



# Storming Fortresses

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh,  
but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.

2 CORINTHIANS 10:4

Vol. 19; No.12

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December, 2000

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*Great administrative changes would take place because Christ has appeared as the Temple.*

*Yet we do read in Ephesians that certain laws have been taken up in that very flesh, and are not in force as they once were. These are the laws which externally (not morally) distinguished Israel from the world.*

## All I Really Need to Know I Learned in the New Testament (Part 2)

By  
Steve M. Schlissel

### **Go, Johnny, Go**

The universality of John's Gospel must be read in the light of all I said last month. If it is, many silly controversies could be avoided. For example, when John says, "To all who received Him, to those who believed on His name, He gave the right to become children of God" (1:12), he is not telling us of a new soteriology, but a new people! John sets this fact in the context of Jewish unbelief. Verse 11: His own pretty much rejected him. Verse 12: But don't let that get you down. That only

means that now *anybody* can become "one of His own." Verse 13: It doesn't matter where you were born, in or out of Israel, if you're born of God.

Similarly, John 3:16 sometimes tortures those who take their starting point in election rather than in the covenant. Poor souls! Just read it with all that's been said in mind and there is no need to twist or be twisted. "God so loved the world [not just Israel] that He gave His only begotten Son [his word, his covenant—cf. Is. 42:6], that whosoever [not just Jews]

believes in Him [apart from circumcision] should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world [all nations, indiscriminately; not all individuals] through Him [the word of God made flesh]."<sup>1</sup>

For our purposes, however, the most important Johannine passage is 12:20-32. Jesus had already performed his most dramatic "sign" (raising Lazarus) and had entered Jerusalem for his final week of ministry

STORMING FORTRESSES is published monthly by REFORMATION MINISTRIES, a non-denominational organisation committed to maintaining and implementing Biblical truth as reasserted by the Reformers.

Subscriptions run from July 1 to June 30. Pro rata rates apply at other times. Current rates are as follows:

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Amounts payable in Australian currency. Cheques made payable to:

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there. Some Gentiles want to see Jesus, apparently interested in becoming disciples. Andrew and Phillip tell this to Jesus. Jesus uses this as an occasion to highlight the essential difference between his pre- and post-crucifixion ministries. Jesus replies to the Greeks' request for access, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies it produces many seeds."

What a seemingly strange way to answer the door! But not when the New Testament theme is kept in view. Jesus is saying, "It won't be long now. As long as I remain on earth, I am sent only to the lost sheep

1. Your donation, if it is simply humungous, entitles you to request our sermon entitled, "Is John 3:16 the Greatest Verse in the Bible?" (Yes, We answer in the affirmative). [This tape is available in Australia from Reformation Ministries,]

of the House of Israel. But," he adds, "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men [that is, all kinds of men, men from all nations] to Myself."

When the kernel of wheat (Jesus) dies in old Jerusalem and ascends to New Jerusalem, he sends his life-giving Spirit to produce many seeds, enough for the whole world.

### Where the Action Is

The Book of Acts, naturally, chronicles the course of this Christ-predicted and Christ-directed covenantal progress. Its first page finds the apostles thinking out of sequence. "Let's talk about Israel," they say. "Let's not and say we did," replies our Lord, "You attend to the work I assign you. Stay here until the Holy Spirit comes upon you, making you into the first batch of 'many seeds' for the world. Then be my witnesses in Jerusalem [all Jewish], in Judea and Samaria [half-Jewish] and to the ends of the earth [non-Jewish]."

In chapter 2, the miracle of Pentecost is illustrative of the New Testament theme: the gospel heretofore spoken in Hebrew will now be spoken in all languages on earth. The curse inflicted at Babel will now be reversed in Christ.<sup>2</sup>

And that's the story that follows: not of a new God or a new ethic or a new morality, but of the Old Testament God, the Old Testament ethic, the Old Testament morality overtaking

Jews (chapters 1-7), then half-Jews (chapter 8), then non-Jews (9-28), gaining entrée to the hearts of men by means of the two-tined message of repentance and forgiveness of sins.

Many questions, of course, were still to be answered. You must remember that until this time, though Gentiles had been welcome to join themselves to the covenant people, to do so as full participants, they had to be circumcised—and then some. Would that continue to be the case? Would the message brought to the furthest corners of the world be, for example, "Good news, everybody! You can join the covenant. *But*, according to Deuteronomy 26, you will become obligated to journey to Jerusalem three times each year"? If that was to be the case, conversion rates—even among travel agents—would have been abysmally low.

No. The gospel to be delivered unto the ends of the earth was a *complete* gospel and a completely *portable* gospel. Some laws governing Israel would change, but none would be abolished. The differences in the New Testament administration are practical differences which have come about because of the inclusion of all nations in the one covenant through Christ. The ethics of Israel, therefore, are not reversed. God does not begin to love what he hated or hate what he loved.

Thus Paul, Peter, James, John and Jude, put to rest disputes by simple appeals to any part of God's law-word (I Corinthians 14:34; 1 Pt. 3:10-12; James 4:6; I Jn. 5:3; Jude 7).

2. All attempts at global reconciliation apart from Christ are necessarily anti-Christ. He is the only way appointed by God.

Even the so-called ceremonial laws fully mature in Christ and become ripe for universal application. Are the laws governing a woman's body abolished when she weds, conceives, bears and nurses? No, they are fulfilled! So too, the older rites and ceremonies are fulfilled in the "New World Order" brought about by Christ's completed work.

Great administrative changes would take place because Christ has appeared as the Temple; Christ himself has performed the work of the Great High Priest (in the order of Melchizedek); Christ himself has become the once-for-all Great Offering. All of these had *always* set forth the Christ-to-come. Apart from his work, they had no efficacy. That is the message of Hebrews. He was in them, preparing the way for himself in history. But now that he has come, and now that he has performed a work sufficient for all the nations of the world, the place of worship, as prophesied by our Lord, would certainly not be Mount Gerizim, nor would it be Jerusalem. Rather the time had now come when Malachi's words would be fulfilled: "My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. *In every place* incense and pure offerings will be brought to My name,<sup>3</sup> because My name will be great among the nations!"

### The Gentile Question

But tell that to the Jews in what we call the First Century. Old St. Pete had trouble comprehending it (Acts 10), but finally got the point: "If God gave uncircumcised Gentiles the same gift as He gave us, who was I to

think that I could oppose God?" (Acts 11:17).

Others either couldn't or wouldn't get it. And so *the most important controversy* of the New Testament soon came center stage: Must Gentile converts to the covenant first become Jews? Will the covenant after Christ remain provincial or will it go to *all* peoples, requiring of *all* only what God required of Abraham, that he trust and obey?

Believers from the Jewish Christian center of power (Jerusalem) went down to a Gentile Christian center of power (Antioch) and said, "Excuse us, but aren't you guys forgetting something? Uh, if you wanna be one with us and our God, get rid of those foreskins." Ouch! The apostles and elders met to consider this question in Acts 15.

This was the \$64,000 question. It would forever affect the character of the gospel being preached. It is important to understand, therefore, what the question actually entailed. The question was *not* dealing with circumcision *per se*. After all, the assembly determined that circumcision could not be compelled of Gentile converts, yet the first thing we find Paul doing after delivering the decision to the churches, is circumcising Timothy, a half-Jew. No, circumcision, as Paul says later, is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing. The question was, *must a Gentile become a Jew in order to become a Christian?*

To *that* question, the assembly of Acts 15, guided by the apostles and the Holy Spirit, gave a resounding "No!" It was contrary to the very

work of Christ to seek to confine it to the Jewish nation. It was written (in the "Old Testament"! ) that Gentiles would "bear God's name," James told the assembly. That time had obviously come. Therefore, let us show consideration for them *and* let them show consideration for the Jews from whence the gospel comes (Acts 15:15-21).

The degree of antipathy held by unbelieving Jews of that time toward Gentiles is hard to measure; it was off the scale. One can get an idea from reading Paul's speech in Acts 21-22. The Jews (by no means the only ethnocentric people in history!) were shouting, "Away with him," until they heard Paul speak their language (22:1). He then gave a powerful and explicit testimony to the work of Christ in his life and, amazingly, they listened politely until he reported, "Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"

Bam! That was it. "Rid the earth of him!," they shouted. "He's not fit to live!"

Not fit to live? What was his crime? It was the mere suggestion that God had kind intentions toward those outside the covenant. Why, they reacted even more violently than some modern hyper-Calvinists do at the same thought! Nevertheless it was true. God's grace was on a boundary-breaking course throughout the world. The New Testament records the story of the astonishing covenant-breaking on the part of the Jews and the equally astonishing plan of God: to leave unbelieving Israel in the dust while bringing his holy cov-

<sup>3</sup>. *viz.*, God will be acceptably worshipped around the world.

enant, bound up in Christ, to the world. Thus the last words of Paul in Acts to the Jews in Rome: "I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!"

### The Beat Goes On

And listen they did, as the diverse destinations of the New Testament epistles testify. A careful reading of these letters supports our contention that the main difference between the Old and the New is the inclusion of the Gentiles in the covenant *without* requiring them to become Jewish.

The theme of the Book of Romans, commonly thought to be justification by faith, is actually the relationship of Jews and Gentiles in view of Christ's completed work.<sup>4</sup> Paul's argument in Chapter 4 is one of the most brilliant to be found anywhere. After proving that Gentiles (1:18-2:16) and Jews (2:17-3:20) stand alike in their need of justification, Paul asks what Abraham's experience was in obtaining justification. The covenant blessings are said to have come to Abraham by faith (4:1-8). Moreover (and this is Paul's entire argument here), Abraham was justified when he was physically still *a Gentile* (in Genesis 15; he wasn't circumcised until Genesis 17). So the father of the Jews was a Gentile

when he was set free from sin and brought near to God. He is thus a fit figure to be the *father of all who believe, whether Jew or Gentile.*<sup>5</sup>

Space (again) forbids an elaboration here of the centrality of "the Gentile Question" in the literature of the New Testament, but do read the New Testament yourself with this theme in mind. For now, let's just summarize the ways in which the administration of the covenant changed, for the nations' good, after Christ's earthly work was completed: Realization, Concentration, Expansion.

### Realization

Christ Jesus our Lord is the realization in history of all that preceded him. The "thousand points" of Old Testament light meet in him. As a diamond reveals light in new and stunning ways, so does our Lord reveal the light that was always in the Old Testament. Jesus is the Old Testament in the flesh. John never recovered from the thought: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled... **WE TOUCHED THE WORD OF LIFE!**"

The Word is not abolished in him! Perish the thought! It is made flesh!

Yet we do read in Ephesians that certain laws have been taken up *in that very flesh*, and are not in force as they once were. These are the laws which *externally* (not morally) distinguished Israel from the world. "Now in Christ Jesus you who were formerly far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances [*i.e.* those ordinances which heretofore separated you], that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace."

We also know that the "laws of approach" (to God) remain as valid today as ever, yet in different forms. No one, for example, can ever hope to be justified without blood. This is the great travesty of post-A. D. 70 Judaism. It is a religion completely at odds with its own premises. For in the Law of the Jews it says, "It is the blood that makes atonement for the soul" (Lev. 17:11). This is still true. The message of the New Testament is that the only blood *ever* required has now, in fact, been shed. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, our sacrifice, and be saved, all ye ends of the earth!"

<sup>4</sup> *The Mystery of Romans* by Mark D. Nanos, Fortress Press, 1996, is a provocative and fresh look at the structure and theme of the book; a must read, whether or not one agrees with Nanos' conclusions. Fascinating!

<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that Paul's argument in Romans 4 is a powerful justification for the baptism of covenant infants. Antipaedobaptists typically argue that infant circumcision was OK because it only made you part of a physical people, but baptism is a sign and seal of a spiritual reality which must precede the rite. Paul, however, says that circumcision was for Abraham "the sign [and] a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith" (v. 11). Thus, Abraham *first* believed *then* received the sign. His progeny, however, *first* received the sign, *then* were under obligation to believe. If the order in the Old was spiritual reality (faith), then sign (circumcision) for adults entering the covenant, but sign then faith for those born in the covenant, that order ought to be regarded as perfectly reasonable in the New administration.

Blood is still required. So, too, the Tabernacle-Temple is still most necessary, only now we see it in Jesus, not Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> And we need a priest today as much as priests were ever needed—Christians have one! The Great High Priest, Jesus. As our Belgic Confession says, “We believe that the ceremonies and symbols of the law ceased at the coming of Christ, and that all the shadows are accomplished; so that the use of them must be abolished among Christians; yet the truth and substance of them remain with us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have their completion....”

If “the laws of approach” remain alive, how much more that moral code revealed as the perfect expression for man of the Divine mind on justice? We could not do good without it! The Heidelberg Catechism reminds us that good works are “only those which proceed from true

faith, and are done according to the Law of God, unto His glory, and not such as rest on our own opinion or the commandments of men.”<sup>7</sup>

### Concentration

With the realization of all things in Christ, we find a concentration of form in the New Testament period, along with the introduction of *bloodless* rites.<sup>8</sup> The Westminster Confession expresses it this way:

Under the gospel, when Christ, the substance was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper: which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory, yet, in them, it is held forth in more fullness, evidence and spiritual

efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the new testament.<sup>9</sup>

Here is what you read in the New Testament: Jesus Christ has realized all the Old Testament threads. Everything is a tapestry in him. Without him they are just threads—in him they form one gorgeous whole. And now that he has come and done the work, the Gospel can expand and go to the rest of the world.

### Expansion

Which brings us back to where we started. It’s realized in him, condensed in form, then distributed *to the world*.

**All I really need to know I learn in the Old Testament. But I need to know it in the form in which it is found in the New Testament.**

*We are indebted to the kindness and generosity of Rev. Steve Schlissel for allowing us to reprint this series of articles. Due to other publishing commitments Rev. Schlissel has asked that these articles not be posted on a website or distributed in a bound form. However, they may be distributed in their current form. As these articles were made freely available to us, so we will make additional copies freely available (excluding postage) to those who request them.*

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<sup>6</sup> John 2:18-22.

<sup>7</sup> Q&A #91.

<sup>8</sup> A strong proof of the truth of the Christian religion as against rabbinical Judaism. For Judaism, the rivers of blood found in the Old Testament just suddenly, and without Divine explanation, cease! The New Testament, on the other hand, explains that the end of blood rites was in no way arbitrary. On the contrary: the real blood, of which all other blood was a mere witness, was shed by the Son of God unto a complete remission of all his people’s sins.

<sup>9</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith 7:6.



## WE CONFESS:

1. Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; (Rom. 2:14–15, Rom. 1:19–20, Ps. 19:1–3, Rom. 1:32, Rom. 2:1) yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation. (1 Cor. 1:21, 1 Cor. 2:13–14) Therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manner, to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His Church; (Heb. 1:1) and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing: (Prov. 22:19–21, Luke 1:3–4, Rom. 15:4, Matt. 4:4,7,10, Isa. 8:19–20) which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; (2 Tim. 3:15, 2 Pet. 1:19) those former ways of God’s revealing His will unto His people being now ceased. (Heb. 1:1–2)
  
6. The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men. (2 Tim. 3:15–17, Gal. 1:8–9, 2 Thess. 2:2) Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word: (John 6:45, 1 Cor 2:9–12) and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed. (1 Cor. 11:13–14, 1 Cor. 14:26,40) **(WCF 1:1, 6.)**

What is the word of God? The holy scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the word of God, (2 Tim. 3:16, 2 Pet. 1:19–21) the only rule of faith and obedience. (Eph. 2:20, Rev. 22:18–19, Isa. 8:20, Luke 16:29,31, Gal. 1:8–9, 2 Tim. 3:15–16) **(WLC Q&A 3)**

