

The Hebrew Way of Life

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Understanding the Hebrew way of life is important. It is important for every child of God. It is therefore most important for those of us who have been given the task to teach God's truth.

Why? The answer lies in the great mystery of the incarnation. The Apostle John reminds us that "the Word became flesh and lived for a while among us" (John 1:14). The flesh was that of a Jewish boy. His earthly address was the Holy Land. He placed himself under Jewish law. He came to fulfill the promises which God gave through the Hebrew prophets. We must always remember that Jesus was a Jew, a Hebrew, even though the pictures we have of him from Sunday School portray him more like one of us.

The Hebrew way of life is a product of God's intervention in history. If we begin with Genesis, we see how salvation began with a promise. God said that help for sinners would come through a human birth, a woman's offspring (Gen. 3:15). Through Adam and through the twenty generations before and after Noah, God dealt universally. Then God concentrated his saving work on the family of a man named Abraham. He narrowed the location of his work to a piece of real estate 120 miles long and 60 miles wide. We use a wide variety of names to refer to this place: Canaan, the Promised Land, Israel, Judea, Palestine, and the Holy Land.

God's chosen people were called in Abraham's day, gathered by God in Egypt, enlightened through God's direct revelation on Mt. Sinai, sanctified through seven centuries of prophets, priests and kings, and finally kept by God as a suffering remnant from the time of the Babylonian captivity until the time of Caesar Augustus. I have used five verbs from Dr. Luther's explanation to the Third Article of the Creed on purpose. The history of the Hebrew people is the leading example of the Holy Spirit's work among sinful men. God caused this history to be written in the Old Testament Scriptures so that believers of all times might acquire from "His Story" the wisdom which belongs to salvation. Recall how Jesus opened up the Hebrew Scriptures to the two confused, yet concerned believers on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:27). Recall how Philip used the Hebrew prophet Isaiah to convert the black Ethiopian (Acts 8:35). Recall too how the inspired Apostles remind us again and again how Jesus fulfilled every word of God from Moses to Malachi. Being Hebrew is not the essence of salvation. Biblical Jewishness is, however, the packaging which a wise God used to wrap his great and gracious gift. Like the wrapping around any package the Hebrew way of life bears the imprint of its contents. The New Testament writer to the Hebrews understood this well when he observed, "The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming-not the realities themselves" (Hebrews 10:1). The Apostle Paul also called the laws of Moses "shadows of things to come," adding "the reality is found in Christ" (Colossians 2:17).

THE "HEBREW CREED"

Certain passages from the Law of Moses became a sort of "Hebrew Creed." God commanded that the words be "like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that the law of the Lord is to be on your lips" (Exodus 13:9). The intent was that every Jewish boy and girl understand (forehead), memorize (lips) and act upon (hand) the content of these passages. We can be sure that many Jewish boys and girls did just that. We do know that it became a custom for the very religious Jews in the days of Jesus to copy the words of these passages on parchment and then actually bind them to their foreheads and their bands during the hours of prayer. We will use several of these passages to introduce our investigation of the Hebrew way of life. They will guide us as we begin our study. The first of the passages is Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Note how the oneness of God receives emphasis in the first line of this passage. The belief in one God immediately set the ancient Hebrew apart from the rest of his world. We have idolatry in our world too, but most of our idols are philosophical and cultural. Modern man practices idolatry in a world that accepts monotheism as the norm and in a culture that views polytheism as being somewhat quaint and out of date. In ancient times the idea of one universal God was considered illogical. It was assumed that different gods ruled different countries or different peoples. It was also thought to be logical for different gods to regulate the various aspects of human life, a separate god for each separate aspect. A pagan like the Egyptian pharaoh had no trouble accepting the existence of a Hebrew God. The pharaoh who opposed Moses did not object to the fact that his Israelite slaves had some sort of god. But it was beyond the comprehension of Egypt or its pharaoh to recognize the Lord God's unique existence. To Pharaoh the exodus episode was a contest between gods. With a hard heart Pharaoh was convinced that his gods were superior in every way to the god of a slave people. It is often overlooked, as we read the account of the plagues, that God's intent in sending calamity was to humble the gods of Egypt (Exodus 12:12).

A belief in the necessity of many gods explains the apparent piety of some ancient rulers who appear in Scripture. Joseph's pharaoh speaks as if he knows Joseph's God (Genesis 41:39). Nebuchadnezzar and Darius praise Daniel's God (Daniel 4:37 & 6:26-27). Pharaoh Necho rebukes King Josiah in God's name (2 Chronicles 35:21). We must not rush to the conclusion that these rulers had come to embrace Israel's faith. They were speaking in universal terms recognizing Israel's God as one among many.

The oneness of God was not an easy aspect of the Hebrew way of life to sustain. If it had been easy, much of the history of the Old Testament would have been different. Idols and idolatry pollute salvation history all the way from Abraham to Christ. Archaeologists find idolatrous figurines in every level of Israelite occupation. Popular polytheism was so strong that it colored the actions and speech of people whom we count as fellow saints. The convert Naaman took back two mule-loads of Israelite soil with him to Damascus to aid him in his worship of the true God (2 Kings 5:17). He had been raised in his pagan homeland to believe that gods and their "home turf" were inseparable. Naomi was willing to send Ruth back to her own country and to her own Moabite gods as a matter of course (Ruth 1:15). Rachel stole her family's household images (Genesis 31:19) because they were mixed up with popular notions about inheritance and success in life. Gideon said "no" to a crown on the pious grounds that God was Israel's only King. Yet he set up a gilded ephod as an open invitation to initiate idolatrous worship (Judges 8:22-27). Israel's first high priest, Aaron, was also the sculptor who gave Israel its first idol. In one breath Aaron gave his golden calf credit for Israel's deliverance from Egypt. In the next breath he issued an invitation for Israel to hold a feast in honor of the true and only Lord (Exodus 32:2-5).

We could dwell on the large amount of negative evidence that the Bible gives us for idolatrous backsliding. This would lead us astray in our study of the Hebrew way of life. The sheer volume of biblical text which concerns itself with idolatry is proof that a mighty struggle was taking place inside Israel and that throughout the Old Testament there were always true sons and daughters of Abraham who believed stubbornly that "the Lord our God, the Lord is one!"

Look now at the rest of the passage which we have quoted from Deuteronomy 6. God didn't want the Hebrews to walk away easily from their struggle to remain Old Testament believers. The commandments of God were to be an intimate part of a believer's inner being ("upon your hearts") and were to be made a part of the training of a man's family ("impress them on your children"). The commandments were fit for any place ("at home" and "along the road") and for any time ("when you lie down" and "when you get up"). The divine way was to be a part of man's doing ("tie them on your hands") and a part of man's thinking ("bind them on your foreheads"). God's precepts were to be visible in private ("on the doorframes of your houses") and in public ("on your gates").

Sometimes our thinking in regard to the Hebrew way of life is colored unfairly by our modern New Testament perspective. Who has not heaved a sigh of relief after plodding through a reading of Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy. What a burden God's law must have been, we think. Maybe so. But no more so than the web of self-chosen rules, regulations and customs with which we often entangle our New Testament lives. Christ is the key to our New Testament freedom. If we live in him, we discover genuine freedom to follow the blueprint for living which God has given us in his holy commandments. The "woman's offspring" which God first promised to Adam and then repromised to his people throughout the Old Testament was the key to unlock the treasure chest of freedom for them no less than for us. The splendid "shadows of things to come" liberated the souls of our Hebrew brothers in that ancient idolatrous world. If we remember this, we can savor the details of the Mosaic law as much as they did. The law which governed the Hebrew way of life is a precious gem. We can turn it carefully in the light of our New Testament knowledge. In its facets we can see bright flashes of New Testament truth. And so we can realize more clearly that the Hebrew believer was as much acquainted with the sweet gospel as we are. He struggled just like us against the strong pull of unbelief, whether in private or in public, whether in thinking or in doing, in any place, at any time, either inwardly or outwardly.

The Hebrew way of life under the law of Moses will be looked upon as a gem with seven facets for the purposes of this study. These facets are (1) the ten commandments, (2) the sacrifices, (3) the place of worship, (4) the priesthood, (5) the code of personal cleanliness, (6) the calendar, and (7) the community and country.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21) had a place at the very heart of the Hebrew way of life. In the time of Jesus they were among the passages which were copied out and worn on the foreheads and hands of believers. Luther used the outward form of the Ten Commandments in his Catechism to present the unchangeable holiness of God against which each sinner must measure his own imperfect righteousness. Because we still use Luther's Catechism, most of us are taught the precepts of God's will through a study of the Ten Commandments. The intent is to show us our sin and our need for a Savior and then to lead us to see God's will for our reborn Christian lives. Because of the way we are accustomed to use the Ten Commandments, it is easy for us to look upon them as different from the rest of the laws which God gave Moses on Mt. Sinai. I recall a Sunday School teacher of mine once stating that Christ fulfilled the civil and ceremonial laws, thereby freeing us from their requirements, but that the Ten Commandments remained. I drew the unwarranted conclusion that Jesus fulfilled only two-thirds of God's law for us. In actual fact Jesus fulfilled the whole law. That included the Ten Commandments which contain moral, ceremonial and civil instruction. Believers are free from the demands of the entire law so that they might in their Christ-given freedom take up the law of love and serve God and their neighbor willingly. If all of this is kept in mind, we can look upon the Mosaic formulation of the Ten Commandments as no different from the rest of the Hebrew way of life. All of the laws of Moses shared a common purpose. All of them had a similar fulfillment. All of them were Hebrew. They were more than law. All contained shadows of the good things that were to come in Christ.

The preamble to the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:2 and Deuteronomy 5:6) sets God's will in a gospel context. God says: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." This signature of God introduces him as the Holy One who breaks into history to convert the human experience from slavery to freedom. One can quickly see both shadow and fulfillment in Israel's deliverance from Egypt. Jesus is the Lamb to be sacrificed. Our Lord is the One whose blood permits death to pass over. Christ is the One who broke the bonds of sin and the chains of death. He is the One who triumphed in hell to set us free.

If we keep in mind that the Ten Commandments are set in the context of the Passover's message of death and resurrection, we can then see how delightful these commandments must have been. A believing Hebrew saw them as a blueprint for thankful, happy living, given by a gracious God. In Christ there are no idols, no vain use of God's saving name, no spurning of the Sabbath rest which God gives as a free gift. In Christ there is a desire to honor authority, a willingness to respect the gift of life, a chaste guardianship of the fountain of life, a respect for ownership and honor, and a cleansing of the covetous heart. At the same time the believing Hebrew looked upon the commandments as useful reminders which he could use to curb his yet-sinful flesh. The Ten Commandments permitted nothing which undermined God's plan for human happiness. Any person who broke the Ten Commandments was simply turning his back on the Hebrew way of life. The same could be said of every ceremonial and civil law. All of God's law had the same law/gospel resonance. Because God was good, his people could leave no room for idolatry, profanity, restlessness, lawlessness, savagery, debauchery, pillage, deceit or naked greed. Because God was gracious such sins had been forgiven and because God was exceedingly gracious these sins could be avoided through a willing exercise of the covenant relationship. Whether the testament or covenant is "old" or "new" there is no essential difference. We are all one in Christ Jesus, not through the observance of commandments, but through the covenant relationship we have in Christ. We know that. The believing Hebrew knew it too.

THE SACRIFICES

Sacrifices began early. We find the two sons of Adam sacrificing already in Genesis 4. The sacrifices of Adam's sons were taken from the labor of their hands, one being a gift of the field and the other a gift of the flock. Both were offered as gifts to God. In fact, the Hebrew word that covers all sacrifices is *korban*, meaning "presentation." God doesn't indicate whether the first sacrifices were prompted by God or whether they arose spontaneously. We do know from Hebrews 11:4 that Abel's gift was acceptable because it was a fruit of faith. Abel's sacrifice was an act of thankful love made in response to grace already received in faith. Cain's gift was rejected because it staked a self-righteous claim on God's favor. Cain approached God as if God were someone with whom Cain could strike a deal. Since God makes no deals with sinners, Cain did not get what he felt he deserved. Abel became the first martyr and Cain the first murderer.

The sacrifices of Cain and Abel were burnt offerings. They were wholly offered to God by fire. We can be reasonably sure that the sacrifices of Noah and the Hebrew patriarchs, at least those which are mentioned in Scripture, were burnt offerings too. On one occasion, however, the offering was a fellowship rather than a burnt offering. When Jacob and Laban agreed to peacefully part ways after 20 years of uneasy partnership, the pair offered a sacrifice that was eaten rather than burned.

Both the burnt offering and the fellowship (KJV: peace) offering became a fixed, required part of the Hebrew way of life after Mt. Sinai. The burnt offering continued to serve as a response to the grace of God which had already been received in faith. The believer was in effect saying, "Here God, out of thankful love for all that you have done for me as my Savior-God, I freely give you such as I have, not because I must, or because it can in any way improve my standing as a sinner before you, but simply because I want to." The

fellowship offering was also something offered to God, but the thrust of the sacrificial act was to declare that God heals the damage caused by sin here on earth. The fellowship offering assumes that such healing requires outward expression. The believer was in effect saying, "Here friend, we share a common faith in God; let us therefore sacrifice together and as a token of the peace that God has wrought between us, let us express our fellowship by eating together." Having someone over for dinner is still a good way to mend fences. In ancient times sharing food was a serious matter and full of significance.

The Mosaic law had two other bloody sacrifices. They are the sin offering and the guilt offering. Both were public confessions. The sin offering allowed a person to keep his covenant relationship with God in good repair. The offering expressed contrition and repentance for sins of weakness committed against God. These are the offenses which continually ooze out of the sinful side of a believer's nature. The guilt offering addresses the same problem of human weakness, but directs itself to the removal of an unintentional sin's impact on a fellow human being. The guilt offering purges guilt so that the covenant relationship between brothers in the faith is kept in good repair.

If we look at the four bloody sacrifices we can see both confession and absolution clearly. Sin against God (sin offering) and against our neighbor (guilt offering) are confessed in true contrition and repentance. Absolution is then proclaimed whether the sinner is thereby announcing that things are right with God (burnt offering) or that they are right with his neighbor (fellowship offering).

The meaning of the bloody sacrifices deepens as we consider how they were carried out. Six acts were prescribed. Three acts belonged to the believer as he brought his offering. Three acts belonged to the priest. This was true whether the sacrifice was a burnt, fellowship, sin or guilt offering. The believer first of all presented his animal to God at the entrance of God's house. Then he laid his hands on the animal. Finally he slaughtered the animal. The priest then took over. His first act was to do something with the sacrificial blood. Then he would place the fat portions on the altar in order for them to be consumed by fire. And finally he would see to it that the rest of the carcass was consumed or shared, either by mouth in the case of the fellowship, guilt & sin offerings or by fire in the case of the burnt offering. Let us look for the truths behind these sacrificial shadows.

The Hebrew was to bring his sacrifice to a place designated by God (Exodus 29:42-43). This underscores the fundamental truth that sinners must give an account before God for their sins. The unbeliever shrinks from the idea of facing God. He runs from the presence of God and hides. It is only the believer who confidently stands before the throne of grace. What the believer seeks as he approaches God is an assurance that his sins have indeed been forgiven. This is what the sacrifices provided. It is important to understand that the sacrifices were not meant for unbelievers. Sacrifices could not bring about a saving relationship with God. The sacrificial system assumes the existence of a heart that already believes. A careful reading of the opening chapters of Leviticus reveals this. Both the sin offerings and the guilt offerings were made to remove unintentional sins only. Such unintentional sins are sins of weakness, not of unbelief. If you search the law of Moses you will find no sacrifices for a hard heart, for an unbelieving heart, or for a heart that is in open rebellion against God. This helps us to understand why the Old Testament prophets condemn the sacrificial system as it was actually practiced in Israel (1 Samuel 15:22, Isaiah 1:11, Hosea 6:6). The prophets saw sacrifices being brought to the Temple by people without faith and they saw them offered by priests without knowledge. Such sacrificing was a sham.

Sacrifices assume substitution. This is what is behind the placing of hands on the head of the sacrificial victim before slaughter. The believer was solemnly setting apart the animal as his substitute. The wages of sin is death. Instead of the sinner dying, however, the substitute will. The great Substitute is Christ. We can be sure

that the sacrificial animals were shadows of Christ. When John the Baptist pointed to Jesus as “the Lamb of God” who takes away the sins of the world, he was pointing his Jewish listeners to Jesus as the sacrificial substitute. Note how God required that the animals brought for sacrifice be selected from among the ceremonially “clean” and that they be without blemish. They were to be Christ-like.

Sacrifices require death. Here we have a clear preaching of the wages of sin. The justice of a holy God demands the ultimate thing of value, a man’s soul for his sin. Even in substitution, the idea of paying a price was not lost. All proper bloody sacrifices cost the offerer plenty. Because provision was made for the poor, God allowed a range of acceptable sacrificial animals all the way from the mighty bull to the lowly turtle dove. Yet a man was expected to bring the costliest offering possible, not the other way around. Recall how David refused to offer a sacrifice that cost him nothing when he dealt with Araunah the Hittite (2 Samuel 24:24). The prophet Malachi closes the Old Testament with a bitter condemnation of those who offered leftovers for sacrifice (Malachi 1:8). No, God did not spare. He gave his best, his son. The price of our salvation was the life of the one and only Son of God.

Sacrifices require the sprinkling or smearing of blood as an atonement. This could be done in a number of ways. The priest either smeared blood on the horns of the altar of sacrifice, or he sprinkled the blood before the Lord inside the Tabernacle sanctuary, or he poured it out at the base of the sacrificial altar. In each case blood was presented to God. Why? The Bible identifies blood as the location of any living thing’s life force (Leviticus 17:11). To shed blood is to take life. To sprinkle or smear blood, however, is to atone. The Hebrew word for atone means to “cover.” Life given to God covers. Here we have the doctrine of justification in its Old Testament shadow form. The blood of Jesus, i.e., the giving up of his holy life as the substitutionary payment for mankind’s sin, covers our sin so that sin is robbed of its power to separate God and man. God’s wrath is turned aside because the object of God’s wrath has the protective shield of God’s love in Christ covering it. Here is the “crushing of the serpent’s head” promised to Eve.

Sacrifices involve fire. Fire consumes and also purifies. Part of every sacrifice was set apart for the fire. If blood atonement foreshadows justification, then sacrifice by fire foreshadows sanctification. Once the sinner is fully assured that his sins are forgiven for Jesus’ sake, he must submit his life to the working of the Holy Spirit. That which is unworthy is to be burned off and destroyed. Thus the smoke arises heavenward as an aroma, sweet smelling to the Lord, because it has been purged. Thus the ash is deposited in a ceremonially clean place outside the camp, because it too has been purged. The meaning is clear. Those portions of a believer’s life which have felt the full force of the Holy Spirit’s fire become good works before God as we 11 as good works among men

The using or consuming of the carcass is the third act of the priest. I believe it points to the life of service which naturally flows out of a heart that has been convinced of its justification and sanctification. Service is rendered to God through a life of praise, prayer and thanksgiving. In the burnt offering, where the emphasis is on the relationship between God and man, the remainder of the carcass went totally up in smoke, prayer-like toward heaven. Service may also be rendered in support of the gospel ministry here on earth. In most of the sacrifices, meat was set aside for the priests who served God. In this way the Hebrew supported God’s ministers as they labored in the public ministry. There is also the kind of Godpleasing service which is done out of generous love toward a neighbor or out of responsible stewardship toward oneself. Such service was expressed in the shared eating of the fellowship offering.

We cannot leave a discussion of the sacrifices without mentioning the non-bloody sacrifices of grain, flour and bread. These cereal gifts were sometimes offered alone, but most often in conjunction with the bloody sacrifices. They are also spiritual shadows. The non-bloody offerings were not to be mixed with yeast or honey.

Gifts of grain were rather to be mixed with oil and to be seasoned with salt. Yeast grows quietly, bloating the dough. Honey ferments and in time renders the bread unfit for use. Yeast and honey therefore portray vividly the destructive workings of sin (1 Corinthians 5:6-8, Galatians 5:9). Oil and salt on the other hand preserve, something that sin can never do. Recall how Jesus referred to his disciples as the world's salt (Matthew 5:13). Recall how oil was used to anoint and set apart those who were called into God's service (1 Samuel 10:1 and 16:13).

THE PLACE OF WORSHIP

The Hebrew grew up with two concepts of God's presence which existed side by side. He believed God was present everywhere (2 Chronicles 2:6 and 6:18, Jeremiah 23:23-24). Yet God made it clear that there would always be a local place, designated by him, at which he would invite redeemed sinners to share close communion with him (Deuteronomy 12:5-7, 1 Kings 8:29). We work with the same paradox. Jesus our Lord is with us always (Matthew 28:20). He is the omnipresent God. Yet he is also true man, located in a human body as truly localized as our own human bodies. It is this mystery of the incarnate Christ that finds expression in the Tabernacle and Temple. We approach God in a personal way through Christ. The Israelites had that personal contact with God at the sanctuary. This contact was, however, limited. The open courtyard was for everyone, but usually only at the time of sacrifice. The priests and Levites supervised all regular activity. Even among the Levites access was limited. Priests were the only ones allowed to enter the Tabernacle itself. Only one man, the High Priest, entered the Most Holy Place. God was approachable, but only through sacrifice and mediation. And so it was meant to be. Believers approach God solely through the sacrifice of Christ and solely through his mediation.

Entrance into the outer court of the Tabernacle was through curtains which were richly embroidered in bright colors. This embroidered beauty also lined the innermost chambers, where the embroidery included cherubim, who are the angels of God's presence. Rich embroidery was also a distinctive mark of the veils which divided one part of the Tabernacle from another. Can these be anything else but a representation of the beauty of God's holy presence?

In the outer courtyard the Hebrew noted the altar of sacrifice on which the body and blood of animals were constantly offered. Behind this altar was a large basin for washing. And beyond it was the tent of God's presence. These three centers of worship point unmistakably prefigure another washing, a greater sacrifice and God's presence in the fullness of time. The Old Testament forms were shadows. The New Testament reality we call the means of grace, that is, the Lord's Supper, Baptism and the living Word.

The Tabernacle tent is full of shadows pointing to the Living Word, the Lord Jesus himself. Both Peter and Paul use the term "tent" as a figure for the human body (2 Corinthians 5:1 and 4 and 2 Peter 1:13-14). The Tabernacle was a tent made of four coverings, one laid upon another. The innermost was made of beautifully embroidered cloth. The second was of black goat's hair. The third was of skins that had been dyed blood red. The fourth and outermost was made of utilitarian hides. These tent coverings point to truths about the Savior. He is beautiful in his holiness, yet he covered himself with the blackness of our sin, and then smothered our sin with his blood. Still the outward Jesus is unremarkable, truly a man among men with "nothing in his appearance that we should desire him!" (Isaiah 53:2).

The priests who entered the Tabernacle saw a table on their right upon which the priests placed several loaves of bread. On the left was a light burning from the seven lamps of a seven-branched lampstand. Jesus used both bread and light to describe himself (John 6:25-49 and 9:5). As the Bread of Life he sustains the bodies and souls of all who believe in him. As the world's Light he banishes darkness and brings clarity to soul

and spirit. No one stands in the presence of God without such Bread and such Light. And it is in the strength of such Bread and Light that prayers are offered. An incense altar was located directly in front of the veil which separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. Incense and prayer are synonymous in the Bible (Psalm 141:2). Petitions made to God in the Old Testament were worthless if not made out of the context of the covenant whose fulfillment was Christ.

Beyond the veil was the Most Holy Place, a perfect cube. Certainly such perfect geometry was not accidental. It pointed to a perfection which God alone possesses. In the middle of this room was a single piece of sacred furniture. In the ark and its atonement cover or “mercy seat” we find a revelation of God’s love rather than his holy perfection. Three items were originally placed inside the ark: two stone tablets upon which were words written by the finger of God; the budding rod of God’s first appointed high priest, Aaron; and a jar of the manna which the Lord God used to sustain Israel for 40 years. The items are shadows, Christ is the reality. All of Scripture is written by the finger of God. All of it points to Jesus Christ. He is the mouthpiece of God, anointed to be the great Prophet. He is also the sacrifice and sacrificer, anointed to be the great High Priest. And he is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords who provides physical and spiritual manna to those who are on their heavenward journey. This Jesus is also the Mercy Seat, the place of atonement, where God and man are reconciled. Only in Christ and through Christ do sinful man and holy God meet without a frightful, damning collision.

The Tabernacle is Immanuel, “God With Us.” It is a figure of Christ, the one who revealed the Father to men.

THE PRIESTHOOD

The Hebrew way of life taught mediation through God-appointed priests. The New Testament writer to the Hebrews understood clearly that the priesthood had found its fulfillment in Christ (Hebrews 4:14-5:10). As a first qualification the high priest had to be one of the people. Jesus was. As a second qualification he had to be selected by God for his office. Jesus was. As a third qualification the high priest was to offer sacrifices for sin. Jesus did. As a fourth qualification the priest was to enter the most holy place and atone for the sins of the people. This Jesus did with his blood once for all.

The priestly garb reinforced the concept of divine mediation. Because Old Testament priests were sinners, God clothed them in such a way that the priestly garments hid the man inside and pointed instead to the perfect priest to come, Jesus. The priest wore a bleached linen tunic and breeches close to the body. These clothes insured priestly modesty. They were in sharp contrast to the scanty clothing which characterized the immodest dress of pagan priests. A blue robe was worn over the tunic. Blue is the color of the heavens. Priestly concerns were heavenly in nature. The blue robe had gold bells and ornamental pomegranates hung alternately along its hem. The bells made it impossible for the priest to do anything secretly. Pagan priests gloried in the mystically obscure and were often guilty of misleading their followers with deceitful tricks. We can only speculate on the significance of the pomegranates. Their appearance is strangely similar to that of a bruise, a mixture of reds, purples, blacks and blues. Perhaps the pomegranates and bells captured symbolically those extremes which marked the ministry of Christ: humiliation and exaltation, suffering and triumph, sorrow and joy. Over the robe the priest wore an ephod crafted of colorful embroidery. Here we see again the beauty of divine holiness. The breastplate on the ephod was strapped over the heart. On the twelve stones of the breastplate were inscribed the names of the twelve tribes. Precious stones were also strapped on the shoulders, each having the names of six tribes inscribed on them. As a mediator for the people the high priest carried the burdens of God’s people on his shoulders and on his heart. The priest also wore the sacred stones (Urim and Thummim) through which God made his secrets known to the high priest. The priestly mediator was also God’s

mouthpiece. On the priest's head was a white turban and a gold plate with the inscription "Holy to the Lord." This reminds us of the prophetic title of Jesus, "the Lord our righteousness." From head to toe the regalia of the Old Testament priestly mediator pointed to mankind's one true Mediator, Jesus.

The high priest was not the only one in God's old Testament service. He was at the pinnacle of a priestly hierarchy which also included the descendants of Aaron, the priests, and the Levites. The whole tribe of Levi was set aside by God as a ransom for Israel. God required that the firstborn of every family, and even of the animals, belong to him. To receive the firstborn back, a ransom had to be paid. The tribe of Levi became that ransom. Here we recall how Abraham was required to bring his one and only son Isaac to the mountain of the Lord so that the Lord might know who was really first in Abraham's life. Abraham put God first, believing that God had the right to demand human sacrifice and believing at the same time that God would raise Isaac from the dead. Then the Lord provided a ram as a substitute. The fingerprints of the eternal divine plan are all over Abraham's experience and the corresponding redemption of the firstborn by the tribe of Levi. The man Jesus needed to die in order to turn aside God's vengeance. He was the one and only acceptable human sacrifice for mankind's sin. He died in the sure hope of the resurrection. Jesus became our substitute. The firstborn was considered a man's strength. He was normally the heir. He was the embodiment of a family's hope for the future. Here too Jesus is the fulfillment. God wanted Israel to remember that their hope and their strength belonged to him and that he would give such hope and strength through redemption. Each believer was to give first place to such eternal truths, just like Abraham did.

THE CODE OF PERSONAL CLEANLINESS

When we turn to the God-prescribed code of personal cleanliness we see how God applied spiritual meaning to the rituals of private life as well. The laws which divided clean from unclean were not given to establish a superior code of health and hygiene, although in many instances improved health and superior hygiene were derived benefits. The real intention was to force the Hebrew believer to examine his existence from God's point of view. Through an observance of the laws dealing with the clean and the unclean, a Hebrew was forced to contemplate how he failed to measure up to divine standards. No matter how hard a Hebrew tried to avoid ritual uncleanness, he would sooner or later become tainted. Unclean, he would be driven to the ritual sacrifices with their sweet gospel content. The code of personal cleanliness left no room for self-righteousness in a believing heart. It taught the Hebrew that he was a hopeless sinner if separated from God's grace.

Eating is a daily necessity. With every bite a Hebrew had to make a decision. Was the food clean or was it unclean? Sane people have looked for a "health food" strategy in the selection of some foods and the rejection of others. This is searching for the wrong point. God's point is that he alone determines what is right and wrong. The sinful self rebels against such a notion, yet the child of God bends to God's wisdom. When God says "unclean!" it is unclean, no matter how eager we are to taste forbidden fruit. Conversely, when God says "clean!" so it is! We need not hanker for "richer" fare.

Childbearing insures survival of the species from a purely biological standpoint. What could be more "clean." Yet a Hebrew woman was unclean for some time after bearing a child. We would miss God's point if we looked for some medical wisdom in post-partem uncleanness. Nor should we try to explain this law away as a silly taboo. With one glorious exception, that being our Lord and Savior, every "woman's offspring" is tainted from conception onward. David is right, "in sin did MY mother conceive me." All of Adam's sons are like their father. They are not born holy, only to be corrupted by their environment. That which two sinful human beings bring into the world is unclean in God's eyes until a covenant relationship is established. Every Hebrew woman had to face this fact of life in her unclean seclusion. No Hebrew mother could ever jump to the false conclusion that her child was born without the need of a Savior. A faithful Hebrew mother would not rest until her son was

made a child of the covenant through circumcision. Nor would she forget to raise her sons and daughters in the knowledge and fear of God and his grace.

Death is pushed out of sight by the living if at all possible. Sometimes it is necessary for God to remind us that in the midst of life we are dying. Birth is but the first step on a road that leads to death. The uncleanness of mildew, leprosy and of other skin diseases taught the Hebrews a graphic lesson. Death is really all around us. To see a leper was to see the corruption of the grave clinging to a live person. To view the stinky, unsightly corruption caused by mildew was to see a picture of the grave's decay. The banishment of the leper and the destruction of mildewed property underscored other powerful truths. Death separates. Death destroys all that is good. Death, if not faced, rends man apart from God and his goodness forever.

We see sin from yet another angle in the laws which dealt with certain voluntary and involuntary bodily discharges. Both caused ritual uncleanness. Jesus taught that a person is rendered unclean, not by what goes into him, but by the filth which pours out of his heart, such things as murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, and slander (Matthew 15:19). A sinner may say, 'but I can't help it.' Help it or not, sin is still sin. Before God involuntary sins are just as unclean as the voluntary variety.

THE CALENDAR

To introduce the Hebrew calendar, it would be good to cite another of those well memorized passages which formed the "Hebrew creed," this time Deuteronomy 11:13-17:

"So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today—to love the Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul—then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied. Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. Then the Lord's anger will burn against you, and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the Lord is giving you."

This passage speaks about seasons, weather, crops, idolatry and survival. The right weather at the right time provided all that was necessary for life. God's way with the calendar left no room for idols to charm fertility from the earth. God shaped the Hebrew calendar around his truth alone. He took what was natural to the land of Canaan and organized it, using the number seven as his sacred yardstick for measuring time.

In respect to numbers we need to be aware of their function as Old Testament shadows too, always keeping in mind that we don't carry things too far. A student of the Bible knows that twelve is used in connection with God's chosen, whether they be tribes or apostles. In a similar fashion 70 is the number used for God's extended family, whether it be the family of man as it is presented in Genesis 10 or whether it be the family of Israel as represented by clans or elders. Seven is another such number. It may be going too far to see in seven the sum of the Trinity (God's number) and of earth's four "corners" (man's number). We can be sure, though, that God used seven consistently when dealing with things which are important to man's salvation. Seven is the number of God's gracious interaction with mankind.

The Hebrew week had seven days. The Hebrew month was a moon month of four sevens, 28 days. The civil year started in the seventh month of the sacred year and the sacred year in the seventh month of the civil year. The Hebrew year had its major festivals begin in the seventh month of these two calendars. Every seventh year was a year of sabbath for the land. After seven cycles of seven years God called for a year of jubilee.

Let's take a look at the Hebrew year. Here in America we have four seasons. The Hebrew knew only two, the dry season and the wet season. Fields were prepared as soon as the rains began to fall, which could be anywhere from mid-October to the end of December. After six months of sun, such rain was necessary if the ground was to be broken by a shovel or a plow in preparation for sowing. Rains continued through March. In a good year there would be a final rain late in spring which would insure a bountiful crop. The grain harvest began in March/April and came to an end in less than two months. Then the heat of summer hit full force, moderated only by a heavy dew in the morning. Grasses disappeared in the face of mid-summer heat, but the fruit trees sucked enough moisture from the morning dew to produce a September harvest of figs, grapes, olives, pomegranates and other fruits.

The first month of the sacred calendar of the Jews was in March/April, at the time of the grain harvest. Passover fell on the first spring full moon. The first sheaf of grain was cut and waved before God. Israel ate unleavened bread for a week thereafter. Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread commemorated Israel's deliverance from Egypt. Seven weeks after Passover the grain harvest drew to a close with a feast of ingathering. This was Pentecost. In the seventh month of the religious calendar, usually in September or October, the civil year began. On the first day of the seventh month trumpets were blown and kings were crowned. On the tenth day the High Priest made his once-a-year visit to the Most Holy Place with atoning blood. It was the great Day of Atonement, a day in which the Israelite was to deny every craving of the body. On the full moon four days later and for seven days thereafter Israel moved into temporary outdoor shelters. These tabernacles or booths were to remind them of the 40 years of wandering which Israel experienced on the way to the promised land. At the same time the booths were a place for joyful celebration. It was another festival of ingathering, this time of the summer fruits. Palms were cut and waved before the Lord. Another long, hot summer was over. There was plenty to enjoy.

Can you see the shadows of things to come? Passover is a clear picture of Jesus' death and resurrection. Egypt stands for bondage to sin and death. Pharaoh is Satan. The Passover lamb is Jesus. The blood which turns away the angel of death is Jesus' perfect atonement. The "passing over" of the angel of death is Easter. The apostle Paul recognized Jesus, the first to rise from the dead, as the firstfruit of all who have fallen asleep and of all who await the resurrection on the last day (1 Corinthians 15:20).

Pentecost is the ingathering of souls. This feast finds its fulfillment every time the Holy Spirit gathers a new soul into the communion of saints. The single greatest example of such Spirit-wrought harvest was the ingathering of 3,000 souls at the Jerusalem Pentecost 50 days after our Lord's resurrection. The spiritual work of Pentecost went on during the Old Testament. Ingathering is part of the Christian Church's work today. The harvesting of souls will continue until Christ's second coming.

What of the feasts of the seventh month? Will they not be fulfilled at Christ's second coming? With a trumpet blast he will return as King of Kings. On that day we will have to deny ourselves in order to worthily receive the grace of God. His atoning blood will make all the difference in the world on the Day of Judgment. Palms of victory will be in the hands of those who receive the pardon of the King. In the heavenly Canaan we will leave behind our earthly sojourn. There we will enjoy the fruits of our faith which God graciously permitted us to produce on earth in spite of spiritual drought.

Of the feasts of the calendar three were singled out for universal participation. Every Israelite male was required to attend Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. Can we not see the fulfillment? Every believer shares in Christ's death and resurrection. Every believer is gathered into the family of God. Every believer is taken home to heaven.

Among the spring feasts Passover was first in importance. Among the fall feasts the Great Day of Atonement was the most important. The cross and empty tomb are the high points of Christ's first coming. Our lord's mediation on our behalf on Judgment Day will be the high point of his second coming. Since atonement is the consequence of what Christ did for us on Good Friday and Easter, it is not surprising that the celebration of Israel's deliverance from Egypt was singled out by the Hebrews as the most important feast. Exodus 13:1-10 and 11-16 were two more passages which were memorized and copied as part of the "Hebrew Creed." Exodus 13 outlines the Passover observance.

Let's look at another calendrical seven. The Sabbath occurred every seven days. Sabbath means rest. Here we tend to think of bodily rest. But we should recall that the rest God had in mind was the kind of rest he himself enjoyed after creation (Exodus 20:11). God was able to fully and completely enjoy what he had done in creating the world and mankind. Even so God's rest is the kind of rest which comes when we fully and completely enjoy everything that God has done for us. It begins with a sincere appreciation for God's creation and our responsibility to care for it as God's appointed caretakers. Since the fall of man into sin there can be no real joy and appreciation for what God has done except through the work of Christ. We must cast our cares on him. We must believe that our sins are forgiven. And then we must live in the Spirit, growing through Word and Sacrament toward that day when eternal rest will be ours. Rest comes when we appreciate the work of God as our Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. In the Old Testament God prescribed one day a week so that the Hebrew would not forget his rest. We, who live in New Testament freedom, find that reminder whenever God's Word is proclaimed.

The Sabbatical year, observed every seventh year, required rest for the land. There was to be no plowing, sowing, or reaping. There was to be no pruning or fruit harvest either. It would be a mistake to see in this law of God an ancient soil bank conservation program. Rather it was a test of faith. The observance of the Sabbatical year had a promise connected with it. In the wilderness of Sinai God gave a double measure of manna on the sixth day of each week so that the Sabbath would not be broken by work on the seventh day. A similar promise was made in connection with the Sabbatical year. God promised that the sixth year would be so plentiful that there would be plenty of food when the seventh year arrived. Unfortunately Israel put little trust in God's promise. The Sabbatical years were skipped. God made up for lost time when he separated his people from their land for 70 years (Jeremiah 29:10 and 2 Chronicles 36:21). The Babylonian captivity was a hard lesson, but the remnant rediscovered the kind of trust God wanted. We can apply this lesson to ourselves. A neglect of trust in God and his Word robs our lives of rest. God may, and often does, send us into "captivity" so that we might rediscover the one in whom to place our trust.

The grand sabbatical was observed every 50 years as a year of jubilee. In it slaves were released, the land had an extra year of rest, and property was restored. Jesus identified himself with the fulfillment of this Old Testament shadow (Luke 4:19). He releases those who have become enslaved, he grants a full measure of rest, and he alone restores all that we have lost because of our wayward sinfulness. The year of jubilee is the rest of rests, the grandest of the calendrical sevens. It pictures the culmination of all spiritual activity on the part of God, the restoration of Eden and the onset of eternal life.

COMMUNITY AND COUNTRY

The seventh and final part of this essay on the Hebrew way of life involves the peculiar citizenship which resulted from God's selection of Israel as his chosen people. Israel was both firstborn son and virgin bride. God was both loving father and faithful husband. These two pictures help us understand the multitude of rules and regulations which shaped the civil government of the Hebrew people.

Among all the nations of the earth Israel was to live up to its birthright as the firstborn of God. Things were to turn out in such a way that the rest of the world would say, “like father, like son.” The attributes of a gracious and merciful God were to be reflected in the civic life of Israel. God required protection for widows and orphans. Slaves were to be treated with dignity. The alien was to be treated with hospitality. There was to be provision made for the destitute. Cities of refuge were created for those caught innocently in a web of circumstantial evidence. Women had rights. God wanted Israel to stand in sharp contrast to the rest of the idolatrous ancient world. Elsewhere naked, often brutal power was the norm. Pagan rulers owned their subjects. In Israel, however, the Lord ruled. Those who served under him as judges or kings were to shepherd the people in humble service and to lay down their lives willingly for their subjects, if need be. Pagan priests formed a rich and powerful ruling clique in the nations around Israel. Hebrew priests were simply to mediate the spiritual blessings of the covenant. The work of pagan prophets degenerated into manipulative superstition. God’s prophets on the other hand were to speak only as God had spoken to them.

It is against this ideal picture of what Israel was meant to be as the firstborn of God that one can read the Hebrew prophets with greater understanding. As soon as Israel wanted to be like the other nations, she was spurning her birthright. When Israel’s leaders gave themselves over to the pursuit of power and wealth and yielded to superstition, the “firstborn son” was no longer at all like its Father. The firstborn son became a prodigal son. Israel’s return to sonship was possible only because of the One who came to breathe life into what it meant to be Hebrew. By his perfect life Jesus did everything Israel had not been able to do. Jesus placed himself under the law to bring prodigal Israel back to its heavenly Father. Thus he could say in respect to the law and the prophets, “I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17). This truth helps make sense of one of the most obscure New Testament prophetic fulfillments. Hosea wrote: ‘When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son’ (11:1). Matthew quotes Hosea, “And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I called my son... (2:15). Israel is the shadow and Christ the fulfillment. Israel failed to live up to the birthright God gave it in Egypt. Jesus did not. He succeeded.

The other picture is that of bride and groom. The emphasis shifts from “like father, like son!” to fidelity. Within the covenant Israel’s duty was to be a faithful spouse. Forsaking all others, she was to keep herself true to the Savior God alone. Within the laws of Moses there is a decided emphasis on the retention of sexual purity, inside and outside of marriage. Such guidance was absolutely necessary. Canaan, the land of promise, had supported a pre-Israelite population whose mores were so corrupt that the concept of fidelity had been totally lost. Unrestrained sexual indulgence was the primary mode of religious expression for the Canaanites. It is not surprising that the Hebrew way of life ruled out treaties or marriages with non-Hebrews.

Some of the most powerful imagery of the Old Testament shows how far the Hebrews strayed from the ideal. Ezekiel compares the twin kingdoms of Israel and Judah to a pair of unfaithful prostitutes. The prophet Hosea’s homelife was a purposeful reenactment of Israel’s infidelity. Only in the New Testament do we see a picture of fidelity. Jesus was faithful unto death, even death on a cross. His work alone restores the true Israel to its role as bride. And so we see her pictured in Revelation 21 as the New Jerusalem “coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband’ (21:2).

Whether bridegroom or father, the lord God was in charge of the covenant relationship. Throughout the book of Leviticus there is a resounding refrain that punctuates the itemized list of laws. Again and again we read, “I am the Lord!” That phrase reveals the true God for what he is. He is the I AM beside whom there is none other. He is also the God of free grace who personally reveals himself. He is the incarnate one. In the Old Testament his dwelling among men was a Word of hope spoken to Adam, later a Word of promise revealed to

Abraham, then a whole Covenant of shadows. In the fullness of time he became more than a shadow. He became flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Let us now turn for a moment to one of many civil laws which regulated community life. Numbers 15:37-41 lays down a regulation that modified Hebrew dress. The specific requirement was minor, perhaps even trivial. But the intent was to keep the Hebrew faithful to his birthright:

Throughout the generations to come you are to make tassels on the corners of your garments, with a blue cord on each tassel. You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the Lord, that you may obey them and not prostitute yourselves by going after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes. Then you will remember to obey all my commands and will be consecrated to your God. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the Lord your God.

Dress among the Hebrews consisted of a linen tunic which was usually a sleeveless shift or tube with a hole cut for the head. It hung from ram the shoulders and covered the body to at least the knees. The tunic was an undergarment. A Hebrew clad only in his tunic was considered naked. This is important to remember when we consider what actually happened when John Mark fled from Jesus' captors in the Garden of Gethsemane. Over the tunic a Hebrew wore his mantel. This item of clothing protected a man from the elements by day and served him as a blanket by night. The mantel was secured by a cloth belt tied around the body. Sandals and a turban completed the average man's attire. Women's clothes were similar, but were cut and decorated in such a way that there was no confusion between male and female attire.

In the passage quoted from Numbers we see how God put his distinctive mark on such Hebrew clothing. The multi-purpose outer mantel was to have a decorative tassel on each of its four corners. A blue thread, the color of heaven, was to distinguish each tassel. At one and the same time a Jew was reminded of his citizenship in Israel and of God's eternal reason for this citizenship. God had made a nation out of Israel in Egypt through his almighty saving power. A true Israelite did not find it hard to move his thinking immediately to the coming of a greater deliverance, one in which he firmly believed. He was a citizen of God's kingdom of grace. Whether standing in a biting wind or curling up at night, the tassels on the mantel were a constant reminder of that grace.

Grace was necessary for the Hebrew nation. Spin the globe to locate the land God selected for his chosen people. You will find it at the crossroads of the Eastern Hemisphere. It had a sea to the west and a desert to the east. Trade routes led to Egypt and Arabia on the south and to the great civilizations of Mesopotamia to the north. Geographically speaking Israel was in the worst possible location. It had no natural defenses like Egypt did. Nor did it have enough room to expand politically as did Babylon and Assyria. Israel's logical fate was to be torn and trampled, a toy in the hands of its more powerful neighbors. Geographically speaking Israel had no guarantee of economic prosperity either. The land was fertile enough. It could produce wine, bread, and oil and it could sustain flocks of sheep and goats. But the volume of water necessary for plentiful harvests was out of human control. Egypt had its annual inundation of the Nile. Babylon and Assyria could control their food supply through irrigation. Israel had only a few year-round streams. Its one major river, the Jordan, lay deep in the Rift Valley. There was no ancient technology to accomplish what the Israelis have done today with water pumped from the Jordan. Plain and simple, Israel looked to the heavens for water. And so, if the Hebrew people were to be politically secure and economically prosperous, it was not up to them, but it was up to God. It is significant that the blessings which form an appendix to the law of Moses stress the importance of covenant obedience on Israel's part in order to insure food and peace. The corresponding curses predict scarcity and devastating war as a sure result of disobedience.

CONCLUSION

All of the world's great religions preach moral and ethical uprightness. All of them also prescribe some way to achieve communion with God. The remarkable thing about the Bible is that it is the only source of religious truth which is rooted in history and geography. It is the only one in which prophecy and fulfillment involve life and a whole people. It is unique and well it one given by God himself. The history is Israel's. The geography is that of Israel. The message is of God's only-begotten Son who graciously did for mankind what mankind could not do for itself. Jesus was an Israelite. The Promised Land was his home. He came to fulfill the promises made directly to Abraham's descendants. He came to put substance into the shadows which made up the Hebrew way of life. If the Ten Commandments are a blueprint for love, Jesus is love incarnate. If the Tabernacle symbolized God's presence among men, Jesus is the real presence. If the sacrifices permitted the Hebrew to confess and be absolved in hope, Jesus is the one who made the forgiveness of sins possible. If the priests were mediators of a thousand sacrifices, Jesus is the Mediator of the only necessary one. If the code of cleanliness taught sin in all of its ugliness, Jesus is by contrast all the more beautiful in his personal holiness. If the calendar foreshadowed the plan of salvation, Jesus is that plan put into action. If the Hebrew community and country were shaped by divine regulation to be different from the rest of the world, Jesus is the head of a spiritual Israel which has been set apart for all time as his holy, redeemed body, the communion of saints. All such observations compel us to place one foot squarely in each testament as we study God's Word. Our understanding of Jesus grows as we expand our knowledge of the Hebrew way of life.