

# Understanding the Foundations

## Chapter 11 - God's Calendar – Pentecost

Why Can't Jewish People See Their Messiah

### Countdown to Fulfillment

In the last chapter, we saw that the appointed times of Passover and First Fruits had incredible fulfillments in the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus. But the story was just beginning! Jesus's resurrection on the day of First Fruits started a countdown to the fulfillment of yet another huge prophecy on the day of Pentecost.

<sup>15</sup> *"You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. [First Fruits]* <sup>16</sup> **You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath.** Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the LORD. <sup>17</sup> You shall bring from your dwelling places two loaves of bread to be waved, made of two tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour, and they shall be baked with leaven, as firstfruits to the LORD. <sup>18</sup> And you shall present with the bread seven lambs a year old without blemish, and one bull from the herd and two rams. They shall be a burnt offering to the LORD, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. <sup>19</sup> And you shall offer one male goat for a sin offering, and two male lambs a year old as a sacrifice of peace offerings. <sup>20</sup> And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before the LORD, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the LORD for the priest. <sup>21</sup> And you shall make a proclamation on the same day. **You shall hold a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work. It is a statute forever in all your dwelling places throughout your generations.** Leviticus 23:15-21 (ESV)

When we read this passage, our eyes tend to glaze over with the list of sacrifices. And strangely, the text doesn't even seem to say what the 50<sup>th</sup> day is about. Yet, whatever it is, it must be important because this was one of three times each year that every male was commanded to come to Jerusalem and appear before the Lord.

*"Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God at the place that He will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, **at the Feast of Weeks**, and at the Feast of Booths. They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed.* Deuteronomy 16:16 (ESV)

This appointed time is called “The Feast of Weeks” or “Shavuot” which means “weeks” in Hebrew. It is named this because it comes seven weeks and a day after First Fruits... literally “a week of weeks.” Note this “**Seven 7’s + 1**” pattern is the same as the seven Sabbatical Years followed by the Year of Jubilee that we studied in Chapter 6. Most people know this holiday by the name “Pentecost” which is derived from the Greek words for “50 days” because it comes 50 days after First Fruits. But what is the significance of 50 days after a few days after Passover?

### *The First Pentecost*

The reason that Shavuot or Pentecost is so significant is that it commemorates the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. Looking at the following calendar, the people of Israel ate the Passover meal on the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan and were protected that night when every first-born in Egypt died. The next morning, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, the Israelites were thrust out of Egypt which is commemorated by the first day of the “Feast of Unleavened Bread.” They crossed the Red Sea on the day of First Fruits and the Egyptian army was destroyed... just as the power of death was broken when Christ arose on the day of First Fruits. [Romans 6:9 / Colossian 2:15]

### *Counting the Omer*

On the calendar, notice the numbers with the pink backgrounds that begin counting on the day of First Fruits. These are called “The Counting of the Omer.” As we discussed in Chapter 6, an omer was the amount of manna that God told the Israelites to collect each morning during their trek from the Red Sea to Mount Sinai. Thus, the “counting of the omer” each year reminds the Jewish people that Passover and First Fruits were just the beginning of the incredible story of God bringing them to Himself on Shavuot. In the very same way, the death and resurrection of Jesus are the beginning of a story leading up to Pentecost.

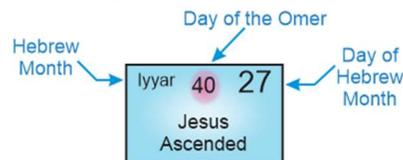
	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	Nisan 4	Nisan 5	Nisan 6	Nisan 7	Nisan 8	Nisan 9 Jesus in Bethany	Nisan 10 Jesus arrives in Jerusalem
	Nisan 11	Nisan 12	Nisan 13	Nisan 14 Jesus Arrested Passover Lambs Killed Jesus Dies	Nisan 15 Passover Israel Leaves Egypt 1st Day of Unleaven Bread	Nisan 16 Disciples buy spices	Nisan 17 Weekly Sabbath
(Early April)	Nisan 18 Israel Crosses the Red Sea Jesus Risen First Fruits	Nisan 19	Nisan 20	Nisan 21 God provides water in the desert 7th Day of Unleaven Bread	Nisan 22	Nisan 23	Nisan 24 Weekly Sabbath
	Nisan 25	Nisan 26	Nisan 27	Nisan 28	Nisan 29	Nisan 30	Iyyar 1 Weekly Sabbath
	Iyyar 2	Iyyar 3	Iyyar 4	Iyyar 5	Iyyar 6	Iyyar 7	Iyyar 8 Weekly Sabbath
	Iyyar 9	Iyyar 10	Iyyar 11	Iyyar 12	Iyyar 13	Iyyar 14	Iyyar 15 God Gives Manna
	Iyyar 16	Iyyar 17	Iyyar 18	Iyyar 19	Iyyar 20	Iyyar 21	Iyyar 22 Weekly Sabbath
	Iyyar 23	Iyyar 24	Iyyar 25	Iyyar 26	Iyyar 27	Iyyar 28	Iyyar 29 Weekly Sabbath
	Iyyar 30	Iyyar 31	Iyyar 32	Iyyar 33	Iyyar 34	Iyyar 35	Iyyar 36 Weekly Sabbath
	Iyyar 37	Iyyar 38	Iyyar 39	Iyyar 40 Jesus Ascends	Iyyar 41	Iyyar 42	Iyyar 43 Weekly Sabbath
	Sivan 1	Sivan 2	Sivan 3	Sivan 4	Sivan 5	Sivan 6	Sivan 7 Weekly Sabbath
	Sivan 8 Giving of Law Holy Spirit Falls Shavuot Pentecost	Sivan 9	Sivan 10	Sivan 11	Sivan 12	Sivan 13	Sivan 14 Weekly Sabbath

(Mid-May)

## God's Calendar

From Passover to Shavuot

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### The Giving of the Law

After beginning to learn to obey God's instructions with the lessons of the Manna, [Chapter 6] the people came to Mount Sinai. There God told the people through Moses that He had brought them to Himself for a purpose.

*<sup>5</sup> Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; <sup>6</sup> and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation...* Exodus 19:5-6 (ESV)

Of course, it is one thing for Moses to tell you “*God said...*” but it is quite another thing if God tells you something Himself. And that is exactly what He did. It would be well for all of us to imagine ourselves standing at the base of Mount Sinai with our legs trembling so badly that we can barely stand. To smell the smoke and feel the heat of the fire. To shield our eyes from the blinding flashes of lightning and to hear the blast of trumpets over the roar of the thunder. Then... to hear with our own ears the voice of God speaking:

*I am the LORD your God,  
who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.  
You shall have no other gods before Me.*

*You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love Me and keep my commandments.*

*“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain,  
for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.*

*“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.  
Six days you shall labor, and do all your work,  
but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God.  
On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter,  
your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock,  
or the sojourner who is within your gates.  
For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them,  
and rested on the seventh day.  
Therefore, the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*

*“Honor your father and your mother,  
that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.*

*“You shall not murder.*

*“You shall not commit adultery.*

*“You shall not steal.*

*“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*

*“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house;  
you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife,  
or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey,  
or anything that is your neighbor’s.”*

Exodus 20:2-17 (ESV)

These are not “Ten Suggestions for a Happy and Prosperous Life.” These are the terms of your relationship with your Creator. Indeed, these were the very words which God later wrote on the two stone tablets that were placed inside the Ark of the Covenant. [Deuteronomy 4:13 / Deuteronomy 10:5 / Hebrews 9:4]

For the past decade, the battle has raged across our country as atheists have demanded the removal of all monuments to the Ten Commandments. Sadly, they have succeeded because those who claim to follow Christ have already removed God’s Laws from their hearts. But we will come back to that later.



### *Pentecost in the New Testament*

Now, let’s fast forward about 1,500 years from that first Pentecost. The city of Jerusalem is filled with tens of thousands of visitors. Jews have come not only from Judea but also from all over the Roman empire where they have been scattered. They have come to celebrate Shavuot, but little did they know that two incredible prophecies were about to be fulfilled.

After Jesus’ crucifixion at Passover and resurrection on First Fruits, Jesus taught His disciples for 40 days. Just before He ascended to Heaven, He commanded His disciples to stay in Jerusalem to wait for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. [Luke 24:9 / Acts 1:4] I’m sure they had no idea what that meant but they returned to Jerusalem and waited obediently. Ten days later was the feast of Pentecost.

#### Acts 2:1-47 (ESV)

*<sup>1</sup> When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. <sup>4</sup> And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. <sup>5</sup> Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every*

*nation under heaven.* <sup>6</sup> *And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.*

I have always pictured verses 1-4 as occurring in the “Upper Room” but the context seems to indicate that this event occurred in the Temple courtyard. The Greek word that is translated as “house” in verse 2 usually means someone’s home. However, it is also used in the phrase, “the House of God.” [Matthew 12:4 / John 2:16 / Acts 7:49] That fits in this context because many thousands of devout Jews rushed together to see what was happening.

<sup>7</sup> *And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?”* <sup>8</sup> *And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?* <sup>9</sup> *Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,* <sup>10</sup> *Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome,* <sup>11</sup> *both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians — **we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.*** <sup>12</sup> *And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”* <sup>13</sup> *But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”*

There are two ways to look at this passage. I have always envisioned that the apostles were speaking in all these languages. That would certainly be a miracle but, with at least 15 different languages, it would also have been total chaos. What the text actually says is that *“each one was hearing them speak in his own language.”* That is truly an amazing miracle because the apostles were just speaking normally and everyone in the crowd understood what they were saying as if they were speaking in each person’s language. The people who were mocking were probably locals who would be hearing the apostles speaking in their normal language. Thus, they couldn’t see the miracle that was happening all around them.

<sup>14</sup> *But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words.* <sup>15</sup> *For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day.* <sup>16</sup> *But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:* <sup>17</sup> *“**And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams;*** <sup>18</sup> *even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.* <sup>19</sup> *And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;* <sup>20</sup> *the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and*

magnificent day. <sup>21</sup> **And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the LORD shall be saved.** <sup>22</sup> “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves know — <sup>23</sup> this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. <sup>24</sup> God raised Him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it.

<sup>25</sup> For David says concerning Him, “I saw the Lord always before me, for He is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; <sup>26</sup> therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. <sup>27</sup> For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. <sup>28</sup> You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’

<sup>29</sup> “Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. <sup>30</sup> Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, <sup>31</sup> he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. <sup>32</sup> This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.

<sup>33</sup> Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. <sup>34</sup> For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, “‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, <sup>35</sup> until I make your enemies your footstool.”’” <sup>36</sup> Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

<sup>37</sup> Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” <sup>38</sup> And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” <sup>40</sup> And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”

<sup>41</sup> **So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.** <sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup> And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the

apostles. <sup>44</sup> *And all who believed were together and had all things in common.* <sup>45</sup> *And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.* <sup>46</sup> *And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,* <sup>47</sup> *praising God and having favor with all the people. **And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.***

But if Pentecost is a celebration of receiving the Law at Mount Sinai, what is the connection between it and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit? Remember back in Chapter 4, we discussed the prophecy of Jeremiah 31? This is its fulfillment!

<sup>31</sup> *“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when **I will make a new covenant** with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,* <sup>32</sup> *not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD.*

<sup>33</sup> *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: **I will put My Law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*** <sup>34</sup> *And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”*  
Jeremiah 31:31-34 (ESV)

When Jesus told His disciples at the Last Supper, *“This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.”* Luke 22:20 (ESV) That wasn’t just poetic language. The disciples knew exactly what He was saying even though they could not possibly understand how it was going to happen.

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is the writing of God’s Laws on our hearts. While it may be accompanied by outward signs, the true sign of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is the total change that occurs in a person’s life. If someone claims to be “saved” or “filled with the Holy Spirit” but their lives do not show it, they are probably deceived. Though few of us understand Torah when we accept Christ as the Lord of our lives, the Holy Spirit writes it on our hearts and we begin to walk in His ways. Notice that the book of Hebrews quotes the prophecy of Jeremiah.

<sup>14</sup> *For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.* <sup>15</sup> *And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,* <sup>16</sup> *“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the*

*LORD: I will put My Laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,”*  
*<sup>17</sup> then He adds, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.”*  
Hebrews 10:14-17 (ESV)

When God says, *“I will put My Laws on their hearts...”*, what laws was He talking about? Well... He has only had one Law since the beginning of time and Jesus said that Law will remain unchanged until the end of time. [Matthew 5:17-20]

### *So Why Can't Jews See Their Messiah Today?*

When Peter preached in the Temple on the day of Pentecost, 3,000 people were added to the church. All of them were Jewish. Indeed, for several years, all the followers of Jesus were Jewish. Yet today, very few Jewish people come to Christ. What has changed? Why is it so hard for Jews today to recognize and accept their Messiah? There are three main reasons, two are obvious and have always been there but the third one is both shocking and heartbreaking.

### *Power and Control*

The first reason, at least for some of those in leadership, is obvious and has not changed since the days of Jesus.

*But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison.* Acts 5:17-18 (ESV)

*The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him.* Acts 13:44-45 (ESV)

There's no mystery here! When ungodly or immature people are in leadership, they will try to crush anything that might challenge their position. Of course, we need not sneer at the Jewish leadership for doing this. In the past 45 years, I have never been in a church where jealousy did not rear its ugly head and defile the work of God in some way.

## **Tradition!**

Another problem that prevents Jews from accepting Jesus as their Messiah is tradition. As we have discussed in other chapters, Jews study the Old Testament, but most are heavily influenced by the Talmud, or the “tradition of the elders” as Jesus called it.



Like any Bible commentary, the Talmud can be helpful in understanding difficult passages of scripture. It also contains an enormous wealth of insight into the deep meanings of scripture. However, like most Bible commentaries, it also puts a spin on some scriptures to promote denominational prejudices. An example of this is how it deals with messianic prophecies. Scriptures such as Isaiah 53 which clearly describe Jesus are either avoided or reinterpreted. Also, if you compare a normal Jewish calendar with the one I created simply from reading the scriptures, you will see that some of the dates, such as First Fruits, are shifted by a few days. This may have been done intentionally because the first three feasts so clearly line up with the death and resurrection of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

However, there is nothing wrong with traditions that don't conflict with scripture. Tradition forms a framework for living and a common heritage that define us. This is especially true for Jewish people who have managed to survive as a people against impossible odds for thousands of years. Most gentile Christians do not understand Jewish traditions and therefore are very uncomfortable with them. Thus, Jews who accept Jesus as their Messiah, often feel pressured to abandon their traditions which requires them to turn their backs to their identity and heritage. That is very sad because it is not only painful to them but it also cuts off relationships with other Jewish people who need to come to know their Messiah.

## **But the Main Reason is Heartbreaking**

While these reasons make it difficult for Jews to accept Jesus as their Messiah, I was utterly stunned when I learned that the main reason was... ***God specifically told them not to!*** This is called “The Deuteronomy 13 Test.”

<sup>1</sup> *“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, <sup>2</sup> and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and **if he says, ‘Let us go after other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them,’ <sup>3</sup> you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For***

*the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.* <sup>4</sup> *You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him and keep His commandments and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him.* <sup>5</sup> *But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of slavery, to make you leave the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.*

Deuteronomy 13:1-18 (ESV)

But, you may ask, “*What does that have to do with Jesus?*” Well... Think of how we present Jesus. We tell people of all the signs and wonders that Jesus performed but we also say that He did away with the Laws of God given through Moses. Therefore, we present Jesus as a false prophet who must be rejected. The early church did not present Him in this way.

<sup>7</sup> *And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.* <sup>8</sup> *And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people.* <sup>9</sup> *Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen.* <sup>10</sup> *But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.* <sup>11</sup> *Then they secretly instigated men who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.”* <sup>12</sup> *And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council,* <sup>13</sup> *and **they set up false witnesses who said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the Law,*** <sup>14</sup> *for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place **and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us.”*** Acts 6:7-14 (ESV)

Notice that **false witnesses** said Jesus came to change the Law of Moses. Similarly, we say Paul taught that the Law was done away with. Yet, when Paul was on trial, he said that he believed everything in the Law.

<sup>10</sup> *And when the governor had nodded to him to speak, Paul replied: “Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense.* <sup>11</sup> *You can verify that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem,* <sup>12</sup> *and they did not find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city.* <sup>13</sup> *Neither can*

they prove to you what they now bring up against me. <sup>14</sup> **But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets,** <sup>15</sup> *having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.* Acts 24:10-15 (ESV)

### Stumbling Blocks

Although salvation is a free gift, God doesn't make true salvation easy. Unlike most of our modern preaching, that reduces salvation to "easy believism" and "fire insurance," God says that His way to salvation is narrow and hard and that few find it. [Matthew 7:13-14] It is hard because we cannot approach God in our pride or arrogance. We must submit our will to His and that is totally repugnant to people. Paul quotes Isaiah saying that the gospel is a stumbling block to those who do not approach God in faith.

<sup>30</sup> *What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith;* <sup>31</sup> *but that Israel who pursued a Law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that Law.*

<sup>32</sup> *Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone,* <sup>33</sup> *as it is written, "**Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.**"* Romans 9:30-33 (ESV) [Isaiah 8:14, 28:16 / Psalm 118:22]

So yes, the Gospel itself is a stumbling block to the proud and arrogant – whether Jew or Gentile. However, when we present a Gospel that says Jesus did away with the Laws of God, we not only deceive ourselves, but we also place a stumbling block against Jews who are seeking to walk in faith... a stumbling block that prevents them from recognizing their own Messiah. In doing so, we have been unfaithful in the mission that our Lord has given us.

<sup>18</sup> *All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;* <sup>19</sup> *that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.* <sup>20</sup> **Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.** 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 (ESV)

## *Faithful Ambassadors*

When a head of state appoints an ambassador, the ambassador must not only be able to deliver a message, he must clearly convey the thoughts and desires of the one who appointed him. While on mission, the ambassador must completely lay aside all of his own opinions and personal interests, so he can faithfully represent the one who sent him. Sometimes ambassadors are honored and sometimes they are not. As Paul wrote:

*<sup>18</sup> ...To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, <sup>19</sup> and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup> for which **I am an ambassador in chains**, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.* Ephesians 6:18-20 (ESV)

Being a faithful ambassador will be tough because the world hates God's ways, but can you imagine the joy of hearing these words spoken to you someday? *Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your Master.* Matthew 25:21 (ESV)

God treasures faithfulness in His children because it is a reflection of His nature. Our task as believers in Jesus Christ is to serve our King as faithful ambassadors. To do this we must lay aside our opinions and strive to accurately understand His thoughts and His desires.

As we discussed back in Chapter 3, it is very difficult to remove the denominational lenses we are accustomed to reading the scriptures through and just look at what the words say. It is even harder to develop the discipline of interpreting everything we read in view of the entire span of scripture from Genesis to Revelation. But that is the task that He has set before us. As Paul said it,

*Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.* 2 Timothy 2:15 (ESV)

## *One Final Thought*

I understand that these are heavy subjects. If you are feeling overwhelmed by the realization that so much of what you thought the scriptures said may be wrong and that you have not been following the ways of your Lord and Savior... *do not be afraid.* The enemy would love to rush in and replace the conviction of the Holy Spirit with condemnation. However, as Paul said, *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* Romans 8:1 (ESV)

God was a God of great grace in the Old Testament and He is a God of great grace in the New Testament. But neither does He ignore sin. Consider carefully what He says following the sin of the Golden Calf at Mount Sinai and how Moses responded.

<sup>6</sup> *The LORD passed before him [Moses] and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup> keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”*

<sup>8</sup> *And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. <sup>9</sup> And he said, “If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for Your inheritance.”* Exodus 34:6-9 (ESV)

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you evaluate all of these matters and ask Him for His wisdom.

*...the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.* John 14:26 (ESV)

*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.* James 1:5 (ESV)

And if you are excited by learning these things, please remember that the Bereans were also very excited about what Paul taught them... but they searched the scriptures daily to see if what he said was true. [Acts 17:11] Scripture called this “noble.” We must never accept something merely because it sounds good. We must grow up *“to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”* Ephesians 4:13-14 (ESV)

Paul agreed saying that we must *“test everything”* and *“hold fast what is good.”* [1 Thessalonians 5:21]

Shalom

