

The Road of Distractions to the Christian Race

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The Biblical Mandate to Avoid Distractions

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, (KJV Heb. 12:1)

Introduction

The word ‘wherefore’ in Hebrews 12:1 is drawing a conclusion from the previous verses in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. This is where some of the Old Testament heroes of the faith are mentioned.

In chapter eleven, the author of Hebrews names some sixteen Old Testament heroes who ran faithfully and achieved the super-grace status of maturity and tells of some of the things they endured. Some of these heroes were tortured, mocked, flogged, imprisoned, stoned, and some even sawed in half. Yet, in spite of these adversities they persevered through each one of these harsh trials and afflictions. It is these Old Testament heroes that the writer of Hebrews wants to use to encourage those of us in the Church Age to reach our own super-grace status. They had far less available than we have today. Therefore, we have no excuse for not reaching our own super-grace status that we are mandated to achieve. Let us begin by understanding the phases of God’s grace.

Prior to entering into any phase in the Christian walk, we first have to be placed into union with Christ by accepting His finished work on the cross for our salvation. This phase is called saving grace, as found in Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works lest any man should boast. (KJV Eph. 2:8-9)

God’s saving grace to us is not based on anything that we have done, but is instead based solely on His worthiness. It has and always will be based on who He is and never who we are; otherwise we would still be waiting to obtain it.

Ephesians 2:9 shows that we are not saved by our good works. Saving grace is truly God’s mercy at work, in that, instead of receiving the wrath that we so deserve, His mercy grants us imperfect sinners this perfectly free grace gift. Therefore, it should be crystal clear that since we did nothing to merit it, we certainly cannot be lost due to any of our bad works. It is simply accepting this ‘gift’ by ‘faith’.

As unbelievers, prior to accepting this free gift, the righteousness of God rejects us because we are not as perfect as He is. Because God's perfect justice had to execute judgment on us, we are ultimately utterly separated from His presence forever. However, when we believe by faith in His finished work, the righteousness of God now accepts us because we become as perfect as He is, and thus enables the justice of God to bless us. The imputed righteousness of God thus demands, in turn, that He provide logistical grace for all believers whether winners or losers in the Christian walk. In God's logistical grace provision there is no distinction. With this fact in mind, let us take a closer look at the meaning of logistical grace.

Logistical Grace Defined

As saving grace places us in union with Christ, logistical grace provides for us God's support and sustenance while we are alive on this earth. The basis for logistical grace is God's imputed righteousness in us and is seen in 2 Corinthians 9:8:

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: (KJV 2 Cor. 9:8)

This verse reassures us that God provides everything so that every believer has an equal privilege and equal opportunity to execute God's plan in their life.

God's logistical supports will involve several things. First of all, the Lord has to keep us alive while we are on this earth. None of us can depart from this life apart from God's will. By implication, Satan cannot remove us apart from the Lord's permission. As a result, if we are to continue to live on this earth means that the Lord will provide all our temporal provisions, which include food, shelter, and clothing. Of course, the basis for food, shelter, and clothing would require that we have a source of income, which would necessitate employment. Obviously, having a job would require having a means of transportation to get back and forth from that job, all of which fall under God's logistical grace provision, which is further taught in Philippians 4:19:

But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. (KJV Phil. 4:19)

Notice the verse tells us that God will supply all our needs and not necessarily all our wants.

In addition, God provides an environment where we can have the freedom to advance to maturity. The environment God provides would begin

with the laws of His four divine establishments. God's divine establishments include the individual, marriage, the family and government, and are for both believers and unbelievers alike.

Each one of God's establishments has a system of authority. The authority for each individual would be his or her volition. Volition is the decision-maker in the soul of every individual. Through our volition or will we can decide to be negative or positive to anything in life. Our volition is responsible for all the choices that we make regardless of whether they are good or bad. There have been many Christian martyrs throughout the Church Age that have had to choose whether to deny Christ or be killed. They each chose death rather than to deny their Lord. These martyrs did not say, 'I did not have a choice'.

In the institution of marriage the husband has the authority or is responsible for the wife. In like manner, in the family, the parents have the authority or responsibility for the children. In any particular national entity, the government has the authority or responsibility for the nation that it governs.

God uses the laws of these four establishments to perpetuate the human race by allowing for freedom, civilization, authority, evangelism and spiritual growth. Thus, establishment laws are extremely important. As a matter of fact, they are as important to each one of us as is the law of gravity. If you can imagine not having the law of gravity you would conclude that it would make for a very chaotic environment. In like manner, not having laws of divine establishment would also make for chaos.

The laws of God's divine establishments define freedom in such terms as privacy, property and authority. There is no such thing as the enjoyment of life or freedom without any authority. A society without authority at any level would make for a very chaotic society and we can see how rapidly the chaos emerges as the rampant disregard for authority grows.

In addition, for believers only, God also provides a collection of priceless spiritual riches such as a portfolio of invisible assets. The assets that God has available are at the disposal of both positive and negative believers alike.

We have available to us such things as the ten-problem solving mechanisms of the spiritual life. In progressive order, these mechanisms begin with the confession technique of First John 1:9. Through confession we are moved to the stage of being filled with Spirit, which is the basis for spirituality. Being in fellowship allows for the third mechanism to function, which is called the faith-rest drill. It is here that the Christian claims and applies the promises of God to their experience. These first three mechanisms are for spiritual childhood. The fourth and fifth mechanisms are for spiritual adolescence and are utilized by being oriented to God's grace and His Word. The next stages are in the realm of spiritual maturity, which would include having love for God the Father and in turn impersonal love for all mankind. Maximizing our love for God will result in us sharing His

happiness, having a personal destiny and complete occupation with Jesus Christ.

The Christian also has available the privacy of his own royal priesthood. This means that every believer in Jesus Christ is appointed a royal priest at the moment of salvation (1 Pet. 2:9). Our priesthood means that we can now represent ourselves before God.

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: (KJV 1 Pet. 2:9)

Also available to every believer is the completed Bible, the local Church and the gift of Pastor/Teacher. All three of these provisions are vital to our spiritual progression since in the completed Bible is found God's complete policy on all matters. The local Church is the place to learn God's policy and the Pastor/Teacher clarifies this policy.

In addition, the Lord even provides the assignment of guardian angels in His logistical grace to us. There are actually three categories of guardian angels, which would include those assigned to children, believers and client nations.

In Hebrews 1:13-14 we see the angels that are guardians of Church Age Believers. In Hebrews 1:14 these guardian angels are called 'ministering spirits sent forth to minister' to those who are 'heirs of salvation'. In Acts 12:13-15, we know that the early Church understood and believed in the concept of guardian angels being assigned to believers. The example in Acts has the Apostle Peter miraculously escaping prison by the aid of an angel and afterwards knocking on the door of John Mark's mother's house. We are told that Rhoda ran to tell the others of Peter being at the front door only to be told by them that she was 'mad' and that it was 'his angel', referring to Peter's guardian angel.

But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation? (KJV Heb. 1:13-14)

And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. (KJV Acts 12:13-15)

Matthew 18:10 also lets us know that children have a guardian angel to protect them during their childhood. There, the Lord talked about the children and ‘their angels’, referring to their guardian angels

Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. (KJV Matt. 18:10)

Also, in Daniel 10:13, 20 teaches us that there are angels that guard client nations. Daniel 10:13 speaks of Michael the Archangel, who is the angel responsible for defending all Jewish client nations. Michael will be a busy angel during the Tribulation period that is found in the book of Revelation (Rev. 12:7).

But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia. (KJV Dan. 10:13)

Then said he, Knowest thou wherefore I come unto thee? And now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia: and when I am gone forth, lo, the prince of Grecia shall come. (KJV Dan. 10:20)

And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, (KJV Rev. 12:7)

Therefore, in logistical grace God sustains our life on this planet in spite of satanic opposition, or opposition from others. The Lord even sustains us in spite of our own tendencies for self-destruction as we do have that propensity. Yet, God keeps us alive in spite of others and ourselves. In First Peter 1:5 we see God’s logistical grace when he tells us that we are ‘kept by God’s power’.

Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (KJV 1 Pet. 1:5)

God provides all these things in His logistical grace for us, regardless of our spiritual status, whether a winner or a loser as pertaining to our spiritual life. Logistical grace is spoken of by the Lord in Matthew 6:25-34. It is in the Gospel of Matthew that the Lord teaches not to worry about food and clothing, since our father in heaven feeds the birds. Our Lord questions, are we not more important?

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. (KJV Matt. 6:25-34)

When we worry, are fearful or have anxiety and apprehension, it simply means that we have either rejected or we are ignorant of God's logistical grace in our lives. In spite of our disregard, the Lord still continues to support us even when we worry.

With all the points that we have discussed on saving and logistical grace, let us continue to our next section in order to understand the next category of God's grace, known as super-grace.

Super-Grace Defined

By definition, the super-grace status of the believer is the highest stage of spiritual adulthood which Paul describes in First Timothy 1:14 as 'abundant' grace. Super-grace is the result of maximizing God's grace and is the 'fullness of God' that Paul writes about in Ephesians 3:19.

And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. (KJV 1 Tim. 1:14)

And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. (KJV Eph. 3:19)

The super-grace status is the category of God's grace that applies to the winner believer only. Super-grace is the highest adult stage of the spiritual life within God's Royal Family and is the objective for every Christian after salvation. In this stage we are completely occupied with Jesus Christ, and, not only does He become our best friend, but we share His perfect happiness. We are no longer slaves to our circumstances in our lives. Extraordinarily, we can begin to handle undeserved suffering and maintain a total sense of security as well as maintain the same mental attitude whether in prosperity or in disaster. In other words, we have confidence that the Lord has all circumstances under control.

As in any true relationship, it will require time and effort on our part to allow the relationship to flourish. It is at this stage in our spiritual life when we truly have capacity for life, love, true happiness and blessings, since we fully understand all the different categories of God's grace.

The super-grace status is the objective of every believer after salvation and should have top priority in our scale of values (Eph. 3:16-19).

That He would grant you, according to The riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God. (KJV Eph. 3:16-19)

Being filled with all the fullness of God is synonymous with spiritual maturity, but there are obstacles that will keep us from this objective, which is what Hebrews 12:1 brings out.

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, (KJV Heb. 12:1)

We are to get rid of anything that will keep us from reaching our super-grace status of maturity. The words 'lay aside' have a reference to taking off like clothes and putting away as in a prison. Our verse in view is teaching that we are to renounce permanently anything that will keep us from our objective. Therefore, it is imperative to know what these obstacles are, so that we may put them away under lock and key.

The Mandate to Lay Aside any Distractions

The word ‘weight’ in Hebrews 12:1 is translated from the Greek noun *onkon* meaning, ‘a weight, a burden, a hindrance, something that gets in one’s way’. By definition, *onkon* has a reference to anything that hinders our spiritual progress.

The word ‘race’ in Hebrews 12:1 is a reference to either a ‘struggle, a fight, or a race’. Both athletes and soldiers are required to maintain a physical conditioning that cannot have any hindrance to their respective performance. Carrying extra body weight or unnecessary clothing would be a hindrance to an athlete in the realm of athletic competition. The same analogy would apply to the soldier in the battlefield. In the spiritual realm these hindrances that *onkon* has a reference to, would not fall under the category of sin. This is why the author of Hebrews makes the distinction with the words ‘weight’ and ‘sin’.

The ‘weight’ that is spoken about in our verse is anything that would cause us not to concentrate on our super-grace objective. As we have seen, our objective is not only to reach super-grace status, but also to maintain that status of maturity. By definition, the opposite of concentration is distraction. Therefore, to ‘lay aside every weight’, would be a mandate for every Church Age believer to take off and lock away any distractions. The distractions to Christians today can be quite numerous and often very subtle.

What Constitutes a Distraction?

Distractions could include such things as entertainment or a social life. There is nothing wrong with either of these activities, but they can be emphasized to the point of taking priority over learning God’s Word, then they can become a hindrance to our spiritual momentum.

Not having an organized life can also become a hindrance or a distraction to reaching our super-grace life. Not being organized will lead us to a mismanagement of our time and become a distraction to our objective in our spiritual life. An organized life always begins with an organized mind. An organized Christian thinker will set time each day for learning God’s Word as well as time on the job and for family. Of course, we will also need time to properly nourish and rest our physical bodies as well as allow time for entertainment. A balance in all these areas of our life will allow us to manage our time and effort effectively in order to reach and maintain our super-grace status. Emphasis on the details of this life placed over our relationship with the Lord will become a hindrance and cause us to miss out on the fantastic blessings that come with reaching super-grace. Not only will we miss out on fantastic blessings in this life, but also in eternity future.

Knowing God's thoughts and understanding how He operates should be the number one priority in the Christian life. The Apostle Paul understood the importance of maintaining a balance in his priorities and that balance fostered confidence in his future in eternity (2 Tim. 4: 7-8).

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing. (KJV 2 Tim. 4:7-8)

In this passage, Paul was about to be beheaded when he wrote these words to Timothy, yet he rejoiced because he had maximized God's grace in his life and shortly in his death. As a result, Paul had also maximized his rewards in eternity future. Paul knew that he would also receive surpassing-grace, which is simply a reference to the blessings, awards, and decorations for the mature believer—those reaching and maintaining their super-grace status of maturity in time.

Certainly, we will be faced with legitimate distractions while running our race, things which include disaster. None of us are resistant; however, it is a matter of maintaining right priorities by living in the light of eternity and realizing this life is short, whereas eternity is forever.

Distractions Linked to the Christian Way of Life

Being Negative to Biblical Truth

There are countless distractions that are linked to the Christian way of life. However, the most obvious form of negative volition is to simply refuse to assemble together for Biblical teaching. For some reason or another, the negative believer does not assemble together under their Pastor/Teacher to learn the things of the Lord, yet showing up is not an indication that a believer is actually positive either.

Another scenario of a distraction is when a believer shows up for Bible teaching, but neglects to use the confession technique found in 1 John 1:9, 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness'. This believer is equally classified as a negative believer.

Neglecting the use of 1 John 1:9 will result in being out of fellowship and falls under the category of negative volition. This confession technique is very important because it is the Christian's recovery drill, and it allows us to regain fellowship with God the Holy Spirit. Therefore, failure to be filled with the Spirit means that Biblical truth will be hindered from being transferred to our stream of consciousness. As a result, there will be a lack of

absolute truth in the soul and no divine viewpoint to base our decisions. A believer in this state of negative volition will be like the person Paul describes in 2 Timothy 3:7 when he writes that they are, 'Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth'. Therefore, failure to be filled with the Spirit would probably describe many Christians today who simply neglect the elementary principle of confession.

In addition, it is imperative to understand that by no means does 1 John 1:9 refer to the pre-salvation state of an individual as some have professed. This mindset sets forth the heresy that our sinful human nature is abolished the moment we become a born-again child of God. This being the case, the erroneous conclusion is that the believer in Christ no longer sins during this temporal life. This issue is addressed by observing some points in 1 John 1:8.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (KJV 1 John 1:8)

The word 'sin' in 1 John 1:8 is translated from the Greek noun *hamartian* meaning, 'a failure, fault, sin, guilt'. That *hamartian* is not referring to acts of sin, but to our sin nature is seen in the fact that the word is singular in number and there is no definite article used with this noun. John is simply saying that if we claim to be sinless because we no longer have a sin nature, we only 'deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us'. Something else to note is the word 'have', translated from *echomen* meaning, 'to hold, possess', is in the present tense. The present tense lets us know that we will continue to fall after salvation and is not a reference to the sins committed prior to our conversion. It is also clear that the Apostle John included himself in the group who still possess the propensity for sin caused by the sin nature when he uses the word 'we' in these two verses. As long as 'we' are in this tabernacle of flesh there will be a tendency to sin. Our sin nature only becomes eradicated upon our physical death or being part of the rapture generation when we get 'caught up together...to meet the Lord in the air' (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (KJV 1 Thess. 4:16-17)

As a result of us still possessing a sin nature, God in His grace has provided the confession technique of 1 John 1:9 in order to recover our fellowship with Him upon committing a sin. Positionally, we are made righteous before our Holy Father at the moment of our salvation, but

experientially we are still being refined until our ultimate sanctification when we will trade this sinful body for our glorified body likened to that of our Lord (Phil. 3:21).

Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. (KJV Phil. 3:21)

Inconsistent Negative Volition

There is also the believer who is involved in what is known as inconsistent negative volition. This believer is basically an occasional hearer of the Word. Believers in this state expose themselves to Biblical teaching when they want something from God, or when they are in some kind of trouble; they are a part time Christian who uses God at their convenience. The danger in this practice is that it can eventually lead to reversionism,¹ which is difficult to get out of and can lead to the sin unto death.

Negative Vulnerability

Another form of distraction associated with negative volition is what is known as negative vulnerability. Although a believer may reach the super-grace status of maturity, they are vulnerable when they react to disillusionment, boredom, discouragement, self-pity or frustration. In other words, we become disillusioned because we set up a false standard for someone who is enchanting to us. Then, when the person fails to live up to our false standards we get shocked, distracted, and disoriented. We cannot focus on our own shortcomings when we are pre-occupied with the shortcomings of someone else!

The principle for negative volition is found in the Lord's words as they are written in John 8:43-45.

Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not. (KJV John 8:43-45)

¹ *Reversionism* is the process of a believer retreating to their former beliefs and habits prior to their pre-salvation state when their sin nature had maximum control of their decisions.

There was a lack of understanding on the part of these Jewish hearers to whom the Lord was speaking in these verses because they could not understand what He was teaching. Yet, He was the perfect teacher, which would beg the question, ‘Why could they not understand?’ These spoken to by the Lord would not believe the truth because they lived in Satan’s system of arrogance. Negative volition is part of Satan’s system, and it is here that we become vulnerable to false teaching (1 Tim. 4:1).

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; (KJV 1 Tim. 4:1)

The fact that we are told that these believers departed from the faith lets us know that they had been part of the faith at one time. We have to remember that spiritual error is seldom a result of simple mistakes. Error is a deliberate strategy from Satan, as found in his system of arrogance, which is constantly seducing believers. The apostle John lets us know how it all begins in 1 John 2:15-16.

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. (KJV 1 Jn. 2:15-16)

Satan’s system of arrogance is a trap for the enslavement of the human race. In regards to believers, this is a factory that produces loser believers because of its various forms of distractions. In Satan’s system of arrogance we walk in what the Bible calls darkness. Here, a believer is separated from God’s system of reality, and by definition this would be a state of psychosis. We see reality with the eyes of our soul, and not our physical eyes; otherwise, we will be deceived. In this stage, we would be walking in darkness and not even realize it, which is a testimony of the deceptive nature of Satan’s system.

An Emotional Revolt of the Soul

An emotional revolt is the area of distraction that is related to the Christian’s emotions. Emotions can be a hindrance to the Plan of God and a distraction to the perception of Biblical truth. Emotional revolt causes the emotions to become the aggressor instead of the responder. Emotions then become the standard for our decisions. Remember that for the Christian, it is God’s Word that should always be the standard for the decisions of our life, never emotions! When emotions rule the life of a believer there will be a

dependence on feelings. An emotional revolt produces chaos in the soul of the believer known as psychosis, and as a result, the driving force is the sin nature. A believer in such a state will exhibit such emotional sins as fear, worry, hatred, anger, and violence, which can escalate to murder. Today, emotional revolt would explain why people kill each other for the most insignificant things.

An emotional revolt in the soul also helps explain why getting involved in the temporary spiritual gifts distract professing Christians.

Involvement in the Temporary Spiritual Gifts

Another major distraction is when Christians involve themselves in practicing temporary spiritual gifts, which include prophecy, miracles, healing, tongues, interpretation of tongues, discerning spirits, and apostleship. Since there is so much confusion in this area, it is imperative that we understand their purpose within their proper dispensation.²

An important thing to note is that these temporary spiritual gifts were operational during the pre-canon period of the Church Age. That period of time existed from A.D. 30 to A.D. 96. They were actually designed to demonstrate that Jesus was who he professed to be, as well as the disciples' working under God's power, during the beginning of the Church Age until the New Testament was completed and circulated amongst all the churches. Once God's policy was reduced to what we now have as our New Testament, the temporary spiritual gifts were removed, having served their purpose. With all this in mind, let us study the purpose of each one of the temporary spiritual gifts beginning with that of the gift of apostleship.

The Temporary Gift of Apostleship

When the Greek word *apostolos* is used without a definite article, as in Colossians 1:1, the high quality of the noun is emphasized.

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and
Timotheus our brother, (KJV Col. 1:1)

In this grammatical construction, we see demonstrated that Paul had the highest rank that has ever been given to a member of the family of God during the Church Age. Paul not only carried authority in the Middle East with regard to his Roman citizenship, and in Judea with regard to his being a Pharisee, but as an apostle in God's Royal Family, where he reached the peak of rank and authority.

² *Dispensations* are basically God's divine categories of history in terms pertinent to each category, such as the time period or dispensation of the Church Age etc.

Approximately 500 years before it came to be used in the New Testament, *apostolos* had already been used as an Attic Greek word, which was used for a high ranking admiral or general officers chosen by a counsel, and the job of such an officer was to command either an army or an Athenian fleet on a military expedition.

Another meaning of *apostolos*, which was used less extensively was for whoever was in command of a band of Greek colonists when they would leave Athens and go elsewhere to establish a Greek colony. The governor of such a founded colony was known as an *apostolos*. As we can see from these meanings, the word implied a command responsibility and both of the uses of this word are found in our New Testament.

As has been mentioned above, *apostolos* is used in the New Testament epistles in a unique way for the temporary spiritual gift of Apostle until the canon of Scripture was reduced to its written form, as we have it in the New Testament. We should remember that there were no Scriptures for the Church Age that explained the unique protocol plan of God for the Church. All the mystery doctrines for the Church were not completed until 96 A.D. when the Apostle John completed writing the book of Revelation. Until their completion and circulation of the New Testament Canon, apostleship was a gift of super-authority that went beyond the local church level.

To make a distinction here, there were actually two categories of apostles in the early church which correspond with the two uses of *apostolos*. The first category included the twelve men with the spiritual gift of apostleship. The second category, on the other hand, included pioneer missionaries as a delegated function in the early church. The twelve men with the gift of apostleship were equivalent to the commander of a military or naval expedition. The second category of apostle was that of pioneer missionaries and this category was equivalent to the founder and governor of a Greek colony.

In any case, the gift of apostleship had maximum authority and is listed in First Corinthians and Ephesians (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph 4:11).

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. (KJV 1 Cor. 12:28)

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; (KJV Eph. 4:11)

The men with the gift of apostleship in the early church were only twelve in number and had various powers. Eleven of these men were carried over from being the Apostles to Israel as documented in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt. 10:2-4).

And when He had called unto Him His twelve disciples, He gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him. (KJV Matt. 10:1-4)

Of course, the only one out of these men that was not carried over on this roster was Judas Iscariot. The remaining eleven were the Apostles to Israel.

The spiritual gift of apostleship carried incredible absolute authority and was designed for not only the formation of what is now our New Testament, but was also a gift that provided leadership in the pre-canon period of the Church Age. However, this absolute authority that was carried with apostleship was *restricted to the pre-canon period of the Church Age*. The leadership that was involved in apostleship included establishing local churches as well as clarifying the mystery doctrines of the Church Age, until the New Testament was completed. They were responsible for maintaining an accurate organized theology while emphasizing a dispensational distinction. This process involved the training of pastor/teachers and the establishing of the policy of the local church. Lastly, someone with the gift of apostle also had the task of sending out colonial apostles.

The apostles were not appointed until after the resurrection of the Lord, as documented in Ephesians (Eph 4:8-11).

Wherefore he saith, When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; (KJV Eph. 4:8-11)

We see in verse eight that ‘...when He ascended up on high, He...gave gifts unto men’, and in verse eleven we see that the first of those gifts was that of apostle. Apostleship was a temporary gift that discontinued after the completion of the New Testament Canon of Scripture. With the

completion of the canon, it is God the Holy Spirit who now bestows spiritual gifts to each born-again believer (1 Cor. 12:11).

But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will. (KJV 1 Cor. 12:11)

A distinction must be made between the two categories of apostles, which first include our Lord's appointment of apostles to Israel during the Hypostatic Union, and the twelve apostles appointed for the pre-canon period of the Church Age. In other words, the apostles listed in Matthew 10:2-4 were apostles to Israel for three years and became apostles to the church when the church age commenced until 96 A.D., with the completion of the New Testament. As we have seen in Matthew, the first of these apostles was Simon-Peter and then his brother Andrew, James and John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, Simon the Canaanite, James the son of Alphaeus and Thaddaeus, also called Jude.

From the list of apostles in the Gospel of Matthew, Simon-Peter was one of the most active apostles with Andrew his brother being more of an honorary apostle, mainly because he did so little and had a very brief life. John was another one of the most active apostles and lived the longest. John is the apostle who wrote first, second and third John, as well as the book of Revelation, and the Gospel that bears his name. Philip also had the gift of evangelism. Bartholomew, who was also called Nathaniel was another of the honorary type apostles. As far as doubting Thomas (also called Didiymus) is concerned, he did very little according to the Bible although, record of extra-biblical sources indicates that Thomas went to India and did an extensive amount of work there. John Foxe documents that Thomas, 'preached to the Parthians, Medes, Persians, Carmanians, Hyrcanians, Bactrians, and Magians and was killed in Calamina, India'. There was also Simon the Canaanite, who probably did the least and James the son of Alphaeus who disappeared almost immediately. These eleven men are mentioned first in Matthew 10:2-4 as apostles to Israel and later became apostles to the church.

The twelfth spot on the roster of apostles vacated by Judas Iscariot would eventually be filled by Paul, but not before the election of Matthias at the suggestion of Peter as documented in Acts 1:15-26.

And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,) Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst

asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood. For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take. Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. (KJV Acts 1:15-26)

The Bible teaches that it was the Lord who gave the first spiritual gifts to the church on the day of Pentecost. After Pentecost God the Holy Spirit now bestows each spiritual gift to believers. The church voted for Matthias without realizing that he had not been appointed by God to replace Judas, showing us that the will of mankind is never involved in bestowing spiritual gifts. Man cannot assign what is only bestowed by the sovereignty of God (1 Cor. 15:7-10).

After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. (KJV 1 Cor. 15:7-10)

One of the requirements for the spiritual gift of apostleship was that the apostle was to have seen the resurrected Christ, which Paul did on several occasions. Paul encountered our resurrected Lord on the Damascus Road as documented in Acts 9:3-6, 22:6-11, 26:13-18.

And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord?

And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. (KJV Acts 9:3-6)

And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. (KJV Acts 22:6-11)

At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. (KJV Acts 26:13-18)

In addition, Paul also saw our resurrected Lord in the Temple as well as in prison (Acts 22:17-21; 23:11).

And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy

testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. (KJV Acts 22:17-21)

And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome. (KJV Acts 23:11)

There is a fourth time that Paul saw the resurrected Lord as documented in Galatians. Paul writes in Galatians 1:12 that his revelation came from the Lord Himself. Paul goes on to explain further in the same chapter of Galatians that the Lord appeared to him in Arabia in a three year span of time (Gal. 1:16-18).

For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. (KJV Gal. 1:12)

To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. (KJV Gal. 1:16-18)

We see from Galatians 1:16-17 that Paul did not consult with flesh and blood. In order words, Paul did not consult with any man, nor with the apostles before him. Paul went to learn under the Lord Himself in Arabia for three years.

Paul became an apostle as a result of the sovereign decision of Jesus Christ according to Ephesians 4:11 and First Timothy 1:12-14.

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; (KJV Eph. 4:11)

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And

the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. (KJV Tim. 1:12-14)

Paul was not exaggerating one bit in stating that he was a blasphemer, persecutor and violent man, but the Lord had mercy and graciously chose him for the ministry.

Having looked at the men who had the gift of apostleship, let us take a look at the secondary category of apostles that could be referred to as colonial apostles. We should remember that although these colonial apostles were called apostles they did not have the gift of apostleship.

The Colonial Apostles

The pioneer missionaries could be classified as colonial or delegated apostles, or missionary/ruler types in the early church. These men had tremendous power, but these powers were delegated. In effect, they were colonial missionaries, and they were called apostles. Remember that *apostolos* was also used for a Greek who founded and governed a colony. Their responsibility would be analogous to the sending out of missionaries today. The purpose of a missionary team today should involve going to a country to form churches in that particular country. This responsibility would begin with evangelism first, but would also involve the recognizing of those men who had the gifts of communication and then they were to proceed to train these men. This process would have the ultimate goal of establishing native churches.

Colonial apostles had lesser spiritual gifts such as pastor-teacher, prophecy, evangelism, as well as the authority to establish churches. These men were pioneer missionaries who were sent out under the authority of those men that had the spiritual gift of apostleship.

The men who would fall under this second category of colonial apostles included such men as Barnabas, James the Lord's half brother, Apollos, Silas or Silvanus, Timothy, Titus, Epaphroditus, Andronicus and Junia (Acts 14:14; Gal. 1:19; 1 Cor. 4:6, 9; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25; Rom. 16:7; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2:6). In each of the verses where these colonial apostles are referred to as such, the word *apostolos* is translated either apostle or messenger. The distinction must be made that these men are called apostles in the sense of being pioneer missionaries, but not in the sense of having the spiritual gift of apostleship. These missionary apostles had the delegated authority from those with the gift of apostleship to go out and form churches, yet, they themselves did not have the gift of apostleship.

Additional Temporal Spiritual Gifts of Apostleship

To establish their authority, the apostle had additional temporal spiritual gifts provided in order to identify him as having the proper authority from God (Acts 5:15-16; 19:11-12; 28:8-9). These temporary miraculous gifts they possessed were so that there was no question as to who had this gift. These particular gifts were used as their authority from God in order to establish that they had the gift of apostleship.

Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one. (KJV Acts 5:15-16)

And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them. (KJV Acts 19:11-12)

And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him. So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed: (KJV Acts 28:8-9)

The temporary gifts possessed by the apostle included such things as miracles, tongues, and healing (2 Cor. 12:12).

Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds. (KJV 2 Cor. 12:12)

From the temporary gifts, tongues was the first gift to be withdrawn since it ceased once Israel went out as a nation in 70 A.D. Consequently, no one has legitimately spoken in tongues since that time.

Once the authority of the apostle was established, and once he was so identified throughout the Roman Empire as an apostle from God, these temporary gifts were no longer necessary and were removed. We can see an example of this in Paul who originally had the gift of healing to the point that even handkerchiefs or aprons touched by him could heal and cast out evil spirits. This powerful ability continued until his identity and authority was established at which point the gifts were removed. We know because at

one time after their removal several of his closest friends were ill or dying, yet he could no longer heal them. In Philippians 2:27 we see that he could not heal Epaphroditus in Rome and in Second Timothy 4:20 we see that he had to leave Trophimus behind because he could not heal him either.

For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. (KJV Phil. 2:27)

Erastus abode at Corinth: but Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick. (KJV 2 Tim. 4:20)

Therefore, having viewed the evidence pertaining to the gift of apostleship, there is no one who *can legitimately* claim to have the gift of apostle today without distorting or ignoring the Biblical evidence. To make any claim of having the gift of apostle today would be heresy. Yet, it should not come as a surprise since Paul also dealt with false apostles in his day and called them ‘false apostles’ who transform themselves as ‘ministers of righteousness’ (2 Cor. 11:13-15).

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works. (KJV 2 Cor. 11:13-15)

It is unfortunate that so many Christians are being distracted by the view that the gift of apostle is still operational today. The danger of this deception is that Satan uses these ‘false apostles’ to supersede the teaching of the Bible.

In addition to the temporary gift of apostleship, the other temporary gifts have also become a tremendous distraction to many professing Christians. Other temporary gifts that are no longer operational today would include that of prophecy, miracles, healing, tongues, the interpretation of tongues, the gift of knowledge and wisdom, the gift of exhortation, the gift of discerning and the temporary gift of faith.

The Temporary Gift of Prophecy

The temporary gift of prophecy was the second in the order of merit after apostle as per First Corinthians 12:28.

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, government, diversities of tongues. (KJV 1 Cor. 12:28)

Here, the word translated ‘prophets’ is a translation of the Greek noun *prophetas* meaning, ‘one who has insight into the divine will and possesses the power of inspired utterances’.

In the Church Age men who possessed the gift of prophecy were not national leaders as were those of the Old Testament. Instead, they functioned exclusively *within* the Church.

The responsibility of those with the gift of prophecy was to communicate a message of divine guidance, a warning of judgment or a prediction about the immediate future as seen in the example of Agabus (Acts 11:27-28).

And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth (famine) throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. (KJV Acts 11:27-28)

During the reign of Claudius, which occurred during the pre-canon period of the Church Age (A.D. 41-54), Agabus correctly predicted the famine which was to come.

In fact, there were a series of famines recorded by ancient historians, not only in Rome and Greece, but also in Judea. The Jewish Historian Flavius Josephus documents the famine in Judea stating that ‘...many people died for want of what was necessary to procure food withal...’³

As a result of Agabus’ prophecy, the Gentile believers at Antioch were moved to send financial relief to believers in Judea. The Jewish believers in Jerusalem spiritually blessed Gentile believers at Antioch, and in turn, believers at Antioch financially blessed the believers in Jerusalem in their time of need.

In another example, Agabus also warned the Apostle Paul not to go back to Jerusalem according to **Acts 21:10-11**.

And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the

³ *Flavius Josephus*, “The Antiquities of the Jews,” 20.2.6

Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. (KJV Acts 21:10-11)

In dramatic fashion Agabus warned Paul that if he went to Jerusalem he would be imprisoned. It is important to notice in Acts 21:9, that the warning to Paul came not from Philip's four virgin daughters mentioned there.

And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy. (KJV Acts 21:9)

That the warning to Paul came from Agabus instead of Philip's four daughters demonstrates that their prophetic spiritual function was directed towards women, and not to men. We know this because in Paul's first epistle to Timothy he writes, 'I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man' (1 Tim. 2:11-12). As Scripture is understood with God's order and patterns in mind, we must always remain sound with respect to His order and patterns as well as to dispensations. That being said, those same verses of Scripture, also, today, disqualify a woman from functioning in the gift of pastor-teacher. Therefore, these verses of Scripture let us know that a woman in the pulpit is against God's Word. God's established policy with regard to the gift of pastor-teacher is by God's design and has not changed. By inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul once again addresses the same issue in his first epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11:3).

But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. (KJV 1 Cor. 11:3)

Again, we see that this established order is by God's design and is still in operation today. We should note here the principle of subjection or submission. It should be observed that submission is not to be perceived as demeaning. Observe the Lord's mindset in Philippians 2:8, 'And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross'. Let us be mindful that we all are under some form of subjection, which is the Lord's way of keeping us humble, which is a difficult concept for us, even as believers, to comprehend.

In actuality, it is an arrogant mindset that has a problem with subjection, although we are all vulnerable to it because we still have our sin nature. And, while it is true that all believers are one in Christ, we each have a different function within the body of Christ. With regard to gender we need to understand our relative functions within the Body of Christ. Thus, the function of the gift of pastor-teacher, according to Scripture, is given to

males only! This order has not changed, though many today seem to think it has.

An example that illustrates this type of arrogant mindset is seen in Korah's rebellion in the Book of Numbers (Num. 16:1-50). Korah showed his dissatisfaction with God's established order when he rebelled against the leadership of Moses and Aaron. He wanted Aaron's position as High Priest and, as a result of his rebellion God caused the ground to open up and swallow Korah and his followers. According to Jude 11, in the latter days apostates will go in the same rebellion as Korah.

Satan also had a problem with God's established order when he stated in Isaiah that he would, 'be like the Most High' (Is. 14:14). Satan concluded that he should not be submissive to anyone. As a result of his rebellion Satan will be sent to the Lake of Fire (Matt. 25:41).

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: (KJV Mt. 25:41)

The examples of Korah and Satan should illustrate how going against God's established order is evil and should be a somber reminder where the Lord stands in regards to those who go against it.

Of course, this doesn't mean a woman cannot teach since women do have a magnificent ability to teach children. Paul expands on the woman's function in Titus 2:3-4 where he instructed Titus that the 'aged women' should teach the 'young women'.

The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, (KJV Titus 2:3-4)

Thus, a distinction is made between those *permitted* by God to prophesy, as opposed to those who *possessed* the gift of prophecy. Further, there is no record of these women's prophecies in Scripture, though some, as a pretext, have pulled isolated examples of women functioning in a one-time situation, to justify their choice to rebel.

Besides Agabus, other men that are declared by Scripture as having the temporary gift of prophecy included such men as Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, Paul, Judas and Silas (Acts 11:27-28; 21:10-11; Acts 13:1; 15:32).

Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had

been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. (KJV Acts 13:1)

We see from this verse that these men were not only prophets, but also teachers. The reason they are also called teachers was because they had a limited teaching ministry that was related to contemporary events of that time. Let us remember that there was no New Testament during this time so prophetic ministry was needed.

Another point to remember is that since the New Testament has a great deal of eschatology or future, final things, it should be fairly obvious that those men who wrote New Testament Scripture had the gift of apostleship as well as the gift of prophecy.

Therefore, the gift of prophecy warned about the judgment of sin, and indicated God's will regarding current events as well as predicted future events during the apostolic age. Upon the completion of our New Testament the gift of prophecy ceased. With our completed Bible, we can now understand God's future purpose for all creation.

Today, depending on how much we know about what the Bible teaches, we can be our own prophet by looking at historical trends. Historical trends are related to believers living either in God's system of virtue or Satan's system of arrogance. We will live in one or the other since we always choose who we will serve. When enough believers live in God's system of virtue there will be a historical uptrend. Likewise, when enough believers live in Satan's system of arrogance there will be historical downtrend, which is what we are witnessing today in our country. This historical downtrend is simply because of the same distractions being discussed in this study.

As has been demonstrated, since A.D. 96, with the New Testament having been completed, the temporary communication gifts of apostleship and prophecy have ceased, and have been replaced with the permanent gifts of evangelism and pastor-teacher.

The Temporary Gift of Miracles

Another temporary spiritual gift distracting many professing Christians today is the temporary spiritual gift of miracles as found in First and Second Corinthians (1 Cor. 12:28; 2 Cor. 12:12).

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. (KJV 1 Cor. 12:28)

Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds. (KJV 2 Cor. 12:12)

In 1 Corinthians 12:28 the word ‘miracle’ is translated from the Greek noun *dunamis* meaning, ‘supernatural power’. In 2 Corinthians 12:12 the same word is translated ‘mighty deeds’.

As with the temporal gifts of apostle and prophet, miracles were given to confirm that these men were truly from God. Therefore, they were given the supernatural ability to perform these miracles at will, again to establish their credibility during the pre-canon age.

Today, the power of God’s completed Word is the greatest miracle to a positive believer. This is how we can overcome our problems; not by sitting on our hands waiting for a miracle. Of course, this does not mean God does not perform miracles in our day. They are just not done through some person who claims to have this gift. It is imperative to remember that Satan does have his deceptive ways of duplicating miracles today (Matt. 7:22-23).

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (KJV Matt. 7:22-23)

The words ‘wonderful works’ in verse 22 are also translated from the Greek noun *dunamis* meaning, ‘supernatural power’. The Lord calls these individuals, whom He never knew, workers of ‘iniquity’. The word iniquity is a reference to ‘wickedness’. It is quite obvious from these verses that the supernatural power these individuals possessed came from Satan and not God. All the miracles being claimed today are designed to bring attention to man and is the method that these individuals use to control and manipulate ignorant believers.

The greatest power available to believers today is the ability to fulfill the Christian way of life through consistently residing under the power of the Spirit and maximizing God’s Word and our spiritual assets. The greatest thing in life is not a miracle, but having God’s Word residing in our soul. This, by far, is more important than any miracle that has ever occurred. Yet, it is unfortunate that believers are missing out because they are being distracted by so many apostate ministers claiming to have these temporary gifts. Romans 10:17 tells us that faith comes from hearing God’s Word, not by seeing a miracle.

So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (KJV Rom. 10:17)

What truly counts is maximizing our relationship with the Lord, which is achieved by learning His thoughts as found in our completed Bible. It takes consistency in learning, retaining and applying God's Biblical principles in all areas of our lives. A miracle is actually easy for the Lord since it does not require cooperation or positive freewill on the part of a believer; developing a relationship, on the other hand, does. A miracle does not carry you very far, as seen in the example of the Exodus generation who 'murmured' or grumbled only three days after seeing the Red Sea parted and the Egyptian army destroyed. (Ex. 15:22-24).

So Moses brought Israel from the Red sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water. And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? (KJV Ex. 15:22-24)

The Temporary Gift of Healing

The gift of healing is yet another temporary spiritual gift that is being distorted today (1 Cor. 12:9, 28, 30). The gift of healing was listed after miracles, and it certified that the man as well as his message was indeed from God.

Healing today does not come through any delegated human authority, as was the case in the pre-canon period of the Church Age. Today, in individual situations, healing can come directly from God depending if the situation lines up with His sovereign will. This was the case of Epaphroditus when Paul solicited prayer on his behalf. Paul states in Philippians 2:27 that Epaphroditus was sick and almost died on him, but God had mercy and healed him. At one time, Paul's ability to heal was so strong that even 'handkerchiefs or aprons' touched by him were able to heal people (Act 19:11-12). By the time Paul wrote these words to the Philippians, he no longer had the gift of healing since he was already certified as an apostle from God.

Of course, there is true healing that occurs when a demon-possessed person experiences the demon leaving their body. This is another of Satan's deceptive methods that he uses to establish his false teachers who then proceed to teach their false message.

We know that Satan himself can be the source of diseases as seen in what he did to Job when he afflicted him with sores throughout his body (Job 2:7). We also know Satan was responsible for Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' (2 Cor. 12:7). In addition, Satan also uses his demons to inflict disease (Mt. 12:22).

Then was brought unto Him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and He healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. (KJV Matt. 12:22)

Notice that as a result of our Lord removing the demon, the man immediately regained his sight and ability to speak. The reason was because it was the demon that caused the man's afflictions. We should not take the demon possession as a third illness that was different from the other two, but the actual source that caused the man's blindness and inability to speak was the demon. This point is brought out more clearly in Mark 9:17.

And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit. (KJV Mark 9:17)

The reference in this verse is to the demon restraining the boy's tongue and vocal cords. The Lord acknowledged that the demon was the cause of the affliction in verse 25 when He specifically called the demon a "dumb and deaf spirit."

When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. (KJV Mark 9:25)

Therefore, we now see that Satan does possess the power of disease and uses this means to counterfeit healing by the removal of the demons. Again, he is then able introduce his false teachers with their false message.

Another very effective method that Satan uses to distract an extreme amount of professing Christians is through the temporary spiritual gift of tongues.

The Temporary Gift of Tongues

The gift of tongues is prophesied in Isaiah 28:11 and is quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:21. In order to understand the temporary gift of tongues accurately there has to be a proper connection made between these two New and Old Testament verses. Let us begin to understand this connection with what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 14:20-22).

Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men. In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people (referring to the Jewish people) and yet for all

that will they not hear Me, saith the Lord (“They” again are the Jewish people). Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe. (KJV 1 Cor. 14:20-22)

That the Corinthian believers were preoccupied with the gift of tongues was yet another sad testimony of their carnal and immature ways, which Paul is attempting to change. He has already called them ‘carnal’ and spiritual ‘babes’ in 1 Cor. 3:1-3. In the fourteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians he now quotes from the Old Testament. Why? The answer to this question is the key to understanding the primary purpose of the temporary spiritual gift of tongues.

Paul states that in the ‘law it is written’. He then proceeds to quote Isaiah 28:11-12 to prove his point that tongues was for a ‘sign’ to Jewish unbelievers. The quote Paul uses lets us know that the prophecy of tongues began with Isaiah (Isa. 28:11-12).

For with stammering lips and another tongue will He speak to this people. To whom he said, ‘This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing:’ yet they would not hear. (KJV Isaiah 28:11-12)

The Lord had offered Israel ‘rest’ and ‘refreshing’, but they refused it by rejecting the Lord and His message through Isaiah. As a matter of fact, the degeneracy of the people had resulted in widespread drunkenness. Isaiah begins in Isaiah 28:1 by calling the Northern Kingdom the ‘drunkards of Ephraim’. Ephraim was the leading tribe that was representative of the ten tribes that made up the Northern Kingdom.

The drunkenness was so prevalent in the Northern Kingdom that even the ‘priests’ and ‘prophets’ were in a drunken stupor (Isa. 28:7-8).

But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment. For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean. (KJV Isaiah 28:7-8)

So, as a result of their degeneracy God would bring judgment, because instead of proclaiming the Gospel to the Gentiles around them they were getting drunk and slurring their speech. Their slurred speech sounded more like a Gentile language instead of their own Hebrew language.

Therefore, since the Northern kingdom would not learn in their own Hebrew language, God would speak to them in a language they did not understand. It came in the form of judgment by the invasion of the Assyrians in 721 B.C.

The foreign language of the Assyrians was heard by the Northern Kingdom before the Assyrians eventually conquered them. Yet, they did not respond to this warning sign of coming judgment. So, God destroyed the Northern Kingdom in the fifth cycle of discipline because of their disobedience.⁴ The Southern Kingdom would eventually suffer the same fate at the hands of the Chaldeans. Each time a foreign language was the ‘sign’ of their impending judgment.

Israel should have known that the sound of a foreign language was an indication of their coming judgment and destruction because even Moses had written about the ‘sign’ of cursing that would result from disobedience (Deut. 28:49).

The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue (or language) thou shalt not understand. (KJV Deut. 28:49)

Both the Assyrians and Chaldeans spoke a language that was unknown to the Hebrew population at large as they conquered the Northern and Southern Kingdoms and left the land ‘desolate’ and the cities laid ‘waste’, as per the fifth cycle of discipline (Lev. 26:33).

And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. (KJV Lev. 26:33)

The land being ‘desolate’ and the cities laid ‘waste’ was what would mark the end of Isaiah’s ministry (Isa. 6:11).

Then said I, Lord, how long? And He answered, until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate. (KJV Isa. 6:11)

Although this judgment came at the hands of the Assyrians and then the Chaldeans, there would be another time that the Jewish nation would suffer this fate. It would be during Paul’s generation and this is the reason he quotes Isaiah in 1 Cor. 14:21.

⁴ God uses what may be referred to as His five cycles of discipline found in Lev. 26:14-39 to induce either negative believers or client nations to return back to His purpose.

Therefore, by quoting Isaiah in 1 Corinthians 14:21, Paul is teaching through Isaiah that Judah, as the last client nation, received the sign of Gentile languages as their warning of judgment because they were negative. They had once again, failed to go out as missionaries to Gentiles. Hence, the 'sign' of Judah's impending judgment came in the form of the temporary gift of tongues or Gentile languages that was used to evangelize unbelieving Jews.

Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came on the disciples and they began to speak the Gospel in Gentile languages to the Jewish pilgrims who were at Jerusalem. These foreign-born Jews were pilgrims who had traveled to Jerusalem from all over the then known world. They had lived in these other countries as a result of their ancestors being scattered to those countries, which included Africa, Turkey, Greece, Rome and other regions to the east; therefore, they spoke only the language familiar to their particular country, and were not familiar with the Hebrew language. Therefore, numerous languages were represented (Acts 2:8-11).

And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. (KJV Acts 2:8-11)

Acts 2:5 states that there 'were dwelling at Jerusalem devout Jews, out of every nation under heaven'. That they were 'devout Jews' refers to them being religious. Yet, these foreign-born Jews were unbelievers because they adhered to the false supposition that salvation came by the keeping of the Mosaic Law.

We are told in Acts 2:11 that the disciples spoke to these unbelieving Jews in their own language the 'wonderful works of God'. Therefore, the message that they spoke had content as well as context, and was not some mindless mystery utterances. The disciples' message simply declared that Jesus Christ was the Messiah and had died on the cross for the sins of the world, as Peter further expounded to the crowd in Acts 2:14-36. Isaiah's 'sign' of coming judgment to unbelieving Jews had once again occurred.

Isaiah's prophetic 'sign' began on the Day of Pentecost and continued for 40 years, upon which time Jews were periodically evangelized by the gift of tongues. This gift was operational until the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in the fifth cycle of discipline. When this destruction occurred the Jews had once again been dispersed and Jerusalem laid 'waste without inhabitants', as Isaiah had previously prophesied (Isa. 6:11).

The Roman General Titus and his Roman legions had reduced Jerusalem and its temple to piles of shapeless ruins. It is estimated that over one million were eventually slaughtered and over ninety thousand were taken captive and scattered throughout the known world.

The Jewish Historian Flavius Josephus documents the devastation left behind by the Roman legions in his account of the ‘War of the Jews’. He states that the ‘carcasses that lay in heaps one upon another, was a horrible sight, and produced a pestilential stench’.⁵

The Jewish nation had once again experienced the devastating judgment of God in August of A.D. 70 by means of the Roman war machine because they had once again failed to see the ‘sign’ of God’s looming judgment. As the presence of the Holy Spirit was manifested ‘like a dove’ at the baptism of the Lord (John 1:32); in like manner, the presence of the Holy Spirit was manifested on the Day of Pentecost as ‘tongues like as of fire’. That Acts 2:3 describes ‘tongues as of fire’ was an indication of, not only the presence of the Holy Spirit, but also of Judah’s approaching judgment since fire also signifies judgment in scripture (2 Thess. 1:6-9).

Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power; (KJV 2 Thess. 1:6-9)

With the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews in A.D. 70, Isaiah’s prophecy had concluded. The ‘sign’ of tongues was no longer needed and ceased at that time (1 Cor. 13:8-10).

Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail [katargethesontai]; whether there be tongues, they shall cease [pausontai]; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away [katargethesetai], For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away [katargethesetai]. (KJV 1 Cor. 13:8-10)

The words ‘fail’ and ‘vanish away’ in verse 8 are translated from the Greek root word *katargeo* meaning ‘to be rendered ineffective’. They are connected with the ‘perfect’ of verse 10. The words ‘done away’ in verse 10

⁵ Flavius Josephus, ‘The War of the Jews’, 6.1.1

are also a translation of the root verb *katargeo*. The ‘perfect’ refers to the completed Canon of Scripture. In other words, when the Bible was completed, then ‘prophecies’ and ‘knowledge’ were rendered ineffective. The verb *katargeo* is in the passive voice signifying that an agent is acting upon the noun. The nouns ‘prophecies’ and ‘knowledge’ are acted upon by the coming of the ‘perfect’, which is the acting agent. The ‘perfect’ was the factor that would terminate the gift of prophecy and knowledge.

The gift of tongues, on the other hand, has a different verb associated with it. The word for ‘cease’ in verse 8 is from the Greek verb *pauo* meaning ‘to stop’. *Pauo* is in the dynamic middle voice signifying that it did not require an agent, but instead would expire on its own. The gift of tongues would terminate on its own when it was no longer needed. Thus, with the destruction and dispersion of Judah as a client nation tongues was no longer needed as a ‘sign’ of warning to unbelieving Jews. This was the reason it ‘ceased’ in A.D. 70, but the gift of prophecy and knowledge would continue until A.D. 96 when the ‘perfect’ or Bible was completed.

There are those who state that the ‘perfect’ refers to either the Second Coming of Christ, or the Millennium, or heaven, but the context and grammar disqualify these views. To begin with, the word translated ‘perfect’ is *teleion* and is in the neuter gender, which eliminates the view that it refers to the second coming of Christ since this view would require it to be in the masculine gender. If the second coming of Christ was in view here, there would be no reason why Paul could not have just simply written, ‘But when the Christ (ho Christos) is come...’ instead of ‘But when that which is perfect (to teleion) is come...’

The Greek word *teleion*, translated ‘perfect’ will connote a qualitative state, something without any flaws or a utopian state. The word also connotes a quantitative aspect. In all the places that *teleion* is used in Scripture, it is used in its quantitative aspect and this exact form of the word is found in six other places besides here (Eph. 4:13; Rom. 12:2; Col. 1:28; James 1:4, 17, 25).

The word refers to a state that was arrived at, a state to which the previous effort and action was directed towards. Thus, the ‘perfect’ is the completed that Paul is contrasting with the ‘in part’ or what is fragmentary. James also uses *teleion* with the same idea as he writes about believers looking at the ‘perfect law of liberty’, (James 1:25)

Wherefore lay apart all filthiness, and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty,

and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. (KJV James 1:21-25)

From the context of what James is writing we can conclude that the 'perfect law of liberty' is a reference to God's completed Word. Thus, the 'perfect' of 1 Cor. 13:10 is the conclusion of all the New Testament Epistles of the church age being reduced to writing, a process that culminated in the completed Word of God, 'the perfect', the agent that caused prophecy and knowledge to stop.

Today, the continuation of tongues is Satan's method of distracting professing believers from the Plan of God. Extreme emotions can cause columns of air to move through a person's epiglottis, which produces strange sounds from those still claiming this gift is still operational. The epiglottis is simply the flap of cartilage that covers the windpipe when people swallow and it keeps food from entering the windpipe. In the case for unbelievers this type of practice can include demon control of their vocal organs.

In order to prevent abuse of the gift of tongues, Paul laid down some restrictions. He could not forbid its use entirely, as the gift was still operational at that time. The gift would not cease until the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, and this had not yet occurred at the time Paul wrote these words (1 Cor. 14: 27-28).

If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course (one at a time); and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God. (KJV 1 Cor. 14:27-28)

The first restriction is that the speaker had to be a 'man'. In addition, no more than three could speak and only one at a time and only if there was an interpreter. It is amazing that those being distracted in the tongues movement today seem to be ignorant of these restrictions. Either that, or they simply reject the restrictions because they have chosen to redefine Scripture, by having their 'experience(s)' to take the place of the knowledge of God's Word, choosing rather to follow their 'belly' (appetites, emotions, lusts) which is their 'God' as described in Philippians 3:19.

Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things. (KJV Phil. 3:19)

The Temporary Gift of Interpretation

With the termination of the gift of tongues, the temporary gift of interpretation also ceased (1 Cor. 12:10, 30, 14:26-28).

To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: (KJV 1 Cor. 12:10)

As we have seen in 1 Cor. 14:27, that one of the restrictions when anyone in the church stood up and spoke in tongues was that there had to be an interpreter. If there was no interpreter, then they had to 'keep silence in the church' (1 Cor. 14:27).

If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course (one at a time); and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God. (KJV 1 Cor. 14:27-28)

The Corinthian church had a serious problem with disorder in their congregational meetings, which is quite obvious throughout the first epistle that Paul wrote to them. As previously mentioned, in addition to tongues being restricted to males only, there could not be more than three and one at a time and without an interpreter, they had to remain quiet. It has to be remembered that sometimes, unbelieving Jews whose native language was a Gentile language, came into the congregation. When this occurred someone with the gift of tongues presented the Gospel to him or her in his or her native language. As a result, the rest of the congregation could not understand what was said. Therefore, the one with the gift of interpretation of tongues would stand and explain what was said.

As was the case at Pentecost, after the disciples had spoken the gospel to all the foreign-born Jews, Peter addressed the crowd (Acts, Chapter 2). Additionally, this gift's design was so that the congregation understood that the one who spoke in tongues, was not going crazy, or to put it in Peter's words, 'these are not drunken, as ye suppose' (Acts 2:15).

As was discussed in the previous section, any alleged 'tongue-speaking' or interpretation of tongues, is a result of psychological malfunction of a believer operating out of emotionalism, or in the case of an unbeliever, demonic activity taking control of their vocal cords. In these scenarios, people use emotions as their criteria for the spiritual life as opposed to using their intellect. But, emotions without thought or logic, is damaging to a believer's soul.

Emotions are designed by God to always be subordinate to our thinking. When emotions are not subordinate to our thinking, our old sin nature is in control and thus bad emotions emerge. However, when we consistently take in God's Word, our good emotions become a reflection of the stream of consciousness whose standard comes from being saturated with biblical principles. This is why consistent Bible study is important because bad emotions from the sin nature are always trying to conquer our soul. As emotions of themselves have no reasoning ability, or common sense, they only get us into trouble, by giving us a false sense of love, for instance, in the area of romance, or cause us such impulsive emotional reactions as rage, fear, hatred, worry, anxiety and even violence. We thus conclude that God's power is stored in the thinking part of us, not in the emotions.

The Temporary Spiritual Gift of Knowledge

The spiritual gift of knowledge was also temporary and ceased with the completion of the Canon of Scripture in 96 A.D. (1 Cor. 12:8; 13:8).

For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; (KJV 1 Cor. 12:8)

This gift consisted of a believer having instant knowledge of New Testament doctrine. As these mystery doctrines were not yet in writing to be studied, the person with this gift knew these Church Age doctrines without studying them. Instead, God the Holy Spirit inserted previously unknown doctrinal information into the right lobe of the person's mind as spiritual knowledge, because the 'perfect' was not yet completed.

The Temporary Spiritual Gift of Wisdom

The temporary spiritual gift of wisdom was also for the pre-canon period of the Church Age (1 Cor. 12:8).

For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; (KJV 1 Cor. 12:8)

The gift 'of wisdom' accompanied the gift of knowledge, and was the ability to explain and apply the mystery doctrine that was taught by the gift of knowledge. Thus, with the gift of knowledge a believer was able to teach the mystery doctrine, and with the 'gift of wisdom', a believer was able to teach *application* of each, particular doctrine.

Today, with completion of the canon of Scripture, and with the gift of pastor-teacher in place, wisdom only comes with spiritual adulthood. It should be noted that no believer reaches spiritual wisdom before reaching spiritual self-esteem. Spiritual self-esteem is the first stage of spiritual adulthood. For the Christian, spiritual self-esteem simply means maintaining a state of maximum humility and keeping *any* arrogance to a minimum. It is a state of having confidence in God and confidence in the spiritually digested Word of God in the soul and stream of consciousness. It is a state where there is no confidence in the flesh, but in God and what He has provided to us in His grace.

The Temporary Spiritual Gift of Exhortation

Before the canon of Scripture was completed and circulated, the spiritual gift of exhortation was also necessary (Rom. 12:8)

Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness. (KJV Rom. 12:8)

This was the temporary gift that consisted of counseling, comforting, warning, and advising. The Greek word used for this gift was *paraklesis* meaning ‘comforter’. Today, God the Holy Spirit is our *paraklesis* or ‘comforter’, since we have the permanent indwelling of the Spirit and the filling of the Spirit. Through the ministry of God the Holy Spirit we are able to learn, retain and apply the mystery doctrines of our New Testament. As we do, God the Holy Spirit is able to counsel and exhort us through the doctrinal truth stored in our frame of reference. This is a process that is dependent on our freewill. It is when we exercise our freewill to reach spiritual adulthood that we reach a point when we are able to counsel, comfort, warn and advise ourselves in the circumstances of our lives.

Of course, there is still a place for these things in the ministry of the pastor-teacher since we certainly can always learn from others who are honest with us, which is what a true friend will always do.

The Temporary Gift of Discerning Spirits

The gift of discerning spirits was also a gift that ceased with the completion of the New Testament (1 Cor. 12:10).

To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: (KJV 1 Cor. 12:10)

This was a gift that was used for the detection of false doctrines during the time that the Canon of Scripture was still being accumulated. Someone with the gift of discerning spirits was able to determine sound doctrinal inspired truth. With the completion of the canon of Scripture in 96 A.D. this gift was no longer necessary because the New Testament now contains all inspired doctrines and is the standard for exposing false doctrines.

The Temporary Gift of Faith

The last temporary spiritual gift of the pre-canon period of the Church Age is the gift of faith (1 Cor. 12:9).

To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; (KJV 1 Cor. 12:9)

This was a special spiritual gift before the New Testament was completed whereby a believer demonstrated faith in a group which was being persecuted or who was under some special pressure. As the others in the group would grumble and whimper and complain about their circumstances, the person with this gift exercised great faith in their deliverance or confidence in God. The believer with this gift exercised it on behalf of the group to depend upon the Lord. He would exercise it by either comforting them with promises or some doctrinal truth or would announce that deliverance was coming.

For instance, there might have come a time when a group of believers was about to be fed to lions. Someone with this gift would stand up and declare their trust in the Lord to deliver them. As a result, all the believers in the group were delivered and spared from going to the lions.

Finally, we must remember that the New Testament did not yet exist, so there were no promises to claim, nor were there any New Testament doctrinal truths to apply. Therefore, the temporary gift of faith was provided in the place of having New Testament promises and doctrines. These believers could rest in faith until the 'perfect' Bible was completed and circulated (1 Cor. 13: 8-10).

Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part [gift of knowledge], and we prophesy in part [gift of prophecy]. But when that which is perfect [New Testament Canon] is come, then that which is in part [temporary spiritual gifts] shall be done away [abolished, phased out, withdrawn]. (KJV 1 Cor. 13:8-10)

Moral and Immoral Deterioration as a Distraction

Another area that professing Christians are distracted in is when they get involved in a deteriorating trend either morally or immorally. Both of these trends are part of a spiritual erosion since they both have the sin nature as their source, just in different directions. As Christians, we should never forget that we will have our sin nature as long as we live in our mortal bodies.

For any Christian who might actually forget that they still have a sin nature we need to look no further than 1 John 1:8. There, John writes that someone concluding that they have no sin is only deceiving themselves and that the truth is not in them. The word 'sin' in 1 John 1:8 is referring to our sin nature since the word is singular and is used without the definite article. We might also notice that John also included himself by using the word 'we'.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (KJV 1 John 1:8)

Therefore, when we are out of fellowship our sin nature will follow a trend in a self-righteous and legalistic direction or a trend towards an immoral and lawless direction. Either of these trends are a distraction to the Christian way of life. The difference between these two degenerative trends is that the self-righteous legalistic believer is falsely judged by his Christian peers as being spiritual, while the immoral and lawless believer is falsely judged by his Christian peers as not being saved at all. Remember that the reality of eternal salvation is determined by faith in the saving work of Christ on the cross. Eternal salvation is never determined by the category of one's sins; otherwise, none of us are saved, which is the reason Romans 3:23 states, 'For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God'.

A believer can shatter their spiritual life by first neglecting to confess sin through the confession technique found in 1 John 1:9. In addition, this condition is often perpetuated when a person gets involved in some aspect of Satan's system of arrogance. As a result of these conditions, a believer can commit *any* sin that an unbeliever can commit who has the *same* sin nature trend. One basically cannot distinguish between a believer and an unbeliever who are both in a perpetual state of carnality, other than the believer's testimony that they have believed in Jesus Christ at one point in their lives.

Understanding the Makeup of a Spiritual Decline

Spiritual corruption of a believer is defined as a decline from the normal standards of the code of conduct that God commands all believers to have (Eph. 4:22-23).

That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; (KJV Ephesians 4:22-23)

The corruption of verse 22 refers to, not only an immoral corruption, but also a moral corruption. Such deceitful corruption would include such things as a lust for power, a lust for money, a lust for approval, a chemical lust or the ever-popular one, sexual lust. A lust is simply an overwhelming desire for something that we think will bring us joy. Unfortunately, an unfulfilled lust only causes frustration and only intensifies our desire, whereas a fulfilled lust also causes frustration because it does not bring the anticipated happiness that we expected.

It is unfortunate that many believers do not realize that happiness and contentment do not originate from the fulfillment of the lust pattern of our sin nature. For the Christian, contentment only comes from a relationship with the Lord, by understanding His grace provisions that we have previously discussed and maximizing them in our lives with a mindset of humility. As Ephesians 4:23 states, lust can only be overcome through the renewing 'of the spirit of your mind'. This attitude is what gives us the spiritual energy to grow and to advance to spiritual adulthood. Otherwise we are vulnerable to some form of lust or another. None of us are free from lust since all of us humans are swimming in the same contaminated gene pool.

Our area of lust is related to the area of weakness or the area of strength in our sin nature. Remember that all of us possess the sin nature within the cell structure of our bodies and each sin nature will have an area of weakness and an area of strength. Our area of strength can actually be deceiving and cause us to have a false self-esteem in regards to our area of strength. This hindrance is known as a moral degeneration.

A Self-Righteous and Legalistic Moral Deterioration

The legalistic trend of the sin nature leads to a moral deterioration that is characterized by self-righteous arrogance and has a tendency for judging other believers (Rom. 14:10-13; Mt. 7:1-3). This judgment arrogance is motivated by our shock of the sins of lustful lawlessness. Again, both lustful lawlessness and self-righteous arrogance have the sin nature as their source. These trends are simply at two opposite ends of the spectrum.

But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. (KJV Rom. 14:10-13)

In view of Roman 14:10-13, if the Lord is constantly judging us in time and will judge us at His judgment seat, then what are believers doing judging other believers? This kind of judgment of other believers has its source in self-righteous legalistic arrogance. Of course, parents, pastors and other individuals in positions of authority have the right to judge those individuals that are under their authoritative care, as in the case of parents over their children.

However, judging from self-righteous legalism is improper, and will bring judgment as well as discipline to the one who is guilty of judging other believers. It is often thought that believers have to have committed some shocking, deliberate sin for God to administer divine punishment, but in actuality, verbal sins can bring multiple forms of discipline (Matt. 7: 1-3).

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? (KJV Matt. 7:1-3)

Thus the believer found in *judgment arrogance* is first disciplined for the mental attitude sin which motivated them to judge, and then is disciplined for slandering, gossiping and maligning the one being judged. God, thus removes the discipline from the one being judged and transfers it to the one who is judging, maligning and slandering. Accordingly, it does not pay one bit to get in the Lord's way when it comes to judging.

In the final analysis, this form of legalistic arrogance establishes non-essential or false standards, and then tries to impose them on believers as well as unbelievers, by bullying them to change by forcing them into a certain course of action. When people don't change to meet the legalist's standards, then comes further judgmentally arrogant behaviors.

What we must remember is that we have to allow for freedom. Freedom is God's policy. Otherwise, tyranny prevails, and the Lord is not a tyrant who *forces* people to choose; He, instead, allows freewill to choose, whether it is the unbeliever who is to choose for Christ, or for the believer to choose to grow in Christ. God in His grace, therefore, does not force an

unbeliever to choose Christ nor a believer to grow in His free availability of it. We exercise our freewill to choose the things we want, because we want to, unlike the legalist who uses coercion.

This is the very reason why human freedom demands the separation of Church and State. Believers actually have no right to superimpose Christianity on the State. The State, on the other hand, is not to suppress the freedom of Christianity, or any other religion for that matter. Both of these types of actions are evil because they ignore freedom, which again, is God's policy. The responsibility of the State is designed to establish freedom by giving all people the right of self-determination to follow any course of action as long as that action does not violate the law of the Land. Therefore, every individual can have the freedom to choose to be an agnostic, or an atheist, or a Christian.

Self-righteous legalism is the reason that an immoral degenerate believer or the unbeliever ends up rejecting Christianity. They end up associating legalistic self-righteous arrogance with the Bible, with the local Church, or with all Christians in general. As a result, they conclude that if that's what Christianity is, they don't want any part of it. So, they end up avoiding learning about the Bible, going to the local Church, and they avoid all Christians.

An Immoral and Lawless Deterioration

The immoral and lawless trend of the sin nature leads to an immoral deterioration and is manifested in the categories of sexual, chemical or criminal sinfulness (Eph. 4:19, 28).

Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. (KJV Eph. 4:19)

The word 'lasciviousness' in Ephesians 4:19 is translated from the Greek noun *aselgeia* meaning, 'sensuality, indecency'. Lasciviousness would refer to unrestrained sex. In addition, the word would also include unrestrained drunkenness and drug abuse. Paul also relates the immoral degenerate believer to criminal activity in Ephesians 4:28 where he writes about a believer not stealing anymore.

The category of sexual sinfulness would include such things as adultery, fornication, homosexuality, incest and such. God designed sex for a man and woman to be an expression of love between them in the bonds of marriage; everything else is sin. This is the reason Hebrews 13:4 states that marriage should be held in high honor and the marriage bed should be undefiled. Sex outside of marriage is not only sinful, but very destructive. Today, the marriage bed is dishonored by most people, including many

professing Christians, and is one of the reasons for the negative downtrend in marriage and the family.

Chemical sins would include the believer getting involved in drugs, acid, cocaine, marijuana, opium or crack. Getting drunk would also be included in the category of chemical sins. Drinking is not a sin, but getting drunk is the issue. Ephesians 5:18 tells us not to be drunk with wine, which lets us know that this Scripture is talking about fermented wine, not grape juice. One does not get drunk on grape juice, as some legalists claim. The same Greek noun translated “wine” in Eph. 5:18 is also translated “wine” in First Timothy 5:23. Here is where Paul advises Timothy to drink a little wine for his stomach problems, he does not tell Timothy to get drunk!

Criminal sinfulness includes robbery, murder, gang violence, shoplifting and the like as such things are against the law.

So, the immoral and lawless believer gets distracted because they put their sexual, chemical or criminal lusts first in their scale of values. Emphasizing their false spirituality, on the other hand, distracts the moral and legalistic believer, and some crusade to straighten out the devil’s world, as well as getting themselves involved in some ascetic practice or another.

The Bible never encourages either of these degenerative trends. The Bible rejects the trend of the self-righteous legalistic believer, as well as the immoral and lawless trend of the immoral believer. Each of these trends goes to opposite extremes. Self-righteousness wants to have authority without freedom, which is dictatorship. Immorality and lawlessness wants freedom without any kind of authority, which results in chaos. True freedom always requires responsibility.

When we live by either trend of our sin nature, it only means that we are either grieving or quenching God the Holy Spirit; neither trend represents the truth of God’s grace.

Each sin nature trend ends up being hostile toward the other. The legalist believer judges the immoral believer, while the immoral believer reacts to the legalist believer. This pre-occupation with oneself or others results in antagonism among the majority of Christians today. Probably about 90% of professing Christians are stumbling around tripping over one another in this manner.

Being pre-occupied with oneself or with other believers is the contrast to being pre-occupied with Jesus Christ, which is the Christian’s ultimate problem solving method in the Christian’s race.

The Problem of Idolizing People

Preoccupation with others is why the trend towards self-righteous legalism also has a tendency for someone to idolize another by having an excessive or misguided admiration for them. Of course, when the idolized person sins, then the legalist is disillusioned and disenchanted. This results in

the legalist reacting with gossip, slander, judging and maligning. This type of mindset actually creates a double standard, one for the idolized person and one for self. We end up excusing ourselves for certain sins, failures, or flaws, but condemn them in the idolized person. We may also condemn someone with the opposite sin nature trend.

Occasional disappointment with others is easily handled through the function of impersonal love. However, impersonal love requires us to be pre-occupied with the Lord, not with other people's sins, failures or flaws. A double standard is actually a flaw of the legalistic believer. We have to always remember that we cannot change others, only ourselves. We should not be pitting a strong sin nature trend against a weak sin nature trend.

Pre-occupation with oneself and with others also causes us to be pre-occupied with the area of friendship, romance, or marriage to the exclusion of our relationship with the Lord. It is this kind of pre-occupation that ends up establishing wrong priorities in our lives simply because these things become more important. We may think that life is passing us by and we have to find someone for friendship, romance or marriage. Friendship, romance and marriage should be based first on our relationship with the Lord when we have developed personal love for God the Father and are pre-occupied with Jesus Christ. As a result, the Lord will bring these things in His timing when we truly have the capacity to handle and enjoy them.

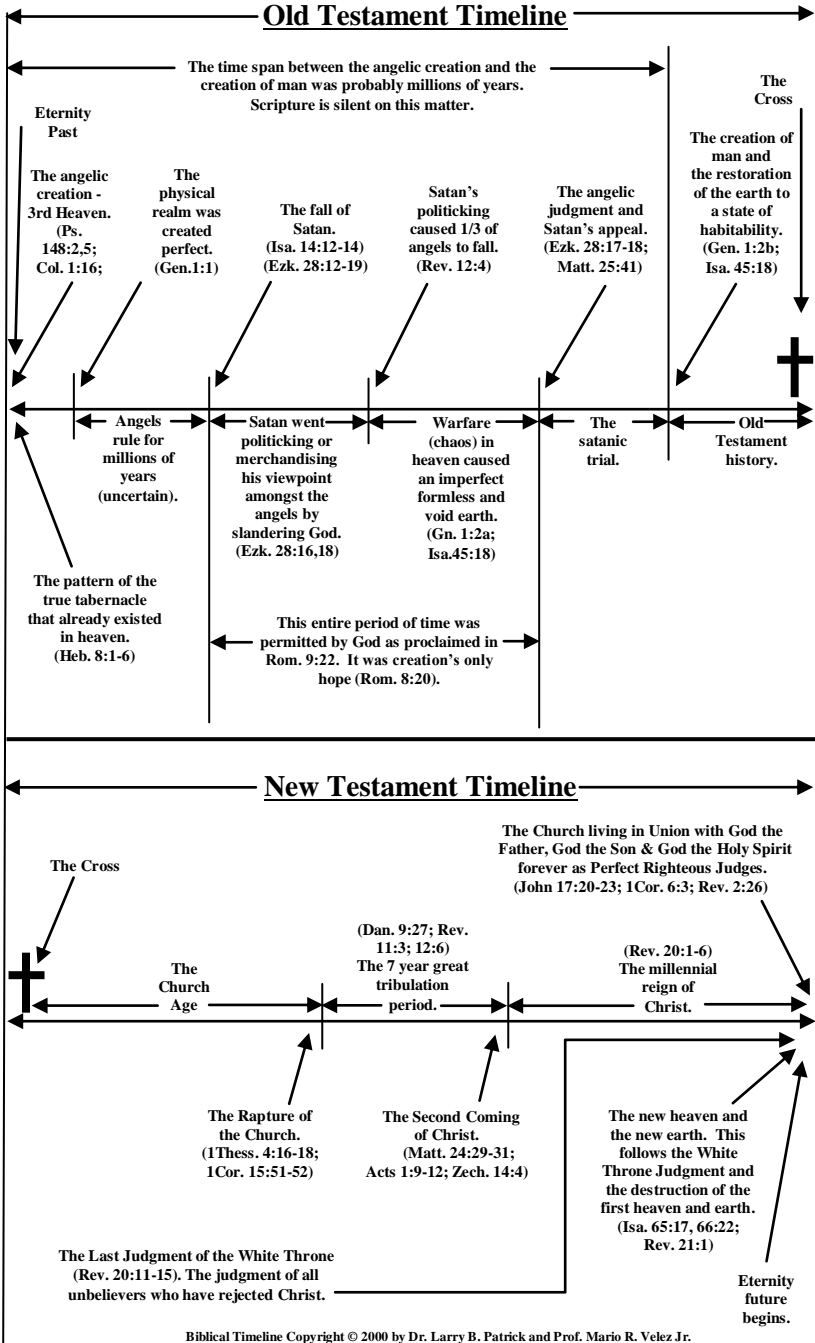
Conclusion

I hope that this study on the distractions to the Christian race has been beneficial in recognizing the many pitfalls that hinder so many Christians today. This study is designed as a reference for you to understand the diverse distractions and solutions that God has provided for each Christian. It is recommended that you make this book part of your yearly study exercise so as to keep these distractions and solutions always in remembrance (2 Pet. 1:12).

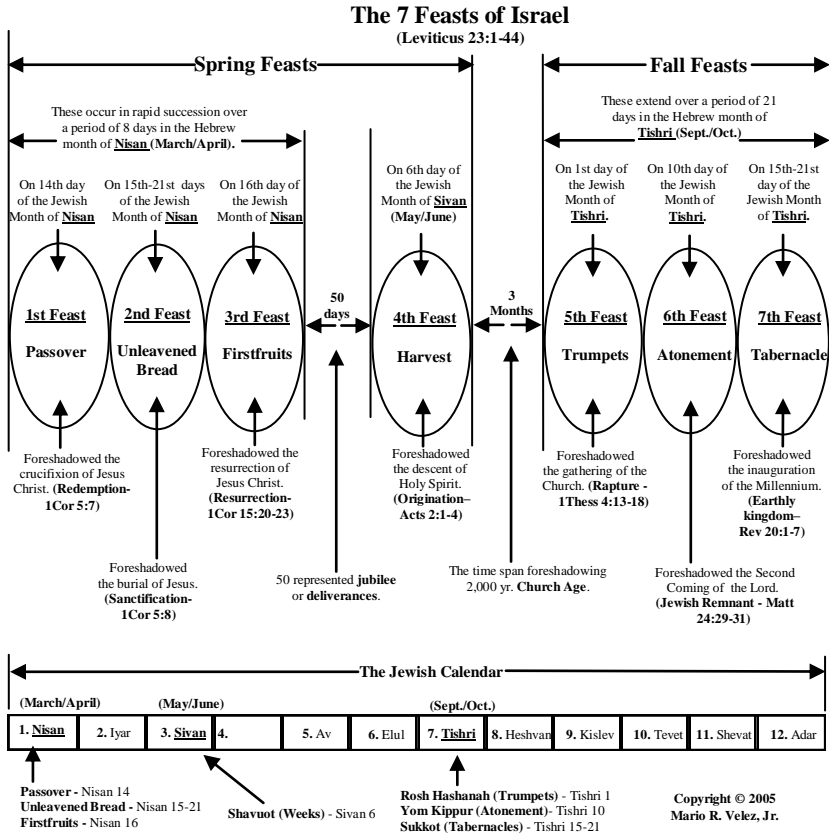
Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. (KJV 2 Pet. 1:12)

Prof. Mario R. Velez, Th.M.

God's Biblical Timeline of History



The Seven Feasts of Israel



Summation of the Seven Feasts

* *Passover foreshadowed the Lord's Crucifixion* - The Lord reminds His disciples in Matthew that the 'feast of Passover' was two days away when He would be crucified. The religious leader had plotted to kill the Lord after the Passover when the people, who had journeyed to Jerusalem for the feast, had departed. Yet, God allowed this event to occur on His timing and not on the timing of the religious leaders (Matt. 26:1-5). This is why Christ is called our 'Passover' Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7).

* *Unleavened Bread foreshadowed the Lord's burial* - Although Mark 14:12 states that the Lord's Supper occurred on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, we have to observe that Mark states that it happened 'when they killed the Passover'. The Passover lambs were killed on the 14th day of Nisan, which was when the Passover Feast was celebrated. The next day, which was the 15th day of Nisan, was when the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread began. This is the reason Passover and Unleavened Bread are often intermingled together and collectively referred to as

‘the eight days of Passover’. Therefore, it was common at the time to refer to this eight day period as the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It was on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (15th of Nisan) that the Lord was in the grave. He did not see decay because He was pure and sinless, without leaven. That the Lord would not see decay is prophesied by David and quoted by Peter in Acts (Ps. 16:8-10; Acts 2:25-28); thus He was the fulfillment of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

* *FirstFruits foreshadowed the Lord’s Resurrection* - In line with God’s timing, the Lord was resurrected on the 16th of Nisan, when the feast of Firstfruits was celebrated, two days after the beginning of Passover. We therefore see in the first three feasts the three days that the Lord taught, of which the third would be when He would rise again from the grave (Mark 8:31). Christ fulfilled this feast in that He was the ‘firstfruits of them that slept’ (1Cor. 15:20).

* *The Feast of Harvest or Weeks foreshadowed the descent of the Holy Spirit* – The fulfillment of this feast is documented in the second chapter of the book of Acts. The feast of Harvest is also designated the feast of Pentecost and it was on this feast day that the Holy Spirit descended on all believers inaugurating the Church age.

Upon examining these four spring festivals we see how they depicted the redemptive work of the Lord’s First Coming. Likewise, the last three fall feasts depict three events that have yet to be fulfilled and have to do with our Lord’s Second Coming. From the model God has left us in the four spring feasts, we can conclude that the future events that the three fall feasts foreshadow will occur precisely on the schedule connected with each fall feast. The first of the fall feasts is the Feast of Trumpets, also known as Rosh Hashanah, which is celebrated on the first day of the Hebrew month of Tishri at the New Moon. As the Feast of Pentecost began the Church Age, likewise, the ‘Feast of Trumpets’ will signal the end of the Church Age when the Lord will rapture His church (1Thess. 4:13-18; 1Cor. 15:51-52). Nine days later, on the tenth day of Tishri, is when the next feast is celebrated, referred to as ‘The Day of Atonement’. The Day of Atonement points to those of the tribulation who will be saved when they see the Lord coming back to the earth physically (Matt. 24:29-31; Acts 1:9-12; Zech. 14:4). The last feast is referred to as the ‘Feast of Tabernacles’, which is a seven-day celebration during the fifteenth day through twenty-first day of the month of Tishri. Tabernacles foreshadowed the millennial reign of our Lord spoken about in the book of Revelation (Rev. 20:1-6).