

Commentary — From the Margins

The Endtime Gospel: The Good News to be Proclaimed

Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” / As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?” And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. / Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But *the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this [τουτο] gospel [τὸ εὐαγγέλιον — the good news] of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*” (Matt 24:1–14 emphasis added)

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The gospel of Paul and Peter’s gospel of God are messages about judgment, about the righteous of this world just barely being saved (1 Pet 4:18) and about those who sin intentionally whether under the law or not under the law perishing (Rom 2:12–16); for according to Paul’s gospel, it is “the doers of the law who will be justified” (v. 13), not because of their works but because of their faith that that would cause them to keep the law in a godless age and society. For as long as the Adversary (the present king of Babylon) continues to reign over the mental topography of living creatures, this world remains the domain of the lawless and

the godless, and this world continues to work its way farther and farther from God—it will work its way away from God until it can go no farther. Then at this midnight hour of the one long spiritual night that began at Calvary, the lives of men will again be given for the ransom of Israel as the lives of Egyptians were given approximately 3500 years ago (Isa 43:3–4).

It was/is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to pay the death penalty for the sins Israel occurred between its exodus from Egyptian slavery and its liberation from indwelling sin and death at the Second Passover. Throughout this time, times, and half a time period, Israel only delayed its death by covering (as if cloaking with a garment) its sins as the Lord waited for Israel to grow in righteousness as a human child grows in maturity. And as the Lord told Abram that his servant Eliezar of Damascus would not be his heir, that his own son [offspring or seed] would be his heir (Gen 15:2–4), angelic sons of God would not be the heirs of the Most High God—His own sons would be His heirs, with the physically circumcised nation of Israel that left Egypt metaphorically represented by Hagar and Ishmael (Gal 4:21–31) and with the Church and Christians circumcised of heart represented by Isaac, Esau, and Jacob, the two generations of Abraham’s heirs according to promise.

The 1st-Century Christian Church, according to Paul, was like Isaac; saints were children of promise (Gal 4:28). But the Passover exodus of Israel from Egypt wasn’t of Isaac or of all of Isaac’s offspring, but was of Israel, with one of Esau’s offspring, the man Caleb about whom the Lord said, “But my servants Caleb, because he has a different spirit and has followed me fully, I will bring” (Num 14:24) into the Lord’s rest (see Ps 95:10–11).

Abraham circumcised Ishmael (Gen 17:23) when Ishmael was thirteen years old (*v.* 13). The birth of Isaac was more than a year away (see Gen 18:9), and Isaac was circumcised on the eighth day (Gen 21:4). Abraham was 99 years old when Ishmael was circumcised (Gen 17:1) and 100 years old when Isaac was circumcised, making Ishmael at least 14 when Isaac was born and at least 16 before Isaac was weaned (Gen 21:8): Ishmael was a young man, old enough to fend for himself when Sarah insisted that Abraham expel Hagar and her son from the household for she would not have her son’s inheritance threatened by Abraham’s love for Ishmael (*vv.* 10–11). Thus, the image presented in the Genesis narrative of Ishmael being a helpless infant—

So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. / When the water in the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot, for she said, “Let me not look on the death of the child.” And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great

nation.” Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. And God was with the boy, and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow. (Gen 21:14–20)

—is problematic ...

Scholars point to problems such as the question of just how old was Ishmael when Hagar was sent out from Abraham’s household to destroy faith in disciples: can Christians really trust Scripture? Just how “correct” is Scripture? Have the above words been *breathed out* by God?

Ignorance is not a solution to scriptural difficulties, nor is unbelief. Inevitably, when problems exist *the problem* is a lack of knowledge on the part of the reader ... because words do not come with their meanings attached to them but must have meaning assigned to them by readers [auditors], Scripture is ultimately a living document “heard” when readers hear the voice of Jesus. It is not the static document that is the compilation of inscribed signs and symbols studied by scholars; for Scripture is the left hand enantiomer of the heavenly Book of Life in which disciples are epistles from Christ, written not in ink but with the spirit of the living God (2 Cor 3:3). And these epistles in the heavenly Book of Life are metonymically the two waved loaves of bread baked with leaven, with leaven representing sin that like yeast in a baked loaf has been killed in the fire of glorification.

The underlying principle that is consistent throughout Scripture is that the unrighteous and ungodly will perish without ever being glorified. The gospel of Paul gives the willful sinner no hope of salvation. And sin is simple unbelief ... to believe God about “big” things such as you should not covet the things of this world that belong to others is difficult for Christians who are not satisfied with what they have, but to believe God about little things such as keeping the Sabbath separates the uncommon Christian from the common. For the common Christian will simply not believe the writings of Moses so they cannot hear the voice of Jesus (John 5:46–47). If they are waiting and listening for Jesus to call them up into heaven in a bodily rapture, they will never hear this voice for they refuse to believe the writings of Moses. And if they believed the writings of Moses, they would not expect to go to heaven before the Messiah comes in fury and with judgments in hand.

Because the sinner will not believe God, the sinner will perish in his or her unbelief for God will send over the sinner a strong delusion that will cause the sinner to believe what isn’t true (2 Thess 2:10–12).

What is true is that no saint can practice unrighteousness and be saved, and what is also true is that no saint has an excuse for transgressing the commandments, especially the Sabbath commandment. Yes, keeping the Sabbath will cost a saint financially, and will cause the saint considerable difficulties in this present world. But would the saint rather face Abraham’s tests, first sending Ishmael off then sacrificing Isaac? James writes, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted

to him as righteousness’—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone” (Jas 2:21–24).

When the Galatians began to circumcise the flesh, Paul condemned them, and wrote in part, “Does he who supplies the spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’” (Gal 3:5–6). Elsewhere Paul writes, “What then shall we say [about] Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’” (Rom 4:1–3). And it is here, on this point, where Paul does not err but shows he lacks the understanding that James the Just, the half-brother of Jesus, grew to have; for the matter about which Abram’s belief was counted to him as righteousness concerned his servant Eliezar of Damascus being his heir:

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” But Abram said, “O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.” And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.” And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” And *he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*

And he said to him, “I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess.” But *he said, “O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?”* He said to him, “Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half. And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. Then the Lord said to Abram, “Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” (Gen 15:1–16 emphasis added)

In the matter of Eliezar not inheriting his house, Abram believed the Lord, but Abram who just had his belief counted to him as righteousness did not believe the

Lord about possessing the land “from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates” (Gen 15:18) and Abraham’s offspring have not yet possessed this geographical territory. Not even when David expanded Israel to its greatest geographical size did the nation possess all that was promised to Abraham, for Abraham did not believe the Lord but asked for proof.

Even in the matter of Eliezar not inheriting his house, Abraham had to “prove” that he believed the Lord, which is what James references when citing the incident in which Abraham offered up Isaac as a sacrifice. Belief by faith is not enough, James’ point. Belief by faith must be put to a test, and in this era, belief is tested by whether a Christian will keep the commandments by faith, not because of social obligations or expectations.

No Christian has to keep the commandments, and God does not have to glorify any Christian. But those uncommon Christians whom God foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified (even though no Christian has yet been glorified except Christ Jesus) will by faith keep the commandments, what God knew before He called them. It is all just this simple: when Abraham’s belief was counted to him as righteousness, Abraham’s belief was not complete. It would be tested by Sarah not having a child, and by Sarah giving to Abraham Hagar, who when she conceived, began to look with contempt on her mistress (Gen 16:5).

And Sarai said to Abram, “May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me!” But Abram said to Sarai, “Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please.” Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her. / The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. And he said, “Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?” She said, “I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai.” The angel of the Lord said to her, “Return to your mistress and submit to her.” The angel of the Lord also said to her, “I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude.” And the angel of the Lord said to her,

“Behold, you are pregnant

and shall bear a son.

You shall call his name Ishmael,

because the Lord has listened to your affliction.

He shall be a wild donkey of a man,

his hand against everyone

and everyone's hand against him,

and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen.”

So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, “You are a God of seeing,” for she said, “Truly here I have seen him who looks after me.” Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered.

And Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. (Gen 16:5–16)

Abraham is 100 years old when Isaac is born ... has this scene of Hagar being by the spring of water been inappropriately replicated in Gen 21:14–20? Or was there a similar scene when Hagar is fifteen or more years older? How many times does Hagar have to be told that God will make of her son Ishmael a great nation? God held it against King Solomon that Solomon had turned away from Him after He had twice appeared to Solomon (1 Kings 11:9). Hagar knew that the Lord had appeared to Abraham when Ishmael was circumcised. She would have been one of those who quickly prepared a meal for the Lord when the three appeared to Abraham before Sodom was destroyed. So only unbelief would have caused her to give up on the Lord when she and Ishmael were sent away when Ishmael was fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years old, and not a child she could put under one of the bushes (Gen 21:15).

It is the second scene (i.e., the second time the Lord appeared to Hagar) that is problematic, for it seems wrong. It seems as if it has been added to Scripture; it seems as if someone tampered with the narrative.

Traditionally, Christians hold that Scripture—the Old and New Testaments—is the infallible *Word of God*, a claim that cannot possibly be true for “infallibility” is a condition in which a text is received, not produced. Ever since the Tower of Babel incident when the Lord separated linguistic icons from linguistic objects [signifiers from signifieds], words have had no “fixed” meaning but are reader-dependent for their meaning. Words mean for the reader whatever the reader says they mean, with only a historic trace or the element of Thirdness limiting meaning. Thus, Scripture can be and is “inspired,” it cannot be infallible; for Scripture is received by both the godly and the ungodly and means different things to each of these generic grouping of readers. Scripture means something different to spiritual infants than it does to those Christians ready for solid food ... those Christians on solid food understand that the Genesis chapter one creation account isn’t about a literal seven day creation of the world but is the abstract for the seven day long spiritual creation of sons of God. Spiritual infants inevitably insist that the Genesis one creation account is about a literal seven day creation; hence they are mocked unmercifully when the problem isn’t a short creation versus a long creation, but rather, a physical creation versus a spiritual creation, with the visible, physical creation preceding and making visible the invisible spiritual creation. Hence, spiritual infants have given to the *Word of God* a negative scientific reputation that is not deserved.

If Hagar left Abraham’s household when Ishmael was fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, or seventeen years old, was Ishmael not old enough to make it on his own? Was it not for Hagar that readers should be concerned? What was an unattached middle-aged woman to do? If her son did not care for her, how was she to survive? So the narrative in Genesis 21:14–21 *feels* wrong; i.e., it runs counter to the spirit. Scripture here has been tampered with, which doesn’t make the story of Abraham sending Ishmael and Hagar away a fiction, but does hold that Ishmael was not a helpless child when he left Abraham, who would have

taught his teenage son basic survival skills, including how to use a bow to take game.

In one of the edits of the biblical narrative, a scribe apparently felt sorry for Hagar and made her exit from Abraham's household more painful than it was.

But Paul writes, "For no one is a Jew who is merely one inwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart ... what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means!" (Rom 2:28–3:4).

If the Jews—the outwardly circumcised nation—were entrusted with the oracles of God, why did the nation not object to the teenage Ishmael being described as a helpless toddler? Or why was the Book of the Law [the Torah] lost in a dilapidated temple, only to be found by workmen commissioned by King Josiah, who receives the Book of the Law in the 18th year of his reign and commands all of the people to, "Keep the Passover to the Lord your God, as it is written in this Book of the covenant.' For no such Passover had been kept since the days of the judges" (2 Kings 23:21–22).

If the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God, they handled them in a fairly sloppy manner for much of the nation's history.

And if Christians are today Jews—part of Paul's gospel—then Christians have also handled Scripture in a sloppy manner, for no Passover as written in the Book of the covenant was kept for 1200 years, a sad indictment of Christians and the Church that would seem to have Christendom trying to outdo the outwardly circumcised nation in ungodliness.

Why would God allow Jews to lose the Book of the Law in the temple? Or allow Paul to err in saying that he would remain alive when Christ Jesus returned? Or allow the greater Christian Church to ignore the Passover for most of two millennium? Does God not care that His people neglect their worship of Him? ... Is that not a fair question? What were the Lord's thoughts when the teenage Ishmael was reduced to a sniveling child? Were His thoughts, *The zeal for righteousness of the descendants of Ishmael will far exceed yours*. And that will prove to be the case when the world is baptized in the breath of God, and there is no more Islam. There will then be only genuine and false sons of God.

Belief will be tested, for salvation is by faith. For every generation and for every person, including for Christ Jesus, faith must preempt belief ... on the cross, moments before death, "Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God [*El* — Strong's #H410], my God, why have you forsaken me?'" (Matt 27:46). Jesus' citation was from Psalm 22:1.

Logic, fact-based analysis, belief in words having literal meanings, doing the works of the law—none of these things will save a person. None of these things are party to the good news of God. It is by faith a person believes that God will raise the person from the dead and give to the person a second breath of life, with this already having occurred in uncommon Christians who outwardly look as they looked before, who still bleed red blood when fingers are pricked. No logical analysis of after-death experiences helps a person understand that the inner self

of the uncommon Christian has been crucified, buried in baptism, and raised from the dead. It is only in what the uncommon Christian does versus what he or she used to do; only in what the uncommon Christian thinks versus what he or she used to think that the uncommon Christian realizes the person isn't who he or she used to be. Yes, the person dwells in the same fleshly body, but something changed—and what changed was the inner person, the inner self. And there is no effective way to communicate this change to the common Christian other than to say what Paul did: “For the mind set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot” (Rom 8:7).

James the just better expressed what faith represents to the mature Christian—the disciple able to digest solid food—than Paul did when Paul wrote to spiritual infants; for the good news of God is that faith in God requires that the person practices godliness, which will have the person desiring to keep the commandments.

The oracles of God that were committed to the Jews did not benefit them when Jesus of Nazareth came as the only Son of the Logos, who was Theos, and who was with the Theon in the beginning. Those oracles caused them to believe that they were righteous when they remained condemned by the law for their sinfulness. ... In order to make visible how poorly Christians have handled the oracles of God, the Book of the Law was lost in a cluttered and dilapidated temple. Think about that, for that is how Christendom appears to God: Christians lost the Book of the Covenant while it was in their hands, for Christians are the temple of God (1 Cor 3:16–17; 2 Cor 6:16).

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The fifth installment of this commentary will begin with section #8.

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