

THE DEEP THINGS OF GOD
(Some “in depth” thoughts about the New Covenant)
By Boyce Mouton

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” - but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.” (1 Cor 2:9-10)

A common problem, both then and now, is the need for spiritual depth. This was especially true at Corinth. Please note these sad words of Paul: **“Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly-mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. . .” (1 Cor 3:1-3)** Shallow soil does not produce giant trees, and shallow thinking does not produce mature Christians. The letter to the Hebrews is another example of teaching designed for the immature. Please consider, (Jesus) **“was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek. We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.” (Heb. 5:10 - 14).**

The next chapter offers this inspired advice: **“Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so” (Heb 6:1-3)**

A “covenant” is binding. **“It is better not to vow, than to make a vow and not fulfill it” (Eccl. 5:5).** That’s why we need to understand the terms of a covenant before entering into it. When the disciples, for example, understood the binding nature of marriage they said: **“If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry” (Matt 19:10).** Joshua foolishly made a covenant with the Gibeonites without seeking counsel from the Lord (Josh. 9:3 - 27). Jephthah made a foolish promise that required him to sacrifice his own daughter (Judges 11:30 - 40). Herod made a foolish promise that resulted in the death of John the Baptist (Matt. 14:6 - 12). When the servant of Abraham promised to seek a wife for Isaac, he wisely secured release from his oath if her family refused to let her go (Gen. 24:41). We also need to be wise and to “count the cost” before entering into a covenant. Human courts render judgements every day based on what two or more parties have covenanted to do. Understanding human covenants, however, is not nearly as important as understanding the nature of our covenant with God.

Even though the Hebrew letter was written to those who were “slow to learn” it still provides important information regarding the New Covenant. Please consider: **“For if there had been**

nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. But God found fault with the people and said: ‘The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.’ By calling this covenant ‘new,’ he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear ” (Heb 8:7-13).

Jeremiah 31:33 is again quoted in Heb. 10:16: “ **This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.**”

Note that the nature of the New Covenant involves promises made by God more than commandments given to man. These promises from God grow even more precious in these “last days” as evil men and imposters go from bad to worse (2 Tim. 3:13).

REJECTING NEW REVELATIONS

As we begin our study, let us face the painful fact that throughout history the people of God have consistently rejected the prophets of God. Even Jesus was rejected! He came unto His own and His own received Him not (Jn. 1:11). Centuries before Christ was born Isaiah knew this would happen. He predicted that Jesus would preach to people who had ears but wouldn’t hear, and eyes but wouldn’t see (Is. 6:9, 10). The people who “will not” are to be pitied more than the ones who “cannot” see. Peter put it bluntly: “**Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders**” (Acts 3:17).

After God’s people crucified Jesus because of “ignorance”, they also killed Stephen for the same reason. Stephen, as you recall, rebuked them with these stinging words: “**You stiff-necked people, with un-circumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him- you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it.**” (Acts 7:51-53). Immediately after Stephen said this, the mob became “furious”, “gnashed their teeth at him”, “covered their ears”, and then stoned him to death (Acts 7:54 - 60). As we probe more deeply into our study of the New Covenant, let us guard against this age old tendency to “cover our ears” and reject information from God simply because it is “new”.

A further problem is presented by the fact that an in depth study requires mental energy and

diligence. Some, unfortunately, are too lazy to exercise such diligence. They will bury their talent in the ground before they will even try to understand the deep things of God. Remember! Even a good seed cannot produce much fruit until it is planted in good soil (Matt. 13:16 - 23)

The good news is that we are not in the struggle alone. When we “take His yoke” we can “learn from Him” (Matt. 11:29). God has promised to never leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5). He has also promised to help us learn by revealing truth to His children.. That’s what our text states, **“God has revealed it to us by His Spirit”(1 Cor. 2:10)**.. Even though God has ordained that men should seek Him (Acts 17:27) the world, in it’s wisdom still does not know God (1 Cor. 1:21). That’s why God has to “reveal” Himself! God is a Jealous God, however, and does not reveal Himself to those who are casual and nonchalant. Jeremiah said it best: **“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13)**.

Abraham is a good example of diligence. God revealed to him things that He apparently revealed to anyone else (Gen. 18:16 - 19). Abraham loved God so much that he was called the “friend of God” (Ja. 2:23). As you know, Abraham not only believed God, but also obeyed Him (Ja. 2:20 - 24). As children of God we need to do the same. “Faith without works is dead!” (Ja. 2:26) If we seek God with all of our hearts, however, as Abraham did, perhaps He will also “reveal” to us deep things He does not reveal to others.

While the example of Abraham is fresh on our minds, let us focus our mental and spiritual energies on a deeper and better understanding of the New Covenant. This Covenant, while frequently not studied or understood, is foundational to God’s eternal plan. To try and understand the genius of Christianity without understanding the New Covenant is like trying to build a building without the Cornerstone. If we do not grasp the revolutionary nature of this “new” relationship we are in danger of living B.C. lives in an A.D. world. Therefore, let us do what Abraham did.

- Let us lay aside every weight and the sin that can so easily beset us, and run with perseverance the race that is set before us (Heb. 12:1).
- Let us love God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength and search for that eternal city whose Builder and Maker is God (Heb. 11:10).
- Let us remember that spiritual wisdom and understanding come from God (Col. 1:9)
- Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will clarify our thinking.
- Without divine help even highly educated scholars are powerless to understand the deep things of God. Jesus said it like this: **“I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.” (Matt 11:25)**
- So, let’s take a deeper look at the New Covenant. Let us “gird up the loins” of our mind remembering that the sheep of God are empowered by God to recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd (Jn. 10:4, 5).

WE ALL NEED GOD'S HELP

The followers of Christ, as you know, are not all unlettered peasants. Many of the world's most brilliant scientists are believers. The late Dr. Henry Morris wrote a book titled "*Men of Science, Men of God*". In this book Dr. Morris gave brief biographical sketches of 101 scientists who were pioneers in their different fields of scientific discipline. These brilliant thinkers were indeed both men of science and men of God. Even though these scientists were highly intelligent, they still recognized their need for help from the Holy Spirit. Dr. George Washington Carver, for example, read his Bible every day and believed that God helped him make his scientific discoveries. The fact that he is famous as the "Father of Synthetics", should cause his critics to take a closer look at his life. While Dr. Carver is famous, his critics are forgotten. Men no longer laugh at this humble man who readily acknowledged his need for divine help. If such humility seems unscientific, please take another look at history. History has a way of exalting the humble and humbling the exalted.

Think about this! If intelligence is all that is necessary to understand the mysteries of God, then the angels would have understood them. They didn't! Peter stated specifically that the angels longed to understand these mysteries but were not able (1 Pet. 1:12). Jesus said that: "**No man can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again**" (Jn. 3:3). Paul wrote: "**The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.**" (1 Cor 2:14). John agreed: "**We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.**" (1 John 4:6)

Even with help from the Holy Spirit, however, we must still be diligent in our study of the Scriptures (2 Tim. 2:15). Even with our most diligent efforts we must confess that "Infinite" truth cannot be completely comprehended by the "finite" mind. The love of Christ, for example, surpasses knowledge (Eph. 3:19). No matter how hard we try, our finite minds cannot completely comprehend the infinite love of God. That's why, at the present time, we only "know in part", and "prophecy in part". Now we only see as "but a poor reflection in a mirror" (1 Cor. 13:9 - 12). When we are face to face with Christ, however, our understanding of the deep things of God will be greatly enhanced. Then we will know as we are known.

As we have said, the primary focus of this study will be to consider more deeply the nature of the New Covenant. This will require, not only hard work and diligence on our part, but also help from the Holy Spirit.

EARTHLY EXAMPLES OF DEEP THINKING

To prepare ourselves for delving into deep spiritual things, let us briefly consider some deep things of earth. As Jesus said to Nicodemus: "**I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe, how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?**" (John 3:12).

- THE OCEAN - There is an old joke about the woman from Kansas who saw the ocean for the first time. When asked what she thought of it she said: “I just thought it would be bigger than that”. The humor in the story involves shallow thinking. The oceans cover 75% of the earth’s surface. Due to the curvature of the earth one can only see a tiny fraction of the oceans’s surface at one time. Moreover, the ocean is over 35,000 feet deep. Beneath the surface are millions of mysteries yet to be discovered. Microbes, for example, make up more than 90% of the ocean’s biomass. They are the main players in the production and consumption of greenhouse gases. Yet, Levente Bodrossy, an OCE Fellow and Science Leader, admits that even now we know almost nothing about the microbial world. Just as deep thinking about oceanography involves more than we can imagine, so also does deep thinking about the mysteries of God.

- FISH - Even though we are constantly discovering new species of life, we have no idea how many “new” species of fish are yet to be discovered. Nor can we completely understand the species we have already discovered. Take, for example, the archer fish. This amazing creature can remain under water and yet shoot down insects over 2 meters above the water. The projectile they use is merely a powerful jet of water. Somehow, the archer fish not only can dispatch the deadly missile, but can even accurately compensate for the refraction of light that distorts his aim. Italian scientists, however, now say they have solved the mystery of how the archer fish can spit such powerful jets of water. I quote “*Research by a team from the University of Milan shows that the fish’s forceful strike is formed externally using water dynamics, rather than using the bodies internal muscles*”. Such a simple answer reminds us of the old joke about how to put 5 elephants in a Volkswagen. The answer is simple. “You put 2 elephants in the front seats and 3 in the back.” While scientists may “claim” to have solved the mysteries of the archer fish, don’t hold your breath for them to create one.

- THE SIMPLE CELL - Darwin, as you know, “believed” that life evolved from non living material. He called this first form of life a “simple cell”. He theorized that this “simple” living cell came from mud.. German biologist Ernst Haeckel, supported this “theory” and after examining mud under a microscope agreed with Darwin that this is where the “simple cell” came from. This “mud comes to life” theory is known as “Bathybius haeckelii”. When we take a deeper look, however, we discover that what Darwin and Haeckel considered a “simple cell” is one of the most complex systems ever discovered. The web site “darwinismrefuted.com” offers this stunning quotation: “*The technology of the twentieth century has delved into the tiniest particles of life, and has revealed that the cell is the most complex system mankind has ever confronted. Today we know that the cell contains power stations producing the energy to be used by the cell, factories manufacturing the enzymes and hormones essential for life, a data bank where all the necessary information about all products to be produced is recorded, complex transportation systems and pipelines for carrying raw materials and products from one place to another, advanced laboratories and refineries for breaking down external raw materials into their useable parts, and specialized cell membrane proteins to control the incoming and outgoing materials. And these constitute only a small part of this incredibly complex system*” Those who think the cell is “simple”

need to think more deeply. **“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!” (Rom 11:33)**

- These examples, of course, can easily be multiplied. These few earthly examples, however, illustrate that it is even difficult to “go deeply” into the things of earth. It is much more difficult, of course, to understand the deep things of God that are eternal.

WE MUST BE BORN AGAIN

A Jewish ruler named Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. We assume he desired a deeper understanding of the things of God. Jesus explained that he needed to be “born again”. In fact, without this he could not even see the Kingdom of God (Jn. 3:3). Nicodemus didn’t understand. Did he need to enter his mother’s womb a second time. Jesus was not talking about a physical birth. He explained to Nicodemus the wonders of the new birth by reference to seeds. Nicodemus had physical life because of a physical seed planted in womb of his earthly mother. Jesus reminded him of this and said: **“Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit” (John 3:6)**. If Nicodemus wanted spiritual life and insight, he could only get it from a spiritual seed . Please do not take lightly the importance of these words.

The growth of every seed, as you know, is determined by a genetic code that God has placed within the seed. The seed of a tomato plant, and that of a redwood tree, for example, are approximately the same size. The difference in what these seeds produce is explained by the fact that each seed has a different genetic code. One seed grows about 3 feet tall, and the other seed grows 300 feet tall. One lives for a few months, and the other lives for hundreds of years.

Since every seed reproduces after it’s own kind, we should not be surprised that the children of God are like their heavenly Father. Believers are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of the incorruptible, even the Word of God that lives and abides forever (1 Pet. 1:23). The first book of the Bible calls Jesus a “Seed” (Gen. 3:15, and last book of the Bible calls Him the “Word of God” (Rev. 19:13). Both descriptions of Jesus are true. Understanding this truth, however, requires deep thinking that results from being born again. Remember! We become the children of God by faith” (Gal. 3:26).

DEEP THINKING ABOUT JESUS

“While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" "The son of David," they replied. He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, "'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet." ' If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions. “ (Matt 22:41 - 46)

Answering this question requires deep thinking. That's why Jesus asked it! Seeds need good soil in which to grow. Unfortunately, many who heard Jesus teach were not good soil. James described "good soil" as those who get rid of moral filth and evil, and then humbly receive the "Seed" that God plants within us (Ja. 1:21). Saving faith is not easy to obtain. It requires such diligence that Jesus considered it to be work. He said: **"The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."** (John 6:29)

As we have said, it was a common thing for new truth to be rejected. Unconverted people saw Jesus from a shallow and worldly point of view. Even Paul once looked at Jesus that way (2 Cor. 5:16). When Paul was "born again", however, he no longer saw Jesus from a purely human point of view. In fact, all Christians no longer see anything from a purely human point of view. When Jesus dwells in our hearts by faith we see everything through His eyes. Paul put it like this: **"So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer."** (2 Cor 5:16) When we look at Jesus through eyes of faith, we recognize with Paul that He is indeed God manifest in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16).

Since the unconverted Jews in their ignorance did not recognize the Deity of Christ, they became guilty of the ultimate absurdity. While endeavoring to build the House of God they rejected the "Cornerstone". Their shallow thinking turned the "Cornerstone" into a "Stumbling Stone" (Acts 4:11). Jesus said to them: **"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."** (John 5:39-40)

By the way, what do you think about Jesus? Before answering that question please take time for a deeper look at Jesus and ask the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom (Ja. 1:5 - 8).

SOME SCRIPTURES TO CHALLENGE YOUR THINKING

- When Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God, Jesus congratulated him and said: **"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."** (Matt 16:17).
- Paul wrote to the Corinthians :**No one can say that Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit"** (1 Cor. 12:3).
- The Rich Young Ruler called Jesus "Good teacher" (Mk. 10:17). Jesus wanted to know if he understood Who he was talked to and said: **"Why do you call me good? . . . No one is good - except God alone"**. Jesus is God but apparently the Rich Young Ruler didn't understand this. That's why he went away sad.
- The neighbors of Jesus at Nazareth saw Him only as a Carpenter. That's why He could there do no mighty miracles. He only laid hands on a few sick folk and healed them (Mk. 6:5).
- Jesus had 4 brothers and at least 2 sisters (Mk. 6:3). At one time, however, we are told that His own brothers did not believe in Him (Jn. 7:5). Obviously they knew that Jesus existed and even worked miracles. At that time, however, they did not go deep enough to understand that He was God manifest in the flesh. Later, two of His brothers, James and Jude, would

- become believers who would write inspired books of the Bible.
- Even the disciples of Jesus had difficulty “going deep” and understanding the miracle of the incarnation. On the night before Calvary Philip wanted Jesus to show him the Father. Jesus answered: **“Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been with you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?” (Jn. 14:8 - 10).**
 - Matthew informs us that when the resurrected Christ appeared to His disciples in Galilee, “some doubted” (Matt. 28:16). Certainly they knew that Jesus was alive and had been raised from the dead. Not one of them doubted this. The profound mystery of God incarnate in human flesh, however, challenged their credulity.
 - John wrote: **“Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.” (John 21:25)** Since Jesus not only created everything on earth, but also throughout the whole universe, this verse is literally true (Jn. 1:3)
 - Jesus said: **“He that looks at me, he sees the one who sent me” (Jn. 12:45).** Obviously, “looking” at Jesus in this verse involves the very kind of “deep thinking” we are talking about.
 - The Jews, however, looked at Jesus and rejected Him. Even though they could not deny His miracles, they still denied His true identity. As we have said, Peter considered this the ultimate absurdity (Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7).
 - Paul had “known Christ” for many years when he expressed his great desire to know Him more deeply: He wrote: **“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,” (Phil 3:10)**
 - Paul’s prayer for the Philippians, and for all believers, is that our love would abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight (Phil. 1:9).
 - Certainly all of us need to go deeper in our knowledge of, and our relationship with, the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE BIBLE USES THE WORDS “TESTAMENT” AND “COVENANT” INTERCHANGEABLY!

The Bible does use the words “testament” and “covenant” interchangeably. The Hebrew word for “covenant” is “berith”. In the KJV it is translated 2 times as “confederacy”, 260 times as “covenant”, 15 times as “league”, and 2 times as “being in league”. The word “testament” is not found in the first 39 books of our English Bible. The word “testament”, however, is found many times in the last 27 books of the Bible. It comes from the Greek word “*diatheke*”. When the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek the word for covenant “*berith*” was translated by *diatheke*” in every passage except Deut. 9:15). When the Greek Scriptures were translated into English the translators were not consistent. Part of the time they translated “*diatheke*” as “covenant” and part of the time as “testament”. In the KJV, for example, “*diatheke*” is translated as “testament” in 2 Cor. 3:6, 14; Heb. 7:22; 9:15 - 20, etc., and “covenant:” in Heb. 8:6 - 13; 9:1, 4; 10:16 etc.)

Thus, in this study we will also use the words “testament” and “covenant” interchangeably.

NOW LET’S GO DEEPER INTO THE NEW COVENANT

- The Wikipedia Encyclopedia states: *“The New Testament (Covenant) is an anthology, a collection of Christian works written in the common Greek language of the first century, at different times by various writers, who were early Jewish disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. In almost all Christian traditions today, the New Testament consists of 27 books”.*
- The Encyclopedia Britannica also agrees that the New Testament (Covenant) is a compilation of 27 books.
- Merriam Webster online concurs that the New Testament consists of 27 books.

This definition is so universally accepted that Bible Publishers for centuries have labeled the two main parts of the Bible the Old Testament and the New Testament.

But let us take a deeper look. Let us dare to challenge conventional wisdom and consider again what the Scriptures teach.

First, let us note that the Hebrew people never referred to the first 39 books of the Bible as the Old Testament. They called these inspired books the “Tanakh”. This word is an acrostic referring to the three major divisions of the Hebrew Bible. (1) the Torah or “teaching” which refers to the five books of Moses. (2) The Nevi’im or prophets. (3). The Ketuvim or writings. Hence “TaNaKh” referred to the Torah, the Nevi’im, and the Ketuvim. In this study we will seek to prove that the first 39 books of the Bible are not the Old Testament, and the last 27 books of the Bible are not the New Testament.

The first person to label the Hebrew Bible as the “Old Testament” was Melito, the Bishop of Sardis. This is the church, as you know, that had a name that it was alive but was actually dead (Rev. 3:1). The first person to label the Greek Scriptures as the “New Testament” was a converted gladiator named Tertullian. This man was instrumental in establishing Latin, rather than Greek, as the vehicle for ecclesiastical thought in the Western world.

It is important to note that the labels “Old Testament” and “New Testament” were not written by inspired men. Consequently they are not a part of the Bible. The text of Scripture is inspired, but words written above the text by uninspired men are not.

Thus, as we have said, when we delve deeper into a study of the New Testament we will be challenging a long standing tradition in the Christian world.

COVENANTS IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS

There are many covenants mentioned in the Bible. For example, here are seven different covenants mentioned in the book of Genesis. They are the:

1. Covenant with Noah regarding the ark (Gen. 6:18).
2. Covenant with Noah and every living creature regarding future floods (Gen. 9:9 - 17).
3. Covenant with Abram concerning the Promised Land (Gen. 15:18).
4. Covenant of circumcision with Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 17:1 - 21).
5. Covenant between Abraham and Abimelech (Gen. 21:17 - 32).
6. Covenant between Isaac and Abimelech (Gen. 26:28).
7. Covenant between Jacob and Laban (Gen. 31:44 - 45).

When the Bible talks about the “Old Covenant”, however, it is not referring to any of these! The Old Covenant was made when God took His people by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt (Heb. 8:9). We will not find the Old Covenant, therefore in the book of Genesis!

THE OLD TESTAMENT (COVENANT)

As we have already said, it is a common practice today to refer to the first 39 books of the Bible as the Old Testament (or covenant) and the last 27 books of the Bible as the New Testament (or covenant). Since understanding the nature of our covenant with God is so critical, let us focus our mental and spiritual energies on this important subject. Let us see if the traditions on this subject are true. Let us begin by observing that the Old Covenant, in the language of Scripture, was the Ten Commandments and not the first 39 books of the Bible. Please consider:

- Not one verse of Scripture ever refers to the first 39 books of the Bible as a Covenant or Testament.
- The Old Testament was made when God took His people by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt (Heb. 8:9). The Hebrew Scriptures, however, were written later.
- God made the Old Covenant with His people in Horeb (Deut. 5:2) or in the language of Galatians 4:25, “Mt. Sinai in Arabia”. The first 39 books of the Bible, however, were written in Palestine, Babylon, and Persia.
- The Old Testament was broken by the time of Jeremiah (Jer. 31:32). Some books of the Hebrew Bible, however, were not yet written at this time.
- The Scriptures state explicitly that Moses received a covenant while he was 40 days upon Mt. Sinai. This covenant (also called the Ten Commandments) was written on two tablets of stone and placed in a receptacle called the “Ark of the Covenant” (Nu. 10:33). Once this covenant was completed God “added nothing more” - Deut. 5:22. (See also Exodus 34:27 - 28; Deuteronomy 4:11 - 13; 5:1 - 3; 9:11, etc.)
- While there are many covenants mentioned in the Bible, the Old Covenant, (or Testament) as mentioned in Hebrew 8:6-13, was in fact the Ten Commandments and not the first 39 books of the Bible.

The Old Testament was written on stone. It was cold, rigid, and inflexible. When a man was found gathering sticks on the Sabbath Day, for example, it was “not clear what should be done to him” (Nu. 15:34). In this instance they prayed to God for guidance and the Lord said to Moses that the man must die. Under the Old Covenant lawbreakers died “without mercy” (Deut. 18:8; 19:13; Heb. 10:28 etc.)

The Hebrew Scriptures are inspired and were written to a covenant people, but these 39 books of the Bible are not the Old Covenant! They never have been and never will be!

THE NEW TESTAMENT (COVENANT)

The Scriptures teach that God found something wrong with the Old Covenant and decided to write a new one (Heb. 8:7, 8). The New Covenant, however, would be totally different and distinct from the old. Like new wine and old skins the two cannot be combined. The revolutionary New Covenant is not cold, rigid, and inflexible for it is written in the hearts and minds of believers (See Heb. 8:6 - 13).

The Scriptures prepare us for deep thinking about the differences between the Old Testament (Covenant) and the New Testament (Covenant) by comparing it to new cloth in and old garment and new wine in old skins (Matt. 9:16, 17). The two covenants are so radically different that they cannot be combined.

Please consider:

- Not once are the last 27 books of the Bible ever called the New Testament or Covenant.
- The Christian Scriptures were written with paper and ink (2 John 12, 3 John 13). The New Testament, however, is not written with ink but with the Spirit of the Living God (2 Cor. 3:3).
- The New Testament became an immediate reality on the first Pentecost after our Lord's resurrection. Thousands were saved and became covenant people on that day, yet the New Testament Scriptures were not written and compiled for many years.
- The New Testament Scriptures came gradually as God guided inspired men into all truth. The canon of New Testament Scripture was not completed until near the end of the first century, and the oldest list of these 27 inspired books dates back only to the Fourth Century. Many Christians died as martyrs before one word of the New Testament Scriptures was even written.
- The Old Testament was written on tablets of stone. It was cold, rigid, inflexible, and without mercy. 3,000 died when the Old Testament was given (Ex. 32:28). The New Testament is written upon the fleshly tables of the heart and mind (2 Cor. 3:3, Heb. 8:8 -10). It was given by a merciful and faithful High Priest (Heb. 2:17). 3,000 were saved when the New Testament was given (Acts 2:41).
- The Old Testament was in the Holy of Holies in the temple. The New Testament ~~transforms~~ transforms our bodies into temples of the Living God (1 Cor. 6:19). Just as the glory of God was associated with the Ten Commandments, so also we are to glorify God in our bodies and in our spirits which are the Lords (1 Cor. 6:20)..

NOTE THESE DIFFERENCES

- Under the Old Covenant, little children and aliens had no knowledge of God and had to be

taught (Deut. 6:7). New Covenant people do not have to be taught. From the least to the greatest they already know God (Jer. 31:34; Heb. 8:11).

- The Old Covenant was in a box (Deut. 10:5; Nu. 10:33), but the New Covenant is in our bodies (1 Cor. 6:19).
- Old Testament worship was confined to a “place” (Deut. 12:5). New Testament worship is in spirit and in truth and can happen anywhere (Jn. 4:23).
- The Old Covenant was administered by priests “without pity” (Deut. 13:8). The New Covenant is administered by a priest that is both faithful and merciful (Heb. 2:17).
- As we gave said before, when the Old Testament became a reality 3,000 died (Ex. 32:28), and when the New Testament became a reality 3,000 were saved (Acts 2:41).
- The Old Testament priesthood came from the tribe of Levi. The New Testament priesthood is after the order of Melchizedek. Melchizedek has a superior priesthood (Heb. 8:6).
- The Old Testament high priest ministered on earth in a tabernacle made by man. The New Testament high priest ministers in heaven in the true tabernacle made by God (Heb. 8:2).
- Old Testament priests were prevented by death from continuing their service, but Jesus, our Great High Priest, ever lives to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25).
- It was God who found something wrong with the Old Covenant and decided to write a New Covenant (Heb. 8:7).

HAGAR AND ISHMAEL

Hagar and Sarah are used in Scripture to help us understand the dramatic difference between these two covenants. These two women, and their two sons, are allegories of the two covenants. (Gal. 4:24). The Greek word translated as allegory is “allegoreo”. “Allos” means “other”, and “agoreuo” means to speak in an assembly. An allegory is a teaching tool that describes one thing under the image of another. By understanding the difference between Ishmael and Isaac we gain insight into the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. Ishmael and the Old Covenant represent slavery. Isaac and the New Covenant represent freedom (Gal. 4:25, 26).

Ishmael and Isaac were half brothers. They had the same father, but different mothers. They were similar in many ways. Abraham begat both in his old age. God spoke to both mothers and prophesied about the future of both sons. Both sons were circumcised. Both became great nations. Both lived in the same part of the world. Both helped bury their father. Since both had the same father, it is quite possible that they were similar in appearance. We may also assume that both wore the same type of clothing, ate the same type of food, and lived in similar circumstances. If we saw them from a distance we might easily confuse one with the other.

These brothers may have seemed alike but they were radically different. The word “radical” comes from the Latin “radix,” which means, “root.” (This is the basis of our English word “radish,” which is a root.) So these brothers were radically different, like slavery and freedom.

Judaism and Christianity are also similar in many superficial ways. In Corinth, for example, the Christians met in a house next door to the Jewish synagogue (Acts 18:7). The two buildings may

have been quite similar. Both of these congregations were involved in similar activities. Both met each week and studied the Scriptures. Both were evangelistic. Both baptized their converts by immersion. Both sang psalms. Both had nothing to do with pagan idols. Both had high standards of moral conduct. Both emphasized the importance of prayer. Both had elders and deacons. When seen from a distance, one might easily confuse one with the other.

These two groups, however, like Ishmael and Isaac, were radically different. The Jewish synagogue was based upon the Old Covenant, that is, the Ten Commandments. As the Old Covenant was to be administered without mercy, the synagogue gave punishment without mercy. It was not at all uncommon for people to be physically beaten in the synagogue (Matt. 10:17; Mk. 13:9; Acts 26:11, etc.)

While the Christians were filled with joy the Jews were filled with fear. The Jews were so afraid of taking the name of God in vain that they would not even try to pronounce His name. Moreover, the actual meaning of all the Ten Commandments was also a constant source of controversy. Take, for example, the commandment to remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy. We have already mentioned the case of the man caught gathering sticks on the Sabbath. When it was “not clear” what to do with him God intervened and commanded that he be stoned to death (Nu. 15:35). Notice that it was “not clear” until God rendered judgement. Over the years there have been thousands, and perhaps even millions, of controversial cases in which the Lord did not intervene, or explain what to do. Thus the synagogue became a place where these controversial points of law were debated.

For example, the Law states that the Sabbath Day is to be kept holy, and that on it no work is to be done. This sounds simple, but it is not. For example, what is work? Some say that to carry a burden on the Sabbath Day is work. But this only raises another question, what is a burden? Scribal Law defined a burden as *“food equal in weight to a dried fig, enough wine for mixing in a goblet, milk enough for one swallow, honey enough to put upon a wound, oil enough to anoint a small member, water enough to moisten an eye-salve, paper enough to write a customs house notice upon, ink enough to write two letters of the alphabet, reed enough to make a pen”*—and so on. So the rabbis spent endless hours debating the meaning of the Old Covenant and the people were never quite certain which rabbi to follow. Simple procedures like moving a lamp, stitching a garment, wearing a wig, putting in false teeth, lifting a child, became the focal point of debate, controversy, and division.

Thus the Old Covenant is controversial, like Ishmael. Before he was born the angel of the Lord said to his mother: **“You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility towards all his brothers.”** (Gen 16:11-12)

The name “Ishmael” means “God hears”. There are at least two reasons why this name is appropriate. First, the Lord “heard” the cries of Hagar’s misery. Second, Ishmael kept crying out

to God about the loss of his inheritance and thus was in constant hostility with all his brothers.

A brief review of Ishmael's life will help to understand his combative nature. For almost fourteen years he had every reason to believe he would inherit the wealth of his father. During this time, he was not only the firstborn son of Abram, he was the only son. He was also much loved by his father. Note that when Abraham was informed that Sarah would have a son, he cried out to God: "O that Ishmael might live before thee!" (Gen. 17:18.) Such, however, was not to be.

When Isaac was born, an incredible thing happened. Ishmael, the firstborn and beloved son of Abraham, was driven out and disinherited. The Scriptures are clear in this regard: "Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac" (Gen 25:5). No wonder Ishmael was angry. He must have "cried out" to God in his misery, just as his mother had cried out in her misery so many years before. This is, of course, an allegory that helps us to understand the nature of law. The very essence of law is litigious and quarrelsome, just like Ishmael. That which is written in stone never changes. Our understanding, however, does change. Consequently, our understanding of law is in a constant state of flux. Human beings are seldom at the same level of knowledge and understanding. Sometimes we even learn new information that requires us to abandon previous positions about which we once felt confident. This is one reason why the Old Covenant, written in stone, will always be controversial.

SARAH AND ISAAC

Sarah and Isaac are much different and are an allegory of the New Covenant. Let us briefly review their story. Thirteen years after the birth of Ishmael, God appeared again to Abram and renewed His promises. This time the promises were given in association with the covenant of circumcision, and the changing of names. Abram (exalted father) was given the name Abraham (father of multitudes.) Sarai (Jehovah is Prince) was given the name Sarah (princess.) The very essence of Isaac's birth involved the supernatural. From the human point of view Sarah couldn't have a baby. It had ceased to be with her after the manner of women (Gen. 18:11.) She was "past age" (Heb. 11:11.) She had a dead womb (Rom. 4:19.) She had wanted to have a baby all of her married life, and had failed. The very idea that she could conceive, after menopause, was preposterous. This idea, as you know, did not come from man, it came from God.

The name Isaac means "laughter." Abraham laughed at the idea of his birth (Gen. 17:17), and so did Sarah (Gen. 18:12). Isaac also must have laughed when he inherited everything Ishmael had hoped for. As we have already pointed out, when Abraham died he left everything he owned to Isaac (Gen. 25:5.) The son of the bondwoman was not an heir with the son of the freewoman (Gal. 4:30.) This, as you know, is like Christianity. Our inheritance is like that of Isaac. It is both miraculous, and undeserved.

While Ishmael was arguing and complaining, Isaac was laughing. This is indeed a poignant allegory of the two covenants.

MAN IS SPIRIT, SOUL, AND BODY

In 1938 B. F. Skinner coined the term "Operant Conditioning". It roughly refers to the changing of behavior by the use of "reinforcement". He demonstrated his theory by placing rats in a "Skinner box". Hungry rats discovered that by moving a lever they would receive food. This is known as "positive reinforcement". "Negative reinforcement" was illustrated in a different box. In this box moving the lever stopped an unpleasant electrical shock. The two learned responses are known as "Escape Learning and Avoidance Learning".

God used the same technique on ancient Israel. In Deut. 28, for example, there is a long list of blessings and another long list of curses. Obedience to God resulted in blessings, and disobedience resulted in curses. It didn't work! Even the threat of death did not deter Israel from disobedience. When the book of the Law was placed beside the ark of the Covenant Moses predicted: **"For I know how rebellious and stiff-necked you are. If you have been rebellious against the LORD while I am still alive and with you, how much more will you rebel after I die!" (Deut 31:27**

Inquiring minds will want to know why Operant Conditioning works better on animals than man. The answer lies in the fact that man was created in the image of God and animals are not. Animals are two dimensional. They have a physical body and physical life. Man, like God, is three dimensional. He has a spirit, a soul, and a body (1 Thess. 5:23). Operant Conditioning does not affect the spirit. That's why God replaced the "old way" of the law, by the "new way" of the Spirit. This is precisely what Paul wrote to the Romans: **"So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code."** (Rom 7:4-6)

The spirit of man is unique and independent of his mind. Paul, for example, said: **"For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful."** (1 Cor 14:14) Obviously, our spirit is more important than our mind. When our physical life is over and our bodies have returned to dust, our spirit returns to God who gave it (Eccl. 12:7). This is why conversion has to involve our spirit. It is like marriage. The church is the Bride of Christ (Eph. 5:22 - 33) and **"he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit."** (1 Cor 6:17 KJV). So, what the law could not do in that it was weak because of our flesh, God accomplished with a new way that involved the law of the Spirit (Rom. 8:1 ff.) Carnal commandments cannot cure spiritual problems.

Thus, we must be "born again". This is the very essence of the New Covenant. Our first birth resulted from a physical seed that did not affect our spirit. The new birth, by contrast, comes from a spiritual seed that takes root in our spirit (1 Pet. 1:23). While the old way of the written code seeks to "conform" us by Operate Conditioning from without, the new way "transforms" us by the Spirit from within (Rom. 12:2). The New Testament is not written with ink on paper, nor even on tablets of stone, it is written in the mind and heart where it gains access to the spirit (2 or. 3:1 - 6).

The book of Romans was written to those who knew the Law (Rom. 7:1) They understood that death releases us from the law of marriage. A dead husband cannot command his wife to do anything. So, while we used to be married to the Law, now death has released us from that Law. The Law, however, does not die, we do (Rom. 7:4). Fortunately our Bridegroom specializes in raising the dead. So when we "died to the Law through the body of Christ, He raises us up from the dead that we might bear fruit unto God. This revolutionary "new way" does work. **"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit."** (Rom 8:1-4)

TWO IMAGES

"And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." (1 Cor 15:49 KJV)

The Greek word translated as "image" in this verse is "eikon". In English it is written as "icon" and is often associated with a small "image" on a computer screen. Clicking on that small "image" can open up huge programs. So Jesus is called the "Image" or "Icon" of the Invisible God (Col. 1:15). When we "click" on Jesus we are introduced to God. In Jesus, dwells all the fulness of the Godhead in a body (Col. 2:9).

The passage before us points out that believers have a dual nature. Physically, we bear the "image" of Adam, while spiritually, we bear the "image" of Jesus. Please note that Jesus in this passage is called the "Last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45). Just as the first Adam began a physical race that bears his image, the Last Adam began a spiritual race that bears His image (1 Pet. 2:9).

Let us examine these two images more closely.

PHYSICAL IMAGE

Your first birth came when a physical seed, was planted in the physical womb of your earthly mother. When the sperm of your father united with the ovum (egg) of your mother, a new life began. This new life resulted from the combination of 23 chromosomes from the mother and 23 chromosomes from the father. These chromosome sets carry some 15,000 genes from each parent. The strands of DNA in this new life are so tiny that 5 million can pass through the eye of a needle at the same time. Gary Bergel and Dr. C. Everett Koop point out in their booklet "When You Were Formed in Secret" that *"the genes, like letters of a divine alphabet, spell out the unique characteristics of the new individual. The color of eyes, hair and skin, facial features, body types and certain qualities of personality and intelligence are all determined by this genetic coding"*.

Our earthly bodies contain the “image” of our earthly father. His DNA is an integral part of every cell in our earthly body. No matter what we eat or how long we live, the genetic code of our physical being does not change! This physical body, of course, is only temporal. Scripture reminds us that the things which we see are temporary, but the things that we cannot see are eternal (2 Cor. 4:18). Obviously, temporary things like flesh and blood, cannot inherit the Kingdom of God which is eternal (1 Cor. 15:50). Our earthly image, like all physical things, is destined for destruction.

SPIRITUAL IMAGE

Peter reminded believers that we are “**born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.**” (1 Pet 1:23). Remember what Jesus said to Nicodemus - “**Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit**” (John 3:6). Every seed reproduces after its own kind (Gen. 1:11). Spiritual life can only come from a spiritual seed. That’s why we have to be born again to have eternal life!

This spiritual seed, though invisible to the human eye, carries the “image” of our invisible God. Though the spiritual seed cannot be seen by human eyes, it is still living, active, and powerful. In fact, the Seed of Jesus that abides in us literally transforms our lives (1 John 3:9). The wind blows wherever it pleases (John 3:8). We do not see the wind, but we hear it. We can even see the physical objects blown by the wind. This is the way we can tell when someone is born of the Spirit. The transformation of their lives is obvious. They are like a city on a hill or a light on a lamp stand (Matt. 5:14 - 16). Believers are renewed in knowledge after the “image” of our Creator (Col. 3:10). In fact, God has predestined believers to be conformed to the “image” of His Son (Rom. 8:29).

It is interesting to note that the “new birth” or “conversion” experience, is described as God writing His Laws in our minds and hearts (Heb. 8:10; 10:16). This “new covenant”(or testament) places within us the “image” or genetic code of God.

Consequently, just as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly (1 Cor. 15:49),. Since the image of the heavenly is spiritual, it will last forever.

GOD’S ETERNAL PURPOSE

As we delve more deeply into the New Testament, we are forced to the conclusion that it is an integral part of God’s eternal purpose. It was conceived by God before the foundation of the world, predicted by the prophets, and became a reality at Pentecost. Please consider these inspired words of Paul: “**I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith**

in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. “ (Eph 3:7-13)

Let's review:

- Before creation God was everything.
- With creation came rebellion and division.
- Jesus came to unite our fragmented universe (Eph. 1:10).
- Jesus would use the New Covenant to bring this unity.
 - The Old Covenant, like Ishmael, created controversy and division (Gen. 16:12).
 - The New Covenant, like Isaac, brings laughter, peace, and unity.
 - The New Covenant reflects the genius of God in bringing all men together in Christ
- Jesus predicted that all of His sheep would come together and be one flock with only one Shepherd (Jn. 10:16).
- Jesus will reign until He has put all enemies under His feet (1 Cor. 15:25).
- At the end of time, all enemies will be destroyed and Jesus will turn everything back over to God (1 Cor. 15:28).
- God will again be everything (1 Cor. 15:28).

SOMETHING TODAY IS OBVIOUSLY WRONG

- God's eternal plan involves uniting all of the universe in Christ.
- On the night before Calvary Jesus emphasized the importance of unity and prayed that all believers would be one in the same way that He and the Father are one (Jn. 17:20 - 23).
- In the midst of the apostolic age the effort to bring unity was so successful that Paul announced to the Ephesians that there was only “one body” (Eph. 4:4).
- Today, the Body of Christ has been divided thousands of times?
- The gravity of our problem demands that no possible solution be shunned and no voice be silenced. In particular, God Himself deserves to be heard!
- If God declares that His New Covenant (Testament) is not written with ink, perhaps it is time that we took Him at His word. Perhaps it is time to place tradition on the back burner and focus on what God Himself has said regarding the New Covenant.

Christians are to be diligent and to “test everything” (1 Thess. 5:21). In particular, this refers to prophetic utterances. We are not to quench the Spirit or despise prophecies. We are, however, to test them. Once Biblical teaching has been tested, we are to hold on to the good and avoid every kind of evil.

One way to identify what God has designed is that it is always more beautiful the more closely it is examined. A snowflake, for example, is beautiful on a mountain, but also under a microscope. By contrast, what man makes is crude and irregular when examined closely. A picture, for example, that seems beautiful from across the room, reveals many brush marks and imperfections when examined closely. Please test this teaching about the covenants! If this teaching is of God, it will stand up under careful scrutiny. If it is not of God, it should be avoided (1 Thess.

5:19 - 22).

WHAT ABOUT THE SCRIPTURES?

If the Scriptures are not the covenant, then what are they? It is important to remember that **“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim 3:16, 17)** No believer can grow to maturity without the Scriptures! Even though the Scriptures are not the covenant, they are absolutely essential for the growth and development of all who are born again. Jesus said it like this: **“Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4).**

Please consider this analogy :

- The Old Covenant was the Ten Commandments but the people could not have survived in the wilderness without manna. Even though the manna was not the covenant, it was essential for the survival of God’s people.
- God fed His people with manna to teach us about the importance of Bible study. Please consider this passage which Jesus quoted from the book of Deuteronomy: **“He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.” (Deut 8:3)**
- Even though the New Testament (Covenant) is not the Scriptures, the people of God cannot survive and mature without this inspired teaching. Peter wrote by inspiration: **“Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. “ (1 Peter 2:1-3)**
- Jesus was right: **“Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4).**

PHYSICAL NOURISHMENT

Let’s take a deeper look at physical life and the need for physical nourishment. The microscopic human life in the mother’s womb must have nourishment to survive and grow. For approximately nine months this nourishment comes from the mother by means of the umbilical cord. Afterward, we receive nourishment orally. Without physical nourishment we will die.

So God has placed hunger within to help insure our survival. The greater the hunger the greater the effort we are willing to make to satisfy that hunger. Since food is essential to our survival, when the Hebrew people got very hungry they were highly motivated to get something to eat. The manna that God gave them from heaven, however, was not easy to obtain. Please consider:

- Manna fell from heaven and was gathered outside of the camp.

- From the center of the camp to the outside was a little less than one mile (a Sabbath Day's journey).
- Since there were two or three million people gathering manna at the same time, it must have been necessary to walk several miles in order to gather a days ration.
- There was only a small window of opportunity to gather manna. It appeared after the dew was gone (Ex. 16:14), and it melted away when the sun got hot (Ex. 16:21).
- The manna was like "thin flakes" (Ex. 16:14), and each person had to gather about 2 quarts every day. This was not easy!
- The manna had to be gathered daily, for anything left over developed a bad smell and maggots (Ex. 16:20). An exception was made each week for the Sabbath so that on the sixth day they could gather two days provisions and it would not spoil (Ex. 16:24 - 30).
- Once gathered the manna had to be washed, prepared, and cooked. In the wilderness, of course, water and wood were not easily obtained.
- Even though the miraculous manna came from heaven as a gift from God, a great deal of time and energy had to be expended every day in order to actually "eat" what God had provided.

SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT

Now let's take a deeper look at spiritual nourishment. When faced with the temptation to turn stones into bread, Jesus reminded that devil that "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). This is a quotation from Deut. 8:3: **"He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."** Please note that feeding the people with manna was to teach something! IT WAS TO TEACH THAT MAN DOES NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT COMES FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD!

There is an obvious connection between eating manna and studying the Scriptures. Both are essential! Just as physical Israel could not live without manna - spiritual Israel cannot live without the Word of God. Like newborn babies crave milk, Christians are to crave every word that comes from the mouth of God (1 Pet. 2:2). Just as physical Israel would shrivel and die from the lack of manna, Christians can shrivel and die without daily nutrition from the Word of God.

The noble Bereans set a wonderful example for all believers in that they studied the Scriptures every day (Acts 17:11). Just as the Hebrews spent several hours a day to survive and grow on manna, the Bereans spent several hours a day to survive and grow on the Scriptures. Imagine, if you can, what it would be like to study the Scriptures in Berea 2,000 years ago. Since the printing press was over a thousand years in the future, copies of the Scriptures were both rare and expensive. The local synagogue normally had some books of the Hebrew Bible, but they were not easily accessible. The noble Bereans, like the ancient Hebrews, had to leave home and walk somewhere to get nourishment. The Scriptures in Berea were undoubtedly under lock and key in the "holy ark" at the local synagogue. Since there would not be Bibles for everyone, some people would obviously

have to wait in line. Since there were no chapters and verses in the Bible at that time, it was not easy to find and verify the teaching of Paul, but they did it anyhow! The Scriptures are explicit: **“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”** (Acts 17:11)

Most people in the world are like the ancient Hebrews in that they spend a large part of the day simply surviving. Without money, fast foods and microwaves, they are resigned to a life of hardship and hunger. Yet, these are often the very people with the greatest hunger for Biblical teaching. One missionary from Africa contrasted his students there from his students in America by pointing out that in Africa they would walk many miles to hear Biblical teaching. These eager students would seek out the front seats, and gladly stay there for hours. They constantly hungered for more spiritual food. In America, by contrast, even the students in a Christian College drove to the campus in cars, slouched down on the back row and said: “Do I have to know this for the test”?

Please consider again these inspired words: **“Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.”** (1 Pet 2:1-3)

Jesus said it like this: **“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.”** (John 6:27)

CONCLUSION

This brief study has focused on the need for deep thinking. Please remember, however, that **“solid food is for the mature”** (Heb 5:14) The wise parent does not give meat to an infant, and the wise teacher does not give solid food to the spiritually immature. Jesus, for example, had many things to tell His disciples that they were not yet ready to bear (Jn. 16:12). We also may have many things to say that need to be taught at a later time.

The message of salvation, however, is so simple and clear that people can come to a saving knowledge of Christ the first time they hear the Gospel. Jesus said that whoever believed and was baptized would be saved (Mk. 16:16) Jesus is right! Please consider these examples from the book of Acts.

- 3,000 believed and were baptized at Pentecost after hearing only one Gospel message (Acts 2:14 - 47).
- The Ethiopian Eunuch believed and was baptized after hearing only one Gospel message (Acts 8:26 - 40).
- The household of Cornelius believed and was baptized after hearing only one Gospel message (Acts 10:23 - 48).
- The Philippian jailer and his household also believed and were baptized after hearing only

one Gospel message (Acts 16:25 - 34).

The example of the Philippian jailer is particularly significant because, as far as we know, he had no background in either Judaism or Christianity. Jewish converts at least had the Scriptures that predicted the coming of Christ. Thus, in the words of Paul, the Jews had an “advantage” over gentiles (Rom. 3:1, 2). The pagan jailer (and his household), without this advantage, still came to a saving knowledge of Christ the first time they heard the Gospel.

When these newly converted pagans gathered with other believers on the Lord’s Day, they were to rid themselves of **“all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.”** (1 Peter 2:1-3)

Because they had been “born again” of a “Spiritual Seed” they were “new creatures” with the beautiful manifestations of spiritual life (2 Cor. 5:17). The DNA of God had been written on their minds and hearts. The more they matured, the more they accurately manifested the nature of their Heavenly Father. Conversion is immediate. Transformation is a life long process. **“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”** (2 Cor 3:18)

Since the New Testament Scriptures were not yet written, the Jailer and his family would only have access to bits and pieces of Apostolic teaching. This did not keep them, however, from being covenant people and desiring the sincere milk of the Word. Even though they were immature, they were still the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

As they matured in Christ, their views of the Scriptures would also mature. This does not necessary mean that they would all think the same way. Believers in Rome, for example, held different views on holy days and proper diets and yet remained brethren in the same family (Rom. 14:1 - 23),. Every family manifests different levels of intelligence and maturity. The same, of course, is true with the family of God.

Please consider the possibility that every child of God has a right to “find” a meaning in Scripture, but no child of God has the right to “give” it meaning.

Today, there are literally millions of believers much like the Philippian Jailer. Many are illiterate and most do not even have Bibles. Some do not even have a written language. Yet, when these precious souls are “born again” they are part of God’s Family. If God is their father, and God is our father, then we are brothers. Fraternity is based upon paternity! Jesus is superior to us in every way, yet He is not ashamed to call us brothers because we have the same father. Please consider: **“Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.”** (Heb 2:11)

Should these new members of God's Family mistakenly view the Scriptures as a covenant, then the family is destined to be divided. We are not united by knowledge! Even husbands and wives do not think alike on every issue. The original 12 Apostles came from different homes and different theological backgrounds. Simon the "Zealot" and Matthew the "tax collector", for example, were political and theological enemies (Matt. 10:3). The Zealots hated the tax collectors, and vice versa. Yet, Jesus selected both to be His Apostles. The foundation for their unity was not their knowledge of the Scriptures, but their loyalty to Christ. Jesus is one and only foundation for Christian unity. **"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Cor 3:11)**

The "old way" endeavored to bring unity by forcing people to "conform" to law by pressure from without. The "old way" failed! The "new way" endeavors to bring unity by "transforming" people by the Spirit of Christ from within. The new way works!

Paul put it like this: **"So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. 6 But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code."** (Rom 7:4-6)

Thank you for taking time to read these words and for endeavoring to think deeply about our covenant relationship with God. May this beautiful benediction help you to focus on things eternal. **"To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy- to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen."** (Jude 24, 25)