God’s Unchanging Truth vs. Human Traditions: Biblical Identities and Historical Developments

Introduction

Within the broad tapestry of biblical history and Christian thought, few themes resonate more powerfully than the contrast between God’s unchanging nature and humanity’s shifting interpretations of divine revelation. From the earliest scriptures through the rise of Rabbinic Judaism, from the ministries of Jesus and the apostles to the expansive world of modern Christian denominations, believers have struggled to embody truth in changing contexts. This essay explores several key facets of that ongoing tension.

First, it examines the **ancient Ituraeans**, a people often linked to Ishmael’s descendants in Genesis, spotlighting how not all who lived near Judea could claim genealogical ties to Jacob (Israel). Next, it surveys the **evolution of terms** such as *Jew, Judean, Judahite,* and *Israelite*—words that, while sharing common roots in Hebrew Scripture, took on layers of meaning over centuries. Building on this linguistic and ethnic framework, the discussion turns to **God’s immutability**—as declared in **Malachi 3:6** and **Hebrews 13:8**—and shows how human traditions, both Jewish and Christian, have developed, sometimes away from the pure teaching of Scripture. The lineage of **Mary and Joseph** offers a vivid biblical example of how “Israelite” identity was never purely ethnic, yet still anchored in covenantal promises. Finally, the essay addresses **the flow of Christian history** from the first century to the present, highlighting how new doctrines and denominational

expressions—such as Dispensationalism—have arisen over time, revealing both the adaptability of religious communities and the risk of deviating from the apostolic foundation.

Though centuries of reinterpretation and reformation have shaped today's varied religious landscape, one truth remains constant: **"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever"** (Isaiah 40:8, KJV). Where human traditions fail, Scripture endures, calling each generation back to the unchanging God whose promises and purposes know no variation. By understanding how past communities have grappled with these realities, we better grasp the urgency of discerning what is truly **"the faith which was once delivered unto the saints"** (Jude 1:3, KJV) and endeavoring to keep our interpretations aligned with God's immutable Word.

1. The Ituraeans in the Biblical Era – Identity and Origins

The Ituraeans were an ancient people mentioned during the late BC to early AD period, known to inhabit **Ituraea**, a region north of Galilee (in what is now southern Lebanon and northern Israel) during Hellenistic and Roman times. Historical sources suggest the Ituraeans were a **semi-nomadic tribe** of Arab or Aramaean origin who settled in the mountains near Mount Lebanon and the Beqaa Valley. Many scholars connect the name "Ituraean" with *Jetur*, one of the sons of Ishmael listed in **Genesis 25:15**. In fact, the descendants of Ishmael's son Jetur are believed to have formed a tribe that later came to be known as the Ituraeans. This implies the Ituraeans were **Ishmaelites** by lineage – meaning they traced their ancestry to Abraham through Ishmael, not through Isaac and Jacob (Israel).

The Bible contains a few indirect references to these people. **1 Chronicles 5:19** notes that the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh fought against the "Hagarites" (descendants of Hagar,

Ishmael's mother), including a tribe named *Jetur*. This hints that Jetur's descendants were known and, in later periods, likely identified with the Ituraeans. By the 1st century BC/AD, Ituraea was a defined district: the Gospel of Luke mentions **Philip the Tetrarch** ruling "**Ituraea** and Trachonitis" (Luke 3:1, KJV). Culturally and ethnically, the Ituraeans were distinct from the Israelites. They were regarded as **Arabs dwelling on the frontiers of Israel** and famed as archers and mercenaries in Roman service. While they lived near Jewish territories, their **ethnic roots were with Ishmael**, meaning they were **kinsmen to Israel only in the broader sense** of being Abraham's offspring. They were not Israelites (descendants of Jacob); rather, they were Abrahamic cousins through Ishmael. Thus, any claim that Ituraeans were "ethnically Israelite" would be inaccurate – they were an **adjacent people who possibly interacted and even intermixed with Jews**, but by origin they stemmed from Ishmael's line (cf. Genesis 25:15). This distinction illustrates how diverse peoples of the biblical era traced lineage to Abraham but split into different branches, with Israel (Jacob's line) being just one branch among the Abrahamic family.

2. Evolving Terminology: Judahite, Judean, Jew, and Israelite

Understanding terms like *Jew*, *Judean*, and *Israelite* requires a look at linguistic history and context. In the Hebrew Bible, the word for *Jew* is *Yehudi* (□□□□□□□□), literally meaning "**of Judah**." Originally, **Yehudi** referred specifically to a member of the tribe of **Judah** or the southern Kingdom of Judah. After the northern Kingdom of Israel (comprising ten tribes) fell to Assyria in 722 B.C., the identity of the remaining Israelites was largely tied to Judah. Thus, *Yehudi* evolved to denote anyone from the surviving southern kingdom (which included people from the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, Levi, and others who had joined). By the time of the Babylonian exile and

return (6th–5th centuries BC), *Yehudim* (Jews) became a broad term for the people of Israel who returned to rebuild Judah and Jerusalem, regardless of their specific tribal ancestry (as evidenced by Mordecai being called a "Jew" in Esther 2:5–6 even though he was from Benjamin).

In Greek (during the Second Temple and New Testament period), *Yehudi* was rendered as **Ioudaios** (Ἰουδαῖος). This Greek term is the source of the English words **Judean** and **Jew**. Originally, **Ioudaios** meant **"Judean," i.e. an inhabitant of Judea** or someone belonging to the Jewish people/nation. The English word **"Jew"** itself comes from the Old French *giu*, from Latin *Judaeus*, from Greek *Ioudaios*, ultimately from Hebrew *Yehudi*. Over time, **"Jew"** came to signify both the ethnic identity (**descendants of the people of Israel**) and the religious identity (**adherents of Judaism**). By the first century AD, being a *Judean* or *Jew* was **not purely a matter of genealogy** – it could also describe a person's religious affiliation or cultural identification with the Jewish community. For example, **Esther 8:17** records that many people of Persia **"became Jews"** (Hebrew: *mityahadim*) during Esther's time, meaning they adopted the Jewish faith and identity. These **converts would not be Israelites by blood**, but they were **called Jews** because they joined the people of Judah in faith and practice.

Israelite, on the other hand, refers to any descendant of **Jacob (Israel)**, and in a biblical context it often means a member of the **ancient people of Israel** in general. All Israelites were descendants of Jacob, whose twelve sons formed the tribes of Israel. However, after the Assyrian exile of the northern tribes, **the term "Jew" (from Judah) effectively became synonymous with "Israelite" for the remaining people**, since the surviving remnant was largely from Judah's kingdom. In the New Testament, the term *Israelites* is still used (e.g. Romans 9:4) to emphasize ethnic lineage from Jacob, while ***Jews* (Judeans)** is used frequently in the Gospels and Acts **to denote**

the people living in Judea or practicing Judaism.

It's important to note the **distinction between ethnic and religious identity** in the first century. **Not everyone called a "Judean" (Jew)** in that era was a blood descendant of Jacob. The case of the **Idumeans (Edomites)** illustrates this. Idumeans were descendants of Esau (Jacob's twin brother). In the second century BC, **John Hyrcanus**, a Jewish Hasmonean ruler, conquered Idumea and **forcibly converted the Idumeans to Judaism**. As a result, Idumeans like **Herod the Great** (who ruled Judea under the Romans) were **considered "Jews" or Judeans in the cultural-religious sense, though ethnically they were Edomites**. The **Jewish Virtual Library** notes, "The Edomites were later **forcibly converted** into Judaism by John Hyrcanus, and then became an active part of the Jewish people. Famous Edomites include Herod". This explains why the New Testament can refer to Herod – an Idumean by blood – as the "King of the Jews" (Matthew 2:1). Similarly, other groups (like the **Ituraeans** mentioned earlier, or various proselytes from around the Greco-Roman world) could be absorbed into the Judean identity through conversion or assimilation.

To summarize, **"Judahite"** typically **means a member of the tribe or kingdom of Judah** (this term is more used by modern scholars for clarity), **"Judean"** means **an inhabitant of Judea** or a member of the Jewish people (particularly in historical contexts), **"Jew"** is the English term for Yehudi/Ioudaios, used broadly for the people and religion descending from the Israelites, and **"Israelite"** means a descendant of Israel/Jacob (especially used for the ancient biblical nation). **By the first century**, these terms had broadened: ***Jew/Judean* had both ethnic and religious connotations**, and one could be called a **Jew by religion even if not an Israelite by blood**. This background helps us avoid an overly simplistic linking of terms to genealogy: in Jesus' time, being a "Jew" was as much about faith and community as birth, which is why a Gentile convert could be considered fully Jewish, and a person of

Israelite ancestry who adopted another religion might no longer be counted among the Jews.

3. God's Unchanging Nature vs. Human Traditions

One of the central teachings of the Bible is that **God's character and His Word do not change**, even though human interpretations and religious traditions often do. **Malachi 3:6** declares, **"For I am the LORD, I change not"** (KJV). In the New Testament, **Hebrews 13:8** affirms, **"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever."** This immutability of God means that His truth and moral standards remain constant. In contrast, the **religious practices and doctrines developed by humans have frequently shifted or deviated over time**, sometimes straying far from God's original instructions. The Bible provides clear examples of this tension between **divine command** and **man-made tradition**.

During Jesus' earthly ministry, He confronted the religious leaders of His day (particularly the Pharisees and scribes) over their **traditions** which had obscured or even contradicted God's commandments. In **Mark 7:6–13**, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees by quoting Isaiah: ***"This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men"*** (Mark 7:6–7, KJV). He pointed out that they ***"lay aside the commandment of God"*** in order to hold to their own customs (Mark 7:8). A specific example Jesus gave was the tradition of *Corban* – where someone would dedicate money to the temple as *"Corban"* (meaning an offering to God) to avoid using it to support their parents. By promoting this practice, the Pharisees allowed people to **bypass the commandment to *"honor thy father and mother"***. Jesus said, ***"Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition"*** (Mark 7:9, KJV), and ***"making the word of God of none effect through***

your tradition" (Mark 7:13, KJV). In other words, human religious tradition had **drifted from the letter and spirit of God's law**, effectively nullifying God's intent.

This kind of deviation wasn't unique to Jesus' time. Throughout the Old Testament, Israel had a tendency to fall into man-made religion (for instance, building high places, adopting Canaanite rituals, or in one case worshiping a bronze serpent relic – **2 Kings 18:4** – after God's purpose for it was long past). Each time, God called them back to the pure worship He originally instructed. **Isaiah 29:13**, which Jesus quoted, shows God's disapproval of people honoring Him outwardly while following man-taught rules in place of His commands.

In the **Christian context** as well, the pattern continued. The New Testament apostles themselves warned of people introducing **teachings or practices not grounded in God's Word**. The Apostle Paul cautioned believers ***"not [to] be spoiled through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ"*** (Colossians 2:8, KJV). Later in church history, as we will discuss, various traditions developed (some helpful, some not) which were not part of the original apostolic teachings. The key point is that **God's revealed truth in Scripture remains the plumb line** – ***"thy word is truth"*** (John 17:17) – whereas human interpretations, rituals, and traditions are fallible and changeable.

God's unchanging nature means His promises and His character stay constant. For example, His attributes of justice, mercy, and holiness are the same in every generation. However, humans, even with good intentions, have often **added layers of ritual or interpretation that drift over time**. Jesus recognized legitimate tradition (He observed the Jewish law and attended synagogue, for instance), but He sharply distinguished between **God's commandments** and **human traditions**, giving priority to the former. As followers of God, **we are**

admonished to continually compare our beliefs and practices to the unchanging Word of God. Where we find that **tradition conflicts with Scripture**, Scripture must win out. ***"We ought to obey God rather than men"*** (Acts 5:29) is a principle that underscores this priority. Thus, while **God never changes**, our understanding must always be reformed to align with His Word, and we must be willing to let go of religious traditions that are revealed to be inconsistent with God's unchanging truth.

4. The Lineage of Mary and Joseph – Jesus' Israelite Bloodline (with Gentile Ancestry)

The **genealogies of Jesus** given in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 show that Jesus was born into the line of **Israel (Jacob)** through the house of **David**. Though Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary (so having no human father in the biological sense), both Mary and Joseph hailed from families descended from Jacob. Joseph's genealogy in **Matthew 1:1–16** traces Jesus' legal right to the throne of David, beginning from Abraham and through David's royal line (via Solomon) down to Joseph. Mary's lineage is commonly understood from **Luke 3:23–38**, which also goes back to David (via David's son Nathan) and even all the way to Adam. These records establish that Jesus of Nazareth was an **Israelite by birth**, a son of David and son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1), fulfilling the prophecies that Messiah would come from those lineages.

However, the question of a "pure Israelite bloodline" is intriguing, because **Jesus' ancestry, as recorded in Scripture, includes several Gentiles**. This was by God's design. The Gospel of Matthew, in particular, emphasizes this by mentioning four women (aside from Mary) in Jesus' genealogy, each of whom has a notable story – and at least two of whom were Gentiles. **Matthew 1:3–6** lists: **Tamar**, **Rahab**, **Ruth**, and "**her that had been the wife of Uriah**" (Bathsheba). **Ruth** was a

Moabite woman, **Rahab** was a Canaanite from Jericho, Tamar was likely an Aramean, and Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah the Hittite (and possibly had a Hittite or Gilonite background). These women's presence in the lineage shows that **Gentile blood was grafted into the Messianic line**. Far from being a flaw, this mix of Israelite and Gentile ancestry highlights a theological point: **God's plan of salvation included the Gentiles from the beginning**.

The story of **Ruth** – depicted above with Ruth gleaning in the fields of Boaz – is a prime example of a righteous Gentile being brought into the fold of Israel. Ruth was a Moabitess who married into an Israelite family. After she was widowed, she clung to her Israelite mother-in-law Naomi, declaring, ***"Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God"*** (Ruth 1:16, KJV). Ruth's faith and loyalty led her to become the great-grandmother of King David. In fact, **"Ruth was a Moabite woman and great-grandmother of David, and therefore an ancestress of Christ"**. Likewise, Rahab from Jericho declared faith in Israel's God (Joshua 2:11) and joined Israel, and she became the great-great-grandmother of King David (Matthew 1:5). These instances demonstrate that **being part of "Israel" was not strictly a matter of blood purity**, but of **covenant and faith**. Those Gentiles who joined themselves to Israel (like Ruth and Rahab) were accepted and even woven into the Messiah's lineage.

What about Mary and Joseph themselves? Both were Judeans of the first century, which means they were Jews ethnically and religiously. Mary was a young Jewish woman, addressed by the angel Gabriel as one who found favor with God (Luke 1:28). While the New Testament does not explicitly detail Mary's lineage apart from Luke's genealogy, early Christian tradition and many scholars understand Luke's genealogy to be Mary's family line, given that it differs from Joseph's and perhaps names Mary's father as Heli (Luke 3:23). Joseph's genealogy (Matthew 1) shows his father was named **Jacob** (not to be

confused with the patriarch Jacob/Israel). Both genealogies converge at **King David**, indicating Jesus is biologically (through Mary) and legally (through Joseph's lineage) a descendant of David. Thus, Jesus fulfills the prophecies of being a **"son of David"** and a true Israelite. The lineage, however, is **far from "pure" in the sense of only Israelite blood** – it intentionally included redeemed Gentiles. This diversity in Jesus' bloodline underscores that **God's unchanging promise to Abraham** was, ***"In thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed"*** (Genesis 22:18). Jesus, the seed of Abraham and of David, carries in His lineage a microcosm of those "all nations," prefiguring the gospel going out to all peoples.

It's also worth noting that any notion of ethnic "purity" had been rendered moot by history: over centuries, **the tribes of Israel had intermingled to a degree**. After the Babylonian exile, those who returned were collectively known as Jews (*Judeans*), and they likely had ancestry from multiple tribes (for example, Anna in Luke 2:36 is from the tribe of Asher, living in Judah). The emphasis in Scripture is not on ethnic purity but on **covenantal faithfulness**. Mary and Joseph were both faithful Jews, **"of the house and lineage of David"** (Luke 2:4), living in obedience to God's law. Jesus was born into this humble, devout Jewish family – **truly Israelite in identity** – yet His very genealogy highlights God's grace in incorporating Gentiles into His plan. In summary, Jesus is indeed an Israelite by blood (through Mary from Jacob's line), but His ancestry, like that of many Israelites, included Gentile heritage. This fulfilled God's purpose of uniting Jew and Gentile in blessing, and it reinforced that **the Messiah would be a Savior for *all* people, both Israel and the nations**.

5. Changing Christian

Interpretations and Denominations – 1st Century to Today

From the first century apostolic church to the multitude of Christian denominations today, there has been a great deal of change in **interpretations, traditions, and doctrinal emphases** – even though God's truth itself has not changed. The Apostolic Age (the time of Jesus and the apostles) presented **one faith** delivered to the saints (Ephesians 4:4–5, Jude 1:3). The early Christians held to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, focusing on core doctrines such as the death and resurrection of Christ, salvation by faith, holy living, and the expectation of Christ's return. Over time, as Christianity spread and entered different cultures and eras, various **interpretations and traditions** developed. Some of these were formalized in church councils; others arose from influential teachers or movements. The result has been the emergence of distinct **denominational families** (e.g. Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, various Protestant traditions, etc.), each with certain doctrinal nuances or practices. It's crucial to recognize that many of these later developments are **human responses to understanding scripture**, and sometimes they **diverge from or even contradict the simplicity of apostolic teaching**.

In the first few centuries, for instance, the church grappled with defining complex doctrines like the Trinity and Christ's divine/human nature – important clarifications that were hammered out in councils (Nicea 325 AD, Chalcedon 451 AD, etc.). Later, in the **medieval period**, many **traditions** took root (the sacramental system, veneration of saints, development of a clerical hierarchy, etc.). By the late Middle Ages, some practices had strayed from biblical foundations, prompting the **Protestant Reformation** in the 16th century. Reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin sought to **return to Scripture** ("*Sola Scriptura*") as the primary authority,

correcting what they saw as accretions of human tradition (for example, the selling of indulgences, or doctrines like purgatory that lacked clear biblical support). The Reformation itself led to multiple new denominations, as different groups of Reformers had varying interpretations on matters such as baptism, the Lord's Supper, church governance, and more.

Fast forward to more recent times, and we see the rise of modern doctrinal systems such as **Dispensationalism** and various **eschatological (end-times) theories** that were unknown in the early church. **Dispensationalism**, for example, is a framework for interpreting the Bible that divides history into distinct periods or "dispensations" in which God relates to humanity in different ways. This theology also typically draws a sharp distinction between God's plans for **Israel** and for the **Church**, and it often includes a specific end-times scenario involving a secret rapture of the church before a tribulation period. Dispensationalism in its classic form **did not exist in the teachings of the early church**; it was developed in the 19th century. It was **"systematized and promoted by John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren in the mid-19th century"**, and later popularized through the Scofield Reference Bible and other proponents. The idea of a pre-tribulational rapture (where Christ snatches away the church before a final period of tribulation) was a novel interpretation that diverged from the historic Christian expectation of a single, visible Second Coming of Christ. Today, some churches hold Dispensationalist views, while others reject them in favor of more traditional eschatology – illustrating how Christians differ in interpreting prophecy.

Various **eschatological teachings** have emerged or evolved: premillennialism (Jesus returns before a literal thousand-year reign), postmillennialism (Jesus returns after a golden age), amillennialism (the "thousand years" of Revelation 20 understood symbolically as the present church age), as well as preterism (many end-times prophecies were fulfilled in the

first century), futurism (most are yet future), etc. The **early apostolic church** was generally **premillennial** in outlook (expecting Christ to return and then reign), but did not speculate about timelines in the detailed way some modern groups do. Over centuries, views shifted – for instance, **St. Augustine** in the 5th century advocated amillennialism, which became the dominant view through the Middle Ages. In the last few hundred years, new interpretations like Dispensational premillennialism (with the rapture concept) came into play. This shows a development of doctrine that often goes beyond what the apostolic church taught explicitly.

Moreover, entirely new movements and denominations have formed, each sometimes adding unique doctrinal emphases: e.g., Seventh-day Adventists (with a focus on Sabbath observance and specific end-time prophecy interpretations), Pentecostals (emphasizing gifts of the Spirit like speaking in tongues, which was present in the first century but had been downplayed for ages), Jehovah's Witnesses and Latter-day Saints (which introduced fundamentally different doctrines, beyond orthodox Christianity), and many others. Even within mainstream Christian orthodoxy, we have seen swings in doctrinal focus – from the rise of **Calvinism vs. Arminianism** debates on salvation, to the Holiness movement, to the recent prosperity gospel trends, etc. Each of these can be seen as a human attempt to **understand or apply Scripture**, sometimes laudable and sometimes questionable.

What is vital for believers is to discern between **God's unchanging truth and human innovation**. The core truths – the deity of Christ, the gospel of salvation, the call to holiness and love – have never changed in Scripture. But the layers of tradition or doctrinal frameworks built around them can and have changed dramatically. Denominations often have differing **traditions** (for example, forms of worship, church governance, or additional teachings). Such traditions in themselves may not be wrong – they can provide structure and identity – but

they become a problem if they **“drift away” from biblical truth or obscure it. Jesus’ warning to the Pharisees about elevating traditions above God’s word serves as a perpetual caution to the Church as well. We must continually examine our doctrines and practices in light of the Bible. If a teaching cannot be solidly supported by Scripture or clearly conflicts with it, it should be reformed or set aside, no matter how venerable it may be.

In summary, **Christianity’s external expressions and interpretative frameworks have changed over time** – from a small Jewish sect in the 1st century with a simple gospel, to an imperial state religion with elaborate councils and creeds, to a fragmented landscape of denominations and theologoumena (theological opinions) today. Yet through all this, **God and His Word have remained the same.** Human understanding may deepen or, at times, err and require correction, but ***“the foundation of God standeth sure”*** (2 Timothy 2:19). Our task is to adhere to that foundation. As Jesus taught, a wise builder builds on the rock of His words (Matthew 7:24–25). No matter how winds of doctrine or tradition blow through the centuries, the **unchanging truth of God**—grounded in the person of Christ and the Holy Scriptures—provides the measure against which all human religious ideas must be tested. When we do so humbly, we can appreciate the rich heritage of Christian history and tradition, yet hold fast to what is essential and true, just as God, who cannot lie or change, has given it to us.

Conclusion: Throughout this exploration, a common theme has emerged: **God is unchanging, but people and their religious systems are not.** The Ituraeans and other groups remind us that various peoples intersected with Israel’s story, but belonging to God’s people was always about more than fleshly lineage – it was about God’s promise and calling. The terms *Jew* and *Israelite* evolved in meaning, showing the difference between mere ethnicity and covenant identity. Jesus Himself, in His lineage, embodied the joining of Jew and Gentile, yet He was

the unerring fulfillment of God's promise to Israel. In His ministry, Jesus confronted how far human tradition had drifted from God's intent, and He called people back to the unchanging truth of God's Word. Over the two millennia since, the outward face of Christianity has continued to change in many ways, producing many denominations and doctrines. But **the core message – God's Word – remains the same**. As students and teachers of the Bible, we must emphasize that ***"the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever"*** (Isaiah 40:8, KJV). Our ultimate allegiance is not to any mutable tradition of man, but to the immutable God and His eternal Word. By recognizing this, we can navigate historical and doctrinal complexities while holding fast to the faith once delivered to the saints, ever reforming our understanding to better conform to God's unchanging truth.

References:

- Holy Bible, King James Version (KJV) – for all biblical quotes and references.
- Historical and scholarly references: Ituraean origins and Ishmaelite connection bibleatlas.org en.wikipedia.org; linguistic notes on "Jew"/"Judean" en.wikipedia.org en.wikipedia.org and examples of conversion to Judaism en.wikipedia.org; account of Idumean conversion by John Hyrcanus jewishvirtuallibrary.org; Ruth's identity as a Moabite ancestress of Christ commons.wikimedia.org; emergence of Dispensationalism in the 19th century en.wikipedia.org. These sources support and elucidate the points made, demonstrating the interplay of biblical text with historical understanding.