

## 5 A Whole Heart

<sup>13</sup>“Go, inquire of the LORD for me and the people and all Judah concerning the words of this book that has been found, for great is the wrath of the LORD that burns against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.” (2 Kings 22:13 NASB95)

*The heart of the New Covenant.* One God, one Lord, one Body, and one Faith. I hope God has been able to remove the masks man has given you, and heal the fractures so you can see the Oneness for yourself. I also hope that your heart is filling with joy that what much of what you’ve seen in the church so far is not the way it has to be. This is critical if you are going to make it the rest of the way, too. Your whole heart has to be in it with Him. It’s all or nothing. All of His heart for all of yours.

<sup>6</sup>For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup>For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. <sup>8</sup>Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Romans 8:6-8 ESV)

Josiah became king of Israel when he was only eight years old and reigned 31 years (2 Kings 22 and 23). He was a good king and one of the best Israel (Judah) ever had (2 Kings 22:2). He did right and would not turn aside to the right or left. When he was a teenager, he started cleaning the land of idolatry. Then at 26, he sent Shaphan the scribe to the house of the Lord (Solomon’s temple) for some money issues. It had fallen out of use and into disrepair in previous years, and it was time to clean house.

In the process, the high priest Hilkiah found the book of the Law and gave it to Shaphan, who in turn read it to the young king. Josiah was greatly saddened and horrified because the people had ignored this book for a long time. He knew that the Lord must be very angry with Israel, so he sent some people to the prophetess Huldah to ask what should be done.

The bad news from God, through Huldah, was that the evil of all the words of the book of the law would be dropped on the people. The good news was that it would skip Josiah’s lifetime. God was pleased that he had responded to the Word with humility and a “tender heart.”

Josiah assembled all the people at the temple and read the book to them. Then they each made a covenant to “walk after the Lord, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes, with all (his) heart and soul” (2 Kings 23:3 parenthesis added).

This is the attitude that God desires of His people. We might not have read the Law and we might not be aware that it is for all of His people everywhere. But what do we do when we hear that it is current and applies to us? Do we come up with dozens of excuses to continue to disobey? Or do we tear our clothes, hit the floor, and beseech the Lord for His mercy?

Is our heart soft and tender flesh, like Josiah’s, or hard like stone towards God’s commandments, testimonies and statutes? Does His Law drive us to our knees in humility and obedience? Or do we raise our heads in proud defiance saying, “You have to give me grace ‘cause I have Jesus?”

I've had so much ugliness and hatred directed at me by people who say they wear His name. All I have to do is suggest that the whole Law is more a part of the believer's life than is usually taught. Try it yourself in a Bible study or other group sometime. Be prepared, however, for what I call the 'firing squad' response. That's where people line up and try to shoot you down with dogma so fast you don't even have time for a last meal.

*What It Is.* The heart of Josiah is what God is looking for, and the New Covenant is all about having a heart just like Josiah's, or more specifically just like God's. Most Christians say that they live by, or are a part of, the New Covenant (by which they mean 'new testament') and not the Old Covenant (Old Testament). However, what most Christians can't tell you is what the New Covenant is or where it's found in the Word. Remember I told you to look it up?

31"Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, 32not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. 33"But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the Lord, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34"They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the Lord, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." (Jeremiah 31:31-34 NASB95)

Oddly, the term 'new covenant' is mentioned in only six verses in the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> None of them explains what the covenant is, except for a couple of partial quotes. The reason is that everyone knew what it was, and it didn't have to be repeated. All of the New Testament verses refer back to 'old' Jeremiah 31 (and to places such as Ezekiel 11:19-20 and 36:22-37).

The new covenant is 1) Between God, Judah (southern kingdom) and Israel (northern kingdom). Gentiles can be included, but the emphasis is on inclusion not replacement. 2) It is not like the covenant at Sinai after the Exodus because 3) The Law (instruction, torah) is written on the heart, He will be God, and Israel His people. 4) All will know Him; no one will need to teach. 5) He will forgive iniquity and remember sin no more. It's obvious that not all of this has been completed, but that's because He's patiently waiting for us.

<sup>4</sup> Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? (Romans 2:4 ESV)

The new covenant was written down by Jeremiah about 600 years before any book of the New Testament. But it has always been in the heart of God. Believe it or not, He wanted Adam and Eve to live by it. He was hoping Israel would take it up. There were individuals here and there, such as King Josiah, who lived it. Jesus presented it again, but it wasn't accepted with open arms or open heart. Even now we give it lip service, but we do not make the whole of it a

<sup>1</sup> Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 8:8, 9:15 and 12:24

part of living. God has always desired that we would respond to Him with a heart of flesh and live His Word. The new thing about the new covenant is not the Word but the heart.

Jesus certified or fulfilled the new covenant (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6) with His death and resurrection at God's perfect time. But since He is eternal, anything that happens to Him has eternal consequences. In other words, believers were in the new covenant before the cross and even going back to the Garden, because the sacrifice of Jesus resonates through time.

<sup>17</sup>If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; <sup>18</sup>knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, <sup>19</sup>but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. <sup>20</sup>For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you <sup>21</sup>who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. (1 Peter 1:17-21 NASB95)

*What It Was.* The old covenant was written on stone tablets, which were not only hard like our natural hearts but also external. The tablets are a picture of our relationship with God before conversion – hearts hard as stone. After conversion, we get a soft heart of flesh that is responsive to God in every way.

<sup>19</sup>“And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, <sup>20</sup>that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God. (Ezekiel 11:19-20 NASB95)

<sup>26</sup>“Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup>“I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. (Ezekiel 36:26-27 NASB95)

Old and new do not apply to God's Word, but to our hearts. The old covenant is old not because His Word is old, but because it was imposed from outside. People's hearts just weren't in it. Our old hearts were made of stone, but the new ones are flesh. Our old hearts didn't know God intimately, but our new hearts are closer to Him than our own blood is to us. God's blood (His Word) has in truth become our blood.

Old hearts have to be coerced with penalties to do what God wants, but hearts of flesh obey with gladness and without fear of death. The old heart has to be told every detail of how to behave as He behaves (“be holy for I am holy”). We don't just know, or naturally want to do, what God wants, ‘by heart.’ The new heart may not know something, but intently and earnestly looks for God's will and responds positively when it finds Him.

To the old heart, the Law is like a carrot and stick. We try to get a carrot without getting

whacked by the stick. The new heart on the other hand seeks out every one of His whims, and acts on even the glance of His eye. Reward and punishment don't really enter into our actions too much. We love (God); therefore we do (His Word). No, old and new don't have anything to do with our ageless God or His Living Oracles; they have to do with our condition. Either God is outside beating on a stone heart, or He is inside and our hearts beat together as one.

*What It Shall Be.* The new heart of flesh we get, in exchange for a heart of stone, is the beginning of a new life which is sensitive to God's Word. Rather than the Law being eliminated, which is normally taught in many Christian circles, the New Covenant is The Law written on the heart, so all will obey. Eventually it will be written by the Spirit on all hearts; at least to the extent that no one will have to be taught about Him.

One reason the new covenant is not like the old is that in the future no one will have to be taught who He is and what He requires. Everyone will know Him. But this doesn't mean everyone will be saved, because not everyone willingly submits to Him in love. On the most basic level, there will be no doubt in anyone's mind that He exists and He orders everything according to His will. There will be those who reject what He stands for, and those who accept Him, but no one will have to be taught His will. Some won't want to submit (see: the lake of fire) but they will definitely know His will.

Another future aspect of the new covenant is that His people will be one. According to the text, the new covenant is only between God, Judah (the southern part of the kingdom after the split), and Israel (the northern kingdom). Gentiles are not mentioned anywhere. So are non-Jews locked out of the new covenant? Do we make up a new thing called the 'church' and just butt our way in, pushing out Israel? This text doesn't say anything about Gentiles, so do we have to become Jews? Does it say anywhere in the Word that God has changed His mind and Jews are replaced by Gentiles? The answer to all these questions is a resounding NO. Hints like the following verse are sprinkled all through the Old Testament.

8The Lord God, who gathers the dispersed of Israel, declares, "Yet others I will gather to them, to those already gathered." (Isaiah 56:8 NASB95)

16"I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. (John 10:16 NASB95)

God tells people repeatedly that He isn't done with Israel; that He will gather them again, discipline them and bless them, and other sheep will be added. Paul describes this last process when he speaks in Romans 9 through 11 about being "grafted in to the olive tree." Israel is still the focus of God's plans and programs, and will always be that way. Non-Jews are included in the new covenant just as they are included in the One Body.

There is no place in any part of the Word where God says something called 'the church' takes over for Israel. Israel is still a main part of God's plan for everyone on the planet and will always be so. For a while, God was angry with them because of their disobedience, and disciplined them by sending them out of His presence and out of the Land. Some who are descended from Jacob are not part of the Body. But never, ever does He say that He is done with them and now is setting up a separate body called 'the church.'

Much of the contrary attitudes about a separate church body come from simple anti-Jewishness. But even though as a group the Jews haven't always done what they should, true

believers cannot write them off. Our Father says not to do so (remember the Zechariah 2:7-8 passage, among others). The new covenant stipulates that we will eventually be one as Jesus and God are one. It doesn't make much sense to attack your own body members. There's a word for that – cancer.

*The New Testament Synagogue.* After Jesus ascended into heaven His followers started preaching His Words to everyone (the Jew first, then Gentiles). As they went, they created assemblies of people who wanted to follow what Jesus taught. These assemblies were made up of Jews and Gentiles in various proportions (mostly Jews at first, mostly Gentiles later).

In the first few decades or so after the resurrection, we have the 'New Testament Synagogue,' with one big problem (among many) because there is no New Testament. It will be written over the 30 or 40 years or so immediately after the resurrection (most of it before the destruction of the Temple in 70 C. E.). But it won't be assembled and received (by the 'church') as the New Testament until around 200 C. E.

Sure, there were some leaders such as Paul or the other apostles or the disciples of the apostles (like Timothy and Titus) for a while. But as time went on there was less and less of a direct connection to the words of Jesus. Letters were composed and delivered to some of the new congregations and also circulated widely. The gospel accounts were floating around too. Mixed in to this were many letters or publications that were of dubious authenticity. It would take a long while until all of this was examined and the genuine parts put into the Book.

So what did the New Testament Synagogue use as a guide, not only for living, but for comparing to new writings and deciding which ones were Scripture? Where did the '1<sup>st</sup> century church' get their directions for living?<sup>2</sup> How could they "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1) and authenticate the new writings? On top of that, some of the letters were generally addressed, such as Revelation, and some addressed to specific people, such as the Corinthians. How did the church in Galatia know that the book of Romans was legitimate, and that it applied to their congregations also?

Obviously, they all had in common the same book that Jesus and the apostles used, which wasn't called the Old Testament at the time. It was called the Torah or Law, or 'Law, Prophets, and Writings.' Sometimes they just said 'the Law and the Prophets' and other times they said 'it is written,' 'the Scriptures' or 'the Word,' and they may have even used the term Tanakh.<sup>3</sup>

So it is important to understand that all mentions of the 'Scriptures' or 'it is written' and such in the New Testament are referring to the Old Testament. Peter might be referring to Paul's writings as Scripture in 2 Peter 3:16, but this is the only place where any of the New Testament writings are perhaps called Scripture. This is not to say the New Testament isn't Scripture, just that most of the references, and all of the quotes of Scripture, are from the Old Testament.

The focus on the New Testament in the modern church has caused a general rejection of the Old Testament as a guide for daily living. But what was good for believers in apostolic times and before should be good for us to live by now. Both testaments are the whole Word of God, and work together to give us complete understanding of God's revealed plans and purposes. If the Old Testament was good enough to live by for the 'New Testament synagogues,' it should be good enough for us too.

*Free Will.* It appears to our eyes as if we have the ability to choose good and bad, right and wrong, and so we label that free will. Thinking only of the 'free' part however, is like going

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<sup>2</sup> Many people want to return to the 'ideal of the first century church,' but have no idea what that really is. I'll give you a hint – look in your 'old' Testament.

<sup>3</sup> Comes from the first letters of the Hebrew words Torah (Law), Nevi'im (prophets), and Ketuvim (writings).

to bed with a person from a bar. That part seems fun. But the fun is over when we wake up in the morning with the bad results. We forget about two of the main parts of free will; responsibility and accountability (Romans 14:12). That is, we forget until we're stuck with the hangover, guilt, a disease, and/or a baby. Not to mention the bad stuff we do after the bad stuff we did. The 'free' part of free will is fun, but we're not free of the consequences the morning after.

We don't have a truly 'free' will because we are constrained and restrained by all sorts of laws. For instance, there is the law of gravity. We cannot jump off of a tall building without having to obey this law. We might develop a machine for flying, but that only postpones a reckoning with this force of God's creation. Sooner or later, one way or the other, depending on fuel economy (your mileage may vary) we have to come down. In the end, we have a date with dirt, however the choice falls out. I told you the puns were intended. I didn't say they were good.

God purchased a choice for us through His Son, which is why our wills seem to be free. We have the 'free will' to choose how we will respond to His love. If we do not take advantage of the work of Jesus, we will, sooner or later, have another kind of date with dirt. We cannot get away from death if we do not choose the life of God. That's where we have freedom – we can choose to live or continue dying. Not much of a choice, there.

<sup>16</sup>Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? (Romans 6:16 NASB95)

The Scriptures tell us we are either slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness. There is no middle ground, though it may seem so because believers can do wrong things. We sin, and payment must be made, just as jumping off a tall building will require a payment. Depending on the height of the building, and how fast we flap our arms, it might take a while to hit the ground. But it doesn't mean a reckoning isn't coming soon.

<sup>4</sup>In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you; <sup>5</sup>but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. (1 Peter 4:4-5 NASB95)

We will all have to stand before God and answer for our 'free will' choices, even if in the meantime it looks to us as if we can turn to the left or to the right. We are accountable for all of our 'freedom.' Free will doesn't mean that we are really, ultimately free to do everything, but it does mean we are free to choose the life that God offers us in His Word.

Few people realize what the doctrine of free will really means. We tend to think it just means 'you can't make me.' I suppose this is part of it (at least as far as people dealing with people). But that isn't all of it, especially when it's between us and God, because yes, He can 'make us' if He chooses. If the will is truly free, and I believe that it is within the boundaries that God has given, then the responsibility for what we choose is also complete and absolute.

If we choose wrong, we cannot say that "the devil made me do it." If we choose right, we will get credit in eternal life, though it is God who makes the right choice possible. Without the sacrifice of Jesus, we would not be able to choose life no matter how badly we wanted to exercise our 'free will.' We give God the glory for making us 'free.' Freedom in Christ means free to choose, free to live, and free to die.

*Biblical math made easy.* Rabbis have counted 613 distinct commandments in the Law. Interestingly, the late pastor Finnis Jennings Dake identified a list of 1,050 separate commands in

the New Testament.<sup>4</sup> The Ten are a summary of the 613 (or even the 1,050) sort of like ‘don’t eat from that tree’ was really a summary of all of God’s Word in the Garden. All of the 613 OT commands (and the 1,050) fit into one or another of the Ten. Notice that the first four of the Ten have God as a focus, and the next six have our fellow man as the focus.

1“Then God spoke all these words, saying, 2“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 3“You shall have no other gods before Me. 4“You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. 5“You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. 7“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain. 8“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9“Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. 11“For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy. 12“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you. 13“You shall not murder. 14“You shall not commit adultery. 15“You shall not steal. 16“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. 17“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”  
(Exodus 20:1-17 NASB95 with a similar list in Deuteronomy 5:6-21)

In summary list form, here they are again.<sup>5</sup>

1. No other Gods.
2. No images.
3. No taking His name in vain
4. No work on Sabbath: six days work, one day rest.
5. Honor father and mother
6. No murdering
7. No adultery
8. No stealing
9. No false witness

<sup>4</sup> The easiest way to find these lists is to search the web. Or you can look on our site [www.wholebible.com](http://www.wholebible.com) under Study Helps. Another way to find the lists is to buy [The Dake Annotated Reference Bible](#) and [The 613 Mitzvot: A Contemporary Guide to the Commandments of Judaism](#) by Ronald L. Eisenberg, both available from Amazon.

<sup>5</sup> There are slightly different ways to number these depending on what sect is doing the numbering.

## 10. No coveting

We might say that the Ten Words are a slight expansion of the twin ideas of loving God (first four) and loving neighbors (the other six). I think this is the reason Jesus stated that the greatest command is to love God, and the second is like it, love your neighbor.

28 One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?"

29 Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; 30 and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' 31 "The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." 32 The scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that He is One, and there is no one else besides Him; 33 and to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." (Mark 12:28-33 NASB95)

Neither of the two commands shows up as such in the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17). In other words, there are no commands to 'love Me' or 'love your neighbor' as specific commands among the Ten. But they do show up as part of the entire Law a number of times, especially when speaking of motivation.<sup>6</sup> There are also other summaries of the Law, such as Psalm 15, 24:3-4 and 101.<sup>7</sup> I'm sure God would be happy to just give us a couple of laws and let it go at that, like He did with Adam and Eve. But we all know how that turned out.

Looking at the two commands a little more closely, Jesus is said by some teachers to teach only two commandments—"love God" and "love each other." Those who insist that Jesus did away with the Law and replaced it with these Two Commandments don't take into account that Jesus really boiled everything down to one.

12 "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. (John 15:12 NASB95)

This command is at the heart of the first single command (don't eat the fruit) isn't it? And isn't it pretty much at the heart of anything God tells us to do? If we love God as He has loved us, then do we really need any other Law? We shouldn't, except humans do not perfectly love God or each other. Our natures still seek out selfish ways to do our own thing. So the Law was added to help define what it means to walk with God.

Way back in the Garden, there was only one command. Well, actually there were several positive commands such as 'go forth, multiply, and subdue the earth,' and 'reproduce after your own kinds.' But there was only one recorded negative command, which was 'don't eat of the tree

<sup>6</sup> See Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 7:9, 10:19 for neighbor, and Exodus 20:5-6; Deuteronomy 5:10, 6:5, 10:12, 11:1, 13, 22, 13:3, 19:9, 30:6, 16, 20 (Deuteronomy 30:6 presages the New Covenant by the way) for loving God, as well as places like Deuteronomy 4:37, 7:7-8, 13 10:15, 18, 23:5, 33:3 for God loving us (His people Israel).

<sup>7</sup> There are many others too. Jeremiah 7:5-11, 22:3; Zechariah 7:8-13; Malachi 3:5 (really the whole book); Isaiah 1:16-17; Micah 6:8. Almost anywhere that God speaks of justice, the poor and widows, the stranger, and so on.

of knowledge of good and evil.’

When God told Adam and Eve not to eat of this tree, He also told them they could eat of any other tree, presumably including the tree of life. They chose the wrong tree, and we’ve all been suffering ever since. Now we’ve got lots and lots of man-made laws, and a few from God. But iniquity still abounds and is getting worse. This is the fruit of the tree of knowledge.

The number of commands is not the point. God could write laws till His fingers cramped (assuming they could) and as long as we practice sin they would be just weirdness to us.

<sup>12</sup>Were I to write for him my laws by the ten thousands, they would be regarded as a strange thing. (Hosea 8:12 ESV)

But just as Adam and Eve could’ve chosen the tree of life, we can choose it now. The Tree of Life is God and His Son Jesus, and they are revealed through the Word. We eat this tree by following what God says, eating and drinking the body and blood of Jesus. In essence, what Adam and Eve did was turn from God’s Word, represented by the ‘do not eat the fruit’ command (or any other command) and went their own way. To follow God now, to eat of the Bread of Life or the Tree of Life, is to repent of our own ways and follow His: simply to do what God says.

*All For One, One For All.* The Bible teaches that all of God’s Word is for everyone. For one thing, everyone who wanted to live in Israel was supposed to be treated the same as the natives. When the promise of deliverance from Egypt was realized, and laws set up for governing the new kingdom, those laws were to apply uniformly.

<sup>49</sup>“The same law shall apply to the native as to the stranger who sojourns among you.” (Exodus 12:49 NASB95)

<sup>34</sup>‘The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God. (Leviticus 19:34 NASB95)

<sup>22</sup>‘There shall be one standard for you; it shall be for the stranger as well as the native, for I am the Lord your God.’ ” (Leviticus 24:22 NASB95)

<sup>15</sup>‘As for the assembly, there shall be one statute for you and for the alien who sojourns with you, a perpetual statute throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the alien be before the Lord. <sup>16</sup>‘There is to be one law and one ordinance for you and for the alien who sojourns with you.’ ” (Numbers 15:15-16 NASB95)

Our one body has one set of living oracles to live by, not two sets for two different groups. Perhaps Peter said it best.

<sup>34</sup>Opening his mouth, Peter said: “I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, <sup>35</sup>but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him. (Acts 10:34-35 NASB95)

“What is right” is God’s Word. A casual reading through some of the prophet’s writings

also shows another thing: God judges all of the nations of the earth according to His Word. It is obvious He is in control, and all people are accountable to Him.<sup>8</sup> Even those nations who were used by Him to chastise Israel and other countries, such as Babylon, were in turn chastised because of their motivations and over-enthusiasm. Make no mistake, everyone is subject to the will of God whether they like it or not. Everyone will be judged accordingly.

*Love.* The fact that God gave the entire Law is not seen by very many as a loving act. Nor is the fact acknowledged that the ‘two commands’ summarize what God had already given and demonstrated with His own actions. Love is the motivating factor with God and always has been.

It is love that caused Him to create us, and love that keeps us functioning. He waits for us to return that love by molding our lives to fit His Word. We refused this long ago, and continue to refuse it every time we go our own way. The overriding Law from God is love; love for the Father and love for our neighbor. Always has been and always will be.

How has Jesus loved us? Well, let me count the ways. We know that He “lay down His life” and that “greater love has no one than this.” He says this in the next verse after the ‘one command’ I just pointed to (John 15:13). We know that “while we were yet sinners” He died for us (Romans 5:8). We know that He is the source of life and light, love, and all the blessings associated with those things (John 14:6).

Remember from the first part of this book we talked about how Jesus is the physical representation of God? “No man has seen the father but the son and He has revealed Him.” So we also know that He loved us from the beginning, when He created Adam and Eve and placed them in a perfect world. We know that He loved them (us) so much He promised that even after they chose to reject His Word (or Law) He would provide a way back to intimacy with Him.

We know that Jesus loves individuals such as our father Abraham (Romans 4:12, 16; James 2:21) as well as Isaac and Jacob. We know that He loves Israel, rescuing them from slavery and bringing them into a land flowing with milk and honey. We know that Jesus loved His people so much that He gave them wonderful Laws for pleasing behavior so He could live among them after He delivered them. He did all of this without anyone asking Him.

These are some examples we have of how Jesus has loved us from the beginning. He has always rescued us from our own perversity, and is always willing to forgive anyone, if we are willing to repent. He gives us His Word to regenerate, restore, and revitalize.

So how do we use these types of love examples from Jesus to love one another? The simple answer is by acting as He has acted. The Words He gave us are the starting point and framework of those actions, which we will talk more about in the upcoming sections.

The Scriptures tell us that the Law is God’s love, beauty, and mercy in action. Look at the example of Israel. First, they were rescued by God (saved by grace through faithful obedience to the Passover) were baptized (through the sea) then went to the desert to find out how God wanted them to live. All this He did without them earning even a small part of it.

In a similar way, God saves people now (born again); we are baptized, and then are given the Word of God to teach us how to live. It never happens in reverse order, where people live righteous lives then tell God they ‘deserve’ life because they lived perfectly.

Love is one of those funny words that’s used all the time but doesn’t only have one definition. We think we understand it, but maybe we don’t as well as we should. In the Bible, the meaning depends a lot on the context of how it is used. The Hebrew version is more context-dependant than the Greek, which has three different words for three different types of love (brotherly, romantic or sexual, and godly). We all know that “I love ice cream” is a lot different

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<sup>8</sup> Browse through the prophets to find prophecies concerning all sorts of godless nations.

than “for God so loved the world,” but we still use the same English word.

The highest and most pure form of love is the one which is between God and people. It is not an emotion, although it gives rise to many emotions. The Greeks call this love ‘agape’ love, and it is primarily an action word (remember, a verb, not a noun). It is based on and defined by God’s character and all the good things about Him.

He is the source of love, and is the one who first loved. We learn love from Him by how He treats us, and how we see Him treat others. As I said before, mercy, beauty, favor, preciousness, patience, long suffering, and forgiveness are some of the aspects of love. So are justice, order, correction, discipline, consequences, meekness and humility.

God showed His love through the giving of His only Son in a sacrifice for our sins. He also loves us by revealing Himself through His creation and His Word. Every one of His Laws is a beautiful example of love. They are perfect for teaching us how to love each other; that is, if they are not robbed of the love in them. This happens when we remove the Spirit and reduce them to a series of arbitrary legislative decrees, or abuse them by trying to trade merit for salvation. We’ll always be a few steps short when “buying a stairway to heaven.”

He loves us so much that ‘He gave’ His Son, and He gives us wonderful instructions on how to love Him back by giving our lives in return. As we submit ourselves willingly to every word, every instruction, every statute or code or regulation or whatever you want to call them, we return as much as we can of the love He has for us. Love is the basis of the Law He gave us. It permeates all of His Word, including the Law, and fills it up with the essence of His presence. As we perform each action He asks, it’s as if the love flows in ever increasing proportion until it turns into a river of life.

Please excuse me if I wax a little poetic here, because as I’m writing I can see it and feel it, but it’s hard to describe completely unless you’ve experience it. Sexual love gives us a little bit of an idea, and brotherly love kind of helps us understand it in a small way. We can even get a taste of it when we eat ice cream. But as Paul said in that famous chapter he wrote, we are empty and useless and nothing without love.

12For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. 13But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:12-13 NASB95)

The thing about love, though, is it isn’t static. We can’t store it and expect it to last. It has to be shared to keep it moving, flowing, and filling. We share it with God as we respond with actions to the love He gave us. We share it with others when we act to benefit them.

Love is doing what is best, good, wholesome, and right for someone else, even at the expense of short-term gain now. God’s Word (or Law) provides the framework for learning love, and for teaching it to other people. We cannot follow the Law properly without love, for love and Law are as inseparable as the Father and the Son.

*Grace and Law.* The new covenant is a merging of grace and Law in a heart of flesh. Israel received the Law along with the presence of God. Grace and Law lived together in the wilderness just as they live in the heart of the believer. We wander through a figurative desert too. The Law is God’s grace in action (the tablets are under the ‘mercy seat’ Exodus 40:20).

God did not have to give Israel instructions on how to prepare for Him to take up residence, as He did when beginning to inhabit the Tabernacle. He could’ve just erased

everything and started over.<sup>9</sup> Instead, He re-instructs His people in loving and holy living, acceptable to Him.

When the Law is written on the heart, it is also a gracious act. Following a few rules is not the point. The point is to learn to live with Him as our center.

16For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. 17For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.  
(John 1:16-17 NASB95)

Verse 17 is not saying that ‘the law stopped and grace started.’ It’s not saying that Law doesn’t have grace, or that Jesus doesn’t have the Law. John says we have all received from the fullness of Jesus, grace (the Law) upon grace (the Incarnation).

Through Moses, Jesus from His fullness and grace gave the Law. Grace and truth were also ‘realized’ or literally came to be (were born) in the Incarnation. My paraphrase: ‘For of (Jesus’) fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. In His fullness we received grace in the Law given through Moses; (in the Incarnation) grace and truth came to be through Jesus in human form.’

*The gospel.* Like the New Covenant, most ‘New Testament’ or part-Bible Christians cannot tell you what the gospel is either. We tend to think of it as a feel-good message about Jesus being our buddy and saving us from bad stuff. Then He allows us to do whatever we want.

The gospel, which means ‘good news,’ however, might really make us feel good, and it should, but the message is not about feelings. It is about ‘God with us,’ which is the meaning of one of the names of Jesus (Immanuel, Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23).

Did you know that the gospel was preached to Israel at Mount Sinai by God through Moses? So says the writer of Hebrews.

2For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. (Hebrews 4:2 NASB95)

Stephen calls the group at Sinai the “congregation in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38) and that they received “living oracles” to pass on to their kids. These living oracles were none other than the Law. So this is another way of saying the gospel was preached to the church at Mount Sinai.

But why is the Law called ‘the gospel’ in Hebrews? Easy. The ‘good news’ at Sinai was that God was going to live with His people, and the Law was part of it. In other words, the church at Sinai had the good news of ‘God with us’ preached to them just as we have.

The Law was to facilitate ‘God with us,’ a.k.a. the gospel. God, in His grace, was taking up residence, and following the Law was (and is) a loving response (faith) to His presence. Jesus is the good news or gospel because He is ‘God with us.’ The Law, His Word, facilitates His dwelling amongst us. His sacrifice makes it possible for God to dwell within us forever, and the Law helps us learn to live accordingly. So the living oracles are part and parcel of the gospel.

But at the Sinai church meeting, the gospel went over like a lead balloon. The glitch? It was not united with faith (trust and obedience). As the Hebrews writer says, the congregation refused to obey God and go into the Land. We can see then that faith has an obedience

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<sup>9</sup> And He almost did after the golden calf incident Exodus 32:10.

component as I said a few pages back. To believe in God, or have faith, means to accept the fact of God's existence and also in His right to give instructions. The Law is a wonderful part of the 'full gospel' which we live as part of our faith.

6Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, 7He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts." (Hebrews 4:6-7 NASB95)

The gospel is something to be obeyed (Romans 10:16; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Peter 4:17). The good news of the kingdom is that Jesus makes it possible for us and God to live together. This means that thoughts and behavior have to line up with God's will. We must forsake our own ways and live by every word out of His mouth. Call it Law, or laws, statues, commands, charge or bread or living oracles or whatever, but His Word is the only gospel.

*Man's Labels.* Most every Christian will tell you that they think the Word is whole and complete. However, most Christians also divide it up into 'old' and 'new' sections. They don't stop to realize that the Bible doesn't use those labels for itself—they were applied by men.

We mask the riches that God provides us in this area when we assume 'old' is outdated, while 'new' is updated and improved. But when a whole-Bible Christian says that the Word is complete, we mean that The Word itself doesn't recognize labels such as these. We do not accept the 'outdated' and 'updated' concepts. We may use the labels to help those who don't know any better, but we do not believe they are accurate. Because of our hard hearts, they have been used to split up the unity of God's Word.

We label parts of God's Word 'law,' but all of His Words are law. 'Torah' means 'instruction' and is usually limited to the first five books of the Bible. Except anything that God says is law and instruction. Looked at properly, His Law is gentle instruction. And believers aren't led around by laws like a horse with a bit anyway. He guides us with His eye.

8I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you. 9Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check, otherwise they will not come near to you. (Psalm 32:8-9 NASB95)

Just because (for now) He allows people to make a choice, and allows a wrong choice in many instances, does not mean He finds the wrong choice acceptable.

30"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, 31because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." (Acts 17:30-31 NASB95)

Everything in the New Testament is found in the Old, even if only hinted at in some instances. The New Testament is also Scripture, but it was certainly not written in a vacuum. All that Jesus and the apostles taught came from the Old Testament, rightly divided and properly

understood and taught.

*What about the Temple?* For a while, the temple was where God lived, and was the ‘heart’ of the nation that He wanted to make into a light for all peoples. That didn’t work out like He wanted. The temple was torn down, the nation scattered. But wait. Was the temple really gone? Not according to the Word.

24For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; 25nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own. (Hebrews 9:24-25 NASB95)

It was a copy of the temple that was destroyed. See, the original temple is in heaven.<sup>10</sup> When the tabernacle was built, it was exactly according to the original (Exodus 25:9, 40; Numbers 8:4; Acts 7:44; Hebrews 8:5). When the temples were built,<sup>11</sup> they were also built according to the original specifications (at least Solomon’s; see 1 Chronicles 28:11-19). God’s temple in heaven is the pattern for the copies. It has never been in danger of being destroyed.

Many people think that because the temple copy was torn down (about 70 C. E.) the Law was eliminated. For instance, one writer has this to say.<sup>12</sup>

“The old Mosaic economy of sacred priests, sacred buildings, sacred rituals, and sacred objects has been forever destroyed by the cross of Jesus Christ. In addition, it has been replaced by a nonhierarchical, nonritualistic, nonliturgical organism called the ekklesia (church).”

He speaks in ignorance, because the Temple is still in existence. It’s just in heaven, with Jesus as our High Priest. God’s holy instructions are still valid, as they have always been. He just moves them into our hearts, along with His Spirit. What is holy is still holy. What is not holy is still not holy.

The period we live in now is not the only time the earth has been without a temple. There was also a long period between the destruction of the first temple and the building of the second. From the Garden to the Tabernacle there was no temple either. In fact, time with a tabernacle or temple (about 1,500 years give or take a century or two) is a much shorter interval than time without it (about 4,500 years).

And guess what? Everyone born during all those different time slots, and indeed any time slot ever, temple or no temple, Jew or non-Jew, still had to live as God wanted them to live. Obedience to God is never based on the presence or absence of a temple.

*God’s barbecue.* Now let’s talk about animal sacrifices, or what I like to call God’s barbecue. Animal sacrifices were never, ever, intended to save anyone. There is no mention anywhere in the Word of eternal life given through the blood of an animal.<sup>13</sup> The best that an animal sacrifice could ever do was show obedience.

<sup>10</sup> Revelation 7:15, 11:19, 14:15-18, 15:5-8 etc.

<sup>11</sup> Solomon’s temple, the second temple built during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, and the later expansion called Herod’s Temple.

<sup>12</sup> From the book ‘pagan Christianity?’ Frank Viola and George Barna, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2008, p. 27.

<sup>13</sup> For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. (Hebrews 10:4 NASB95)

<sup>6</sup> By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for, And by the fear of the LORD one keeps away from evil. (Proverbs 16:6 NASB95)

If a person's sacrifice was accepted, then the person was accepted. This was because the sacrifice was accepted based on a person's heart, as well as his or her actions. A person who loves God and wants to do what He says will try to present a sacrifice the way God wants. The person who is sloppy about it shows how little they care. Just like Cain (Genesis 4:3-5).

Animal sacrifice was a shared experience with God and with others in the community. Most sacrifices were parceled out to the people involved (Leviticus 7). Part of it was God's (the part that was burned up) part was for the priests (for the work) and part was for the person doing the offering (and usually family and friends). That's why I call it God's barbecue.

The sacrifices were also a reminder of Jesus. They were stand-ins, so to speak, for what would eventually happen with Him. We can think of them as memorials, because that's how God thought of them. The blood and the burning were like a constant prayer, asking God to treat the people with mercy and grace on the basis of the Ultimate Sacrifice (Jesus).

People also needed to be reminded of their sin and the price of disobedience (Hebrews 10:3). That's why the humble submission of the person doing the offering was just as important as the procedure. If sacrifices were offered merely as part of lip service, they didn't work. The death of the animal was not as important as faith (trust and action).

<sup>10</sup>Hear the word of the Lord, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the instruction of our God, You people of Gomorrah. <sup>11</sup>“What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?” Says the Lord. “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle; And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats. <sup>12</sup>“When you come to appear before Me, Who requires of you this trampling of My courts? <sup>13</sup>“Bring your worthless offerings no longer, Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies— I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. <sup>14</sup>“I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, They have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing them. <sup>15</sup>“So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. <sup>16</sup>“Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, <sup>17</sup>Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow. (Isaiah 1:10-17 NASB95)

God tells Isaiah in this passage that He “had enough of burnt offerings” because they were only lip service. He was not making an arbitrary change. Sacrifices and holy days were (and are) rendered ineffective if they were mixed with iniquity or lawlessness (verse 13).

If our hands are “covered with blood,” which isn't from the sacrifices, the sacrifice isn't acceptable. The effectiveness of the sacrifices was based on the future final sacrifice of the only Son of God, or they never would've worked (such as they did) in the first place. The sacrifice of the Christ allowed God to dwell in the midst of Israel in a tent.

24“Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:24 NASB95)

There are lots of reasons for animal sacrifices, including thanksgiving, fellowship, and peace. But salvation was never a reason. If salvation were the point, then when Solomon offers 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep (2 Chronicles 7:5) was he ‘more saved’ than the person who could only afford a couple of birds (Leviticus 5:7)? Of course not.

Sacrifices were well known long before Sinai and in many other countries. Most of these were perversions of the original sacrifices God ordained way back with Adam and Eve. None of them ‘saved’ anyone. The 70 bull sacrifices during Tabernacles in Numbers 29:12-35 are generally understood as being for the nations.<sup>14</sup> Did the sacrifice of bulls ‘save’ the nations? Did the bogus sacrifices performed by many other people save them? The short, easy answer: “no.”

*The order of Melchizedek.* According to Hebrews, we have a high priest that ministers in the heavenly temple on a continual basis.

1My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. (1 John 2:1-2 NASB95)

23The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, 24but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. 25Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:23-25 NASB95)

33 Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. (Romans 8:33-34 ESV)

The writer of Hebrews tells us that there was a change in the Law because of a change in the priesthood (Hebrews 7:12) not because God eliminated any part of it. If we still had a temple here, we (believers) would still use it for sacrifices. The apostles used it on a regular basis,<sup>15</sup> including sacrifices (Acts 21:26). There is evidence that Gentiles offered sacrifices too.

Believers may not (all) be Levitical priests, but we can still perform many similar functions. We can live and teach His Words. We can tell people of God’s invitation (nay, command) to become part of His kingdom. We can offer sacrifices of praise (Hebrews 13:15). John the Baptist was a Levitical priest (Luke 1:5-25) who chose a different way to minister than

<sup>14</sup> This comes from association with the 70 nations in Genesis 10.

<sup>15</sup> Acts 2:46, 47, 3:1-8, 5:20, 21, 25, 42, 21:26-30, 22:17, 24:6, 12, 24:17,18, 25:8, and 26:21.

in the corrupt establishment. We can do the same. Believers are part of the kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6; Revelation 1:6, 5:10).

5'Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; 6and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel." (Exodus 19:5-6 NASB95)

All believers are kings and priests as is evident if you read the Word. We are just not priests after the Levitical pattern. Our high priest is after the order of Melchizedek, so we are too. We have direct access to God and can live and teach God's Word to anyone who wants to learn. It's just that as Jesus said, our kingdom is not of this world. Believers are the ones spoken to in the section below. Unbelievers certainly wouldn't be called "priests of the Lord" (verse 6).

1The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, Because the Lord has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners; 2To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, 3To grant those who mourn in Zion, Giving them a garland instead of ashes, The oil of gladness instead of mourning, The mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified. 4Then they will rebuild the ancient ruins, They will raise up the former devastations; And they will repair the ruined cities, The desolations of many generations. 5Strangers will stand and pasture your flocks, And foreigners will be your farmers and your vinedressers. 6But you will be called the priests of the Lord; You will be spoken of as ministers of our God. You will eat the wealth of nations, And in their riches you will boast. (Isaiah 61:1-6 NASB95.  
See also Luke 4:14-21)

Formal priesthood and laity systems outside of the tabernacle or temple (or Melchizedek) are unscriptural. Every believer is a priest, and responsible for learning more about God and using it for the benefit of others. We are priests when we act like priests; serving God and representing Him. Paid positions doing 'ministry' for us are not ordained by God in any way shape or form in the Scriptures.<sup>16</sup> At most, we have elders (old guys) sometimes called shepherds, and we can share good things with them.

*The temple rebuilt.* Ezekiel describes another temple (chapters 40 through 48; see also Zechariah 6:11-15 for another instance) that hasn't been built yet. It has priests and animal sacrifices. It looks like this temple will be built after the return of the Christ, during His thousand year reign (Ezekiel 44:2, for instance).

14"Yet I will appoint them to keep charge of the house, of all its service and of all that shall be done in it. 15"But the Levitical priests, the sons of Zadok, who kept

<sup>16</sup> 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4 mention gifts of certain able men and 1 Timothy 5 speaks of 'double honor' given to them, but the system of tithe-receiving pseudo-priesthood that we have now is not mentioned.

charge of My sanctuary when the sons of Israel went astray from Me, shall come near to Me to minister to Me; and they shall stand before Me to offer Me the fat and the blood,” declares the Lord God. 16“They shall enter My sanctuary; they shall come near to My table to minister to Me and keep My charge. (Ezekiel 44:14-16 NASB95)

23“Moreover, they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean. 24“In a dispute they shall take their stand to judge; they shall judge it according to My ordinances. They shall also keep My laws and My statutes in all My appointed feasts and sanctify My sabbaths. (Ezekiel 44:23-24 NASB95)

So how do we square the new temple with the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus (Romans 6:10, 1 Peter 3:18)? Some try to stick with the idea of two separate programs, one for Israel and one for the church. So the new temple must be for Israel, in their reckoning.

Clearly, however, a temple and animal sacrifices mean something other than salvation. Otherwise why build another temple at all, when Jesus is right there on the throne? It isn't necessary to make up separate programs for separate people groups. All God's people will one day be giving offerings in a brand new temple. Animal sacrifices in a temple are simply memorials or reminders of the work of Jesus on the cross.

When the temple of Ezekiel is built, all of His people will sacrifice there. Salvation will not be the issue, just like it's not the issue now and never was. The issue is obedience.

16Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. 17And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, there will be no rain on them. 18If the family of Egypt does not go up or enter, then no rain will fall on them; it will be the plague with which the Lord smites the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths. 19This will be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths. (Zechariah 14:16-19 NASB95)

*The temple meaningless.* The presence or absence of a temple copy really doesn't mean all that much in some ways anyway. It is the presence of God in our hearts that makes the difference. Even when the temple copy was around, it was misused.

4“Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, ‘This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.’ 5“For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly practice justice between a man and his neighbor, 6if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, nor walk after other gods to your own ruin, 7then I will let you

dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.  
 8“Behold, you are trusting in deceptive words to no avail. 9“Will you steal, murder,  
 and commit adultery and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal and walk after  
 other gods that you have not known, 10then come and stand before Me in this  
 house, which is called by My name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’—that you may do  
 all these abominations? 11“Has this house, which is called by My name, become a  
 den of robbers in your sight? Behold, I, even I, have seen it,” declares the Lord.  
 (Jeremiah 7:4-11 NASB95)

There were times when Israel used the temple (or the Ark of the Covenant) as a talisman. They sinned as they wanted, then went and did the sacrifices (with ‘bloody hands’) to get clean.

Christians are no better. We use the name of Jesus in much the same way. We sin all we want during the week, then go to the ‘temple’ on Sunday and weep while we sing songs with raised hands expecting that we will be all clean again. Obviously, temple or no temple, if lip service is all we offer to God, it is never acceptable to Him. We can’t depend on a temple, or the name Jesus, or a communion wafer, or a crucifix, to protect us from iniquity we harbor.

*Choose life.* When Josiah found God’s book of life, what we call the Law, he was stricken to his core and instantly adjusted his life to it. He jumped whole-heartedly into the living oracles by grabbing all that God commanded. He did not rationalize that the Laws must be ‘old’ so therefore only applied to some earlier group of people. Neither did he reinterpret them as only ‘spiritual’ so he could ignore some.

With his heart of flesh he entered into the covenant (or Promise) that God has had with man since the beginning (‘I will be your God and you will be my people’). He could’ve acted like the wicked kings and ignored what God said, but he chose life. He bought into God’s Word to the extent that he led his people in the observance of a Passover feast (2 Chronicles 35). It was so good nobody had seen one like it before. It was better even than the Passovers during the times of the Judges or any other king (2 Kings 23:22 and 2 Chronicles 35:18).

We have the same choice. When we discover all the words of His book of Law we can join in, or we can continue to rebel. The death and resurrection of Jesus makes possible a free-will heart-to-heart relationship with the Father. Our tender heart of flesh responds to all of God’s Word by giving our whole life to Him in return. If that means changing what we eat, what we wear or how we act, that’s a small enough sacrifice compared to what He gave us.

The gospel includes the law, because the good news is ‘God with us’ and His Word is part of the package. We don’t need a temple in order to live it like He wants us to. As priests of the Melchizedek order, we live the Law and teach it to everyone who will listen. “Doing what is right,” as Peter says in Acts 10:35, is always in style. The whole-Bible priest knows the Word is one faith given to His one body of believers. It is always fresh and new, and always applicable to all of His people, all of the time. It is never obsolete or outdated.

Temples have no purpose if we only serve God with our lips. If our hearts aren’t in it, a temple (or an ark) is just an empty box. Animal sacrifices, whether before or after the cross, are only effective if they are made by a heart obedient to the Spirit of God’s Word or Law. We will get to offer these beautiful memorials again at the barbecues with God and Josiah and the rest of the family, at the reunion in the kingdom, after a new house is built by Jesus. All people on the earth at the time will come to the house warming, or they’ll be sorry they didn’t. One way or the other, God will be all in all. From the least to the greatest, everyone will know Him and His Law.