

Philosophy, the Culture War, and Hanukkah

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In case anyone has missed it: we are in the midst of a culture war. It isn't really new, but we have seen what amounts to an escalation of hostilities in the last fifty years. Imagine, we have four major 'Christian' denominations struggling with homosexual clergy and approval of homosexual 'unions.' The average Evangelical Christian assumes that these 'so-called Christians' must be ignorant of the Bible. Not so, beloved. It is not the absence of Scripture in those churches, it is the absence of a correct way of reading and then obeying Scripture. The problem is, the very same approach to Scripture is present in even the most conservative church in America.

The Battlefield in Conservative Congregations

I have observed the following in congregations I have been a part of:

- Theft committed by congregational leaders.
- Youth involved in varying kinds of sexual sin.
- Violence against a spouse – with no rebuke from congregational leaders.
- Lawsuits between congregants.
- A public stand against abortion, and then a pastor counseling for exceptions in the privacy of his study; leading to a church couple having an abortion – after which the church leadership then took pains to publicly lie about it.
- The private (secret) dismissal of church leaders because of sexual sin.
- A married woman employed by the church, 'dating' other men, with the approval of the senior pastor – all because, in the pastor's mind, she was 'separated' from her husband.
- Numerous known adulterous relationships that ended marriages – with no official challenge.
- A pastor who preyed on congregant women; and who had been hired with the knowledge of past immoral behavior.

All of these things I have observed were in conservative congregations. Don't misunderstand, it is not unusual that sin is present in among 'G-d's people' – it is that in every one of these cases, the church leadership permitted such things to go unchallenged.

How is it possible, that the Redeemed Community looks just like the world? It used to be said, "Observe what the world is doing today, and the church will be doing it in the next generation." That is no longer true. It does not take a generation. Sin is rampant, and unchecked in the Evangelical church today.

If G-d's Word is immutable, and His standards absolute, how can it be that the people who call themselves 'the people of the Book' have become irrelevant in the culture war by their silence about the sin in their midst? One word: **Philosophy**. That is, the philosophical or rational approach to G-d's Word.

Beloved, philosophy begins with the question, "What is truth?" and ends with the answer, "This is truth *to me*." G-d's Word was not given to be subjected to the exercise of philosophical argument. The Evangelical church is only slightly behind the decaying mainstream denominations, because it stopped treating G-d's Word as the

absolute authority. Maybe it never did. In short, we have too many people talking theology; and too few practicing and teaching G-d's commands.

Now, if you do not like history, let me encourage you to stick with me on this one – I promise, this relates very much to each one of us. I will try to make it as painless as can be. So get a comfy chair, or sit by the fire and let me tell you a story.

Oh, and there is a test later on.

It began in a Garden. A Serpent, and a Woman...

"And he [the Serpent] said to the woman, 'Has G-d indeed said, "You shall not eat of every tree of the garden"?' (Genesis 3:1b)

That is a logical question. Think about it. G-d had said in verse 16 and 17, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat." So the Serpent's query was logically correct. Ah, but was it truth? No, it wasn't. G-d's instruction to the Man and the Woman was to ***eat of any tree*** except the 'Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.' The difference seems subtle, but it is not. The instruction is mostly a positive instruction to eat of *any* tree, with *one* exception. The negative instruction against the eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was an instruction with a reason: "for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." G-d does not often offer such a motivating reason for His instructions.

In the next few verses, the Serpent takes the Woman for a ride on the philosophy train, and railroads her right into the most logical answer to his first question: "Has G-d indeed said?." The logical answer of course (to Eve), "Why no, He didn't *really* mean what He said when He said don't eat" – after all, misread 1Cor 6:13; 8:8; Rom 14:17, and this error filled logic seems to make sense. You see, beloved, the Serpent's first question, "Had G-d indeed said?" was really meant to cause the Woman to ask the question, "What did G-d *really* mean?" Cue the organ music. The very simple instructions of G-d had been turned into a logical exercise – and we all know the outcome, which continues to this day.

Written Down, Literal

G-d's instructions began to be written down beginning with Moses, and then the human reaction to them became a little more stark. It seemed that many of G-d's instructions were completely illogical from a human perspective. Who has ever read the instructions regarding a leper from Leviticus 14 and thought to themselves, "Yeah, this makes complete sense"? Either one accepted the instructions at face value, or one discarded them outright. For many, there was either an acceptance of G-d's instructions, or an abandonment of following G-d altogether. A brief look into the book of Judges shows the chaos of the outright abandonment of G-d's instructions. Selective compliance seemed to work better.

Gradually, the people learned to put aside G-d's instructions one at a time until they abandoned G-d's Word entirely. Of course, their abandonment of G-d's instructions – even the ones that made no sense like the year of *sh'mittah* (sabbatical rest for the land) – cost them dearly. Specifically, the failure to keep G-d's command that the land rest every seven years led to the seventy years of captivity in Babylon (2Chr 36:21; Jer 25:1; Lev 26:34-35, 43). So much for selective compliance.

Along came King Josiah and later the Scribe Ezra – and the rediscovery of G-d's Word. The idea that the Torah was forgotten, and had to be found in the dust of *the Temple itself* seems prophetic for today's believers (2Kings 21:8). When the Torah was read to Josiah he immediately assumed that G-d's instructions were to be taken at face value, and not put through the rigors of logic and philosophy. 150 years later, Ezra would establish a place of reverence for G-d's Word among the people of Israel.

The people of Israel became the people of Torah. Their approach to the Word of G-d became literal – they had learned their lesson about selective compliance, and outright abandonment of G-d's instructions for living. No doubt, the Enemy twisted even that in a way to obscure G-d's clear instructions by add-on rules and regulations – of course, all man-made. G-d's Enemy is very adept to manipulating men, whether religious or not. Regardless, the avenue of a philosophical attack upon G-d's Word had largely failed with the Jewish people up until the 1st Century CE. There was one brief moment in the 2nd Century BCE, when the philosophical approach almost took hold, but failed – we will look at that later.

Christianity, the Religion of Philosophy?

In the 1st Century CE, philosophy was seen as a way to make the Bible less offensive to the intellectuals of Rome and Greece. Philo (20 BCE - 50 CE), a Jew from Alexandria, Egypt, married Scripture with Plato and Aristotle. The result was to turn the 'Old Testament' into one giant allegory.

When Christianity spread into the Gentile lands, there was more and more philosophy applied to their beliefs and practices. Philo was the one Jew that many of the Gentile Christians seemed to read. Most of the early Gentile church fathers were students of Plato and Aristotle. They were men like Justin Martyr (100-165 CE), who said that Plato was inspired by G-d:

"And let it not be this one man alone – Plato; but, O philosophy, hasten to produce many others also, who declare the only true G-d to be G-d, through His inspiration, if in any measure they have grasped the truth."

Justin Martyr thought philosophy, and Plato specifically, were G-d-given and inspired to reveal the true G-d.

To Plato, the idea or the thought, was the true reality – the physical was not reality. This is an idea that modern Christianity still adheres to. Such a concept is the antithesis of Scripture. Yeshua's teachings that pointed to the heart were the teachings of Torah; which implored men to incline their hearts toward G-d, and that outward actions were the evidence (the reality) of true faith.

No one can underestimate the influence of Origen (185-232 CE) upon the emerging Christian church of the 2nd Century. Origen was the one who truly brought Neo-Platonism to Christian theology. He was the master of the allegory and the philosophical approach to G-d's instructions.

Augustine (354-430 CE) was a disciple of Greek philosophy. He was influenced greatly by Plato; and considered the incarnation account of John 1 to have been foreshadowed in Plato's view of 'G-d.'

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 CE) was greatly influenced by Aristotle and intellectualism. His philosophical approach to Scripture makes the mind and intellectual assent into 'a kind of faith.' He believed that there can be no opposition between faith and reason.

And of course, Martin Luther (1483-1546 CE) was greatly influenced by Augustine and Aquinas.

Beloved, where do you think all the thinkers of modern theology get their theories? It is not new. In a nutshell, let's just say, "It's all Greek thinking."

The Philosophical Approach To All Instruction

Let's look at how humans respond to authoritative instructions, and how we use them ourselves in the raising of children. It will help us understand effectiveness of annulling G-d's Word using the 'philosophical approach.'

Most parents intend their young children to obey their instructions literally. An example is an instruction to a young child:

"Don't cross the street by yourself."

As the child gets older, the parent usually believes that the child will grow into a consciousness of the dangers and learn appropriate safety steps to safely cross the street alone. No parent expects their child to follow those instructions all of their lives. In other words, over time, the instruction becomes essentially invalid as the child learns *what the parent means*. In many parents' minds, it requires experience and cognitive abilities for a child to outgrow the parental prohibition.

Here is another parental instruction:

"Don't use drugs."

No parent that gives such an instruction intends to have such an instruction to expire once a child reaches a greater level of cognitive maturity. They intend it to be a lifelong instruction.

These examples show the philosophical approach that many of us use regarding instructions. We evaluate every instruction, a rule, or a law with a logical approach – always by asking, "Does this instruction make sense?" We are constantly presented with the erroneous axiom, "G-d gave you a brain didn't He?"

There are several problems with the philosophical approach to instructions or warnings. It assumes that the one evaluating the warning or instruction, is in complete command of all the facts regarding why the warning or instruction exists.

For example, let's imagine the police driving through a neighborhood telling the residents to evacuate because of a overturned chemical train. One resident who naturally distrusts the police hears the warning and says to himself, *"That makes no sense – I don't know of any train tracks around. This is just an attempt to do some unlawful search of my house while I am gone."* Little does he know that there are train tracks nearby, even though there are no roads that cross them. The person who chooses to logically process the warning does so because:

1. He distrusts the authority giving the instruction.
2. He is not familiar with all the reasons behind the instruction.

Go back to the Garden – the sin of Eve was in *not trusting the One Who instructed* – and she *reasoned* that she did not know what 'dying' was, so it made *no sense* not to eat of the 'Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.'

The problem with our modern theologies that approach G-d's Word with selective compliance is that they are all based upon two false assumptions:

1. G-d's instructions change as we (collectively) mature spiritually.
2. G-d's illogical (humanly speaking) instructions were only valid until we figured out that they were merely figurative instructions. In other words, they only existed until what they illustrated was obvious – or they were only metaphors (sound familiar?).

Actually there is a third and even bigger false assumption: We think we know it all, and know *what G-d really means*.

Selective Compliance Kills

I am an airline pilot. I am also an airline instructor. I teach airline pilots to fly one of the types of airliners that my airline operates. As you can imagine, **standard operating procedures** are not things to be treated lightly. The airline I work for expects its pilots to operate their aircraft precisely within the guidelines that the manufacturer and the airline dictates. A generation ago, many airline pilots treated such instructions with a grain of salt. They valued their own aviation experience and knowledge far more. As aircraft have become more complex, most pilots have learned to trust the **standard operating procedures** more closely. In the aircraft that I instruct in, it is even more pronounced because it is highly automated and very complex. Most of our pilots adhere to the **standard operating procedures** very literally. The reason?

1. They trust the authority that provided the procedures.
2. They know that they do not know every reason behind each procedure, because that is the job of thousands of engineers, not a single person.

Every once in a while, someone at the airline I work for needs some 'attitude adjustment' because of non-compliance with some rule they think does not apply to them. An instructor friend of mine likes to ask them the question, "You think you know best in this instance. It seems minor, but it makes me ask, what other policies and procedures do you not comply with?" He is right. Selective compliance kills. It kills spiritually as well.

This is not a child-raising article; but just so that you know, the examples regarding how we often teach our children are the wrong approach. We should be very clear with the instructions and warnings to our children. Make sure that they know if the instructions are valid for life – or only for a while. Make sure that they know that your instructions are not optional. This is the Bible way. Train a child as G-d trains us. That is, unless you approach G-d's instructions philosophically – in which case you can count on your children doing the same with your instructions and warnings. *"Surely mom and dad didn't really mean I shouldn't do this!"*

The Philosophy Test

Here is a quick test to see if the philosophical approach has affected you. If you think any of the following statements are true, you are using a philosophical approach to G-d's Word:

- Truth needs to be understood in order to be obeyed.
- What you believe is more important than what you do.
- Knowledge is worth pursuing for its own sake.
- We must separate the sacred from the secular.
- Mundane things in life interfere with our spiritual focus.
- The primary purpose of education is to understand the world around us and acquire correct ideas and right thinking.
- Knowledge and right thinking feed the soul.
- The primary source of religious teaching should be trained pastors or teachers.

Everyone of the above statements is absolutely false. The Bible teaches against each of them. How'd you do?

An Answer to 'Greek Thinking' – The Story of Hanukkah

Something needed to be done – the Enemy could not have G-d's people actually reading and studying G-d's instructions, *literally*. So, he went back to his tried and true method from the Garden.

Cue the organ music. The Enemy's rejoinder to G-d's people's renewed emphasis on G-d's very words taken literally, began around 345 BCE.

In the temple of the Nymphs at Mieza around 345 BCE, King Philip II of Macedonia hired a philosopher named Aristotle to tutor his young son. Aristotle had been the star pupil of Plato, who was a pupil of Socrates. Aristotle tutored the young prince for five years and when Philip II died, that young prince became the King of Macedonia. His name was Alexander, and in the next few years he would conquer the known world, and would be called Alexander the Great. Alexander brought to the world the Greek language, the Greek religion, and Greek science; but most of all he brought the world Greek philosophy. When Alexander died suddenly in 323 BCE his empire was eventually divided into four parts, by his four Hellenist generals. The age of universal Hellenism was upon us.

Hellenism was the influence and culture of Alexander's Greek Empire. It permeated all the known world for at least four hundred years, and as we have seen – it is still present with us today.

Two of the empires that emerged from Alexander's one-world empire, was Ptolemaic Egypt and Seleucid Asia. These two Greek empires were in constant competition until the rise of the Roman Empire around 60 BCE. Between Seleucid Syria and Ptolemaic Egypt was the little land of Israel. Israel rests on the land bridge between Asia, Europe, and Africa. For the history of the back-and-forth influence that the Ptolemaic Dynasty and the Seleucid Dynasty had on Israel and her people, one must only read the prophetic accounts from 11th chapter of Daniel – written two hundred years

before they occurred. The 'king of the north' and the 'king of the south' are easily identified when looking at the history of the Greek empires of Ptolemy and Seleucus.

So the Enemy's plan of attack against G-d's Word was to spread the philosophy and religion of Greece throughout the world. Specific to his plan was the tiny land of Israel. It was there he focused his energy – because his goal was not just to deceive the world, but to destroy G-d's people.

Hellenism began to catch on in the land of Israel in the Second Century before the birth of Messiah. The Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek, in of all places Egypt. Greek became the popular language of the people of Israel that had moved to societies like Alexandria, Egypt. Along with the language and culture, came the philosophy and logic. G-d's literal instructions were allegorized by such notable Jewish philosophers as Egypt's Philo. A 'kinder, gentler' Judaism, that fit better with the other cultures around them, began to emerge in Jewish communities in Egypt. No more literal sacrifices – and 'beliefs' replaced actual deeds.

All of the machinations of the Enemy were not lost upon a small group of G-d's people in the land of Israel. They were dedicated to the literal words of G-d – and they did not ask the question, "Has G-d indeed said?" or "What did G-d *really* mean?" The battle over G-d's Word would have not occurred if it had not been for these few. Instead, G-d's people would have quietly disappeared into the melee of Hellenism. These few stood up against the attack of the Enemy seen in Hellenism and philosophy. They later became known as 'the Maccabees.'

Around 175 BCE, a king rose to power in Seleucid Syria. His name was Antiochus IV. He later named himself 'Epiphanes' – and claimed to be divine. He is the one Daniel prophesied about in Daniel 8:9. He is called the 'little horn.' This Antiochus IV is one of the most often alluded despots of Scripture. That is because he took the culture war to new levels –aggression against the very Person of G-d. Daniel 8:11-14 tells us about it,

"He [little horn] even exalted *himself* as high as the Prince of the host; and by him the daily *sacrifices* were taken away, and the place of His sanctuary was cast down. Because of transgression, an army was given over *to the horn* to oppose the daily *sacrifices*; and he cast truth down to the ground. He did *all this* and prospered. Then I heard a holy one speaking; and *another* holy one said to that certain *one* who was speaking, 'How long *will* the vision *be, concerning* the daily *sacrifices* and the transgression of desolation, the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled underfoot?' And he said to me, 'For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed.'"

Just as Daniel had prophesied, in 167 BCE, Antiochus IV cast truth to the ground by issuing the following decree to Israel (1Macc 1:44-48):

- They could no longer follow the Torah of G-d
- They could no longer observe the Sabbath or the Festival days
- They could not circumcise their sons
- They must eat meat that was unclean

Then on the 25th of the month of Kislev (corresponds to December), Antiochus marched into his province of Judea and went into the Temple of G-d in Jerusalem

and desecrated it by erecting a statue of Zeus in the Temple and sacrificing a pig on the Brazen Altar. He forbade the daily sacrifices in the Temple.

The historical book of 1Maccabees 1:49-50 tells us,

"To the end they might forget the Torah, and change all the ordinances. And whosoever would not do according to the commandment of the king [Antiochus], he said, he should die."

Some of G-d's people living in the land of Israel could no longer sit idly by. They were a decided minority, but they had determined never again to ask the questions, "Has G-d indeed said?" or "What did G-d *really* mean?"

It started in the small village of Modin. A Levite of the priestly caste named Mattityahu watched dumbfounded as a Greek official demanded that a local Levite sacrifice a pig to prove the loyalty to the new Hellenistic culture in the land. When the man succumbed to the official pressure (no doubt reasoning in his mind, "Surely G-d did not expect me *to die* for His instructions did He?") – Mattityahu was filled with zeal like Pinchas (Phinehas of Numbers 25). He stood up and said in a loud voice,

"Though all the nations that are under the king's dominion obey him, and fall away every one from the religion of their fathers, and give consent to his commandments: Yet will I and my sons and my brethren walk in the covenant of our fathers. G-d forbid that we should forsake the Torah and the ordinances. We will not hearken to the king's words, to go from our religion, either on the right hand, or the left." 1Maccabees 2:19-22

With that, Mattityahu pulled out a sword and killed the errant Levite and Antiochus' official. He then called out,

"Whosoever is zealous of the Torah, and keeps the covenant, let him follow me."

He took his five sons and fled to the hills. They began a rebellion against Antiochus. His eldest son, named Judah (also known as 'Maccabee' or 'the Hammer') became the leader of their small army. One stunning victory after another, against enormous odds, caused the ranks of the Maccabees to swell.

Finally, in 164 BCE, the Maccabees succeeded in driving the Greeks from Jerusalem.

On the 25th of Kislev in 164 BCE, just 2300 evening and morning sacrifices (1150 days, or 3 years and 2 months) after the decree against the daily sacrifices – just as Daniel had prophesied – those that would not compromise on G-d's instructions rededicated the Brazen Altar and began the daily sacrifices again in the Temple in Jerusalem. The next eight days were set aside as a time of rededication for the Temple. This would later become known as the 'Dedication' or in Hebrew 'Hanukkah.' This is the 'Feast of Dedication' [*Chag Hanukkah* in Hebrew] that Yeshua celebrated in Jerusalem in John 10:22-23.

What Hanukkah Teaches

Just what can we learn from the story of Hanukkah to help us in the culture war? Am I calling for armed rebellion? No, and that is not what the story is ultimately about. If one sits down and reads 1Maccabees and Daniel 8 and 11, it becomes very clear what the message is: G-d blesses with victory, those who are zealous for His literal words. Victory in what form? Why, against the culture that lulls us into compromise and ineffectiveness. The rebellion against Antiochus did not actually start in Modin, when Mattityahu took up arms. The rebellion against the culture began when G-d's people purposed and did what G-d commanded. The rebellion began long before Antiochus issued his decrees that were opposed to Torah. Remember them?

- They could no longer follow the Torah of G-d
- They could no longer observe the Sabbath or the Festival days
- They could not circumcise their sons
- They must eat meat that was unclean

Now, go down that list and you will find that these are things in which most Evangelical Christians would ***agree with Antiochus completely***. Add to that the annulling of the Temple service and the only thing modern Christians have any beef with Antiochus over was his idolatry. Makes you wonder doesn't it? Or maybe not...

The men and women who determined to literally obey G-d, no matter how silly it looked, and no matter how great the persecution that followed – had great exploits... because through their faith-filled obedience, they learned to know G-d. Here is how Scripture prophetically speaks of these very same men and women of the time of the Maccabees:

"...but the people who know their G-d shall be strong, and carry out *great exploits*." Daniel 11:32b

You see, the better part of Daniel 11 is a prophecy against Antiochus and for the godly men and women who did not fall prey to his deceit – and a foreshadowing of a time yet to come. Antiochus was a type, or figure, of the coming Anti-Christ. Just like Antiochus pronounced his decrees to logically annul G-d's commands; and just like the Greek culture and philosophy that sought to allegorize the Word of G-d – so will the coming Anti-Christ.

Antiochus, was called a 'man against Torah.' Yeshua, in Matthew 24:15 indicates that one like Antiochus would repeat what Antiochus did when He polluted the Temple of G-d. Paul indicates that the coming Anti-Christ would also mirror what Antiochus did with regard to G-d's instructions. 2Thessalonians 2:37 refers to him as the 'man of sin' and coming in the mystery of 'lawlessness.' This is a word that when taken into the Greek and then Hebrew is quite clearly: 'Against Torah', or against G-d's instructions. The coming Anti-Christ will be like Antiochus – 'one against Torah.'

Faithful Obedience

G-d has given us a mind. G-d does expect us to use it. That does not mean that we should approach G-d's instructions with a philosophical approach.

Let's look at that word for just a moment. The English word 'philosophy' comes from the Greek '*philosophia*' – *philo* is 'love'; and *sophia* is 'wisdom.' It means, 'love of

wisdom.' So who doesn't want to love wisdom? I don't, not if it is man's wisdom. And that is what philosophy is: man's wisdom. Scripture has much to say about true wisdom from G-d, and man's wisdom. First and foremost true wisdom is quite simply Scripture, *not man's perspective of Scripture*. Let's go back to the Garden...

There were two unique trees it seems in the Garden. There was the 'Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil' and the 'Tree of Life' (Genesis 3:22). The Woman and the Man were free to eat of the Tree of Life – but because they decided that knowledge gained their way was better, they were forbidden to eat of the Tree of Life after that time. There was a choice: Knowledge, or Wisdom. Our choice is the same – and all Scripture is focused upon getting back to the Garden... and the Tree of Life. The Tree of Life is Wisdom, G-d's Wisdom. This is what Proverbs 3:13-19 is speaking of:

"Happy *is* the man *who* finds wisdom, and the man *who* gains understanding; For her [wisdom] proceeds *are* better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold. She *is* more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her. Length of days *is* in her right hand, in her left hand riches and honor. **Her ways *are* ways of pleasantness, and all her paths *are* shalom. She [wisdom] *is* a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy *are* all who retain her.** The L-RD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens."

This passage is a part of the Synagogue liturgy, which has been said since before the days of Yeshua with regard to the Torah. Torah = Wisdom. All G-d's instructions are paths of shalom. All G-d's instructions are as a Tree of Life to those who take hold of them.

By the way, if you saw that it was by 'wisdom' that G-d created the earth, then you also understand that this is language that John used in John 1 in referring to Yeshua as the 'Word.' You see, 'wisdom' = Torah = Yeshua. He is the embodiment of G-d's Word, His instruction, His Torah; or better yet, it represents Him.

Our response to G-d's instructions will dictate whether we are living in man's wisdom, or depending upon G-d's.

For example: Let's say you are reading G-d's Word and come across something you have never seen before. An instruction, a command, that appears to be something G-d wants His people to do. The man or woman who approaches G-d's Word as David did in Psalms 19 and Psalms 119 thinks like this: *"This is something G-d has said. G-d is good, and all of His instructions are ways of shalom and pleasantness. This will make me happy as I learn from Him in doing it."* This person will be disappointed if the command outlined is impossible for him to *do*.

Impossible? Why yes. There are commands in Scripture that were given to individuals only. For example, Genesis 22 where G-d instructs Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. It is also impossible for women to obey all the instructions to men and vice versa. It is impossible for most to fulfill the commands that deal with living in the Land of Israel.

The difference is in our approach to G-d's Word. If we are looking for ways or explanations as to why something does *not* apply to us, as opposed to looking for ways to do whatever G-d commands, we will never see what G-d has said. On the

other hand, if we approach G-d's instructions with delight, we will immediately have a complete change of perspective on all of G-d's Word. This is faithful obedience. Not obedience in order to gain some right standing with G-d. Not mental agreement alone in order to replace the actual *doing* of what G-d has said. Faithful obedience. This is what James was speaking of when He summed up the Royal Torah of G-d (James 2). It is faith mixed with obedient deeds.

Treat with suspicion any teaching that attempts to explain away the plain meaning of Scripture by use of allegory.

"Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."
Matthew 5:19

The Revelation

You have no doubt heard the biblical axiom, "Without a vision the people perish..." It is used often in an effort to establish a *raison etre* for a congregation. It attempts to use Scripture to support the 'build it and they will come' model to promote building projects; or the 'praise = entertainment; worship = solemnity' model to promote programs. Try finding a congregational building program that does not contain the word 'vision' in it and you are doing well. One problem with this axiom is that it is only half of the verse from Proverbs 29:18:

"Where *there is* no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but happy *is* he who keeps [guards and cherishes] the Torah."

Notice, the word 'revelation' is used. This better explains what the King James Version is saying when it uses the word 'vision.' In typical Hebrew parallelism, the phrases are meant to offset one another.

- "no revelation" versus "cherishes the Torah"
- "cast off restraint" versus "happy [blessed]"

Beloved, this one verse could be a proof text for what I am writing. The fact that the American Evangelical church has lost the culture war by forfeit is proof that she has not adhered to 'revelation' – which is Torah (i.e. G-d's revealed Word). She has "cast off restraint" because she thinks G-d's instructions are merely suggestions, and all that matters is 'faith' (Read Romans 3:31: "Do we then make void the Torah through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the Torah.").

It is time for a change. It is time for G-d's people to abandon man's thinking and turn to, and *do* G-d's ways. It is time for G-d's people to abandon Greek thinking, and simply delight in obedience to G-d's Word. But that will not happen as long as G-d's people continue to listen to sermons, teachings, and read for themselves about the theology of the Bible – instead of humble, faithful obedience to G-d's Word. It will never happen as long as G-d's people approach Scripture in the way of philosophy.

"Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit,
according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the
world, and not according to Messiah."

Colossians 2: 8

Have a Blessed Hanukkah, and may you dedicate anew yourself to Yeshua – the
Light of the World.