

Reading the Old Covenant

Commentary for March 18, 2010 — Paul's Assessment of Israel's Blindness

The apostle Paul has some very interesting comments to make about Israel's inability to understand the Scriptures that God gave to them to read, understand, and to preserve:

“For if the ministration of condemnation [the Old Covenant¹] be glory, much more does the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.

For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excels.

For if that which is done away [was] glorious, much more that which remains [is] glorious. And not [glorious] as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly [intently] look to the end of that which is abolished.”

• 2 Corinthians 3:9–13

What does Paul mean by **“abolished”**? Paul means that the Law had vanished. It was nullified (Concordant Version). It was made useless by Christ (Young's Literal Translation). It was passing away (New King James Version). It was brought to an end (English Standard Version). At an end, it was fading away (New American Standard Bible). Its end was a fading splendor (Revised Standard Version). It was made ineffective (NET Bible). Whatever the translation, you get the point being made by Paul.²

Why did Paul have this understanding of the status of the Law of Moses? It was because the Law was fulfilled completely for us by Christ (Matthew 5:17–18). The Law can be fulfilled through us, the *ekklesia*, again through Christ through His Spirit within us (Romans 8:4–10, 13:8–10; Galatians 5:14–18, 24–6:2).

Paul continues in 2 Corinthians chapter 3:

“But their minds were blinded: for until this day remains the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which [veil] is done away in Christ.

But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

• 2 Corinthians 3:14–18

The apostle Paul wrote to the *ekklesia* at Corinth that Israel at that moment did not understand the Old Testament when they read it. That lack of understanding continues to the present day. God still maintains the veil (veil is our current spelling) **“upon their heart”** which makes their minds to be blinded to the truth of God contained within the Word of God which

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1. Paul is referring to the Law of Moses, that which was: **“written not with ink, ... in tables of stone, ... not of the letter, ... for the letter kills, ... But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones ...”** (2 Corinthians 3:3–7). There is no doubt that Paul means the Law of Moses.
 2. This is the same understanding of the law that Paul used in 2 Corinthians 3:7 where the same Greek word was again used as a participle, **“to be done away”**:

“But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away.”

He gave to them to preserve (Romans 3:2). Therefore I am not surprised when I read statements from writers like Jewish author Mordecai Schreiber:

“But do we really know the Bible? I believe this question ought to be juxtaposed with the question ‘do we know God.’ It is generally agreed that we don’t really know God, and after centuries of scholarship we don’t really know the Bible.

Perhaps there lies the greatness of this text. Its message and its layers of meaning are inexhaustible. Every new generation is bound to find new meaning in it. In the final analysis, biblical scholarship is our puny human effort to know the unknown. This does not mean we must desist from engaging in it. To the contrary, those of us who feel compelled to do it must do it. But we must ever be cognizant of our enormous limitations, and always approach it with humility and, yes, reverence.”³

Does that mean that the people of Israel (and Mr. Schreiber) do not understand the words? No. Do they understand the message? Not yet. Not until God allows them to understand. This seems arrogant, but that is precisely what the apostle Paul is saying, like it or not.

Israel is incapable of understanding the true message of the Old Covenant, the Old Testament, until God through Christ removes the veil upon their heart and opens their minds to understand the glory of Christ. They cannot comprehend that Christ is the center of history, the object and goal of the Old Covenant, the Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible, and that Christ’s life, death, resurrection, ascension, and present life at the right hand of God the Father fulfills the Law of Moses, as was God’s purpose from the beginning.

Paul states that He knows not only God’s will but even the hidden aspect of God’s will, even **“the mystery of His will.”** As Paul phrases it:

“Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he has purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his own will:

• Ephesians 1:10–11

It is God’s will that Israel continue its blindness, that Israel continue for a time to have the “veil” over its heart, clouding its mind to receive the Gospel of Christ. Israel does not and cannot understand: **“Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you”** (2 Corinthians 4:14). Paul says that God uses an agent to continue Israel’s blindness (2 Corinthians 4:4). In the end, all Israel will be saved, in God’s own time (Romans 11:26).

Richmond, VA, Meeting — Important Notice

God willing, I will be giving two (2) presentations at the Richmond Bible Fellowship Conference in Richmond, Virginia. It will be at the Days Inn Hotel, 2100 Dickens Road (Phone 804-282-3300). **The cost is \$60.00** for the entire conference. ASK is not sponsoring this 3-day event. Contact Roosevelt Arrington: 804-350-2198 to register for the conference. Please register before March 26, 2010. I am scheduled to speak at 11:00 am and 4:00 pm (one hour each) on Saturday, April 3, 2010. There will be a panel discussion of questions and answers at 5:00 pm for one hour. If you cannot attend all three days, then contact Mr. Arrington about 1-day attendance. For more information see the “A.S.K. Events” page.

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3. [Morry's Blog](#), Bible Topics, “Do We Know the Bible?” by Mordecai Schreiber, for 9/10/09.