

Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil

by

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God gave us the most precious gift that could ever be given - His only Son. Jesus showed us the greatest act of love that can possibly be shown. He gave his life for us. We understand that Jesus died in order that we might have forgiveness of our sins; however, in today's world, it seems that "sin" is a politically incorrect word. Isa 5:20 warns of such matters as it states, "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" Today, we call gambling, "gaming;" abortion, "women's rights;" adultery, "affairs;" and the list goes on. It seems that once again we need to revisit the topic of sin and see how God has dealt with the people of this world since the beginning of time. It becomes urgent that we know how and why God considers man to be in sin. We must understand the laws that God has required man to follow since the beginning of time and the consequences of disobedience to those laws.

God defines sin as the "transgression of the law" (I John 3:4). From this statement it becomes imperative that we understand the meaning of law and determine exactly what law God expects man to follow. Law is defined by Webster as, "A rule, particularly an established or permanent rule, prescribed by the supreme power of a state to its subjects, for regulating their actions, particularly their social actions." In the spiritual realm, law would be the rules that God has directed the people of this earth to follow. We know that God has given more than one law. The Law of Moses was given by God on Mount Sinai specifically to the nation of Israel, and at Pentecost God made the gospel available to all mankind. The Law of Moses was given only to the people of Israel and the gospel is the way of salvation for all men today.

We know that everyone who has ever lived on this earth has been subject to some law of God. Rom 5:12-13 states,

Rom 5:12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

Rom 5:13 (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

Sin entered this world because of the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Their act of eating the forbidden fruit brought death into this world and everyone will die because all have sinned (Rom 3:23). Sin is the transgression of law, but sin is not imputed where there is no law. So, if all have sinned, then everyone who has ever lived must have been under a law given by God. There has never been a time when man was not subject to some law of God.

We can be certain that law existed from Adam to Moses because Rom 5:14 says,

"Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses,"...

Those who lived during the time from Adam to Moses were subject to death because they committed sin in the sight of God. In order for them to be in sin, they had to transgress some law given by God. Rom. 5:13 tells us that "sin is not imputed where there is no law." Therefore, law had to exist during that period of time.

From the time of the giving of the Law of Moses on Mount Sinai until Christ died on the cross, only the nation of Israel was subject to the Mosaic Law. Gentiles living during that period of time were not subject to the Law of Moses. However, we know they were under some law; otherwise, they would not have been subject to death. The wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23), but sin is not imputed where there is no law (Rom 5:13). Rom 2:14 also shows us that the Gentiles during the time of the Mosaic Law were subject to some law as it states:

"For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:"

Many Bible class discussions have centered around the meaning of the Gentiles having a law unto themselves. We have no written record of any law that God expected the Gentiles to follow, nor is there any indication in the Bible that such a written law ever existed. Then, how did the Gentiles know the law that God expected them to follow? Did God make it known in some way other than a written record? Were the Gentiles responsible to observe the ways God dealt with Israel in order to know the will of God? It is important to have an understanding of these matters in order to fully understand how God deals with the people of the world today.

God used the nation of Israel to destroy Gentile nations and kill many people during Old Testament times. When the children of Israel entered the Promised Land, they conquered and killed many. We know those nations were wicked. God would have never destroyed righteous people. He would not have destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah if ten righteous people could have been found dwelling in those cities (Gen. 18:32). These nations were wicked in the sight of God. Since sin is the transgression of law, these people must have broken some law that both God and these people recognized. It is our intent to determine exactly what this law was.

Let us consider three examples of people in the Old Testament who were judged by God as being wicked in his sight. First, let's look at the account of God sending Jonah to Nineveh.

Jon 1:1 Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,

Jon 1:2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

Nineveh was the capital city of the nation of Assyria. It was a great city with many thousands of inhabitants. The people who lived in Nineveh were Gentiles. They were not subject to the law of Moses, which was only for the nation of Israel. Again, we have no record of any written law or messenger from God going to that city to instruct them how to live according to God's will. What we do have is an account of God sending Jonah to Nineveh to tell them if they did not repent of their evil ways, they would be destroyed.

Jon 3:4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

Jon 3:5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

As soon as they heard the words of Jonah, they repented of their evil ways. They must have recognized that Jonah was sent from God and that the practices in which they were engaged were evil. The

question remains: How did the people of Nineveh know what was evil in the sight of God?

For the second example, let us consider the situation of Sodom and Gomorrah. We are familiar with the account of Abraham and Lot choosing a location to settle with their families. Lot chose to dwell in the fertile plain of Jordan, which was near Sodom and Abraham stayed in Canaan.

Gen 13:12 Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.

Gen 13:13 But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.

Sodom and Gomorrah were wicked cities before Lot arrived. Lot could not have possibly explained to those people how God expected them to conduct their lives. They were already wicked. Because of this wickedness, God told Abraham that he intended to destroy those cities. Abraham bargained with God in order to save the cities. He first asked God not to destroy the cities if fifty righteous men could be found. This number of righteous people was finally reduced to ten. Since there were not ten righteous souls in the city, God destroyed them.

Gen 19:24 Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven;

Now the question remains: By what law were these people found guilty? A law must be in force in order for God to impute sin. Read again Rom. 5:13-14.

Rom 5:13 states: "For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law."

Rom 5:14a Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses...

Sin was in the world between the time of Adam and Moses; therefore a law must have existed, otherwise God would not have held them accountable. So, we need to determine exactly what this law was.

Let us consider one last example of how God punished people in this world because of their sin. Prior to the time of the great flood, God looked down on the people of this world and found them to be wicked.

Gen 6:5 And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Gen 6:6 And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.

Gen 6:7 And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.

As God observed the wickedness that existed on the earth, he became sorry that he had created man and determined to destroy the world with water. They had broken God's law. What law had they broken? Once again, we have no evidence that God had given them any written law, or that he had spoken directly to all the people that dwelt on the earth. Because of their wickedness, God sent the

great flood and destroyed everyone except faithful Noah and his family.

With all these examples of God bringing judgment against the people of this world because they had broken his law, it becomes imperative that we know and understand this law. We have no written record of any law except the Law of Moses and the gospel. So, what was this law of God? The answer is found in Genesis chapter three. Here we find the account of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. God had placed them in this beautiful garden that contained everything they needed in order to sustain their physical lives. God placed two trees in the middle of the garden; (1) the tree of life and (2) the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God gave instructions that Adam and Eve could eat of every tree in the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. As long as they ate of the tree of life they could have possessed physical life forever. We know this to be true because after they disobeyed God and he removed them from the garden, he placed Cherubims at the gate of the garden to keep Adam and Eve from returning to eat of the tree of life and living forever (Gen. 3:22-24). Therefore, the tree of life contained special powers that could affect the lives of Adam and Eve.

The tree of knowledge of good and evil also contained special characteristics. In order to entice and deceive Eve, Satan told her that if she ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, she would become as God and know the difference between good and evil.

Gen 3:4 And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:

Gen 3:5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

God had told Adam and Eve that if they ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they would die. The serpent told them they would not die, but instead they would become wise. He also told them that if they ate of the fruit, they would become as God, knowing the difference between good and evil. That was a correct statement. He used some truth in order to entice them to believe a lie.

Gen 3:6 And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

When Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, it changed man forever. Their eyes were opened. They could now recognize the difference between good and evil. We know this to be true because they realized they were naked and made clothes to cover themselves.

Gen 3:7 And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

This is also stated by God in Gen 3:22,

Gen 3:22 And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: ..."

Every person of accountable mind born on the face of the earth from that time forward has had the knowledge of good and evil implanted within their heart and mind by God. God has given man the ability to discern between good and evil... right and wrong. He expects man to follow good and do

what is right. We have no defined name for that law, so for our purposes we will simply refer to it as the Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Why do we have feelings such as embarrassment, guilt or shame? It is because Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. They were not ashamed of their nakedness before they ate of the forbidden fruit.

Gen 2:25 And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

However, after they ate of the fruit, they were ashamed because of their nakedness. Their eyes had been opened. They now understood the difference between good and evil.

Gen 3:7 And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

Gen 3:8 And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.

They were then afraid of the presence of God.

Gen 3:10 And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.

Gen 3:11 And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?

God questioned them about eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil because they now recognized they were naked. From that point forward, every accountable person born on this earth has had the knowledge of good and evil instilled in them by God. God expects man to follow the moral values that he has implanted in the mind of everyone. Adam and Eve knew they had disobeyed God and knew they had done wrong. The Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil had been instilled in their minds and hearts. People in this world today know the difference between good and evil; however, as was the case with many in the Bible, many people today choose to do evil.

Let's look once again at the three illustrations given above of people being destroyed or told to repent or they would be destroyed.

Those people who lived prior to the flood had the knowledge of good and evil ingrained in their minds. They all chose to live according to evil rather than good, except for Noah and his family. God was justified in destroying all of those people. They had broken the Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

The people who lived in Sodom and Gomorrah knew the difference between good and evil. They chose evil and God destroyed them.

During the time of Jonah, the people living in Nineveh knew the difference between right and wrong. They chose to do evil. God gave them an opportunity to repent of their evil ways by sending Jonah to warn them. They repented of their evil and God spared them. Please read again Romans 2:14-15.

Rom 2:14 For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:

Rom 2:15 Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;

The Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil was written in the mind and heart of the Gentiles by God. They knew the difference between right and wrong. God had instilled it in their minds, and he has instilled this law in mind and heart of every accountable person who has ever lived, or will live on this earth.

People today have the Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil instilled within their minds and hearts. They know the difference between good and evil. Like many of the people in Old Testament times, many today choose to follow evil. They seek to justify their evil ways and entice others to follow. They simply do not want to do right. They choose not to believe in God because that would require them to follow good instead of practicing evil. Yet, hopefully, there are still many others who realize they are doing wrong and need the salvation of Jesus Christ. That is why Jesus came to earth and died. He made a way for those people to escape the condemnation of God by believing in Jesus, being baptized into his death and following the commands he has given to his people to follow. He provided a way for all men to be saved. That is the good news... the gospel.

Today, it is not difficult to determine what the Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil is. It is defined in several places in the New Testament for God's people. As an example, please read Gal 5:19-21.

Gal 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,

Gal 5:20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,

Gal 5:21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

This passage, along with others, explain what God has always expected of man. Every accountable person since the Garden of Eden has known and understood that these things are contrary to the will of God.

Please read John 3:17-18.

Joh 3:17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

Joh 3:18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

All people outside the church are condemned today because they have broken the Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil. They have not believed in the name of Jesus Christ and taken advantage of the forgiveness Jesus provides. Jesus did not come to condemn the world as in the days of Noah. He came that the world might be saved. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Everyone has committed evil in God's sight. God sent his Son to provide forgiveness to anyone who will believe on him and follow his ways. Through our baptism, we leave a world of sin and enter his church. That

places us in a relationship with God where he will continue to forgive our sins as long as we are attempting to follow his ways. Man knows the difference between good and evil... right and wrong. It was planted in him in the Garden of Eden. As God's people, let us discern the difference between good and evil and follow good all the days of our lives.

This understanding of the Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil also helps us understand some passages we may have not thoroughly understood. For example: We have heard questioned many times about the fate of those who may have died between the crucifixion of Jesus and the day of Pentecost. The thought being: The Law of Moses ended at the cross according to Col. 2:14, but the gospel was not given until 50 days later at Pentecost.

Col 2:14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;

So, during those 50 days, what law were those Jews under who had served God during the time of the Law of Moses? They were not without law. A time has never existed when man was without law. They were under the Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil, as was every other person living at that time. They were simply awaiting the arrival of the gospel of Christ that was given on Pentecost, which would save all men, not just the Jews. I might also emphasize that many at that time were already followers of Jesus because of the teachings of John the Baptist, the Apostles, and Jesus himself. But, our point here is that man has always been under Law.

We must understand that the Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil was implanted in the mind of man in the Garden of Eden. It was the only law of God until the time of Moses when God gave the Ten Commandments to the people of Israel. However, the Law of Moses was only for the nation of Israel, therefore the Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil continued to be the law for all people other than Israel. Now, the Law of Moses did not relieve the Israelites of their obligation to follow the Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Law of Moses emphasized the Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Ten Commandments are built on the knowledge of good and evil.

Now, let's take a look at what happened when Christ came to earth. He did away with the Law of Moses. He did not do away with the Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil. It is still instilled in the minds of people today. That helps us understand exactly what the gospel is and why Jesus died in order to bring it into existence. According to Rom. 3:23, "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Since sin is the transgression of law, all have broken a law established by God. All have broken the Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil. No man has ever lived a perfect life in the sight of God, except Jesus Christ. That is why Jesus stated in Jno 3:18,

"He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

They are condemned, or judged (as in other translations), because they have broken the Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil. They remain in that state because they have not believed in the name of the Son of God. The purpose of the gospel is to provide man with a way of salvation from the sins he has committed under the Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

This is why there are "good" people in this world today that are not saved in the sight of God. Not even a good person can live totally righteous in the sight of God. He will sin (all have sinned). The only way anyone can be saved and live eternally in heaven is by obedience to the gospel of Christ. That puts man under the law of the gospel of Christ. The gospel obviously contains the moral laws of good as contained in the Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil, but it also contains instructions for those who have chosen to follow Jesus Christ. Just as the Law of Moses was a separate law for God's people during the Mosaic Age, the gospel is a separate law for those who have chosen to follow Christ in the Christian Dispensation. The difference being, the Law of Moses was for only one nation (Israel), however the gospel is for all people. It is open to acceptance for anyone on this earth who chooses to follow Christ and obey his commands for entrance. Unlike the Law of Moses, which did not provide for immediate forgiveness of sins (that came at the cross), the gospel was given specifically as a way for man to obtain forgiveness of his sins and live in a close relationship with God all his life.

This understanding of the Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil also helps us understand another situation in the Bible with which we sometime have questions. That is the account of Cornelius in Acts chapter Ten. Here we find the gift of the Holy Ghost being poured out upon a group of Gentiles that heard the gospel proclaimed by Peter. Cornelius had been praying to God.

Act 10:30 And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing,
Act 10:31 And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.

God heard the prayer of a Gentile who was not a Christian. It is also stated that his alms or offerings were remembered by God. We often ask the question: Why did God hear the prayer of someone who was not a Christian when I Pet 3:12 states the following?

1Pe 3:12 For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

Once again we must understand the situation. The gospel was first preached to the Jews. Read Rom 1:16.

Rom 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

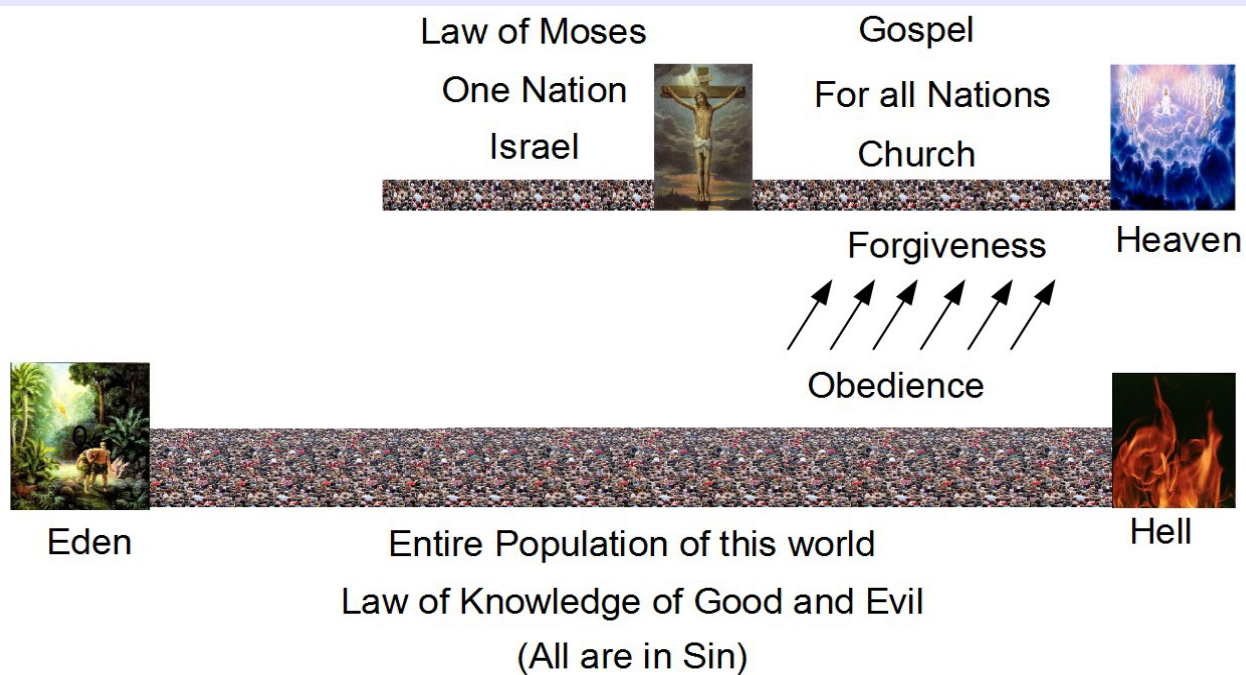
The events surrounding the conversion of Cornelius was the marking point of the gospel being preached to the Gentiles. That means that up until that point in time, Cornelius was still living under the Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The gospel had not been made accessible to the Gentile world. It had only been preached to the Jews. Since Cornelius was living under the Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil, he was in the same situation with God as was Noah and Abraham. Noah was a good man in an evil world and he found grace in the sight of God. Does that mean that Noah had not sinned. Absolutely not. However, he was a good man and attempting to follow God. Because of this, he found grace in the sight of God. When Abraham was called by God to be the father of a great nation, he was subject to the Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Was he a perfect man? Again, he was not; yet, he was also attempting to follow God to the best of his ability. The same is true with Cornelius. He was a good man living under the Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil. God chose him for a special purpose

just as he had chosen Noah and Abraham for special purposes. That is why his prayers were heard by God and his alms came into remembrance. There is no need for another event such as took place with Cornelius. The mission of including Gentiles in the gospel has been accomplished.

After the time of Cornelius, the gospel was available to everyone on this earth. All men can now have forgiveness of sins committed under the Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil by being obedient to the gospel of Christ. Emphatically, obedience to the gospel is now the only way man can have a relationship with God.

The laws that God has given man can somewhat be illustrated by the drawing below.

The Laws of God



We must understand that God has always held man accountable for his deeds. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, that changed mankind forever. All people from that time forward have known the difference between good and evil... right and wrong, and God has demanded that we do good. Those who do evil have and will be punished. In order to bring Jesus into this world, God gave the Law of Moses specifically to the nation of Israel. All people were still accountable to the law of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Ten Commandments were based upon that law. When Christ came to this earth, he fulfilled the Law of Moses and brought it to an end. He established his own law through the gospel for everyone who would follow him by repenting of their sins committed under the Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil. When they repent of those sins and come into the church by being obedient to the gospel, they are then under the Law of Christ. Following that law will provide us an eternity in heaven with God. All others in this world are still under the Law of Knowledge of Good and Evil. They cannot live perfectly and, therefore, will be condemned. Because of this, it is imperative that we take the gospel message to every person living on the face of this earth. May God bless your Bible studies.

Books by Lonnie Woodruff

Revelation For Christians Today

We must begin to realize that Revelation is a prophecy about the church. It is not about the destruction of Jerusalem or Rome. The Old Testament prophets prophesied about events leading up to and including the first coming of Christ. Revelation is a prophecy about the Christian dispensation and the second coming of Jesus. The visions focus on the church, and the messages assist Christians in remaining faithful during their lives on this earth. This book has been used in many congregations of the Lord's church in the United States and around the world. Workbooks for Bible classes are also available.

Eden To Eden

Beginning with the Garden of Eden, follow the path designed by God to bring His people back into a close relationship with him in the church, which is our spiritual Garden of Eden. It will soon become clear that many literal events in the lives of the Israelites were patterns that Christians must follow today. *Eden To Eden* will heighten one's overall understanding and appreciation for the church. This book, along with the accompanying workbook, is an excellent study for adult as well as teenage Bible classes.

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