

## FREEDOM OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD

“Consequently I reckon that the sufferings of the present season do not amount to anything in comparison with the glory that is going to be revealed in us. For the eager expectation of the creation is waiting for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not by its own will but through him that subjected it, on the basis of hope that the creation itself also will be set free from enslavement to corruption and have **the glorious freedom of the children of God.**” – *Romans 8:18-21*

Through Christ Jesus, we have been made free – free from despair, free from the apparent futility of life, free from the enslavement to corruption, sin and death. Whereas some wonder **if** there is life after death, we who look to the Christ have a **certitude** of personality survival on into eternity.

“Moreover, brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant concerning those who are sleeping [in death]; that you may not sorrow just as the rest also do who have no hope.” – *1 Thessalonians 4:13*

That assurance is verified through our spirit as the spirit of truth bears witness that we are sons of God and heirs of Christ (*Romans 8:16*) – heirs to the heavenly kingdom. We must be careful to safeguard this freedom and not let it be trampled upon by doubt, smothered by anxiety, or destroyed by looking to the weak and beggarly elementary things. Yes, we **live in** the flesh, but we are not **led by** the flesh. We are led by spirit. “For all who are led by God’s spirit, these are God’s sons.” – *Romans 8:14*.

The early Christians, being mostly Jews, had an especially difficult time keeping their minds on their spiritual inheritance. Their long history of law-keeping, seasonal observances, sacrifice and offerings seemed to always lurk in the background threatening to swallow their new found freedom. Paul was thus obliged to repeatedly counsel those brothers and sisters not to look back to the Law Covenant or the things under the law. For if they did, then as to them individually, the Christ died for nothing. (*Galatians 2:21*)

Strangely, Christians today, the vast majority of whom are **not** fleshly Jews and were **never** under law, are falling victim to the same folly of turning to the Law Covenant of the Jews as a guide and measure of their faith. We refer to that as “rebuilding Jerusalem” and it is to be strictly avoided because such a course will nullify our spiritual inheritance and cause us to be condemned as those under law.

**“Therefore those in union with Christ Jesus have no condemnation.** For the law of that spirit which gives life in union with Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For, there being an incapability on the part of the Law, while it was weak through the flesh, God, by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us who walk, not in accord with the flesh, but in accord with the spirit.” – *Romans 8:1-4*

Let us examine what it means to “rebuild Jerusalem” and how that can affect our freedom – the freedom Christ lived and died for – as well as our eternal future.

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### **The Jews of Jesus’ Time**

By the times of Jesus, the nation of Israel had arrived at a settled concept of their religion. They had built up a rigid wall of separation between themselves and the gentile world; and they looked upon all gentile ways with utter contempt. They worshiped the letter of the law and indulged a form of self-righteousness based upon the false pride of racial descent. They had formed preconceived notions regarding the promised Messiah, and most of these expectations envisioned a Messiah who would come as a part of their national and racial history. To the Jews of those days, Jewish theology was irrevocably settled, forever fixed.

When Jesus arrived, his teachings and practices regarding tolerance and kindness ran counter to the long-standing attitude of the Jews toward other peoples whom they considered heathen. For generations the Jews had nourished an attitude toward the outside world which made it impossible for them to accept the Master's teachings about the spiritual brotherhood of man. They were unwilling to share Jehovah on equal terms with the gentiles and were likewise unwilling to accept Jesus as the Son of God.

The scribes, the Pharisees, and the priesthood held the Jews in a terrible bondage of ritualism and legalism, a bondage far more real than that of the Roman political rule. The Jews of Jesus’ time were not only held in slavery to the law, but were equally bound by the slavish demands of the traditions, which involved and invaded every domain of personal and social life.

These minute regulations of conduct pursued and dominated every loyal Jew, and it is not strange that they promptly rejected one of their number who presumed to ignore their sacred traditions, and who dared to flout their long-honored regulations of social conduct. They could hardly regard with favor the teachings of one who did not hesitate to clash with dogmas which they regarded as having been ordained by Father Abraham himself. Moses had given them their law and they would not compromise.

By the time of the first century, the spoken interpretation of the law by the recognized religious teachers, the scribes, had become an authority higher than the written law itself. And

all this made it easier for certain religious leaders of the Jews to array the people against the acceptance of a new gospel.

These circumstances rendered it impossible for the Jews to fulfill their divine destiny as messengers of the new gospel of religious freedom and spiritual liberty. They could not break the fetters of tradition. Jeremiah had told of the 'law to be written in men's hearts' (*Jeremiah 31:33*); Ezekiel had spoken of a 'new spirit' to live within man (*Ezekiel 11:19*); and the Psalmist had prayed that God would 'create a pure heart and a new spirit.' (*Psalms 51:10*)

But when the Jewish religion of good works and slavery to law fell victim to the stagnation of tradition and ritual, the hand of the Father passed the mantle of religious enlightenment by means of the Kingdom of Heaven to a new nation producing its fruits. (*Matthew 21:43*) Into this world, Jesus came.

### **The New Message of Sonship**

When the Son of Man began his ministry early in the first century, he preached a message of hope directed initially to the Jews:

“And he came to Nazareth, where he had been reared; and, according to his custom on the sabbath day, he entered into the synagogue, and he stood up to read. So the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed him, and he opened the scroll and found the place where it was written: **‘Jehovah’s spirit is upon me, because he anointed me to declare good news to the poor, he sent me forth to preach a release to the captives and a recovery of sight to the blind, to send the crushed ones away with a release, to preach Jehovah’s acceptable year.’** With that he rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were intently fixed upon him. Then he started to say to them: ‘Today this scripture that you just heard is fulfilled.’” – *Luke 4:16-21*

Throughout his entire ministry, Jesus demonstrated his great affection for his people and his desire to lift them from their oppressed condition:

“And Jesus set out on a tour of all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the good news of the kingdom and curing every sort of disease and every sort of infirmity. On seeing the crowds he felt pity for them, because they were skinned and thrown about like sheep without shepherd.” – *Matthew 9:35-36*

“Now when he came forth he saw a great crowd; and he felt pity for them, and he cured their sick ones.” – *Matthew 14:14*

He recognized the heavy load laid upon them by their religious leaders, and he assured the people that the message he brought is not burdensome:

“Come to me, all you who are toiling and loaded down, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am mild-tempered and lowly in heart, and you will find refreshment for your souls. For my yoke is kindly and my load is light.” – *Matthew 11:28-30*

Jesus recognized their frailty. He had good news to share, but he did not want to crush their spirits while doing so. Specifically, he did not want to destroy their heritage or condemn their faithfulness. So when he preached his message, he told the people:

“Do not think I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I came, not to destroy, **but to fulfill**; for truly I say to you that sooner would heaven and earth pass away than for one smallest letter or one particle of a letter to pass away from the Law by any means and not all things take place.” – *Matthew 5:17-18*

Yes, Jesus fulfilled the Law. By fulfilling it, he finished it. He released the Jews from the Law and he brought it to an end.

“But now **we have been discharged from the Law**, because we have died to that by which we were being held fast, that we might be slaves in a new sense by the spirit, and not in the old sense by the written code.” – *Romans 7:6*

“For **Christ is the end of the Law**, so that everyone exercising faith may have righteousness.” – *Romans 10:4*

“Furthermore, though you were dead in your trespasses and in the uncircumcised state of your flesh, [God] made you alive together with him. He kindly forgave us all our trespasses and **blotted out the handwritten document against us**, which consisted of decrees and which was in opposition to us; and He has taken it out of the way by nailing it to the torture stake.” – *Colossians 2:13-14*

“However, before the faith arrived, we were being guarded under law, being delivered up together into custody, **looking to the faith that was destined to be revealed**. Consequently **the Law has become our tutor** leading to Christ, that we might be declared righteous due to faith. **But now that the faith has arrived, we are no longer under a tutor.**” – *Galatians 3:23-25*

No more did they have to ‘scrupulously observe days and months and seasons and years.’ (*Galatians 4:10*) No more sacrificial offerings. No more types and shadows. (*Hebrews 8:5*) They were given the freedom to become sons of God.

“For such freedom Christ set us free. Therefore stand fast, and do not let yourselves be confined again in a yoke of slavery.” –  
***Galatians 5:1***

Jesus had preached his message of ‘good news to the poor, a release to the captives, a recovery of sight to the blind, and a message of Jehovah’s acceptable year.’ (*Luke 4:18-19*) Thousands of the common people were responding to Christ’s message and getting baptized into this new freedom that put the old burdensome covenant to an end. Yet in spite of this glorious good news, the religious leaders resisted the teaching. They regarded Jesus’ testimony of sonship as blasphemy. (*Matthew 26:63-65*) And they would expel from the synagogues all who listened to him. (*John 9:22; 12:42*)

Finally, after repeatedly trying to reach the hearts of the Jewish religious leader without success, Jesus proclaimed:

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the killer of the prophets and stoner of those sent forth to her,—how often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks together under her wings! But you people did not want it. **Look! Your house is abandoned to you.**” – ***Matthew 23:37-38***

Yes, their house – their religious system – was abandoned! The Father’s spirit moved away from the nation as a whole and took up lodging in the remnant of faithful Jews who listened to Jesus and subsequently formed the new Christian congregation.

In the beginning, the new converts were allowed to preach and teach right within the synagogues. (*Acts 9:20*) But eventually, the brothers had to separate themselves. (*Acts 11:19-26*) The Christian message was no longer welcome in company with the Law. Over the next few centuries, the Hebrew writings came to be known as the Old Testament and the Christian writings were known as the New Testament. As we can see, that is a fitting distinction!

### **Out with the Old and in With the New**

Once the Jewish Christians separated from the synagogues, it became necessary to clarify the distinction between the old way under the Law and the new way under Christ. Paul explained that through faith in Jesus, the Jews were sons of God and no longer slaves to the Law. And they were to worship alongside others, even gentiles, who joined the faith:

**“You are all, in fact, sons of God through your faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor freeman, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one [person] in union with Christ Jesus. Moreover, if you belong to Christ, you are really Abraham’s seed, heirs with reference to a promise.” – Galatians 3:26-29**

To those who believed that they could combine the old Law with the new, Paul wrote:

**“However, before the faith arrived, we were being guarded under law, being delivered up together into custody, looking to the faith that was destined to be revealed. Consequently the Law has become our tutor leading to Christ, that we might be declared righteous due to faith. But now that the faith has arrived, we are no longer under a tutor.” – Galatians 3:23-25**

These two codes are not to be practiced simultaneously. They were to view them as applying consecutively – one after the other. First, they had the Law, then they had the Christ. Consequently, all those who chose the Law – the old tutor – were automatically rejecting the new teacher, Jesus Christ. And conversely, all who chose the Christ, were automatically rejecting the law, as Jesus said:

**“No one can slave for two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will stick to the one and despise the other.” – Matthew 6:24**

For those sticking with the Christ, the old system of things was dead to them.

**“As for me, through law I died toward law, that I might become alive toward God.” – Galatians 2:19**

Yet, in spite of Paul’s repeated efforts to help them realize their newfound freedom, many of the Jewish Christians began to turn back to the Law. In fact, the majority of the Christian Scriptures are devoted to moving the Jewish Christians forward in their faith, and leaving behind the written Law of works and rituals in favor of the law of the spirit. Paul wrote:

**“But now that you have come to know God, or rather now that you have come to be known by God, how is it that you are turning back again to the weak and beggarly elementary things and want to slave for them over again? You are scrupulously observing days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that somehow I have toiled to no purpose respecting you.” – Galatians 4:9-10**

He attempted to put matters into prospective. The Jewish system of things consisted of weak and beggarly things compared to the inestimable glory of sonship in the Kingdom. Yet many were looking back longingly, electing the mundane earthly works under the Jewish system rather than the unknown realities of the Kingdom of the Heavens. Based on the constant reminders that they were no longer under Law, it appears that this issue continued to be a struggle for the Jewish Christians.

### **Not Rebuilding Jerusalem**

What about us today? Many of us, **who were never under Law**, are likewise reaching back to those “weak and beggarly elementary things” and choosing to slave for them. So we ask, are we today seeking to rebuild the Jewish system by reviving its mundane earthly promises? If we are, we are blinding ourselves:

“For to this present day the same veil remains unlifted at the reading of the old covenant, **because it is done away with by means of Christ**. In fact, down till today **whenever Moses is read, a veil lies upon their hearts**. But when there is a turning to Jehovah, the veil is taken away. Now Jehovah is the Spirit; and **where the spirit of Jehovah is, there is freedom.**” – 2  
*Corinthians 3:14-17*

For example, in establishing the hope for mankind, some choose the Jewish idea of an earthly paradise over the heavenly hope. They look to the prophesies of Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel and the Psalms, completely ignoring the Christian writings from Matthew to Jude, and then latching onto the prophetic signs of Revelation. (See our series of articles entitled “**The Cherished Earthly Hope**” for a discussion of this error.)

They completely ignore Jesus’ repeated statements that he came to reveal God as a Father (*Matthew 11:27*), that we are God’s sons (*Matthew 6:9-15*), that we are to follow Christ into the heavens, and that Christ is preparing a place for us in the Heavenly Kingdom. (*John 14:1-6*). They further ignore Paul’s statements that we are citizens of the heavenly kingdom (*Philippians 3:20*), aliens and temporary residents on earth (*1 Peter 2:11*), and have an incorruptible inheritance in the heavens (*1 Peter 1:4*).

Clearly, all the Jewish promises for an earthly paradise are elementary and not the type of life sons of the kingdom are to strive for. For when we choose this course, we remonstrate that “Christ died for nothing.” (*Galatians 2:21*)

Few, if any, among us would accept the idea that Christ died for nothing. Yet, if we find ourselves mirroring the Jewish system, we are, in fact, declaring through our actions that we choose the weak things under law over the superlative things under spirit. When we do, we are for all intents and purposes, rebuilding Jerusalem, thus, finding ourselves in direct conflict with the Father who clearly abandoned it.



And what about our relations with our brothers and neighbors? Have we built a wall of separation between our religion and the religion of others? Do we look at other religions as heathen or pagan? Have we developed a sort of national pride in our religion? Do we choose to imitate the fiery prophets of Israel, pronouncing judgment on those who we believe are disapproved, rather than the mild and loving message of reconciliation? (**2 Corinthians 5:18**) Have we added burdensome rules of conduct that dominate our personal and social life beyond what is written? Have we allowed the interpretations of “Rabbis” to overstep the Bible’s message? Have we allowed our beliefs to crystalized and fossilize to the point where we cannot receive the gospel of religious freedom and spiritual liberty as sons of God?

If so, we need to readjust ourselves in accord with the spirit – “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, mildness, self-control.” (**Galatians 5:22-23**) Since the Father abandoned the Jewish system of things, we have an obligation to likewise let go. We see the Jewish system as partial, a shadow, a prototype, a typical representation, but not our exemplar, and not the fulfillment. Christ is the fulfillment.

### **The Faithful Men and Women of Old**

That does not mean that we cannot benefit from considering the history of the Jews. For example, on this website, in our foundation series “**The Royal Priesthood and the Holy Nation**,” we examined the typical representations of the Law Covenant, and we used that as a means of establishing a common ground with our brothers who look to the Jewish system of things as a model, in order to lead them to the New Covenant.

Paul also utilized this technique of using the traditions of others to establish common ground when he was speaking to the men in Athens:

“Paul now stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said: ‘Men of Athens, I behold that in all things you seem to be more given to the fear of the deities than others are. For instance, while passing along and carefully observing your objects of veneration I also found an altar on which had been inscribed ‘To an Unknown God.’ Therefore what you are unknowingly giving godly devotion to, this I am publishing to you.’” – **Acts 17:22-23**

The Law is indeed a “tutor leading to the Christ,” but once we are led to the Christ, we can leave the tutor behind. (**Galatians 3:24-25**)

“For we have partial knowledge and we prophesy partially; but when that which is complete arrives, that which is partial will be done away with.” – **1 Corinthians 13:9-10**

Nevertheless, while we do not imitate their religious system, we should be careful not to look with disdain upon the children of Abraham because they have fallen on days of traditional



barrenness. The forefathers offered themselves up to the persistent and passionate search for God, and they found him as no other whole race of men have ever known him since the times of Adam.

Our Father has not failed to mark the long and untiring struggle of Israel, ever since the days of Moses, to find God and to know God. For weary generations, the Jews have not ceased to toil, sweat, groan, travail, and endure the sufferings and experience the sorrows of a misunderstood and despised people, all in order that they might come a little nearer the discovery of the truth about God. And, notwithstanding all the falterings of Israel, they progressively, from Moses to the times of Amos and Hosea, did reveal increasingly to the whole world an ever clearer and more truthful picture of the eternal God. And so was the way prepared for the still greater revelation of the Father through Jesus in which we have all, **including the Jews**, been called to share.

### The Faith of the Sons of God

In the letter to the Hebrews, Paul describes faith:

“Faith is the assured expectation of things hoped for, the evident demonstration of realities **though not beheld.**” – *Hebrews 11:1*

In short, it is the ability to believe without seeing. Continuing on, Paul enumerates the experiences of several of the men and women of old as examples of faith. (*Hebrews 11:2-38*) And he concludes:

“And yet all these, although they had witness borne to them through their faith, did not get the [fulfillment of the] promise, as **God foresaw something better for us**, in order that they might not be made perfect apart from us.” – *Hebrews 11:39-40*

Our hope is a better hope because it leads to freedom, sonship and everlasting life in the heavens with the Father. Nevertheless, we can look at their examples as an assurance that exercising faith has its rewards. Moreover, rather than passively marveling at the faith of the men and women of old, we should be discovering those qualities in ourselves and becoming new expressions of bold and faithful living for our generation and future generations to look upon. To future generations, **we** will be the ‘men and women of old.’

And who knows, the “tested quality of our faith” may have enormous value to the Father, beyond the value to ourselves. (*James 1:2*) We do not believe that our achieving perfection is for the sole purpose of glorifying ourselves. There must be a purpose to all the effort the Father and the Son put into creating man, raising him to perfection, even sending the Christ who suffered on our behalf. Surely there will be work for us to do.

“After these things Jesus found him in the temple and said to him: ‘See, you have become sound in health. Do not sin anymore, in order that something worse does not happen to you.’ The man went away and told the Jews it was Jesus that made him sound in health. So on this account the Jews went persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things during Sabbath. But he answered them: **‘My Father has kept working until now, and I keep working.’**” – *John 5:14-17*

As such, we wonder, as we keep our minds fixed on the things above (*Colossians 2:2*), if there are certain assignments in the heavens for those of us who have exercised extraordinary faith under difficult circumstances. We can imagine there may be tasks that require the services of Sons who can work faithfully in isolation from their brothers; perhaps assignments in other confused worlds like ours; perhaps assignments on newly developing worlds. Take, for example, the high priest Melchizedek:

“For this Melchizedek, **king** of Salem, **priest** of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him and to whom Abraham apportioned a tenth from all things, is first of all, by translation, ‘King of Righteousness,’ and is then also king of Salem, that is, ‘King of Peace.’ In **being fatherless, motherless, without genealogy, having neither a beginning of days nor an end of life**, but having been made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually.” – *Hebrews 7:1-3*

We wonder if Melchizedek was such a perfected soul on assignment to our planet! After all, it is written in Revelation that some of us will serve as “kings and priests.” (*Revelation 5:10*) Is not that what Melchizedek was?

Whatever the case, we can be confident that our hard work at perfecting our faith will be for a grander purpose. So while we are here, let us do our utmost to grow in faith, cherishing our divine freedom, and working as ambassadors of the Christ, and in service of one another.

“Do not you people be owing anybody a single thing, except to love one another; **for he that loves his fellowman has fulfilled [the] law.**” – *Romans 13:8*

We welcome your comments.

***“Elaia Luchnia”***