the blood and hard fat (marbled fat in lean tissue is of a different composition and is not forbidden) of even clean animals also remains in force for Christians (Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 7:23-27; 17:10-14; 19:26; Acts 15:20, 29). Dr. Russell and other health researchers have explained very clearly the health implications behind these laws.

It's noted that certain aspects of the

purification rituals also have a general hygienic or health aspect, even though the literal application of them is no longer binding. There are health benefits to both mother and baby, for example, in remaining away from crowds for several weeks, or even two to three months, after a baby's birth, even though she is not regarded as "unclean," and she does not need to offer a sacrifice at the end of what would under the Old Covenant have been her period of uncleanness (Leviticus 12:1-8). There are also health benefits to male circumcision. But being physically circumcised does not of itself change one's character (Romans 2:25-29).

In summary then, the sacrifices and purification rituals of the Levitical priesthood and physical Temple in their literal application have been replaced by the reality of which they were symbols. However, the ten commandments and related moral requirements, law of clean and unclean meats, and similar laws continue to have a literal application under the New Covenant.



**In the modern age Americans and many others around the world are enjoying unprecedented wealth. Luxuries previous generations could not even dream of are taken for granted by today's generation. But how are we faring morally and spiritually in the midst of such abundance?**

It was only about a hundred years ago, in the 1920's, that automobiles became commonplace in the United States. Before that, people walked, or rode horses, sometimes mules, or rode in carriages drawn by draft animals. Sometimes they took trains or trolleys, but even travel by rail had not begun to gain popularity until around the mid-1800s. The first transcontinental railway in the United States was completed in 1869.

Commercial radio broadcasting in the United States began in 1920. Commercial television became popular in the United States in the 1950s. The technology has improved dramatically since that time, and radios and high definition televisions are less expensive than ever before, making them affordable to the point that nearly every household in the United States has at least one radio and one television.

Refrigerators, freezers, air conditioners, are conveniences that have become widely available only in the past century in the United States, the wealthiest large-population nation in the world

in terms of per capita income. Only a handful of countries with relatively small populations exceed the United States in per capita income, but the United States is currently the world's wealthiest nation in terms of total net wealth, followed by China, Japan, Germany, and the United Kingdom.

In the early 1800s most people, about three out of four, in the United States were employed in agriculture, mostly subsistence and local market farming ("History of agriculture in the United States," wikipedia.org, retrieved 1-3-2020; "Output, Employment, and Productivity in the United States after 1800," National Bureau of Economic Research, 1966). In 1920 more than 25% of the U.S. population was employed in farming. Today it's less than 2 percent, and technological improvements have enabled more food to be produced with less human labor than ever before.

Only about 40 percent of land in the United States is used for agricultural production, including livestock grazing and forest production. Even with its small farm labor workforce, the United States produces about half the world's corn, about a third of its soybeans, ten percent of its wheat, and about twenty percent of its beef, pork and lamb. The United States is the world's leading exporter of agricultural products. (China produces more, but has a much larger population). In proportion to their income, Americans spend less on food than citizens of any other nation in the world (weforum.org, retrieved February 19, 2026).

The United States leads the world in lumber and petroleum production, has abundant mineral resources, and what some say is the most technologically advanced and diverse economy in the world ("United States of America - Overview of economy," nationsencyclopedia.com, retrieved 2-19-2026; worldatlas.com rates South Korea as the most technologically advanced nation, followed by USA, but opinions may differ based on where the focus is. A

number of nations are vigorously pursuing advancements in technology).

Due to technological advances, it takes less money today in real terms for Americans to buy many common items than it did fifty years ago. A recent article in the *Washington Times* compares the time required to earn money based on an average wage to buy various items today as opposed to 1970. It takes about a quarter of the time today as opposed to 1970 to earn enough money to buy a dozen eggs, about a third of the time to buy a half gallon of milk, 57 percent to buy a pound of rice, a little over half to buy a man's undershirt, eighty-five percent for a gallon of gas, and less than a fourth to purchase a transatlantic airline ticket.

Using a low cost phone service plan, making a long distance phone call in the United States can cost only a tiny fraction of what it would have cost fifty years ago. The Internet barely existed back then. On the Internet today one can access books, publications, and other media virtually free of charge that would have been largely inaccessible to most people fifty years ago. Of course, in most cases, you have to pay for your access to the Internet, so there is some cost. But computerization and the Internet have made many things less costly, and more widely and easily available.

The computer in a cellphone is more powerful than computers that would fill a room a generation ago. Cars are more efficient, and a gallon of gas, cheaper in real terms, will take you on average significantly farther than a generation ago. For several years in the last decade the United States was mired in a recession and slow economic growth. Many people had difficulty finding jobs. But now, the *Washington Times* article states, "The real wealth and well-being of the vast majority of Americans have risen faster for the past three years than almost any time in history" (as of 2019).

The article also states, "In the United States, there are more jobs than workers. Wages for all groups are rising faster than prices. What is particularly remarkable—and a very good sign—is that wages for the lowest income and least skilled are rising faster than other groups" ("U.S. economy better than ever," Richard W. Rahn, washingtontimes.com, 12-31-2019). As of February 2026 the stock market in the USA has risen to new highs, inflation is moderate, wages are up, unemployment is down.

The living standard, in material terms, for the average person in the United States and in much of the rest of the world is higher than at any time in history. At the same time, many of the world's people are still trapped in impoverished conditions, but even many poor areas of the world are becoming less poor.

So the world, and especially the United States and other developed countries, are enjoying prosperity on a scale unlike any in history. But does this kind of prosperity translate into a better and more secure life in the long term? How should we react to the material riches made available to us?

A potential peril associated with prosperity is that all too often it can result in people forgetting about God. Instead of trusting in God, it's all too easy to trust in one's wealth and be consumed with material pursuits. In this article I'll discuss some pitfalls of prosperity we need to be mindful of.

"Two things I request of You (Deprive me not before I die): Remove falsehood and lies far from me; Give me neither poverty nor riches—Feed me with the food allotted to me; **Lest I be full and deny You, And say, 'Who is the Lord?'** Or lest I be poor and steal, And profane the name of my God" (Proverbs 30:7-9).

Notice that part of the request is **not** to be given riches, "Lest I be full and deny You [God], And say, 'Who is the Lord?'"

Jesus remarked about how riches may have a spiritual impact. "Assuredly, I say to you that **it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.** And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. 'When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, 'Who then can be saved?' But Jesus looked at them and said to them, 'With men this is impossible, but **with God all things are possible.**' Then Peter answered and said to Him, 'See, **we have left all and followed You.** Therefore what shall we have?'" Jesus replied, "... **everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life**" (Matthew 19:23-27, 29).

**Being a Christian, a true disciple of Jesus Christ, requires sacrifice.** It means being willing to give, and if necessary to give up everything to serve God. That doesn't mean you can't be prosperous and also be a real Christian, but it's not necessarily easy. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job and others were rich, and yet faithful to God. But they put God ahead of riches and wealth. Not often typical of people who are wealthy.

There are only a few countries on earth that have a higher standard of living than the United States. But as we have become more prosperous in today's world, we have become less virtuous as a people. Interest in religion, especially Christianity, is declining in the United States.

"Never before in American history has religion—and in the U.S., that inherently means Christianity—been so tested. Cultural distractions abound and church attendance is dropping, and faith leaders mired in scandal are struggling to figure out how to connect with the next generations of potential churchgoers.

.....  
"People of faith are still a majority, with more than 75% of the country

ascribing to some religion. All combined, Christianity counts for nearly 63% of the population.

"Yet all the growth is on the other side of the spectrum, the so-called 'Nones,' or do not have a religious affiliation. That includes atheists and agnostics, but the real stunning rise within the Nones has been those who don't so much actively question or reject God, as much as they don't see a reason to bother with religion.

"Call them the apathetics.

"The apathetics don't attend services, don't ascribe to any one creed, and often don't even have much familiarity with the faith world. They account for a bigger share of the population than the agnostics and atheists combined, and their numbers are growing by millions each year.

.....  
"For the first time ever this year, the Nones are the largest demographic in the U.S., with 23.1% of the population, overtaking the Catholics and the evangelicals, Mr. Burge [Ryan, a political scientist at an Illinois university] calculates. Among those ages 18 to 22—the vanguard of Generation Z—more than 40% belong to the Nones, according [to] his numbers, which are based on the General Social Survey, a massive trove of sociological data.

"The increasingly chaotic religious landscape is causing friction, particularly where the beliefs of the faithful clash with the culture.

"In Hollywood, Christianity is portrayed somewhere between a comedy and a disease, though some other faiths fare better.

.....  
"In the nation's courtrooms, centuries of doctrinal Christian belief, which underpinned the nation's laws, are being challenged by a smaller but politically powerful LGBTQ community.

.....  
"The Public Religion Research Institute said the Nones in the U.S. are growing at a stunning rate. In

2010, they accounted for 18%. By 2012 they were 20% and have grown 1% each year since. As of 2018, 26% of Americans had no affiliation.

.....  
"There are a host of theories about what has happened to faith in the U.S.—and to Christianity, in particular.

"One is that the U.S. is following the path trod by Europe, **with economic prosperity correlating with less religion.**

.....  
"In 1976, mainline Protestants made up 30% of the country. Now they're 10%.

.....  
"Mr. McConnell at LifeWay [Research] says church leaders say that even in the last decade they've seen a startling drop in engagement. People are spending less time reading the Bible on their own or even praying.

"Kids' sports and just the myriad of activities that schools are offering for kids, and media choices and things like that, that's a lot of competition for a church and just vying for people's time and attention. It begins to start a spiral of less time, less relationships, less knowledge,' he said." ("Losing our Religion: America becoming 'pagan' as Christianity cedes to culture," Stephen Dinan, [washingtontimes.com](http://washingtontimes.com), 12-30-2019).

The precipitous decline of interest in professing Christianity, especially, is illustrated by another statistic. **In 1948 ninety-one percent of the population of the United States identified as Christian. In 2019 it was only sixty-five percent. Those claiming preference for Protestantism has declined in the same period from sixty-nine percent to thirty-five percent** (cf. "What is your religious preference: Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, another religion, or no religion?" [www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com), retrieved January 23, 2020).

What is happening in our nation and other professedly Christian nations in

the Western world should not surprise anyone familiar with the Bible. **God through Moses prophesied and warned us of what would become of us in the latter days, as we became rich.**

"When I have brought them to the land flowing with milk and honey, of which I swore to their fathers, and they have **eaten and filled themselves and grown fat, then they will turn to other gods** and serve them; and they will provoke Me and break My covenant. **Then it shall be, when many evils and troubles have come upon them,** that this song will testify against them as a witness; for it will not be forgotten in the mouths of their descendants, for I know the inclination of their behavior today, even before I have brought them to the land of which I swore to give them" (Deuteronomy 31:20-21).

Moses prophesied, "For I know that after my death **you will become utterly corrupt, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, because you will do evil in the sight of the Lord,** to provoke Him to anger through the work of your hands. Then Moses spoke in the hearing of all the assembly of Israel the words of this song until they were ended" (Deuteronomy 31:29-30).

"He [God] made him [the peoples descended from Israel, which include British descended people and most of the early white settlers in the United States] ride in the heights of the earth, That he might eat the produce of the fields; He made him draw honey from the rock, And oil from the flinty rock; Curds from the cattle, and milk of the flock, With fat of lambs; And rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, With the choicest wheat; And you drank wine, the blood of the grapes. But Jeshurun [Hebrew (*yeshûrûn*) pronounced *yesh-oo-roon*, a symbolical name for Israel, which is from *yashar*, meaning *upright*] grew fat and kicked [or

despised]; You grew fat, you grew thick, You are obese! Then **he forsook God who made him, And scornfully esteemed the Rock of his salvation.** They provoked Him to jealousy with foreign gods; With abominations they provoked Him to anger" (Deuteronomy 32:13-16; note that even though the past tense is used in this translation, this is a prophecy of future events, for the era approaching the end of this age).

The chapter goes on to list other sins and the punishment God will send as a result.

Since 2019, it's reported that more than 7,600 U.S. congregations—about a quarter of the total of what had been the nation's third largest religious denomination, the United Methodist Church, have separated from that group, primarily over same sex marriage and ordination of homosexuals. The majority of Methodist Churches in the United States favor endorsing homosexual clergy and same sex marriage. However many of the denomination's churches in the South and the majority internationally are not in favor of having homosexual ministers and participating in same sex marriage, thus the split ("Methodist Church proposes breaking up over gay marriage," [washingtontimes.com](http://washingtontimes.com), January 3, 2020; [engagegodfirst.org/methodisms-division](http://engagegodfirst.org/methodisms-division), retrieved February 19, 2026).

This is just an indication of what is happening in many Church denominations in this country and many other countries, especially in prosperous western nations. It's become rather common to see LGBTQ flags flying on church flagpoles in many places in the country.

God warned through the prophet Isaiah, "The look on their countenance witnesses against them, And **they declare their sin as Sodom;** They do not hide it. Woe to their soul! For they have brought evil upon themselves. Say to the

righteous that it shall be well with them, For they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, For the reward of his hands shall be given him. As for My people, children are their oppressors, And women rule over them. O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, And destroy the way of your paths" (Isaiah 3:9-12).

From God's standpoint, it's not the role of ministers or Churches claiming to be Christian to foster, facilitate, and participate in promoting and encouraging sin. To do so invites God's judgment.

Here's an interesting comment from an editorial writer for the *Washington Times* in response to the news about the Methodist Church split. "There's actually a larger matter to mull here and it's one that concerns the entire Christian community, the whole grouping of declared followers of Jesus Christ, and it's one that goes like this: The Bible doesn't lie. Ministers might; pastors can; churches as bodies and staffed entities certainly could and would, if pragmatics and politics trumped enough traditional teachings. But the Bible as a book?"

"Its words are infallible. And it should be the priority go-to for individuals—even for those individuals who think their church leaders do just fine telling them the word of God. The Bible, in the end, will light the right way" ("United Methodist Church split sets sin on display," Cheryl K. Chumley, [washingtontimes.com](http://washingtontimes.com), January 3, 2020).

What does the Bible say about listening to unfaithful Churches, or unfaithful ministers? "Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; They speak a vision of their own heart, Not from the mouth of the Lord. They continually say to those who despise Me, "The Lord has said, 'You shall have peace'"'; And to everyone who walks according to the dictates

of his own heart, they say, "No evil shall come upon you." For who has stood in the counsel of the Lord, And has perceived and heard His word? Who has marked His word and heard it? Behold, a whirlwind of the Lord has gone forth in fury -- A violent whirlwind! It will fall violently on the head of the wicked. The anger of the Lord will not turn back Until He has executed and performed the thoughts of His heart. In the latter days you will understand it perfectly. I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in My counsel, And had caused My people to hear My words, Then they would have turned them from their evil way And from the evil of their doings" (Jeremiah 23:16-22).

Sodom is used several times in the Bible as an example of God's judgment on wickedness. What were the circumstances of Sodom's sinful state? One circumstance was their wealth, the abundance of their material goods. It led to pride, and a disdainful, arrogant, lawless spirit. God prophesies of the peoples descended from Israel today: "As I live," says the Lord God, "neither your sister Sodom nor her daughters have done as you and your daughters have done. Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had **pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me**; therefore I took them away as I saw fit" (Ezekiel 16:48-50).

God warns of turning from him in the pursuit of wealth, or when one has acquired wealth. And remember, while you may not consider yourself wealthy, most of us in the United States, and many in much of the rest of the world, are wealthy by historical standards. Jesus said in a parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' So he said, 'I will

pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.'" But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' **So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.** Then He said to His disciples, 'Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds? And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith? And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. **But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you**" (Luke 12:16-31).

And in another parable Jesus said, "There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then

he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.' Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'" (Luke 16:19-31).

The rich man's problem was not that he was rich, but that he trusted in his riches, and refused to hear God.

God has a message for the church of the Laodiceans. It indicates that not only the world in general, but the Church of God itself would exhibit apathy and a degree of spiritual indifference as the end of this evil age approaches.

"And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: "I know your works, that you are **neither cold nor hot**. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, **I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'** -- **and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked**—I counsel you to buy from Me **gold refined in the fire**, that you may be rich; and white garments,

that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. **As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.** Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 3:14-22).

Lethargy, apathy, especially in spiritual matters, in studying the Bible, for example, in praying, in seeking God, characterizes our nation, and to a large extent our world, and, unfortunately, to a large extent, the Church of God. If and when we conclude we're spiritually rich, when we get to thinking we've learned

everything we need to know, and thinking we've made all the progress we need to make, when we become comfortable with the condition of Satan's world, when we fail to earnestly pray and study the Bible daily, **we stand in mortal danger!**

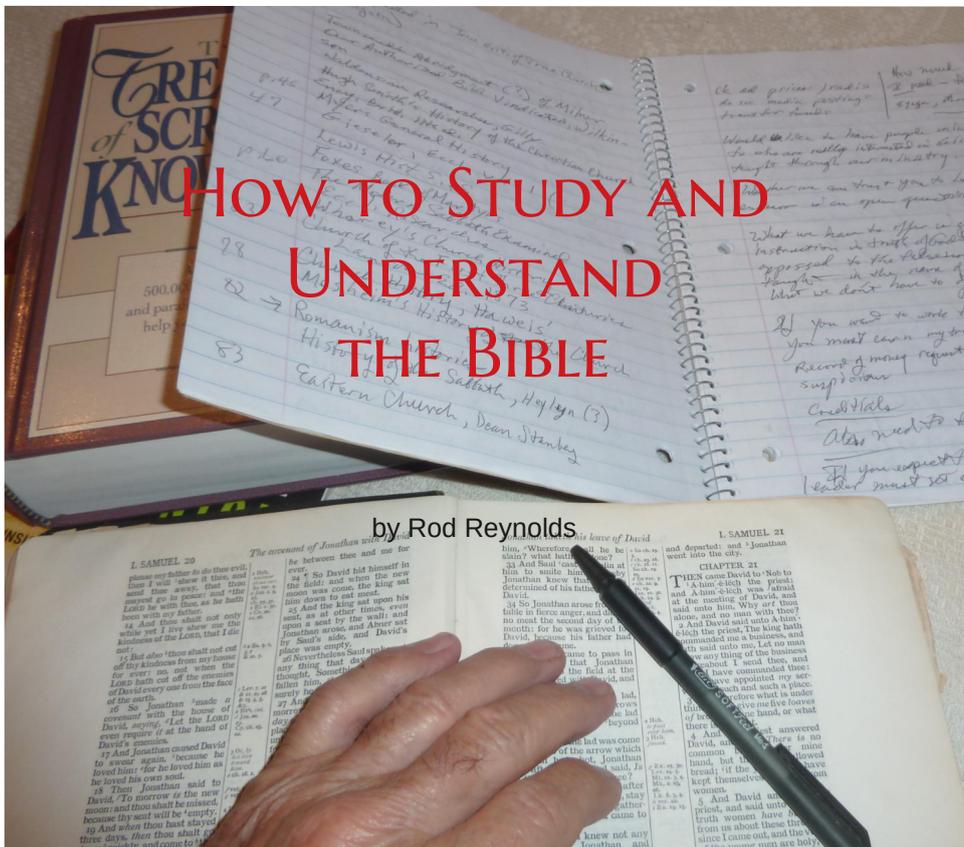
It appears, given the condition of the world we live in, that Jesus Christ's second coming is not far off. He will establish a new world government of peace, justice, and universal joy (Isaiah 9:6-7; 35:10; 51:3).

But before that, the Bible warns of a “great tribulation” to befall nations as the end of this age approaches. It is called “Jacob’s trouble,” and will affect primarily the nations descended from Jacob, or Israel. It will affect not only the Jewish state of Israel, but also the United States, Great Britain, and some of the nations in northwest and west central Europe. It will also affect many, possibly the majority, in the Church of God (cf. Matthew 24:21;

Jeremiah 30:7; Revelation 6:9-11; 7:14). Other calamities will follow, affecting all the nations of the world, according to the Bible's prophecies, as human beings the world over will reap what they have sown (Proverbs 1:29-31; Hosea 8:7; Romans 2:5-11; Galatians 6:7-8; Revelation 9:20-21).

**So we must take warning, stir ourselves out of our lethargic and apathetic state, and be zealous for God.**

The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: **“Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life”** (1 Timothy 6:17-18).



# HOW TO STUDY AND UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE

by Rod Reynolds

**The Bible is the world's best selling book, with estimates of five billion or more copies of the Bible printed. But how many people really under-**

**stand the Bible, even among those who read it regularly? Do you? Would you like to understand it better?**

How important is it to study and understand the Bible? Just this: in the Bible is revealed the **Word of God** to mankind preserved in writing. **God reveals himself** to us through his Word. Through his Word we can learn what God is like. What his purpose is. What principles he upholds. What our relationship to him should be.

Jesus Christ is the living Word of God (John 1:1; Revelation 19:13). Jesus Christ is the Spokesman, the Revelator, of God to man. God's Word has been revealed through the Spirit of God to men who preserved it in writing in the Scriptures (2 Peter 1:20-21).

The word “disciple,” is a very common expression in the Bible for the followers of Jesus. “Disciple” means learner, or student. Jesus said “learn from me” (Matthew 11:29). To understand, believe and live according to God's Word is to have eternal life (John 6:63, 68). The source of godly wisdom is the Word of God, the Scriptures, the Bible. “...the Holy Scriptures ...are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in

Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15). Effective Bible study then can lead you to eternal salvation (Proverbs 3:21-23; 4:5-6, 13).

Unless we are learning and growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ we are in danger of losing out (2 Peter 3:17-18). We can learn and grow in grace and knowledge through effective Bible study.

No animal can use language in the same way man can. Dogs can learn simple commands. But only humans can communicate abstract ideas in terms of language. In that respect among others we are more like God than animals. God gave us the capacity to learn by the word so we could eventually learn what he is like and become like him. Are we using the gift of intellect as God intended?

In this article you will find twelve keys that will help you to better understand the Bible.

#### 1) Set aside regular time for study.

You should make it a point to study the Bible every day (Deuteronomy 17:14, 18-20; Proverbs 8:33-36). It's spiritual nourishment (Job 23:12; Matthew 4:4). Bible study should be something you delight in, and look forward to every day (Acts 17:11). Setting a specific time for Bible study may prove helpful. If you don't plan it, you will likely let it slip (2 Chronicles 19:3; Ezra 7:10). Prepare – plan – to study and seek God.

#### 2) Pray for understanding.

A true understanding comes to you from God as you seek to learn of him and practice obedience (Proverbs 2:1-7; Psalms 111:10; Psalms 119:33-38; Proverbs 3:5-8.)

#### 3) Seek correction and understanding.

The mistake of many in their approach to God's Word is that they seek to find in the scriptures some way of justifying themselves. They ferret out some obscure scripture

which can be twisted to support what they want to do or some preconceived notion. The proper approach is to study with an attitude of receiving instruction from God in humility. You must want to be taught of God. God's Word cuts deep, like a two edged sword. If you let it, it will judge your inmost thoughts, show you where you are wrong and need to change. It will reveal to you the flaws in your character which need correction (Hebrews 4:12-13; Jeremiah 10:23-24; Isaiah 66:1-2; Proverbs 6:23; II Timothy 3:16).

#### 4) Realize the Bible is inspired.

The entire Bible—both Old and New Testaments—is the inspired Word of God (II Timothy 3:16; II Peter 1:21). When studying the Bible, bear in mind it is God speaking to you. Reverence his Word and let it inspire and motivate you to grow spiritually into his likeness (1 Peter 1:13-16).

#### 5) Let the Bible interpret the Bible.

Though some things seem confusing and are not readily understood, keep in mind that God is not the author of confusion and there are no genuine contradictions in God's Word, when it's properly understood (1 Corinthians 14:33; John 10:35; II Timothy 2:15; John 17:17). Examine the context and gather **every scripture** on a given subject or doctrine. Use passages that are clear in their meaning to interpret and shed light on those more difficult to understand. Information about a particular subject may be scattered in bits and pieces over many different books of the Bible.

“Theology is the whole meaning of Scripture — the sense taught in the whole of Scripture, as that sense is modified, limited, and explained by Scripture itself. It is a consistently interpreted representation of the statements of the Bible, on the various facts, doctrines, and precepts, which the book of God reveals” (*The Bible Handbook*, Joseph Angus, Samuel Green, p. 201). And further, “...the Spirit of God does not communicate to the mind of even a teachable, obedient, and devout Christian, any doc-

trine or meaning of Scripture which is not contained already in Scripture itself. He makes men wise *up to* what is written, but not beyond it” (*ibid.*, p. 179). The words of Scripture understood in harmonious relation to the whole of Scripture are the proper basis for interpreting Scripture. “For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, Line upon line, line upon line, Here a little, there a little,” is how the teachings of God's Word are to be understood. The Scripture was written in such a way that ignoring this principle, “...they might go and fall backward, and be broken And snared and caught” (Isaiah 28:10, 13).

The Bible is a book of symbols, or parables and analogies, type and antitype. But the Bible interprets its own symbols (e.g., John 21:17; Psalm 100:3; Matthew 10:6; I Peter 2:25; Revelation 19:7-9; Matthew 22:2; etc.). One common source of error and deception is putting **one's own interpretation** on symbolic figures used in Scripture, **rather than following the explanations of Scripture** itself (2 Peter 1:20).

#### 6) Keep an open mind.

Much religious confusion is in the world. You must prove the truth and learn how to distinguish it from error. In so doing it's necessary to maintain a positive attitude toward God's Word and keep your mind open to the truth. Often scholars hostile to God's Word have babbled about alleged errors or contradictions in the Bible. Yet the critics themselves have been proven wrong time and again as new knowledge has come to light. For example, the book of Daniel was said to have been in error because the available historical sources made no mention of king Belshazzar. Finally in 1854 archaeologists dug up documents from ancient Ur written by Nabonidus, King of the Babylonian Empire, which showed that Belshazzar had been made a co-regent with his father Nabonidus (*Archaeology and the Bible*, G. Frederick Owen, p. 142). The detailed accuracy of Daniel is proven by the fact that not only is mentioned Belshazzar, the king forgotten to history, but also that Bels-

hazzar made Daniel the *third* ruler in the kingdom, behind himself and his father. This is only one example of many where critics of Bible have been proven wrong (2 Peter 3:1-4, 8-9, 14-18).

Many doctrinal errors can also be corrected if you are willing to accept truth that can be clearly proven from the Bible, but is new to you. Many people have seen certain truths but have been unwilling to forsake error. They then stop growing in the knowledge of God (Isaiah 8:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:2).

### 7) Prove God's way is right by living it.

Don't approach Bible study as an academic exercise only. Rather approach Bible study as your opportunity every day to drink in of the words of life. Look at the Bible as the source of instruction to guide your thinking, your conduct, your approach to life, your philosophy of life, knowing that if you live according to those instructions you'll have strength of character, peace of mind, spiritual riches, and the promise of life for all eternity. Remember that character is knowing and doing what is right, and God's blessings come with obedience (1 John 3:22; John 13:17; James 1:25; Malachi 3:10; John 8:31-36).

### 8) Study by subject.

It's all too easy to rationalize a lack of Bible study with the plea, "I don't know what to study." Sit down and make a list of subjects you need to know more about (Sabbath, heaven, hell, prayer, obedience, love, faith, etc.). By studying a subject in detail you will vastly increase your depth of understanding. It's important that you believe the truth not just because someone else told you but because you have dug into the Bible and searched it out yourself (Acts 17:11). Faithful ministers of Jesus Christ can point you in the right direction, but then you need to study and learn and understand each doctrine through your own efforts as well. If you are faithful, someday you'll be called upon to teach and instruct others.

You need to be preparing yourself to do so effectively (Revelation 20:6; Malachi. 2:7; Isaiah 30:20-21; Hebrews 5:11-13).

### 9) Mark key verses and passages.

A marking system can save time in locating scriptures and provide a quick recall of subject matter. Develop a system that works for you. I sometimes use margins to write down other scriptures for reference or explanations of difficult scriptures. I also try to memorize where I can find Scriptures I may need to refer to to explain a doctrine. Talk to several people to see how they do it for ideas you can use. There are a variety of Bible note taking suggestions and tools available on the Internet you may want to explore as well.

### 10) Meditate as you study and re-view.

Stop and think about what you're reading, about what the Scripture is saying. Ask yourself as you read each word, each sentence and paragraph, "Do I understand this?" It's the tendency of many to simply read over things they don't understand without ever even realizing it. If you find unfamiliar words, look them up in a dictionary or lexicon. If phrases seem contradictory or don't make sense begin searching for proper understanding, as you also pray for it (Proverbs 2:1-9). Then when you do understand reflect on the ways in which you can apply what you have learned (Psalms 1:1-3; Psalms 119:97-99).

### 11) Read the Bible through.

Read the Bible from cover to cover as a separate project. Insure nothing is missed. This can broaden your perspective as to story flow. And as you read, keep notes of Scriptures you'll want to go back to later and study in greater depth. This can provide you with a rich source of interesting subjects to study. Some Bibles, for example Nelson's New King James Version, have in the back of at least some editions a plan for reading the Bible through in a year.

### 12) Learn to effectively use study aids and historical sources.

The Messenger Church of God has published a number of revealing articles and sermons covering important Biblical doctrines (available at [cogmessenger.org](http://cogmessenger.org)). Take advantage of these by studying them, and use them as a "springboard" to further understanding. Take the time to look up Scriptures referred to in the material presented. What you find in the material provided by this source may go against the grain of what you have been told elsewhere. But it's your responsibility to prove from the Bible itself the truth of your beliefs: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21; KJV). If you find something you've been taught in the past is demonstrably wrong, have the courage and integrity of mind to admit the error and change. You can't grow in knowledge if you're unwilling to abandon false beliefs.

Keep in mind that the Bible is inspired, but it was not inspired in the English language. There is no truly "inspired" translation of the Bible into English, in the same sense the Bible was inspired in the original languages. While it's not necessary to be fluent in Hebrew and Greek to understand the Bible's message, gaining at least some familiarity with the original languages can be helpful in developing a more clear understanding of many Bible passages. Commentaries, lexicons, Bible dictionaries, an interlinear translation, and having access to several different good translations, can all be helpful in giving you insight into the original languages of the Bible. Of course, if you want to delve deeper into the original languages you could consult a grammar of Biblical Hebrew or Greek.

For those interested in the latter, a useful introduction to the Biblical languages is provided in *Do It Yourself Hebrew and Greek*, by Edward W. Goodrick. The book is designed for serious Bible students who want "to discover as accurately as possible what the Bible meant in its original languages but who is not in a position to master those languages." It introduces the alphabets and basic gram-

mar of Hebrew and Greek, and provides instructions on the use of various language tools available to Bible students.

A Bible handbook can provide a convenient source of background information (*Angus-Green*, *Halley's*, *Unger's* are good ones). Most useful is a concordance, of which there are several. *Strong's Concordance* has handy lexicons in the back so you can find meanings of original language words. A Bible atlas (such as *Zondervan NIV Atlas of the Bible*, by Carl G. Rasmussen, among others) can give you topographical, geographical and historical information. Topical or annotated Bibles can be useful (*Companion Bible*, *Nave's*, etc.). Popular Bible dictionaries include *Easton's*, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, and others. Commentaries can help, but remember they and similar resources may in certain respects reflect unsound opinions and prejudices of the author. Let the Bible interpret itself. Often resources like these referred to can be accessed for little or no cost at a public library or on the Internet.

If you have a computer, it would be wise to invest in a good Bible software program. Some don't cost very much, others can cost hundreds of dollars, and still others are free. One of several free programs available currently is the "Sword Project," (featuring downloadable modules). Graphic front ends are available for Windows, Mac and Linux (and some devices). Available modules include many Bible translations, Hebrew and Greek Bibles, apocrypha, commentaries, dictionaries and lexicons, historical resources, books, maps, etc. More information is available at <http://www.crosswire.org>. Another free Bible software program worth mentioning is E-Sword ([e-sword.net](http://e-sword.net)). It has versions for Windows, Mac, iPad, iPhone, and Android. Does not have a Linux version but I run it on Linux using Wine. There are thousands of free add-on modules for E-Sword, including books, commentaries, dictionaries, etc., and some paid modules as well.

The Internet is a trove of other re-

sources as well. Many encyclopedias, historical books, etc., can now be obtained at little or no cost from the Internet. There are many sources but some worth checking out include Project Gutenberg (<http://www.gutenberg.org/>); Project Gutenberg Australia ([gutenberg.net.au](http://gutenberg.net.au)); Google books ([books.google.com](http://books.google.com)); Internet Archive ([www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)). Amazon ([www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)) also has many books available for download free or at very low cost, among which, for example, is Rodkinson's twenty volume translation of the Babylonian Talmud.

It's important to remember that the Bible is a book of history, one might even say a book of history — past, present and future — understanding that much of the Bible is prophecy, or history written in advance. The Bible is replete with types and antitypes, recurring themes and patterns expressed often in historical and prophetic events — varying in detail, but similar in outline and substance. Not only is the Bible a book of history, but it is a book that has a history, that is, the various books of the Bible were each written in a particular historical setting, and reflect to a degree the language and the cultural and historical milieu in which they were written. An accurate knowledge of history is an important aid to understanding, and is sometimes essential to a full understanding of Biblical teaching.

For example, in the book of Daniel are prophecies concerning four great empires whose influence extends to the far reaches of the earth, to be succeeded by the Kingdom of God. The four are all discussed in chapters 2 and 7, and every chapter of the book relates to one or more of them in some way or other. The first of these empires or great kingdoms is identified as that of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2:37-38), the empire of Babylon (Daniel 1:1, *et al.*), also known in history as the Chaldean Empire. The second and third great kingdoms are identified as the combined empire of Media and Persia, and the empire of Greece, also known as the Macedonian Empire (Daniel 8:20-21). But the fourth empire is nowhere in the Bible directly identified by name.

The Babylonian Empire was conquered and succeeded in 539 B.C. by the Medo-Persian Empire, which swallowed up its territories and peoples (Daniel 8:3-4, 20). The latter was in turn conquered by Alexander and his army in a series of battles ending in 330 B.C., and the Persian Empire, its territories and peoples were absorbed into the Grecian realm (Daniel 8:5-7). Upon Alexander's death a struggle for succession ended with the Empire being divided under four rulers, as Daniel had prophesied (Daniel 7:6; 8:21-22). Each of these four surviving kingdoms was eventually overrun and integrated into the Roman Empire. By carefully comparing the historical record with prophecies of the Bible the fourth great kingdom of the book of Daniel is clearly identified as the Roman Empire. **Without a knowledge found in external sources of historical events related to these prophecies, we would have little understanding of them.**

Also, each book of the Bible was written against a particular historical and cultural background. The message of the Bible is not limited by its historical and cultural context, contrary to the opinion of those who seek to malign and ridicule Scripture. Nevertheless, **an understanding of the context of its history and culture can be an important aid to understanding.** For example, understanding what the term "law" (or Hebrew: *Torah*; or Greek: *Nomos*) meant to the Jews of the New Testament era can be of considerable help in developing a thorough and correct understanding of New Testament teachings related to law.

So learn as much as you can about history, particularly as it relates to Scripture. Besides general histories, histories dealing with specific nations, cultures or subjects can be useful. *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Joachim Jeremias), *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, and *The Temple* (both by Alfred Edersheim) are excellent sources of information on Jewish culture at the time of Jesus Christ, as are the works of Josephus.

Books on archaeology can also be

helpful. Some useful ones are: *World's Lost and Found, Archaeology and the Bible* (G. Frederick Owen); *Archaeology and Bible History* (Joseph Free and Howard Vos); *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Kenneth A. Kitchen); *The Bible in Its World* (Kenneth A. Kitchen). Not everything in such sources is necessarily accurate however. Weigh what you read carefully against the Scriptures and other publications offering viewpoints worthy of consideration on controversial matters. Remember, "There is no wisdom or understanding or counsel against the Lord" (Proverbs 21:30). Another resource for up to date information relating to Bible archaeology is the website maintained by Associates for Biblical Research (<https://biblearchaeology.org>) and their magazine *Bible and Spade*.

*Documents from Old Testament Times*, D. Winton Thomas, Ed., is a worthwhile book featuring English translations of extra-biblical documents relating to the Old Testament. Pritchard's *Ancient Near East* is similar. Both of these may as of now be downloaded free of charge at <https://archive.org>.

*An Encyclopedia of World History* (Langer) provides a useful summary and timeline of important historical events. Other encyclopedias, especially the 1911 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, can also provide useful summaries of historical information relating to the Bible. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of useful historical sources, but only a sample to which could be added many more.

Remember that Bible study is as important to you spiritually as food is to you physically. Partake daily of the bread of life. Spend time letting God teach you. Following these principles should make you a better student and make more effective use of your time. They will make Bible study more interesting and effective, and can make the Bible a more effective tool for you as you strive to let God build in you his character.

**Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.**

**1 Thessalonians 5:21 KJV**

**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;**

**A good understanding have all  
those who do His commandments.**

**Psalms 111:10**

**Be diligent to present yourself approved to God,**

**a worker who does not need to be ashamed,  
rightly dividing the word of truth.**

**II Timothy 2:15**

**I will meditate on Your precepts, And  
contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in**

**Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.**

**Psalms 119:15-16**

**Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit,**

**hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking,  
as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of  
the word, that you may grow thereby.**

**I Peter 2:1-2**

**Your testimonies, which You have commanded,**

**Are righteous and very faithful. My zeal**

**has consumed me, Because my enemies**

**have forgotten Your words. Your word is  
very pure; Therefore Your servant loves it.**

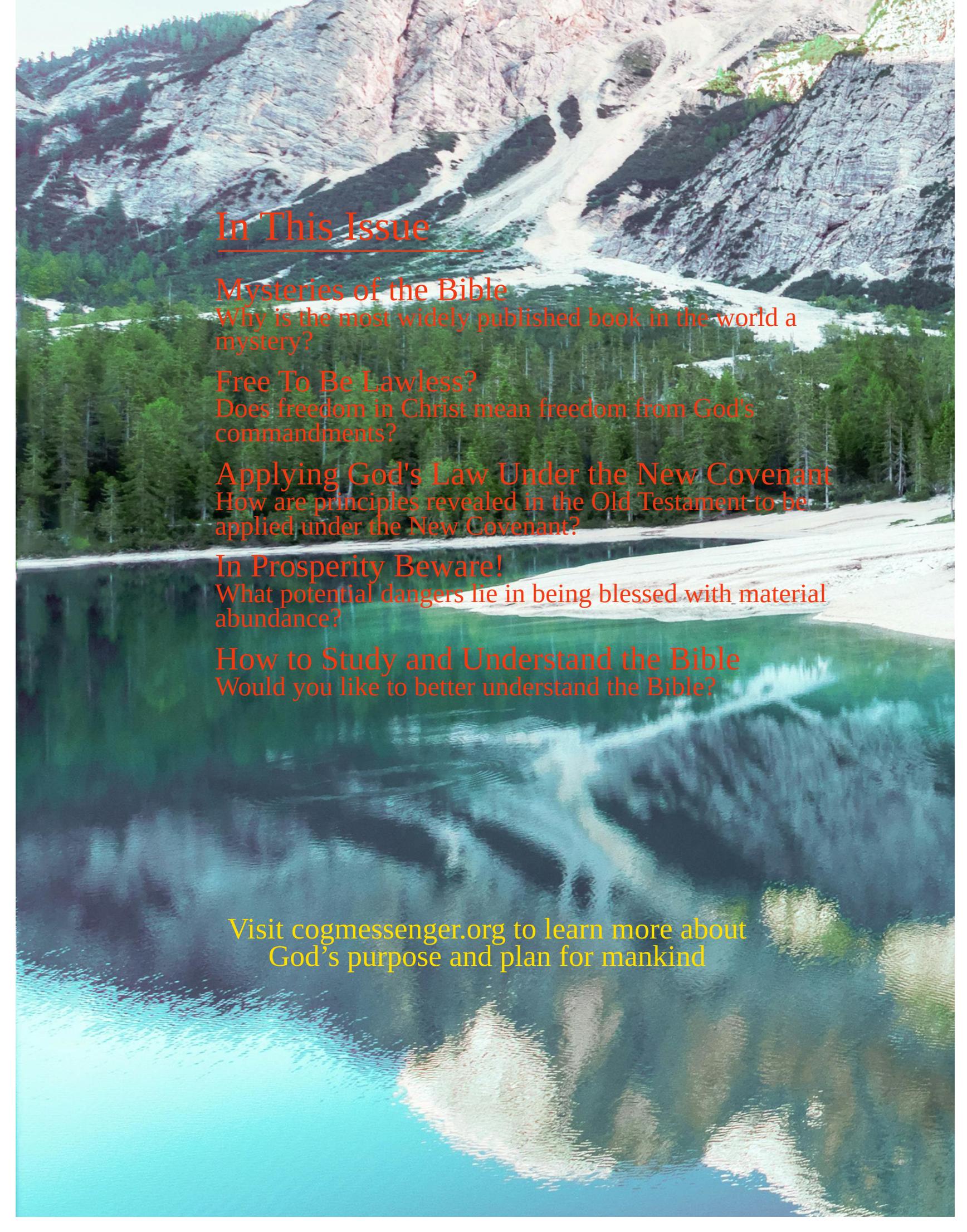
**I am small and despised, Yet I do not forget**

**Your precepts. Your righteousness is an**

**everlasting righteousness, And**

**Your law is truth.**

**Psalms 119:138-142**



## In This Issue

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