



# The *ENJOY THE BIBLE*

Quarterly

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Fourth Quarter 1999

## Questions and Answers

Our annual issue devoted to Questions and Answers. The following selections have been edited to either conserve space, ensure clarity, and/or remove any personal information.

### **GALATIANS 6:16; 3:29; and PHILIPPIANS 3:3**

*These three verses in Paul's epistles are often used by ones who claim that Christians today are Israel, or spiritual Jews. While I know we are not Israel, just what is Paul referring to in these verses?*

It certainly is a doctrinal and spiritual tragedy when Christians don't "rightly divide the word of truth" in recognition of God's two programs — the one with Israel and the other with us today in this dispensation of God's grace to the Gentiles. Not only does confusion abound in so many areas of doctrine and practice, but Christians even fail to identify themselves properly. Since they are commonly taught that we today are fulfillers of Israel's promises and partakers of Israel's program, it is not very far-fetched that they end up thinking that they are 'spiritual Israelites,' or 'spiritual Jews,' etc. Indeed such teaching prevails today, as you know. It is a major tenet of Covenant Theology, and just about any other doctrinal system that does not "rightly divide the word of truth."

The verses you cited, (Galatians 6:16; 3:29; Philippians 3:3; along with some others like Romans 2:28-29), are commonly used by ones who want to uphold the idea that Christians today are spiritual Israelites. And when it comes to exposing the error of the idea, you will need to deal not only with the "right division" of God's word, but also with the fact that these verses are being mishandled within their own respective contexts. As I briefly comment on these particular verses, I am going to focus on the error of how they are mishandled within their own contexts.

**Galatians 6:16** — In view of the fact that this verse refers to "the Israel of God," this is naturally one of the favorite verses. First of all let's note how this verse is commonly mis-read in many people's minds. It is commonly read and misunderstood as if Paul said, "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy; that is upon the Israel of God." In other words, it is commonly mis-read and misunderstood as if Paul was identifying the ones who walk according to this rule as "the Israel of God." But that is not what the verse says at all. Instead the

designation "the Israel of God" is immediately preceded by the second of two directive prepositions, which actually identifies "the Israel of God" as another entity which Paul pronounces as partakers of "peace" and "mercy" if they too "walk according to this rule." The two directive prepositions in the verse, "on" and "upon," identify two distinct entities which can be partakers of "peace" and "mercy" by walking according to the rule that Paul is talking about. The "them" are the ones like the Galatian saints (and us) who are members of the "new creature" of the preceding verse that God is now making "in Christ Jesus," where there is neither Jew nor Gentile, etc. However, "the Israel of God" is another and different entity entirely. It is composed of the ones Paul spoke particularly about back in Galatians 2:1-10. Hence there are two designated entities in Galatians 6:15 and 16 — the "new creature" and "the Israel of God."

Before God brought in this present dispensation of Gentile grace, suspended His program with Israel, raised up the Apostle Paul as the apostle of the Gentiles and committed to him "the gospel of the uncircumcision," His program with Israel was in effect. In accordance with this, Peter (as the apostle of the circumcision) was preaching "the gospel of the circumcision" to "the circumcision." Now in view of the teaching of the prophets, those in Israel who believed "the gospel of the circumcision" were cleansed of any identification with apostate Israel. They were no longer identified with apostate Israel which, for example as God said through Hosea, He no longer considered to be His people; and, as Isaiah said, were a nation not called by His name. Hence, apostate Israel was not "the Israel of God." In fact God had actually delivered it over to the Adversary and had dedicated it to destruction in His day of wrath. In contrast to apostate Israel it would be those of "the circumcision" that believed Peter's "gospel of the circumcision" that would be the nation called by God's name, that would be "an holy nation," that would be given the kingdom, that would be accounted to the Messiah for a generation, that would be the people of God; in short, that would be identified as "the Israel of God."

Hence, "the Israel of God" is what those in apostate Israel became part of when they believed "the gospel of the circumcision" that Peter and the 11 preached before God brought in this present dispensation of His grace with the raising up of the Apostle Paul. "The Israel of God," there-

fore, was naturally in existence when God suspended His program with Israel and brought in the present dispensation of Gentile grace. And as Paul explains in Galatians 1 and 2, at a set time God had him deal with them to communicate unto them the gospel which was committed to him to preach among the Gentiles. When that took place, Peter and his were given to fully understand the suspension of their program, and how to conduct themselves in view of it. But this means that for a period of time both the members of God's new creation the church the body of Christ and "the Israel of God" existed together, and even side-by-side, so to speak, as in the Galatian area. (Which of course is why Paul talks about them and cites them as the identifiable entity known as "the Israel of God" in his epistle to the Galatians. The Galatians were very familiar with them.)

Therefore just as the two directive prepositions of Galatians 6:16 demand, there were two distinct identifiable entities in the Galatian area: the one being the members of the "new creature" God is forming "in Christ Jesus" through the preaching of "the gospel of the uncircumcision" committed to Paul, and the other being "the Israel of God" formed in God's program with Israel through the preaching of "the gospel of the circumcision" committed unto Peter. The Galatians saints that Paul wrote to were not "the Israel of God" and neither are we. "The Israel of God" came out of apostate Israel just as the prophets taught it would and it only exists in connection with God's program with Israel.

Paul also deals with the doctrine of "the Israel of God" in Romans 9-11, especially in the latter part of chapter 10 and the first part of chapter 11. The remnant of Israel according to the election of grace is "the Israel of God."

**Galatians 3:29** — The only reason why anyone would ever use this verse to try to uphold the idea of being a spiritual Israelite is because they completely fail to understand what Paul teaches in Romans 4 about Abraham's dual-fatherhood: that is his fatherhood regarding justification by grace through faith before God ever had him circumcised, and his other fatherhood as "the father of circumcision" once he was circumcised. In Galatians 3:29, (as is clear from the preceding context regarding justification unto eternal life), Paul is dealing with Abraham's fatherhood regarding justification. He is not dealing with Abraham as the father of the circumcision.

As Paul teaches in Romans 4, faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness when he was in uncircumcision. And in so doing that, God established Abraham as "the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also." And this He did, once again, before He ever had Abraham physically circumcised and thereby set him apart in connection with the special program He has for him and his physical children. Hence, Abraham is our faith-father-example when it comes to justification unto eternal life, even in this formerly unprophesied dispensation of grace. (The suspension of God's program with Israel has no effect upon this fatherhood of Abraham.) And therefore when we believed

the gospel of Christ preached unto us in this dispensation, we walked in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham and God counted our faith for righteousness too. Hence, we justified Gentiles in this dispensation are "Abraham's seed" in connection with his fatherhood regarding justification unto eternal life, and in connection with the promise of that eternal life being vested by God in the one "seed" which is Christ. But we are not Abraham's seed, or children, in connection with Abraham's other fatherhood as "the father of the circumcision."

**Philippians 3:3** — In view of what I just said regarding Romans 4 and Galatians 3, it might seem contradictory for Paul to be saying here that "we are the circumcision." But there was more to circumcision than it just being "a seal of the righteousness of the faith which (Abraham) had yet being uncircumcised." As the "rudiment of the world" that it was, it also meant something in connection with the doctrine of sanctification. And that is the way Paul is referring to it in Philippians 3.

When Paul says "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh," he is contrasting us who possess the 'real circumcision,' so to speak, with those among the unbelieving Jews who are in truth "the concision," only cutting off the physical flesh of the foreskin as they perpetuate the rudiment of the world of physical circumcision.

The "rudiments of the world" all employed a physical, visible, tangible operation, which testified to the need for God Himself to perform a similar operation of a spiritual nature to the inner man, in order for there to be real things like, true cleansing, true sanctification, true worship, and the like, in God's sight. Regarding physical circumcision, it testified by its physical operation to the need for God Himself to perform an operation that cuts one off from the natural deadness of the body of his sinful flesh so that he can be sanctified unto God's service and render to God true functional life and worship. Physical circumcision — the circumcision made with hands — never could produce such sanctification. It, along with the other rudiments of the Law, only testified to the need for such a circumcision made without hands to be made by God Himself.

The provision for that true inward-man-sanctifying-circumcision was made when Christ died upon the cross as our substitute-Redeemer. And in connection with the riches of God's grace unto us "in Christ" in this dispensation, God performed that circumcision even on us the very moment we trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ as our all-sufficient Sav-

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ior. And as such, “we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

This real circumcision that God Himself performs is what Paul describes in more detail in Colossians 2:8ff, especially in verse 11.

<sup>10</sup> And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:

<sup>11</sup> In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: (Colossians 2:10-11)

In view of being made partakers of this circumcision made without hands, we are “the circumcision” as Paul says in Philippians 3:3.

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### HEBREWS 7:1ff

*Just who was Melchisedec?*

He was a “man,” just as Hebrews 7:4 says he was, whom God established to function in a number of very special ways in His decreed land even before He had called Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees.

Genesis 14 describes him as being “priest of the most High God, possessor of heaven and earth.” Hence God had first of all established him in His land as His own testimony to the fact that He Himself is “the most High God, possessor of heaven and earth” and that the world was in the hands of a usurper who desired to be “like the most High.” In this connection Melchisedec met Abraham, as related in Genesis 14, and blessed him in connection with God’s plan and purpose for him and his seed.

However, there was more to Melchisedec than this, especially when it comes to the order and nature of his priesthood with God. He was also a doctrinal testimony, so to speak. In particular he was a doctrinal testimony regarding the features and characteristics that constitute a perfect priesthood. And as such his priesthood stands in stark contrast to the order and nature of the Levitical priesthood upon which Israel functioned under the Law. This is what Psalm 110 in particular makes reference to, and this is the issue regarding him that is dealt with in Hebrews, especially chapter 7.

Regarding the unique order and nature of his priesthood, God established with Melchisedec the only kind of priesthood with Himself that could be perfect, being the only kind that was fully consistent with His “Jehovah-ness” and grace, and the only kind that combined both kingship and priesthood in one. With respect particularly to the priesthood, as Hebrews 7:1ff sets forth, the Melchisedecian priesthood was a priesthood in which the priest did not lay claim to the priesthood because of his father or his mother; did not pass it on to any descendant; did not enter into it at a specified age, nor end it at a specified age. In other words, the

Melchisedecian priesthood was clearly of an entirely different kind than that of the Levitical priesthood. It is the “better” priesthood in all respects, as Hebrews 7 teaches, and it is the one in which, and through which, “perfection” is found.

Moreover in accordance with the issue of God’s “Jehovah-ness,” (i.e. the issue of God Himself becoming whatever Israel needs Him to be), Melchisedec was “made like unto the Son of God.” Therefore a “like”-ness was established with Melchisedec; or more precisely as Hebrews 7:15 says, a “similitude” was established. By the very meaning of Melchisedec’s name, along with the unique features pertaining to his priesthood, Melchisedec was “made like unto the Son of God.” And as such he truly was a doctrinal testimony of what was yet to come.

In perfect accordance with the doctrine of God’s “Jehovah-ness,” the only one who could by the very nature of His person actually bear the meanings of the name “Melchisedec,” and also be made a priest after Melchisedec’s order, would be God Himself; in particular “the Son of God.” Melchisedec, therefore, by his very name and priesthood characteristics, testified to the implementation of God’s “Jehovah-ness” when the Son of God would en flesh Himself in the line of the tribe of Judah to be not only “King of righteousness” and “King of peace,” but also to be called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec from a tribe in Israel of which “Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood.”

With Melchisedec God did something very similar to what He also did later on in Israel’s history with Moses. As is spelled out earlier on in Hebrews 3, Christ Jesus is both “Apostle and High Priest.” And with respect to both of these offices, the Lord Jesus Christ (as the implementation of God’s “Jehovah-ness”) was preceded by a particular man who faithfully performed a similar function to what the Lord Himself would perform later on. And as such these two men (Moses and Melchisedec) were “for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after.” As “Apostle,” Christ was preceded by Moses, which Hebrews 3 focuses upon. As “High Priest,” Christ was preceded by Melchisedec, which Hebrews 7 focuses upon.

Hence with particular respect to the priesthood, while Israel under the law was taught the hard way the issue of their need for God’s “Jehovah-ness” and grace, (along with being constantly confronted with this through the imperfect nature of the Levitical priesthood), Psalm 110 declared the “hope” that there was “that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec.” The need for this better priesthood was set forth way back in Abraham’s day with Melchisedec himself. The fulfillment of the need, by means of the implementation of God’s “Jehovah-ness,” was realized when “being made perfect” the Son of God “became the author of eternal salvation unto all that obey him; called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.”

## **JOHN 1:29 and 3:16**

*Please explain to me your understanding of how John 1:29 and John 3:16 "pertain to the gospel of the kingdom (or Israel's program) and not to the body of Christ."*

First of all, there are areas of commonness in God's two programs. For example, the only way for an Israelite to ever be made spiritually fit to be utilized by God in His plan and purpose with Israel on this earth is for God to provide for making him fit through the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is also true for us Gentiles today in this present dispensation of God's grace. The only way we could ever be made spiritually fit to be utilized by God in his now-revealed plan and purpose for His new creation, the church the body of Christ, is for God to have provided for making us fit through the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ. That basic need and fundamental value of Christ's redemptive work is common to both of God's programs, and naturally it is a doctrinal issue and is dealt with by God in both of His programs. In similar manner, the doctrine of justification by faith unto eternal life is common to both of God's programs. No one either in God's program with Israel or in this present dispensation of His grace is justified unto eternal life by their works, or by faith plus works, but by faith only. Hence in both programs when justification unto eternal life is being dealt with, the common issue of justification by faith will be found. And there are some other areas of commonness as well. But even though there are issues of commonness in God's two programs, they are still two distinct and different programs with a far greater number of differences between them in view of the two distinct purposes of God being accomplished by each respective program. Howbeit, sometimes the issues of commonness can puzzle people. And when that happens, it can result in them taking the things in those areas of commonness as they apply to us today in this dispensation and reading them back into those areas of commonness in Israel's program. And the place where this most frequently happens is in John's Gospel, and two of the most common places in John's Gospel where this happens are John 1:29 and 3:16.

It also needs to be understood that God's program with Israel has the salvation of the world in view. In fact a result of the establishment of God's kingdom with Israel on this earth will be the issue of God's salvation going out to the ends of the world, just as set forth in the prophets. This needs to be recognized because often times when people see the emphasis in John's Gospel on the world, with phrases such as "For God so loved the world" and the like, they can think of nothing else but God's dealings with the world in this dispensation of grace as described by the Apostle Paul in his epistles. But this present dispensation of grace is not God dealing with the world according to Israel's program. Rather in this dispensation God is dealing with the world in an entirely different manner than that. In fact, He isn't dealing with the world in connection with Israel's program at all. He is dealing with the world completely apart from Israel's program, and with Israel's program suspended. However, that

is not what is being spoken about back in John's Gospel when the salvation of the world is referred to. There the world is spoken about in connection with the outworking and fulfillment of God's program with Israel.

Therefore with respect to John's Gospel, even though the salvation of the world is spoken about and even though justification by faith unto eternal life is emphasized, these two issues are being dealt with within Israel's program and as they pertain to Israel's program. All four of the Gospel accounts, including John's, record the time of the arrival of the climactic stage in God's program with Israel, when the time schedule God had given to Israel for the establishment of the kingdom of heaven was nearing its completion and the kingdom was being preached to be "at hand." John is recording things that pertain to the exact same time in Israel's program as is recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. However John, in connection with the things that God has him record, deals especially with the issues that pertain to the spiritual fitness of both Israel and the world to participate in the kingdom of heaven; and two of those issues of spiritual fitness have points of commonness with the issue of spiritual fitness in this dispensation of grace. But nevertheless, John's Gospel is still a part of the portion of God's word that pertains to His program and dealings with Israel, and everything in it needs to be understood and appreciated as such.

With respect, therefore, to the two verses in question: When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming unto him, as related in John 1:29, and said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," he wasn't declaring something that God had kept silent about since before the world began. He wasn't declaring the issue of God suspending His program with Israel and in grace and mercy turning to the Gentiles in spite of Israel. In other words, John the Baptist wasn't declaring "the gospel of the grace of God" for obedience to the faith among all nations and/or "the mystery of Christ" which was only later revealed to and proclaimed by the Apostle Paul. Instead John the Baptist was simply identifying Jesus of Nazareth for who He was in connection with providing for the fulfilling of Israel's program. In particular he was identifying Jesus as the Christ when it came to Him as Christ fulfilling the first mandate of the Davidic Covenant. That first mandate was the issue of Him fulfilling what the first of the Jehovah-compound-names called for Him to do and that was to be what the name "Jehovah-jireh" described as set forth back in Genesis 22. As Genesis 22 sets forth, "Jehovah-jireh" is the issue of 'In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen,' where what shall be seen is the issue of God providing Himself a lamb for a burnt offering. "Jehovah-jireh" is the issue of God providing Himself a lamb for a sacrifice for sin, and that lamb being God's only-begotten Son, just as Abraham was told to offer his only-begotten son for a sacrifice. The issue of Christ fulfilling what the name "Jehovah-jireh" called for and offering Himself a sacrifice for sin was not only Israel's only hope of ever being made fit to be utilized by God in what the Abrahamic Covenant called for them to be, but it was also the only hope

of the rest of the world ever being able to participate with Israel in God's kingdom when it is established on this earth with them in fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. Israel's fitness for the kingdom, and the world's ability to participate in that kingdom once established, depend upon Christ being "the Lamb of God" in fulfillment of "Jehovah-jireh." And this is who John the Baptist is identifying Jesus to be when He declared what He did in John 1:29. But now once again, what John declares and why he declares it is not the issue of what is going on in this present dispensation of God's grace.

In like manner to John 1:29, what John 3:16 says is also not a declaration of the "gospel of the grace of God" for us Gentiles in this dispensation. I know how often times John 3:16 is treated as if it is a one-verse explanation or summarization of the gospel of our salvation today. But in reality it is not. One has to read our gospel of grace back into it in order to treat it as such, which is just what people do. However, that is neither being honest with the text nor is it true to "rightly dividing the word of truth." John 3:16 does declare the issue of God's love for the world and the issue of faith in God's Son for everlasting life, but strictly speaking and honestly speaking the verse declares that in connection with the spiritual need for justification unto eternal life with God's program with Israel still in effect and the present dispensation of grace not having even been revealed yet. And it should also be noted in connection with the issue of faith in God's Son at this time, that this did not involve an understanding of the Lord's work on the cross. Passages, for example, like Matthew 16:21-23; Luke 9:43-45; 18:31-34, make this abundantly clear. Peter, James, and John, for example, were justified by faith unto eternal life; but they didn't get justified by trusting in the Lord's work on the cross as their substitute-Redeemer as we do in this dispensation. The "preaching of the cross" that is preached in this dispensation was not what they heard. Therefore, believing in God's Son at that time, as stated in John 3:16, did not involve understanding His work on the cross. And once again, strictly speaking and honestly speaking that is the program, context, and situation in which John 3:16 exists and to which it pertains.

**MATTHEW 28:19 and ACTS 2:38**

*How are we to understand the references to baptism in the following texts: Acts 2:38 (baptized in "Jesus' name"); Matthew 28:19 (baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost)? Why are they not the same?*

The Lord's instructions to His apostles that are set forth in Matthew 28:19 pertain to the time in Israel's program when the "gospel of the kingdom" will be going out to "all nations" and they will be "teaching all nations." The specified time for that was not immediately following the Lord's return to heaven. But rather in accordance with the Lord's teachings regarding the climactic stage of God's program with Israel, it would come after repentance had been given to Israel and the final installment to Israel's program involv-

ing the day of the Lord had begun. Then the "gospel of the kingdom" would be "preached in all the world for a witness to all nations." And in view of the fact that it will be those of the "nations" that will be hearing the "gospel of the kingdom," (who unlike Israel know not by nature the true and living God and the reality of the nature of the Godhead), they will be instructed in the truth of Who the true and living God is and then commanded to be baptized in the "name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (the three persons of the Godhead) when any of them respond positively to the "gospel of the kingdom."

The apostles' preaching and practice in Acts 2:38, however, is not to the "nations" in accordance with Matthew 28:19-20. And the apostles knew it, hence they don't operate on the instructions of Matthew 28. Instead their preaching and practice is to Israel in accordance with the extension of mercy and forbearance that God was giving to Israel following the rejection of their Christ. During that extension God was giving "repentance to Israel" before the scheduled final installment to Israel's program was ready to begin, in which He would have His day of purging and avenging wrath. Therefore Peter preached the truth to the people of Israel regarding who Jesus of Nazareth is, (that He is their Christ and that they had rejected Him), and then he responded to those who were persuaded of the truth regarding what he said. When he did so the issue wasn't one of baptizing them in the name of the Godhead, (as if they were ones who by nature didn't know the true and living God but now were acknowledging the Godhead and were now identifying themselves with Him instead of idolatry or atheism). Rather the issue with the believing Jews was one of the apostles baptizing them "in the name of Jesus Christ," (as ones who were now acknowledging the truth that Jesus is their Christ, and that they were now identifying themselves with Him and disassociating themselves from the rebellious element in Israel, which was soon to be destroyed). Hence the difference between the situation in Acts 2:38 and the Lord's instructions to His apostles in Matthew 28:19.

Of course the use of water baptisms was a natural thing in God's program with Israel, seeing He dealt with them as "children" and so employed various overt "rudiments of the world," like water baptisms, along with other "carnal ordinances" in His interactions and dealings with them. Things, however, are different in this present dispensation of God's grace with both Israel's program suspended and God dealing with us as "sons" and not "children." Water baptisms now have no role, function, or validity in this present dispensation.

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