



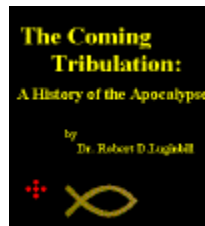
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The Coming Tribulation:
A History of the Apocalypse

Part 1

Introduction: Revelation 1:1-20

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I. Definition and Overview of the Tribulation

Secular history is, for obvious reasons, generally written about the past. As believers in Jesus Christ, however, we are blessed to have the future history of the earth's final years revealed to us through a select number of God's prophets who have recorded it in the holy scriptures for all time. It will be the purpose of this seven-part study to explicate what the Bible has to say about the final chapter of human history, an aim of no small consequence, for we live on the threshold of that apocalyptic time, and it behooves all who call Jesus Christ their Lord and Master to be prepared for His imminent return, as well as for the period of severe testing which will precede it.

And the voice which I heard from heaven was speaking to me again and saying, "Go and take the scroll which has been opened and is in the hand of the angel who has taken his stand on the sea and on the land." So I went over to the angel, telling him to give me the scroll. And he said to me, "Take it and eat it, and it will make your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey." So I took the scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was like sweet honey in my mouth, but my stomach was filled [past capacity].

Revelation 10:8-10

The scroll, as we shall see in due course, is the future history of that approaching time, and the caveat implied in this very tangible experience given to the apostle John is one that should be taken to heart and kept firmly fixed in mind: studying the events of the end times is both enjoyable and profitable, but for those to whom it falls to live through them personally, the experience will be very bitter. It would be difficult to emphasize

this point too strongly. When we read of any other period in human history, the experience can be both useful and pleasurable, but is necessarily concerned with the past. God's history of the last days is both enjoyable and spiritually edifying for us to study here and now, but, unlike any other history, entails the very real possibility, especially as those final days draw ever nearer, that we shall experience first-hand the very things we study, namely, the Great Tribulation, the most terrible period earth will ever endure. And so it is critical for all discerning Christians who contemplate these matters to remember that these things are real, that the pain and suffering, the horrendous apocalyptic events, the privation, persecution, and martyrdom, are not past events from which we have been separated by the passage of time, but imminently future occurrences, that may very well fall upon us in the full grim reality of bitter experience. If this be our lot, we shall at the end, when all has been said and done, be able to confirm first hand what John was told, that the final chapter of human history was sweet to learn about, but terribly bitter to experience in the flesh.

Our preceding five part series, The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation, is, as the name implies, an important prerequisite to the study of the end times which we are undertaking here. It is assumed that the reader has already digested the information contained therein, for much of what we are about to cover here (and in the six following parts) will not otherwise be completely coherent. For the events which the Tribulation will set in train, through and including the culmination of human history and the beginning of eternity, are all part of God's master plan for dealing with our adversary the devil, restoring the universe to a completely holy and righteous state, and replacing all that was lost through creature rebellion with something more wonderful than human hearts could ever hope or imagine. But without the extensive context of Satan's Rebellion (part 1), God's resultant judgment on the universe (part 2), the corruption and fall of Man, God's surprise replacement for the devil and his angels (part 3), the worldwide system Satan has put in place to rule the earth wrested from mankind's control (part 4), and God's seven millennial day plan – history as constructed and conducted by God – designed to bring about perfect judgment, restoration and replacement (part 5), the events of eschatology (i.e., the biblical study of "last things") can easily be misunderstood.

1. Scope and Methodology: The purpose of this seven-part series is to relate the last chapter of human history as the Bible records it. The key event of history's culmination and termination, the great watershed in the future history of the earth, is, from the divine perspective, the return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (i.e., His 2nd Advent). For Jesus Christ is the true focus of history, and from the point of His return onward, history's course will be under God's direct, overt control, with the Son of God Himself personally ruling over the earth until the day when history itself, along with death, is finally swallowed up for all time (Is.25:7-8; 1Cor.15:26; 15:54-55), and our God inaugurates the commencement of eternity with His creation of the New Heavens and New Earth. The return of Christ is thus the "blessed hope" toward which all we who believe in Him and wait for Him should ever direct our gaze (Tit.2:13), eagerly awaiting it (2Pet.3:11-12), just as we would the birth of a child (Jn.16:21-24), or the dawning of a new day (to which the 2nd Advent of the true "Light of the world" is often compared in

scripture: e.g., Is.60:1; Mal.4:2; Lk.1:78; Rom.13:11-14; 1Thes.5:1-10; 2Pet.1:19-20; 1Jn.2:8).

And just as the birth of a new child is preceded by intense pain, so it will be at the end of the present age when our victorious Lord returns and transforms our sorrow into joy (cf. Is.25:8; Rev.7:16-17; 21:4):

When a woman gives birth, she is in pain, for her time has come. But when she brings forth her child, she no longer remembers her *tribulation* (Greek: θλίψις, *thlipsis*) on account of her joy, for a [new] person has been born into the world.

John 16:21

In this world you do have *tribulation* (Greek: θλίψις, *thlipsis*). But be courageous. I have overcome the world.

John 16:33

And just as dawn is preceded by the darkest part of the night, so it will be at the end of the present age when our victorious Lord returns and turns our darkness into light (cf. Num.24:17; Is.9:2; 60:1; 60:19; Matt.2:2; 2:9-10; Jn.1:4-5; 8:12; 2Pet.1:19; Rev.2:28; 21:23; 22:16):

The sun will be turned to *darkness* (Hebrew: חֹשֶׁק, *choshekh*) and the moon to blood, before the Day of the Lord, that great and terrible [day].

Joel 2:31

For behold, *the darkness* (Hebrew: חֹשֶׁק, *choshekh*) – it will cover the earth, even a deep gloom its peoples. But the Lord will rise over you, and His glory will appear above you. Nations will come to His light, and kings to the brilliance of His rising.

Isaiah 60:2-3

The wonder of the return of that One truly New Person, our resurrected Lord, will seem all the more wonderful in contrast to the pain of the Tribulation that precedes it. And the brilliance of the glory of His return will seem all the more brilliant in contrast to the darkness of the night that precedes it. For immediately preceding that grand and glorious day when the First Born of the Father assumes His rightful throne, the world will experience the most dire and cataclysmic period that history will ever record. It will be a time so terrible that it is most commonly referred to in scripture as *the Tribulation* (Greek: θλίψις, *thlipsis*; cf. the first pair of passages above), a time so bereft of the light of God's truth that it is most commonly characterized in scripture by the quality of darkness (Hebrew: חֹשֶׁק, *choshekh*; cf. the second pair of passages above). The Bible leaves no doubt about the fact that the Tribulation will be earth's darkest and most trying chapter, terminating in God's severe judgment upon the world:

Blow a trumpet in Zion, and raise the alarm on My holy mountain. All the inhabitants of the earth are distressed, because the Day of the Lord is coming, because it is near at

hand. A day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and deep gloom.
Joel 2:1-2a

That day will be a day of blackness, a day of constraint and pressure, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and deep gloom.
Zephaniah 1:15

Terror and pit and snare [have come] upon you, you who dwell on the earth! And it shall be that he who flees from the sound of the terror shall fall into the pit, and he who climbs out of the pit will be caught in the snare. For the sluice-gates on high have been opened, and the foundations of the earth quake. The earth is broken in pieces. The earth is split asunder. The earth totters violently. The earth staggers wildly like a drunken man and sways like a shanty. For its transgression weighs heavily upon it. So will it fall, and not rise up again.
Isaiah 24:17-20

Known as the Tribulation, this harrowing, seven year prelude to Christ's millennial rule, constitutes both the upcoming and the initial portion of God's conclusion to human history. Like the creation around us (Rom.8:19-22), we long to experience the coming of the Son of Man, to put off this sinful flesh for the perfection of the resurrection, and to revel in the reality of eternity with Him forever. But before this happy rebirth of our bodies, before the dawning of His brilliant light, must come a time of great pain and testing, a time of deep gloom and darkness. As in each individual life as it has always been for those who choose to follow God, the personal trial and tribulation of this life must precede the final victory of release and comfort with Him. So also in the final course of human history, the devil's world-rule, darkest and most terrible just before the birth of the new age and the dawning of the light of the Son of Man, must precede that blessed time to come. In both cases (i.e., personal and historical tribulation), severe testing must be endured before the final blessing is attained. For this reason, it is of the utmost importance for every Christian, especially at this late hour in the history of the world, to be prepared for the Tribulation to come, in order that we may all reach harbor safely at Christ's return. And it is imperative that we give our full and close attention to what the Bible has to say about that final, dark chapter in the world's history, whether or not "the day" comes upon us personally. For whether or not it falls to our lot to experience personally the Great Tribulation, as Christians we cannot avoid in our own lives the experience of personal tribulation, and a proper appreciation of the Bible's perspective on each class of tribulation is essential preparation for both.¹

In order to accomplish the essential purpose of this series, that of understanding and preparing for the coming Tribulation, many books and passages of scripture will need to be considered in some detail. References to and extensive treatments of the end times, of which the Tribulation forms the first and focal part, are prominent and ubiquitous in the Bible (for reasons to be considered below). Therefore the job of stitching together all the critical information scripture provides on this extensive subject could easily have been an unmanageable one, even an impossible one, had not God provided a ready

means (in the form of the Book of Revelation) for solving this potential organizational problem. In studies of this sort, the Great Apostasy, antichrist, Babylon, the 2nd Advent of our Lord, along with other principal themes and events, are often covered exclusively in a topical way. It is this writer's opinion, however, that written history is best organized according to a chronological scheme. Since we are blessed to have in the form of the Book of Revelation exactly such a chronologically based outline of the Tribulation (along with the events that precede and follow it), it seems by far the best course to utilize Revelation as our primary outline for this study.²

The book of Revelation will therefore serve as our organizational "blue-print" in this present series (as it is clearly meant to be the believer's central text for understanding the end times), but we shall endeavor not to exclude other portions of scripture that treat the events we are about to study. Thus "The Coming Tribulation" series will be both *topical* (doctrinal, treating specific subjects and drawing material from other books of the Bible in the process) while at the same time *biblical* (following the book of Revelation verse by verse and treating the subject matter it contains at the appropriate place and in the appropriate order, including as many digressions as necessary, scriptural and topical, to properly complete the whole).

2. Definition and Terminology: The Tribulation is the cataclysmic seven year period which precedes the 2nd Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. It comprises the final seven years of the Church Age,³ and, as its primary name suggests, will be a period of intense judgment and severe trial – judgment from God against the unbelieving world, and persecution for believers at the hands of our adversary the devil and his earthly representative, antichrist. This combination of causes which will make the Tribulation such a terrible time in which to live are widely misunderstood. For while it is certainly true that the Tribulation will see the most intense satanic activity in the history of the world, God is far from uninvolved in the events of those seven years. Indeed, the Tribulation is first and foremost the beginning of the penultimate phase of God's judgment upon the earth and its inhabitants. The fact that Satan (and his minion, antichrist) will be in control of human affairs as never before merely makes the issue all the more clear: in six thousand years of human history, mankind has, by and large, not only failed to choose *for* God, but has, for the most part, chosen for Satan instead, and this trend will reach its apogee during the Tribulation. The exception to this rule, the assembly of those (i.e., the Church) who have turned away from this world and its present ruler to follow instead God and His Anointed, will be, during the Tribulation, subjected to the most intense persecution in the history of the planet.⁴ This is all the more reason for the divine retribution that is part and parcel of tribulational events:

Then I heard the angel of the waters saying,
"O You who are and [always] were, the Holy One, You are justified in rendering these [seven bowl] judgments. For [the inhabitants of the earth] have poured out the blood of [Your] saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. *They deserve it.*"
Revelation 16:5-6

Throughout human history, mankind has by and large chosen to reject God and serve the devil instead. This is a trend which is currently intensifying, and which will reach an extraordinary peak during the Tribulation. For, as in the unique experience of the Pharaoh of the Exodus whose heart God allowed to be hardened beyond human norms (Ex.11:9-10),⁵ divine restraint upon the limits of evil will be greatly reduced during these last seven years of the Church Age (2Thes.2:6-8).⁶ Let all who consider these things mark well the fact that while many of the horrors of the Tribulation are indeed wrought by Satan and his minion, the Man of Lawlessness (antichrist), even these events could not occur without the Lord having first given His leave. For all history is in His hands, and, in the end, even these excesses of creature evil merely serve to demonstrate His glory by way of contrast (also exactly as in the case of Pharaoh: Ex.9:16). During the final chapter of Satan's rule on earth, God will allow the floodgates of evil to open wide – to the end that the inhabitants of the earth, having already chosen to enthusiastically serve the creature rather than the Creator, might suffer the full consequence of their blasphemous choice (Is.6:10; Jn.12:40; Acts 28:26-27; Rom.1:18-32):

[These] have exchanged the truth of God for the lie [of the devil], **and have worshiped and served the creature** [Satan] in place of the Creator who is [worthy to be] blessed forever. Amen.

Romans 1:25

Ultimately, God has given His creatures the choice of whether or not to serve Him. For those who persist in serving Satan instead of God, God eventually removes the divine restraints which would hinder them from doing so in full:

And just as they did not see fit to keep God in their hearts, God abandoned them to their unfit minds, to do things which are not fitting.

Romans 1:28

During the Tribulation, these divine restraints upon the practice of evil will be removed as never before, so that mankind will serve the devil to an unprecedented degree, bringing down upon itself the unprecedented judgment of God. As a result, the Tribulation will be, truly, "the worst of times", for in it the most intense temporal judgment of God will be leveled upon the most egregious human behavior in history (cf. Jer.25:31-32; Mic.7:13):

Behold, the Lord is about to empty the earth and lay it waste, and He will mar its face and scatter its inhabitants. And it will be the same for the people as for the priest; for the servant as for his masters; for the maidservant as for her mistress; for the buyer as for the seller; for the lender as for the borrower; for the creditor as for the debtor. The earth shall be thoroughly emptied and thoroughly plundered, for the Lord has pronounced this decree. The earth mourns. It wastes away. The world languishes. It wastes away. [Even] the celebrities of the earth languish. For the earth has befouled itself at the hands of its inhabitants. *For they have transgressed the teachings [of God]; they have altered [His] statute[s]; they have violated the eternal covenant.* Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants are punished. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are

incinerated, and little of mankind remains.
Isaiah 24:1-6

Get out, My people. Go into your rooms and close your doors behind you. Hide yourselves for a little while until My indignation has run its course (i.e., until the Tribulation is over). For behold, the Lord is about to come forth from His place *in order to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity*. And the earth will reveal the blood shed upon it, and conceal its slain no longer (i.e., the persecution of believers will be punished).

Isaiah 26:20-21 (cf. 2Pet.3:10b)

Behold the tempest of the Lord! In fury it goes forth, a swirling tempest, and it will swirl upon the heads of the wicked. *The wrath of the Lord* will not turn back until He has accomplished, until He has fulfilled, the intents of His heart. *In the last days* you will give thoughtful consideration to this.

Jeremiah 23:19-20 (cf. Jer.30:23-24)

Behold, I am making known to you what will take place during *the final period of [God's] indignation* (i.e., the Tribulation).

Daniel 8:19a

For [during that period] the king [antichrist] will consult only his own desire, and will exalt and magnify himself above every god, and against the God of gods he will speak astonishing things. He will have success until the [time of] *indignation* is complete, for [all this] has been firmly decreed to take place.

Daniel 11:36

The above passages and commentary must suffice for now to give the reader an overview of the general character of the Tribulation (see section III below). It remains here to set out in brief the most common terminology used in scripture to describe this period:

a. The Tribulation: Derived from the root *thlib* (θλιβ), meaning "to exert pressure", the Greek word *thlipsis* (θλίψις) is used commonly in secular Greek for discomfort, extreme difficulty, and, in general, physical and emotional pressures of every sort. In scripture too, the word is not restricted to being a technical term for the final seven years of the Church Age, and often refers to personal tribulation (cf. Jn.16:21; 16:33). But *thlipsis* is the most common term employed to designate that final, intense trial, and its main reference (to extreme pressure) makes it a most apt and descriptive designation for that period we have come to call *the Tribulation*.

For at that time there will be a *great tribulation* such as has never occurred from the beginning of the world until now, and [such as] will never again occur thereafter.

Matthew 24:21

Immediately following *the tribulation* of those days, the sun will grow dark and the moon will not give out its light, and the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the

heavens will be shaken.
Matthew 24:29

For those days will see a *tribulation* the like of which has never occurred from the beginning of God's creation of the world until now, and never will occur again.
Mark 13:19

But in those days, after *that tribulation*, the sun will grow dark and the moon will not give out its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers which are in heaven will be shaken.
Mark 13:24

The word used by our Lord for the coming apocalypse in the four passages above is, indeed, the Greek word *thlipsis* (θλίψις), and is, moreover, along with the other phrasing of these verses, a deliberate echoing of Daniel's prophecy in chapter twelve verse one. For the Greek version of the Hebrew Old Testament (i.e., the Septuagint, widely available in our Lord's day) also uses *thlipsis* to translate the Hebrew phrase "time of distress":

And it shall be a *time of distress* [Hebrew: '*eth tsarah* (צרה עת); Greek: *hemera thlipseos* (ἡ μέρα θλίψεως)] such as has never occurred since people first existed on the earth until that time.
Daniel 12:1b

Of course the word *thlipsis* need not always be present when the Tribulation is in view in scripture (e.g., 1Tim.3:3; Rev.3:10). But, given the palpably descriptive nature of the word "tribulation" and the fact that the passages quoted above – some of our most important references to that future time, and given directly by our Lord – utilize that very word, the traditional choice of "the Tribulation" as the main technical term to describe the final seven years of the Church Age seems a sound one, and has been followed in this present study. Tribulation has one important additional advantage as the key word for describing the time of the coming apocalypse. It calls to mind the pressure and discomfort of the personal tribulation all Christians who are following their Lord and Master have to bear from time to time in this life,⁷ and therefore acts as a poignant point of reference for the intensified pressure and discomfort which all those called to live through the coming Tribulation will have to endure (cf. Matt.13:21; Rom.5:3; 2Cor.4:8; 4:17; Col.1:24; 1Thes.3:3; 2Thes.1:6; Heb.11:37-38):

How narrow is the gate (i.e., there is only one way to God, through Christ), and how *constrained* (lit. "tribulated") is the road (i.e., the way of Christ is filled with tribulation) which leads to [eternal] life, and few are those who find it!
Matthew 7:14

[They were] strengthening the hearts of the disciples, and encouraging them to remain in the faith, and saying "We must pass through many *tribulations* to reach the

Kingdom of God".
Acts 14:22

And we sent Timothy to you, our brother and co-worker in the gospel of God and of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that none of you might waver in the midst of these *tribulations*. For you yourselves know [very well] that we have been appointed for this (i.e., to endure pressure in this life). Indeed, when we were with you I was warning you that we [all Christians] were destined to be persecuted (lit., *tribulated*).
1st Thessalonians 3:2-4

By studying the Tribulation, we gain perspective on the personal tribulations that all Christians must endure in this life. And by understanding the central place our personal tribulations have in God's plan (as essential tests of faith), and growing spiritually through them (Rom.5:3-4), we also prepare ourselves for that great day of testing.

b. The Great Tribulation: A further distinction often employed and adhered to here is the distinction between the Tribulation as a whole (i.e., the entire seven year period of the apocalypse) and "the Great Tribulation", which properly refers to second half of this period (i.e., the final three and a half years before the return of our Lord Jesus Christ). The Great Tribulation will be the time of greatest pressure and intensity of persecution in human history, for it will be in that second half of the Tribulation proper that apostasy turns to persecution.

And he said to me, "These are the ones who are going to come out of (i.e., be martyred in) the *Great Tribulation*, and they have washed their robes and made them white with the blood of the Lamb".
Revelation 7:14

For at that time there will be a *Great Tribulation* such as has never occurred from the beginning of the world until now, and [such as] will never again occur thereafter.
Matthew 24:21

c. The Apocalypse: The book of Revelation is sometimes entitled "the Apocalypse" (see Rev.1:1 in part V below), since "apocalypse" is an English transliteration of the Greek word *apokalypsis* (ἡ ἀποκάλυψις) meaning "revelation". It is well to note the singular number of the noun here, for the full Greek title of the book is "the Revelation of *Jesus Christ*". There is only one Christ, and only one revealing of Him to the world at the 2nd Advent (*n.b.*, so there is no book of "revelationS"). The Greek word "apocalypse" means, literally, an unveiling, a making manifest of that which was previously not seen. So it will be at the end of the Tribulation when our Lord returns to earth in glory. Now the book of Revelation, our guide in this series, includes in its coverage the *entire* Tribulation, making it very clear that in prophetic terms the Tribulation constitutes a vital prelude to that return, to that unveiling, and to that "revelation" (along with the judgments which accompany it). Therefore the common understanding of the apocalypse as synonymous with the end times is fine as far as it goes, but we must be

careful not to exclude from our understanding of the word "apocalypse" that element which is most essential to its meaning: the return in glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, made manifest to the entire world on that day along with His bride, the Church. And when Christ is fully revealed to the world at His return (Lk.17:30; 1Cor.1:7; 2Thes.1:7; 1Pet.1:7; 1:13; 4:13; Rev.1:1), we, His bride, will be unveiled with Him (Rom.8:19; cf. Rom.16:25-26; Gal.3:23; Eph.3:5-6). The apocalypse is therefore only introductorily tribulational. In its deepest sense it is the very **hope for which we so earnestly yearn:**

. . . so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you await *the revelation (lit., "apocalypse") of our Lord Jesus Christ. God will also make you to stand firm without reproach until the end on that day of our Lord Jesus Christ (i.e., the 2nd Advent).*
1st Corinthians 1:7-8

. . . and to give you who are being distressed (lit., "tribulated") relief along with us at the *revelation (lit., "apocalypse") of our Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels.*
2nd Thessalonians 1:7

But your faith, when proven genuine in the crucible of life, will result in praise, glory and honor for you at the *revelation (lit., "apocalypse") of Jesus Christ.*
1st Peter 1:7

The *revelation (lit., "apocalypse") of Jesus Christ which God gave to Him to show His servants what must happen soon.*
Revelation 1:1a

d. The Time of Jacob's Trouble: This phrase in Jeremiah 30:7 is a clear reference to the Tribulation as the context indicates. It will be a time like no other (v.7), but one followed by liberation (v.8), the rule of the Messiah (v.9), and the regathering of the nation (v.10).

e. Daniel's 70th Week: The final "seven" in the vision of the seventy sevens (or "weeks" of years) given to Daniel (Dan.9:20-27) is, in fact, the Tribulation. In the middle of the final week of years, for example, the "abomination of desolation" is set up in the temple by antichrist ("the prince who is coming", v.26; cf. Matt.24:15; Mk.13:14).⁸

f. The Sea of Trouble: Prior to using this phrase to describe Israel's deliverance through the Tribulation (in a manner reminiscent to her deliverance from Pharaoh through the Red Sea), Zechariah chapter ten discusses the apostasy of the tribulational period (v.2), the unholy leadership of Israel during the Tribulation (v.3), the Jewish resistance prior to the Lord's return at Armageddon (vv.4-7), and the regathering of Israel after the Second Advent, all of which clearly establish the meaning of this phrase as a reference to the Tribulation:

For she (i.e., Israel about to be regathered in vv.8-9) will pass through *the sea of trouble* (i.e., the Tribulation) . . .
Zechariah 10:11a

g. The Hour of Testing: Because of their faithful service, the Philadelphia generation of the Church would not pass through the Tribulation.⁹

Because you have kept my command to persevere, I shall also keep you from *the hour of testing* which is about to come upon the world of mankind to put the inhabitants of the earth to the test.

Revelation 3:10

h. Other Passages: There are also many other places in scripture where the Tribulation is referenced without the use of specific terminology. In Genesis 49:18, for example, where Jacob, in prophesying about the future of Israel says in reference to Dan (just having been compared to a serpent) "I look for thy deliverance, O Lord", he is speaking prophetically about the Tribulation, and the fact that antichrist will come from the tribe of Dan.¹⁰ Passages and contexts of this sort generally possess the common feature of looking forward to the conclusion of God's plan for history (which conclusion begins, as we have seen, with the Tribulation):

And [the angel] said to me, "Understand, O son of man, that the vision refers to the *time of the end*." . . . "Behold, I am making known to you what will take place during *the final period of [God's] indignation* (i.e., the Tribulation), for [this will happen] at *the appointed time of the end*."
Daniel 8:17b & 19

At *the end of days* (or, "in the last days"), the mountain of the temple of the Lord will be established as the chief of all mountains, and it will be raised higher than all [other] hills, and all the nations will flow to it.
Isaiah 2:2 (cf. Ezek.38:16)

"The Lord says in regard to *the last days* (introducing a quote from Joel 2:28-32) . . ."
Acts 2:17

The Spirit explicitly says that *in the end times* certain men will rebel from the faith, giving their allegiance [instead] to deceitful spirits and demonic doctrines.
1st Timothy 4:1

So be aware of this, that in *the last days* there will be difficult times.
2nd Timothy 3:1

Your gold and your silver has rusted away, and its residue will give testimony against you and will eat your flesh like fire. [This is what] you have treasured up for yourselves

in the last days.

James 5:3

(3) Keep this foremost in your mind: in *the end times* cynics will ridicule [the truth], acting out of their own selfish lusts (4) and saying, “Where is that ‘return’ He promised? Everything is the same now as it was since the beginning of the world, since the time our forefathers passed on.” (5) But it escapes their notice in asserting this, namely, that there were heavens long ago too, and an earth, which was [re-]established out from under water (i.e., the “waters below”) and through [the midst of] water (i.e., the “waters above”) by the Word of God – (6) [and that it was] through these two [sets of waters] that the world of that time (i.e., in Noah’s day) was [again] deluged by water [from above and below] and destroyed. (7) Now the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire by that same Word (of God), preserved for *the day of judgment* and the destruction of godless men.

2nd Peter 3:3-7

But you, beloved, remember the words of the apostles of our Lord, spoken to you before, that at *the end of the age* (lit., “time”), there will be mockers who behave after the manner of their own unholy lusts.

Jude 17-18

3. The End Times and Motivation: As is evident from the list above, scripture frequently makes use of the coming of the end times to encourage the believer's alertness, to pique his motivation for putting God first in his life, and to direct his focus off of the here-and-now and onto the more important future realities. Clearly, once we accept, believe and fully internalize (i.e., correctly apply) the reality of the Tribulation and the very real possibility that we may live to experience it, we cannot help but be better motivated to make optimal use now of the resources God provides to grow spiritually and help others do likewise (cf. Eph.5:16; Col.4:5). For such growth is our only genuine means of preparation for those terrible days to come: stockpiling canned goods in the cellar is largely pointless, but stockpiling God's Word in our hearts is of the utmost value, whether or not we are called upon to endure the Tribulation first hand:

I mean this, brethren: ***there is not much time left*** (lit., time has been “reefed short” like a sail). So in the future, let those who have wives be as those who do not have them, and those who weep as those who don't weep, and those who rejoice as those who do not rejoice – and those who make use of this world as those who do not take full advantage of it. For this world in its present form is passing away. And I want you to be free of worries.

1st Corinthians 7:29-32a

Let us not put Christ to the test, as some of them [of the Exodus generation] did and were killed by serpents. And let us not complain, as some of them complained, and were killed by the Destroyer. These things happened to them as an example to us, and were written to warn us – *we who live at the culmination of the ages*. So let him who thinks he stands firm beware lest he fall. You have not suffered any testing beyond normal

human [experience]. And God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your capacity, but will give you a way out along with the test so that you can bear up under it.
1st Corinthians 10:9-13

Let your reasonableness be known to all men – *the Lord is near*.
Philippians 4:5

But you, brothers, are not in darkness that *the day [of the Lord] should catch you* like a thief. For you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness. So let us therefore not sleep like the rest [of unbelieving mankind], but be awake and alert.
1st Thessalonians 5:4-6

And let us give careful attention to one another[*'s ministries*] as motivation for [our own] love and good works, not abandoning your mutual assembling (as some have made it their practice to do [and which makes this impossible]), but rather encouraging each other [to persevere in this work of the Lord], and doing so to an ever greater degree to the extent that you see ***the day [of the Lord] drawing [ever] closer***.
Hebrews 10:24-25

So then you too exercise patience [like the farmer of v.7], [and] steady your hearts, because *the return of the Lord has drawn near*.
James 5:8

The end of all things has drawn near. Therefore exercise discretion and sober self-control for [the benefit of your] prayers.
1st Peter 4:7

Children, it is *the last hour*, and just as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many "antichrists" have arisen, whence we know that it is in fact *the last hour*.
1st John 2:18

And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for *the time is near*."
Revelation 22:10

Before moving on, it is unfortunately necessary to note at this point that this important and legitimate element of scriptural motivation has, in many contemporary Christian circles, been severely hamstrung by the false doctrine of the pre-tribulational rapture.¹¹ Obviously, were it true that contemporary Christians had no chance of ever experiencing the Tribulation (as that false doctrine teaches), the enormous amount of material the Bible contains on the subject would immediately be rendered merely "academic", and a very large body of highly motivational material rendered essentially abstract (and so largely meaningless in practical terms). In fact, the motivation provided by the knowledge that this most serious test to our faith may indeed potentially come upon us helps us to prepare for those tests which we *do* have to face, whether or not we ever live

to experience the Tribulation itself. Therefore the teaching of the pre-tribulational rapture not only constitutes a danger to those believers who will nevertheless find themselves some day in the midst of the Tribulation, but also robs (and has robbed) many of a large share of the important and legitimate motivation the Bible provides to prepare for trial and testing. Make no mistake. Our Lord Jesus Christ will not return until the 2nd Advent, and the proper conclusion to draw from this clear teaching of scripture is that believers need to take what the Bible has to say about the seven years of the Tribulation which precede that blessed event very seriously indeed (Matt.25:1-30; Lk.21:25-28; 1Cor.1:7; 15:20-28; Phil.1:6; 1Thes.4:5-18; 5:1-11; 2Thes.1:3-12; Tit.2:13; 2Pet.1:19).

So we ask you, brothers, in regard to the coming our Lord Jesus Christ [discussed in chapter one, verses 3-12], and our assembling together to Him [in resurrection at His return (cf. 1Cor.15:51-54)], that you not be so easily moved from your correct understanding [of these matters], nor disturbed [by doubts about what you should know to be true] – not even if [this "new information" purports to come] through a spirit, or an [inspired] word or a letter supposedly from me, declaring that the Day of the Lord is already upon us. Do not let anyone deceive you in any way. *For [the 2nd Advent cannot come] unless the Apostasy [the great falling away of the faithful in the first half of the Tribulation] has already occurred, and the man of lawlessness [antichrist] has been revealed [an event also occurring in the Tribulation], that "son of destruction" (i.e., characterized by, author of, and doomed to destruction), the one who will oppose and exalt himself against every so-called god and object of worship to such a degree that he will take his seat in the temple of God and represent himself as being God. Don't you remember that while I was still with you I was explaining these things to you?*
2nd Thessalonians 2:1-5

II. The Tribulation in Context: Satan's Rebellion and the Plan of God

God has always existed and always will exist. Only within the temporal, material universe (entirely His creation along with the creatures who inhabit it) is there any need to discuss a "Plan of God", for God Himself is perfect and infinite and in no need of change or development of any kind. This same status quo of perfection (albeit to a finite degree) was also the case in the original creation of the universe with its angelic inhabitants. For God originally created a perfect system in an Eden-like environment without need or necessity. Satan's rebellion changed all that. With the defection of the universe's top-ranking angelic creature along with a full third of his fellows, creature history began, a history that has nonetheless been shaped and directed by the Plan of God from its inception. Of course, the devil's treachery did not "surprise" the omniscient, eternal God, infinite in His nature. God was no more surprised by the devil's rebellion than by the fall of Adam and Eve. Structured into His organization of the universe both initially (in His original creation of the universe and the angels) and subsequently (in His re-creation of the universe and mankind) has always been this overall Plan of God, shaping, guiding, directing events as only the planning of a God of infinite wisdom, infinite power, and infinite knowledge could do. So certain is His plan,

so unalterable in every detail, that all events of history, angelic and human, have been foreknown by Him and foreordained by Him (cf. Rom.8:29-30).¹² And central to this plan, the foundation, the cornerstone, and the agent of it, has always been our Lord Jesus Christ (Jn.1:1-5; Heb.1:1-3):

Everything in the heavens and on the earth was created by Him (Jesus Christ), things invisible as well as those visible – whether thrones, authorities, rulers or powers, everything was created through Him and for Him. And He Himself is before everything, and everything subsists in Him.

Colossians 1:16-17

Even though this subject, the Plan of God, has been covered elsewhere in depth (see the previous note), and, in terms of its specific application to the Satanic rebellion, has recently been treated in great detail (in part 5 of the previous series of that name), it is crucial to note here that our present subject, the Tribulation along with the events which follow it, represents on the universal level the *conclusion* of that plan. The Tribulation, therefore, is no small occurrence on the overall schedule of history as defined by God, but is, in fact, a pivotal, momentous development, for it represents *the* major period of God's judgment upon the earth during the whole of human history. God's judgment upon the original heavens and earth following the devil's revolt, and God's final judgment wherein the present heavens and earth will be incinerated are equally major, equally significant judgments (these three together constituting respectively parts II, I, and III of the judgment phase of the Plan of God).¹³ But as we human beings were not around to experience the first phase of judgment (which produced the Genesis gap and necessitated the subsequent seven day re-creation of earth),¹⁴ and as the final phase of judgment (phase III) will not occur until the conclusion of history as we know it, the Tribulation looms even larger in significance as *the preeminent judgment-event in the collective experience of mankind (only the world-wide flood rates comparison: Matt.24:37-38)*. **At no time before or since will mortal man witness the wrath of God displayed to such an awesome degree. At no time before or since will the issue of choice – between God and the devil – be made more manifestly clear to the human race. At no time before or since will humanity nevertheless embrace Satan more closely. At no time before or since will those whose allegiance belongs to the One True God be subject to more intense pressure and persecution. And at no time before or since will the devil be in more direct control of events on planet earth. The Tribulation will be the time of greatest leeway given by God to human and demonic will, and for precisely this reason will be the most horrible time humanity has ever experienced. It is also precisely for this reason that the Tribulation will be the time of God's greatest temporal judgment upon the creation, encompassing the earth, unbelieving humanity, and the fallen angels alike, for evil only uses freedom to intensify evil, and intense evil is always and inevitably answered by intensified divine judgment (as befits a God of perfect righteousness). The Tribulation is the last period of human history wherein mankind (nominally) and the devil (in reality) will play a major role in the direction of human affairs (subject, of course, to the**

overarching Plan of God which has been moving inexorably forward to its ultimate goal since the instant of creation).¹⁵ How appropriate that God, while allowing within these seven years the widest discretion ever in the voluntary exercise of evil by reprobate creatures, has ordained for the Tribulation the most devastating response to evil in the form of unprecedented divine judgment! And how appropriate that this most appalling period of human history, so terrible precisely because it is most fully under creature control, will be directly followed by the most wonderful and sublime period of human history, the millennial reign of our Lord Jesus Christ, where God in the Person of the God-Man will exert a more direct control over human affairs than has ever yet occurred since the fall of Adam (with the devil and his minions safely incarcerated for a thousand years: Rev.20:1-3)!

We can learn much from this eloquent juxtaposition of the inevitable degeneracy of creature rule on the one hand, growing ever worse as divine restraint is relaxed (and bringing down upon itself the inevitable judgment God's justice requires), and the beneficent nature of God's rule through His Son on the other, a reign of perfect justice wherein the evil nature of mankind will be properly restrained and blessings will flow from every quarter. This is a principle of contrast (between "our" way and God's way) that has been repeated since the dawn of creature history and will continue in one form or another until the close of history shortly after the end of the Millennium: when men (or angels) follow their own will, horrible things result, and divine judgment is inevitably and necessarily invoked, so that the end is worse than the beginning; when, however, God's will is done, the result is blessing, and out of judgment comes restoration (of whatever was damaged) and replacement (of whatever was lost) so that the end is better than the beginning.

The threshing floors will be filled with grain and the wine-presses will overflow with new wine. For I will restore to you the years that the locusts have consumed.¹⁶

Joel 2:24-25

This cycle of the consequences of will versus Will is essentially the same whether it occurs in the life of a single individual, a family, a group, a nation, a civilization, or in the entire scheme of history writ large, and in each and every case the point of division in the choice of (self) will versus (God's) Will is obedience to Jesus Christ. The issue is always Jesus Christ, for He is the Truth (Jn.14:6), He is the First Born and Heir of all creation (Col.1:15-21; Heb.1:2-3; Rev.3:14), the One for whom, by whom and through whom all things exist, the One who has been directing the Father's plan since the beginning, the One who will shortly return to earth in glory to begin His rightful reign, and the One without whose death on our behalf there would be no salvation, no restoration. On every level, whether large or small, Jesus Christ divides the universe on the issue of will: to reject Jesus Christ is to reject the Will of God; conversely, to choose His Will, is to follow Jesus Christ:

I am the way: the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.
John 14:6

Do not think that I have come to hurl peace upon the earth. I have not come to hurl peace upon the earth but a sword (of divisiveness). For I have come to divide, [so that] 'a man [will be set] against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; [with the result that] a man's enemies will be the members of his own household' (Micah 7:6). Whoever loves his father or mother above Me is not worthy of Me, and whoever loves his son or daughter above Me is not worthy of Me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever has found his life will lose it, and the one who has lost his life for My sake will find it.

Matthew 10:34-39

III. General Character of the Tribulation

Man is made in the image of God, according to His likeness (Gen.1:26-27), and created for His glory (Is.43:7).¹⁷ Therefore it should not be accounted strange that every aspect of human existence revolves around our attitude about Him, or that in whatever we choose, we really are only choosing for or against Him (especially in the case of believers: 1Cor.6:19-20; Gal.5:17). Just as king Rehoboam "did evil because he had not set his heart on seeking the Lord" (2Chron.12:14), so every instance of not responding to Him inevitably leads to (and equates with) responding instead to evil. Our only true choice in life is whether to prefer being servants of God or pawns of the devil. This is true in all things, great and small. For this reason, human history (the cumulative choices of mankind) is not occurring in a vacuum, but rather is being played out against the backdrop of Satan's rebellion. This principle will be more obvious during the Tribulation than in any other previous period. For just as the issue of choice will never be clearer than in the Millennium in terms of positive motivation (under the direct righteous rule of Jesus Christ), so the issue and consequences of human free-will will never be clearer in terms of negative motivation than in the Tribulation (with the world under its most direct satanic control in the person of antichrist). Over the course of this seven-part series, we shall have much to say about the events and trials of that great period of testing to come, however it is important to stress here that the Tribulation's general character is neither accidental nor peripheral but is rather the direct result of the intensification during its seven years of this issue of choice between God and His Son on the one hand, and the devil and his surrogate on the other. In no other era of history will the consequences of the question "which side are you on?" be more obvious and immediate. The Tribulation will be a great time of testing precisely because humanity will be forced to choose between two clear extremes, between good and evil, without the luxuries of privacy and time for circumspection that have been taken for granted in the past. For the middle ground of quiet agnosticism (and all its equivalents) made possible by God's invisible restraint of evil through law and nationalism will be removed to a very large degree.¹⁸ This is why, dear reader, our subject is of such pressing importance. Should it be our lot to endure that great conflagration to come, our

faith will be tested as never before, for during the Tribulation the devil will pressure all mankind to accede to his will beyond anything the world has yet experienced.

Woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come to down to you, having great anger, because he knows that he has [only] a short time [remaining].

Revelation 12:12

The greater the devil's direct control over the earth and its inhabitants, the more the pressure to reject God and His Son. And the more evil done on earth, the greater the divine judgment upon that evil. From these twin essential traits of the Tribulation (demonic control and divine retribution), unique in terms of their unprecedented intensity, flow most of the other characteristics associated with that cataclysmic period. Along with the division they create (i.e., the necessity of choice for Christ or antichrist) these two main traits and their collective results will combine to make the Tribulation the time of the most severe testing ever experienced by believers. It will be the great crucible of our faith.

But when the Son of Man returns, will He find faith on the earth?

Luke 18:8b

The Tribulation, whose very name communicates unprecedented distress (as we have seen above in section I.2) will thus be the great "hour of testing" which will put mankind "to the test" (Rev.3:10). It will be 1) a great smelter that separates silver from dross, 2) a great threshing floor that separates wheat from chaff, and 3) a long "dark night" requiring the utmost perseverance to endure (Is.21:11-12; Amos 5:18-20; Jn.11:9-10):

And [during that time of the end] many will purify and cleanse themselves, and will be *refined* (lit., "smelted in a crucible"). But the wicked will act wickedly, nor will any of the wicked understand. But those who give [these matters] careful attention will understand.

Daniel 12:10 (cf. Dan.11:33-35)

His winnowing fork is in His hand, [ready] to cleanse His *threshing floor* and gather the grain into His barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Luke 3:17

We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day. *Night is coming*, when no one is going to be able to work.

John 9:4

As believers, it is this issue of maintaining our faith – no matter what – upon which we must take the greatest care to keep our gaze directed. For amidst the universal war, famine, plague, worldwide disasters and tremendous divine punishment upon the earth's unbelieving inhabitants, *maintaining faith* (firmly fixed on our hope and expressing itself in love: Gal.5:5-6; cf. Col.1:4-5) will be the central issue for all believers

in that most intensive refining process called the Tribulation. For in all the troubles to come, He will be faithful to those who remain faithful to Him . . .

In spite of wide spread apostasy (2Thes.2:3; 1Tim.4:1; Matt.24:9-14):

Now we see that they (i.e., the Exodus generation) were unable to enter into this [place of rest] because of their unbelief [lack of faith]. So let us beware lest any of you should seem to fall short [on this score], by casting aside [God's] promise [in a similar way]. For we have had the gospel preached to us just as they did. But the word they heard did not profit them, for, though they heard it, they did not mix it with faith. Therefore it is we *who believe* who enter into this rest [not those who abandon their faith], just as He has said . . .

Hebrews 3:19 - 4:3a

In spite of severe economic dislocation (Rev.6:6):

And if God dresses the wild plants in such a way – here today but thrown into the oven tomorrow – will He not all the more do so for you, *O you of little faith?*

Matthew 6:30

In spite of warfare, plague and catastrophe (Is.13:12; Ezek. chap. 38-39; Dan. chap.7, 9, 11; Rev.6:2-8; chap. 13):

You will not be afraid of terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that goes about in the darkness, nor of the plague that destroys at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side, even ten thousand at your right hand – you it will not approach.

Psalms 91:5-7

In spite of the extreme divine judgments that will drastically change conditions on earth (Rev.6:12ff.; 9:1ff.; 16:1ff.).

Thus you shall say [to Baruch]: "Thus says the Lord. Behold, I am about to tear down what I have built, and uproot what I have planted – and this [will befall] the entire earth.¹⁹ So should you request for yourself big things (i.e., blessings far out of line with a time of general cursing)? Do not make such a request. For, behold, I am about to bring evil upon all flesh, says the Lord. Now I have granted you your life as a spoil in the places where you shall journey.

Jeremiah 45:4-5

In spite of the hostility of a worldwide, monolithic, pagan religion (Rev.13):

Beloved, don't be amazed at the fiery ordeal of testing you are now undergoing, as if something out of the ordinary were happening to you. But to the degree that you are [truly] participating in Christ's sufferings, be joyful about it, so that at His glorious revelation, you may also rejoice with great gladness. If you are indeed being reproached

on account of Christ's name, you are truly blessed, for the Spirit of glory, even the Spirit of God, rests upon you. Now let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or a meddler, but if [anyone should suffer] as a Christian (i.e., a "Christ-person"), let him not be ashamed of it. Let him rather glorify God under that name. For it is time for the judgment to begin, starting with God's household. And if it first begins with us, what will be the end of those who do not believe God's gospel? For [as it says], "If the righteous man is barely saved, where will the ungodly and sinful turn? (Prov.11:33)". Therefore let all those who are suffering according to the will of God entrust their lives (while doing what is good) to a Creator *who is faithful*.

1st Peter 4:12-19

In spite of widespread martyrdom of true believers in Christ (Rev.6:9-11):

Do not be afraid of any of the things which you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. *Be faithful* unto death, and I shall give you the crown of life. Revelation 2:10

Based upon the above general characteristics of the Tribulation, it is tempting to see this cataclysmic seven year period as the great and final confrontation between God and the devil, with believers caught in the middle. However, such a characterization, while improving upon many contemporary views that leave the Lord out of the picture entirely, is wrong on two crucial counts:

1) It falsely puts the Lord and Satan on the same level. In truth, Satan is able to launch his "final offensive" only because God allows it (2Thes.2:6-8; Rev.5:1-5). Furthermore, the issue of God's complete victory is never in the slightest doubt, the entire course of the Tribulation merely serving His righteous ends (as we have seen in section I above).

2) It falsely portrays believers as mere "victims", when, in fact, we shall have a critical role to play in God's demonstration of His righteousness and faithfulness in the midst of this most difficult period in human history. In the face of wide-spread apostasy in the first half of the Tribulation, those who do not stumble will constitute a remnant of the faithful and a base for that three and a half year period's miraculous evangelism. In the face of world-wide persecution during the second half of the Tribulation, the Great Tribulation, those who stand firm in their faith – even unto death in many cases – will be an unprecedented witness to the truth and mercy of God that will contradict Satan's universal lies.

It is certainly true as we have noted above, however, that the war in heaven and consequent expulsion of the devil and his angels to the earth (Rev.12:7-9) will result in more intensive, more immediate pressure for mankind to choose for or against God than has yet been the case in the human experience. And choosing *for* God will entail a heavier price world-wide than has yet been the case in human history, especially in the general persecution of the Great Tribulation. God's merciful, world-wide evangelism of the Tribulation's first half, and His judgments upon the unbelieving inhabitants of the

earth (for their idolatry and persecution of believers) in the second will further clarify the issue, making the Tribulation an era of little or no middle ground between good and evil: more than at any other time, it will be a period where all are likely to be either zealous followers of Jesus Christ or committed partisans of antichrist, and the intensive pressures that characterize the Tribulation (the devil's operations on the one hand, and God's righteous response on the other) do much to explain this polarity. As believers, we should take such information to heart, and determine in advance not to be lukewarm, but to be boiling hot in our faith now (lest we grow cold under those future pressures when the middle ground largely falls away). In the Tribulation, mankind will be confronted with the immediate choice of going God's way or the devil's way (as is ultimately the case in every life, but often with time for deliberation) – "halting between two opinions" in the midst of the Tribulation will only lead to personal disaster vis-a-vis one's faith (1Kngs.18:21; cf. Rev.3:15-16).

As we saw in the final part (5) of our previous study, The Satanic Rebellion, it has been a trend of the Plan of God since the expulsion of Adam from Eden to proportionally expand the number of believers in all four ages of human history, so that what began with a trickle in the Age of the Gentiles will finish in full flood during the millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ.²⁰ In a similar and related way, knowledge of this issue of self-will versus the Will of God (as focused on the person of Jesus Christ) has also clearly been trending upward, a fact most clearly seen in the transition from the shadows of the Law of Moses to the revealed reality of the Person of Jesus Christ (Col.2:17; Heb.8:5; 10:1). This trend too will hit its temporal peak in the Millennium which begins with the revelation of Him to the world in His glorified state, and encompasses a thousand years of extreme blessing wherein God will be known in the very face of Christ more intensely and obviously than ever before in the history of humanity (Is.2:1-5; Acts 1:11; 1Cor.13:12; Rev.1:7):

They shall not harm nor destroy on all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.
Isaiah 11:9

"For" says the Lord, "this is the covenant which I shall make with the house of Israel after these days: I shall put my precepts in their minds and write them upon their hearts, and I shall be their God, and they shall be My people. They shall not teach each one his fellow and each one his brother, saying 'Know the Lord!', because all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them. For I shall have mercy upon their unrighteous deeds and shall remember their sins no more."
Jeremiah 31:33-34

Immediately preceding this millennial peak lies the Tribulation, a period wherein God's truth in Christ, made more widely and clearly available than at any time prior to the Millennium (through the ministries of the "two witnesses", the 144,000, and direct, divine proclamation), will also be opposed more violently and effectively than ever before in the historical experience of mankind (e.g., Rev.13:5-17). The Church Age has seen the beginning of this two-fold trend already. On the one hand, the areas and

opportunities for human obliviousness to the choice between Christ and the devil have been shrinking as the world has become progressively "smaller" while the message of the gospel has become more generally available, constituting a major change from the previous dispensation of His grace:

And they said, "Men, why are you doing this? We too are human beings subject to the same mortality as you, *giving you the good news* to turn away from this pointless [idolatry] back to the living God, who made heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, *who in the generations gone by allowed all the nations to go their own ways* – although [even then] He did not leave Himself without a witness, giving you rains from heaven and productive seasons, filling you[r bodies] with sustenance and your hearts with joy.

Acts 14:15-17

On the other hand, it is also true that these past two millennia have seen a corresponding increase in satanic activity – not overt demon possession and idolatry per se, but the steady laying of the ground-work for the next "Tower of Babel", morally, politically, socially, indeed, in every aspect of the "world system" which the present ruler of this kosmos has established.²¹ That system is not merely a static device for present world rule, it is also the devil's organizational base for his ultimate offensive, de facto world domination through the person of his antichrist. It is thus a base of operations which he is doing his best to develop in specific preparation for that day. This is the accelerating "mystery of lawlessness" (only too visible in our own day) which is aiming toward that final gambit to be played out in earnest during the Tribulation:

Even now you know what it is that restrains [antichrist] so that he will be revealed [only] in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness (*anomia*) is already at work – it is only the Restrainer [who keeps things in check, and will] until He moves out of the way. And then the lawless one (*anomos*) will be revealed . . .

2nd Thessalonians 2:6-8a

By linking lawlessness to the revelation of antichrist in the context above, and by using near identical cognate vocabulary to describe the two (antichrist is "the lawless one" – *anomos-᾽ νομος*, while lawlessness itself is *anomia-᾽ νομία*), Paul makes it crystal clear that this lawlessness (which we are already experiencing) is a prerequisite preparation for the coming of the lawless one (i.e., antichrist). That preparation (the devil's progressive inroads into human society at all levels and in all places) is "already at work", but cannot be entirely completed until the Spirit's restraint is allowed to wane as the Tribulation begins (part of the divine plan to demonstrate Satan's true intentions and ultimate impotence).²² We find a similar meaning in the apostle John's comments about the "spirit of antichrist" which he describes as already active in his day, even though antichrist himself will not be revealed until the Tribulation begins (1Jn.4:3). Moreover, the very fact that many "antichrists" are active in the present age is proof positive that we are on the threshold of the Tribulation:

Children, it is [now] the final hour, and just as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many "antichrists" have arisen – that is how we know it is the last hour.
1st John 2:18

The Church Age, therefore, finds the devil restrained from launching his final, supreme offensive, but in full preparation mode for rapid implementation of his plans just as soon as the opportunity is presented (with the breaking of the seals of the Book of Revelation and removal of divine restraint: Rev.5:1-5; 2Thes.2:6-8). The removal of divine restraint, without which action on God's part Satan's tribulational operations would be impossible, is a topic that will be covered in detail in the next part of this series. Suffice it to say for now that this fact alone (i.e., no Tribulation without divine permission) proves that the Tribulation, far from being "an accident", is, on the contrary, an essential period in God's construction of the ages, in the course of which the devil's wickedness and true intentions will be laid completely bare (cf. Rom.7:13), while God gains surpassing glory in subduing the creature in preparation for the glorious reign of His Son (Ps.110:1; Heb.10:13; cf. Ex.14:4; Is.63:12-14). Apropos of our immediate purpose here is the fact that this removal of restraint (coupled with the devil's exploitation of this unique opportunity) does much to explain the outrageous and unprecedented events that will take place during the Tribulation. For at other times in human history, "breaking the bonds" that God has set for human (or angelic) behavior has resulted in predictable divine judgment of a preventative nature (cf. Ps.2:3; Jer.5:5). This is true whether the offenders who overstep the ultimate bounds of divine restraint be angels (witness the imprisonment of the demons involved in cohabitation with human women in Genesis 6),²³ or men (compare the swift and complete destruction of Sennacherib and his army for defying God: Is.36-37). The preceding parenthetical examples constitute extreme cases of the general principle of just judgment upon any and all who set themselves against God's truth and overstep the clear limits He has imposed:

God's wrath is about to be revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness – on men who suppress the truth [about God] in their unrighteousness.
Romans 1:18

In the Tribulation, however, previously restrained lawlessness will reach unprecedented heights – the full flowering of the "mystery of lawlessness" already operative, but destined to reach full flood in the Tribulation. The experience of the Pharaoh of the Exodus provides us with a useful parallel for understanding the processes involved here. Specific divine relaxation of normal human limits was required in order for Pharaoh to be able to "harden his heart" to the degree that he did in such high-handed opposition to God in the face of such miraculous displays of His power.²⁴ However, the result of all Pharaoh's stubborn resistance was only a greater degree of glory for God, as uncommon persecution was followed by uncommon judgment and miraculous deliverance (Ex.14:4; Is.63:12-14):

Indeed, for this very reason I have raised you [Pharaoh] up, namely, to demonstrate My power to you and to proclaim My Name in all the earth.
Exodus 9:16

This similarity (between the removal of restraint in the individual case of Pharaoh and general removal of restraint in the Tribulation) is not accidental: the entire history of the Exodus (as we shall have occasion to in part 7 of this series) provides an important teaching paradigm or parallel model for the experiences of the Tribulation. In the Tribulation, intensely blind hardness of heart will be endemic, allowing the majority of mankind to serve the devil as never before. Greatly accelerating the danger of this trend will be the fact that the bulwarks of law and nationalism will also be eroded as never before, largely eliminating any safe-haven of neutrality for those who are not interested in choosing for God, but who, under normal conditions, would refrain from enlistment in the cause of evil. Taken together, all these factors (removal of divine restraint, the fruition of the "mystery of lawlessness", the implementation of Satan's final offensive, and the corresponding divine judgment upon it) will combine to make the seven years of the Tribulation a singularly terrible experience that will truly be "bitter in the stomach" (Rev.10:9-10; cf. Ezek.2:8 - 3:3).

While the Tribulation may be a time of terror for unbelievers, for believers it is more properly seen as a time of testing. Given this most essential characteristic of the Tribulation (the essence of what we have delineated above), it should be clear at this point that the proper focus for believers in contemplating it (not to mention preparing for it) is not fear, but faith and confident hope in God's ultimate deliverance. The information scripture provides about tribulational events before the fact is not designed to terrorize Christians into inaction. Rather its purpose is to give them fair warning in order that they may both make maximum *spiritual* preparations ahead of time, and also be able to put these events in a proper faith perspective, when and if they are called upon to endure them.

During the Tribulation, Satan will reveal more clearly than ever before his true malignant intent towards mankind (Rev.12:12; 13:5-10), and in righteous response God will cover Himself with glory in just judgment of evil upon the earth (Is.24:1-23; Mic.7:13). In the midst of such a maelstrom, human beings will not easily be able to remain neutral. The question "which side are you on?", though being asked today, is often put off. In the course of the Tribulation, however, all mankind will be forced to give an answer, and to stand by the answer they give.

And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of this book's prophetic message, for the time is near. Let the unrighteous continue to act unrighteously, and him who is filthy continue in his filthiness, and let the righteous continue to produce righteousness, and him who is sanctified continue in his sanctification".
Revelation 22:10-11

For those who remain faithful to Jesus Christ, despite dungeon, fire and sword, victory is assured, along with a glorious place in the Kingdom to come.

And it will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God! We put our hope in Him that He would deliver us. This is our Lord. We put our hope in Him. Let us rejoice and be glad in His deliverance!" Isaiah 25:9

IV. The Biblical Sources for the History of the Tribulation

More than any other topic in scripture, the study of eschatology (i.e., the "last things") and specifically, of the Tribulation requires some prerequisite work on methods and sources. This is true in the case of the latter issue (sources), because few subjects are more widely dispersed throughout the Bible in Old and New Testaments alike. It is also true in the case of the former issue (methods), because one absolutely has to understand something of how prophecy (especially Old Testament prophecy) is constructed in order to be able to extract doctrinal information from it in a valid way. Furthermore, understanding something of the latter (i.e., *how* we are gathering our material) will also help to explain our approach to the former (i.e., *where* we are gathering our material). So before conducting an overview of the books where most of the important information about the Tribulation resides, we need first to consider some of the basics of the process, the manner, and the *method* of biblical prophecy (which is by definition, after all, divinely provided information about future events).

1. Hermeneutic Issues

It is fair to say that biblical prophecy, especially as it is found in the Old Testament prophets, can often be challenging (even difficult) to understand. This is not entirely accidental, for much (if not all) Old Testament prophecy was directed towards a population that, in the main, was not interested in hearing what was being said. Therefore, in the same way that Jesus spoke in parables to an audience that gladly accepted His miracles but not His message, so God gave the recalcitrant recipients of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Minor Prophets prophecies that would "make their ears tingle" but which would not necessarily be patently obvious at first as to their meaning. That is to say, because of its unique function (of warning to a rebellious population), prophecy's overt meaning often requires interpretation to be understandable: one has to demonstrate an interest in the message before the message becomes accessible. Therefore we may legitimately compare the analysis of prophecy to the translation of a foreign language. For prophecy, just like a foreign language, must first be properly "translated" (interpreted) in order to be understood. The task of effectively "de-coding" a text in a foreign tongue requires experience with the language in question, and, ideally, some formal training. Any visitor to a foreign land whose language he does not speak can readily testify to the need for some sort of dictionary or language aid. Knowledge of even a few basic rules of grammar, a handful of phrases, and a few key vocabulary items, can, in such cases, make a trip much more enjoyable. Such is the case in treating biblical prophecy as well. Unfortunately, the rules for proper

interpretation are seldom spelled out and explained. Therefore a short foray into a few key areas of prophetic interpretation here will be most helpful in preparing us for our survey of the biblical sources of the Tribulation which we are about to consult. The writer is keenly aware that these issues are not commonly addressed and will be found by some to be more onerous and less titillating than one would generally expect from a study with the "end times" as its subject matter. Understanding these principles is, however, essential, even foundational, to the proper development of the evidence upon which our study will be based. The reader's patience is therefore earnestly besought while we examine these critical issues.

a. Prophetic Foreshortening

When ones views an extensive mountain range from a distance, the eye often sees a particular version of events from long range that would be significantly altered by a change in perspective. Move closer, and what had looked like one homogeneous ridge line, may reveal itself to possess more depth, diversity and distinction than had previously been assumed. Move to the side, and a more clearly three-dimensional picture emerges. Move overhead, and the individuality of certain mountains, valleys, or groups of peaks may come to light. This does not mean in any way, it is important to note, that the first perception was *wrong*, merely that it was one particular perspective only, valid from its own point of view, and, when taken in conjunction with other perspectives, even essential for "getting a feel" for what this mountain massif "is like".

A similar phenomenon occurring in prophecy is often termed "prophetic foreshortening". One classic and rather well-known example of prophetic foreshortening in the Old Testament is to be found in the case of the Messiah, who was destined to come not only as the Glorious King, but also as the Suffering Servant (cf. Is.52:13 - 53:12). Even the prophets themselves were "eager to discover the precise time the Spirit of Christ within them was signifying as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow" (i.e., the 2nd Advent and Millennium: 1Pet.1:10-11; cf. Lk.10:24; Jn.8:56).²⁵ In producing all of this wonderful prophetic material, not completely understood at the time (at least as far as the distinction between the 1st and 2nd Advents was concerned), the prophets of old were "not so much serving themselves as they were you" (i.e., believers of the present, post-First Advent age: 1Pet.1:12). Today, even new initiates into the Christian faith are generally well aware of the difference between the 1st and 2nd Advents of Christ – we now "speak the language" of Christology, the distinction being demonstrated by the first coming of Jesus (which did not include the commencement of His millennial reign), and explained in detail throughout the New Testament epistles (where the 2nd Advent is explained and anticipated). With the suffering of Christ now a historical reality, put into complete perspective by Paul, Peter and John, we now see the two advents from a side-long perspective, so to speak, clearly articulated in their individuality (instead of as one massive "mountain" of prophecy, indistinguishable from the Old Testament perspective). But to the prophets and believers of the past, viewing these discrete occurrences through prophecy only and from the distant fore-ground of the actual events, the two "peaks" seemed to blend indistinguishably close together. Indeed, in Jesus' day, the necessity for the Messiah to

suffer on behalf of all mankind was lost sight of entirely, with His contemporaries, in their hardened unbelief willing to accept only the glories of the 2nd Advent, while failing to understand that these had to be based upon the humiliations and sacrifice of the 1st Advent.

Instances of this phenomenon of prophetic foreshortening also abound in the area of general eschatology (i.e., prophecies about the end times). To take but one brief example, Isaiah chapter sixty-six ends with the following:

"For just as the new heavens and new earth which I am about to make are going to continue before Me", says the Lord, "so your seed and its name will continue. And it will come to pass that from month to month and from Sabbath to Sabbath all flesh will come to worship before Me", says the Lord. "And they will go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who rebelled against Me, for their worm will not die and their fire will not be quenched and they will be abhorrent to all flesh".

Isaiah 66:22-24

This passage, which, as we know clearly both from New Testament descriptions of the new heavens and new earth (2Pet.3:13; Rev.21:1), as well as from the description of condemned unbelievers (cf. Mk.9:48), must describe the Eternal State (after the close of human history), follows immediately on the heels of a description of events in the newly instituted millennial kingdom of Christ (Is.66:18-21). With the framework of eschatological teaching supplied from the New Testament, these passages can be fit precisely into the scheme of future events. From a strictly Old Testament perspective, however, the sections, treating events at the outset and conclusion of the Messiah's thousand year rule, are difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish, blending together in a way nearly identical to analogous treatments of the 1st and 2nd Advents (e.g., compare Is.9:6a, "unto us a child is born", with 9:6b-7, "He will reign on David's throne", where the birth and return of Christ are indistinguishably linked). In treating prophecies of this sort, it will be important to keep in mind that such blending together of events (or foreshortening) is an extremely common phenomenon in prophecy.

One may be forgiven for asking why such a technique (at least potentially confusing) was even employed? In response, we may note first of all that with the help of all the information the New Testament provides in these matters, Old Testament prophetic material now *is* accessible to us (when "rightly divided", that is). Therefore what we have here is an analogous situation in the case of this foreshortening of prophetic information about the end times to that of the similar treatment of details contained in the prophets about the 1st and 2nd Advents of Christ, wherein they were "not so much serving themselves as they were" us (1Pet.1:12), though earnestly ""eager to discover the precise time" of such events (1Pet.1:10-11; cf. Lk.10:24; Jn.8:56): however much of a mystery this conflation of information was at the time, we are *now* in a position to construct a detailed history of future events with the help of further New Testament revelation (the Book of Revelation in particular).

Secondly, all the information contained within the prophetic books has always been useful and important, from the time of writing, right up until the present hour (and for as long as history may continue). Much of the benefit these prophecies have always provided is to be found in the *encouragement* to be taken from the knowledge they provide about the eventual reestablishment of divine control over the world on the one hand, and the salutary *warnings* they deliver from close consideration of the tremendous divine judgments that will precede this on the other. These are indeed benefits that could be gained from reading the prophets before the coming of Christ and without a complete understanding of the chronological scheme of the eschatological events in question (or, for that matter, of any of the specific distinctions we can now discern). Furthermore, it is a benefit that all Christians can glean from reading the prophets today as well, even without a firm grasp of eschatology. For even cursory consideration of the depiction of the events of the end times in prophecy has value from the standpoint of analogy: the day will come when *God will judge* the world, so what manner of believers ought we to be now (2Pet.3:11-12)? And the day will come when *God will rule* the world, so should we not be encouraged to serve Him properly now (2Pet.3:13-14)?

Finally, there is also an element of deliberately constructed enigma in such prophecy (as suggested at the outset). God has not chosen to make those scriptures which delineate the future a readily open book on all counts. As with many of the truths of the Word of God, they are accessible only through diligent study and laboriously constructed theology. This state of affairs is not without its benefit either, for it serves to distinguish between those who truly want to know Him and those whose interest is merely ephemeral (cf. Matt.13:20-21; 13:34-35; Mk.4:16-17; 4:33-34; Lk.8:13). For this reason Jesus spoke in parables to the enthusiastic crowds who would soon be shouting for His crucifixion (Matt.13:10-17; cf. Ezek.33:30-32; Hos.12:10), and advised all of us who follow Him to be careful about "throwing pearls before swine" (Matt.7:6). There are no pearls of greater price than the truths of the holy scriptures, and it is greatly worth our while to diligently seek God's truth, even if it means wrestling with the likes of prophetic expression (as we are doing here). For the only alternative is to find ourselves in the same predicament as much of Isaiah's audience who were not really interested in what he had to say:

And He said to me, "Go and say to this people, 'Hear well, but do not comprehend. See well, but do not understand'. Harden the heart of this people, make their ears heavy, and blind their eyes, so that they may not see with their eyes, nor hear with their ears, nor understand with their hearts, nor repent and be healed".
Isaiah 6:9-10

b. The "Day of the Lord" Paradigm

Aside from the foreshortening of the 1st and 2nd Advents, the most common Old Testament prophetic blending is the combination of a great deal of currently unfulfilled

eschatology (i.e., prophetic information about the end times) into a single whole under the name "The Day of the Lord" (or other equivalent phrases; see below). This comprising of the bulk of the end times into a single, unifying name, though creating interpretive difficulties, does have a very sensible rationale: beginning with the Lord's termination of the Tribulation at the glorious and victorious return of His Son, and ending with the commencement of eternity, the "Day of the Lord" truly is that period in which God Himself openly asserts His direct control over human history, first in judgment (at the conclusion of the Tribulation), then in restoration (throughout the Millennium), and finally in replacement of temporal history with something far better (at the commencement of the Eternal State). Starting with the very end of the Tribulation (i.e., with the events that signal and encompass the 2nd Advent and Armageddon), this really will be an era in which God's clear and demonstrable orchestration of history's events will be undeniable (as opposed to the present time where God's control of history, complete and foreordained though it unquestionably is, must be observed through the eyes of faith: cf. 2Cor.4:18; 5:7; Heb.11:1). For this reason, that future time to come will be even more clearly His "day" than all of the rest of the historical millennial days which have preceded.

In the final part of our previous series, we devoted much time to the biblical teaching of millennial days – specifically, the molding of all human history by God into seven discrete millennia (Ps.90:4; 2Pet.3:8).²⁶ The "Day of the Lord" is essentially coterminous with the seventh millennial day, the Sabbath of human history, wherein Christ will reign for a thousand years, beginning with His return and the judgments which accompany it, and concluding in a final cycle of judgment that will segue directly into the Father's Eternal Kingdom (1Cor.15:24; Rev.21:1). The "Day of the Lord" technically begins with Armageddon and the events that betoken its proximity. However, given that all divine judgment during the Tribulation serves to warn of this impending "day of judgment", this phrase in prophecy is often also inclusive of events that will actually occur during the Tribulation.

Howl, for the *Day of the Lord* is near, all destroying from the Almighty. Therefore will every hand hang slack and every human heart melt, and they will be dismayed. Convulsions and pain will seize them, and they will writhe like a woman about to give birth. They will look at each other in astonishment, their faces ablaze. Behold, the *Day of the Lord* is coming, a mighty day of anger and intense wrath, to make the earth desolate and remove her sinners from upon her. For the stars of heaven and the constellations will not flash forth their light. The sun will grow dark on its course and the moon will not pour out its light. Then will I punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity. I will bring an end to the arrogance of the proud and bring down the haughtiness of the ruthless. I will make men more rare than gold, and mankind than the choice bullion of Ophir. Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will quake from its place on account of the anger of the Lord and on *the day of His fierce wrath*.
Isaiah 13:6-13

The reduction of worldwide population described above is a trend that runs throughout the Tribulation (Zeph.1:2-3; cf. Mic.7:13), but culminates in the Armageddon judgments. These judgments, along with the glorious return of the Messiah, form the point of emphasis for the phrase "the Day of the Lord", but that this "day" runs the entire length of the Millennium can be seen from the following:

And the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire by that same Word (of God), preserved for the day of judgment and the destruction of godless men. Let not this one fact escape your attention then, beloved, namely that one day is like a thousand years in the Lord's eyes, and a thousand years like one day (i.e., the "day" will span a millennium). The Lord is not delaying in the fulfillment of His promise (as some think); rather He is exercising patience for your sake, being unwilling for anyone to perish, but desiring all instead to come to repentance. For *the Day of the Lord* will come like a thief, **a day in** (i.e., over the course of) *which the heavens will depart* with a roar, the very elements will ignite and dissolve, and the earth and everything which has been done upon it will be laid bare [for the Lord's inspection]. Since all these things are destined to disintegrate in this way, [consider] what sort of [Christians] we ought to be, [devoted to] holy and godly conduct, as we wait with eager expectation and apprehension the advent of **the Day of God**. For on *that day* the heavens will burst into flame and dissolve, and the elements will catch fire and melt. But we are awaiting new heavens and a new earth just as He promised – [a world] where righteousness dwells.

2nd Peter 3:7-13 (cf. Rev.21:11 - 22:3)

The "Day of the Lord" commences with the 2nd Advent and concludes, as the passage above shows, with the "advent of the Day of God", that is, the beginning of the Eternal State, the Kingdom of the Father, at the termination of human history when all rebels have been destroyed and all foes of God eternally judged. For the "Day of the Lord" will be the period of the subjection of the enemies of God, a process that begins with the tribulational judgments and Armageddon, but which runs to the end of the Millennium (including, for example, the suppression of the Gog-Magog rebellion: Rev.20:7-10), and the Last judgment (Rev.20:11-15):

But each [will be resurrected] in his own echelon. Christ [is the] first-fruits (i.e., the initial person and echelon of resurrection). Next [will be] those belonging to Christ at His coming [all believers at the 2nd Advent]. Then the end [of human history – the resurrection of millennial believers], when He will hand the Kingdom over to the Father, *after He has brought an end to all rule, all power, and all authority* (i.e., hostile human and angelic control). For He must rule until He has *placed all His enemies under His feet*.

1st Corinthians 15:23-25 (cf. Psalm 110:1)

Some of the names for this "day" in the Old Testament including a partial list of important occurrences include:

1. "The Day of the Lord": The term proper is often one of judgment, referring in large measure to the retribution that will be wrought upon God's enemies at Christ's 2nd

Advent (Ezek.13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1; 2:11; 2:28-32; 3:14; Amos 5:18-20; Ob.1:15; Zeph.1:7-13; Zech.14:1-21; Mal.4:1-5):

The great *Day of the Lord* is near, very near and coming quickly. The sound of the *Day of the Lord* will be one of warriors roaring bitterly. That day will be a day of blackness, a day of constraint and pressure, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and deep gloom, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the high corner-towers. For I shall bring distress upon mankind, and they will walk about like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord. And their blood will be poured out like dust, and their innards like excrement. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the *day of the anger of the Lord*. And all the earth will be devoured by the fire of His jealousy. For He will bring all the inhabitants of the earth to a complete, yes, a terrifying end.
Zephaniah 1:14-18

2. "The Day of Vengeance": This term links the general judgment described above with God's personal retribution on behalf of His oppressed people (Is.61:2; 63:4; Jer.46:10):

For the Lord has a *day of vengeance*, even a year of retribution for Zion's cause.
Isaiah 34:8

The "year" mentioned here is a season of recompense upon all of God's enemies and the enemies of His people, and is thus also synonymous and coterminous with the "Day of the Lord" (cf. Is.61:2; 63:4). As such, it is also called "the day of wrath" (Is.13:13; Ezek.7:19; Zeph.1:18), and "the day of reckoning" (Is.10:3). It should be noted that the theme of God's vengeance on this day is also often present in prophecy where the word "day" is not specifically used (e.g., Deut.32:40-43; Is.34:1-7; 35:4; 59:17-18; 63:5-6; Ezek.25:12-17; Joel 3:4-16; cf. 2Thes.1:5-10).

3. "That Day": So common (and at the time of writing commonly understood) is the prophetic title "Day of the Lord" that it is also often referred to by the simple phrase "that day", it being taken for granted that the reader will understand by this "the Day of the Lord" (Is.2:10-21; 3:7; 3:18; 4:1-2; 5:30; 7:18; 10:20; 10:27; 17:4; 17:7; 17:9; 24:21; 25:9; 26:1; 27:1-2; 27:13; 31:7; Jer.46:10; Hag.2:23):

On *that day* men will throw their idols of gold and their idols of silver which they have made for themselves to worship to the moles and to the bats, and go into holes in the rocks and crevices in the cliffs for fear of the Lord, and from the splendor of His majesty when He arises to shake the earth.
Isaiah 2:20-21 (cf. Revelation 6:15-16)

New Testament usage is similar, being distinguished only in that it benefits from a more complete revelation of prophetic information. New Testament usage entirely confirms what we have said about the "Day of the Lord" so far. Some of the names for this "day" in the New Testament include:

1. "The Day of the Lord": In addition to a focus on judgment (1Cor.5:5; cf. Acts 2:20), Paul uses the phrase in 1st Thessalonians to describe the timing of the resurrection of the Church and to explain that the ingathering of living believers will follow the resurrection of departed believers on the "Day of the Lord" (1Thes. 4:13 - 5:3). In 2nd Thessalonians, Paul's use of the "Day of the Lord" shows unequivocally that the core meaning we have noted from our study of Old Testament passages, namely, that its primary focus is upon the 2nd Advent, matches his understanding of the term as well, for "that day" will not arrive before the prophesied events of the Tribulation have preceded it (i.e., the "Day of the Lord" follows the Great Apostasy in the Tribulation's first half, and the reign of antichrist in the second: 2Thes.2:1-4). Peter's use of the term at 2nd Peter 3:10 most clearly demonstrates the all-inclusive nature of the "Day of the Lord", clearly extending from the return of Christ unto the destruction of the universe at the conclusion of His millennial reign (quoted with commentary at the beginning of this section).

2. "The Great Day": The book of Revelation refers to the "Day of the Lord" twice as "the Great Day", characterizing it further once as a day "of wrath" (Rev.6:17), and once as a day "of God Almighty" (Rev.16:14).

3. "The Day of Christ": With the New Testament's clear identification of the Messiah as our Lord Jesus Christ, Paul often refers to this future age-day under the title, "the Day of Christ", a term that usually focuses specifically upon the judgment and reward of Christ's Church at His return (Phil.1:6; 1:10; 2:16; cf. 2Cor.1:14; 1Thes.2:19):

[God] who will also keep you firmly grounded until the end, irreproachable on *the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

1st Corinthians 1:8 (cf. 3:13)

4. Other Terms: As in the Old Testament, the familiarity of the theme means that often the idea of the "Day of the Lord" (including the pre-2nd Advent judgments, the return of Christ, His millennial rule, and the end of human history) can be in view without using any specific technical term. Without exhausting the topic, we shall round out our survey here with some other terms which do occur that are also synonyms for the "Day of the Lord", stressing one or another of the aforementioned aspects of this familiar theme:

a. "The day He comes to be glorified" (2Thes.1:7-10).

b. "That day" (2Tim.1:12&18).

c. "The day of judgment" (Matt.10:15; 11:24; 12:36; Acts 17:31; 2Pet.2:9; 3:7; 1Jn.4:17; Jude 6).

d. "The last day" (Jn.6:39-54; 11:24; 12:48).

The particular hermeneutic "problem" we are confronting here concerns mainly Old Testament usage of the phrase "the Day of the Lord". The "Day of the Lord", is, in addition to being a very specific prophetic term for the end of human history

(following the Tribulation), also used quite frequently in the Old Testament prophets *as a paradigm* for contemporary (or near contemporary) events. Just as Paul, in the book of Hebrews, can under divine inspiration look backward and compare the backsliding of contemporary Christian residents of Judea to the behavior of the Exodus generation (i.e., utilizing an "Exodus paradigm" for purposes of comparison: 1Cor.10:1-13; Heb.3:7-19), so Old Testament writers of scripture under the same inspiration of the Spirit often look forward, comparing events taking place (or soon to take place) to the events which will transpire at the end of history. This is why "that day" often seems to (and often actually does) leap forward rapidly from descriptions of ongoing events to a dramatic discussion of occurrences which must refer to the "end times" exclusively, frequently without any clear signal in the text that such a spectacular shift is going to take place. This rapid-fire shifting between present and future events, although potentially confusing at first, is, when properly understood, an incredibly effective way both to encourage the faithful to persevere, while warning the recalcitrant of the dangerous path they are treading. For God's ultimate destruction of the wicked and deliverance of the righteous "on that day" serves as a pattern, an example, and a paradigm of how He always acts at such times of crisis, in terrible justice to the wicked, and in absolute faithfulness to the righteous.

The critical factor which often escapes the notice of readers of the Old Testament prophets is that once one understands the *pattern* of the "Day of the Lord", one can then be shown how that same *pattern* has always and will always repeat in human history. The "Day of the Lord" is the ultimate episode of the divine "cycle" of judgment, restoration and replacement (studied in detail in the last installment of our previous series).²⁷ This is true not only in broad-stroke outlines, but even down to fine details. To broaden the analogy slightly, this prophetic paradigm often includes first the degeneration of the nation, followed by warnings to it, judgment upon it, judgment upon the foreign instrument of that judgment, divine deliverance of a remnant from the foreign oppressor, the joy of the redeemed in deliverance, the restoration of God's blessing, and the substitution of the redeemed in place of the previous sinful populace.

For this reason, an Old Testament prophet who was led by inspiration of the Holy Spirit to predict the coming of a conqueror to Palestine to punish the apostasy of the people always had an excellent, God-given analogy ready at hand in the ultimate occasion of such an event at the threshold of history's end (cf. Ezek.33-39; Joel 1-3). And if such a prophet were tasked with encouraging the faithful regarding God's eventual deliverance from the coming scourge, there would be no better parallel than the coming of the Messiah to destroy the enemies of God and restore the fortunes of Israel forevermore at the commencement of the "Day of the Lord" (cf. Is.10-11). This frequent Old Testament use of the "Day of the Lord" *as a paradigm* for putting contemporary events (or near term prophesied events) into the proper *divine* way of looking at things so as to teach, encourage, warn and explain, needs to be grasped in order to properly interpret those scriptures which anticipate the tribulational events and the "Day of the Lord" that follows. The "Day of the Lord" paradigm stresses God's control and final disposition of all history (since the point of analogy is that "day" when His control will become absolute), and, as such, it is greatly encouraging for believers to realize that as He will do

ultimately, so He will do imminently in every phase of history (to include His righteous resolution of the crises of the present). Despite testing and temporal disaster, the righteous will always be able to look forward to the time of deliverance and rejoicing, while the wicked have only the fiery judgment of God to anticipate.

Oh, the raging of many nations – they rage like the raging of the sea! Oh, the uproar of the peoples – they roar like the roaring of great waters! Although the peoples roar like the roar of surging waters, when he rebukes them they flee far away, driven before the wind like chaff on the hills, like tumbleweed before a gale. In the evening, sudden terror! Before the morning, they are gone! This is the portion of those who loot us, the lot of those who plunder us.

Isaiah 17:12-14 NIV (generalizing conclusion to an oracle against *Damascus*)

c. The Cycle of Judgment, Restoration, Replacement

Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again. All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 1:4-9 NIV

Human history is repetitive, as the best secular historians have always recognized.²⁸ History is cyclical, because God has made it that way – to teach mankind a few basic but important lessons about the true nature of life on this earth. Just as all men learn about the existence and reality of God from observing His creation (Rom.1:18-20), so through an objective observation of the human condition and human behavior through time (i.e., history), the utter pointlessness of all human endeavor is plain enough for anyone to see (anyone, that is, who is willing to face the unvarnished truth about human existence).²⁹ This principle becomes even more perspicuous when we turn to the scriptures. Examination of history strictly from God's point of view reveals a cycle of divine judgment, restoration and replacement which has been repeating predictably since He created the universe (and will, until the present universe comes to an end). This is true at all times, from pre-human angelic history to the end of time as we now know it, and on all levels, from the lives of the most obscure human beings to the rise and fall of the greatest empires. In both angelic and human experience, history began with creature rebellions which set in motion God's assertion of control in judgment, restoration and replacement – a cycle of divine direction of the historical process which not only redresses wrong, but also demonstrates God's inimitable grace, bringing a healing closure wherein the end is better than the beginning (the outcome of renewal being reserved for those who respond to His grace, while those who reject it are confirmed in condemnation).

Since the dawn of history, we see this cycle repeated not only on the national level, but also in every human life. Man is born in sin, condemned by the justice of God (Rom.3:23; 5:8; 7:14-20; 1Cor.15:22). But by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Man is offered restoration to God (through faith). For all those who respond to God's magnanimous offer, an incomparable new life, an eternal life replaces the pathetically short and painful mortality that is now our common lot. For all those who reject the costly sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the original judgment of death is confirmed, with the sentence of death to be executed at the end of history (i.e., judgment day, at the "Great White Throne": Rev.20:11-15).

The cycle of judgment, restoration and replacement for the repentant (and of confirmation and condemnation for the resistant) can also be seen in the life of nations. We can only speculate about the details of cases that are not specifically commented upon by scripture, but it is easily within the ability of anyone with even a rudimentary grasp of history to supply examples of nations which have been destroyed for godless behavior (cf. Babylon by God's agent, Cyrus), or severely chastised and later restored upon repentance from their evil (cf. Assyria in the Book of Jonah). That God conducts Himself in such a way towards the nations of the world is certainly taught in scripture:

If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or a kingdom is to be built up and planted and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.

Jeremiah 18:7-10 NIV

The main difference in this cycle for nations is that God's chastising judgments (as well as recovery from judgment) are necessarily collective in nature. That is to say, all the inhabitants of a nation find themselves "in the same boat" in times of divine retribution, so that even a Jeremiah suffers from association with a nation under the most severe punishment of God, let alone less prominent believers like you and me (Ezek.14:13-20; and compare the "message to Baruch" in Jer.45). Conversely, nations which repent and are pardoned (or do not fall afoul of the awesome divine standard in the first place) certainly have their share of "wicked" who benefit by association with a populace that is largely God-fearing (or at least adheres to base-line standards of law and morality). What concerns us in the present context, however, is less the process of judgment and the standard applied (Jer.18:7-10 quoted above puts the principle in quite general terms – God will decide what is intolerable evil and what is rewardable good) than it is the historically repeating cycle itself.

The cycle of events we are discussing here finds its archetype in the events of the Tribulation and the subsequent "Day of the Lord". For this reason, these celebrated eschatological events provide the key analogy we have been discussing found throughout the Old Testament prophetic books. That is to say, the specific pattern of judgment, restoration and replacement which will occur in conjunction with that ultimate "Day", is the very pattern to which the Old Testament prophets continually

made reference, and, further, is exactly what is being used as an analogy in their treatment of contemporary events: whenever some part of the cycle of divine judgment, restoration and replacement was imminent, it was most often these ultimate future events to which the prophets turned in divine inspiration for descriptive examples of what was soon to be unleashed in their own times. While our purpose here is in one respect the same as theirs (i.e., drawing lessons of warning and providing encouragement in anticipation of ultimate divine deliverance from the terrible events to come), in another respect it is "inside-out": while Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and the Minor Prophets often use the "Day of the Lord" paradigm to explain events that were soon to take place, we shall be analyzing not only the clearly eschatological portions of their writings but also their contemporary applications to provide, by reverse analogy, information about the coming Tribulation and the glories to follow. Put another way, if a prophet explains a contemporary event by describing it in terms of what will happen on the "Day of the Lord", we can be assured that the analogy works both ways: the contemporary event, *because* it is analogous to what will happen on the "Day of the Lord", therefore *gives us information about* the "Day of the Lord".

To take a rather well known example of how we need to be aware of this "multiple application" of prophetic scriptures in order to properly glean all pertinent information about the Tribulation from scripture, the reader is asked to recall our discussion of Isaiah chapter 14 (in part 1 of the preceding Satanic Rebellion series). In that chapter, what begins as a near contemporary prophecy about the end of the Babylonian captivity (still future at the time of writing) quickly segues into a description of the king of Babylon, an account which has been widely (and rightly) taken to refer to Satan, tracing his career from his original fall to his ultimate destruction (at the end of the "Day of the Lord"). Given that the details at the end of the discussion are valid *both* for the near term and for the ultimate cycle (the Tribulation and the "Day of the Lord"), we would not be amiss in seeing the description of Israel's restoration at the beginning of the chapter as being likewise applicable to that final day even as it is to the near contemporary restoration it predicts (i.e., the end of the Babylonian captivity). Indeed, in this particular case, there is in fact not a single detail given in Isaiah 14:1-4a (the introduction to the taunt against the king of Babylon) which cannot be affirmed by independent verification of other scriptures as being applicable *both* to contemporary events *and* to the future "Day of the Lord":

v.1a: *"The Lord will have compassion on Jacob and will again choose Israel and will settle them in their own land."* NIV

Commentary: It is the prophesied resettlement of the Jews in their own land here that is the concrete result of God's compassion and choice (in restored favor) of Israel. The immediate applicability of this verse is to the return of the exiles from the Babylonian captivity (cf. Jer.3:18; 16:15; 23:8), an event roughly contemporary compared to the distant end times (though still nearly two centuries away at the time Isaiah recorded this prophecy).³⁰ However, the regathering of Israel from throughout the world and the resettlement following the 2nd Advent of the Jewish survivors of the Tribulation in the land of Israel is also prophesied many times in scripture (Is.10:21-22; 11:10-16; 35:8-10;

43; 49:8-26; 60:4; 66:20; Jer.3:18; 30:10; 31:8; 33:15; Ezek.11:17; 20:41; 34:13; 37:21-28; 39:25-29; Amos 9:11; Zeph.3:20; Zech.8:7-8; 10:10).

v.1b: *"Aliens will join them and unite with the house of Jacob."* NIV

Commentary: There had always been some gentiles who had joined themselves to Israel out of a desire to seek the Lord (cf. Ex.12:19; 12:38; Num.9:14; 15:14; 35:15; Deut.1:16; 31:12; Josh.8:33-35). Therefore in terms of contemporary events this most likely refers to the return of non-Jews who were nevertheless part of the community (cf. Ezra 2:43-59; Neh.7:46-52). From an eschatological point of view, however, the inclusion of believing gentiles into the woof and warp of Christ's millennial kingdom in an identical fashion is also a well-documented prophecy (Is.2:2-3; 11:10; 27:13; 56:3-8; 60:3; Ezek.47:22; Zech.2:10-12; 8:20-23; cf. Est.8:17).

v.2a: *"Nations will take them and bring them to their own place."* NIV

Commentary: This was fulfilled in the near term by Cyrus the Great's proclamation and support both of the original return of the exiles to the land under Sheshbazzar (Zerubbabel) as well as of the rebuilding of the temple (2Chron.36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-11; cf. Is.44:28; 45:1-7), by Darius' confirmation of the policy (Ezra 6:1-12), and by the support rendered to Nehemiah by Artaxerxes (Neh.2:1-9; cf. Ezra 6:13), Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, all kings of the Persian empire which was a great collection of "nations" (Ezra 1:2). However the passage finds its ultimate fulfillment in the regathering of the Jews following the Second Advent, when the nations will enthusiastically assist Israel's return to the land (Is.43:6; 49:22; 60:4; 60:8-9; 66:20).

v.2b: *"And the house of Israel will possess the nations as menservants and maidservants in the Lord's land. They will make captives of their captors and rule over their oppressors."* NIV

Commentary: In addition to the returning believing gentiles, the restored Jewish nation would eventually again rule over the surrounding peoples (Samaritans, Idumaeans, etc.). Yet here we see the eschatological emphasis beginning to rise beyond the contemporary application of the prophecy, for this subjection and possession of the gentiles will clearly be a more prominent aspect of the millennial Israel (Is.11:14; 25:3; 43:14; 49:23; 54:3; 60:10-16).

v.3: *"On the day the Lord gives you relief from suffering and turmoil and cruel bondage,"* NIV

Commentary: As in the previous verse, so here in verse three the application of this aspect of the prophecy, while true for Israel restored from the harsh Babylonian captivity (cf. Ezra 9:8-9; Ps.137:1-6), will be even more perspicuous on that ultimate "day", the "Day of the Lord" (Is.40:1-2; 49:10; 49:13; 54:7-15; Ezek.39:25-29).

v.4a: "you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon." NIV

Commentary: In addition to the literal king of Babylon (defeated by Cyrus the Great), this verse also applies to the ultimate king of "mystery" Babylon, antichrist as head of the revived Roman empire (cf. Rev.17:1-5), and it is in this connection that the verse and those which follow have their ultimate application (Is.14:14-23). Furthermore, this particular section of prophecy, in addition to looking forward to near term and far term future events, also looks backward to the time of the devil's rebellion against the Lord before human history began (cf. Ezek.28:11-19).³¹ And, finally, when the description of the downfall of the king of Babylon/antichrist/devil is concluded, Isaiah moves back to events that were right on the verge of taking place (closer even than the Babylonian captivity which was still well over one hundred years future). Verses 24-27 detail the impending defeat of Assyria at the Lord's hands, a miraculous deliverance which was soon to take place in Isaiah's own days (cf. chapters 36-39). This event, that is, the supernatural destruction of the Assyrian army (see especially Is.37:36-38), is parallel to and evocative of the destruction by the Lord Jesus Christ of antichrist's armies at the 2nd Advent (i.e., the battle of Armageddon). In practical and contemporary terms, this is surely the message Isaiah was sent to convey, with the dire parallel events of the future serving as a severe warning example to the nation to repent and return to the Lord. That Judah was miraculously delivered from the Assyrian threat while the Northern Kingdom of Israel was completely destroyed is a clear indication of Judah's response to Isaiah's message (and of Israel's rejection of it).

The discussion above should be sufficient to show that Old Testament prophecies may often have both a near term and a far-future fulfillment (i.e., an ultimate fulfillment occurring during the Tribulation and the "Day of the Lord"). We would therefore be remiss if we failed to consider such prophecies in our construction of tribulational history.

This multiple applicability, moreover, is a deliberate and divinely-inspired device designed to bring home the significance of the cycle of near-contemporary events ready to be unleashed by comparing them to that ultimate, eschatological (i.e., "end times") cycle of events. The process of judgment, restoration and replacement is a traumatic one. Prophecies of the sort considered above help to prepare those willing to hear the words of God for the cataclysmic nature of this cycle, be it the ultimate events of the end times or analogously trying contemporary events. In short, God's prophets were continually led to make use of the device of drawing upon the future events of the Tribulation and "Day of the Lord" as an analogy for what was about to happen in their own time in order to get the attention of those to whom they ministered.

Our treatment of Isaiah 14 above also demonstrates that near and far term applications of these prophecies are often interwoven to such a degree that separating them out can be a difficult process. Usually it is a mistake to try, for, as the passage above shows, more often than not there is *both* a near and a far term applicability. The reality of multiple fulfillment (designed to bring home to a contemporary audience the significance of historical events about to unfold by comparing them to the ultimate example of the end

of history), rather than being a hindrance or a disadvantage to us today is, quite to the contrary, a genuine boon in our search for detailed information about the Tribulation and the "Day" which is to follow. For, once we accept the fact of multiple fulfillment and come to understand the purpose and method of the Old Testament prophets in employing it (under the guidance of the Spirit), not only do we find ourselves free of the incorrect and enervating hermeneutic stricture that would have us choose yea or nay in such cases (i.e., under the mistaken belief that each passage *must* refer *either* to contemporary events *or* the end times), but we are also presented with a wealth of information about the events it is our purpose to study here, as previously closed passages become important sources for details about the Tribulation and subsequent "Day of the Lord" when viewed from the standpoint of the prophetic analogy which is the "Day of the Lord" paradigm.

None of this is accidental. The prophecy analyzed above (and all biblical prophecy) is of God's inspiration, and the predicted (and actual) occurrence of events derives from God's construction of history and His administration of it according to His divine plan and divine standards for His own gracious purposes. We should not be surprised, therefore, that this sort of thing (i.e., the continual repetition of the cycle of judgment, restoration and replacement) appears again and again in prophecy and in history. Rather we should set ourselves to benefit from this phenomenon in our attempt to glean as much detail as we can about the end times from all scriptural sources. For, with proper interpretation, a precise understanding and employment of the "Day of the Lord" paradigm as applied in scripture to the cycle of judgment, restoration and replacement opens up much of Old Testament prophecy that would otherwise be seen as *only* applicable to events that have already taken place.

In order to put ourselves in a position to gain as much as we can from this deliberate paralleling of events, it will be helpful here to sketch out in broad outlines the pattern of events which the cycle typically entails. Israel, as the nation of believers to whom these prophecies came (exclusively from prophets of Jewish descent), is, obviously, the primary point of reference for the historical cycle we are considering. A synopsis of the historical sequence of this cycle for Israel (applicable by analogy in many ways to nations in general) can be given as follows in broad outline:

1. **Backsliding**: the spiritual degeneration of the nation.
2. **Warning**: divine verbal warnings and intensifying warning-judgments on the nation.
3. **Judgment**: virtual destruction of the nation by a chosen instrument of judgment (i.e., another nation).
4. **Restoration**: divine deliverance of a faithful remnant and repentance of the survivors.

5. **Retribution:** judgment upon the instrument of judgment (i.e., the destroying nation is destroyed in turn).

6. **Replacement:** the rebellious are purged and joy restored to the redeemed (who replace the previous sinful populace).

Clearly, while response to God's warnings averts the cycle, lack of response brings the cycle to full fruition (which has historically meant, in the case of gentile nations, complete and utter destruction with no surviving remnant).

History continues to repeat itself in the terms described above because mankind remains the same (a fact not lost upon the more insightful secular historians)³², but also (and much more importantly) because **God** is forever the same (Heb.13:8), and so are His standards. As a consequence, His response to rebellion on behalf of those who belong to Him is ever the same as well. Thus the Old Testament prophets made great use of His consistent historical and future responses to backsliding in their attempts to turn Israel from her sins. Upon reflection, therefore, it is not surprising that this approach of contemporary warning and encouragement based upon the consideration of cataclysmic future events should have been employed. It is, on the contrary, surprising only that people past and present have failed to prove more responsive to our Lord in light of the fearful expectation of judgment for lack of proper response to and respect for Him so well documented, past, present and future.

This inveterate tendency of mankind individually and collectively to stray from God (with those who turn back to Him under the pressure of judgment few and far between) guarantees that the judgment part of the cycle (which has been repeating since Adam and Eve) will continue as long as sinful mankind inhabits the earth. God's amazing grace in providing forgiveness through Jesus Christ to those who *do* respond and return to Him guarantees that restoration and replacement will also continue for all who take advantage of His bountiful grace. This is, in essence, the story of Christ, the personal embodiment of the grace of the God and the One whose sacrifice has made that grace available to all who are willing to embrace it. And because this essential story of gracious deliverance from judgment in the Messiah is so clear, it was possible for the Old Testament prophets to move back and forth between contemporary and far-future references with much greater ease than anything with which we are (at first) comfortable. For example, they can switch from the impending destruction of ancient Israel to the ultimate deliverance of Israel at the 2nd Advent precisely because from the divine point of view the progression of these events is *identical* in principle: God's judgment and His gracious deliverance in restoration and replacement always operate on the same standard and always on the basis of the same sacrifice (that of our Lord Jesus Christ). It is only the particulars (time, persons, scale) which change. So it is that not only can the experience of every nation be seen in these terms (i.e., the alternatives of grace and judgment), but also of every generation and every individual.

d. Typology and Sequence in Old Testament Prophecy

The interchangeability of particulars within the unchangeable cycle we are studying goes a long way toward explaining the tendency (as well as the ability) of Old Testament prophets operating under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to "shift scenes" with such alacrity. Once we add to this equation the phenomenon of *typology*, our interpretive picture will be fairly well complete. Simply put, typology is the use of an analogous substitute (a "type") to represent, explain or symbolize an exemplar or model (an "antitype"). This phenomenon is likewise ubiquitous in scripture and not confined to prophecy. For example, Joshua is a clear "type" of Jesus: he leads Israel back into the promised land, defeating her enemies through divine agency (cf. the fall of the walls of Jericho) – even his name, Joshua, is indistinguishable in the Hebrew and the Greek from Jesus (we write them separately in English only as a matter of convenience to avoid confusion).³³ Joshua thus foreshadows the return of our Lord Jesus Christ and His 2nd Advent victories. In a similar way, the king of Babylon and antichrist can be representative types of Satan (as we saw above in our consideration of Isaiah chapter fourteen).

Once we have become comfortable with the principle of typology (as well as with those of foreshortening, eschatological paradigms, and the repeating, divinely controlled historical cycle), the method and practice of the Old Testament prophets becomes largely accessible. For these men were all, under God's divine guidance, working off of a well-known story, *the* story of the ages: divine judgment upon rebellion, with gracious restoration of the repentant, and the replacement of what was lost with something better, all based upon divine provision in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This "story" is the essence of what we call "history", the *true* story of what is happening, has always happened, and will ultimately happen here on planet earth, ever revolving around and essentially incomprehensible without the Person of Jesus Christ, by whom the world was made and in whom it has its being (Jn.1:3; 1Cor.8:6; Col.1:16-17; Heb.1:1-2).

In historical terms, then, this "cycle as story" typically plays out in the following way:

1. **Backsliding**: A nation, group or individual (more often than not, originally believing) turns away from God.
2. **Warning**: God provides an intensifying series of warnings and divine discipline to graciously prod the wayward back to Him before it is too late.
3. **Judgment**: In the absence of repentance, God raises up an oppressor to destroy the rebellious.
4. **Restoration**: In His mercy, God raises up a Deliverer to rescue the faithful remnant (or person) and restore the repentant survivor(s).
5. **Retribution**: The oppressor (individual or national) is utterly destroyed.

6. Replacement: The faithful remnant replaces the rebellious majority, with their end being more blessed than their beginning (for a nation or individual alike).

Egyptians, Canaanites, Amalekites, Assyrians, Babylonians, Romans – the list of nations who have played the role of oppressor in this story (as applied to Israel on the national level) is both long and familiar. In the ultimate version of this "story of the ages", the one which we have set ourselves to explore in our present study, namely, the Tribulation and the "Day of the Lord", it will be the worldwide confederacy of nations under antichrist playing this part, and with not only Israel, but all believers cast in the role of the oppressed. The Tribulation will constitute the judgment phase, with the 2nd Advent of the Messiah as the time of restoration, followed by the Millennium wherein the world will see an "over and above" replacement under the righteous rule of Christ unprecedented in human history both for its miraculous nature and for the intensity of its blessings. It is to this historical "antitype" (i.e., the cycle of judgment, restoration and replacement that will occur during the Tribulation and "Day of the Lord") and personal "anti-types" (i.e., the antichrist and Satan as oppressors in turn opposed by the glorified Christ as Deliverer) to which the prophets ultimately looked and from which they inevitably drew their parallels under the guiding hand of the Spirit.

Old Testament prophecy, therefore, is not "all over the map" (for anyone who knows how to read the map). Rather, these future references are deliberately and divinely designed elucidations of the contemporary situations the prophets were confronting. Since, more often than not, these situations involved impending judgment upon the nation for apostasy, one of the most frequent points of analogy to be found in the likes of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, etc., is the Tribulation and subsequent events (i.e., the "Day of the Lord" paradigm). It is for this reason that we have indulged ourselves here in a somewhat detailed discussion of these matters, one which it may well be that some will find challenging to digest at first take. But it is essential to digest these things, for the prophecies concerned constitute an invaluable font of information about the end times, the very subject of our present study.

2. Biblical Sources for the End Times

As mentioned at the outset, we shall be utilizing the Book of Revelation (which treats the end times in an essentially chronological manner) as our organizational guide for this study. Before beginning our exegesis of Revelation, however, it will be useful to list here the major sources of material about the end times occurring outside of the Bible's final book. Of necessity, this sketch will be in the manner of a quick overview in order to provide a sense of what material there is and where it is to be found. Obviously, time and space do not permit here a complete outline, not to mention exegesis, of all the books and chapters listed below. These and other pertinent passages will indeed be adduced and considered in context during the course of this study as we proceed chronologically with our investigation of the "history of the Tribulation". The reader is therefore asked to keep in mind that the following list of "highlights" is not meant to be entirely comprehensive (smaller sections providing critical and significant details can

and do occur elsewhere in scripture as well: compare the isolated passages treated in section I above).

a. Old Testament

"All scripture is God-breathed and useful . . ." (2Tim.3:16; cf. Rom.4:23-24; 1Pet.1:12), and so it is true that there is not a book (nor, for that matter, a chapter) in the Old Testament which cannot be used in one way or another at least to illustrate some aspect of or some principle pertinent to the end times (in part for reasons discussed in section IV.1 above). The spiritual truths of God's control of history have always remained the same. There are, however, some parts of the Old Testament which need to be singled out here, either for their notable concentration of prophetic information about the Tribulation and the following "Day of the Lord", or for the very close paradigms they provide to the events of this coming era. That this latter phenomenon is not accidental can be seen in the case of what is possibly the most salient example, namely, the comparison of the Exodus to the Tribulation (i.e., "the Exodus paradigm"): in the book of Revelation, for instance, the victorious song of the martyrs is called "the song of Moses" (Rev.15:2-3; cf. Ex.15), a clear and deliberate coupling of the experiences of the children of Israel in escaping from Pharaoh with that of believers of the Tribulation and the Great Persecution launched against them by antichrist.³⁴

In terms of topicality and theme, the traditional English order (though different in some respects from the traditional Hebrew order) suits our purposes here, for it organizes the books of the Old Testament according genre (loosely construed):

The Pentateuch: (Genesis through Deuteronomy)

Genesis:

3:15: the protevangelium

6-9: the Noahic paradigm (the flood as a type of the Tribulation)

11: the Tower of Babel and Nimrod (a type of antichrist)

49: Jacob's blessing of his sons

Exodus: the book as paradigm (Egypt as a type of antichrist's kingdom)

Leviticus: 16-17: the Day of Atonement (a type of the Great Tribulation)

Numbers:

13-20: the apostasy of the Israelites (a type of the Great Apostasy)

23-24: the oracles of Balaam

Deuteronomy:

18:14-22: the Prophet (a prophecy of Christ)
28:15 - 30:20: the cycle of judgment, restoration and replacement
32: the song of Moses
33: Moses' blessing of the tribes

The Historical Books: (Joshua through Esther)

Joshua: the book as paradigm (Joshua as a type of the returning Messiah)

Judges: historical examples of apostasy, judgment, redemption, restoration and replacement

The Wisdom Books: (Job through Song of Solomon)

Job: a paradigm of intensive undeserved suffering (analogous to believers in the Tribulation)

Psalms: The book of Psalms, prophecy with a uniquely personal focus, illustrates in a vivid way the ideas discussed in the previous section. This is particularly true of the first two books of psalms (1-41 and 42-72 respectively), organized and, for the most part, written by King David.³⁵ As other prophets used their inspired knowledge of the end times to draw parallels to motivate their audiences, David shares with us in these two collections a powerful reminiscence of his own spiritual experiences, demonstrating for us how he motivated and encouraged himself in the Lord in the midst of the severe tribulations he faced (cf. 1Sam.30:6). A significant part of this self-motivation comes from his inspired concentration upon future events, that is, looking forward to the Messiah and His kingdom. David had faith in God's promises, that just as the establishment of His greater Son's kingdom was assured, so God would deliver him from his troubles and bring him into his own kingdom as well. Books I and II of Psalms are in particular essential reading for all believers in time of tribulation, especially for us who now find ourselves on the cusp of the end times. For these two books give us David's take on the proper perspective of "the believer *in the storm*". Reading and understanding these books as units is important, for in doing so we catch a glimpse of this great believer under tremendous pressure (in his early exile years, and in his later difficulties), allowing us not only to identify with David in all these troubles, but also to learn how to find our strength and encouragement in God as he did. For those of us whose lot it will be to endure *the* Tribulation, books I and II are veritable synopses of that experience.³⁶ For this reason, although the same might be said of the psalms in books III-V as well (consider the clear eschatological significance of, for example, psalms 82-84, 87, 93, 96-98, 102, *110, 117, 118, 137, 148, 150), all of the psalms in these first two books are listed below with a brief description followed in square brackets by a general application for believers in tribulation (and, ultimately, in *the* Tribulation). Far from being repetitive, these are critically important perspectives, which, taken as a whole and kept in the heart, can sustain us in the worst of times:

Book I: David's life a paradigm of the Lord's deliverance from tribulations (the Tribulation)

1: spiritual blessings on the faithful, judgment on the wicked
[*following the Lord is worthwhile*]

2: the Messiah's subjugation of the rebellious nations
[*the Lord protects us from the adversary*]

3: David flees from Absalom
[*the Lord protects us in danger and delivers us from treachery*]

4: a plea for relief from godless enemies
[*let us trust and delight in God and His deliverance*]

5: a humble yet confident prayer for help
[*the Lord answers our prayers, but destroys the wicked*]

6: a prayer for forgiveness and help
[*the Lord forgives us our sins and confounds our enemies*]

7: a righteous prayer for deliverance from a false accuser
[*the Lord judges our wicked enemies*]

8: the Last Adam's future reign
[*we shall one day share in Christ's dominion over the earth*]

9: God's judgment on the godless nations
[*God controls history and will vindicate our cause*]

10: man oppresses but God redresses
[*despite human expectations, God vindicates the helpless*]

11: a rebuke of those who would demoralize the godly
[*the Lord will destroy the wicked for us*]

12: the victories of the wicked tongue are temporary
[*God protects us from slanderous tongues*]

13: a plea for help under extreme pressure
[*in spite of trouble, we trust in Him and are grateful*]

14: the godless adversary
[*those who follow antichrist are fools – the Messiah will vindicate us*]

- 15: the requirements for fellowship with God
[*the righteous life is not in vain*]
- 16: keeping our focus on God
[*He is our portion and hope, our good transcending this life*]
- 17: a confident prayer for deliverance from enemies
[*we can be assured that God will answer us*]
- 18: a hymn of victory for the Messiah
[*in Him, our ultimate deliverance & victory are certain*]
- 19: the creation testifies to the truth of God's words
[*we must stay focused on the Word of God*]
- 20: a prayer for the victory of other believers
[*we are encouraged by each others confident faith*]
- 21: the Victorious King gives thanks
[*we will share in our Lord Jesus Christ's final victory*]
- 22: the Suffering Servant and Victorious Messiah
[*Christ our example of endurance & victory*]
- 23: Christ our Shepherd
[*the Lord is guiding us through tribulation to ultimate victory*]
- 24: the advent of the King of Glory
[*those who reject antichrist(s) will reign with the Christ*]
- 25: a prayer for guidance and mercy
[*God is our source of truth, forgiveness and deliverance*]
- 26: a prayer for distinction from the wicked
[*God will not destroy us along with the wicked*]
- 27: absolute confidence in the Lord
[*we can and should have complete faith in His deliverance*]
- 28: a prayer for deliverance is answered
[*the Lord will hear and answer us in trouble too*]
- 29: praise for the majesty of God
[*He whose voice shakes the world can and will protect us*]

30: praise in repentance for God's mercy and forgiveness
[*everything depends upon His favor*]

31: an acknowledgment of complete dependance upon God
[*we need Him utterly*]

32: praise for God's forgiveness after confession of sin
[*He forgives those who return to Him*]

33: praise for the Lord's character and power
[*God's plans will stand in spite of human designs*]

34: praise for the Lord's goodness unto the helpless who trust in Him
[*He will provide for us too*]

35: placing the battle in God's hands
[*the Lord will fight on our behalf if we but trust in Him*]

36: the godless are blind to the wonder of God
[*He blesses the righteous but rejects the wicked*]

37: God will bless the righteous and destroy the wicked
[*trust Him – don't look to appearances*]

38: a plea for mercy and deliverance from enemies
[*The Lord forgives those who confess and delivers those who look to Him for help*]

39: experiencing the vanity of life
[*only getting and staying right with God counts in this life*]

40: God rewards and delivers the patient and humble [S]ervant
[*Christ's self-sacrifice, humility and ultimate deliverance our model in tribulation*]

41: the Lord's deliverance from the treachery of false friends
[*the Lord delivers the righteous from even the worst circumstances*]

Book II: David's life a paradigm of God's deliverance from the Tribulation (tribulations)

42: confidence in the Lord's deliverance from tribulation, part 1
[*it is important to find our encouragement in the Lord in times of tribulation*]

43: confidence in the Lord's deliverance from tribulation, part 2
[*it is important to find our encouragement in the Lord in times of tribulation*]

44: a plea for national deliverance from persecution
[*God is the source of our victories and He is aware of all our troubles: trust in Him*]

45: the glory of the Messiah and His wedding to the bride
[*we will share in His victory and be with Him forever*]

46: the Messiah's victory over the nations
[*we have no cause to fear for the Lord fights our battles*]

47: the millennial coronation of the Messiah
[*His victory is a certainty, so our deliverance is assured*]

48: the millennial capital of the Messiah
[*we will be safe and secure with God our guide forever*]

49: confidence of the mature believer in the midst of tribulation
[*the apparent blessings of the wicked will dissolve and they themselves will turn to dust*]

50: the millennial purging
[*the Lord will separate the wicked and the righteous, so what sort ought we to be?*]

51: a prayer confessing sin and asking forgiveness
[*God requires a contrite heart rather than an external show of contrition*]

52: the oppressor Doeg the Edomite as a type of antichrist
[*God will make the righteous flourish, but the destroyer will be utterly destroyed*]

53: the fool who denies God as a type of antichrist and oppressor
[*the ruthless will come to know the fear of God at Messiah's return*]

54: a prayer for deliverance from general betrayal
[*though men betray us for gain, God will deliver us but destroy them*]

55: a prayer for deliverance from betrayal at the hands of friends
[*though those we love betray us, God will judge the deceitful and save us*]

56: a prayer for deliverance from allies of convenience
[*God is our deliverance from unbelievers who surround and would betray us*]

57: "do not destroy"; a prayer for deliverance when trapped and cornered
[*the Lord sees our plight and will turn our enemies' devices back on themselves*]

58: "do not destroy"; a complaint and request for deliverance from evil rulers, like antichrist
[the wicked rulers will be destroyed swiftly and the righteous vindicated]

59: "do not destroy"; a prayer for deliverance from powerful enemies; Saul as antichrist
[God is our fortress and refuge against the destroyer; He will repay the adversary]

60: an appeal to the Lord of the armies
[only with God can we gain the victory]

61: anticipation of the Kingdom of God
[we need to have faith that He will deliver us and give us rest]

62: a reminder of the source of our strength and all our good
[we need to find our rest and hope in God alone]

63: communion with God in persecution; the Tribulation as a desert that must be crossed
[deprivation and persecution bring home the fact that God is our true portion]

64: prayer for deliverance from conspiracy
[even the most clever plans of our powerful enemies collapse before God our refuge]

65: a hymn of praise anticipating the Messiah's return
[remember God's provision and be confident in His ultimate deliverance]

66: praise for Messiah's victory and ultimate deliverance
[He will bring us through the fire and water of the Tribulation, and we will praise Him]

67: the millennial reign of the Messiah
[the Lord will settle everything in righteousness and blessing on earth as it is in heaven]

68: the Second Advent anticipated and described
[on the "Day of the Lord", God and His people will be exalted and the wicked destroyed]

69: the humility of the Messiah and His ultimate deliverance of Zion
[Christ our role model in enduring tribulation and persevering to victory]

70: a prayer for personal deliverance and for strengthening of fellow believers
[we need to encourage both ourselves and others in the Lord]

71: a prayer of confidence in the Lord's deliverance, even in the face of martyrdom
[*we need to be confident in Him, even if it be His will for us to drink this cup*]

72: the righteous rule of the Messiah
[*remember that the wonder of His victorious Kingdom is assured for us*]

Song of Solomon: an allegory of Christ and His bride, the Church

The Prophetical Books: (Isaiah through Malachi):

Isaiah: The prophecy of Isaiah provides us with perhaps the largest concentration of material applicable directly to the end times, for Isaiah made good use of the "Day of the Lord" paradigm to impress upon his contemporaries the serious nature of the Lord's impending terminal judgment upon the Northern Kingdom of Israel and warning judgment upon the Southern Kingdom of Judah (accomplished during his lifetime by the "Lord's rod", Assyria). Roughly the second half of the book of Isaiah (i.e., chapters 40-66) concentrates upon the judgment-restoration-replacement theme with a near term focus upon Babylon (though this approach also occurs in key portions earlier in the book). The Babylonian captivity, as mentioned above, was still many years distant at time of writing, so that this second half of the book provided Isaiah's contemporaries with both an impending [relatively near term] future judgment as well as an ultimate panorama of the judgment to come upon apostasy, the deliverance of the faithful, the destruction of the adversary, and the final victory and reign of Messiah.

That Babylon should figure so heavily in this regard in the book's second half (chapters 40-66) should not seem at all odd to anyone who has read the hermeneutic section above – God's judgment upon Judah through the agency of Babylon in ca. 586 B.C., the restoration of the nation seventy years later, and replacement thereby of the idolatrous inhabitants with a humble, God-fearing remnant, subsequently blessed, is close to being a carbon-copy of the ultimate fulfillment of a similar experience at the end of secular history (a phenomenon repeated constantly in prophecy in accordance with the principles we have studied above). Nevertheless, this focus upon a Babylonian captivity which was still over a hundred years future when Isaiah died has led many to posit a "second Isaiah" who would have had personal experience of these events. In fact, the second half of the book of Isaiah fits perfectly into the scheme and tradition of prophecy as we have been studying it: God deliberately revealed future events to His prophets and thereby made His people aware of important, repeatable and predictable patterns in His administration of history so that they (and we) might draw the right conclusions about His control of events and in humility be forewarned of impending disaster. Because of the importance of the book in its entirety to our purpose in this series, all chapters are listed and briefly considered below. One point which it is hoped will be easily observed from the following is the manner in which Isaiah moves effortlessly between future and contemporary events, illustrating and illuminating each by means of the other:

[Warning and Judgment]

1: Israel's relationship to the Lord the key to her experiences (judgment and deliverance)

- 2: the end times in reverse as cautionary tale: the millennial "Mountain"; the "Day of the Lord" . . .
- 3: . . . the Tribulation
- 4: . . . the Tribulation continued; the millennial reign of Messiah.
- 5: the parable of the vineyard: Israel's relationship with the Lord part 2: apostasy and judgment
- 6: Isaiah's commission: a message of warning destined to be rejected by all but the remnant

[Israel and Assyria: a paradigm of the 1st and 2nd Advents]

- 7: Immanuel rejected and consequent judgment on the nation embodied in . . .
- 8: Assyria a type of the kingdom of the beast; the majority fail to turn to the Lord for help
- 9: Messiah and His deliverance of the nation; in spite of the apostasy of the nation . . .
- 10: . . . continued; the final destruction of the oppressor and the restoration of the remnant
- 11: the Messiah and His millennial reign; the return to the land
- 12: the joy of the restored (victory song)

[Babylon Present and Future]

- 13-14a: contemporary Babylon as a type of beast's kingdom (the prince as antichrist and Satan)

[Judgments on the Nations: coming conquests as types of the ultimate 2nd Advent dispositions]

- 14b: Assyria (a type of the beast's kingdom, his army crushed in Israel at Armageddon)
- 14c: the Philistines (a type of the hostile neighbors of Israel, totally destroyed)
- 15: Moab (a type of the neutral neighbors of Israel suffering under antichrist's conquest)
- 16: . . . continued.
- 17: Syria (a type of the regional allies of antichrist; persecuting Israel but ultimately destroyed)
- 18: Cush (a type of the Southern Alliance defeated at the hands of the beast)
- 19: Egypt (a type of the Southern Alliance leader defeated by antichrist, but turning then to God)
- 20: Egypt and Cush (a type of the Southern alliance in toto, defeated)
- 21a: Babylon (a type of the beast's kingdom; judgment prior to and at the 2nd Advent; cf. Rev.17)
- 21b: Edom (archetypical of all the nations hostile to Israel [the goats]; cf. Esau vs. Jacob)
- 21c: Arabia (archetypical of all the sympathetic nations [the sheep])

[Judah, Tyre and Assyria: types *and* antitypes of Israel, "Babylon" and antichrist's kingdom]

- 22: the siege of Jerusalem a type of antichrist's attack; the before and after stewards (premiers)
- 23: Tyre as antichrist's Babylon; her destruction

24: the Tribulation and 2nd Advent judgments as a paradigm for the Assyrian invasion
25: praise and celebration in the Kingdom as a paradigm for God's deliverance from Assyria
26: the prospect of future praise and resurrection as encouragement in the Tribulation (vv.20-21)
27: then Armageddon and the Messiah's reign as a paradigm for His deliverance from Assyria

[type and antitype; the invasion of the land, contemporary and during the end times]
28: the Northern Kingdom of Israel's impending judgment an antitype of tribulational judgment
29: Ariel: Zion the "alter of God" on which the beast's army (typologically Assyria) is destroyed
30: Israel disappointed by Egypt (on whom they rely instead of the Lord) then and in the future by "Babylon"
31: the disastrous results of her reliance on Egypt then and "Babylon" in the future
32: the King and his Kingdom: God's deliverance despite unfaithfulness and attendant disasters
33: the destroyer destroyed (contemporary Assyria and Babylon; future Babylon of the beast)
34: God's retribution on the persecutors of Israel at Armageddon (applied to Assyria)
35: the millennial Kingdom (an antitype of the blessings to follow Assyria's defeat)

[historical introduction to Isaiah's eschatological compendium]
36-39: Assyria and Babylon – despite the examples of the Northern Kingdom's destruction and the Lord's miraculous annihilation of the Assyrian army, future generations of Judah go down the same path of apostasy; however, the contemporary generation responds and so is not destroyed as typified by the response of their king, Hezekiah

[Isaiah's eschatological compendium: the Babylonian captivity, a future event at the time of writing, paralleling the events of the Tribulation and Second Advent]
40: the encouragement of the coming Messiah: take heart in [T]ribulation, God controls history
41: Cyrus as a type of the Messiah subduing the nations
42: the Messiah's first coming and His glorious return
43: the Messiah's merciful deliverance of Israel (despite her unfaithfulness) from Babylon[s]
44: the folly of the idolatry of Israel's enemies; the repopulation of Israel [near and far term]
45: Cyrus a type of Christ; God's subduing of Israel's enemies at [H]is hand
46: the Lord the One who defeats Babylon [near and far term] despite Israel's hardness
47: the destruction of near and far future Babylon
48: in spite of Israel's hardness, God's appointment of the Messiah to deliver from Babylon[s]
49: the Messiah's two comings: for the humble, a light; for rebels, a sword; He restores

Israel

- 50: God's provision for the salvation[s] of Israel in the person of the self-sacrificing Messiah
- 51: encouragement to the faithful: God will deliver from [T]ribulation; fear Him not man
- 52: the good news of incipient victory [based upon] Messiah sacrificing Himself for the nation
- 53: Messiah's sufferings rewarded by the Lord
- 54: the restoration and glorification of Israel under Messiah's rule
- 55: the blessings of His Kingdom and of His salvation available to all
- 56: the expansion of blessing and salvation to the nations; Israel's pre-advent rulers indicted
- 57: the contrasting futures of the righteous and the wicked and God's mercy upon the contrite
- 58: true contrition and its benefits
- 59: the sinful, the contrite, and the Lord's redemption from sin [1st Advent] and oppression [2nd]
- 60: the glories of the Kingdom [following contrition and deliverance]: in Messiah, God is with us
- 61: encouragement (in [T]ribulation) in the good news of the coming Kingdom and its glories
- 62: encouragement (in [T]ribulation) in the promise of redemption, restoration and reward
- 63: encouragement (in [T]ribulation) in the coming judgment; the paradigm of Moses and Israel
- 64: a contrite prayer for God to bring on these [near and far term] judgments and restorations
- 65: the alternative futures of the arrogant and the contrite; the reality of the coming Kingdom
- 66: the reality of these impending events [near and far term]; all will worship Him in His victory

Jeremiah: Although the book of Jeremiah is more heavily and specifically focused upon the contemporary situation of imminent divine judgment upon Judah, the impending Babylonian invasion furnishes an important parallel to the sinfulness of the nation and God's judgment in the form of the invasion of antichrist during the end times (in contrast to the warning judgment upon Judah in the form of Assyria during Isaiah's day). Chapters 1-20 in particular recount the impending judgment upon sinful Judah which will be reenacted in a similar fashion in the future, along with a similar rejection of the Lord's prophets and their warnings. Some particularly pertinent eschatological passages include:

- 3: promise of the glorious millennial future as encouragement for repentance
- 4: destruction from the north (Babylon as the beast's kingdom) and the "Day of the Lord"
- 6: the command to flee Jerusalem (parallels the mid-Tribulation flight of the faithful)
- 8: trouble from Dan (a reference to antichrist's invasion)

- 12: disposition of the repentant nations [near and far term]
- 14: the drought (evoking similar privations of the Tribulation)
- 15: two witnesses (evoking the ministry of Moses and Elijah before the Great Tribulation)
- 16: prophecy of the restoration of Israel and the conversion of the nations
- 23: the Branch: Messiah and the restoration of the nation an antitype for their own return
- 25: God's judgment on Babylon and the nations (symbolic of the beast's world kingdom)
- 30: the Great Tribulation and millennial restoration applied to contemporary events
- 31: encouragement through Israel's ultimate restoration under the New Covenant
- 33: encouragement through Israel's ultimate restoration under the Branch (the Messiah)
- 45: a message to Baruch: the principle of deliverance through [T]ribulation
- 46-49: prophecies against the nations: near and far term application [see Isaiah 14-21]
- 50-51: the destruction of Babylon and Israel's restoration [near type and future antitype]

Ezekiel: The commissioning of Ezekiel contains many parallels to the apostle John's commission to write the book of Revelation. Ezekiel's status as an exile, the circumstances and overwhelming nature of the vision, the appearance of the Lord, the cherubim, throne and sea, the eating of the scroll, the marking of the elect are just some of the more obvious similarities to what may be found in the book of Revelation as well. And while the theme of the first half of Ezekiel of impending future judgment upon the nation of Israel can also be applied broadly to the future judgments of the tribulational period, it is in the second half of the book where the focus shifts almost exclusively to those future events which we repeatedly see forming a deliberate and close analogy with the near contemporary situation confronting the prophet in his own day:

- 25: prophecies against the nations: near and far term application (see Isaiah 14-21)
- 26-28: Tyre as the beast's Babylon; Tyre's prince as Satan and antichrist (cf. Is.13-14)
- 29-32: reliance upon Egypt ("Babylon") a vain hope near (and far) term
- 33: the warning trumpet principle: God's merciful fore-warning of final judgment
- 34: the true Shepherd's restoration and judgment between the sheep and the goats
- 35: judgment upon Edom as archetypical of the judgment to come upon "the nations"
- 36: the physical and spiritual restoration of Israel [near and far term]
- 37: the resurrection and the reign of the Messiah as paradigms for near term deliverance
- 38-39: encouragement of the prophecy of the beast's invasion and defeat at Armageddon
- 40-48: the millennial temple and regime parallel to post-Babylonian captivity events

Daniel: The book of Daniel, as is well known, contains detailed information regarding the course of events during the Tribulation. Chapter eleven, in particular, will be treated in great detail in part 4 of this study. However, the following observations are offered here by way of overview:

- 2: the statue: a prophecy of world history culminating in Rome and revived Rome
- 7: the four beasts: a prophecy of world history culminating in Rome and revived Rome

8: the ram and the goat: Hellenistic history culminating in Antiochus a type of antichrist
9: the 70 "sevens": a prophecy of the future of Israel culminating in the Tribulation
11: a prophecy Alexander's successors culminating in Antiochus a type of antichrist
12: the Great Tribulation and the resurrection

Hosea:

14: encouragement from the promise of future millennial restoration and blessings

Joel:

1-2: the locust symbolic of the end times invasion
3: the "Day of the Lord", Armageddon, and the millennial blessings that follow

Amos:

1-2: prophecies against the nations: near and far term application [see Isaiah 14-21]
5: the "Day of the Lord" as a reality check: God will judge in righteousness
9: the encouragement of the Messiah and future millennial blessings

Obadiah:

1: Edom as typical of "the nations"; the "Day of the Lord" and the coming Kingdom

Micah:

1-3: the characteristics of a nation on the verge of judgment symbolic of the last days
4: Messiah's millennial reign and Armageddon as antitypes of divine deliverance
5: the first and second coming of Messiah; Assyria as the beast's confederacy
6: pre-judgment indictment of the nation
7: the Tribulation followed by the future glory and restoration of Israel

Habakkuk:

1-3: the Babylonian invasion symbolic of the beast's end times invasion

Zephaniah:

1: the future "Day of the Lord" employed as a contemporary warning
2: prophecies against the nations: near and far term application [see Isaiah 14-21]
3: the [T]ribulation and the restoration of the remnant [near and far term]

Haggai:

1-2: the rebuilding of the temple encouraged by analogy with future events

Zechariah:

- 1: the four craftsmen: the four destroyers of Israel destroyed [#4 = Rome – New Rome]
- 2: surveying millennial Jerusalem; command to escape Babylon; the 2nd Advent
- 3: Joshua the priest symbolic of the remnant to survive to the 2nd Advent
- 4: the warning ministry of Moses and Elijah and the Messiah [the Golden Lampstand]
- 5a: the Scroll: lawlessness to be extirpated in the Messianic Kingdom
- 5b: the Jar: lawlessness restrained until released and manifested in eschatological Babylon
- 6: Joshua crowned symbolic of the coming Priest-King; the 4 chariots of God's judgment
- 7: contemporary warning against apostasy by analogy with similar end times behavior
- 8: contemporary encouragement of future millennial blessings upon Jerusalem
- 9: contemporary encouragement of future judgment on the nations and Messiah's return
- 10: contemporary encouragement of the Lord's support of Israel's war against antichrist
- 11: contemporary warning against apostasy by analogy with the future "false prophet"
- 12: contemporary encouragement of the Lord's conduct of Armageddon
- 13: contemporary encouragement of future repentance of Israel and their purification
- 14: contemporary encouragement of the 2nd Advent of the Messiah and His reign

Malachi:

- 3: the witness (John [1st Advent] – Moses and Elijah [2nd Advent]); the final purification
- 4: the "Day of the Lord"; the witness (Elijah [John]); the repentance of Israel

b. New Testament Books (excluding Revelation)

Passages in the New Testament with eschatological significance are at once more familiar to most Christians and at the same time somewhat more widely dispersed than is the case in the Old Testament prophetic books, often occurring in the form of individual verses. Chapters of notably concentrated material about the end times include (though are not necessarily limited to):

Matthew 17 (Mk.9; Lk.9): the transfiguration: a preview of the 2nd Advent

Matthew 24-25 (Mk.13; Lk.21):

- the end of the age (Mt.24:1-35): a synopsis of the Tribulation for the benefit of believers
- the unknown day and hour (Mt.24:36-51): warning to the faithful not to fall away
- the parable of the virgins (Mt.25:1-13): those who fall away during the Great Apostasy
- the parable of the talents (Mt.25:14-30): the last judgment based on deeds, not words
- the sheep and the goats (Mt.25:31-46): the last judgment based on deeds, not words

1st Corinthians 15: the resurrection

2nd Corinthians 5: the resurrection

1st Thessalonians 4-5: the 2nd Advent, resurrection, and "Day of the Lord"

2nd Thessalonians 1: Armageddon

2nd Thessalonians 2: the Great Apostasy and the antichrist

1st Timothy 4: the Great Apostasy; essential teachings of the coming Anti-Christian Religion

2nd Timothy 3: the Great Apostasy; characteristics of the leadership of the Beast's Religion

2nd Peter 2: the Great Apostasy; false teachers and their ultimate judgment

2nd Peter 3: the "Day of the Lord"

Jude: the Great Apostasy; false teachers and their ways

The purpose of the above survey (exclusive of the Book of Revelation which is to provide the structure for this seven-part study) has been to show by way of overview our Lord's gracious exposition for us before the fact of these critical events:

"I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand and I will do all that I please."

Isaiah 46:10 NIV

3. The Book of Revelation

Revelation is not only the last book in the Bible – it was also the last written, having been penned under explicit divine inspiration by the apostle John in circa 64-68 A.D.³⁷ Additionally and very importantly for our present study, Revelation, while partaking of many of the interpretive devices we have studied in the case of Old Testament prophecy, gives a distinctly *chronological* exposition of the Tribulation and the events which follow it. This fact of this step-by-step recounting of future events in Revelation is extremely useful in helping us to understand and to explicate the history of the Tribulation. It is also deliberate, a gift from God the Father to His Son and His Son's Church to aid them in their hour of most desperate need. Furthermore, without the book of Revelation, it would be a difficult task at best to pull together all the various and variegated strands of prophecy in the rest of the Bible into a coherent and understandable whole. There is some irony in the fact, therefore, that Revelation is often considered one of the most difficult books of the Bible to understand, since an essential part of its purpose is to serve as a foundation for understanding the whole future course of history as related by biblical prophecy elsewhere. Time does not permit us (nor would it be of any intrinsic value) to give an account of all the many incorrect theories that

have been advanced over the years to "explain" (or explain away) this critical book of the Bible, such as amillennialism (a reduction of the book to symbolic meaning only) and historicism (treating the book as commentary on past historical events only). Suffice it to say, that such theories inevitably stem from a low view of the doctrine of inspiration, that is, a failure to appreciate and accept the truth of the fact that in the book of Revelation we have the very words of God to the same exact and perfect degree as is the case with all the other inspired books of the canon. The essential point is this: the book of Revelation gives us the most complete, most concentrated picture of the Tribulation to be found anywhere in the Bible, and does so in a largely straightforward and chronological way.

V. The Revelation of Jesus Christ: Revelation 1:1-20

Revelation 1:1-2:

Jesus Christ's revelation which God gave to Him in order to show His (i.e., Christ's) servants what must take place in rapid succession; and He (i.e., Jesus) in turn placed His seal of authority upon it by sending it through His angel to His servant John, who [here] gives witness to [this] word of God and testimony from Jesus Christ, as many things as he (i.e., John) did see.

Jesus Christ's revelation: The first sentence of Revelation (i.e., verses 1-2) sums up in concentrated and dramatic fashion the book's importance, scope and purpose. It is for Christ, from the Father, through John, to believers, for the purpose of giving the Church of Christ critical information about future events. First and foremost, the book is a revealing of the Messiah Himself, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The word "revelation" (literally "unveiling" as we saw above in part I.1.c) is the Latin counterpart of the Greek word *apokalypsis* (ἀποκάλυψις) from which our English word "apocalypse" is derived. The "unveiling" in view is of the exalted and glorified Messiah to the entire world as its King, an event which will not come to full fruition until His 2nd Advent, but which is to be preceded and heralded by the events described within the pages of the book of Revelation (as well as pertinent passages occurring elsewhere in scripture). The book of Revelation itself, therefore, constitutes a "revelation", not merely of truth directly from God (something that is true of all scripture) but more specifically of the events which precede and accompany the return of our Lord, giving us, His faithful followers, an important preview of that history to come. What these first words indicate is a fact that cannot be overemphasized in our discussions of the end times: the book of Revelation in particular and the culmination of history in general is *all about Jesus Christ*. He is the beginning and the end of God's plan for human history, the solution to the problem of sin and the Ruler who will put all God's enemies under His feet, the last of which will be the scourge of death itself.

in order to show His servants: This phrase expresses the purpose of the book: the provision of critically important information to the Church of Christ. For all believers, and especially for that generation "upon whom the end of the ages has come"

(1Cor.10:11), knowledge of future events as specifically outlined by God Himself on our behalf is not just "nice to know" but absolute "need to know" information. The Tribulation will constitute a period of testing of the faith of the faithful so intense that many will falter and many will fail (i.e., the Great Apostasy, a chilling event covered in part 3A of this series). It will also be a time of the most intense and widespread persecution of believers that human history has ever witnessed (i.e., the Great Persecution, covered in part 4 of this series). It is a measure of the immeasurable mercy and grace of our Lord that He has chosen to share with us the details of these difficult times in advance. Moreover, a good part of His purpose in doing so is surely that we may be prepared for what is to come, not through material preparation, but through spiritual preparation, not through hoarding of supplies in our cellars, but through amassing His truth in our hearts, and through drawing ever closer to Him (Ps.118:6-14; 121:1-2; Is.40:29-31; Matt.6:25-34; Rom.8:31; Heb.13:5-6).

what must take place in rapid succession: The events of the end times, that is, the eschatological history to come, constitute an essential part of God's plan for the termination of human history, summing all things up in Jesus Christ (Eph.1:10). As we have seen from the prior series (i.e., The Satanic Rebellion, especially part 5) and from our discussion above (section II), the Tribulation is the final judgment phase for these first six thousand years of human history, a judgment which "must take place" before the concomitant restoration and replacement, embodied in the resurrection and Millennium respectively, can be instituted. The Tribulation is thus a period of painful but essential "birth pangs" (cf Matt.24:8), which must precede the new life of the resurrection occurring at Christ's return and the rejuvenation of the earth during His millennial reign. For the Lord will first make clear for all the world to see, human and angelic alike, the utter sinfulness of the human heart and the unadulterated evil of purpose in the heart of the world's present ruler, the devil. Currently under significant divine control and restraint, the world of the coming Tribulation will experience an unprecedented "freedom" to go its own way, and the resultant horrendous behavior on the part of the devil and all who have taken their stand with him (human or angelic) will leave no doubt as to the consequences of a world largely free of God's restraining hand. A significant part of this trend will be the unprecedented persecution of those who have chosen for and stay faithful to the Lord, an event we are entitling the Great Persecution which will in turn occasion massive divine judgment from the Lord on behalf of His children, culminating in the battle of Armageddon (cf. Rev.6:10; 16:5-6). Finally, this terrible time of events "which must take place" will stand in the starkest possible contrast to the wonders of the Millennium which follows, a world of perfect spiritual and material peace under the rulership of the Son of God Himself, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The words translated "in rapid succession" (Greek: *en tachei*, ἐν τάχει) are not, as is often assumed, making reference to the imminence of the end times (a principle taught elsewhere: cf. v.3). Rather, this adverbial phrase calls our attention to a critically important characteristic of the Tribulation, one of which it would be well for every believer to take careful note: the horrific, utterly unbelievable cataclysms of the Tribulation will severely test the faith of genuine believers not only because of their magnitude, but, significantly, also *because of their rapid succession*. In our own day,

and, indeed, throughout human history so far, tragedies, both individual and collective, have often occurred. One has only to reference the hitherto unprecedented events of the Second World War to understand that our world has been no stranger to tremendously difficult periods of human suffering. But in the Great Tribulation, mankind will experience such a string of tragedy upon tragedy, judgment upon judgment, persecution upon persecution, and in such swift and unrelenting succession, that nothing which has happened in the past can serve as an adequate parallel. The result will be that believers called upon to endure this most difficult period in human history cannot count on a period of emotional respite (as is often provided in the course of human affairs), for during the Tribulation the successive hammer blows of unparalleled events to come will occur one after the other and in ascending intensity.

It is a well known and biblically verified principle that nothing is more difficult to endure than "woe upon woe" (cf. Job's experiences; cf. also Phil.2:27). During the Tribulation, it will not only be the horror of events, but also their exceptional rapidity and escalating intensity that, barring sufficient preparation, will be sufficient to "stun" even the strongest of believers, removing any chance for normal recovery from emotional shock on account of the continuous sequence of pressure-filled events that will characterize the period. In short, there will be no "breathing space" in the Great Tribulation to come, and instead of a single event with which to cope, we shall be faced with a continual layering of terrible events quite unprecedented in their character and intensity. Now our God is supremely sufficient to supply all our needs, even in this most trying of times (Ps.46). Under such unique circumstances, however, it should be evident at the outset that proper spiritual preparation for that great time of testing will be absolutely essential for faith to thrive and survive. For the Tribulation will be a time when normal, secular strategies for coping with pressure and disaster will be found wholly ineffective – only a solid, deep, abiding faith in the Lord is likely to endure this unprecedented coming assault, a fact that explains in no small part the phenomenon of the Great Apostasy, the wholesale turning away from the Lord (and hence from salvation) which will characterize that difficult period. This is our first glimpse of the true nature of the Tribulation to come and our first indication that no amount of prior spiritual preparation will be regretted on the part of those called upon to suffer through it.

placed His seal of authority upon it: The Greek word *semaino* means literally "stamped with a seal or mark" and foreshadows the seal of God given to His servants (Rev.7:3-4) in contrast to the mark of the beast received by those who overtly reject the Lord during the Tribulation (Rev.13:16-18). The means by which this stamp of authority is effected is the transmission of the book to John via our Lord's personal angelic representative (i.e., "His angel", most likely Gabriel; cf. Dan.8:16; 9:21; Lk.1:11; 1:19; 1:26; 2:9). The chain of command evident in this passage is important to note. The Son receives this book – more than mere information, it is an authoritative **decree** outlining events which *shall* take place by the command of God the Father (in recognition of the victory of His Son at the cross). The Son sends the message/decree to His one surviving apostle, John, through His top ranking angelic adjutant. John then in turn "bears witness" that the words he has penned are indeed the report/vision he has been given.

The chain of authority is thus clearly delineated for us in these verses, making it abundantly clear that Revelation is marked out as the very words of God in a way more precise and definite than is to be found in any other book of the New Testament. Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine any more emphatic assertion of specific divine authority. One can only conclude from this description that the information contained in Revelation is meant to be taken as critical and essential *by God*. As becomes evident later in the book, we are meant to understand the "seal" idea here with a capital "S" (Rev.1:4; 1:10; 2:7; 2:11; 3:1; 6:1ff; 7:3-4; cf. 2Cor.1:22; Eph.1:13; 4:30), for the ultimate Seal of God is His Holy Spirit, that member of the Trinity responsible for empowering the process of inspiration (2Pet.1:20-21; cf. 2Sam.23:2; Acts 1:16; 1Tim.3:16; 1Pet.1:11). Taken in conjunction with the severe warnings at the end of Revelation against altering this message in any way (Rev.22:18-19), we may well ask what more one could have asked by way of introduction to invest this book with God's own authority and emphasize the importance of its message for the entire Church universal, especially for our own generation "upon whom the end of the age has come" (1Cor.10:11; cf. Rom.13:11-14).

gives witness to [this] word of God and testimony from Jesus Christ: The humility of the apostle John is evident in this statement and entirely appropriate. For although these words were written down by him in his own style, the message itself and the content his words contains came directly from God, His Spirit so directing the inspired prophet that the result is the precise message our Lord desired to convey (i.e., our Lord's "testimony" or "solemnly witnessed message of truth").³⁸This is the essence of true, biblical "inspiration", not of man's will, but of God's will; not a confused or somewhat imperfect human message with divine elements, but a perfect divine message set in a form understandable to human beings, as the apostle Peter made quite clear in one of his own epistles:

For I did not follow concocted tales in making known to you the power and the coming return of our Lord, Jesus Christ, but was an eyewitness to His majesty. For when He had received honor and glory from God the Father, these words sounded forth to Him from God's majestic glory: "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased." And these words I myself heard as they were delivered from heaven, for I was with Him on the holy mountain (cf. Matt.17:1-8). Yet I consider the prophetically inspired Word (i.e. the Bible) even more reliable (i.e. than what I saw with my own eyes). You too would do well to pay the closest attention to this [prophetically inspired Word], just as to a lamp shining in a dark place (cf. Ps.119:105), until the day dawns, and the Morning Star rises (i.e. Christ returns), pondering in your hearts this principle of prime importance: *no single verse of prophetically inspired scripture has ever come into being as a result of personal reflection. For true prophecy has never occurred by human will, but only when holy men of God have spoken under the direction and agency of the Holy Spirit.*
2nd Peter 1:16-21

Finally, it should not go unnoticed that John's prophetic role in the production of the book of Revelation is also made more clear here than is the case in any other New Testament book. This is evident from the many striking similarities between his

experience and that of prominent Old Testament prophets, most notably Ezekiel. Important parallels include John's vision of the Lord Himself with the cherubs, the sea, and the throne (Rev.4 with Ezek.1-2), the Lord's direct and personal address to the prophet and commissioning of him (Rev.1:17-20 with Ezek.2:1ff.), the Spirit's direct control of the prophet (Rev.1:10 & 4:2 with Ezek.2:2), the eating of the scroll (Rev.10:9-10 with Ezek.2:8ff.), the sealing of the servants of God (Rev.7:3-4 with Ezek.9:4), and the overall theme of warning (Rev.1:3 & 22:1-20 with Ezek.2:3ff.), to name but a few of the more notable similarities. John and Ezekiel see and experience similar things *not* because John is somehow "borrowing" from Ezekiel, but because they both saw the same heavenly realities, and were directed to write about them by the same Spirit. The detail of personal prophetic experience that it was given to John to share with us all is a measure of how seriously we are to take this book of Revelation and the essential information it contains: it was apparently judged important by our Lord for all of His Church to see that this vivid description of tribulational events came directly from Him. We therefore ignore and belittle these warnings to our very great peril (as the following verse makes abundantly clear).

Revelation 1:3:

The one who recites this prophecy will be glad he did so, as will those who listen to the words of this prophecy and retain [in their hearts] the matters written in it. [This is true] because the time is near [for these events to take place].

one who recites: True happiness comes from reading and heeding the words of God (the only sure basis for spiritual growth and progress in His plan for our lives).³⁹ This is true of all scripture and, as this verse affirms, especially true of the book of Revelation (so that we would surely be mistaken to judge it of less account than other scripture). At the time when the apostle John penned these words (the mid 1st century), "books" (actually papyrus scrolls which had to be individually and painstakingly reproduced) were quite expensive and would certainly have been out of the question for the average individual. In our modern world we tend to take for granted this most blessed of all possible material possessions – our very own copy of a translation of the holy scriptures. Because of the great expense and difficulty of reproduction, for many centuries only large congregations would have been likely to possess a complete Bible. And so, because of its rarity, church services during John's day and later devoted much time to public readings of the scripture (the only way that the average Christian would be able to hear it). Concentrating on the "retention" of what was being read was therefore crucial, and the fact that the verse above makes a point of encouraging those who would hear the book of Revelation read out loud to hold these things in their mind shows just how important we should deem the book and its contents to be.

the words of this prophecy: Revelation is here officially called a "prophecy" and is thus validated as unquestionably part of God's canon of holy scripture known as the Bible. Furthermore, from the Greek etymology of the word *propheteia* (προφητεία), a prophecy is properly both a forth-telling and a fore-telling from God Himself (cf. 2Pet.2:16-21 quoted above). It is important to recall in this connection that this

particular prophecy is "the Revelation of Jesus Christ", literally the "unveiling" of Him and His future appearance as the coming King. We can say with assurance therefore that great lengths have been gone to in order to assure us that we are meant to understand here and now the information Revelation contains about future events, for it is a "prophecy" in both senses of the word, that is, a *fore*-telling as well as a forth-telling. This is true as much as a source of personal motivation for proper spiritual preparation as it is as a guide for negotiating the future events themselves. As noted earlier in this study (section I.1), even if we are not personally called upon to endure the Great Tribulation, the spiritual preparations we make inspired by this book will be invaluable also for the personal tribulations that every believer must face sooner or later. And should we indeed find ourselves in the midst of that great conflagration to come, then a thorough knowledge of the details contained in the Bible's final book will be absolutely essential. Finally in this connection it should be noted that this "reading" was also normally associated with "explaining" the scripture (the original point of attending church services now sadly lost in great measure in contemporary Christianity: cf. Jewish custom as in Lk.4:16-30), so that the blessing offered by verse three above is the very thing for which we are striving here as we translate and exegete the book of Revelation as a blue-print for the Bible's future history of end times event.

because the time is near: Since the book of Revelation is at its most essential level about Jesus Christ as His "revelation", the nearness of time referred to here is first and foremost the imminency of the 2nd Advent of our Lord. Because this world-changing development will be preceded by the events of the seven year Tribulation (as related in the book of Revelation), the "nearness" described in this verse necessarily applies to these events as well (which form the focus of much of our present study).⁴⁰ This principle of "imminency", i.e., that the Tribulation could commence at any time, is specifically given here as a reason for paying close attention to everything the book of Revelation has to say. Repeated references to this principle throughout the book of Revelation (e.g., 1:3; 3:11; 22:7; 22:12; 22:20) leave little doubt that we are meant to understand the end times in just this way: the final cycle of history which can potentially begin at any time. This principle of imminency of the 2nd Advent (and so of the Tribulation which precedes it) thus constitutes a stirring call to spiritual preparedness, for even the casual reader of Revelation will be aware of the inadvisability of facing the incessant string of catastrophes which the Tribulation will bring without adequate spiritual preparation.

This point has proved a stumbling block to many in the past. For, clearly, many centuries have passed since the apostle John was inspired to write these words from God. How then could these events have been considered "near" at the time? In fact, we have already discussed in great detail the principle that in God's eyes, even a span of a thousand years is like a mere day (Ps.90:4; 2Pet.3:3-10; see part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion, section II.7). Even without this principle, there is really no contradiction here. The imminency of the end times means rather that God has the right (since our Lord's victory at the cross) to bring these events about *at any time*, and that, therefore, we His children must be prepared for these events *at all times*. If God in His matchless grace has seen fit to delay the onset of the Tribulation (and bring to salvation countless

believers in the meantime), this should be a cause for rejoicing, not doubting. Our Lord's efficacious sacrifice on behalf of the entire world has opened the door for the glorious future to come, so that the Father is perfectly within His divine right to begin the final chapter of history at any time (as has been the case since 33 A.D.), or, alternatively, to delay commencement of the end times until all those He has determined for faith in Jesus Christ have been saved. Inasmuch as we are not privy to these details, readiness and acceptance of the principle of imminency (along with a dedicated commitment to diligent spiritual preparation) is and has always been the appropriate response to the "nearness" of the time expressed here and elsewhere in the book of Revelation. We should expect to experience the Tribulation, whether we ultimately do or not. That is the only way to be spiritually safe.

Moreover, many of the readers of these words over the centuries did indeed pass through serious and intense tribulation (e.g., the martyrdom of believers in the Roman empire, in Europe during the Reformation, and in Communist countries, to mention but three particularly harsh examples of persecution). And, as we have often remarked, anyone attempting to truly follow Jesus Christ will meet with "personal tribulation" in this life.⁴¹ The call to spiritual readiness embodied in this verse has thus never been to no avail for any who have heeded it from the heart. We have also seen (in part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series) that God's plan for human history has been proceeding in a succession of thousand-year millennial days, a schema which places the commencement of tribulational events in the very near future from our present point of view. As the Creator and Director of history, it is entirely within God's prerogative to alter this schema at will (whether to lengthen or to shorten the time: Ezek.12:26-28), but it is certainly incumbent upon us, His children, to strive to be spiritually prepared for whatever may befall *now more than ever* as we "see the Day [of the Lord] drawing near" (Heb.10:25).

And let us give careful attention to one another[']s ministries] as motivation for [our own] love and good works, not abandoning your mutual assembling (as some have made it their practice to do [and which makes this impossible]), but rather encouraging each other [to persevere in this work of the Lord], and doing so to an ever greater degree to the extent that you see ***the day [of the Lord] drawing [ever] closer.***
Hebrews 10:24-25

Revelation 1:4-6:

John, to the seven churches which are in Asia [Minor]: Grace to you and peace from the One who is and was and is coming (i.e., the Father), and from the seven spirits (i.e., the Holy Spirit) which are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth. To the One who loves us and has released us from our sins by His blood – and He has made us a kingdom, priests of His God and Father – to Him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

John: John begins this salutation by identifying himself. He is the apostle John, the one whom "Jesus loved" (Jn.20:2; 21:7; 21:20) and entrusted with the care of His

mother Mary at the cross (Jn.19:27), the last of the apostles (cf. Jn.21:22-24), and the one called upon here to deliver the final message of the Bible, a tremendous honor indeed.

the seven churches: These are the seven churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea, all located in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) and apparently part of John's circuit ministry. As an apostle of Christ, John's authority for building up the church extended as far as necessary, but at this point His personal teaching ministry seems to have been concentrated on these seven churches (which he would have visited in a circular sequence; cf. Samuel's ministry: 1Sam.7:16-17). At the time of writing, as he indicates below, however, John was apparently being held in custody by the Roman authorities on the island of Patmos (v.9), in conjunction with the first empire-wide persecution of Christianity launched by Nero, a pogrom which had recently claimed the life of the apostle Paul (2Tim.4:6-8), and possibly that of Peter as well.

As to the seven churches themselves, they are indeed actual, historical congregations of believers alive at the time of writing, circa 64-68 A.D. Moreover, they are also used symbolically in the chapters to come as representing the seven sequential, chronological periods of the Church Age's two millennia (the specifics of which will be addressed in part 2 of this study). The fact that Revelation is addressed to the entire Church Age to come (in the form of "the seven churches") therefore makes the book unique for us in this respect as well – it is the only New Testament writing with a message specifically addressed to us today, the seventh and last "church" before the close of our present age.

Grace to you and peace: This blessing is a heart-felt wish offered up by John on behalf of his audience (which, given the preceding observation, includes you and me).⁴² It is a wish for us to have from God both His grace (i.e., His perfect favor) and His peace (i.e., His perfect comfort). Both of these elements speak to the results of a close, enduring and growing relationship with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Grace views this desirable relationship from the standpoint of God, the one who gives us everything (with spiritual blessings especially in view), while peace views it from the point of view of the believer, who is kept safe and secure (most importantly in the heart) by God who protects us in every situation. The "blessing" is couched in the form of a wish because God's grace and God's peace are not to be taken for granted: they increase or decrease in proportion to the believer's nearness to Him, in proportion to the Christian's spiritual growth. John here fervently wishes for the favor of God and the protection of God for all those under his charge, present and future, but he recognizes (as the fact that this is a wish indicates) that the fulfillment of his desire is not in his hands. Each of us as individual Christians must decide to make our relationship with God, our spiritual growth, the top priority in our lives for this wish to attain its maximum potential. This blessing is not "magic". Whether we receive all the grace and peace we could receive does not depend upon John or anyone else, and we know that God's ability and desire to bless us is not limited in any way. No, if we are limited, it is only by ourselves, by our own failure to put God and His Word first in our lives.

John also clearly marks out the source of this potential double blessing as God in all three Persons, and does so in a way that emphasizes our God's complete control over the events that are about to be related. The grace and peace, the favor and comfort which can be ours, come from the entire Trinity, emphasizing the Father's imminent possession of the devil's world, the Spirit's restraint of the devil's world (see Rev.5:6; Is.11:2), and the Son's victory over and conquest of the devil's world. This is a very important perspective on which we would do well to reflect. For all the terrible events of the Tribulation will be unable to shake the bountiful supply of grace and peace directly from God to all believers, provided only that we keep faith with Him.

Finally, it should be pointed out that in this formulaic wish John has omitted one element which is often included in similar introductory blessings, namely mercy (cf. 2Jn.3; also 1Tim.1:2; 2Tim.1:2). The omission here is significant in that mercy is the gift of God that allows (through the blood of Christ) sinful man to accommodate to the perfect holiness and justice of God. The book of Revelation, addressed to believers (who have made this accommodation through their relationship with Jesus Christ), is largely concerned with God's judgment upon a renegade world in the clutches of the devil as never before in history. For the devil, the antichrist, the false prophet, and all those who arrogantly reject God, the Tribulation will mark that period when the long-suffering mercy of God, categorically spurned by his enemies, will no longer be the issue; rather, God's holiness and justice will be the issue, visited upon the persecutors of His people in righteous wrath.

the One who is and was and is coming: The Father. That He "is and was" speaks to His eternity; He is God forever and ever. That He "is coming" not only confirms that this eternity of His will never end. It also is our first direct statement of the Father's advent: He too will again take up residence on the earth at the end of time, so that we His children will ever be with Him, along with His Son and His Spirit, not in heaven, but on the new earth and in the New Jerusalem, when everything has been replaced that was displaced by the devil's original rebellion, only with the end superior to the beginning (cf. Rev.21:22; 22:3).

the seven spirits: The seven spirits which reside before the very throne of the Father are a reference to God the Holy Spirit as is evident both from later instances in the book of Revelation and from elsewhere in scripture as well (Prov.9:1; Is.11:2; Zech.3:9; 4:2; 4:10 with 4:6; Rev.3:1; 4:5; 5:6).⁴³ The Holy Spirit is, of course, indivisible, and the number seven here most likely connotes the idea of perfection and completion: that is, the continued perfect ministry of the Spirit throughout all seven periods of the Church age promoting spiritual growth and restraining the evil one. That the Holy Spirit is not overtly so named here is in keeping with His role in the Father's plan. The very name "Spirit" or wind (in Greek and Hebrew both) indicates something powerful but unseen, the hallmark of the Spirit's ministry.⁴⁴

from Jesus Christ: As the Person whose revelation is the object of this book, our Lord Jesus Christ is both the final member of the Trinity mentioned in this salutation and is described in a detailed, three-fold way, with each description contributing to our

understanding of the God-Man's unique role in the plan of God (with each corresponding to the members of the Trinity in the same order as in the salutation):

1. the faithful witness: As the Father's representative (e.g., Messiah means "Anointed One", i.e., by the Father; cf. Jn.4:34; 7:16; 8:26; etc.), Jesus Christ bore perfect witness to the truth of God during His 1st Advent, and left us that legacy of placing faithfulness to the truth before everything else.

2. the firstborn from the dead: The God-Man is also the only human being to live His life in complete responsiveness to the Holy Spirit, and is the first to have been resurrected into incorruptible form by the power of the Spirit (Rom.1:4; 1Pet.3:18; cf. Rom.8:11). Our Lord has thus left for us the pattern of operating in God's power rather than our own (Zech.4:6; Rom.8:14), and demonstrated for us the certainty of our hope, the reality of the future resurrection for which we so eagerly look (Rom.8:23-24; Heb.2:9; 1Jn.3:1-3).

3. the ruler of the kings of the earth: This title calls attention to the work of the Son of Man Himself, having won the right of total rulership of the world through His self-sacrificing victory at the cross (Lk.10:18; Jn.16:33; 19:30; Col.2:15; Rev.5:5). Our Lord Jesus Christ set for us the example of serving in humility in this life in the sure and certain hope of ruling with Him in the next (Matt.20:25-28; Jn.13:1-7; 2Cor.8:9; Phil.2:5-8). The 2nd Advent will see the fulfillment of this principle, and we who have chosen for Him will share in the rulership of His Kingdom (Rom.8:17; 2Tim.2:12; Rev.1:6; 2:26-27; 3:21).

As we contemplate the words of this book of Revelation, let us remember that it is the revelation of our Lord and Savior, and let us remember well the example He has set for us, the example of putting God the Father's truth first as a faithful witness in everything He thought and said and did (not of being concerned for His own reputation, opinions and experiences), the example of relying and depending entirely on God's provision of strength and power in the Holy Spirit in everything He thought and said and did (not of being concerned with His own fleshly resources and logistics), and the example of humbly serving God the Father for His glory in everything He thought and said and did (not of being concerned for His own status or position). For to serve our Master well, we have to be like Him in these things, and that means imitating His faithful witness for God, His selfless reliance on God's power, and His humble service to God.

You too should have this attitude which Christ Jesus had. Since He already existed in the very form of God, equality with God was [certainly] not something He thought He had to grasp for. Yet in spite of this [co-equal divinity He already possessed], He deprived Himself of His status and took on the form of a slave, [and was] born in the likeness of men. He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even [His] death on [the] cross [for us all].

Philippians 2:5-8

For it is to this [sharing in the sufferings of Christ] that you have been called, for Christ also died on your behalf, leaving you an example so that you might follow in His footsteps: He committed no sin, nor was any guile found in His mouth. He did not return slander when He was slandered, did not threaten when He suffered, but entrusted Himself to the One who judges righteously.

1st Peter 2:21-23

Let each one of us strive to please his neighbor for [what is truly] good in order to bring about [that person's] edification (i.e., spiritual growth). For certainly Christ did not strive to please Himself, but, just as it is written, "the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen upon Me".

Romans 15:2-3

I have given you an example that you may do as I have done.

John.13:15

If anyone wants to follow Me, let him [first] deny himself, then pick up his cross and follow Me.

Matthew 16:24

to the One who loves us and has released us: This phrase begins a doxology which is concluded in verse six. John expresses for us all the praise we to shower upon our Lord Jesus Christ in response to His love for us, manifested in His releasing us from our sins by His own blood, His death on the cross on our behalf. Sandwiched in between the object of praise (Christ) and the praise itself ("glory and power forever") is a parenthetical remark that should capture our attention: through His victory, our Lord has "made us [into] a kingdom, namely priests" to His Father.⁴⁵ No clearer proof could be given that this book is for believers in Jesus Christ. For it is the revelation of Him (in all His coming glory), *and* we are to share in that revelation, being an integral part of His Kingship, and sharing in His priesthood. As we contemplate the tribulational sufferings to come as outlined in Revelation, we should not lose sight of the fact that these are merely the birth pangs that must precede the "birth", namely, His return accompanied by the glories of His millennial reign wherein we shall be full and blessed partners. Glory to Him! May we strive to hold fast to the King of glory no matter what may betide in order that we may share in the glory of His Kingdom to which we have been called (Rom.8:17; 2Tim.2:12; Rev.1:6; 2:26-27; 3:21).

Revelation 1:7:

Behold! He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the peoples of the earth will grieve on account of Him.

He is coming with clouds: This verse gives us a foretaste of the ultimate result of the working out of history in the final, tribulational period as described in the book of

Revelation, providing us with a synopsis of the "revelation of Jesus Christ" at His 2nd Advent (for His millennial reign). The "clouds" mentioned here are the "heavenly armies" of Revelation 19:14, not only the angels who will accompany our Lord at His return, just as they announced His birth (Lk.2:13; cf. Dan.7:13; Matt.24:30; 26:64; Mk.13:26; 14:62; Lk.21:27), but His bride, the Church, as well (cf. Rev.17:14; and compare Rev.19:7-8 with 19:14). For the entire "host" of the Church of Jesus Christ will be marshaled in resurrection on that Day and return with Him in glory to share in His millennial reign (1Thes.4:13-18; cf. 1Cor.15:51-52).

every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him: The dramatic return of our Lord will be visible to everyone on earth. Singled out for special mention are His kindred people, Israel, in the phrase "those who pierced Him", referring to the episode at the cross as predicted by Zechariah (compare Jn.19:34-37 with Zech.12:10; cf. Ps.22:16). This is a description of an instantaneous repentance and conversion of the Jews alive at the Second Advent when they witness return of the Messiah as explained by the apostle Paul (Rom.9-11): the "hardness in part" that has characterized the majority of the descendants of Abraham since 1st Advent will dissolve instantly upon the Messiah's return. The return of many Jews to the Lord during the Tribulation, the ministry of the 144,000, and the purging that follows Christ's return, all subjects requiring detailed explanation (forthcoming in future installments of this series), are omitted here (both in the text of Revelation as well as our coverage), since the purpose of this reference is akin to that of the previous phrase, namely, to emphasize the final victory of the Messiah and the completion of the process of restoration when Israel's heart is once more united to the Lord at His return (Acts 3:21; cf. Ezek.36:27; 39:25-26; Mal.4:6; Matt.17:11; Mk.9:12; Acts 1:6).⁴⁶

Brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery (and so think more of yourselves than you should): hardness has come over a part of Israel until the time when the fullness of the gentiles has come in [to the family of God]. And it is in this [following] way that all Israel will be saved just as it is written:

The Deliverer will come from Zion. He will expel ungodliness from Jacob. And this will be My covenant with them when I take away their sins.

Romans 11:25-27

all the peoples of the earth will grieve: The grief indicated here is largely self-directed. When the glorified Christ becomes visible to the surviving inhabitants of the world (unbelievers all, as the resurrection of living believers will precede this event: 1Cor.15:51-52; 1Thes.4:13-17) their folly in failing to turn to God will become painfully and penetratingly obvious, occasioning intense world-wide grief and regret (Zech.12:10-14). This prophesied reaction should be a source of major encouragement to believers present and future, for it guarantees that those who deny the truth of the faith upon which our lives are founded (and who will, in the Tribulation, persecute us universally

for it) will come to understand *in this life* the horrible error of their ways – our vindication in this respect will not need to await the Last Judgment.

It should also be noted that this reaction to the 2nd Advent directly picks up the response during the 1st Advent of those present at the crucifixion who "beat their breasts" following our Lord's remarkable death and the supernatural darkness and earthquake preceding it (Lk.23:48). Beyond a self-centered sense of anguish for what had happened and for what might result, the world as a whole did not turn to Him despite this "grief" and in the future too is destined to repeat the experience of uncomfortable foreboding at His glorious return, having failed to choose for Him during the Tribulation as well, despite even more dramatic, supernatural demonstrations of the power of God.

Revelation 1:8:

I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord who is God, "He who is and was and is coming, the Almighty".

This verse, with the Father speaking in His own voice, serves to validate Christ's coming reign foreshadowed in verse seven. For the Father to speak thus in His own voice is a rare yet precedented occurrence found also in other places where He seeks to demonstrate that the Son is acting entirely with His authority (e.g., Ps.110).⁴⁷ With this statement then, the Father effectively rules out any other way of salvation (cf. Jn.14:6). Verse eight sets His seal, as it were, upon the conclusion to all prior history being summed up in the person of His Son as the only acceptable object of faith in the Father's eyes. Revelation is "Christ's revelation" and this testimony from the Father is the equivalent of Him setting His signet ring in the wax of its seal to guarantee that the book, along with the exalted role for His Son that it describes, possesses His very own authority.

Verse eight also marks the end of the introduction and salutation of Revelation in a manner befitting the discussion of the end times that forms the content of Revelation, for the part of the Father's title "who . . . is coming" (Rev.1:4; 4:8; cf. Rev.21:22-23) projects our view forward to the conclusion of Christ's millennial reign when the Father's Advent to the newly recreated earth and the arrival of the New Jerusalem will mark the end of human history and the beginning of the Eternal State where God shall be "all in all" forevermore (1Cor.15:28). Verses seven and eight in combination, therefore, embrace the entire final chapter of history, from the return of the Messiah to the commencement of eternity, reminding us that in spite of tribulation or even *the* Tribulation, all that is to come will be resolved in God's glorious and perfect way (a perspective we would do well to retain as we contemplate the pressures and disasters that will dominate the seven year period which precedes this blessed end).

Revelation 1:9-11:

I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance in Jesus was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I came to be in the Spirit on the Lord's day and heard behind me a loud voice like that of a trumpet, saying, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.

fellow partaker in the tribulation: The humility of this great man, an apostle of Christ, is again clear in this self-description, where he represents himself not as such but as our brother, and one who shares in our common testing (tribulation), common aspiration (our resurrection and glorification in the Christ's kingdom), and common necessity (of enduring patiently anything and everything it is our lot to face as believers in our Lord Jesus Christ here in the devil's world).

the island called Patmos: As suggested above, the vision (and subsequent writing) described here most likely took place in circa 64-68 A.D. at the time of the empire-wide persecution of Christianity under the emperor Nero. John was evidently not executed at this time (as the apostles Paul and Peter were), but was, as tradition holds and as this description would seem to confirm (both from the reference to "tribulation" and his explanation: "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus", i.e., teaching and telling about Jesus) exiled to the small Aegean island of Patmos for the duration of the persecution (an event which would not have extended far beyond the death of Nero in 68 A.D.).

in the Spirit: God placed John in an ecstatic state to receive the divine revelation which was to follow. The phrase "in the Spirit" as used here should thus be carefully distinguished from the command given to all believers to "walk in the Spirit" (Gal.5:16; cf. Rom.8:4; Gal.5:25; Eph.5:18).⁴⁸ The translation given above "*I came to be* [in the Spirit]" is a rendering of the Greek verb meaning "to happen" or "to become" (*gignomai*: γίγνομαι). Obviously, English usage will not allow the translation "*I became* in the Spirit", but on the other hand "*I was* in the Spirit" fails utterly to convey the passive and progressive nature of the event, that is, that John is hereby describing his *entrance* into an exceptional spiritual state *quite apart from his own will*. What we have here then is a description of the ecstatic prophetic state induced by God on behalf of His *prophets* specifically for the purpose of divine revelation, an event well paralleled in the cases of other inspired writers of scripture (Num.12:6; Ezek.1:1; 1:3; 2:1; 8:3; 40:2; Dan.10:1-7; Micah 1:1; Zech.1:8; 4:1; Acts 10:10; 11:5; 22:17; 2Cor.12:1-4; 2Pet.1:20-21; Rev.4:2; 17:3; 21:10; cf. Is.6:1ff.; Jer.1:5-19; Hos.1:1-2; Amos 8:1; 9:1).

the seven churches: As mentioned above, these seven churches in Asia minor are traditionally taken to be (and in all probability were) the main stops on a circuit of face-to-face ministry upon which John had regularly embarked before his exile to Patmos. However, as an apostle of Jesus Christ, John's authority was not limited to these seven churches, but covered the entire contemporary Church. Furthermore, as a gift of revelation about our Lord Jesus Christ and the events surrounding His glorious return, the book of Revelation is a common heritage of the entire Church throughout the

centuries (not just the seven churches mentioned here). That the seven churches listed above should be singled out in this way as recipients of the book of Revelation is a powerful indication of their symbolic function: they are meant to stand for the Church as a whole, not only for a small portion of the believers alive at the time of writing, but for the *entire Body of Christ* throughout its history (a subject we shall visit in detail in part 2 of this study).

Revelation 1:12-16:

So I turned around to see [the source of] the voice that was speaking to me, and when I had turned around, I saw seven golden lampstands. And in the middle of the lampstands was what looked like a man, dressed in a long robe with a golden belt tied around His waist. And His head and his hair were as white as wool or as snow, and His eyes were like a fiery flame, and His feet were like white-hot bronze when super-heated in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. And He held seven stars in His right hand, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword. And His face shone like the sun in its glory.

I turned around to see: John, in the midst of this ecstatic, prophetic state, nevertheless maintains his personality and normal perspective. In this his experience is identical to that of other prophets, for example, Isaiah and Ezekiel (cf. especially Is.6; Ezek.1-2). Indeed, the similarities not only between John's experience and theirs but also in the particulars of what he is shown are most reminiscent of what both of those Old Testament prophets were given to record. It is important to note that this is because they all saw the same reality, glories of God that are not visible to the rest of us, and most definitely *not* because of "literary borrowing" (as many who deny the truth of scripture would have it). The similarity of experience between Ezekiel and John is particularly striking. Both are exiles (Ezek.1:1), both see the Lord in His glory (Ezek.1:26-28), the cherubim (Ezek.1:5-21), the throne and the sea (Ezek.10:1; cf. 1:22), both are commanded to "eat the scroll" they are given (Ezek.2:8-3:3), both describe the marking of the elect to be spared divine judgment (Ezek.9:3-4), and both relate the taking and scattering of fiery coals from the altar of God as an instrument of divine judgment (Ezek.10:1-6). For anyone acquainted with both books, it is clear that this is a partial list of many other similarities which should not be considered surprising given that, as we have seen above, Ezekiel is largely taken up with describing (even if sometimes by way of foreshadowing) the very events that John is given to directly prophesy in Revelation.

seven golden lampstands: As the Lord Himself tells John in verse twenty, these lampstands represent the seven churches. In the ancient world, the *lychnia* (lampstand) is akin to what we would call a "floor lamp", being an elevated stand upon which an oil-burning "lamp" (comparable to a "light bulb" in our analogy) would be placed in order for the light of the lamp to be more widely distributed (cf. Matt.5:14-16). That we are meant to understand that these lampstands include lamps even now burning and giving off light is clear from Revelation 4:5. Note then that all seven of these churches are

giving off light, the very purpose of the church, individually and collectively (Mk.4:21; Lk.8:16; 11:33; and cf. Jn.8:12).⁴⁹

You are the light of the world. A city built on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and [so] it illuminates everything in the house. Let the light within you shine in this way before men, so that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:14-16

From the passage above and the context of the lampstands we can easily deduce that the proper job of the Church, as well as of individual churches and Christians, is largely to shine forth God's light in this dark world. That is, to act as His witnesses to the truth, the very light of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ (Jn.14:6; cf. Jn.1:4-9; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46), to do everything necessary to provide a place and a means for the light of the truth of the gospel to be available for the illumination of the hearts of all (cf. 2Cor.4:4-6), both for the salvation of the unsaved (Jn.12:46), and for the edification of the Body of Christ, our fellow believers who compose His Church universal (2Pet.1:19). Therefore that a group of churches, seven in number (the scriptural number of completeness and perfection as the seven days and the seven spirits indicate), should thus represent with such strong symbolism the purpose of the *entire* Church, is yet another indication of what we have suggested above, namely, that these seven churches do in fact stand here for the *entire* Church of Jesus Christ throughout the two millennia of its appointed history. For it is in precisely this way, that is, by shining forth God's light in the dark world around us, that we Christians individually and collectively have always been charged with following in the footsteps of the true Light of the world (Jn.8:12), in order that we might become more like Him even as we progressively reflect His truth with ever greater diligence, accuracy, and effectiveness:

And every one of us, when ***we reflect*** [like a mirror] the Lord's glory with no "veil" obscuring our faces (i.e., with unsullied Christian witness), is being transformed into the same image (i.e., becoming more Christ-like) so as ***to reflect*** an ever greater degree of glory – exactly what is to be expected with the Lord's Spirit as the agent of our transformation.

2nd Corinthians 3:18

Do everything [you do] without grumbling and criticizing, that you may be blameless and undefiled, children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you ***shine as light-givers*** in the world, holding fast [your witness] to the Word of life (i.e., Christ and His gospel).

Philippians 2:14-16a

a man: This "man" is *the* Son of Man, our Lord Jesus Christ, the subject of the revelation given in this book.⁵⁰ John felt it necessary to add this detail because the appearance of our Lord here is so overwhelmingly impressive that it would be easy to assume that this glorious Person is too marvelous to be a genuine human being. But Jesus, in addition to being divine, *is* human – without taking on true humanity, He

could not have died on our behalf to liberate us from our sins. What is astonishing to John is that Jesus' appearance here is so strikingly different from that of the not-yet-glorified Person he had seen so many times in his life, both before and after His resurrection (e.g., Jn.20:22). Only the short glimpse of the glorified Christ he had seen on the mount of transfiguration (Matt.17:2; Mk.9:2-3; Lk.9:29) could have prepared him for this awe-inspiring sight of our Savior in all His glory as He is now seated at the Father's right hand (Ps.110:1; Rom.8:34; Eph.1:20-22; Phil.2:9; Heb.1:3; 12:2; 1Pet.3:22). Up until this giving of the book of Revelation, the descriptions we have been given of our Lord in His glorified status, with the full panoply of glory having been received after His ascension to heaven and session at the Father's right hand (cf. Jn.7:39; 12:16), have been somewhat limited (the mount of transfiguration and Paul's vision on the road to Damascus being notable exceptions: Matt.17:1-13; Mk.9:2-13; Lk.9:28-36; Acts 9:3-9; 22:6-11; 26:13-18). Here, John is privileged to see (and records for the entire Church) our Savior as He truly is, with further shielding of His glory from our eyes being unnecessary since His first mission on this earth has been completely and successfully accomplished (Phil.2:5-11, and compare Is.53:2 with Jn.7:39).

This picture of our Lord is glorious indeed – gloriously dressed, dignified by His snow-white hair, with all His physical characteristics, eyes and face and voice and face, bespeaking even in His humanity the deity that is His. And it is well to remember that the reality of the truly overpowering nature of the Messiah evident from this passage was always true (even when with His glory masked He came to earth in the flesh for the first time: Phil.2:7-8). The wonder of His glory is a reality here and now as well (even though He is not at present visible to the world: 1Pet.1:8). When His revelation to the world does become a historical reality at the 2nd Advent, we have already seen how the universal response of the unsaved inhabitants of the earth will be one of paralyzing awe and deep regret at their previous lack of faith in Him. As His followers, then, do we not need to take pains to see Him as He truly is – just as He is described here – picturing in our hearts and taking to heart the awesome reality of Him (with the help of this gift of scripture and the teaching of the Holy Spirit)?

For here stands our Messiah in all His glory *in the midst* of the seven lampstands, that is, our Lord in His capacity as the central and focal Person of *the Church*, itself being represented as a perfect seven-fold whole. In His right hand, He holds seven stars, angels who superintend the seven historical periods of the calling out of Christ's Church (cf. verse twenty). And out of His mouth comes a sword, a symbol of the word of God (Heb.4:12), the very truth of Him, now complete with the giving of this book, the final installment of the canon of holy scriptures. In this image, the collaboration of the Trinity in the completion of Christ's Bride and the glory of that accomplishment can be clearly seen, as our Lord Himself stands in the midst of His Church (the seven lampstands), holding in His hand the administrative authority (the angelic superintendents) to call out and direct its development (as delegated by His Father: cf. Heb.2:13b), and empowering this glorious process through the sword of the Word, the province and ministry of the Holy Spirit (Eph.6:17). As Christ's face shines upon us at the conclusion of the description in verse sixteen, therefore, let us remember Peter's words and treasure them up carefully in our hearts along with all other scripture that speaks of

Him until the day when we see His glory face to face in our own flesh (1Cor.13:12; 1Jn.3:2; cf. Job 19:26-27), remembering that it is in these same holy scriptures that we find the true power to see Him by faith here and now, and so live our lives *for* His glory:

You too would do well to pay the closest attention to this [prophetically inspired Word], just as to a lamp shining in a dark place (cf. Ps.119:105), until the Day [of the Lord] dawns, and the Morning Star rises (i.e. Christ, the Light of the world, returns in glory), pondering in your hearts this principle of prime importance: not a single verse of prophetically inspired scripture has ever come into being as a result of personal reflection. For prophecy has never been given as a result of man's will – on the contrary, [it has only come when] holy men directed by the Holy Spirit have spoken words [that come] from God.

2nd Peter 1:19-21

Revelation 1:17-20:

And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. Then He put His right hand on me, saying, "Don't be afraid. It is I, the First and the Last, even the Living One. And although I died, behold, I am alive forever and ever! Indeed, I possess the keys to death and Hades. So write what you have seen, both the things that are [happening] (i.e., the Church Age trends represented by the seven churches) and the things that are going to happen after them (i.e., the Tribulation and the events which follow it). The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand and the seven lampstands [is this]: the seven stars are the seven churches' angels, and the lampstands are the seven churches."

like a dead man: John's response at the visible presence of God, here the resurrected Christ, is entirely understandable and appropriate (cf. Ex.33:20; Deut.5:26; Judg.13:22; Is.6:5; Ezek.1:28). As flesh (and corrupt flesh at that), fellowship with the holy and perfect God is impossible and unthinkable for us (that experience must await our resurrection). We should consider, moreover, that even the apostle John, one of the greatest believers ever to have drawn breath, was not prepared to see the glorified Jesus in the flesh – if only we could see God as He really is, how would we not immediately realize the completely unfounded nature of our earthly fears; how would we not immediately be ashamed at the deficiencies in our personal service to Him? This passage offers us a rare chance, namely, to see with scripture's help through the eyes of faith our Lord as He really is, and to recommit ourselves to trusting Him with all our heart and to following Him with all our strength. We may not be doing so now to the degree we should, and we may not even be capable of complete success in this, but when we finally do see Him face to face, will we regret a single prayer to Him, a single attempt to grow closer to Him, a single act of ministry on behalf of His Church that would otherwise have failed to occur? After all, lack of zeal and enthusiasm for our God and His Christ is, as we shall see in the next installment of this series, the operative negative characteristic of the Church during this final phase of its calling out prior to the Tribulation. We would thus do well to make maximum use of every opportunity for

reinforcing the reality of Him we claim to love more than life itself, and for taking up with vigor the individual cross we each have been assigned to bear.

Don't be afraid: Jesus' words here are definitely not commanding John to abandon his healthy fear of God, an essential ingredient in the life of every believer and one without which a true love of God (one encompassing the appropriate level of awe, reverence, and respect, at any rate) would be impossible (cf. Deut.10:12; 10:20; Ps.19:9; Prov.1:7; Eccl.12:13; Is.6:5; 11:3; 33:6; 57:11; Matt.10:28; 2Cor.5:11; Eph.5:21; 6:5). That having been said, it is also important for believers to understand the difference between fearing God and being unreasonably afraid of God. In this respect, we may compare our situation to that of the relationship between children and their honorable, loving parents (an illustration that is really more than that since God actually *has* adopted us as His children in Jesus Christ: Jn.1:12; Rom.8:14-19; Gal.4:5; Eph.1:5; Heb.12:7). In normal, healthy families, children do not live in constant fear of their parents. However, all children must learn at a very early age that their parents' authority is nothing to be trifled with, and that trepidation is indeed a legitimate feeling when they contemplate or commit behavior which is unacceptable in their parent's eyes (especially when a fair standard is employed). In the same way, we believers, adopted into the very family of God the Father on the basis of His Son's sacrifice on our behalf, can be absolutely confident of His love for us (cf. 1Jn.4:18), but by the same token we would be foolish to deceive ourselves into imagining that our heavenly Father will tolerate unacceptable behavior from us any more than our earthly parents did (Heb.12:4-13). It therefore bespeaks a complete misunderstanding of the perfect and merciful character of our God to possess a morbid fear of a Father who loved us enough to send His Son to die on our behalf (Jn.3:16; Rom.5:8; 2Cor.5:14). But should the fact that He loves us so and forgives us in Christ produce disrespect for Him on our part and embolden us to conduct unbecoming those called to be the children of God? God forbid! We should take care never to lose our healthy fear of God, since it helps to keep us on the straight and narrow (Ex.20:20; Prov.3:7), and guides us away from many of the pitfalls of this life (Ps.19:9; Prov.9:10-12; Eccl.12:13-14). For those who possess this appropriate fear of God and follow Him in the way He has ordained (through following Jesus Christ), there truly is nothing to fear, in this life or the next (cf. Rom.8:12-17):

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and the body in hell.

Matthew 10:28-31 NIV

the keys to death and Hades: "Death and Hades" refers to what we generally call "hell" in our contemporary vernacular (and they have this same meaning in Rev.6:8; 20:13-14; and cf. Matt.16:19). That is to say, this is the place of the dead who rejected Christ during their earthly lives. The compound term used by our Lord here is far more accurate and specific than what we mean by "hell", for the common-knowledge of this concept is misguided on several points which should be addressed here. Hades, the present "hell", contains three separate compartments:⁵¹

1) torments (the place we think of as "hell" where unbelievers are being temporarily housed after death: Matt.5:29-30; 23:33; Lk.12:5; 16:23; Rev.20:13-15).

2) Abraham's bosom (where believers were temporarily housed prior to the ascension of our Lord to the Third Heaven which is the current residence of believers who have died: Lk.16:19-31; cf. Rev.7:9-10).

3) the Abyss (where a portion of rebellious angelic kind, notably those involved in the Genesis chapter six attack on humanity, are being temporarily imprisoned: Lk.8:31; 2Pet.2:4; Jude 6; Rev.9:1-11; 20:1-3).

All residence in Hades is temporary, because the ultimate abode of all believers is the New Earth (at the end of history: Rev.21-22), while the ultimate abode of unbelieving humanity and rebellious angelic kind is the Lake of Fire (following the Last Judgment: Matt.25:14-46; Rev.20:11-15). The designation "death and Hades" is also important in this particular context as well because it makes clear that the dead mentioned here are unbelievers, not believers who have died in the Lord (as these are presently in heaven: cf. 2Cor.5:6-10; Rev.7:9-10).

The "keys" mentioned as being possessed by our Lord Jesus Christ refer to the fact that only through Him can a person escape our common human destiny of death and punishment (Jn.14:6). Because God in His wondrous mercy gave His Son for us and because Jesus died for us, that destiny can be changed by any and all – one needs only to turn to Him to receive this redemption from the power of sin and death (Rom.8:1-4; Gal. 3:13; 4:5; Eph.1:7; Col.1:14; 1:20; Heb.1:3; 1Pet.1:18-19; Rev.1:5), and the grant of eternal life in their place (1Jn.5:11-13). The plural, "keys", used here is also significant. Christ Jesus is *the* key, but we must accept and follow Him (i.e., we must receive and utilize the key we have been graciously offered by putting our faith in Him). He has already "unlocked" and opened the door of the prison house for us all (cf. Is.42:7; 61:1), but we must still follow Him out (cf. Acts 12:9). All the merit, all the work is His (Eph.2:8-9), but we must respond to that work in order to be released (Jn.1:11-13; Rom.10:8-11). Just as our Lord told us at John 3:5 that we are saved "by water and Spirit" when we are born again (i.e., our belief in and response to the water of the Word, the gospel message, on the one hand, and God's salvation of us in Jesus through the power of the Spirit on the other: Eph.5:26; Rev.22:17), so the plural "keys" is an indication of this critically important point of truth: God has done absolutely the most for us in sacrificing His Son (Rom.5:6-8; 2Cor.9:15; Eph.2:8), but He will not override our free will and force us to believe in Him against our will (1Tim.2:4; 2Pet.3:9; cf. Rev.2:21).

the seven churches' angels: The "*angeloi*" (ἄγγελοι) mentioned here are, as is almost always the case in scripture, angels (not human "messengers" or "pastors" as some versions have it). And, as is also the case in this passage, angels are often identified as stars in the Bible (Job 38:7; Is.14:12 & 13; 40:26).⁵² It is not an uncommon event for them to be entrusted with the sort of oversight and protection described in this verse. In this connection, we may mention as parallel cases their guarding of individual

believers (Gen.32:1; 2Kng.6:16-17; Ps.91:11-12; Dan.6:22; Matt.4:11; Matt.18:10; Lk.16:22; Act 12:15; Heb.1:14), their ministries to specific nations (Dan.10:13; 10:20-21; 11:1), and their guardianship of the gates of New Jerusalem (Rev.21:12). In this last instance of protective oversight, they are also organized in a similar way to what is described in Revelation 1:20, with one angel assigned to each gate for each individual tribe of Israel, a fact that carries even more weight when we consider that the description given in Revelation chapters 21-22 includes all who shall ever put their faith in Jesus Christ, ultimately organized into framework of Israel.⁵³ Thus an "angelic liaison" for the sequential generations of the Church forms a close parallel to the liaisons for individuals, nations, and ultimate corporate divisions of the Body of Christ found elsewhere in scripture. Moreover, since the seven churches of chapters 2-3 are, additionally, individual local churches in their own right as well, the principle of a specifically assigned angelic minister to all true churches of Christ should also be understood from these passages. The purpose for such angelic officials is doubtless the same as we have seen from prior studies: in addition to the wonders He performs by His own power, God also works through His creatures (whether men or angels), for we are all His servants (Heb.1:7; 1:14; Rev.19:10; 22:8-9). Thus God's control and oversight of the Church of Jesus Christ, whose Church we are, is a highly organized affair, with every detail of our progression and edification, in fact, having been meticulously planned since before the beginning of time (Rom.8:28-32; Eph.1:11; 2:10; 5:25-27), a most important perspective to have and to retain at the threshold of the Tribulation.

VI. Conclusion: The True Focus of our Hope

In these closing days of the pre-tribulational history of mankind, life has become both complicated and comfortable for many believers, a potentially dangerous correlation of factors. For to the extent that one possesses all the necessities of life in abundance, even to the point of luxury (in historical terms, even though in relative terms this will always be the province of the few), the most powerful natural stimulus to Christian hope is largely removed. And to the extent that the modern lifestyle which supplies that abundance is found to be a jealous and demanding taskmaster (especially if the entertainment and delights that are part and parcel of this lifestyle be factored in), little time and energy may be expected to remain at the end of frantic days and hectic weeks for the barest consideration of such issues, let alone the diligent service of our Lord, especially in an environment where most of our friends and neighbors are caught up in focusing upon the false hopes of this ephemeral world. This challenge – of serving God in the midst of the realm of Mammon – is no easy one, and it is really no surprise that it is one which has gone widely unanswered in these last days of the Church. Just as the believers in Laodicea were spiritually poor in spite of their material prosperity, so we, the last generation of the Church and heirs to the questionable Laodicean heritage, need to take very seriously the challenge of focusing our hope on what is truly important, what is eternal, and of eschewing what is really not important, but instead destined to be reduced to dust. For without a clear vision of the hope that is before us, we stand little chance (in the face of the relative prosperity and universal apathy that surrounds us) of motivating ourselves in the Lord to the level of zeal for Him that is both appropriate and

salutary. In order to be spiritually safe now, and, even more importantly, to prepare effectively for the difficult times ahead, it is absolutely imperative that we break through this all-pervasive miasma of worldly comfort set in such a demanding material lifestyle, and instead see clearly in our hearts that our true treasures are the ones we ought to be busily storing up in heaven:

Don't stock up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and corrosion eat them away and where thieves dig through and steal [them]. But stock up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor corrosion eat them away and where thieves neither dig through nor steal [them]. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:19-21

Jesus is our treasure, not the things that this earthly life can provide, though they exceed our wildest dreams and expectations. We are here for Him, and only have our hope of outliving the grave because of Him and because of what He did for us. Do we remember Him? Do we see through the deception of material prosperity and desires and fears into the true, the good, the eternal realities that lie behind this fragile and unsatisfying veil of pseudo-happiness the devil has striven so mightily to produce? If we cannot see our Lord but faintly now, what, pray tell, should we expect when the coming storm breaks upon us? No, we must not be blinded by the world and the things of this world. We must take advantage of every day, every opportunity, to draw closer to our God, to be more like our Savior, and to serve Him in the manner and the ministry that He has chosen for us individually one and all while we still have the light to do so, because the days of darkness are fast approaching.

So Jesus said to them, "For a little while yet, the Light is among you. Walk while you have the light, so the darkness doesn't overtake you."

John 12:35

Beyond the days of Tribulation, lie all the eternal glories that He has promised: our reward, our resurrection, the New Jerusalem, and our eternal relationship with Him. If we have but a little faith, He is faithful to bring us safely through the "fire and water" to come (Ps.66:12; Is.43:2), through the wilderness of tears that must be traversed (Ps.84:5-7; Is.58:11), through whatever the individual trials it will be our lot to face, even unto death (Ps.48:14). And on that day, when we stand with Him in resurrection and in glory on the holy mountain, we shall begin an eternity of joyful praise, thanksgiving and adoration, and know of a certainty that He was faithful to all He promised us.

And it will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God! We put our hope in Him that He would deliver us. This is our Lord. We put our hope in Him. Let us rejoice and be glad in His deliverance!"

Isaiah 25:9

For we believers in Jesus Christ, "upon whom the end of the ages has come" (1Cor.10:11), are waiting for the literal and bodily return in glory of the King of Kings

and Lord of Lords (Rev.19:16). On the other side of the vast darkness and excruciating testing which is the Great Tribulation is His glorious appearance, His "revelation" to the world, once and for all, and our gathering together with Him, in resurrection and in glory, for an eternity with Him, a joy which shall know no end (1Thes.4:16-17). This final and inexpressibly wonderful union with Him who is our Master is the true focus of our hope, and even in the Tribulation's darkest days, every passing day will only bring us closer to this blessed reality.

[W]e who are awaiting the *blessed hope*, namely the glorious and majestic appearance of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Titus 2:13

Until that glorious day, let us then be careful how we walk. Let us rather run well this race that has been set before us (1Cor.9:24-27), carefully redeeming the time (Eph.5:16; Col.4:5), and training ourselves for the battle ahead (2Tim.2:3-5; 4:7-8), never losing sight of the One who is our hope, our great and unshakeable confidence even in death of victory over death in eternal life forevermore.

To all [believers] God desired to make known what wealth there is in this glorious mystery regarding the gentiles, for it is that Christ – *your hope of glory* – is in you.
Colossians 1:27

Marana tha (Aramaic = "O our Lord, return!")

1st Corinthians 16:22

No matter how trying the tribulations or the Tribulation to come, no matter how painful and dark, no matter even if death or martyrdom awaits, the wonder and the glory of His return, and the rapturous joy we shall experience on being united with Him for all eternity thereafter will eclipse whatever sorrow and suffering has preceded it with the blinding light of an eternal life with the One we love (Rev.7:16-17).

For I do not consider these present hardships in any way comparable to the glory destined to be revealed for us [at the 2nd Advent]. For all creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God. For the created world is now subject to futility – not of its own choosing, but because of Him who subjected it [as a consequence of Adam's sin] – but not without hope. For [at the 2nd Advent] the created world will be liberated from its enslavement to decay at the glorious liberation of the sons of God (i.e. our resurrection). For we know that the whole creation has been experiencing intense pain and agony right up until this present time. And not only the created world, but we too who have received the Holy Spirit as a foretaste [of the good things to come] agonize within ourselves as we eagerly await our adoption, that is, the redemption of our body (i.e. resurrection). ***This is the hope with which we were saved.***

Romans 8:18-24a

The Coming Tribulation: A History of the Apocalypse

Part 2A

The Seven Churches of Revelation: Revelation 2:1 - 3:22

Introduction: We concluded the first part of this series with a consideration of the true Christian hope – our ultimate resurrection and eternal future with our dear Lord Jesus Christ. For us, the current generation of the Church, standing on the very brink of the Tribulation, this "hope" is more tangible than ever before, because there is the very real prospect (if not the inevitability) that some who read these words will survive in the flesh to see our Lord return to earth, and will at that moment be "caught up" in resurrection at His glorious return. In all our detailed investigation of the Tribulation's terrifying events, this perspective of hope rather than of fear should be carefully maintained. For we who have chosen for Him are most certainly *not* the objects of God's wrath which will be poured out upon the earth during those terrible years, and whatever we may be called upon to suffer in the time between the Tribulation's commencement and our Lord's return will be for His glory and our glorification – our labor is not in vain in Him (1Cor.15:58). The overwhelming reality of His final victory and our blessed unification with Him at that time will transcend to such a great degree whatever horrendous trials it be our lot to endure in the time between that all such relatively "light affliction" will not be worthy of comparison to the glories destined to follow them. May He who is our Light also transcend in our hearts these events even before the fact in the midst of the darkness to come!

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.
Romans 8:18 KJV

The Seven Churches: Revelation 2:1 - 3:22

In our preliminary discussion of the seven churches in the previous installment of this series it was explained that, in addition to being seven literal and historical local churches existing in John's day, these seven are also representative of the seven eras of the Church Age that had only just begun at the time Revelation was written. These indications include:

- John's apostolic authority (especially as the last apostle) extended to the entire Church, not just these seven (1Cor.9:1-5; 12:28; Gal.2:7-9). This is not a message designed by him to address specific issues in particular churches (as 1-3 John), but a message given by God to *the* seven "churches" (Rev.1:11: the definite article is significant here, because there were clearly more than seven local churches at the time of writing).

- Our Lord Jesus Christ is and was concerned for His entire Church, not just for these seven local churches. This revelation of His Person is clearly meant to be for His entire bride, the whole Church universal, and not merely for a very small portion of it.
- The book of Revelation is the heritage of the entire Church. It is meant to bless all who read it (Rev.1:3), and meant to show all who consider it (Rev.22:7) what will happen in the end times.
- Revelation, after beginning with the messages to the seven churches in chapters two and three moves immediately to the history of the end times on the far side of the Church Age's two millennial days. The book is indisputably focused on the conclusion of the Church Age, so that the preceding messages to the seven churches only make structural sense as an overview of the intervening two millennia.
- The seven lampstands cannot well be understood as only these seven local churches, for they are seen alone in the presence of Christ in chapter one (Rev.1:12-13), and again alone in the presence of the Father's throne in chapter four (Rev.4:5). The lampstands, light-giving bodies which represent the role of the Church universal in reflecting the truth of Christ in this dark world, and doing so as a totality in both instances, must therefore represent more than seven local churches in the first century.
- The description of Jesus Christ as "in the midst" of the seven lampstands, holding the seven stars, the angels of these churches (Rev.1:12-16), is symbolism which strongly suggests His authority over the Church, and the entire Church at that, and would be very hard to apply exclusively to seven local churches. The number seven, the number of perfection in the Bible, also argues for these seven "churches" to be a symbolic representation of one complete Church (cf. the seven spirits of Is.11:1-2 and Rev.4:5 standing symbolically for the one and only Holy Spirit).
- The text of Revelation 4:1 "what (i.e. the Tribulation) must take place [immediately] *after these things* (i.e., the "events" of the seven churches)" only makes good sense if the seven churches be taken as the aggregate period of time between John's penning of these words and the commencement of the Tribulation (see section II below).
- Finally, it is appropriate for the last book of the Bible to be addressed to Christ's entire Church (rather than merely to seven local ones).

This interpretation helps to explain other apparent anomalies in the messages to the seven churches. Why, for example, should the church at Colossae, a mere dozen miles distant from that of Laodicea and the recipient of a canonical epistle from the apostle Paul less than a decade before, be omitted in favor of Laodicea, if not for the fact that the situation at Laodicea was symbolically more applicable to later developments in the Church universal? And there were, of course, many other local churches at time of writing beyond Asia Minor as well as within it. It is, in fact, only because of the symbolic importance these churches bear for the historical eras of the Church which they respectively represent that they have been included in the list. In addition to these

considerations, the interpretation of the messages to these seven churches will be seen to reinforce what has been suggested above: the seven churches are, in addition to being seven actual local churches ministered to by the apostle John nearly two thousand years ago, representative of seven distinct periods in the history of the Church Age which is only now in its final phase.

From a structural point of view, these seven also give us – importantly – a historical perspective which pushes our thinking forward from the beginning of the Church, through its history, then down to commencement of the end times, that is, the Tribulation which is the threshold of Christ's return. Thus, the two-chapter treatment of the seven churches or seven phases of the Church Age is an important link between John's present (chapter one) and the events of the end (from chapter four forward). Chapters two and three, therefore, "fill in the blank" as to the events of the Church Age that come between the time of writing and the time of the end. The fact that this transitional discussion is so extremely rapid and contains no discernible or fixable dates (before the benefit of historical hindsight) also means that the sense of immediacy and imminency of the approaching apocalypse (along with the corresponding urgency for believers to be alert and to prepare for that eventuality) is actually heightened rather than diminished by the inclusion of this historical survey.

Relating present events and circumstance in this way as models for understanding future realities is a phenomenon which occurs quite frequently in biblical prophecy, as we have taken pains to show in part 1 of this series (cf. the entire second half of Isaiah which, as we have seen, deals with a [then] future Babylonian captivity as an extended analogy to the end times). So this use of seven actual churches to lay out trends which were to take place in the following two millennia of the Church Age is not without biblical parallel. In the experience of these seven churches, we are given to see the unique characteristics of each of the seven historical eras of the Church. Nor is it unprecedented for corporate tendencies to dominate for centuries at a time as is the case in the seven Church eras. Jesus, with the behavior pattern of legalistic unbelief in mind into which the Israel of His day had fallen, prophesied to His contemporaries that the current "generation" would "not pass away" until His return (Lk.21:32 in context), a clear reference to a grouping defined not by longevity but rather by consistent corporate behavior (a point reiterated by the apostle Paul: esp. Rom.11:25-27; cf. Lk.11:50-51). Thus the messages to the seven churches, far from being a lengthy aside, are an essential and comprehensive history of the Church, conveying our focus rapidly forward from the 1st century to the very brink of the Tribulation (where, as it happens, we now stand), and doing so in a manner that teaches us a tremendous amount in the process.

Overview of the Seven Church Periods: Before proceeding to a detailed exegesis of Revelation chapters two and three, it will be helpful here to provide a brief synopsis of the seven Church periods they describe:

1. Chronological and Historical Overview: Each of the seven churches represents an era of the Church. These eras are presented sequentially, and, with the exception of the first and last eras (Ephesus and Laodicea respectively), are of equal length. It will be

remembered from our study of the millennial day structure of God's plan for human history (covered in part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series) that the Age of the Church comprises two millennial days or two thousand years (the last seven of which are coterminous with the Tribulation). In broad-stroke terms, the seven eras of the Church run from the end of the apostolic age to the beginning of the Tribulation, that is, from 70 A.D. to 2026 A.D., a total of 1,956 years. This total excludes the seven years of the Tribulation as well as the first 37 years of the Church Age, the "age of the apostles" (of whom John was the last). The Tribulation (the subject of Revelation chapters 4-19) is excluded from the tally because it is an era common to the Jewish and Church ages, and one with its own unique trends and developments at that. The "apostolic age" is also excluded because, in addition to being on the point of already being "history" when John penned this book, it was the unique time of the Church's initial construction and development under the special authority and tutelage of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (rather than operating under its own trends), and essentially predates the seven church prediction which begins with the Ephesian era. As to the remaining 1,956 years of the Church Age's two millennial days, these are to be divided into five eras of equal duration sandwiched in between the two "book-end" eras of Ephesus and Laodicea. Ephesus, the first era, is a short, transitional period which runs for a mere twelve years, commencing with the death of John, the last surviving apostle, in the spring of 70 A.D.⁵⁴

As discussed in part 1 of this series, the book of Revelation is best taken to have been written between 64-68 A.D. (with the probability growing proportionally greater towards the end of this four year window).⁵⁵ This chronology coupled with the date given above for John's death of 70 A.D. would mean that the last apostle survived his persecutor, Nero (d. 69 A.D.), a precursor and virtual type of the antichrist (an important symbolic combination of events in itself). John then died a scant six months before the destruction of Jerusalem and of the second temple by the Roman legions under Titus, an event which definitively and dramatically marks the temporary end of the exclusively Jewish *oikonomia* of the plan of God (i.e., the dispensation and administration of God's witness through the rituals prescribed in the Mosaic law whose curtailment was signaled by our Lord in the parable of the tenants: Matt.21:33-46; Mk.12:1-11; Lk.20:6-19). For from this point forward, no doubt is left but that it is the Church universal – composed of gentiles as well as Jews – which is to be the "lamp" of God's witness to the world until Christ's return (cf. Is.42:6; Matt.5:15; Mk.4:21; Lk.8:16; 11:33; Rev.11:4). This fact can be clearly seen in and is emphasized by the "lamps" which figure so centrally in the vision of Christ in chapter one, as well as in the messages to the seven churches in chapters two and three (Rev.1:12-13; 1:20; 2:1; 2:5).⁵⁶

Following the death of John, then, the "Ephesian church" represents a transitional period of short duration wherein the canon of the completed Bible is distributed throughout the Church and the Church itself shifts from apostolic supervision to exclusive rule by local churches. This first era lasts for a mere twelve years and constitutes a period of grace. During the time of "Ephesus", the Church is given a breathing space to adjust from a period characterized by miracles, miraculous events, and oversight by the apostles of the Lamb themselves, to a time when local churches would be the "pillars and supports" (1Tim.3:15) of the Church universal and when the

Bible would be the sole touchstone of all faith and practice (cf. 1Tim.4:6; 5:13-16). Such an interval was clearly necessary in order to prepare the incipient Church for the intense persecutions of the next era that would constitute its "baptism of fire" so to speak. The twelve years may be variously explained as being allocated on the basis of one year for each of the apostles, and/or one year for each of the twelve tribes of Israel (into which the Church, the body of Christ consisting ultimately of all pre-millennial believers, will eventually be incorporated).⁵⁷

The transitional period of Ephesus is followed by five eras of equal length. The eras of Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia all run for 360 years each. Since 360 days is the standard length in days of a Jewish ceremonial year (that is, twelve lunar months of 30 days each without the intercalation necessary to make the year conform to the solar calendar), it is not a far jump to see this figure of 360 as significant in representing the basic unit for each of these five eras (in the same way that a day often stands for a year [or epoch] in scripture as we have already seen).⁵⁸ The 360 day year, moreover, has particular significance within the book of Revelation, for it is precisely by a total of seven such years (split in two by their tally of days) that the length of the Tribulation is specifically defined (this is true both of the first half of the Tribulation and the Great Tribulation: see Rev.11:3 and 12:6 respectively).

After the introductory era of Ephesus and the five 360 year eras which follow, the Age of the Church terminates with a second shortened era, that of Laodicea, which runs for 144 years. This reduction in length vis-à-vis the preceding five eras is to be explained by the fact that, like Ephesus, Laodicea represents a transitional period (leading, in this case, into the final epoch of the Church Age, the Tribulation). As was the case with the Ephesian era, the length of the Laodicean era is likewise significant. First of all, its 144 years unquestionably foreshadow and are meant to suggest the ministry of the 144 thousand Jewish believers who are sealed and begin their evangelistic efforts immediately upon the completion of the Laodicean era (Rev.7:1-8). In this way, just as the twelve years of the Ephesian era (one for each apostle/tribe of Israel) constituted a period of grace in which the Church might prepare for the era of persecution to follow, so also the 144 years (one for each chiliad of the tribulational evangelists from the twelve tribes of Israel) constitute a period of grace – and of warning – which precede the most intense period of testing and persecution believers will ever experience, that is, the Tribulation. Now 144 is, of course, twelve times twelve, and we would not be wrong to draw from this fact the conclusion that the Tribulation will surpass previous persecutions of the Church by a like order of magnitude. And just as the performance and preparation of the Ephesian era Church left something to be desired in their lukewarm attitude to the Word of God (as we shall see below), so the performance and preparation of the Laodicean era Church (i.e., our own echelon of the Church) is falling short by an analogous order of magnitude, in spite of its preeminent advantages both in terms of time (a twelve-fold longer period of preparation) and resources (beyond anything ever witnessed in eras past and with the entire prior experience of the Church to build upon). The upshot of this sad state of affairs is that (should present trends continue) never will a group of believers be less prepared to face a greater challenge and with less excuse than at any time in Church history as will be the case when we

Laodiceans find ourselves confronting the coming Tribulation. Finally, the number 144 is also reminiscent of the twelve-square tally of days in the Jewish ceremonial calendar that represents the unprecedented number of believers called out during the Millennium.⁵⁹ While it may thus be possible to see the symbolism of these 144 years in a positive light as foreshadowing this exceptional number of believers predicted to be saved during the final millennial day of human history, it is also very likely that Laodicea's 144 years are a sign of unfulfilled promise, that is, a bitter comment upon the fact that at the end of the Church's two thousand year maturation, our Lord had every right to expect a period of prolific fruit-bearing that might in theory have rivaled what the Millennium will deliver in fact. But just as the Ephesian era Church failed to live up to expectations following a miraculous tutelage at the hands of the apostles, so the Laodicean era Church is failing to measure up to the promise that such abundant resources and opportunities surely give, and is doing so to an astoundingly depressing degree (cf. Matt.21:18-19).

The truncation of the eras of Ephesus and Laodicea may also be explained in another way: the cutting short of potentially damaging failure. For while God often allows groups and individuals to squander their spiritual opportunities to the full, when their actions compromise the spiritual futures of others He is not slow to act (witness the Babylonian destruction of Judah: Jer.29:4-23). While the Ephesian trend to disregard God's Word was not allowed to stultify the Church (for an era of persecution which separated the "good and bad figs" followed quickly: Jer.24:1-10), so "Laodicea" is allowed to spiral spiritually downward at a leisurely pace only so long until an analogous period of intense persecution ensues, namely the Tribulation, a period which likewise separates "the wheat from the chaff" (Matt.3:12). In both periods of persecution, Smyrna historically and the Tribulation prophetically, those who truly love God and His Son (and are not merely going through the motions) are given golden opportunities to demonstrate this love and to "shine like the brightness of the firmament" (Dan.12:3) instead of being gradually undermined and compromised in an increasingly lukewarm sea of indifference.

The seven eras of the Church, wherein the time following the temporary removal of the "lamp" of Israel is replaced by a series of seven "lamps" composed mainly of gentiles who would be God's witnesses until the restoration of Jewish supremacy in the years preceding Christ's return (Matt.21:43; Mk.12:9; Lk.20:16), may thus be summarized in overview as follows:

1. Ephesus: 12 years 70 to 82 A.D. "The Era of Transition"
2. Smyrna: 360 years 82 to 442 A.D. "The Era of Persecution"
3. Pergamum: 360 years 442 to 802 A.D. "The Era of Accommodation"
4. Thyatira: 360 years 802 to 1162 A.D. "The Era of Compromise"

5. Sardis: 360 years 1162 to 1522 A.D. "The Era of Corruption"
6. Philadelphia: 360 years 1522 to 1882 A.D. "The Era of Revival"
7. Laodicea: 144 years 1882 to 2026 A.D. "The Era of Degeneration"

(See [Synoptic Chart of the 7 Churches](#) courtesy of Dr. Charles Johnson)

Preceded by the apostolic period (running from the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord in 33 A.D. to the death of John in the fall of 70 A.D.), the sequence above bears some resemblance to the life of an individual Christian who has had his or her share of "ups and downs" in the faith following an initial period of blessed and blissful spiritual success immediately after salvation (analogous here to the apostolic period). Falling into apathy shortly thereafter, this hypothetical believer is shocked into a commendable response when confronted with significant opposition to his or her faith (Ephesus followed by Smyrna). Once the crisis has passed, however, a slow and mundane period of decline then occurs (the succession of Pergamum, Thyatira and Sardis), but at the very moment when complete atrophy and apostasy seem inevitable the believer is again shaken from the doldrums and reacts with a renewed and intensified positive response to the Lord and His Word (Philadelphia). The blessings that follow this revival bring in their turn a certain blindness as the believer's spirituality falls prey to prosperity (Laodicea). This is followed by an ultimate crisis wherein faith is either embraced or abandoned (analogous to the Tribulation). For those alive at the end of the Laodicean period, analogy becomes reality as the final maelstrom of faith will actually *be* the Tribulation: all those of genuine and enduring faith will respond heroically to the unparalleled challenge that meets them in the midst of the Church's darkest hour, even at the cost of their lives, so that the final chapter of Church history is one of victorious faith, triumphant through the flames of unprecedented persecution:

And this is the victory that has overcome the world: our faith [in Christ]!

1st John 5:4

One final point of overview is needed before we begin our individual consideration of the seven churches and their eras. All seven messages share a certain similarity in structure (which it is customary to note in treatments of Revelation), and the discussion below will follow this somewhat parallel structure. Moreover, a parallelism in the structure of these messages should not be at all surprising, since, as we have made a point of demonstrating above, each church addressed here by our Lord represents a particular era of His Church, an extended "generation" of the faithful to bear light to the world by reflecting Him, *the* Light of the world, as the lampstands which serve to bear the Lamp:

This is what the One who has the mastery over the seven stars in His right hand says, the One who walks in the midst of the seven golden *lampstands*.
Revelation 2:1

And the city has no need of the sun nor the moon to shine for it, for the glory of God has shone upon it and the Lamb is its *lamp*.
Revelation 21:23

Points common to all of the seven messages include:

1) Salutation: All seven messages begin with "to the angel of the church of . . . write". That the recipient of the message is the angel in charge of the particular sub-echelon (or "generation") of the Church in question demonstrates the importance of the divine chain of command (God working through His angelic servants in a structured and consistent way: cf. e.g., 1Tim.5:21). It also shows that whatever may be true about the quality of the superintendence of the Church on the visible, human level, there is much effective supervision, heavenly liaison, and guardianship taking place in the angelic realm which we cannot see (but know is there nonetheless through these and other passages: see the Satanic Rebellion series as well as part 1 of the present series). Moreover, the command to "write" these things to the angel in charge makes clear that the giving of the particular message is authorized and commanded by Christ Himself.

2) Imprimatur: Our Lord Jesus Christ's introduction per se is given in a nearly identical fashion in all seven messages. The Greek phrase *tade legei* ("these things [He] says": τὰδε λέγει) is in fact an identical feature common to all the messages, and constitutes an imprimatur, that is, a demonstrative statement on our Lord's behalf assuring us that what follows are indeed His very own words directly from Him and endowed with His complete authority.

3) Self-description of the Lord: The content of all seven descriptions is different, reflecting the differences in the seven messages, but in all seven, our Lord speaks of Himself in the third person (i.e., "the One who . . .").

4) Particular message from the Lord: All seven individual messages include an assurance from the Lord in the first person that He is in full possession of the necessary information to make the evaluation which the particular messages contain ("I know . . ."). This is followed, in varying structure, by a descriptive evaluation of each church, along with a command or commands appropriate to their particular situations.

5) Admonition: All seven messages contain the admonition "he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches". This sober advice (given by our Lord) serves to impress upon us all the importance of paying attention to the details given in each description, for even though the remarks are directed to a particular era of the Church, the principles discussed by our Lord concern us all. Hence, each message is described as being – in addition to a specific charge to a given part of the Body of Christ – a message

to "the churches", that is to say, to the Church of all eras. It is further stated in this common admonition that the [Holy] Spirit is the One who is delivering these messages, the point being that though the messages are from Christ to the seven churches via their angels, even so it is the Holy Spirit who is behind all communication of divine truth in this world at all times.

6) Promise: In addition to warnings, admonitions and corrections, each message also offers up a wonderful set of promises to encourage us in our Christian walk, to remind us that in spite of stumbling and reproof, we are God's children with the future hope of eternal life along with all the indescribable blessings that entails. These blessings are variously and marvelously described, and each presents a different facet of the future glory that awaits all those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ and follow Him faithfully to the end.

1. Ephesus: "The Era of Transition" (September 70 to 82 = 12 years)

Revelation 2:1-7:

(1) To the angel of the church in Ephesus, write: "This is what the One who has the mastery over the seven stars in His right hand says, the One who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. (2) I know your works and your toil and your perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil people. And you have put to the test those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them out to be false. (3) And you possess perseverance, and you have endured every sort of tribulation because of My Name, and you have not faltered. (4) But I have against you [the fact] that you have abandoned [that] love you had at first. (5) So remember where you have fallen from, and repent, and do the works you did at first. And if you do not, I am going to come to you and move your lampstand out of its place, if you do not repent. (6) But you do have this [in your favor], [the fact] that you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. (7) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who wins the victory, I will give to him [the right] to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God."

The name "Ephesus", while a geographical name, can be taken by the Greek reader to derive from the word *ephizo*, "to sit upon". This etymology is important, for it conveys (as is the case with the names of all seven local churches selected for their affinity to the historical eras they represent) the fundamental characteristic of the Ephesian era. For the name "Ephesus" while betokening "establishment" (a good thing), also clearly implies a certain impassivity, that is, a "sitting upon" the laurels of past accomplishments, and, specifically (as becomes clear later in the message), the development of a lackadaisical attitude toward the Word of God (the "first love" or "love you had at first" of verse four). Thus the overall character of this and all the eras (as well as the overall lesson for all who read these words) is made clear from the start in our Lord's choice of church names. In the case of Ephesus it is that no Christian can ever afford to cease spiritual growth, to assume that past successes are sufficient. For it is

only in continued forward progress through the "narrow gate" and up the "constricted way" that spiritual safety is to be found (Matt.7:13-14).

Ephesus represents the era of transition from direct apostolic rule to the rule of the local church. It begins, appropriately enough, with two pertinent events, namely, the death of John, the last apostle, and the fall of Jerusalem. In the case of the latter event, the destruction of the second temple marked the definite termination of the Mosaic ritual connected with it: from now on the Church was to focus on the reality of Christ to which the ritual of the law had pointed. In the case of the former event, John's death marked the definite termination of apostolic authority: from now on the Church was to serve its One Head, Jesus Christ, as equal members of His body. Both of these developments would mean major transitions for the Church, a difficult role for the Ephesian era believers to fill, but one for which the wonders of the apostolic age had prepared them. The challenging nature of the task faced by this first post-apostolic generation of the Church may be seen in the fact that, from that day to this, believers are still having trouble with both issues when trying to find answers in pseudo-rituals (looking back to the temple rites) and in pseudo-hierarchical authority structures (looking back to apostolic authority) rather than looking where they should look, the only place *to* look, namely, to the Bible, and to the administration of *its* truths through the gifts we the Church collectively possess.

The end of all apostolic rule and of the miracles and miraculous gifts which had attended it meant that the Church would now have to become totally dependent upon the less spectacular (though intrinsically more powerful) procedure of administering the Word of God entirely through the Bible and the concomitant gifts of empowerment given by the Holy Spirit. For from the first days of the Ephesian era right up until our time, the work of the Church, salvation and spiritual growth, has been accomplished exclusively through ordinary Christians who have not possessed such impressive and extraordinary gifts. It has not been through healing, or tongues, or apostolic authority, or any other overtly miraculous means that the Church has spread the message of Jesus Christ and provided for its own growth in the power of the Spirit, but through normal evangelism, and teaching, and pastoring, and all of the myriad helps that each individual member of the Body of Christ has provided in support of the fundamental goal of the Church: to grow in Christ and to help others do likewise (Jn.21:15-17).

The true importance of the historical development of Church ritual and Church administration in the process of our collective salvation and spiritual growth has been highly overrated (at least as far as positive influence is concerned). Certainly, some basic administrative structure was and still is necessary for local churches to serve our Lord "decently and in good order" (1Cor.14:40; cf. 1Cor.14:33). But it can be fairly argued (as will be obvious even from our peripheral treatment of Church history which follows in this section) that over-enthusiastic, one might even say, morbid concentration on the forms of Church government and Church ritual have done far more harm than good in the past two millennia, and for one obvious reason: they have tended to attract attention to themselves rather than to the Word of God.

Jesus Christ Himself gave us the ceremony of communion (Matt.26:26-28; Mk.14:22-24; Lk.22:17-20; 1Cor.11:23-26), a ritual of remembrance of Him and His work and the only true Christian ritual, and even this has been abused – for its true purpose is not to "impart" grace or fellowship or anything else, but to *remind* believers of Him and His work and the choice we have made to follow Him (cf. "Do this *in remembrance of Me*", Matt.26:26-29; Lk.22:19; 1Cor.11:24-25).⁶⁰ And as to the government of the local church, all the evidence points to the conclusion that flexibility of form in the implementation of the guiding principle of "decently and in good order" is what the scriptures enjoin.⁶¹ There is no evidence in the Bible for any administrative superstructure superior to the local church following the (temporary) ministry of the twelve apostles.

Success in the transitional era of Ephesus, therefore, would depend not upon the development of organization, but upon individual Christians redoubling their efforts in the Word of God: hearing it, believing it, learning it, teaching it, living it, and helping others do the same. The "report card" given by our Lord above shows the Ephesian performance as mixed. On the one hand, they are commended for abstaining from false and sinful influences ("good defense", we might say), but on the other they are roundly criticized for giving short shrift to what really counts for spiritual growth and forward progress in the Christian life by abandoning their "previous love" for the Word of God. Given the fact that the canon of scripture, though complete, was only in the incipient stages of collection and widespread distribution, we can understand why the era of Ephesus was so abruptly cut short after a mere twelve year run: had this lackadaisical attitude toward the Bible been allowed to continue for an extended period of time, the consolidation and distribution of the Holy Scriptures might have been placed in serious jeopardy.

There were signs from even before the start of the Ephesian era that there would be problems with the transition from apostolic to local church rule. Paul's pointed remonstrances to the Jerusalem congregation (the book of Hebrews), and to the Corinthians (1st and 2nd Corinthians), and John's loss of control over one of the churches as evidenced in his third epistle are just a few of the more pointed examples which, even at the time, might well have led us to see Peter's hopes for the post-apostolic Church as overly optimistic (2Pet.1:12-15).⁶² For if such problems continued to surface in the "green wood" under the guiding hand of the apostles, what might be expected "in the dry" (Lk.23:31)? Ideally, the Church (as a collection of local churches) would have redoubled their efforts in the Word of God after the apostles' departure (along with the departure of the miraculous gifts which characterized their age), and would have taken pains to "call to remembrance" their teachings, as Peter so fondly hoped they would (2Pet.1:12-15; 3:1-2; cf. Paul also: 2Tim.1:13). But despite the "good defense" against sinful influences which we have noted in the case of the Ephesians, the evidence suggests that the dynamic and Spirit-filled personal *teachings* of the apostles were largely lost, and, apparently, almost immediately so. This does not mean, it is important to note, that a single iota of divine truth was either lost or even lost to us – all that God has meant for us to know in this life is contained in His holy scriptures. These scriptures were indeed lovingly preserved, collected and distributed, so that today the entire canon

of scripture is safe and widely available. But scripture must be *understood* to be learned, believed, and applied. By failing to preserve the *understanding* of the scriptures, bequeathed by the very men that wrote them under the Spirit's guidance, the Church as a whole lost a tremendous amount of momentum in the realm of spiritual growth, a momentum which would in some respects only begin to be seriously recouped centuries later during the Reformation.

We cannot know the exact whys and wherefores of these events. Church history as we have it is a non-inspired and incomplete picture of what really happened, and, if our present experience be any guide, we can be sure that we shall have to await our Lord's evaluation of events to find out what were the truly critical developments and who the truly important personages from His point of view.⁶³ What we can say from the divine assessment afforded us here is that the fire of devotion to the Word of God cooled quickly once the apostles had passed from the scene, and that faithful resistance to false teaching and sensual temptation, while laudatory and necessary, was not a sufficient substitute for an active love of the teachings of scripture. Such "good defense" without sufficient "offense" (i.e., the aggressive and heartfelt pursuit of the truths of the Word of God) not only fails to measure up from the standpoint of service to our Master (who expects us to use our gifts for the salvation and spiritual growth of our fellow members of His Body), but also undermines even this good "defense" in the end. For whatever we do or refrain from doing in the Christian life, everything should be done from an active faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom.14:23; Col.3:17). That is to say, both resistance to sin and evil and the prosecution of truth and good works should flow from a living, dynamic relationship with our Lord and Savior such as is only possible through consistent, persistent, meaningful immersion in the principles, the examples, the teachings, the doctrines, the truths, the words of God:

But in the teaching (*torah*) of the Lord is his delight, and in His teaching he meditates day and night.

Psalm 1:2

Even the best of behavior patterns are subject to becoming brittle and legalistic, mere rote and tradition, once divorced from the vibrant and powerful source of motivation upon which they were originally based. And once the right sort of things begin to be done for the wrong reasons, collapse and decay are only a matter of time. With the clear hindsight provided here by scripture, we can see that the short history of the Ephesian era was in the best interest of the Church. Despite their honorable behavior, there was and is no substitute for the Word of God.

Christ's Self-description to Ephesus:

1. "the One who has the mastery over the seven stars": Both phrases here, "who has the mastery over the seven stars (i.e., churches)" (Greek *krateo*, κρατέω, to rule over), and "who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands" call attention to our Lord's complete authority over His Church. It is not tradition or comfortable ritual that should be our focus in this world (the Ephesian mistake), but rather our Master, the Lord Jesus

Christ, the very Word of God (Jn.1:1). Christ is our authority (Eph.1:22; 4:15; 5:23), and we cannot afford to allow anything to become more important to us than the Word of God (Ps.138:2 [Hebrew and KJV]).

Christ's Particular Message to Ephesus:

1. "I know your works and your toil and your perseverance": True "good works" are the result of faith and faithfulness, of a true and living faith in our Savior Jesus Christ motivating action on His behalf (Jas.2:14-26). These include but are most definitely not limited to what we today call "charity". The purpose of good works is the glorification of God, and the means of doing genuine divine good involve everything which helps others to come to Christ and to persevere and grow in Him. This explains why in the most controversial passage on the subject of faith and good works, that is, the book of James, the examples given of extraordinary "works of faith" involve, contrary to expectation, not cases of sacrificial charitable giving, but rather exceptional instances of trusting God in difficult circumstances: namely, Abraham's sacrifice of his only son Isaac (Jas.2:21-24), and Rahab's protection of the Israelite spies at great risk to her life (Jas.2:25). Both of these examples provide a model of how believers should act with courageous faith, and so inspire us to do likewise. Neither is an example of mere monetary self-sacrifice or of lending a helping hand in material things.

Such true perseverance and works of faith inevitably go together (as James assures us: Jas.2:26), for they are both a result of spiritual growth which is in turn based upon a thorough foundation of hearing, believing, learning and applying the words of God.⁶⁴ Although such had been the Ephesians' pattern in the past, this "first love" was no longer their number one priority, apparently having been replaced by rote and tradition.

Material charity (as "good works" have [wrongly] come to be almost exclusively understood by many) is, indeed, often the result of proper spiritual motivation with these good purposes of advancing the kingdom of Jesus Christ in mind. Ironically, however, acts of material charity, divorced from the true biblical purpose for them (showing the mercy of God in providing the means by which others too may have the opportunity to learn about Jesus Christ and follow Him as disciples), can become a stumbling block when they are made to substitute for the dynamic purpose and power of God (to which they should respond, not replace). In this respect too, the Ephesians had apparently fossilized a correct procedure from the past (persistence in charitable works) while abandoning its spiritual foundation.

2. "you cannot endure evil people": The word translated here as "evil" is the Greek word *kakos* (i.e., generically bad or wicked), but since this word is picked up by the reference to the false apostles in the next clause as well as by the reference to the "Nicolaitans" in verse six, it is clear that the particular wickedness indicated here is evil in perhaps its most dangerous form as far as the Church is concerned, namely, the organized evil of false teachers and their followers and of the false doctrines and evil practices they promote. Inasmuch as this same issue of the relationship of each Church era to satanic influence is addressed (at least implicitly) in all seven messages, it will be beneficial here

to take an overall view of the varying terminology used by our Lord to describe and characterize the pernicious phenomenon of Satan's organized attack upon the truth as it is properly practiced by the true Church.

False Teachers, False Doctrines, and False Christians: First of all, it is important to note that the recurrent evil described in these seven messages under a variety of names (i.e., Nicolaitans, Jezebel, synagogue of Satan, false apostles, etc.) is to be distinguished from the devil's worldwide efforts to ensnare unbelieving mankind through a whole host of false religions, cults, and philosophies.⁶⁵ On the contrary, the variously described false and evil influence in the seven messages noted here is directed specifically and entirely toward the Church of Jesus Christ. More precisely put, these "groups" represent the historical assault by the devil upon and his infiltration of the true Church by means of individuals, groups and false teachings, all of which are contrary to the truth, the Person and the purpose of Jesus Christ. The true Church, after all, cannot be seen with our eyes. The true Church is composed of those who are genuinely believers in Jesus Christ, His true disciples who have dedicated their lives to following Him. The true Church is not a building, nor can it be defined in terms of physical structures. It is not an organization, nor can it be defined in terms of specific associations or bureaucracies. The true Church is not for man to define or even to be able to perceive with complete certainty, for only the Lord knows who are truly His, and who are really false (2Tim.2:19; cf. Jn.10:14; 1Cor.8:3; Gal.4:9). Even within the elite circle of the original twelve apostles, one "was a devil" (Jn.6:70-71), and our Lord's implied admonition to us with this reference constitutes an important lesson for all who genuinely believe in Him: be careful of assuming what only God can know for sure. For within even the most orthodox of organizations, and even in the most zealous of Church eras there have been false teachers, false doctrines, and false Christians. And we can say of a certainty that our adversary has made the infiltration, perversion, and destruction of every true Christian group and organization a very high priority. This has been the case throughout Church history as can be seen from this synopsis of our Lord's descriptions of "the false" during the seven Church eras:

Ephesus: *False apostles* rejected; **Nicolaitans** hated [the false kept out of the Church]

Smyrna: Slandered by the *Synagogue of Satan* [the false attacking from outside the Church]

Pergamum: You *have Balaam and Balak* [the false accommodated within the Church]

Thyatira: *Jezebel* [the false compromised with and in turn compromising the Church from within]

Sardis: No group mentioned [the true excluded by the false from the visible, apparent "church"]

Philadelphia: Acknowledged by the *Synagogue of Satan* [the true has separated from the false]

Laodicea: No group mentioned [the false has infiltrated and blunted the true Church to such a degree that false and true have melted into one indistinguishable, lukewarm mass]

The chart above should be sufficient to show that in every era of the Church there has been a struggle between the false (satanic infiltration of organized Christianity) and the true (genuine believers in and followers of Jesus Christ, irrespective of organization). Not everyone who has applied the name "Christian" to himself has been so in fact (a principle which still applies today), and, on the other hand, not everyone who has found himself outside of what is seen *by the world* as "legitimate Christianity" has for that reason been excluded from the true Body of Christ, His genuine Church.

Organization is important, as we have allowed, and a certain amount of bureaucracy is necessary to any temporal association, but all too often in churches big and small, such things have come to possess a momentum of their own, and have come to assume an importance exceeding the very purpose for which they were originally put in place: any and all true Church organization must serve the purposes of Jesus Christ, that is, the dissemination of His gospel and the spiritual growth and edification of all those won to Him. But it has frequently been the case in the history of the Church that certain organizations styling themselves as "Christian" have not only failed in this primary task, but have actually gone so far as to prevent others from doing so, even to the point of persecuting and bringing to martyrdom true followers of Jesus Christ.

Physical plant too is important. It is very helpful for any church to have a place to meet, but all too often in churches big and small throughout the eras of the Church, the physical, temporal, concrete concerns of church organizations have come to dominate the agenda, taking away valuable resources (spiritual as well as material) from the work of missions and evangelism and the training and support of the clergy, the mainstays (organizationally speaking) of spreading and teaching the Word of God. This trend toward emphasizing physical superstructure over spiritual foundation is not only a stultifying one, but, whenever left to pursue its natural end, has always led to a complete death of faith in the organizations and individuals so afflicted.

It is worth noting that Jesus had the benefit of neither bureaucracy nor buildings in the accomplishment of the most sublime ministry in world history. A handful of dedicated men who chose to follow Him regardless of the cost, and whatever open field or space might be available sufficed. This is not to say that believers since should have followed this model precisely, or that the development of an established organizational structure and the possession of dedicated buildings are wrong – certainly, they both provide benefits. The example of our Lord cited here is merely to illustrate that the emphasis and priority which many if not most organizations in the history of the Church have placed on such things has in fact been misplaced, and has indeed in many cases and instances been not only counterproductive but often disastrous. We are here for a

purpose. We are here to believe in and to follow our Lord, to learn His words and to live them, and to help others do likewise through the ministries and gifts which God has given us. To the extent that bureaucratic organization and physical plant are helpful to this primary purpose, well and good, but as true believers in Jesus Christ we should take pains to ensure that such secondary things do not keep us or even distract us from our true primary duty, the learning and the living of the Word of God.

3. "you have put to the test those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them out to be false": As mentioned in the historical synopsis of "the false" above, the Ephesian era Church was successful on this very important point of identifying false influences and false teachers and had rejected them rather than accommodating, compromising, or commingling with them. The apostle Paul's words of farewell to the elders of literal Ephesus are apropos of this point and show that the post-apostolic Church did indeed take this and other warnings like it to heart (cf. Rom.16:17-18; 2Cor.11:13-15; Eph.4:14; Col.2:16-23; 1Tim.4:1-5; 2Tim.2:23-3:9; Tit.1:11; 2Pet. 2:1-22; 1Jn.2:22; Jude 4):

For I know that after my departure fierce wolves will enter in among you who will not spare the flock. And even from among your own number [of elders] men will rise up and speak twisted things in order to entice the disciples (i.e., believers) to follow them. So be alert, remembering that for three years I did not stop warning each of you [about these dangers] day and night with my tears.

Acts 20:29-31

Paul's warning is also echoed by the apostles Peter and John:

And there arose among the people false prophets, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will introduce destructive false doctrines – even denying the Master who bought them – and will bring swift destruction on themselves. And many will follow their lascivious ways so that the way of truth will be subject to blasphemy on their account. And in their greed they will exploit you for profit by means of their fraudulent teachings.

2nd Peter 2:1-3a

Beloved, don't believe every spirit [of every so-called prophet], but test the spirits [of these "prophets"] [to see] whether they are from God.

1st John 4:1

These warnings recall similar words from our Lord Himself :

Beware of the false prophets who are going to come in among you in sheep's clothing, but underneath they are ravenous wolves.

Matthew 7:15 (cf. John 10:12)

It is very easy for someone to claim to be "an apostle" (or an evangelist, or a prophet, or a teacher, or a pastor, for that matter). In the days of the early Church, once the true

apostles had passed from the scene, it would have been a simple matter for strangers to come to any given town and claim the possession of apostolic authority to one degree or another (on the basis of claimed prior association with one of the actual apostles, for instance). From the passages quoted above (and the other references listed) it is clear that there was a responsibility to *make sure* of the genuineness of such men and their teaching *before* extending the right hand of fellowship and accepting their words as true. After all, in the case of the Ephesian era Church which we are considering here, the Christians of this period are being commended by our Lord for *rejecting* such false claims, and without question such rejection must have been based upon careful testing of the individuals and teachings in question. Continuing to quote from our Lord's "wolves in sheep's clothing" remarks regarding false teachers in the Matthew chapter seven passage cited immediately above we read:

You will recognize [these false prophets] from their *fruit* (i.e., their words, teachings, personal behavior and modus operandi). People don't collect grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles, do they? Just so every good tree produces good [serviceable] fruit, but the rotten tree produces bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree produce good [appealing] fruit. [For] every good tree which doesn't produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will recognize [those false prophets] from their *fruit*.

Matthew 7:16-20

The "fruit test" given to us by Jesus Himself remains the standard by which we are to judge and evaluate any and all who purport to convey the Word of God in any fashion, and we are well advised (by our Lord Himself) to do what the Ephesian era Church did and make careful use of this test *before* accepting the teachings, the authority, or the fellowship of any new element (individual or group) into our midst. For it is precisely this failure to be strict when it comes to the truth of God's Word that has led to the commingling of truth and falsehood that so characterizes the Church of our own Laodicean day.

It should be well noted that this standard applies to the "good trees", not the bad. Those who really are servants of the Word labor under a higher standard of judgment administered personally by Jesus Christ (i.e., if they do not produce proper fruit, they are "cut down and thrown into the fire"; cf. Jas.3:1; Rev.22:18-19; cf. Lk.20:46-47). Therefore it is not the individual Christian's place to judge the effectiveness of true ministers ("good trees") – Christ will do that, and will not be slow to discipline whenever and wherever His genuine teachers fall short. Rather it is the responsibility of the individual Christian to distinguish between "good trees" and trees which are entirely "bad". The "fruit test", therefore, is not some impossible standard to discern, but a relatively easy rule of thumb to apply in investigating the ministries of those who purport to be teaching the Word of God. For anyone of normal intellect and common sense with even a minimal familiarity with basic Bible principles, it is not difficult to discover if a particular tree belongs to the category "generically, intrinsically and irredeemably bad", for the bad fruit of such ministries will be impossible to hide.

There is, however, a well-known contemporary saying which has some bearing on these things: "You can't cheat an honest man". While this saw may not be universally true, the point behind it deserves consideration in our present context, namely, the dishonest person is more susceptible to flimflam precisely because of his nature. In a similar way, it is much more difficult to deceive those who are energetically pursuing spiritual growth and diligently following our Master than it is those whose dedication to Him is minimal and whose Christian walk is lax. Those who are little interested in pursuing the truth of the Word of God are inevitably eager for something "more interesting" and hence are more vulnerable to "spicy" false teaching. And those who are not following the Lord closely in their personal behavior are inevitably receptive to anyone who willing to tell them that the wrong they are doing (or the right they are failing to do) is really all right. In other words, those who verge on being "bad trees" themselves, are less likely to be able (or even willing) to recognize this trait in false teachers:

[Timothy], I [give] you [this] charge before God and Christ Jesus, the One who is about to judge the living and the dead, [charging you] by His appearance [at His Second Advent] and by His Kingdom: Proclaim the Word! Keep at it, whether circumstances are favorable or not! Reprove, rebuke, [and] encourage with all patience [in your] teaching! For the time will come when they will not put up with sound teaching, but will [instead], desiring to have their ears scratched, heap up by their own [devices] teachers to match their specific lusts. And they will turn their ears from the truth and resort instead to fictions (i.e., made up by these false teachers).

2nd Timothy 4:1-4

In the history of the Church, there has never been a lack of men who, for their own selfish interests (be it for wealth or power or fame or what have you), have been willing to tell weak Christians of the sort we are discussing here exactly what they have wanted to hear. This willingness to accommodate teaching to the audience's desires is a hallmark of false teachers. Another, seemingly opposite characteristic is the tendency of false teachers to bully, browbeat and brainwash all who come within their orbit into accepting outrageous and obviously unbiblical teachings. Far from being opposite in fact, however, both behavior patterns have in common an utter disregard both for the genuine truth to be found in scripture and also for the welfare of those who follow them (i.e., they are of a truth wolves preying upon the sheep: cf. Zech.11:16). Indeed, both sets of behavior are often found within the same individuals, cults, and pseudo-Christian organizations, as new followers are often attracted with whatever their "itching ears" desire to hear, and only later, after the hook has been properly set, gradually enslaved by being brow-beaten into accepting any number of false teachings designed to make them more malleable for the parasites who exploit them.

The "fruit-test": So then, for those who are intent on wandering from Christ, all such "testing of spirits" is pointless, for it is only a matter of time before such individuals fall prey to the false. For those who are genuinely trying to follow Jesus Christ and be His disciples, although it is true that they are not as susceptible to false teaching, false

teachers, and false-Christian groups, it is, nevertheless, imperative that they continue to apply the "fruit-test" in the way our Lord directed in the interest of spiritual safety.

1) testing the teacher: Evaluating and judging other people is always a dangerous business and one which is best avoided if unnecessary (Matt.7:1-2; Lk.6:37). However, given that serious spiritual growth is extremely difficult without in-depth teaching of the scriptures, and that this process requires the believer's acceptance of the authority of the teacher in question to some degree, at least an initial evaluation is advisable, therefore, when it comes to the issue of choosing whether or not to accept a particular person's teaching authority in the first place. This will mean, it is true, that the lifestyle and personal behavior of the teacher in question should be above reproach (cf. 1Tim.3:1-15; Tit.1:5-9), at least, that is, when a fair and accurate judgment is rendered on more than mere appearances (Jn.7:24).⁶⁶ After all, many a false teacher will go to great lengths to try and project an image of sanctity, hiding under a layer of whitewash his true nature, and thus making the issue often less than obvious (Matt.23:27-28). On the one hand, while charlatans are often very careful to conceal their faults, genuine teachers may, out of innocence, be less careful about hiding their own shortcomings (none of us, after all, is perfect). So while sanctimonious behavior trumpeted for mass consumption should put anyone on the alert, and while false teachers often have at least one "tell", or glaring fault that shines through and reveals what is really underneath, judging the source is not entirely without its difficulties. This, at least in part, accounts for the acceptance by some (who should know better) of false teachers (based upon their polished deceptions) and the rejection by some (employing an over-legalistic standard) of true teachers (based upon patent peccadillos and minor imperfections). As in all things, the employment of careful, balanced, and sober judgment, accompanied by prayer and the aid of the Spirit, should be able to avoid both of these extremes.

2) testing the teachings: It is surely for just this reason that our Lord directs our attention in these matters not to the tree itself (which may give the *appearance* of being "good"), but rather to its *fruit*, whose goodness and badness it is impossible to conceal. While we may not always be able to discern the nature of the heart from what people choose to "show us" in their personal behavior, judging the quality of their production, their fruit, is an easier matter. The analogy of literal fruit is helpful in this regard. Good fruit is generally obvious upon inspection: it gives a pleasant appearance and smell. With even a small experience of particular types of fruit, it is rare that we are fooled about quality even before tasting (and we often go to great lengths at the market to judge the weight, color, luster, smell, etc.). If we do make a mistake, one bite is usually sufficient to tell us that a piece of fruit is rotten, or unripe, or otherwise deficient in quality (i.e., because of parasites or what have you). And even on those rare occasions when we partake in spite of all these factors, the physical reaction of our bodies will no doubt keep us from making such bad judgment a continuing practice (e.g., an over-indulgence in green apples is seldom repeated). As obvious as all this is in the realm of literal fruit (and our Lord has made a point of picking an analogy wherein we have no excuse and no chance to plead ignorance), is it not amazing that so many continue to persevere in indulging in bad "spiritual fruit", that is, in the lies and dissembling of false or otherwise inadequately or ill-prepared teachers? For while we may not be absolutely

sure about the tree (indeed, the false teacher may be charismatic in the extreme, popular, well-spoken, even a model of aestheticism, etc.), if the fruit/teaching is bad, it will stink discernibly, it will taste noticeably bad, and it will produce unmistakable spiritual dyspepsia (to put the issue again in terms of literal fruit). For if the teaching is false, it will arouse our spiritual suspicions immediately (like a banana bruised on the outside), will not square with the Bible upon scrutiny (like an avocado mottled on the inside), and, if we are foolish enough to "take it in" anyway, will cause sudden problems in our spiritual life (like a rotten apple eaten in spite of our better judgment), problems which should immediately warn us of our mistake.

In the realm of real fruit, a person "would have to be mad" to persevere in eating bad fruit and to continue to endure the predictable and dissipating consequences (an unheard of situation). In the realm of spiritual fruit, the believer still possessed of his/her spiritual sanity (that is, still committed to following Christ instead of what the flesh, the eyes, and ego lust for: 1Jn.2:15-17), must react in a similar manner, turning away from the source of the problem (suspicious as it was to begin with). The main difference in this analogy between bad fruit and bad teaching is that, sadly, while few human beings are willing to deliberately skew their perception of physical reality so as to call certifiably bad fruit good, hardening the heart and distorting spiritual reality to the point of calling teaching which is dangerously inadequate or intentionally deceptive good is an all too common occurrence (Eph.4:17-19). This has much to do with the spiritual battle in which we find ourselves. On the one hand, fruit trees have no hidden agenda, but false teachers (and the devil who motivates and uses them) clearly do: the exploitation of potential victims for their own selfish ends. On the other hand, any motivation we would have to eat rotten literal fruit is easily counterbalanced by the painful price to pay, but when it comes to all the hidden desires of our hearts, we human beings have always been most susceptible to those who are willing to tell us that what we know is wrong (but want or want to do) is really all right. This has been the case since the serpent told Eve that eating that *most famous fruit* would not only fail to produce the dire effects predicted by the Lord, but would even have positive benefits as well (Gen.3:4-5).⁶⁷

For by giving voice to unparalleled folly, [these false teachers] entrap by fleshly lusts and sensuality those who did not flee far enough from such habitual deceivers.
2nd Peter 2:18

Choosing the "bad fruit" of false teachers is the result of spiritual myopia in the first place, and, should one persist in such damaging behavior, results in the end in complete spiritual blindness (Matt.6:22-23; 15:14; Mk.4:12; Lk.8:10b; Jn.9:34-41;12:40; Rom.1:21-32; 1Jn.2:11):

And to the degree that our gospel really is covered by a veil, it is obscured in this way only in the case of those who are perishing. For in the case of such persons, the god of this world has *blinded the minds* of these unbelievers, in order to prevent the shining forth unto them of the light of the gospel of Christ's glory – even Him who is the very

image of God.
2nd Corinthians 4:3-4

This is why, dear friends, committed followers of Jesus Christ are seldom ensnared by the lure of "bad fruit" (even if they desire it, they maintain their spiritual "wits" and reject it), while half-hearted and lukewarm individuals are easy targets for false teachers (being all too eager to accept the false version of reality being offered in order to indulge their various lusts, whatever these may be).

3) testing the group: No one is perfect, and so perfect behavior cannot be expected from any group, not even from a legitimate Christian church. Nevertheless, it seems obvious to say that wild or weird behavior on a mass scale should be reason enough to doubt the holiness of any would-be "Christian" church (taking into account, of course, that every organization has an occasional "loose cannon" or two: Tit.1:16). Baring any obvious and dominant trend towards immorality on the one hand or legalistic self-righteous on the other in the behavior of the membership, there are other factors to consider as well in determining whether or not a particular self-styled group of "believers" is really following our Lord. Certain telltale characteristics of organizations operating for their own ends apart from God and His Word are inevitably present even in groups which (falsely) profess to be Christian. Positive indications that one is dealing with a "false group" may include (but are certainly not limited to) the fact that they . . .

- teach and practice things which are patently and easily refuted by the Bible (cf. 1Cor.15:12-19).
- discourage (or prohibit) individual Bible reading and personal Bible study (cf. Acts 17:11).
- adhere to "secret doctrines" or "oral tradition" available only from and interpreted exclusively by the leadership (cf. Col.2:18-23).
- violate hypocritically (though not openly) whatever good standards they do profess and proclaim (cf. Matt.23:27-32).
- seek to exploit their own membership for money, pleasure, or otherwise take advantage (cf. Acts 20:29-30).
- seek to control the lives and take over the decision-making of their members (cf. 2Pet.2:18-22).
- seek to isolate their members from friends, family, and society at large (cf. Gal.4:17).
- claim a superior righteousness or morality based upon their own deeds instead of Christ's work (cf. Phil.3:7-9).
- promise eternal life and salvation apart from faith in and faithfulness to Jesus Christ (cf. Gal.1:6-9).
- deny Jesus Christ by their teachings or their actions (cf. 2Jn.1:7).

This last standard of evaluation, the "Christ test", should really be at the heart of any evaluation of groups which purport to be Christian:

Any spirit (i.e. person, teaching, organization) which professes that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, but any spirit which does not profess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not from God.

1st John 4:2b-3a

To fulfill this requirement, there must be acknowledgment of and adherence to the following principles (taught by scripture as natural corollaries to the proposition that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh and is God"):

- that Jesus Christ is both undiminished deity and true humanity (Rom.9:5; Col.2:9; 1Jn.5:6-12).
- that He came into the world to die for all mankind (Jn.3:16; 1Pet.2:24).
- that His work was deemed acceptable by the Father (Rom.3:21-26).
- that we are saved on the basis of our faith in Him and in His work alone and not by our own works (Eph.2:8-9).
- that apart from faith in Jesus Christ, there is no way to approach the Father (Jn.14:6).
- that the true believer in Jesus Christ follows Christ and His teachings throughout his life on this earth (Matt.7:20; Jn.8:31; 1Jn.2:4; 2Jn.1:9).

So while "testing" teachers, teachings and groups may (wrongly) seem disrespectful to some, and while many if not most of the so-called "Christian" groups who need such testing inevitably discourage the practice of checking to see what the Bible says, this is one area where the Ephesians believers do come in for praise from our Lord.

Such proper "checking", moreover, is not easy. Time, thought and effort are required in order to determine that specific points of teaching or behavior or modus operandi are unbiblical (this was especially true in the 1st century when the scriptures were not universally available, nor particularly easy to use when they were). Even more difficult than the process and effort of testing to see if would-be teachers and their pronouncements and organizations are truly "of Christ" is the hard decision to separate when such people fail the test. For without the dogged determination to persistently reject from fellowship (personal or collective) any person, persons or teaching which are patently wrong and dangerously contrary to scripture, all the testing in the world is pointless. Given the attractiveness of many false teachers, their doctrines, and their organizations on the one hand, and the extreme pressure from the world to compromise in such cases on the other, we should not be too quick to dismiss this accomplishment on the Ephesians' part which has come in here for praise from our Lord. For these 1st century post-apostolic believers kept "the false" at bay so effectively that for all intents and purposes during the Ephesian era there was little difference between the "Church visible" and the "Church actual", a claim that certainly cannot be made today in our own

Laodicean era where, quite the contrary, false and true have so intermixed that the whole is a lukewarm, indistinguishable mass. Although this success on the Ephesian believers' part in excluding false teachers, false teachings, and false groups does not excuse the deficiency for which they are criticized of failing to pursue *correct* teaching (their "first love"), rejecting false teachers, teachings, and individuals was and remains a critical safeguard for the faith and practice of the true Church of Jesus Christ.

4. "And you possess perseverance, and you have endured because of My Name, and you have not faltered.": These three statements express the same essential truth: believers of the Ephesian era maintained their faith in Christ and their faithfulness to Christ in a steadfast fashion. The threefold repetition of the basic idea (a "tricolon") serves to reinforce and emphasize the fact. Still, there is a small distinction to be made between these three very similar sentiments:

1) "Perseverance": The Greek word *hypomone* (ὑπομονή) is commonly found in scripture with the theologically significant meaning of "perseverance" (as we have it here: cf. Lk.8:15; 21:19; Rom.2:7; 5:3-4; 8:25; 15:4-5; etc.). This of course refers to the believer in Christ's active continuation of their belief while still in this world following salvation. Of the three qualities for which the Ephesians are being praised here, "perseverance" is the one which most clearly relates to the Ephesian era believers' maintenance of their personal faith in and faithfulness towards Jesus Christ in spite of all the difficulties, distractions, and problems of their time, chief of which was the loss of apostolic leadership in this time of transition.

2) "Endurance": This is the same word used for "toleration" in verse two: "you cannot endure evil people". The Greek verb *bastazo* (βαστάζω) in its literal sense means to "carry a load" and is used frequently in the Bible with the figurative meaning of bearing a spiritual burden (cf. Matt.20:12; Lk.14:27; Acts 9:15; Rom.15:1; Gal.6:2; 6:5). Thus this second phrase includes along with the maintenance of personal faith ("bearing up" under the trials of life) the idea of continuing ministry to others as well (i.e., "keeping at it" in the "good works" without which faith is dead: Jas.2:17).

3) "Forbearance": "Hard work" is the core meaning of the Greek verb here *kopiazo* (κοπιάζω). Though generally possessing purely positive connotations (cf. Matt.11:28; Gal.4:11; Phil.2:16; 1Tim.4:10;), in the perfect tense it sometimes carries as here the idea of having become "worked out" or exhausted. Our Lord's statement that the Ephesian era believers have not "become exhausted in their hard work" (of Christian ministry) most clearly of the three statements in context relates their continued faith to the ministry which springs from it.

5. "you have abandoned [that] love you had at first": Given that the Ephesian era believers have such a good track record in maintaining their faith against the challenges of life, of producing fruit for the Lord from that faith, and of keeping a safe distance from those (false friends) who would seek to compromise this life of faith and faithful works, it may perhaps seem curious at first that this next criticism should be leveled at

them by our Lord. But in spite of their exemplary *modus operandi* in general, the Ephesian era believers had apparently lost their focus on the central issue and true focal point of the Christian life: love for God and for His Word (which two things are, in truth, indivisible). There is, let there be no doubt, no difference between loving Him and loving what He has to say (cf. Ps.138:2). Jesus Christ **is** the Living Word of God (Jn.1:1-2; Heb.1:3; 1Jn.1:1; cf. Matt.7:21-23), and apart from the words of God we cannot come to know Him at all (Jer.9:23-24). So when the Bible commands us to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your might" (in Mk.12:30, Jesus is quoting *the Bible*: Deut.6:5), it must be understood that this is possible *only* through a lifelong commitment to drinking in the truth of the scriptures without which it is impossible to come to know Him and love Him. This was certainly our Savior's own approach as during the days of His first advent He took up the challenge of spiritual advance in the same way that we must do: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds forth from the mouth of God" (Matt.4:4; cf. Deut.8:3). Let it not be lost on anyone that our Lord is here quoting the Word of God to commend that Word to us, even He who Himself is the very Living Word of God!

As so many others before and since, the Ephesian era believers had lost sight of this most important principle of the primacy of the Word of God in every Christian life. They had instead, following the departure of the apostles, adopted a lackadaisical attitude to scripture and the truth it contains. This is both understandable and regrettable. Life was busy. Life was distracting. And they were keeping up a good way of life, after all. Moreover, the teaching of the generation following the apostles would have to have suffered by comparison. None of those who followed Peter, Paul and John could have hoped to have held a candle to these great and gifted apostles. Then too, as the dramatic spiritual gifts which had characterized the apostolic church began to fade (no more tongues or its interpretation, no more prophecy, no more healing etc.), the temptation to see studying the Bible as less exciting than such miraculous events, and to find the Bible teaching of the successors of the apostles somewhat lackluster by comparison was no doubt very real.

There is a good analogy to every believer's own Christian experience to be found here. Inevitably, the time of excitement that follows conversion to Christ will pass and the glow will fade. The Word of God is in objective fact *always* exciting and interesting (not to mention crucial to our growth and spiritual well-being), but we have to make the decision to *see it in this light* when the initial burst of enthusiasm wears off and the hard work begins. We have to make and stick to the commitment to place the Word of God before anything else in our lives (for only if His Word is first in our hearts is He truly first in our hearts). For if one is not moving forward in the Christian life, then one is not growing, and, in fact, will eventually regress after momentum spills off. In this way, even the good way of life which the Ephesian era believers were maintaining for the time being would eventually come to be at risk. For all the good works they accomplished were, after all, based upon their previous growth, and spiritual atrophy eventually and inevitably undermines even the highest of standards. The Ephesian era believers had enjoyed the "fun" of the apostolic time. In today's terms, they would love the music and

the socializing, the special events and the guest speakers, but they would be less inclined to conscientiously persevere in the practice of personal Bible study and to diligently persevere in the pursuit of substantive Bible teaching. These things must be our "first love" if Jesus, if our Father, is to be our first love, because it is only through His Word that we come to know Him, to know His will, and become prepared to serve Him in this life.

6. "remember where you have fallen from, and repent, and do the works you did at first": Recovering lost momentum in spiritual growth is described here by our Lord as a three step process:

1) remember: The Ephesian era believers are commanded to recall their former circumstances, consider their present situation, and realize that they have lost ground spiritually ("fallen"). Standing pat is almost impossible in the Christian experience, so that one is inevitably always either moving forward or falling back. These 1st century believers are being shaken awake by their Lord and ours and made to recall that in times past they were indeed walking closer to God because they were walking in His Word. Recognition of the reality of one's situation is always the first step in a spiritual recovery. Just as one must first recognize and admit to oneself the facts when one has fallen into personal sin before any recovery is possible, so it is in respect to the overall course of one's spiritual life as well: in order to turn the ship around and put it back on course, the course, that is, which leads us ever closer to Him, there must first be an acknowledgment that the present course is wrong (i.e., failure to make the Word of God a priority) and has only resulted in a general drifting away for the Lord:

For this reason, it is all the more necessary for us to pay attention to the [teachings] we have heard, lest we ***drift way*** [off course].

Hebrews 2:1

2) repent: Once reality has been faced and the sad state of one's spiritual status acknowledged, the next step indicated by our Lord is "repentance". The concept of repentance requires some circumspection in its explanation because of the many misunderstandings the English word has occasioned. The command "Repent!" has the potential for falsely focusing the attention upon emotional reaction and extremes of behavior that are not actually being suggested in the Greek text here. On the other hand, one would also not wish to explain this command as a simple, unemotional "change of mind" (also an understandable interpretation, given the etymology of the Greek verb *metanoeo*-μετανοέω which does contain the two elements of "mind" *nous* and "change" *meta*). An examination of the Greek vocabulary (and corresponding Hebrew expressions, most notably *nicham*-נחם, and *shubh*-שוב) indicates that the truth lies somewhere between judging the validity of repentance by the degree of emotional reaction on the one hand and confining repentance to a cold, emotionless calculation on the other: repentance is more of a deep and determined "change of *heart*", that is, a real "turnaround" in a person's attitude, which is not necessarily to be judged by the initial outward display of emotion. Genuine, biblical repentance is not merely for show (i.e., visible, temporary emotional distress without long-lasting change), and not just in

principle (i.e., acceptance of the facts without the resolution for change), but a deep-seated change of attitude about past behavior that inevitably results in a definitive change in that behavior:

But if a wicked man turns from all the sins he has committed and keeps all My decrees and does what is just and right, he will surely live; he will not die. None of the offenses he has committed will be remembered against him. Because of the righteous things he has done he will live. Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?
Ezekiel 18:21-23 NIV

3) do: As the quote and discussion of repentance above suggest, a genuine change of heart is to be followed by a definite change in behavior. Once the mistake has been faced up to, and once a new determination of the heart has been adopted, the next and obvious step is to put this newfound resolution into practice, to actually *do* what it is that one has failed to perform in the past, in this case, to renew the pursuit of the words of God, a course of action apparently (and unfortunately) which the Ephesian era believers failed to adopt:

My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words but *they do not put them into practice*. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but *do not put them into practice*.
Ezekiel 33:31-32 NIV

7. "if you do not": The consequence of failing to reinvigorate the process of spiritual growth is clearly spelled out by our Lord. As their penalty, the Ephesian era believers will experience a rapid removal of their "lampstand" (the symbol of their Church era). Continued reluctance to take up the challenge of growing in the Word day by day will have (and did have) the effect of bringing on the "day of visitation" at an accelerated pace. For nothing could be more disastrous for the incipient Church than for its members militant to perpetuate a culture of lukewarm attitudes about what should have been their "prime love", the written Word and the Living Word, the inseparable Person and teachings of Jesus Christ. Because of the obduracy of its believers in this matter, the Ephesian era did in fact come to an abrupt halt (after a scant 12 years), with God waking the 1st century faithful out of their spiritual lethargy by means of a series of persecutions which would test and characterize the next era, that of Smyrna.

I am the true vine and my Father is the vine-dresser. Every branch [that is] in Me which does not bear fruit He removes, and every branch which does bear fruit He prunes so that it might bear more fruit.
John 15:1-2

This passage – the words of our Lord Himself – makes the situation entirely clear. There is only one way for believers in Him to proceed, namely, with continued progress in their spiritual life and the production it engenders. God the Father "works" with this

attitude and approach, trimming and pruning us, helping us to do it better day by day. But lack of production, the inevitable result of the spiritual atrophy we see in the Ephesian case, ends in removal (as indeed it did for this first of the Church eras).

8. "you do have this [in your favor], [the fact] that you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate": As explained above, these "Nicolaitans" were a group of false teachers and their followers who pretended Christianity but in reality were in no wise true followers of our Lord Jesus Christ. The etymology of their name, "the people conquer" ("conquer" from the verb *nikao*-νικάω, plus "people" from the word *laos*-λαός) is significant, for this particular satanic attack hit home where the Ephesians were the most vulnerable. For the central creed of these false apostles and pseudo-believers of putting "majority rule" before the tenants of the Bible (pithily contained in the Latin gnome "vox populi, vox dei" – i.e., "what the people say has the authority of God") was well-designed to be difficult to refute by those who had themselves become complacent about the teachings of scripture. During their short tenure, however, the Ephesian era believers did resist and reject this approach. For though their lackadaisical attitude to the Bible made it hard for them to refute the Nicolaitans and their false apostle leaders in principle, yet their correct appreciation and rejection of the *deeds* that flowed from such perverse doctrine kept them from accommodating to their false teaching ("you hate [their] works")..

We should note that our Lord is pleased not with the Ephesian era believers' hatred of the Nicolaitans themselves, but with their hatred of the Nicolaitans' deeds. After all, we are commanded not only to love our brothers in Christ, but all mankind without exception (Matt.5:43-47; 22:37-40; 1Cor.13:1-13; 1Jn.2:7-12), that is, to earnestly desire (and to facilitate where possible) the reconciliation of all to God, through their salvation in Jesus Christ (Ezek.18:23; Matt.18:14; Jn.12:47; 1Tim.2:4; 2Tim.2:24-26; 2Pet.3:9). But it must be noted here that the reverse is also true: we are indeed to detest the evil works and evil deeds of evil doers – *after the example of our Lord*. These two attitudes (of love for all those whom God has made, but of hatred for all actions contrary to God's perfect will) are not at all contradictory and must not be confused. For while it is clearly wrong for Christians to hate evildoers, it is also clearly wrong-headed for us ever to *justify* wrong or evil *behavior* on the pretext that "Christians ought always to love". After all, we can love our children while at the same time we abhor (not to mention punish) dangerous behavior on their part. How much more then is this not the case when it comes to unbelievers involved in immoral, illegal, illicit or otherwise abominable behavior? Just as we must take care not to allow our disgust at egregiously anti-God actions to sour the universal love we are commanded to deploy toward all mankind, so we must also take pains not to allow this genuine and mandatory attitude of Christian love to mellow and soften our rigid opposition to all evil, detestable, and sinful acts. The Ephesian era believers come in here for praise on the basis of the latter consideration, without being faulted on the basis of the former, and we should all aspire to the same.

Christ's Promised Rewards to Ephesus:

1. "To the one who wins the victory, I will give to him [the right] to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God":

The restriction of rewards to those who "win the victory" is a common feature in all seven messages from our Lord to each of the seven eras of His Church. The phrase "the one who wins the victory" is actually an attributive participle in the Greek (from the verb *nikao-νικάω* – the source of our "Nike"), and means, literally, "he who wins/is victorious". The reference in all seven instances is to every believer who emerges from the crucible of this life with his/her faith intact:

For everything that has been born from God *overcomes* (*nikao-νικάω*) the world. And this is *the victory* (*nike-νίκη*) that **has overcome** (*nikao-νικάω*) the world: *our faith* [in Christ]!

1st John 5:4

Make no mistake – only those who maintain their faith in Christ, who serve Him faithfully and end their lives in faithfulness, still believing in Him, are the victors referred to here.⁶⁸ The world, the flesh and the devil are ever trying with might and main to drown true faith, to quench genuine belief in Christ, to burn up and choke to death the "faith plant" of all those who have turned to follow Jesus (cf. Matt.13:1-9; 13:18-23; Mk.4:1-9; 4:13-20; Lk.8:4-8; 8:11-15), but "all those who endure to the end will be saved" (Matt.10:22) – this is the essential victory of everyone who genuinely belongs to Him. The repetition of this qualification for all seven churches also makes it clear that the various reward-aspects of salvation discussed under each era are equally available and equally applicable to *all* believers of *all* seven eras, provided that they too endure until the end, persevering in their faith.⁶⁹

As to the particular reward mentioned here for those of Ephesus who have endured life with faith intact, it should first be remembered that at the beginning of the message to Ephesus our Lord chose to emphasize His authority with the statement "This is what the One who has the mastery over the seven stars (i.e., churches) in His right hand says, the One who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands". The issue of response to Christ's complete and completely legitimate authority also dominates the content of the message to Ephesus (as we have seen), as the believers of that era were called upon by Him to reinvigorate their spiritual walk. Finally, in the promise of reward here to those who persevere in faith, Christ guarantees "[the right] to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God". Thus in the ultimate Eden, the seventh and final paradise of the New Jerusalem, believing mankind will once again possess the right of partaking of the "tree of life", with all the blessing that sublime experience entails.⁷⁰

This particular promise was an important reminder to the Ephesian era believers (as it is to us as well) that following Jesus Christ in this life, that is, persevering in faith and faithfulness (including the spiritual growth to which these 1st century believers were being re-called) does not mean losing out on the joys and pleasures of life. For in eternity, the delight which we shall experience with Him "in the paradise of God", eating from "the tree of life" itself, will put all the transitory pleasures of this temporary life

decidedly "in the shade". For our eternal life in the perfect eternal bodies we have been promised after the pattern of our resurrected Lord will most definitely *not* be one deprived of happiness. Rather, it will be one of blessed, legitimate and sanctified enjoyment of wonders we can scarcely now imagine. This promise of the right to eat of that wondrous tree is one we are meant to take to heart and anticipate, remembering and believing that though we may have to deny ourselves in this life in order to take up the cross which Christ has assigned each one of us individually, yet in that marvelous time to come the glories of the New Jerusalem will render the heights of what may be experienced on this ephemeral earth insignificant by comparison, the most sublime of which will be the face to face experience of the One we love, our Lord Jesus Christ.

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Romans 8:18 KJV

There is one last conclusion to draw from our examination here of the Ephesian era of the Church: Those who would go back to the early Church for authority on faith and practice (instead of relying exclusively upon what the Bible has to say) should consider instead that here we have it directly from our Lord that even in John's day and immediately thereafter this generation of the so-called "apostolic fathers" was not paying the attention to the Bible and its teachings that it should have done. Following the departure of the likes of Paul, Peter and John, their forward progress was arrested, and they failed to continue to grow in the Word (their "first love"), with the result that their "lampstand" was prematurely removed (after a mere twelve years). Emulation of such post-apostolic patterns through a hyper-traditionalism that clings to good forms but abandons as a primary focus what had energized the Church in the first place and always has since (namely, attention to the Living Word through His written Word) is also typical of what is happening in our own Laodicean day. Scripture must be our only source of faith and practice, not the traditions of the post-apostolic generation (or of any other generation, for that matter) who were found wanting in this respect by our Lord Himself. For it is only by doggedly sticking with His Word that we continue to grow and to serve Him effectively, whereby the way to the tree of life will be abundantly supplied.

Happy is the man who does not walk in the path of the wicked, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers. His delight, instead, is in the law of the Lord, and he meditates on His law day and night. He will be like a tree planted where the waters divide, which will yield its fruit in its season, and whose leaf will not wither.

Psalm 1:1-3

2. Smyrna: "The Era of Persecution" (82 to 442 = 360 years)

Revelation 2:8-11:

(8) And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: "This is what the One who is the first and last says, He who died and came to life. (9) I know your works and your tribulation and your poverty – but you are rich! – and the slander [falling upon you] from those who say that they are Jews but are Satan's congregation. (10) Have no fear

of what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Demonstrate faithfulness unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. (11) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who wins the victory shall not be hurt by the second death."

Smyrna means "myrrh" in Greek, that is, the resinous, aromatic substance (derived from the gum of certain south Arabian trees) used in making incense and in the process of embalming.⁷¹ Myrrh was a costly substance (one of the gifts of the Magi at Jesus' birth: Matt.2:11), and speaks here of the persecution and martyrdom which befell many of the believers of this second era of the Church. Though called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice for our Lord, those who died for Him died a death which was characterized by the fragrant aroma of myrrh (the incense analogy). That their martyrdom was acceptable to God (no matter what their persecutors may have thought), and so was characterized by proper burial (symbolically sweet-smelling in heavenly terms no matter what the actual earthly disposition of their remains), is also indicated by the name Smyrna, "myrrh". For believers of all eras, we can be assured that if we are ever called upon by our Master to endure persecution or loss of our lives for Him, such sacrifices are equally precious in His sight, carrying the sweet scent of the most costly perfume before the throne of God as a token of the rewards that will fall to the lot of all called to share the sufferings of Christ (1Pet.4:12-19; cf. Ps.116:15; Matt.16:24-25; Rom.8:17; 2Cor.1:5; Phil.3:10; Col.1:24).

Beyond the name, the theme of eternal life victorious over death is evident in every part of the message to Smyrna. Christ describes Himself as the One "who *died and came to life*", the believers of Smyrna are told to be *faithful unto death*, and the reward for their continued endurance is the promised *crown of life*. Finally, the victorious one *will not be hurt by the second death*. This focus upon eternal life triumphing over mere physical death for true followers of Jesus Christ was a critical one for those of the second era of the Church, for the era of Smyrna represents the era of intense persecution of the Church by the Roman state. Called upon to demonstrate their faith in the ultimate manner, martyrdom, the believers of Smyrna responded magnificently, and this period of the Church was in many ways one of her finest hours. It is easy (or rather "easier") to be a Christian when "the sun is shining". However, these believers of the Church's second era endured slander, ostracism, intense personal tribulation and poverty, imprisonment and even martyrdom. Yet they held onto their faith – and not only held on, but continued their spiritual advance, generating significant production for our Lord (the significance of the "crown of life" discussed below). Without question, it is no simple matter to persevere in faith in this life, much less to continue an aggressive spiritual advance, still less to come into the full function of ministry to which we have been severally called. But to accomplish *all* of these things under the adverse circumstances faced by the believers of the Smyrna generation – lack of resources, intense opposition, hostility, imprisonment and even the very real threat of death for

practicing what they believed – this is a test that few of us (if we are honest with ourselves) would probably be able to pass.

In the event, the faithful of Smyrna did meet the challenge and pass the test, an entire series of them, as a matter of fact. For the "ten days" mentioned by our Lord are ten distinct periods of persecution which occurred during the 360 year era of Smyrna (see below). And distributed chronologically as these persecutions were within Smyrna's allotted time, there was never a point when these believers could afford to fall into complacency (the failing of the Ephesian era). No, the believers of Smyrna had only two options: either stay alert, or risk the shipwreck of their faith when the next wave of persecution hit. The fact that, along with Philadelphia, Smyrna is the only Church era which does not come in for any rebuke or threat of judgment from our Lord in His message to them is clear proof that this noble group of believers made the right choices – and continued to do so throughout the period entrusted to them.

One principle to be gleaned from the Smyrna experience is that all good progress in the gospel of Jesus Christ produces opposition from the evil one and his earthly minions. This is true even today, though for many of us (though not for all of us) the possibility of state-sponsored persecution seems a distant possibility – the devil has many other ways to oppose any and all who are truly striving to draw closer to Jesus Christ and to serve Him properly with the gifts entrusted to them. For it is ever the case that the most dedicated believers (like those tried and true Christians of the era of Smyrna who went to their deaths rather than renounce our Lord) are often the ones who come in for the most intense experiences of personal tribulation (note Christ's use of the word "tribulation" twice in this message and see below). This observation is easily reinforced by even a peripheral overview of outstanding Old and New Testament personalities and thus gives the lie to the so-called "prosperity gospel", for even in those cases where exceptional believers such as Abraham and David did receive notable material wealth from God, we should be quick to note that their lives were also characterized by an intensity of testing which few of us would wish to emulate.

Finally, before moving on to a consideration of these verses themselves, it should be pointed out that the initial population of the Smyrna generation would be, roughly speaking, the children and grandchildren of the Ephesus or apostolic generation. There is a comparison to be drawn here between the believers of the Exodus generation, who failed the wilderness test (ironically out of an alleged concern for their children), and the generation which followed them who did have the faith to enter the land of promise under Joshua's leadership (cf. Num14:27-35). Ephesus failed to meet the challenge of the Word, but Smyrna took up the challenge of putting scripture and spiritual growth before all else – *and held on in spite of the severe persecution which their exceptional faithfulness occasioned.*

Christ's Self-description to Smyrna:

1. "the One who is the first and last, He who died and came to life": As mentioned above, our Lord's victory over death, the resurrection of His humanity following His triumph

on the cross, provides the model destiny of all who follow Him (Ps.16:10). For even though He was persecuted and executed for our sakes, God the Father through the Holy Spirit raised His human body from the dead in incorruptible form, and so shall He reign forever. This self-description reminds the believers of the era of Smyrna who were chosen to glorify Him through martyrdom (along with all who been given that particular destiny since) that even if the world puts us to death, it cannot hold us there. For just as "it was impossible for Him to be held by [death]" (Acts 2:24), so also we are confident of our coming resurrection and the concomitant victory over death forevermore. Indeed, dying a true martyr's death, as was the case for many believers of the Church's second era, is the strongest confirmation possible in this life that one has successfully run the course God has assigned and is truly passing to a heavenly reward (cf. the case of Stephen and his vision of Christ just before being martyred: Acts 7:55-60). Rejection to the point of martyrdom is the highest compliment (albeit an unintended one) which the devil's world can pay a follower of Jesus Christ. And far from compromising our true life which shall last forever, martyrdom only confirms it. For all those who have been baptized into Him by the Spirit (Rom.6:3-4) share His destiny, death to the world in this life, life everlasting through the resurrection of this mortal body in the next. How much more is this not true for those who, like many of the era of Smyrna, have been called upon to follow Him even unto martyrdom (cf. Peter: Jn.21:18-19)?

"And do not fear those who can kill your body, but are not able to kill your self. But fear rather the One who is able to destroy both your self and your body in hell."
Matthew 10:28

Christ's Particular Message:

1. "I know your deeds and your tribulation and your poverty – but you are rich!": The believers of Smyrna had a difficult time from almost every worldly point of view. Christianity, originally poorly understood by Roman bureaucracy, soon came to be distinguished from Judaism (which had the favored status of a *religio licita*, that is, a form of worship countenanced by the state) – and came instead to be viewed as little more than a cult, and a potentially dangerous one at that. As ironic as this may appear, that the one and only true way to God should be considered dangerous, erroneous, and superfluous by a pagan state, provides a telling perspective on how the devil's world really functions. To the world, it is utter madness to devote oneself to a faith which brings trouble and privation. But from the eternal perspective, the trouble of this life lasts but a moment, and the poverty of this life is destined to give way to untold eternal riches for all believers in Jesus Christ. In contrast, those who have had a short season of peace in this life with the means of the world abundantly at their disposal *apart from obedience to God* will perish when this life concludes and suffer the loss of all they prized (contrast Heb.11:26-27). The believers of the Smyrna era were poor (as societal outcasts, this stands to reason). And they knew trouble, difficulty and hardship, even to the point of full-blown persecutions and pogroms against them on many occasions. Our Lord states these things as fact. But He is also quick to point out what we all should take pains to keep fixed prominently in our hearts: the riches we possess in the Word of God, in our fellowship and union with Jesus Christ, in the rewards for our Christian labor

which will exceed anything the world can yet imagine and do so for all eternity, so far eclipse the mortal and ephemeral rewards of this life as to make comparison unworthy:

For I do not consider these present hardships in any way comparable to the glory destined to be revealed for us.

Romans 8:18

2. "and the slander from those who say that they are Jews but are Satan's congregation":

The word translated "slander" here is actually the Greek word *blasphemia*, the origin of our English word "blasphemy". Inasmuch as the "defamatory speech" is directed at the believers of Smyrna rather than at God Himself, "slander" is the preferable translation (for our English word "blasphemy" is in general exclusively reserved for outlandish railings directed against God Himself). Nevertheless, *blasphemia* is not the most common word for slander, and we should be aware that there is indeed a meaning being imparted here by our Lord which suggests more than mere slander on the part of the opponents of the Smyrna era believers. For to slander those holy to God is, indirectly, to slander Him as well, and any attack upon us who follow Jesus Christ is taken personally by Him (cf. Is.54:15-17; Zech.2:8).

Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of His holy ones.

Psalms 116:15

The source of these vituperative verbal attacks upon the believers of the Smyrna era is said to be "the congregation (or "synagogue", from Greek *synagoge*: συναγωγή) of Satan". Along with the "false apostles" and "Nicolaitans" of Ephesus, "Balaam and Balak" and those who hold to the teachings of the "Nicolaitans" at Pergamum, "Jezebel" at Thyatira, and the identically named "synagogue of Satan" at Philadelphia, this designation (along with all the other designations mentioned as we noted above in our treatment of Ephesus) indicates the false or anti-Church element of the era in question in its relationship to the true Church. The "synagogue of Satan who falsely claim to be Jews", therefore, are organized unbelievers who claim to be "of God", but are in truth the devil's congregation carrying out the devil's will. It is very important to note here that for John, for the book of Revelation, for Jesus Christ, for the Father, for all true Christians who understand the Bible, truly being a Jew in fact is a decidedly *good and blessed* thing. These individuals only claim that spiritually privileged status *and do so falsely*.

While it is true that if we were to interpret this "synagogue of Satan who falsely claim to be Jews" from the time of the writing of the book of Revelation, then a tempting identification for these individuals would be the Judaizers who so fiercely opposed the apostle Paul with their legalistic teachings (cf. especially the book of Galatians). In terms of the second historical era of the Church, however, the antagonism here is clearly between true believers on the one hand and those who are in reality opponents of the Church of Jesus Christ on the other. As we have mentioned above (and will have occasion to see again several times during the course of this seven part study), John, inspired by the Holy Spirit, uses Israel (true Israel, that is) to represent those who are of

the family of God in distinction to those who are not really in any way "of God" but are really His opponents even though they may claim to act in His Name. Given the fact that Israel is the foundation of the Church and the ultimate organization into which the entire Church, the assembly of all believers throughout human history, is eventually to be subsumed, this representation on John's part is not an unexpected one (cf. the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem: Rev.21:12).⁷²

Therefore the proper identification of these "false Jews" and "congregation of Satan" as they existed during the period of the Church's persecution by the Roman empire, the era of Smyrna, is the state-sponsored system of religion generally known as paganism. The mind-set of those who were under paganism's sway at this time (the majority of the population of the empire) was exactly as described by John: they were, so they thought, "the true religion" (i.e., the equivalent of claiming to be Jews), but in reality they served a system of false religion designed by the devil to ensnare mankind to his will and keep them from the true God. It is interesting if chilling to read, for example, the correspondence between the emperor Trajan and the younger Pliny in which Christians are characterized as "insane" and means are explored of coercing their "repentance" and return to the "true religion". In this respect, the paganism of the Roman empire is much like the revived system of state religion which Satan and his minion, antichrist, will foster during the dark days of the Tribulation. It too will be characterized by the zealous contention that it is the only true religion, will be intolerant of all others, and will persecute Christians for their failure to "convert". And just as the pagan religion of antiquity eventually infiltrated and took over the organization of the true Church by the time of the middle ages (i.e., the era of Sardis, on which see below), so also the rump of that corrupted organization will form much of the basis for the worldwide satanic religion in the time of the Tribulation.

Though variously named and identified, the false groups mentioned in these seven messages share certain common features. In addition to a claim of superior authority (they are "apostles", or "true Jews", or have "deep things", etc.), they also all share in the common objective of attacking and undermining the true Church by suborning true believers to spiritual infidelity. The pressure to compromise with the beliefs and practices of the world contrary to the Word of God has always been a severe one here in the devil's *kosmos*, and will continue to be so until the return of our Lord. Historically speaking, these purveyors of maculate and substitute forms of the truth (pimps for the devil's prostitute religion, whose ultimate incarnation will come in association with the great whore of the Tribulation: Rev.17:1-18), were identified and rejected by the Ephesians, then assaulted and persecuted Smyrna for refusing to accommodate to them, established a foothold in Pergamum, were tolerated in and infiltrated into Thyatira, completely gained the upper-hand in Sardis, lost control of the true believers in Philadelphia who separated from them, and have reentered the body of Laodicea like a virulent disease, whose degenerating effects we are sadly being forced to watch as they intensify day by day. Since the various names and relationships given to the evil forces in opposition to the Church within the texts of the seven messages give us important information about the nature and status of their attacks on the militant body of Christ, it will be helpful here to summarize in chart form what our Lord tells us about the deadly

antagonism of the devil's "anti-church" in its efforts to resist, oppose, destroy and corrupt the true Church throughout all its eras:

Ephesus: status of the anti-church in "The Era of Transition" (September 70 to 82 = 12 years)

identification: early attempts by unbelievers to infiltrate the true Church [unsuccessful].

contemporary position: excluded from the true Church.

claim of authority: "say they are apostles"; "Nicolaitans" [the majority is the authority, they say, and not the Bible].

weakness of target: careless Ephesian attitude toward the study of the Word of God.

specific attack: libertinism justified; attack on the truth of the Bible [where the Ephesians were vulnerable].

Smyrna: status of the anti-church in "The Era of Persecution" (82 to 442 = 360 years)

identification: paganism attempting [unsuccessfully] to coerce and destroy the true Church.

contemporary position: separate from the true Church, but established as the state religion.

claim of authority: they claim to be the true and legitimate religion ["[falsely] say they are Jews"]

weakness of target: none – by enduring even to the point of martyrdom, the believers of Smyrna demonstrate their faith beyond question.

specific attack: lack of worldly means (no money, no influence, no power) – but these "weaknesses" are such only in the eyes of the world; if God is for us, who can defeat us?

Pergamum: status of the anti-church in "The Era of Accommodation" (442 to 802 = 360 years)

identification: evil in the form of secularism and paganism beginning to influence the Church through temptation and accommodation in the manner of the conspiracy of Balaam and Balak.

contemporary position: infiltrating into the true Church.

claim of authority: the presence within the body of those who stoutly hold to these "teachings of the Nicolaitans".

weakness of target: growing powerful in the secular realm, the church visible becomes vulnerable both to the fallacies of "inclusiveness" and the need for centralization, thus opening the way to infiltration by evil.

specific attack: upon the desire for secular security, leading to the false assumption that accommodation with evil to garner secular power can be indulged in with impunity.

Thyatira: status of the anti-church in "The Era of Compromise" (802 to 1162 = 360 years)

identification: evil now entrenched in the body gains control of the leadership of the church visible ["Jezebel", the whore, representing the increasingly secular and unbelieving leadership].

contemporary position: the secular, pagan element begins to assume a dominant position within the leadership of the church visible ["Jezebel" supported by her "adulterers" and their "children"]

claim of authority: these elements falsely claim superior authority based upon superior knowledge "teaching" the "deep things" which are in reality deceptive lies (i.e., "of Satan").

weakness of target: "Jezebel" and her followers prey upon those within the church visible who are vulnerable to the false appeal of secret dogma, elaborate ritual, and false authority.

specific attack: spreading of influence through these cult-like activities to those still holding to true faith and practice ["to eat food sacrificed to idols and indulge in sexual immorality" = spiritual unfaithfulness].

Sardis: status of the anti-church in "The Era of Corruption" (1162 to 1522 = 360 years)

identification: no group mentioned = the body is now, as a whole, moribund, with only a spark of life left in some of its individual members.

contemporary position: the cancer of evil has now thoroughly infiltrated and dominated the originally healthy body.

claim of authority: the evil and the false have usurped the offices and authority of the visible organization of the "Church".

weakness of target: for true believers to continue within the dead body will mean the eventual extinction of the true faith.

specific attack: directed toward the last vestiges of true faith and practice.

Philadelphia: status of the anti-church in "The Era of Revival" (1522 to 1882 = 360 years)

identification: the entirely corrupt and completely ungodly "synagogue of Satan" in opposition to true believers who have separated themselves from this dead body which once represented the Church.

contemporary position: having usurped the original organizational body of the earthly Church, the false "synagogue" now finds itself opposing from the outside the true Church reformed.

claim of authority: the opponents claim to be the true and legitimate religion ["say they are Jews"], the "one true Church", but are in reality "Satan's synagogue" [an evil organization].

weakness of target: none – the true believers have put the truth of the Word of God first and God has honored these "works" granting them a bountiful harvest [of evangelism, knowledge, spiritual growth], an "open door".

specific attack: despite active persecution, the false put off balance; even some of its own recognize that God is with the Philadelphians and repent, "worshiping" at their feet.

Laodicea: status of the anti-church in "The Era of Degeneration" (1882 to 2026 = 144 years)

identification: no group mentioned = the false has now infiltrated the reformed Church organization and is indistinguishably intermixed with it.

contemporary position: the "sleeping sickness" of evil has managed to thoroughly permeate the true "Church" to the point of having fatally compromised it.

claim of authority: established within the "Church", unbelievers have spread the apathy of relativism: everything is "good", so nothing can be wrong (and nothing right).

weakness of target: not a cancer as in Pergamum/Thyatira/Sardis (which would be identifiable), but a degenerative illness that has attacked the body from within subtly and incrementally to avoid sharp reaction, and has brought about spiritual paralysis in the "host".

specific attack: instead of posing a clear challenge, the anti-church of our own day has gradually introduced relativism, false or loose standards, apathy about the Word of God, etc., rendering the Church of our era largely insipid (lukewarm), and ineffective.

3. "Have no fear of what you are about to suffer": Returning to our examination of the message to Smyrna, in stark contrast to the dismal state of affairs in our own day, the believers of the second era of the Church were entirely ready for the trial our Lord put before them. Given a similar mandate, it is doubtful that the Church of our own era would as a whole (making allowance for faithful individuals) be up to the challenge. Indeed, in eschatological terms we are on the threshold of the greatest failure of the Church, when, in the first half of the approaching Tribulation, there will occur an unprecedented falling away from the faith (the "Great Apostasy"). It is with a sense of awe and humility, then, that we should read these words of our Lord, given to a group of believers who for the most part lacked the great advantages we enjoy today. They were on the whole very poor, looked down upon by the pagan society, excluded from many important and critical activities because of their unwillingness to adopt idolatrous pagan practices. They were largely uneducated and suffered a dire lack of the resources for studying and teaching the Bible now at our fingertips. But they made the most of what they had. They put Jesus Christ first in their lives, even though there was a very real price to pay for doing so. They learned what they could, believed what they learned, and put it into practice faithfully and powerfully. For they did not lack either the Spirit or the Lord's gracious oversight. Mixed with a powerful faith, this was a recipe for the greatest spiritual success, transcending exponentially the advantages we have today (but largely fail to take advantage of). So when our Lord tells the believers of Smyrna not to be afraid of the terrible suffering, trials and persecution which are coming their way, it is an acknowledgment on His part of their *ability* to bear up under these things in faith and perseverance (cf. 1Cor.10:13). It is also a reminder to us that without God, without a close and vibrant relationship with Him, no material advantage, no matter how impressive, will count for much when the hour of testing arrives, but that with God, we truly have nothing to fear from it:

So what shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but handed Him over for our sake, how will He not also graciously give us everything [we need] along with [that gift of] Him? Who will [dare to] bring charges against God's elect? God is the One who is pronouncing [us] justified. Who is he that condemns [us]? Christ Jesus is the One who died [condemned in our place], and the One, moreover, who was raised from the dead [for us], who is [seated] at the right hand of God, who is also making petitions on our behalf. What will separate us from Christ's love? Tribulation? Or privation? Or persecution? Or hunger? Or destitution? Or danger? Or violence? As it is written, "For your sake we are being put to death all day long. We were accounted as sheep for slaughter". But in all such things we are *decisively victorious through Him* who loved us [enough to do what He did for us]. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, neither angelic nor human authorities, neither things present nor things to come, neither heavenly powers, be they the highest [of the elect] or the lowest [of the fallen], nor any other created thing [on this earth] will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Romans 8:31-39

4. "the devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you": The persecutions which await the believers of Smyrna run the full gamut of trouble. They would know isolation, ostracism, and danger throughout most of their era. And at times (ten distinct "times", as a matter of fact), this already high level of opposition was destined to overflow into an even more intense persecution that would bring on the imprisonment of many and the martyrdom of no small number. Given that our own generation is on the threshold of the most intense persecution of believers in world history (in spite of the fact that a great many of us now find ourselves in the deceptively calm "eye of the storm", so to speak), a few points should be noted about persecution of an intensity so great that it actually leads to physical imprisonment (and even death). In particular, we ought to keep in mind that . . .

1) there is a difference between deserved and undeserved punishment. Our Lord was terribly abused by the legal system of His day prior to His crucifixion, and He had lived a perfect life. His suffering in this regard redounds to His eternal glory, as it is the case with His apostles (Peter, Paul, and John, for example: Acts 12:1-19; Acts 21-26; Rev.1:9), and all His disciples who have ever been or will ever be imprisoned for the simple fact of believing in and following Him. So while we should indeed be ashamed to suffer imprisonment for wrongful conduct, we must be careful, should it ever be our lot to endure this particular trial for His sake, to distinguish in our hearts true suffering for Christ from punishment for crime, and not to be ashamed of shame endured for Him (1Pet.2:20):

If you are indeed *being reproached* on account of Christ's name, you are truly blessed, for the Spirit of glory, even the Spirit of God, rests upon you. Now let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or a meddler, but if [anyone should suffer] as a Christian [i.e., a "person-belonging-to-Christ"], *let him not be ashamed of it*. Let him rather glorify God under that name.

1st Peter 4:14-16

By faith, Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and chose instead to suffer maltreatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin, because *he considered the reproach* [suffered on behalf] of Christ greater riches than the treasure vaults of Egypt. For he was looking to his reward. Hebrews 11:24-26

Since then we too [like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and run with endurance the race set before us, turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him, *endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despite*, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Keep in mind all the terrible opposition He endured against Himself at the hands of sinful men, so as not to grow sick

at heart and give up.
Hebrews 12:1-3

2) there is no suffering or trial that comes into our life apart from the will and foreknowledge of God: Whatever our God allows to happen to us is for a reason, a reason that always involves His glory and our greatest good (Rom.8:28). If we do experience suffering not on account of our own failings but because of our faithfulness, being persecuted by the world, we cannot afford to lose sight of the fact that our loving heavenly Father knows all about it (and knew all about it in eternity past: cf. Acts 9:16), so that nothing will ever befall us that is not part of His perfect plan:

Then Pilate said to Him, "Do you not speak to me? Don't you know that I have the authority to release you and [that] I have the authority to crucify you?" Jesus replied to him, "You would not have authority over Me unless it had been given to you from above."
John 19:10-11a

Should such an occasion arise, therefore, we ought to be even more careful than ever before to walk with Him in faith and trust, knowing, like Daniel's friends, that He is able to deliver us, even from the hottest fiery furnace.

"If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and He will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if He does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."
Daniel 3:17-18 NIV

The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the [lions'] den. And when Daniel was lifted out of the den, no wound was found on him, because *he had trusted* in his God.
Daniel 6:23 NIV

3) "sharing in the sufferings of Christ" is a part of the normal Christian experience (Acts 5:41; 2Cor.1:5; Phil.3:10; Col.1:24; 1Pet.4:12-13): It is impossible for anyone who puts their faith in Jesus Christ to avoid opposition from the devil's world. For every act of faith, every good decision, will be challenged by the current ruler of this *kosmos* (Jn.15:18-21).

Beloved, don't be amazed at the fiery ordeal of testing you are now undergoing, as if something out of the ordinary were happening to you. But to the degree that you are [truly] participating in Christ's sufferings, be joyful about it, so that at His glorious revelation, you may also rejoice with great gladness.
1st Peter 4:12-13

Furthermore, such testing is a necessary element in the building of faith, like the tempering of steel to make it stronger and to prove it genuine (1Pet.1:7). In fact, our

glorification with our Lord is conditional upon our "suffering through" this life with faith intact:

And if we are God's children, then we are also His heirs, even fellow heirs of Christ – that is ***if we have indeed suffered with Him*** so that we might also be glorified together with Him.

Romans 8:17

Not everyone, it is true, is called upon to endure persecution, imprisonment, or martyrdom. Indeed, not every would be able to bear up under such extreme stress and strain, giving a good witness and persevering in faith in the process. Our God knows all this, and many have no doubt for this very reason been spared trials of this sort, trials which may well have quenched their faith. At first blush, there may seem to be a negative incentive for developing the faith necessary to bear up under the sort of trials the believers of Smyrna had to endure. But, really, there is no higher compliment that our Lord can pay a believer than to demonstrate to the world and its current demonic ruler that one of His own truly does put Him before all else (cf. Job 1-2; Dan.9:23).

4) and, ultimately, all that we may suffer for Him only results in blessing and reward: Without exceptional suffering, there can be no exceptional reward (see below under the "crown of life"). Besides that, it is important for us as Christians to keep in mind that we belong to the Lord, and that we are here for His use, at His disposal. We all try to maintain our health and the security of our lives for ourselves and our loved ones, and rightly so. But there may come a time when we are called upon to make sacrifices for our Lord which compromise these things. We need to be ready for that day, whether it comes for us or not. Professional soldiers do everything they can to minimize the potential for disaster on the day of battle, but, if they are worth their salt, do not shirk from danger even at the risk of and the actual loss of their lives when the situation demands it. As soldiers of Jesus Christ, we have to recognize that there may come a day when we too are called upon to likewise "cash in our chips", so to speak, to offer up our fortunes, our freedom, even our lives, if so be that the will of God requires it. And we have this great comfort, an encouragement that does not pertain to those whose reward is in this life alone, to know that in losing our lives and all that we have in this world, we gain Christ and more blessing than we can now imagine in the coming world which will not pass away.

And whoever does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever has found his life will lose it, and the one who has lost his life for My sake will find it.

Matthew 10:38-39

5. "you will have tribulation for ten days": The use of distinct units of time (especially the "day") to represent longer periods of time in the Bible is a very common phenomenon, one which we have covered exhaustively elsewhere.⁷³ Accordingly, the "ten days" mentioned here are ten distinct periods of persecution (or "tribulation")

predicted by our Lord for the era of Smyrna. Because the historical record for events relating to the Church during the first four centuries of the Christian era is far from complete, these times of tribulation have been variously identified. However, sufficient evidence exists to pinpoint ten significant periods of persecution as having occurred, roughly speaking, during the reigns of the following Roman emperors.⁷⁴

Domitian 81-96

Trajan 98-117

Marcus Aurelius 161-180

Septimus Severus 193-211

Maximinus 235-238

Decius 249-251

Valerian 253-260

Diocletian 284-305

Licinius 311-323

Julian 360-363

As this chart makes clear, with the exception of the final generation (i.e., from the death of Julian "the apostate" to end of the era in 442), these ten periods of testing were well spread out within the era of Smyrna, requiring the believers of these difficult centuries to remain constantly alert and sharp in their faith. Of the precise extent of these persecutions we know less than we should like to (some being better documented than others). For example, we would scarcely know about the troubles of believers in the east during Trajan's time, but for the surviving correspondence of Pliny. The later persecutions of the believers in Gaul under Marcus Aurelius, on the other hand, are fairly well attested (cf. book V of Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History). A list of general characteristics, however, some or all of which may be inferred for each of the ten periods of persecution, would include:

- General prohibition on Christian faith, study, worship, and proselyting.
- Penalization of Christians for failure to foreswear Christ and/or sacrifice to pagan gods.
- Treating Christians as scapegoats in plagues and natural disasters.
- Accusing Christians before the legal system on the crime of being Christian.

- Imprisonment of those refusing to "repent" their faith in Christ.
- Execution of the most stalwart in their faith (martyrdom).

Christ's Promised Rewards:

1. "Demonstrate faithfulness unto death, and I will give you the crown of life": Both this promise of the "crown of life" and that of protection from "the second death" (see immediately below) are direct reflections on the part of our Lord of the difficulties and tribulation faced by the believers of the era of Smyrna. The "crown of life" is one of the three major echelons of reward given to Christians who persevere as such *in this life* (i.e., showing that the next life was more important to them than the present one, a key characteristic of spiritual maturity).⁷⁵ Along with the crowns of "righteousness" and "glory", this is a distinct award given to recognize accomplishment by the believer in this life. The crown of "righteousness" (corresponding to the virtue of faith) goes to all believers who achieve spiritual maturity in this life (2Tim.4:8). The crown of "glory" is the highest award, bequeathed to all those who fulfill in time the ministries that God has assigned to them (corresponding to the virtue of love: 1Pet.5:4). The crown of "life", corresponding to the virtue of hope, is bestowed upon believers who achieve and maintain spiritual growth even when seriously tested and opposed by the evil one, sometimes (as in the case of the believers of the era of Smyrna) in the fire of intense persecution (Jas.1:12). Our Lord's promise of the "crown of life" associated with the virtue of "hope" should therefore come as no surprise, for it is only in the hope of the glories to come that the believer is able to put his or her walk with God above the things of this world, especially when the level of resistance intensifies (as it certainly did during the Smyrna era). Furthermore, although it is by no means a prerequisite for winning this award, true martyrdom is a guarantee of this crown, for valiantly facing death on Christ's behalf is impossible without a mature and edified faith, which is in turn the result of *consistent spiritual growth*.

2. "The one who wins the victory shall not be hurt by the second death": This promise is in many ways the "converse" to the "obverse" side of the coin above. For just as a courageous physical *death* in true martyrdom guarantees the crown of *life*, so also everyone who endures to the end with faith intact by keeping focused on eternal *life*, is assured of never coming into contact with *death* again. For us who remain faithful to Jesus Christ in this life, physical death really is only the beginning of eternal life, an unimaginably blessed and unending reality that nothing will ever be able to touch again once we make our exit from this world. For those, on the other hand, who persist in unbelief throughout the period of grace given them for decision (i.e., this short life on earth), their ultimate destiny is not life but death, another death, the "second death", for nothing short of the word "death" can convey the terrible prospect of an eternity separated from God and all the blessings of the New Jerusalem, committed forever instead to the torment of the lake of fire (Is.66:22-24; Matt.3:11-12; 25:31-46; Mk.9:42-49; Rev.20:11-15). By "losing our lives" on this earth, that is, by putting Jesus first with all the difficult choices that entails, choices of faith and sacrifice for Him which seem nonsensical to the world, we gain our life, abundant eternal life with Him forever

(Matt.16:24-28). By cravenly putting this life and its considerations first, however, and turning away from the Lord who died for all and calls us to the only true way of life, unbelievers make the poorest bargain imaginable, trading short-lived dust and rubbish for the incomprehensible wealth of an eternity with Jesus Christ, selecting instead permanent residence in the lake of fire. As a popular phrase rightly has it, "born twice, die once; born once, die twice". This is in fact the true situation for all believers vis-à-vis unbelievers, regardless of their level of spiritual growth. How will it not then be even more true for believers who, like many of those of the era of Smyrna, have made the ultimate sacrifice for Jesus Christ?

3. Pergamum: "The Era of Accommodation" (442 to 802 = 360 years)

Revelation 2:12-17:

(12) And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: "This is what the One who has the sharp two-edged sword says. (13) I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you are holding fast to My Name. And you did not abandon your faith in Me in the days of Antipas my faithful witness who was killed among you where Satan dwells. (14) But I have a few things against you, namely that you have there those who practice the teachings of Balaam, who instructed Balak how to throw a stumbling block in front of the Israelites, to eat food sacrificed to idols and commit sexually immoral acts. (15) So you also have those who practice the teachings of the Nicolaitans in a similar way. (16) So repent. And if you do not, I am going to come to you quickly and make war on them with the sword from My mouth. (17) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who wins the victory, I will give to him the hidden manna, and I will give to him a white stone, and on it will be written a new name which no one knows except the one who receives it."

The name Pergamum was an extremely famous one in antiquity. In addition to designating this town situated on a mountain side on the border between the Asian territories of Mysia and Lydia, Pergamum was also the name of the citadel (or acropolis) of the fabled city of Troy. The choice of cities for this third era of the Church, the "era of accommodation", is thus no accident. Pergamum represents the first era in a three era progression whereby the Church would see its organizational structure and leadership spiritually compromised and sapped of anything resembling true Christianity, to such a degree, moreover, that in the sixth era of the Church, the era of Philadelphia, the true Church would have to separate completely from the "church visible" in order to survive (i.e., the Reformation). To return to the image of Troy evoked by the name Pergamum, that famous city fell "from within" after being deceptively penetrated (by the legendary "Trojan horse"). This image of "the enemy within the gates" is indeed the one which arises from a careful inspection of the treatment of Pergamum given here by our Lord. For while the Ephesian era had seen the devil's anti-church entirely excluded from the true Church, and while the era of Smyrna had seen the devil's anti-church powerfully battering away at the true Church from without (in the form of the state-sponsored pagan persecutions), in the era of Pergamum we see for the first time the enemy actually "within the gates" of the true Church, if only incipiently so: "you **have there** those who

practice the teachings of Balaam"; "you **also have** those who practice the teachings of the Nicolaitans". The description of these non-Christian elements as being wrongfully included in and tolerated by the Pergamene era believers makes it clear that some accommodation with the forces of evil has in the form of the devil's anti-church taken place *within* the visible church.

Of course, this description is giving us an overall picture of the way in which the era of Pergamum would develop. And we are right to assume (based upon the worsening situation in the next era, that of Thyatira) that what is being described here is the beginning of a trend toward a growing accommodation of false elements within the Church which was to gather momentum during these 360 years.

But how did this dangerous state of affairs come to pass? In the previous era, that of Smyrna, our Lord had not a single negative remark or reproof for these gallant believers who withstood the fire of persecution. Writing in the midst of their troubles, during the persecution under emperor Septimus Severus at the end of the second century, Tertullian upbraided the pagan persecutors with the following words: "The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; *the blood of Christians is seed*", and, ever since, "the blood of the martyrs as the seed of the Church" has been the common historical judgment upon this era's contribution to the Church's growth.⁷⁶

But while oppression brought tempering, validation and true growth, the ultimate "success" of the Church visible at the end of the era of Smyrna began, sadly, a process of corruption that would eventually result in the complete spiritual death of the organization which had once been synonymous with the true Church (by the time of the era of Sardis). The three eras of Pergamum, Thyatira and Sardis, therefore, form a regrettable progression of the growing influence of the devil's anti-church *from within* the true Church until, at the end of the day, there is nothing left but a remnant which must escape for the true Church to be preserved (i.e., the Reformation represented by Philadelphia). As in the famous Talmudic story of the *golem*, a tale that correctly describes the process of infiltrating evil in general, the devil's pseudo-Christian elements address the believers of the Church of Pergamum as "my masters" (begging tolerance and inclusion), the believers of the Church of Thyatira as "my brothers" (demanding equality once included), and the believers of the Church of Sardis as "my slaves" (dictating obedience having gained control after admittance), in proportion to the growing power and influence they amass.

During the previous era of Smyrna, the hostility of the Roman government and of the pagan society at large had enforced a certain amount of unity upon believers in spite of their geographic and cultural differences (most especially to be seen in the differences between the Greek and the Roman halves of the empire, in terms of geography, cultural outlook, and linguistic differences).

This solidarity can be seen, for example, in the united front the Church presented to the heresies of that day as manifest particularly in the first three "ecumenical councils" of the Church. These were held respectively at Nicea in 325 (against Arianism), at

Constantinople in 381 (against Apollinarianism), and at Ephesus in 431 (against Nestorianism). The very fact of these councils, wherein representatives from all of Christendom attended (and no individual, group or specific church had priority) tells us that the unity of the Church during that previous era of Smyrna flowed *from below* (i.e., from individual believers and their chosen leaders in individual churches). For though, it is true, these represent the time when the Church had "won out" and was in the process of becoming a state church, there was nonetheless as yet no imperial papacy, no worldwide, monolithic super-organization, steeped in erroneous tradition (and having "institutionalized" gross error). Not that the believers of the era of Smyrna were perfect, but we can say that, by and large, Christians of that era pulled together *in the right direction*, and that this wonderful phenomenon was due at least in part to the fact that they still essentially saw themselves to be a faithful few navigating a dangerous sea of opposition from all quarters (rather than the dominant, state sponsored majority into which they were in the process of developing).⁷⁷

By the time we come to the era of Pergamum, however, the situation has changed radically, and the discernible effects upon the Church universal are equally earth-shaking. For Pergamum marks the end of the transition of Christianity from an unknown quantity (as far as the civil authority of that time, the Roman empire, was concerned) to the established state religion (by way, as we have said, of nearly three centuries of persecution), and from persecution of the faithful to a situation where many would wish to join the Christian ranks for political and social reasons rather than from a deep and abiding faith in Christ (making the presence in the Church of an element of pseudo-believers inevitable). Thus the Church's "victory" during the fourth century was at least a mixed blessing, for the political alliance between Church and state begun under Constantine was indeed a "fateful union" as Walker has so eloquently described it, a bargain with the devil in many respects, because it guaranteed that politics and state concerns would at least influence (and sometimes even come to dominate) the administration, organization, and even the faith and practice of the Church (witness the state interference in the first ecumenical council at Nicea, for example).⁷⁸

The diminution of imperial power under the pressure of the barbarian invasions of the fifth century reduced this threat considerably and presented the Church universal of the era Pergamum with the opportunity to flourish spiritually without being fatally compromised by secular involvement. That opportunity, however, was not fully grasped, for the growing centralization, politicization, and bureaucratization of church administration springing out of Constantine's adoption of Christianity was an element not easily expelled and a trend not easily reversed. Political pseudo-Christianity proved to be both a virulent, resistant strain on the one hand, and a seductive and seemingly necessary development on the other, as the power-vacuum left by the fall of the western empire was gradually filled up by the church at Rome.

It is indeed in the church at Rome where we see this trend towards secularism most clearly manifested, though it was by no means confined to Rome (to one extent or another, all of the important sees succumbed). But it was at Rome where, over the course of this and the two following eras of the Church, a large local church gradually

metastasized into a worldwide organization of unprecedented political power. It is important to note on this score that in historical terms as the *political* power of Rome increased, its spiritual purity decreased proportionally (a reminder to true disciples of Jesus Christ everywhere that we are here to serve Him, not to dabble in the devil's world-system).

Volumes could be (and have been) written charting the political rise and spiritual decline of the Roman church. More important for our purposes here is to consider briefly the effects of the historical developments alluded to above on the era of Pergamum, the period which marks the inception of this dangerous trend toward the bureaucratic centralization of power and the eventual imposition upon true believers of a pseudo-faith (leading to their separation from this dead edifice during the era of Philadelphia). In general terms, the combination of factors discussed above (i.e., the overall unity of the community of faith, the radical turn of events under state-sponsorship, the power-vacuum of the fifth century and following, and the inclusion of lukewarm and even pseudo-elements within the visible Church) all contributed to the secularization of the visible church. This secularization, seen by many historians as the key element in its political success, was also the major factor in its eventual spiritual decline.

Centralization of power and homogeneity of bureaucracy certainly have their advantages in the abstract: this "one-two punch" of united effort and the means to direct it are the hallmarks of every effective organization – in worldly, political terms, that is. The creation in particular of the Roman "super-church" in the west was, again from a secular point of view, a giant leap forward in the provision of worldly security for the Christian faith, an understandable if spiritually lamentable objective, especially given the growing threat and conquests of Islam in the final two centuries of the Pergamene era. With the rise of the papacy (in the likes of Leo the Great, 440-461, and Gregory the Great, 590-640), the regimentation of the priesthood, the concentration of doctrinal and administrative authority in the Roman see, Rome (and, though less successful in secular terms, the eastern sees as well) did become a true "Pergamum", a citadel which no individual or group with politico-military aspirations could afford to ignore. And in light of the experiences of the previous era of wide-spread persecution, the desire to provide such a "fortress" against future attacks is understandable. The problem with such thinking, however, is that, on the contrary, *it is God* who is our mighty fortress (Ps.46:1), and *it is the Lord Jesus Christ* who is our Rock (1Cor.10:4; cf. Ps.127:1). This world "lies in the lap" of the evil one at present (1Jn.5:19), so that whenever and wherever Christians have tried to play the devil's game of power politics, they have inevitably been subverted. True security in this world rests not in what our own hands can provide, but in remembering that beneath us are His everlasting arms (Deut.33:27), and in trusting Him to provide for our protection (1Jn.5:18).⁷⁹

The development of the centralized church provided, as we have said, some true advantages, as well as some which were only apparent (in particular this false sense of "security"): It afforded a united front against heresy, an apparatus for training clergy, a mechanism for producing and disseminating the scriptures, and a platform for

evangelism. But even within these categories of "advantage" lay the seeds of trouble. Once false doctrine has infected a "protecting organization", strengths can easily become weaknesses. Those teaching truth contrary to the accepted false principles find themselves attacked as "heretics" (witness the intense opposition to the Reformation). Once political considerations become paramount, those selected for elite positions in the clergy are most likely not those whom God has chosen to instruct His flock (but rather a political verses a spiritual priesthood). Once the game of power-politics dominates all other considerations, even the scriptures themselves can be tampered with or discounted (witness the false emphasis sometimes placed on "oral tradition" versus the scripture, and the "canonization" of the Apocrypha). And once what is being evangelized is not the gospel of Jesus Christ, but a pseudo-religion of salvation by works (e.g., works of supererogation, indulgences, penance, etc.), then the words of our Lord have come to fulfillment in the case of this super-church as well:

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you scour land and sea to make a single convert, and when he converts, you make him twice the reprobate you are."
Matthew 23:15

Then Jesus called [the disciples] over and said to them, "You know that the men of repute who rule over the gentiles lord it over them mightily, and that their prominent men exercise forceful authority over them. But it is not this way with you. Rather, whoever wants to be great among you will be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you will be everyone's slave. For the Son of Man also did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom on behalf of many."
Mark 10:42-45

All of these abuses, of course, did not come to fruition during the era of Pergamum (this would take two more eras to fully transpire), but the root of the problem is clearly to be found here. So while this centralizing, bureaucratizing trend may be understandable in the context of persecutions past and in the dangerous world of that earlier time, it nevertheless turned out to be a poor bargain (given what later occurred as a result). On the one hand, such a concentration of political power was never meant to be for the Church as we can plainly see from the latitude the apostles gave to their charges (obvious from the Pauline, Petrine, and Johannine epistles), exercising much more of a circumspect control, and one founded more upon moral authority than the arbitrary power which the individual sees and the papacy would soon come to wield.⁸⁰ And these men were the Lamb's very own apostles! On the other hand, the policy of concentrating authority in the hands of only a few central churches, and, eventually, largely in only one church was also destined to backfire badly. Just as the original Pergamum, the citadel of Troy, was finally captured in spite of its seeming impregnability – because it fell from within – so the development of this monolithic church structure, while it might be effective in protecting itself from external threats, would soon be infiltrated (Pergamum), compromised (Thyatira), and dominated (Sardis) by the non-Christian elements which, ironically, it had let in – like a Trojan horse – in order to keep the overtly hostile forces out. Jesus had warned us all about the dangers of such "leaven":

And [Jesus] gave orders to [the disciples], saying, "Beware! Be on guard against the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod (i.e., the Sadducees: cf. Matt.16:6)".
Mark 8:15

The "leaven", of course, is not literal (as the disciples originally construe it: Matt.16:7-12; Mk.8:16-21), but refers rather to false doctrines (Matt.16:12) and, in the case of the Pharisees at any rate, also to their hypocrisy (Lk.12:1). Now simplistically put, during our Lord's day the Pharisees were the party of legalistic, traditional religion, "teaching as [if they were God's] doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt.15:9). The Sadducees, on the other hand, were essentially secularists whose relationship to God was one entirely consisting of "lip-service" (cf. Is.29:13). They were much more concerned with political power than religion (which explains the reference to Herod; cf. Matt.22:23-34). In the case of the inchoate "fortress church" of Pergamum, *both* of these characteristics can be seen in a developmental stage: on the one hand, the adoption of pagan trappings and the creation of a system of impressive (though unbiblical) ritual and paraphernalia is one and the same with the Pharisees' erroneous and onerous interpretations of the Law of Moses; on the other hand, the construction of a one-world church with a highly centralized and domineering leadership would fulfill the Sadducees' fondest hopes. The main difference between the Pharisee-Sadducee antagonism and the formation of the Roman super-church, however, is plain to see. For while the Pharisees and Sadducees were bitter enemies (cf. Acts 23:6-10), *both* trends worked in tandem in the development (or corruption) of the church visible beginning in the era of Pergamum. In fact, these two trends served to reinforce each other. For the creation of a "palatable" and "attractive" Pharisaic system of worship for the sake of accommodation and protection required a powerful, centralized Sadducean authority to bulldoze opposition and enforce uniformity.

Inevitably then, the quest for Sadducean political power and influence on the part of false and negative elements within the church visible (called in Pergamum's case practitioners of the teachings of Balam and Balak, and of the "Nicolaitans"; see the chart above under Smyrna) had much to do with generating this overall policy of Pharisaic "accommodation", which is the signal characteristic of the era of Pergamum as we have mentioned above (cf. Hos.4:7). And the terrible results of this policy are extremely relevant for us to consider today. For in order to expand to the utmost, the church had to be as inclusive as possible. Numbers now became the name of the game, and quantity (i.e., gathering within its ranks as many as possible who would at least give nominal obedience to the church) became a much more pressing concern than quality (i.e., instead of dedicating itself to serving the spiritual growth of genuine, committed Christians). No longer was "what the Bible says" the number one concern, but rather, "what will contribute to growth".

As a result, we may trace to this era the initial development of most if not all of the pagan and superstitious practices which increasingly came to characterize the medieval church. The practice of infant baptism, the carefully defined hierarchy of rank, the evolution of an elite priesthood with all its fantastic trappings, the ritual of confession, the use of statues, the construction of massive and elaborate churches, the worship of

other human beings in the guise of saints, the use of votaries, the creation of the complex of festivals, the system of penance and works, the use of ecumenical councils to squelch legitimate diversity (beginning with Chalcedon in 451), etc., etc., were all egregious developments from the point of view of biblical Christianity, precisely because they helped to institute what amounts to a system of pagan religious cultic activity (invested with a Pharisee-like patina of dogma) having absolutely nothing to do with the One true God or with salvation through His Son Jesus Christ.

For quondam pagans, on the other hand, this stress upon such practices and paraphernalia was incredibly comforting. When Christian priests looked and behaved like pagan priests, when Christian saints resembled pagan gods and goddesses, when Christian statuary became like unto those in pagan temples, and when Christian rituals, practices and festivals came to be almost indistinguishable from their pagan counterparts, surface conversion and allegiance became an easy matter – but at the cost of much genuine belief and true spiritual growth. What the "church" gained in being "accommodating" in order to include large numbers of those for whom Christianity was at best an after-thought, she lost by diluting her original essence, and eventually found herself subverted by the very forces against which she had thought to protect herself with these policies. In the era of Pergamum, these problems were only incipient, but her overly generous toleration of these evil, non-Christian influences began a trend which would eventually shatter and transform the Church visible.

The problem with a fully integrated and unified Church/church is that such an organization, being run by imperfect human beings, may well have the effect of spreading good usage and prohibiting heresy, but it can also have, and inevitably *must* have (again, because those who run it are imperfect, and imperfection tends to breed more imperfection over time) have the opposite effect eventually, that is, of spreading heresy and prohibiting good usage. This dual trend towards centralization and accommodation would thus have, by the time of the late middle ages, the same effect that the tower of Babel was intended to have in ancient times: the squelching of all *true* faith and practice in the name of a unity that was becoming increasingly anti-God in fact. That it took so many centuries for the rot to progress to the point of making the splitting off of (most if not all) true believers (necessary for the perpetuation of the faith) is a testimony to the faith and dedication of so many Christians who continued to labor in the only vineyard they knew in spite of ever increasing problems.

Christ's Self-description:

1. "This is what the One who has the sharp two-edged sword says": The image of the sword here stresses the need to make sharp distinctions between right and wrong, between true believers and phony ones:

Do not think that I have come to hurl peace upon the earth. I have not come to hurl peace upon the earth but a sword [of divisiveness]. For I have come to divide, [so that] 'a man [will be set] against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; [with the result that] a man's enemies will be the

members of his own household' (cf. Micah 7:6). Whoever loves his father or mother above Me is not worthy of Me, and whoever loves his son or daughter above Me is not worthy of Me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever has found his life will lose it, and the one who has lost his life for My sake will find it.

Matthew 10:34-39

The "sharp two-edged sword" of Revelation 2:12 is to be understood in similar terms. Toleration of and accommodation with those minions of the evil one who had infiltrated the church was, as we have made the case, a recipe for disaster. The Ruler of the Church thus describes Himself here in terms that remind us of His own policy of non-toleration of evil and non-accommodation with those who compromise the truth. We are to choose for Him without reservation or we are not worthy of Him (as the Matthew passage above makes clear). Later in the message to Pergamum, this impression is strengthened as the offending believers are told by our Lord to repent (of their attitude and practice of toleration of evil and compromising the truth), and also told that, if they do not take the admittedly hard decision to force out the cancerous elements in their midst, He Himself will take matters into His own hands. In the same way, Paul had to deal harshly with the Corinthian church when they in a very similar way out of fear and a misplaced sense of tolerance failed to take action when confronted with gross sinfulness (1Cor.5:1-13): "Those outside [the Church] God will judge. [You] expel the wicked one from among you! (quote from Deut.17:7)". The necessity for believers to separate themselves from evil and evildoers is at the heart of experiential sanctification, the walk of righteousness to which we have all been called (1Cor.5:8; 5:11; 2Cor.7:1; Heb.12:14). By failing to separate ourselves from those who do wrong, we risk being drawn into their error as well:

Do not be deceived: bad associations corrupt good behavior.

1st Corinthians 15:33

Christ's Particular Message:

1. "you dwell, where Satan's throne is": The devil's "throne", as we have seen in significant detail in the Satanic Rebellion series, is the earth, the kingdom which he wrested from Adam in the temptation and fall of Genesis chapter three. Yes, the believers of Pergamum, and all believers since the fall and up until the establishment of Christ's millennial kingdom, do indeed dwell in the enemy territory of the kingdom of darkness, at least physically. *Spiritually*, however, we have been transferred into the "kingdom of God's beloved Son" (Col.1:13). Therefore the adoption of a "fortress mentality" is entirely the wrong point of view for us who have chosen to follow the victorious King. This is even more the case given that the days of intense, organized, state persecution are by the era of Pergamum temporarily past (they would resurface in part from time to time, such as in the days of the Philadelphian era, but the next universal persecution of the Church will not occur until the Tribulation's second half).⁸¹ The enemy has already been defeated in principle (Lk.10:18; Jn.16:33; Heb.2:14-15), and the day of consummate victory is imminent (Rev.19:11-21). The Church is therefore not

here to build "bunkers", as the name Pergamum suggests the believers of that era had, but rather to adopt an offensive mind-set, marching with the Lamb wherever He advances (Rev.14:4), and picking up our cross to follow Him (Matt.10:38; 16:24). From a purely secular point of view, the pursuit of political power and strength is somewhat understandable in the context of Pergamum. In her days, after all, the western Roman empire came crashing to the ground and what had been Roman territory was subjected to successive waves of barbarian invasions and regimes. From the spiritual point of view, however, the Church's survival and success never had a thing to do with the Roman empire, originally hostile, then later "sponsoring" the church visible. Our warfare is not an earthly one – we do not struggle against flesh and blood (Eph.6:12). But in the service and in the power of our Lord, as long as God is our refuge, we need no earthly citadel (Ps.46:1), and no fortification of the evil one which can stand against His Church:

And I tell you that you are Peter [the little rock] (*petros*), and upon this [mighty] Rock (*petra*, i.e., upon Christ Himself; cf. 1Cor.3:11) I shall build My Church (cf. Dan.2:44-45), *and the gates* (i.e., the fortified defenses) *of Hades* (i.e., the devil's kingdom) *will not* [be able to] **resist it**.
Matthew 16:18

2. "And you are holding fast to My Name and you did not abandon your faith in Me in the days of Antipas my faithful witness who was killed among you where Satan dwells": Despite the fact that the Pergamene believers have taken the unwise course of tolerating evil in their midst, they themselves are still holding onto their faith. It will take two further eras until faith within the church visible is largely quenched, leaving it "dead" (in Sardis: Rev.3:1). The believers of Pergamum are praised not only for faith present, but also for preserving their faith in past persecutions (the reference to Antipas). Beyond this passage, nothing is known historically of this Antipas, but that does not preclude the existence of such a martyr in John's day, nor does it preclude this "Antipas" from also being a symbolic reference to past martyrdom, either sporadic persecution at the beginning of the Pergamene era, or even further back in the previous era of Smyrna (the name Antipas meaning either "in place of all" or "against all", referring to the select and substitutionary nature of martyrdom in the first instance, or to its steadfast resistance to all compromise and satanic opposition in the second). The key word here is "past" – the persecution which resulted in the martyrdom of Antipas is over, and the Church in the era of Pergamum has now passed into a much less precarious position from a secular, worldly point of view. Yet in spite of the change of circumstances, now that the times were more conducive to spiritual advance and a spiritually offensive mind-set, the best that can be said for Pergamum is that 1) they defended effectively in the past, and 2) they are still "holding on" in the midst of the devil's world ("where Satan dwells"). This positive accomplishment is not to be underappreciated, and there is no equivocation or sarcasm in our Lord's praise here. But the lack of any mention of offensive activity (i.e., "deeds"; contrast Ephesus: Rev.2:2; Thyatira: Rev.2:19; Philadelphia: 3:8) suggests that the interpretation of Pergamum as an era characterized by a "bunker-mentality" is correct.⁸² Antipas is by now "old business". What this verse says, is, in essence, "true, you have a good heritage, and you

are to be commended for it, but that does not excuse what you are doing (and not doing) now".

3. "But I have a few things against you, namely that you have there those who practice the teachings of Balaam, who instructed Balak how to throw a stumbling block in front of the Israelites, to eat food sacrificed to idols and commit sexually immoral acts. So you also have those who practice the teachings of the Nicolaitans in a similar way": The first thing to notice about our Lord's indictment of the Pergamene era Church is that "those who practice the teachings of Balaam" and "those who practice the teachings of the Nicolaitans" are one and the same. This Church "has" them both, and the reference to the Nicolaitans is added by way of explanation (i.e., "so [in an analogous way] you also have . . . the Nicolaitans"). Despite the fact that the identity of the historical Nicolaitans is shrouded in speculation, as we saw in our discussion of false teachers in Ephesus and in our overall assessment of satanic attacks throughout the seven eras (given under Smyrna), all of these terms refer essentially to the devil's "anti-Church" (and its relationship to the true Church). As mentioned above, the fact that the Pergamene Church "has" these two groups (synonymous in terms of personnel), signals us that, unlike the previous two eras, the forces of the evil one have gained a foothold within Pergamum.

That having been said, we can also garner from this dual description something about the operations of this growing element of unbelievers in the earthly assembly of Christ. These "Nicolaitans" are doing what "Balak did on advice from Balaam". The word "Nicolaitan", is composed, as we saw above, from Greek words meaning "people" (*laos*) and "conquer" (*nikao*), representing (as it did in the case of Ephesus) the pronouncement by false teachers of the priority of popular opinion over biblical truth.⁸³ That is to say, the use of this name by our Lord highlights once more the fact of accommodation which we have identified as the leading characteristic of the era of Pergamum (i.e., the acceptance of false practices, false persons, and false beliefs in an effort to be inclusive for the sake of security on the one hand and political power on the other). The main *difference* between the Nicolaitans here and those of Ephesus is that in the era of Pergamum they are *inside* the visible church, promoting their anti-Church agenda from positions of leadership and authority within the framework of organized Christianity.

The means by which these false teachers and their supporters pursued their ends (eventually gaining complete dominance of church organization in the era of Sardis) is explained by the reference here to Balaam and Balak. Balak, it will be remembered, was the Moabite king who desired to destroy the Israelites as they were about to enter the land (Numbers chapters 22-26). To this end, he hired Balaam, a famous enchanter, to curse them. Balaam, unable to bring about Israel's destruction from without because of the Lord's overruling will, instead provided Balak with a strategy for destroying Israel from within. This strategy was, in its essence, to persuade individual Israelites to become involved in Moabite idolatry, with Moabite women providing the attraction for this destructive course. In this way, carnal seduction would lead to spiritual infidelity as

well, and Israel, separated from her God by her own godless actions, would be easy prey for Moab (or any enemy).

The analogy with the Church of Pergamum is not difficult to see. The Nicolaitans, having infiltrated into the fellowship of the true Church, are adopting a similar strategy to the one conceived of by Balaam. Through deceptive and enticing false teaching they are bringing into a church, now prone to accommodation, pagan practices of the heathen religion (discussed above). The resulting adoption of the paraphernalia of the ancient world's heathen cults (which religion Christianity was still in the process of replacing), had the worldly advantages of encouraging and welcoming former pagans into the church visible by making it a much more friendly and "accommodating" place (especially for those who might be poor pagans but who were no Christians). And on the other hand, this toleration and eventual embracing of pagan festivals, forms, and beliefs also provided an element of security by coopting and neutralizing the objections of potential and actual pro forma converts. From a spiritual point of view, however, this trend towards celebrating pagan festivals, worshiping statues and demigods, and replacing the truth of scripture with man-made principles, was, in effect, a new sort of "legalism" (cf. Matt.15:9; 1Cor.10:19-21; 12:2; Gal.3:3; 4:9-10; Col.2:17; Heb.8:5; 10:1). For it was made more palatable to the true Christians within the Church by endowing these pagan elements with a patina of Jewish temple ritual (e.g., "temples", "priests", "feasts" and more exist in both Jewish and pagan liturgy). That such a "marketing" strategy was wrong in principle (no matter how successful it might prove) is clear:

But at that time [when you were unbelievers], not knowing God, you were slaves to those things which are by nature not [truly] gods. But now, having recognized God, or, as it really is, having been recognized *by God*, how is it that you are turning back to these weak and impoverished *false [pagan] principles* which you wish to serve as slaves all over again? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that I may perhaps have spent my labor on you in vain.

Galatians 4:8-11

So don't let anyone judge you in regard to food or drink, or in the category of festival observances, be it of new moons or Sabbaths. All these things are shadows of what was to come, but the reality has to do with Christ. Let no one gain control over your life, desiring to [enslave you to himself] through a show of false humility and the adoration of angels, basing his approach on what he has [allegedly] seen while puffed up by his own fleshly thoughts, yet not embracing the Head [Christ]. For it is from this Source that the entire body [the Church] is [truly] supplied and instructed through [all] its joints and sinews, and [thus] produces the growth that God has given. If you have died with Christ to these *false [pagan] principles* [belonging to] this world, why are you letting yourselves be [wrongly] indoctrinated as if your life were of this world? In accordance with the commandments and teaching of [mere] men [these false teachers tell you] "Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!", even though [we know] that all these [are only] things [which] decay with use.

Colossians 2:16-22

Don't let yourselves be mismatched together in the yoke with unbelievers. For what partnership does righteousness have with immorality, or what fellowship does light have with darkness? What agreement is there between Christ and Belial (i.e., the devil)? What agreement is there between God's temple and idols? For we are the temple of the Living God, just as God has said.

2nd Corinthians 6:14-16a

This disastrous path of compromising truth in order to expand and secure the "organization" would eventually be the spiritual death of much of the original organization of the church-visible. For to compromise God's truth for temporal advantage is the essence of "spiritual idolatry" and "spiritual unfaithfulness", a persistent failing of Israel throughout her long history, and one which always had dire consequences (Hos.4:12 & 5:4).

So where intense, external pressure had been ineffective in our adversary's attempts to corrupt the Church in the time of Smyrna, internal temptation (specifically, the desire for security apart from God) proved to be highly effective in the time of Pergamum. The notion that one can dabble in things diametrically opposed to God's truth and "still be a good Christian" was a fallacy every bit as false then as it is today (and every bit as dangerous). It was no more acceptable or salutary for the Church of Pergamum's day to tolerate unbelievers and adopt unbelieving ways than it was for Israel to intermarry with the Moabites and adopt their pagan idolatry. For the progression is the same in both instances. Spiritual unfaithfulness follows wrongful association (1Cor.15:33; cf. Prov.13:20; 22:24-25; 2Cor.6:14): "[Balaam] . . . instructed Balak how to throw a stumbling block in front of the Israelites, **1**) to eat food sacrificed to idols and **2**) (i.e., "then") to commit sexually immoral acts". Thus the intermarriage with pagans which precedes the involvement in idolatry in the historical example of the Moabites and Baal-Peor used here by our Lord is exactly parallel to the situation in which the believers of the era of Pergamum find themselves: tempted and pressured to make common cause with pagans in adopting terrible practices, they thereby begin the process of spiritual unfaithfulness which would prove so devastating over the next two Church eras.

4. "So repent. And if you do not, I am going to come to you quickly and make war on them with the sword from My mouth": This statement is addressed to the entire Pergamene Church ("I am going to come *to you*"). Therefore, the compromising of truth and the accommodating and associating with pagan practitioners mentioned here is a problem for everyone in the Church, one requiring a true change of heart and mind and the deeds that flow therefrom (i.e., genuine repentance), even though it is true that the sword (of punishment) will descend only upon those evil-doers in the Church's midst (i.e., "[I am going to] make war *on them*"). The sword mentioned here, it will be recalled, is visible to John, flashing forth from our Lord's mouth as He delivers this message (Rev.1:16), and this is also the sword with which He will destroy His enemies at His return (Rev.19:15; 19:21; cf. Is.49:2; 2Thes.2:8). But in addition to the clear threat of divine punishment for failure to comply, there is another important significance of the sword, mentioned now for the second time in the message to Pergamum (cf. v.12). For in addition to being an instrument of destruction, the sword is also an instrument of

division and separation (as we saw above: Matt.10:32-39), the very division and separation (between good and evil) which the Pergamene era Church has failed to practice, and which is being demanded here by our Lord (cf. Heb.4:12).

God is holy, and all who would follow Him in truth must sanctify themselves unto Him, separating from what is impure, cleaving instead to what is good and righteous and honorable (Phil.4:8; 1Pet.1:15-16; cf. Deut.32:51). That does not mean that believers are to turn their backs on the world, for it is clearly impossible for us to live anywhere else (1Cor.5:9-11). But it does mean that we are to be careful and prudent in our choice of close fellowship and association, especially when it comes to the gathering of ourselves together for the worship of God. We must be true to His principles of truth, trust in Him that such is the correct course of action, and not allow ourselves to be tempted or bullied into compromising what we know to be right for the sake of those who do not really love Him in truth.

Christ's Promised Rewards:

1. "To the one who wins the victory, I will give to him the hidden manna, and I will give to him a white stone, and on it will be written a new name which no one knows except the one who receives it": The theme of the rightness of choosing for and following God wholeheartedly and without reservation in spite of the worldly pressures to compromise and accommodate is continued in Christ's promise of these specific rewards to the Pergamene Church.

The Hidden Manna: The "hidden manna" represents our complete and open fellowship with Jesus Christ face to face on that blessed coming day. Manna, as every Bible reading Christian knows, was the divinely provided "bread" that sustained the Israelites for forty years in the midst of a barren desert (Ex.16). And we know that God's provision of the manna-bread was specifically designed to teach the Israelites that "man does not live by bread alone, but by every *word* that proceeds forth from the mouth of God" (Deut.8:3; cf. Matt.4:4; 6:11; Lk.11:3). The "manna" in the context here is described by our Lord as "hidden" because we are not presently experiencing this promised personal and visible fellowship with the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ (Jn.6:25-58; cf. Matt.26:26). For though we love Him here in time, we cannot yet see Him in the flesh (1Pet.1:8; 1Cor.13:12; Heb.11:27; cf. Jn.20:29), but on that blessed day to come, we who overcome through faith in Him will experience forever the incalculable joy of sweet fellowship with the Lord who bought us:

In complete truth I tell you, he who believes has eternal life. "*I am*" the Bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. *This* is the bread which comes down from heaven (i.e., Christ Himself; cf. Matt.16:18 "*this* Rock"; Jn.2:19; "*this* temple"), that anyone who eats of it may also not die. "*I am*" the Living Bread who has come down from heaven. Whoever eats of *this* Bread will live forever, and, moreover, the bread which I will give is My flesh, [which is about to be offered] on behalf of the life of the world. John 6:47-51

In the context here, this true manna which we shall "eat" and with which we shall be satisfied forever, is also set in contrast with the "eating" of "sacrifices to idols" leading to the "sexually immoral acts" encouraged by the "Nicolaitans". For the wholesome fellowship with Jesus Christ represented by the true "eating" of the Bread of Life here in time, the taking in of the words of God about the Word of God, is completely antithetical to the false fellowship and false indulgence of which the Pergamene era Church is accused by our Lord. Rather than seeking safety, sustenance and refreshment in secular compromise and accommodation with unbelievers (as they did), we should turn instead to the One who is truly able to satisfy us here and now with the truth (because He is the Truth), and who will satisfy us with the promised hidden manna in eternity, everlasting personal fellowship with the One who died on our behalf.

The cup of blessing which we bless – is it not fellowship in the blood of Christ? And the bread which we break – is it not fellowship in the body of Christ? For one bread, one body we many are, since we all partake of that One Bread. Consider [even] physical Israel [on this point]. Do not those who eat the sacrifices share fellowship in the altar? So what am I saying? That food sacrificed to demons [really] is anything? Or that an idol [really] is anything? [Of course not.] However, [it is true] that what the [se pagans] sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not want you to share fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons [at the same time]. You cannot participate in the Lord's table and the table of demons [at the same time]. 1st Corinthians 10:16-21

If we truly do accept that He is our portion forever, both now and in the life to come (Ps.73:26), and if we truly do look forward to this promise of hidden manna, eschewing the allures of false fellowship and the enticements of this present world, then we should ever remember and apply the truth of the lesson that "man does not live only on bread", and determine never to neglect our "true eating" of the manna of the Word, which has proceeded forth from the mouth of our God in the Person of His Son, so as to secure our portion of that future manna, now hidden from the world, but destined to be revealed at the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The White Stone: There are several important aspects to consider in the symbolism of the "white stone" which our Lord will give to every one of us who overcomes, successfully completing a life of faith and faithfulness in the midst of the devil's world.⁸⁴ First, in keeping with the other promises of Christ which we have seen so far in these messages to the seven eras of the Church, this promise too reflects the description of the Pergamene Church era previously given. For just as the hidden manna contrasted the future provision of true fellowship with false fellowship with pagan elements (of which the Pergamene era Church was guilty), so one function of the white stone is to contrast the true, eternal security of each believer in Jesus Christ to the drive for false security in time (the failing of Pergamum reflected in the name of this third era of the Church, "citadel"). In contrast to a man-made earthly citadel built by accommodating pernicious secular influences, a citadel which, ironically, is pictured here as already infiltrated and being attacked from within (compare the success of the "Trojan horse" against the original Pergamum), believers ought to focus on the fact that we are being built up into

an eternal edifice which shall never fall, the true, spiritual Church, founded upon the one and only true Rock, our cornerstone Jesus Christ (1Pet.2:4-8; cf. 1Cor.3:9-15; Eph.2:20-22). The white stone thus represents our true union with Him and our true security in Him in contrast to the harmful union with secular forces taking place in Pergamum for the sake of a worldly security that could never be truly secure, compromising as it did the very principles of truth which should have been protected.

Such special stones, memorials from God for those who are His, are known collectively in the case of the angels (i.e., the "stones of fire" of Ezek.28:13-14), and in the case of the twelve tribes of Israel (i.e., the precious stones on the breast plate of the high priest: Ex.28:17-21; 39:10-14; Hos.3:4).⁸⁵ But it is most encouraging for us, we who find ourselves in the middle of this spiritual battlefield called life, to be told that we are not only known to God individually and will be individually recognized with special "stones" as "stones" in the edifice of His grand design, the Church of Jesus Christ, but will also receive from our Lord Himself "a new name" to be inscribed upon this memorial stone (cf. Is.56:5; 62:2; 65:15). Given what we know about divine renaming elsewhere in scripture (e.g., Abram to Abraham, and Jacob to Israel, to name but two), it seems clear that this "new name" will be a divine reflection of the role we have played in God's plan here on earth in service to the Church of Christ – a revelation which is both an encouragement and a spur to persevere (as indeed all future reward and evaluation from God should be).

[On that day] you [who have forsaken Me] will leave your name to my chosen ones as a curse, for the Lord God will put you to death. But to His servants there will be given a different (i.e., "new") name.

Isaiah 65:15

4. Thyatira: "The Era of Compromise" (802 to 1162 = 360 years)

Revelation 2:18-29:

(18) And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: "This is what the Son of God says, the One whose eyes are like a flame of fire and whose feet are like white-hot bronze. (19) I know your works and your love and your faith and your ministry and your endurance, and your most recent works are more numerous than your first ones. (20) But I have against you that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, she who claims she is a prophetess and teaches and deceives My servants to commit sexually immoral acts and eat food sacrificed to idols. (21) And I gave her time to repent, but she was not willing to repent from her prostitution. (22) Behold, I am going to throw her and her adulterers with her onto a couch, [yes], into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, (23) and I will kill her children with death. And all the churches will know that I am the One who tests the desires and the hearts, and I will give to each one of you according to your works. (24) And to the rest of you in Thyatira, as many as do not hold to this doctrine, you who have not acknowledged Satan's "deep teachings", as they call them. I am placing upon you no further burden. (25) Only hold fast to what you possess until I come. (26) And to the one who wins the victory and gives heed to My works until the end, I will give to him authority over the nations. (27) And he will shepherd them with

an iron rod and crush them like vessels of clay, (28) just as I have received [the authority] from My Father. And I will give him the Morning Star. (29) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

The era of Thyatira may best be described as ambivalent or bifurcated. For on the one hand, within its 360 years, genuine followers of our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished many spectacular things for Him and His Church, but on the other hand, it is also an era wherein the unbelieving, satanic "anti-church" element expanded to the point of being able to challenge for the leadership of the visible organization. This dichotomy can be seen in the name "Thyatira", inasmuch as its etymology, "unwearied in sacrifice", can also cut both ways.⁸⁶ For the name both represents the tremendous sacrifices made (especially by missionaries) in bringing the gospel of Christ to many barbarian nations (a hallmark of this era), while at the same time it calls to mind participation in the false sacrifices of idolatry mentioned here by our Lord (as was also the case in Pergamum). In terms of spiritual sacrifice, Thyatira possessed many whose love for the Lord was impressive indeed, made manifest by the works they accomplished. However, Thyatira also possessed a growing element devoted not to Christ but to their own secular and carnal agendas, that is, a malignant, cancerous "anti-church" guilty of what amounts to idolatry and pagan revelry, those who were spiritually unfaithfully to Christ (in contrast to the faithful whose work is praised), and who, by definition, were devoted to the devil instead. In Pergamum, the enemy had merely entered within the gate, but in Thyatira, we see them challenging true believers for dominance within the structure of the temporal church organization.

Christ's Self-description:

1. "This is what the Son of God says, the One whose eyes are like a flame of fire and whose feet are like white-hot bronze": This description, which speaks entirely of judgment, is a clear indication that, in spite of the positive points our Lord will address in Thyatira's behalf, the pressing nature of the problem which afflicts her is uppermost in His mind. That bronze (compare the bronze altar of burnt offerings: Ex.27:1-6; cf. Num.21:9; Deut.28:23; Zech.6:1) and even more especially fire (e.g., Is.66:15; Matt.3:10-12; Rev.20:10-15) speak of coming judgment is a fact well-known to readers of scripture. The double mention of flaming eyes and white bronze-feet serves to intensify the picture of impending judgment (upon those who refuse to repent: see below), with the eyes calling attention to our Lord's complete and perfect knowledge of all things, including, in this case, of all transgression in need of fiery divine correction (2Chron.16:9; Zech.3:9 with 4:10; Rev.5:6), while the feet of white-hot bronze, on the other hand, speak to the readiness of our Lord to execute this judgment forthwith in the absence of repentance (Eph.6:15; cf. Is.52:7). Our God is a "jealous" God (Deut.4:23-24; Heb.12:29), that is, a God intolerant of infidelity on the part of those who have pledged themselves to Him, and the self-description given here bespeaks His indignation over the spiritual prostitution in which a goodly portion of Thyatira is engaged.

Christ's Particular Message:

1. "I know your works and your love and your faith and your ministry and your endurance, and your most recent works are more numerous than your first ones": This is indeed a glowingly positive report for the true believers in Thyatira, one which both reflects the significance of the ministries in which they have been engaged, and also impressively acknowledges that the trend of their activities is a positive one. The most noteworthy and spiritually significant positive trend in the history of the era of Thyatira is, as mentioned above, the broad expansion of missionary activity beyond the frontiers of the original Roman empire. Within the time frame covered by the era of Thyatira (802 to 1162), northern Europe, eastern Europe, Russia and the British isles were evangelized (to note the most dramatic and best documented areas of growth), resulting in a massive influx of genuine believers into the Church of Jesus Christ. For this wave of conversion was unlike the process of "social Christianization" which had taken place in the era of Pergamum. At that time, it will be remembered, many compromises were made to soften the pagan population's entrance into the church's lists, and even so the new converts were motivated in many cases by practical considerations rather than spiritual ones. But for the new Christians of the era of Thyatira, things were different. On the one hand, they were presented with a largely "solid-state" Christianity, which, whatever its flaws (acquired during the previous era), was nonetheless at its core the worship of God through Jesus Christ based upon the Bible. And on the other hand, those of the previously "heathen" lands became Christians, by and large, out of genuine and personal motives (rather than as a result of shifting political realities). It is clear from the outcome that God honored the efforts of true evangelists and their eager listeners in blessing the Church era of Thyatira with one of the most dramatic and rapid expansions of the Christian faith which the Church Age was to experience. It is primarily this activity (along with the spiritual and material support provided by Thyatira at large) which comes in for the impressive praise recorded here by our Lord.

However, given what our Lord has to say by way of criticism in the verses which follow, we should all soberly reflect that even an excessive amount of good is not sufficient to counteract an excessive amount of evil (cf. Ezek.33:12-16). None of us is perfect, and none of the Church eras were populated by perfect Christians. But there is a limit to the Lord's patience, longsuffering and gracious though He irrefutably is (Ex.34:5-7; Is.48:9; 1Tim.2:4; 2Pet.3:9; 3:15). There may come a time in the life of any civilization, any organization, any Church era, any group whatsoever, when even the presence of exceptional good or exceptionally godly believers is insufficient to ward off divine judgment upon widespread rebellion and apostasy (Ex.32:11-14; 32:32-33; Ezek.22:30):

Son of man, if a land sins against Me by being unfaithful, and I raise My hand against it and shatter its staff bread and send famine against it and cut off from it man and beast, even if these three men were in its midst, Noah, Daniel and Job, they would only deliver their own lives by their righteousness.

Ezekiel 14:13-14

In this respect, Thyatira demonstrates the exact opposite of the earlier era of Pergamum, where good defense was prized (to the point of developing a dangerously centralized bureaucracy), while the learning and spreading of the Word of God was neglected.

Applying the lessons of Thyatira and Pergamum to our own individual lives, we can see then that in addition to a "good offense" of spiritual growth, preparation for service in accordance with the gifts we have been given, and the implementation of the ministries and good works God has ordained for us since before time began (Eph.2:10), we also have need of a "good defense", that is, a firm commitment to "putting to death" the sin nature within us (Col.3:5; cf. Rom.8:12-13; Eph.4:22; Col.3:9), and dying to this world even as we live for Christ (Rom.6:2-14; Gal.2:20; 5:24; 6:14; Phil.1:21; Col.2:12; 2:20; 3:1-4). Life in the midst of the devil's world is indeed a difficult proposition, and it is certainly true that it is a challenging task to be perfect in our self-discipline, picking up our cross daily to both "reject wrong and choose the right" (cf. Is.7:16), as our consciences informed by the Holy Spirit tell us to do. For, in spite of the fact that if we would but put ourselves in His hands, His Spirit is ever present within us both "to will *and* to do" (Phil.2:13; cf. Matt.26:41; Rom.8:5-13; Gal.5:16-18), it is nevertheless true that as human beings we are likely to run into rough patches in our lives (some of which may well be testing and attack: Job 1-2; 2Tim.3:12; 1Pet.4:13; 5:9) wherein forward progress on these two fronts may be arduous and excruciatingly slow. At such times, it is of paramount importance that we demonstrate unrelenting persistence and perseverance (cf. Rom.5:3-5). In this way, even if our forward progress in personal sanctification (our "defense": Heb.12:14) and in spiritual growth and ministry (our "offense": Gal.6:9-10) is running into significant resistance (whether from personal fatigue or from external pressure), we shall nevertheless *not lose* ground if only we keep on pushing forward:

(15) So as many as are [spiritually] mature, let us have this attitude (i.e., of focusing on our spiritual advance and reward and not getting hung up on what lies behind: vv.13-14), and if in any matter your attitude is off-center, God will reveal that to you (i.e., assuming you are mature and are advancing as you should). (16) But with respect to the progress you have made, keep on advancing in the same way!
Philippians 3:15-16

For if we can but persevere when under attack (again, whether we share any culpability for the spiritual assaults under which we suffer or whether they are essentially compliments to the progress we are making, having attracted the attention of our adversary), then when the pressure lifts, and lift it eventually shall, we will find ourselves not only stronger in faith, but also none the worse for wear in any spiritual sense.

2. "But I have against you that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, she who claims she is a prophetess and teaches and deceives My servants to commit sexually immoral acts and eat food sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent, but she was not willing to repent from her prostitution": It is clear to see from our Lord's words here that within Thyatira there is a pseudo-Christian element (represented by Jezebel) which is leading genuine Christians astray ("teaches and deceives My servants to commit sexually immoral acts and eat food sacrificed to idols"). That is to say, the anti-church element which had as yet only entered the gates of Pergamum (benefitting from that earlier era's likewise misplaced tolerance) is now described as being actively engaged in suborning

and seducing believers away from the true worship of Jesus Christ, and doing so *from a position of authority within the church visible*. What had merely been an incipient problem in Pergamum, therefore, is now a full blown challenge for the control of the church visible by an element (represented by Jezebel) which, while it may profess itself to be serving Christ, is in reality serving Satan (a point made clear by the fact of her unwillingness to change her ways in spite of the remonstrances and grace period given by our Lord).

The phrase "sexually immoral acts" here refers not to literal fornication but rather to spiritual infidelity to which some of the believers of Thyatira are being suborned and seduced through the efforts of Jezebel, abandoning thereby their loyalty to Jesus Christ in favor of substitutes offered by this false authority.⁸⁷ The fact that this seductive call to sacrilegious activity in the name of Christianity issues forth from *within* the visible organizational structure of the church makes it a doubly dangerous and sinister development. For it can be challenging enough for us – given the devil's prodigious deceptive abilities – to ward off lies that originate from outside of church organizations, but when such threats issue forth from *within* the very groups to which we have joined ourselves, it may take all of our discernment and knowledge of biblical truth to defend against them.

The "Jezebel" problem is still present in our own time. For without any doubt there are today many "church" organizations which falsely claim to represent God (i.e., "who say they are prophets, but are not"). We at least have the option of separating ourselves from any such group which in whole or in part turns away from God to pursue instead a course of worldly power and abominable practice in the manner of Jezebel. In the ninth through twelfth centuries, however, there were few alternatives. The times, the technology, the educational system, the largely feudal society, the particular economies, and the political circumstances simply did not favor a separatist reformation of the kind that became necessary (and possible) several hundred years later. It is important to recognize that the criticism being leveled here by our Lord (i.e., "I have against you that you tolerate") is directed towards the entire Church era of Thyatira and should not be construed as a fault of true believers who are not part of the problem. Changing an organization from within is always the most difficult type of struggle, and one which is usually unsuccessful. Separation "from" or extreme external pressure "from without" are, in general, the only effective ways to bring about correction under such circumstances. Our Lord therefore takes upon Himself the responsibility for punishing "Jezebel" and all those who choose to commit spiritual adultery with her "if they do not repent".

Our Lord's choice of "Jezebel" to represent the increasingly non-Christian character of the leadership of the church visible is a telling one. For Jezebel, it will be recalled, was a pagan foreigner who became queen of Israel by marriage (1Kng.16:31). Until her death, she remained a vigorous and violent proponent of the worship of Baal, a false and highly obscene religion whose practice the words "prostitution", "harlotry" and "adultery" aptly describe, both in terms of literal practice and also in terms of the spiritual infidelity to our Lord that participation in this cult entailed. After becoming queen, Jezebel soon

convinced her husband king Ahab to adopt and promote this cult in place of the worship of the One True God (1Kng.16:32-33). Jezebel's influence and power soon became such that, although she was in no way a legitimate ruler, she nevertheless functioned for all practical purposes as co-regent of the Northern Kingdom, fostering her chosen form of idolatry in every possible way, while energetically attempting to supplant the worship of the Lord by eliminating His prophets (1Kng.18:4; 18:13).

This picture has much in common with what we know of the growing degeneration and secularization in the leadership of what was an increasingly centralized and bureaucratic church during the ninth through the twelfth centuries. During this period, instead of making use of growing resources, numbers, and opportunities to promote the independence of local churches and to foster the purity of biblical Christianity, the trends in both of these crucial areas were exactly the opposite. Thyatira is the era wherein increasingly secular central authorities consolidated and expanded their power by a variety of worldly means, diminishing thereby the independence and authority of local congregations on the one hand, while on the other hand reinforcing their own power through an increasingly superstitious system of ritual and dogma of human design. Exactly at the time when it was becoming more feasible to educate the impressive wave of new converts in the scriptures, erroneous traditions, previous false opinions, and essentially pagan superstitions were actually invested with increasing authority for all the wrong reasons. That such things were endemic throughout Christendom at this time should not distract us from observing that these trends can be seen most perspicuously in the case of the "imperial" Roman church and papacy.⁸⁸

In light of the return in chapter seventeen of Revelation to the image of the prostitute, we would do well to consider the implications of our Lord's choice of Jezebel here to describe a church leadership and organization now largely metastasized into an instrument of evil. Prostitutes, in order to effectively ply their trade, need to cover up what they really are under a thick veneer of alluring lies. The whore of Revelation chapter seventeen, for example, is dressed in purple and scarlet with glittering gold, jewels and pearls. She holds a golden goblet in her hand – but inside are abominable adulteries and filth (contrary to the beguiling picture she tries to present). And it is ever so. The devil's lies are always "dressed up" in the most attractive packages possible. We should not be surprised to see in the high ritual of various cults (whose end is death) the most superficially beautiful rites, elaborate paraphernalia and places of worship, and anthropologically interesting practices (behind which lie only the bones of the dead as in the case of the whitewashed sepulchers to which our Lord refers: Matt.23:27). One has to look inside the cup they offer their unsuspecting victims to see the horrible and profane reality of what they truly are beneath their deceptive patina.

During the era of Thyatira, Rome in particular had dressed herself in all the trappings of the true believers who had gone before, adorned herself with the wealth that so many had lavished on her over the centuries, portrayed herself as the special, chosen "prophetess" – and violently treated any and all who opposed her, just as the original Jezebel did. Furthermore, the marked elevation during this period of superstition over the Bible, of the veneration and worship of creatures (angels and "saints"), of idols

("relics", "statue", "shrines", "icons", etc.), and the elaborate rituals and gaudy trappings which characterize all the pre-reform churches (and now, sadly, many of the post-reform ones as well) are clear signs of the substitution of worldly, and, in truth, pagan forms for a pure and genuine devotion to Jesus Christ (developments which in the event helped to solidify the power and influence of those in control of this meaningless ritual and paraphernalia). Jezebel, therefore, represents false authority, falsely won, opposing itself to true followers of Christ, and through the pressure of coercion and the seduction of superstition luring away any and all whose faith may contain a weak link. Jezebel represents the secularization of church organization and church aims by a non-Christian leadership intent on worldly power, that is, a complete shift of focus from evangelism and spiritual growth to the drive for secular power and position, a forceful prosecution of the "marriage" of pseudo-church and state which had also occurred in ancient Israel (under Ahab and Jezebel). This is a change of heart from the previous era so fundamental and so detrimental that it would condition the entire future course of Church history (for the worse).

Moreover, this is also the sort of thing which is extremely difficult to garner purely from historical treatments, for while the difference in orientation in a spiritual sense is analogous to the difference between day and night, secular history's weakness has always been its inability to see into the hearts of men. History can show us that "two men on a bridge" are in approximately the same place – it takes scripture to show us that they are moving in exactly opposite directions. This weakness certainly applies in the case of church history. The Hildebrandian faction, for example, is often portrayed as a "reform movement" within the church. However, the enforcement of celibacy and the fight against political appointments to the clergy and against the purchasing of positions ("simony"), had, in the event, the (intended) overall effect of strengthening the centralized ecclesiastical authority. Power may eradicate certain abuses, then be used to perpetuate far worse ones (cf. the Nazis, who ran on a platform of social reform). Although it may be true that many of the evangelism efforts discussed at the outset of this section did have the support of the central authority, that does not mean the motives of the supporters were as pure as the motives of the missionaries: obviously, increasing numbers and the expansion of areas of influences are both developments which tend to increase political power. But it is clear from scripture that blocking our vision of Christ with the false substitutes which this world provides based upon a falsely claimed authority is the essence of idolatry, worshiping in effect the creature rather than the Creator (Eph.5:5; Col.3:5). The vigorous pursuit of this process is the worst form of spiritual infidelity, the very trademark of Jezebel:

My people inquire of their wood[en idols], and their [diviner's] staff speaks to them. For a spirit of harlotry has led them astray, and they have prostituted themselves away from following their God Hosea 4:12

Whatever the good that centralized and organized collective churches may have done over the centuries, the expansion of authority beyond the level of the local congregation (and the inevitable propagation of false teaching) has done disproportionately more harm. This is the case because the amassing of power (and the motivation behind it)

requires, in general, behaviors and policies which have nothing to do with Jesus Christ, but which have everything to do with the playing the devil's game on the devil's worldly playing field. Inevitably, therefore, so-called "Christian" individuals, factions, and organizations which engage in such worldly pursuits (instead of concentrating on the Word of God and the life of the Spirit), come to rely upon the tactics and the methodologies of Satan's world-system. In other words, while such practitioners may project themselves as "servants of light", they are, in reality, serving a satanic purpose through satanic means (2Cor.11:13-15).

3. "Behold, I am going to throw her and her adulterers with her onto a couch, [yes], into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, and I will kill her children with death. And all the churches will know that I am the One who tests the desires and the hearts, and I will give to each one of you according to your works": The anticipation of tribulational events within the messages to the seven Church eras which is found here is not unparalleled. For example, we also find in the message to the Philadelphians a promise from our Lord of deliverance from that terrible time (Rev.3:10). In direct contrast to the Philadelphians' reward for faithful service, our Lord here threatens to throw Jezebel and her followers in Thyatira into "great tribulation", a clear reference to and anticipation of "the Great Tribulation", the very event whose explication forms the subject of the book of Revelation. Indeed, apart from the absence of the definite article, the Greek phrasing used here is identical to that used for "[the] Great Tribulation" (*megale thlipsis*: μεγάλη θλίψις, versus *he megale thlipsis*: ἡ μεγάλη θλίψις).

Jezebel represents the spirit of harlotry within the church visible on the part of the leadership and their supporters. As is made clear from these verses, such spiritual infidelity to Jesus Christ (whether by the leaders or the followers) is not only unacceptable to our Lord, but also incurs severe judgment from Him. The source of this behavior is the internal seduction of the visible church from within by unbelievers who are ostensibly though not actually Christians.⁸⁹

In verses 21-23, we find three parties who incur our Lord's displeasure: 1) "Jezebel": those servants of Satan in powerful positions within the leadership of the church visible during the era of Thyatira; 2) "her adulterers": supporters, enablers and abettors of this false authority; 3) "her children": the doomed offspring of this diabolical union of false authority and false teaching, that is, "converts" who are in no way genuine followers of Christ. The phrase, "you who tolerate", is, as pointed out above, a collective reference to the entire Church era. Toleration of evil is always dangerous, on any level (Deut.13:16). However, active *participation* in evil is always disastrous, for such a course destroys one's own faith even as it takes part in the sins of others: Jezebel's "adulterers" here find themselves cast upon the same "[dining and reclining] couch" with her, an image of participation in festal and obscene communion with this agent of Satan, for which allegiance they will pay a heavy price (Is.59:2).

We may take great comfort in the fact that our Lord was well aware of "the desires and the hearts" of all groups during the era of Thyatira (v.23). And thus is it ever so. He always gives "to each one of you according to your works" (v.23), so that while the

corrupt leadership is frustrated and ultimately eliminated along with all who facilitated its evil plans, and its "children", that is, those who are brought into this false family, are "stricken with death" (v.23),⁹⁰ we who truly believe in and remain faithful to Him can anticipate not only deliverance, but also an ultimate reward "not worthy to be compared" to the pressures under which we may now find ourselves as a consequence of such satanic opposition (Rom.8:18; 2Cor.4:17).

4. "And to the rest of you in Thyatira, as many as do not hold to this doctrine you who have not acknowledged Satan's "deep teachings", as they call them. I am placing upon you no further burden. Only hold fast to what you possess until I come": The first thing to notice here is that the "doctrine" and the "deep things" are one and the same, namely, the "teachings" of Jezebel discussed above. In respect to the latter element, "deep things" is the name which these false prophets give to their doctrine. They do not call their teachings the "deep things of Satan". Rather, the qualifier "of Satan" has been added by our Lord to make clear the true nature of the false "mysteries" they are promoting.⁹¹ The doctrines of the increasingly secular (and hence satanic) "Jezebel" leadership of the church visible were described earlier by our Lord as "teaching" believers in Thyatira "to commit sexually immoral acts and eat food sacrificed to idols". That is, as we have seen, to choose the course of spiritual unfaithfulness, following after the false idols of this world (substitutes offered up by these false prophets and their true master, the devil) rather than following after Christ. These "teachings", "doctrines" and "deep things" all represent the intricate fabric of lies, false rituals, and concocted human dogma designed to provide the power-hungry leadership of the church visible during the era of Thyatira with a basis for their false authority.

This is a very important concept to comprehend, and one which no Christian should fail to understand. For if an organization, group or individual claims to base their authority and teaching upon the Bible, that is an easy enough claim to verify or refute. Clearly, the presence of teachings, practices, rituals and behaviors which are not authorized by the Bible and/or condemned by the Bible would then undeniably demolish that claim. Even in cases where this acid test may only arouse well-founded suspicions, that is reason enough for an individual believer to separate and find a place where he/she is more certain that what is being taught and done is in line with the Word of God (for we are all responsible for the decisions we make on this score: see Read Your Bible: Protection against Cults). However, when organizations, groups or individuals claim a *secret* or *mysterious* authority, when they rely for their authority upon unverifiable tradition, personal interpretation which trumps the Bible, or "inspiration" and feelings as the basis for their authority, believers should immediately take care, because, even if somehow what is being taught and done is not completely anti-God, there is still absolutely no way for the believer to ascertain the rightness or wrongness of the individual doctrines being proffered when playing by these false rules. That is precisely *because* the things being taught and used to establish the authority of such false prophets are "mysteries", "deep things" (to put their deceptive spin on it) which only the thoroughly initiated may know. This reliance upon secret information, ungrounded tradition, and personal infallibility or inspiration of leadership has been a hallmark practice of cults from time immemorial. It had been true of the gnostic cults which

plagued the historical local church at Thyatira during the first century; it was true of the increasing ostentatious and centralized organization of the church visible during the historical era of Thyatira; and it is true of many "religious" organizations and cults today. For if the accountability of the Bible is removed, then no other authority on this earth is capable of keeping such individuals and groups accountable. Thanks be to God that He will call all who deceive in His Name to account, both in this life and in the next! It is for this very reason that our Lord had said in verses 21-23 above that He Himself would take responsibility for judging Jezebel, her adulterers, and her children.

In spite of the fact that "tolerating" Jezebel was, collectively speaking, a point against the Church era of Thyatira, our Lord here (addressing the true believers in her midst) stresses that serving Him is the charge that has been given to individual Christians – our primary responsibility is to pick up our cross and follow Him every day (Lk.9:23). Without personal godliness and personal growth, there can be no question of trying to reform organizations or other individuals who may not be operating within the will of God (Matt.7:3-5). If we truly are following Him, growing in knowledge, sanctification and production, then He places upon us "no further burden" (v.24) than to persevere in this good conduct while continuing to resist the seductive calls of false prophets to come to know their "deep things", meaningless lies covered by an attractive but superficial veneer. This is the essence of "holding fast", the perseverance of continued growth and service on the one hand, and of separation from all evil on the other (cf. 2Jn.1:8; 2Pet.1:10).

For Christians who really are trying to please their Lord and Savior in every way, false religion of the sort which "Jezebel" is selling is one of the most dangerous types of evil. That is because much cleverness and effort always goes into making the false system appear (from the outside) to be attractive, and interesting, and good, and "deep". But its intricacies are those of the spider's web, its external comeliness that of the whitewashed tomb, and its alluring features the charms of a prostitute. No matter how beautiful buildings, rituals, paraphernalia, statues, vestments and the like may be, we are here to worship Christ, who taught us simply, while dressed in humble attire, out of doors, and with words alone. No matter how attractive as potential objects of reverence saints, or apostles, or pastors, or popes, or Mary, or angels may be, we are here to worship God and His Son only. No matter how entertaining miraculous gifts, or mystical teachings, or supernatural events and manifestations may be, we are here to believe the truth of the Word of God and through the Word to worship Him in Spirit and in truth. For those who make use of this rule to follow Jesus Christ, that is, the rule or "canon" of His holy scriptures, there is truly "no other burden".

Christ's Promised Rewards:

1. "And to the one who wins the victory and gives heed to My works until the end, I will give to him authority over the nations. And he will shepherd them with an iron rod and crush them like vessels of clay, just as I have received [the authority] from My Father": In quoting Psalm 2 here, our Lord is deliberately contrasting the false authority of Jezebel with the true authority which belongs to Him, having been won through His

victory at the cross (Lk.10:18; Jn.16:33; 19:30; Col.2:15; Rev.5:5). For those who resist the siren song of pseudo-mysteries emanating from pseudo-authorities and adhere instead to the true authority of Jesus Christ and the true authority of God's Word, our Lord Jesus Christ promises a share in that genuine authority and a chance to participate in His millennial rule wherein all who oppose the truth will be summarily crushed. In the midst of the devil's world, it may be grating to have to endure the copious and ubiquitous lies that bombard our ears and eyes, but if we remain faithful to Him who is the truth, we can joyously anticipate not only the future triumph of what is right and true over all that is deceptive and false, but can even be a part of the implementation of that triumph.

2. "And I will give him the Morning Star": The "Morning Star" is a reference to the Person of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2Pet.1:19; Rev.22:16; cf. Num.24:17; Is.9:1-2; 42:6; 49:6; Matt.2:2; 2:9; 4:16; Lk.2:30-32; Jn.1:4-5; 8:12; 9:5). The symbolism of this title is twofold. On the one hand, at His return, in the midst of a supernatural day which is "neither light nor darkness" (Zech.14:6-7; cf. Is.13:9-13; 34:4; 60:1-2; Ezek.32:7-10; Joel 2:2, 2:10, 2:31; 3:15; Zeph.1:15-18; Matt.24:29; Mk.13:24-25; Acts 2:17-21; Rev.6:12-13), He will blaze forth at His return like the light of the brightest star (Is.60:1-3; Matt.24:29-30; 2Pet.1:19; Rev.1:7), a true harbinger of the blessed morning to come after the long dark night of the Tribulation (cf. Heb.1:3).⁹² On the other hand, Jesus in His humanity also replaces the previous chief of the created world, "Lucifer" (meaning "light bearer": Is.14:12), who was designed to reflect the light of God, but chose darkness instead, that is, to go his own way in rebelling against God (Eph.6:12; Col.1:13; Jude 1:6; 1:13).⁹³

Everyone one who wins the battle of faith and enters the next life with that faith intact will live with Jesus forever, as part of His Bride, the Church, and will thus "have Him", the Morning Star, enjoying forever an eternal and intimate relationship with the One we love, the One who died for us. Just as the promise of shared authority spoke to our coming temporal rewards (fulfilled during the Millennium), so this promise of the "Morning Star" speaks to our eternal rewards, specifically, the inestimable pleasure of an eternity of intimate fellowship with the One who bought us, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. "Jezebel", the figure chosen by our Lord for false authority appealing to vulnerable Christians on the basis of alluring but deceptive promises, represents compromise with worldly power, selling out in this life for celebrity and secular acceptance. But for all those who reject such false substitutes and cleave instead to our true partner Jesus Christ, the eternal participation we shall have in His power and His celebrity, and His eternal acceptance of us as His very Bride, will in no way be comparable to the "mess of potage" offered by the pseudo-prophets of the devil's world system (no matter how attractive they may presently seem).

5. Sardis: "The Era of Corruption" (1162 to 1522 = 360 years)

Revelation 3:1-6:

(1) And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: "This is what the One who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars says. I know your works, that your name says you are alive, but you are dead. (2) Wake up, and strengthen what remains and was about to die. For I have not found your works complete in the presence of My God. (3) So remember how you have received and did hear, and give heed and repent. If, then, you do not wake up, I will come like a thief and you shall not recognize at what sort of time I will come to you. (4) But you do have a few persons in Sardis who have not befouled their clothing. And they will walk with Me in white, because they are worthy. (5) The one who wins the victory will be dressed in white clothing in this way, and I will assuredly not erase his name from the Book of Life. And I will acknowledge his name in the presence of My Father and in the presence of the holy angels. (6) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

In contrast to the four preceding eras, with the commencement of the era of Sardis the *entire* organization of the church visible now finds itself in a state of severe corruption, so severe, in fact, that it can only be described as being "dead". This state of affairs is reflected in its etymology. The name "Sardis" comes from the famous reddish gemstone to which the historical city gave her name, that is, the Sardius (or Sard). The reddish color invoked here calls to mind the idea of sinfulness (Is.1:18; Rev.12:3; 17:3-4). And it is more than interesting to note that the Hebrew equivalent for this gem is *`odhem* (אודם). This is a virtual equivalent to "Edom", the alternative name of Jacob's elder brother, a fact which becomes all the more pertinent when one considers that Esau/Edom is a typical prophetic symbol for the pagan nations in contrast to the people of God (as we saw in part 1 of this series). So on the one hand, Sardis may be an attractive and shiny gemstone in the eyes of the world, but to the Lord, rather than being built on the Rock and comprised of "living stones" (1Pet.2:4-5), she is instead a dead stone whose red color betrays her true spiritual state. On the other hand, like Esau, though born with a glorious birth-right, Sardis too chose instead a "mess of [red] pottage" as her heritage, leaving the true spiritual blessings for others to claim (cf. Gen.25:30; Mal.1:2-3; Rom.9:10-13), and forcing the true people of God to separate from her and her pagan practices (as Jacob was forced to separate himself from the unbelieving Esau).

Even among secular historians, the "Late" or "High" Middle Ages (spanned by the era of Sardis) are generally recognized as a time of severe recession in the spirituality of the church visible. The mid-twelfth through early sixteenth centuries saw, among other things, the triumph of the imperial papacy in the west, the "great schism" between east and west, the dominance in academia of "scholasticism" (essentially a triumph of philosophy over legitimate biblical study), the inquisition (culminating in the Spanish inquisition of the fifteenth century), the violent suppression of various "sects" which were challenging the homogenous rule of Rome, the crusades (a shameless projection of political power on behalf of the church visible), and the institutionalization of all previous doctrinal error and pagan practice into the codified "canon law", an event which marked the victory of universal papal rule, and which was a recipe for effective persecution and extermination of any and all who might choose to look to scripture for

the truth instead of to the dead, anti-biblical traditions and church dogmas accreted over the previous centuries as instruments of church power.

Sardis therefore represents the third phase in the degeneration of the visible church which had begun the better part of a millennium before. What had started as an infiltration of the church organization in Pergamum, and progressed to a domination of its hierarchy in Thyatira, had by the time of Sardis permeated virtually the entire church visible, to the extent that, apart from a remnant of genuine followers of Christ, there was at this point almost nothing "Christian" about the so-called Christian church. For, at this historical juncture, Jesus, the living Word, was not the primary object of worship (statues, saints, rituals and the like had effectively obscured the fact that salvation comes through faithfully following Him alone), and His teachings, the written Word, were not the primary standard of faith and practice (the Bible had become a distant third to the authority of the hierarchy and the now codified traditions). It is not too much to say that by the end of the era of Sardis, the secular "church" visible and the spiritual Church actual had become, for all intents and purposes, two separate entities, to the point that a complete separation of the latter from the former, and the wholesale reconstitution and "reformation" of a new "church visible" became necessary to preserve the genuine community of faith on earth, one consisting of those who truly believed in and followed our Lord Jesus Christ and His teachings, the holy scriptures (cf. Jn.14:23-24).

Given the fundamental weaknesses inherent in all humanly designed organizations (and the history of the church as we have briefly sketched it in this study), these developments should come as no surprise. For human organizations are only as strong as their weakest link, and while errors (of faith, doctrine or practice) have a tendency to become memorialized by "tradition", the vibrant spiritual realities which originally underlie all genuine Christian groups are as difficult to institutionalize as they are to quantify and express, let alone to bequeath to future generations. Regardless of past successes, therefore, by the time of Sardis, the increasingly monolithic and centralized organizational church was, particularly in the west, far from God, and drifting farther and farther away with every passing year. No longer was the problem merely the existence of newly "converted" pagans whose practices and beliefs should be accommodated. No longer was the problem merely the domination of the central leadership by a power-hungry faction with an entirely secular viewpoint, agenda, and methodology. By the time of the era of Sardis, the rot, which had begun with new entrants into the organization (without likewise entering into the true Body of Christ through faith), and which had then spread to the "head" through a desire on the part of an ambitious few for worldly power achieved and exercised through cosmic means, had now metastasized throughout the entire body so that the form and practice of what secular historians would no doubt term "Christianity" was now by and large anything but. In short, the visible organization of what had been the Christian church on earth was now essentially dead, having become merely a dried-up, hollow shell of its former self, with all the true life and spirituality drained completely away. In order for this

organization to endure as a functional part of the true Body of Christ, radical surgery would be necessary

Christ's Self-description:

1. "This is what the One who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars says": It will be remembered from our Lord's own interpretation (in chapter one, verse twenty), that the seven stars are the seven angels of the seven churches, the supernatural administrative agents of Jesus Christ who carry out His commands for the direction of His Church.⁹⁴ The seven spirits, first mentioned in Revelation 1:4, are, as we saw in our treatment of that passage, a reference to God the Holy Spirit, the One who provides the power for the functioning of Christ's Church.⁹⁵ Both of these references speak to the same issue, namely our Lord's complete control of history and total authority in all things pertaining to His Body, the Church. No human failure, no satanic opposition, no historical event of any kind can frustrate the completion of His Body and the accomplishment of all which has been ordained for it. The fact that the majority of those who are part of the visible church organization in the era of Sardis are either not following Christ as they should or are not true followers of Him at all can in no way and will in no way deter the Plan of God. This self-description is a reminder to all – especially to all those in leadership positions who may suppose they possess some measure of sovereignty in the Church and to any and all who believe that their particular organization is the repository of true authority – *that it is Jesus Christ* who is the Head of the Church. His is the only true and the ultimate authority, transcendentally and completely so. Furthermore, as the Creator of the world and the Director of the Father's plan for human history, there is not the slightest chance that anything will transpire to keep His Body the Church from attaining its destined fullness and completion at exactly the right time in exactly the right way.

Christ's Particular Message:

1. "I know your works, that your name says you are alive, but you are dead": This statement should be taken at face value to mean what it unquestionably says, namely that by the time of the era of Sardis, the visible church organization was stone-cold dead. In spite of the fact that the church visible of this era continued to lay claim to the *name* "Christian", and to profess to be a *living* agent of the One true God, it had by this time become in no way a true witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. Instead, like the Pharisees of our Lord's day, it had, through the superstitions and false teachings it had come to embody, actually "closed the door" of salvation to many who wished to enter the Kingdom of Heaven (cf. Matt.23:13-14). It is thus important to note that merely using the name "Christian", a glorious title which means, literally, "[a person] belonging to Christ", does not in fact make one a Christian. The hierarchy and majority of the membership of the visible church of Sardis describe themselves as "Christians", but we have it from our Lord that in the true, spiritual sense, they "are dead". That is to say, the bulk of the Sardian congregation has not put their faith in Christ for eternal life and are not following Him with their lives. They have substituted for faith and discipleship the

rote, the ritual, the human dogma, and the superstitions of the visible church organization, superficialities which have aggregated into high pageantry by this time, but which have almost nothing to do with Jesus Christ. They have accepted the reputation of "Christian" from those who have gone before, while elaborating, augmenting, and enshrining the false traditions of these previous eras to the point of blocking out entirely the light of the truth of the gospel of Christ (cf. 2Cor.4:4). The self-identification of so many unbelievers as "Christians", even to the point of outnumbering true followers of Christ, is a trend and a problem that has continued from the era of Sardis right up to the present day, and will continue up to and through the "Great Apostasy" and the "Great Persecution" predicted to occur during the Tribulation's first and second halves respectively.

2. "Wake up, and strengthen what remains and was about to die. For I have not found your works complete in the presence of My God. So remember how you have received and did hear, and give heed and repent": The call to repentance issued here to the Sardian era of the Church by our Lord Jesus Christ is unequivocal, and is based, as this statement makes clear, upon the inferior quality of their work (with the lack of production being an unmistakable indication of the failure of their faith: cf. Jas.2:14-26).⁹⁶ Jesus therefore tells them to "wake up", to come back to life in a spiritual sense, that is, to abandon their faith in their own works, rituals, and human teachings, and instead return with all their hearts to Him who is the only way, the only truth, and the only life (Jn.14:6), to be grafted back into the true Vine, that they may once again produce a genuine crop through Him and for Him (Jn.15:1-8).

Based upon what had been handed down to them, the Sardians could have (and should have) known well the words of God and the Word of God. They could have (and should have) devoted themselves to true faith in Him and to truly following Him. According to these verses, they had "*received*" a form of authentic Christianity from the previous era of Thyatira, even though this was "*about to die*" and required strengthening. The reader will notice that the past tense (Greek imperfect) is generally overlooked by the versions, but Jesus' words here are extremely precise and the tense is important to note. When Sardis "heard" the truth, so that she was still in possession of what she "received" (i.e., the Bible and the biblical message of faith in and discipleship to Jesus), these "things", that is, the visible organization of the Church at that time, were on the point of death. The once pristine and truly catholic organized Church was "about to die" because of its agglomeration of false teachings and traditions, because of its increasingly bureaucratic, centralized, and secular hierarchy, and because of its accelerating trend towards valuing ritual, ceremony, paraphernalia, and pageantry above the holy scriptures and the true worship of Jesus Christ. This status of "about to die" therefore represents the situation *at the outset* of the Sardian era.

Unfortunately, instead of reversing course and "strengthening" what was good (the evangelistic efforts of the former era of Thyatira), and instead of weeding out what was bad (the power-hungry secular leadership and growing paganism of the church visible), Sardis has gone in the opposite direction, compounding the degenerative focus upon non- and anti-biblical practices, while at the same time failing to live up to our Lord's

expectations in the realm of faithful production ("*For I have not found your works complete in the presence of My God*"). And small wonder. For where there is no true spiritual life, and where the so-called "church" is in actuality spiritually dead, there *can* be no genuine working for God. All true "works" done for our Lord Jesus Christ must of necessity be done through Him and in Him and for Him, and there can be no true production apart from Him:

Stay *part of Me*, and I will [stay] part of you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it remains part of the vine, so you too cannot [bear true fruit] unless you stay part of Me John 15:4

Even what might be thought to pass for good cannot be counted as such when done in the energy of the flesh, apart from the Spirit of God, out of false motives, and on the basis of false pretenses. God may choose to use such efforts in the accomplishment of His overall plan (cf. Lk.9:50; Phil.1:15-18), but that does not mean that those who produce them are believers or will receive a believer's share in the Kingdom of Heaven anymore than has been the case for other unbelieving agents of the past (e.g., Cyrus the Great in Is.45:1-4: "I will strengthen you, although you have not acknowledged Me").

3. "If, then, you do not wake up, I will come like a thief and you shall not recognize at what sort of time I will come to you": Sleep is often found in scripture used as a metaphor for death (as when Jesus describes Lazarus as "asleep": Jn.11:11-14). In our context here, the sleep from which "nodding Sardis" is commanded to awake is not a physical but a spiritual death (cf. Rev.3:1: "*your name says you are alive, but you are dead*"). This statement applies to the church visible as a whole, and, as in the case of similar corporate evaluations of Israel by our Lord found throughout the Old Testament prophets, indicates that the great majority of individuals presently "members" of this group are either backsliding or entirely apostate.

The "sort of time" at which thieves come upon unsuspecting households is invariably nighttime (at least in the ancient world). Night is also the time of sleep and rest, but in the application of the analogy here, the values of good and bad have, of course, been reversed, with the peaceful "sleeper" being at fault, and night being, in a scriptural sense, a time of danger rather than repose. Light represents truth (Jn.3:20; 14:6; Eph.5:8-14), and the absence of it makes the believer spiritually vulnerable. Just as the darkness of night lends itself to sleep, so the absence of the light of truth induces spiritual drowsiness, that is, a lack of alertness which, if it progresses far enough, can result in complete spiritual "sleep" (i.e., spiritual death). The use of this analogy stressing the importance of staying awake and spiritually "quick" in the face of the darkness of this world is a common one in scripture, and is an issue which will reach its most critical stage during the dark days of the coming Tribulation (cf. Matt.24:42-44; 25:1-13; Mk.13:33-37; Lk.12:35-40; Eph.5:14; 1Thes.5:1-10; Rev.16:15).

The "visitation" our Lord warns of here is a general divine inspection and subsequent judgment upon the Sardian era of the Church (which will end with the remaking of the church visible). But the principle of unexpected divine judgment or "visitation" upon

unsuspecting spiritual degeneracy is one which holds good at all times, in all eras, and for all institutions and individuals. On a personal level, no man knows the day or hour of his death, and the teachings of our Lord are filled with examples of those who were extremely foolish from the divine perspective in wasting the opportunities God had given them, recognizing their folly only too late when once the final "visitation" of God had come upon them (cf. in particular the examples of "the rich man and Lazarus": Lk.16:19-31; "the parable of the rich fool": Lk.12:13-21; "the abusive steward": Lk.12:42-48; and see also Jerusalem's tragic failure to recognize "the time of your visitation", comparing Lk.19:41-44 with Lk.22:23).

4. "But you do have a few persons in Sardis who have not befouled their clothing. And they will walk with Me in white, because they are worthy": The contrast between the situation in previous eras of the Church and the situation here in Sardis is stark. For things have come to such a pass that far from being in danger from outsiders or from some pernicious influence within, the church visible is now *itself* almost entirely composed of unbelievers and backsliders (that is, with the exception of "the few" mentioned here). The Lord's solution to the problem will therefore not be a restructuring of the visible organization of the church, but rather the deliverance from the midst of this once proud body the remnant of the truly faithful, and the reconstitution of the "church" in the following era of Philadelphia. The statement that this remnant of those who are truly following Jesus Christ have "not befouled their clothing" is a reference to the sanctified life of the faithful few, an inevitable characteristic of true spirituality and a genuine pursuit of the truth (1Thes.4:3). This quality of earnestly seeking to walk the way the Lord would have us walk is placed here in sharp contrast to the majority's befouling of their reputations through unsanctified behavior (cf. Zech.3:3-4; and compare the command to "guard our garments" in Rev.16:15). As believers, we are all, without exception or condition, *positionally* sanctified by the blood of Jesus Christ (Rev.7:14; cf.1Cor.1:30). But we are also called upon to live our lives as if that meant something to us, and to develop an *experientially* sanctified and holy walk while on this earth (Heb.12:14). The result of following of our Lord in this proper and necessary way is the future realization of the eternal life we now possess in principle and for which we wait so expectantly, that is, the *ultimate* sanctification which we shall fully experience on that day when our bodies are redeemed in resurrection (Rom.6:22).⁹⁷ Our eternal, ultimately sanctified state is thus described here as "walking in white" with our Lord Jesus (Rev.19:14; cf. Rev.6:11), with the color and the quality of our future clothing representing our righteousness in time, righteousness which is achieved through faith in Jesus Christ, confirmed in worthy following of our Lord, and finally brought full circle in the eternal righteousness that will be ours forever with Him (Rev.19:7-8).

Christ's Promised Rewards:

1. "The one who wins the victory will be dressed in white clothing in this way": The white clothing of sanctification contrasts sharply with the Sardian "red" of sinful allegiance to this world. As indicated above, this reference to our future white clothing is descriptive of our eternal life brought to fruition at our resurrection (with which eternal life is

essentially synonymous, living forever in a perfect and spectacular new body "in the age to come": Mk.10:30; Lk.18:30; cf. Dan.12:1-2; Jn.3:16; Rom.2:7; 2Cor.5:1).⁹⁸ The reality of our eternal life, life unending and forever in paradisaical circumstances with our Lord, is a fundamental part of the gospel of Jesus Christ (1Cor.15:1-19). As Christians, people who proclaim their faith in Jesus, we should take every opportunity to remind ourselves and others of this sublime fact. For us, death is not something to be feared. Rather, it is a transition to far better circumstances, chief of which will be our reunion and experiential union with our blessed Lord forever (Phil.1:21-26; cf. 2Cor.5:1-10). And not only shall we live forever, but we shall do so in perfect bodies, uncorrupted by sin and no longer subject to any of the complaints of this world (Is.25:8; 49:10; Rev.7:16; cf. 1Cor.15:12-58). Further, the white clothing mentioned here is yet another sign of the wonder of that time to come, for we shall be dressed like our Lord "in this way" walking "with Me" in perfect, eternal clothing of brilliant white (cf. Dan.7:9; Matt.17:2; Mk.9:3; Lk.9:29; Rev.6:11; 7:9-14; 19:14; like the angels of God: Matt.28:3; Mk.16:5; Rev.4:4). All too often we believers have a tendency to undervalue the eternal life which is ours (contrast Paul's command to Timothy to "*take hold* of the eternal life to which you have been called": 1Tim.6:12). Even if we had only been vouchsafed to live forever in this imperfect world under these present difficult circumstances and in merely functional health, that would be a boon for which the unbelieving world would offer untold riches. But we have been promised so much more, a perfect body, in a perfect world, and a perfect eternal life walking together forever with our Lord Jesus Christ "in white".

2. "I will assuredly not erase his name from the Book of Life": The book mentioned here is variously titled in scripture as "your [God's] book" (Ex.32:32-33), "the book" (Dan.12:1), "the Book of Life" (Ps.69:28; Rev.3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12; 20:15), "the Lamb's Book of Life" (Rev.21:27), and, at least once, mention is merely made by our Lord to our names being "written in heaven" (Lk.10:20). As all these verses indicate, God keeps a record book in heaven containing the names of all who, through faith in Jesus Christ, are to be spared from the last judgment of unbelievers (which is the second death: Rev.20:6; 20:11-15; cf. Acts 24:25; Rom.2:5-6).⁹⁹ Believers are, of course, also evaluated by Jesus Christ on the basis of "the things done through the body" (2Cor.5:10; cf. 1Cor.3:12-15; Rom.14:10), but this is a far different matter from the last judgment of unbelievers (even should much of what has been "done" by us be deemed unacceptable). For we who complete this life with our faith in Christ intact, "will not enter judgment" because we have passed "from death to life" (Jn.5:24-30; cf. Jn.3:18; 1Jn.3:14). That fact is reflected by the inclusion of our names in the Book of Life, a solid and enduring record of our salvation (Dan.12:1; Lk.10:20; Phil.4:3). Absence from the book, however, means certain condemnation (Rev.20:12 with 20:15; 21:27). Therefore this promise to the genuine believers in Sardis that their names will not be "blotted out" is both comforting personal reassurance in the midst of so much unbelief and corruption, and at the same time strong encouragement for them to maintain their correct approach to the Christian life, a validation, in fact, of their good behavior in contrast to that of their fellow Sardians. For one clear implication to be drawn from our Lord's words here is that there are certainly *some* in Sardis who have turned away from Christ, and whose

names, without the repentance here demanded, are indeed at risk of being blotted out of this crucially important book.

May the[godless] be blotted out of the Book of Life, and may they not be recorded with the righteous Psalm 69:28

"And now, if You will forgive their sin, [fine]. But if not, [then] please blot my name out of Your book which You have written." But the Lord said to Moses, "The one who sins against Me, him will I blot out of My book." Exodus 32:32-33

The Book of Life is itself never a means of condemnation. God has other "books" chronicling the course of our lives which will form the basis of indictment for those who do not accept, or who reject, or turn away from Jesus Christ in this life (Dan.12:1; Rev.20:12). Rather, the Book of Life is a means of vindication for all of us whose names are included when we stand before Christ on that day (Rev.20:15). The inclusion of our names will be evidence, in effect, that we remained faithful to Jesus Christ in this life. Christians, faithful followers of Jesus Christ, the true "victors" in this life, are thus promised here that our Lord will most definitely not erase our names from the Book of Life, for by "winning the victory" through faithfully following Him in this life, we are assured that our names will remain indelibly written in God's Book of Life forever.

3. "I will acknowledge his name in the presence of My Father and in the presence of the holy angels": This promise is a positive corollary to what is essentially a "double negative" above: Jesus will not erase our names; He will (instead) formally acknowledge them. At that blessed point in the future, all potential for the removal of our names for the Book of Life will have passed away. For when we stand before Him on that great day in resurrection, we shall be like Him and with Him from that point forward and forevermore (1Jn.3:2). This announcing of our "name" in the court of heaven, the verification that we are enrolled for eternal life, is the reward that falls to the lot of all those who sought His glory on this earth rather than their own (Jn.7:18), who sought a true eternal "fame" rather than the vain and pointless celebrity of this present world. This is true of our relationship with the temporal church visible as well, and thus has an important application to the largely dead church-visible of the era of Sardis which we are studying here. For those who were celebrated as great and important within the visible organization of that time were in God's eyes of no account. But those who rejected the corrupt and secular trends of that era, seeking instead true salvation through pure and unadulterated faith in Jesus Christ, they are the ones whose names our Lord shall proclaim "before the Father and the holy angels". The name or reputation, the tangible counterpart of the ego, is something for which the world strives mightily and values highly. But we believers in Jesus Christ live in hope of an eternal name and an everlasting reputation (Rev.2:17), for we are here not advancing our own name, but the Name, the reputation, the Person and the work of the only Name under heaven which offers salvation, that of our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12).

6. Philadelphia: "The Era of Revival" (1522 to 1882 = 360 years)

Revelation 3:7-13:

(7) And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: "This is what the One who is holy and true says, the One who has the key of David, the One who opens and no one will lock, who locks and no one opens. (8) I know your works. Behold, I have provided an open door before you which no one can shut. Because you have a little power and have given heed to My Word and have not denied My Name, (9) behold, I am going to give you some of those from Satan's synagogue who claim they are Jews and are not but are lying. Behold, I will make them come and worship at your feet and they will know that I have loved you. (10) Because you have kept My command to persevere in Me, I will also keep you from the hour of testing which is about to come upon the entire inhabited world to put the inhabitants of the world to the test. (11) I am coming quickly. Hold on to what you have that no one takes your crown [away]. (12) The one who wins the victory I will make a pillar in the temple of My God and he shall never go out again. And I will write upon him the Name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem (which is going to come down from heaven from My God), and My new Name. (13) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Philadelphia represents the era of revival which began with the Reformation in the sixteenth century, was followed by the spread, defense, and solidification of true Christianity during the seventeenth century, the evangelical revival of the eighteenth century, and the blossoming of this genuine Christianity into the intensified dedication to biblical study and to worldwide evangelism of the nineteenth century. It would be difficult to overestimate the spiritual power and significance of this exciting time in the history of the Church (wherein the positive developments discussed here were almost exclusively the province of what has generally been called "Protestantism"). In contrast to Sardis, the third phase in a series of progressively degenerate eras of the visible church organization and a time when almost the entire church-visible was dead in the spiritual sense, Philadelphia represents a complete turn around. Philadelphia thus personifies a veritable "rising from the dead" of organized Christianity in the revitalized protestant church(es).

Along with Smyrna, Philadelphia is the only other Church era to receive a report from our Lord lacking in overt criticism. Indeed, historically speaking, the era of Philadelphia was an impressively commendable one in terms of the quantity and quality of its evangelism, in terms of the orthodoxy and intensity with which it sought God's truth through the holy scriptures, and in terms of its widespread charity directed towards believers and unbelievers alike, all this in spite of the often violent opposition it encountered, especially in the early years. It is also to Philadelphia's credit that the believers of this era essentially made "something from nothing", jump-starting, as it were, the forward progress of the church-visible through defection from the moribund organization already in place, and creating new organizations, while re-inventing the procedures, policies and approaches necessary for the sanctification and spiritual progress of the Christians of its day. All this had to be accomplished in an environment of intense hostility from the former church, occasionally severe persecution, and

significant political interference. The history of the West during these four centuries is well established and testifies to these facts, as we see a growing opposition from the old church-visible to the new path being forged by true believers (such as Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli), a political reaction leading to wars and pogroms, and a continual diaspora of these genuine Christians from antagonistic countries (such as the Huguenots from France). But rather than allowing these difficulties to cast a damper upon their search for the truth, we also see from the famous reformers themselves, their followers, and the serious theology and biblical scholarship of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Word of God and the tools for its proper study (textual, theological, linguistic, historical, etc.) developed, distributed, and exploited as never before in history. The courageous separation of Philadelphia from the dead church (16th century), her survival and triumph over the forces which sought to destroy her (17th century), the revivification and intensification of true spirituality among the faithful (18th century), and the bubbling over of these positive trends into widespread evangelism, dedicated biblical scholarship, and charitable activities (19th century), mark Philadelphia as one of the truly extraordinary eras of the Church, all in spite of the great psychological pressure of being placed in the position of having to go against the established former church.

This last point, the trauma of separation from all that one has once known and from all that was once the only center and focus of supposed "legitimacy", was not undertaken lightly by the reformers, and remained an issue throughout the era of Philadelphia. A large part of this "separation anxiety" was no doubt due to the strident claim by the now dead church-visible (from which Philadelphia had to part) to be "the one true Church", a claim it sought to support and emphasize on the basis of centuries of practiced ritual, ornate regalia, and imposing rigamarole, though not on the basis of the truth. The need to belong, to come in from the cold and be a part of a tangible "universal fellowship", was a longing and a desire that vexed the spirit of Philadelphia throughout her history (a normal human emotion which all cults exploit). It is also a concern to which our Lord responds throughout His message (see below), promising to the true believers of Philadelphia at the end of that message demonstrable and marvelous tangible proofs of an eternal fellowship beyond comparison with any temporal union (Rev.3:11-13), proofs which corresponds to our true "union" with Him which was irrefutably if invisibly theirs all the time "in Christ" (Jn.14:20; 15:5-8; 17:23; Rom.6:3-11; 2Cor.5:17; Eph.2:4-10; 2:13). There is no greater "belonging" for the Christian than the reality and the experience of belonging to Christ, and, conversely, there is no fellowship or union apart from Christ which can in any way compensate for the loss of Him – such was the essence of the choice confronting the Philadelphians. For while scripture emphatically counsels unity with our genuine brothers in the true Church (e.g., Eph.4:3), it also emphatically commands careful separation in all things intimate from both those whose behavior has crossed the line into gross sinfulness, and from those who are not, in fact, truly followers of Christ, a stricture all the more pressing to the degree that such associations carry with them subordination to false authority (cf. Rom.16:17; 1Cor.5:9-13; 2Thes.3:6; 3:14-16):

Don't let yourselves be mismatched together in the yoke with unbelievers (i.e., close, intimate association). For what partnership does righteousness have with immorality, or

what fellowship does light have with darkness? What agreement is there between Christ and Belial (i.e., the devil)? What agreement is there between God's temple and idols? For we are the temple of the Living God, just as God has said: "I will dwell among them and walk among [them], and I will be their God, and they will be My people. Therefore come out from the midst of them (i.e., the ungodly) and separate yourselves" says the Lord, "and do not touch anything unclean. Then I will receive you and will be to you as a Father, and you will be to Me as sons and daughters" says the Lord Almighty.
2nd Corinthians 6:14-18

Difficult as it may be, there often comes a time when separation from pernicious influences is not merely a prudent course but really the only possible safe one, even if the group or individual from which we separate continues to exert a strong emotional pull. This was certainly the case for all true believers as the era of Sardis came to a close. To abide within the dead edifice of the traditional church was a course of action impossible for Philadelphia if she were to remain faithful to the Lord. For the logic of continued association with this now completely corrupt and spiritual defunct organization could only mean eventual death by association and severe moral compromise, no matter how hard one might try to make spiritually acceptable accommodations (a theme amply demonstrated by Luther's life and experience). In separating herself from the established church-visible, Philadelphia made the correct choice, a difficult choice, but the correct one. Without distancing herself from the spiritually dead system of Sardis, she could not have fulfilled her duty toward the Lord (as she did in the event: "*you have given heed to My Word and have not denied My Name*"; "*you have kept My Word of perseverance*"). For things had come to such a pass by the waning days of Sardis, that only in separation could true faith and faithfulness be maintained. By the time of the early sixteenth century the church visible had become so spiritually dysfunctional that no other course of action remained to those who genuinely desired to follow Jesus Christ other than to "come out of her, My people", or to share in her sins and punishment (cf. Rev.18:4).

There is a lesson in this for us all. While no separation from a longstanding relationship should be entered into lightly, as believers, whatever the era, we do need to take all necessary measures to avoid being dragged down spiritually by negative associations, even when the parties in question are ostensibly followers of the Lord as the traditional church-visible at that time claimed to be (cf. Jude 1:22-23). This is especially true where it is not merely a matter of stumbling, or weakness, or misinformation, but of willful, dedicated, self-justifying sinful behavior on the part of these reprobate associates. In such cases, no intervention on our part is likely to be effective in bringing about change. For organizations and individuals of this sort, the only hope of repentance before faith is entirely destroyed will lie in the intervention of divine judgment (1Jn.5:16-17; cf. 1Cor.5:5; Phil.3:18-19).

That does not mean that such separations are ever easy. Indeed, the fact that it is only in extreme circumstances that this ultimate course of action should be entered into virtually guarantees that parting will prove a rough experience. It should also be noted here that in our own era this (correct) principle has often been severely misapplied.

Cults, in particular, are always eager to have new or potential adherents cut themselves off from all friends, family and former associations – the better to gain complete domination over their victims' lives. That is not at all what is being described here. Quite the contrary, the believers of the era of Philadelphia seceded from *just such a wrongfully dominating organization*, one in which it was no longer even possible to coexist and at the same time truly follow the Lord. It is only in cases where one's freedom to follow Jesus Christ has been essentially curtailed that such separation is called for. Friends, family, and longstanding associations may sometimes be time-consuming and may often fail to appreciate one's own unique approach to Christian discipleship, but that is not at all the same thing as effectively preventing our worship of God, and in no way abrogates our divinely mandated responsibility to do what is right by these persons and groups.

The fact that the believers of Philadelphia had no real choice but to separate for conscience' sake from the contemporary church-visible (other than to endure the shipwreck of their faith: 1Tim.1:19), did not lessen the trauma of separation or eliminate the grief which is often felt for an irretrievably lost relationship. This sense of loss and (vain) hope of reunion (still manifest in our own day in the form of the ecumenical movement) is reflected in the name "Philadelphia", in its etymology bearing, as is well known, the meaning "brotherly love", yet also reflecting in this context the pining of the believers of that era for unity lost. This sentimentality and nostalgia was, unfortunately, also reflected in many of the new organizational approaches adopted during the course of the Reformation and beyond. Somewhat ironically, although the forms of Church governance and ritual are in general not specifically treated in scripture (and therefore call for the greatest flexibility), it was this very nexus of issues which became the cause of the greatest controversies within the community of the true believers of Philadelphia.¹⁰⁰ Thus the name "Philadelphia" cuts both ways, exhibiting at once the genuine love of the true believers of that era for Christ and for each other, yet at the same time indicating a somewhat maudlin view of the past which soured the present, at least to some degree. This characteristic is reflected in the many facets of the reformed churches which remind and harken back to the old rituals and old ways, at least in form if not in substance. Looking back is always a dangerous thing from a spiritual point of view, as Lot's wife discovered (Gen.19:16-26; cf. Lk.9:62; 17:32; Heb.6:4-6; 10:35-39; 11:15). It was impossible (as well as inadvisable) for Philadelphia to try and build something equivalent to the traditional church-visible she had left, and there were obvious dangers in making energetic attempts to have the new churches "look and feel the same", especially since "secular form over spiritual function" had been a large part of the problem to begin with.

All this helps to explain why our Lord's evaluation of Philadelphia, while extremely positive in many ways, is not as glowing as we might have expected. For in the phrases "I know your works" and "because you have *a little* power" we see, through our Lord's very precise language here, praise of a somewhat muted nature (compare on the subject of works the clearly positive "your most recent works are more numerous than your first ones" in the case of Thyatira: Rev.2:19; or the decidedly negative "that you have a reputation of being alive but you are dead" in the case of Sardis: Rev.3:1). Despite her

many virtues and accomplishments, Philadelphia was not perfect. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that the believers of that era did brood carefully over their organizational, ceremonial and theological choices, even when many such actions were really nostalgic responses to what had been left behind. In our own Laodicean era, by way of contrast, like the dog that returns to its own vomit (2Pet.2:22), we have been all too quick to reassume many of the legalistic and unbiblical burdens which Philadelphia had left behind, even to the point of seriously contemplating reunion with the same dead edifice previously abandoned in order to ensure spiritual survival.

Christ's Self-description:

1. "the One who is holy and true": Both of these words, "holy" and "true" speak to the issue of sanctified separation. The first of the two, "holy" or "saintly" embodies the quality of sanctification, that is, a setting apart from all that is profane, a complete separation from sinfulness and evil (to which all who follow Him have been called: Heb.12:14).¹⁰¹ The second word used by our Lord to describe Himself here is "true", the adjectival counterpart of the noun "truth" in both English and Greek. Truth entails separation from all that is false and from all lies. In distancing herself from the corrupt church-visible of her day, Philadelphia was responding to the prodding of the Holy Spirit to separate from moral and spiritual corruption (i.e., to be "holy"), and to take her stand instead with the truth against the false dogma that had come to dominate the church-visible (i.e., to be "true"). Thus in using these two words to describe Himself and His own character, our Lord Jesus Christ identifies with and approves the difficult course undertaken by Philadelphia in her separation from the sinful and false traditional church of her day. For He is the truth, so that we must speak the truth (Jn.14:6; Eph.4:25). He is holy, so that we must be holy as well (1Pet.1:15-16).

2. "the One who has the key of David, the One who opens and no one will lock, who locks and no one opens": In the ancient world as is the case today, keys spoke of access and authority to enter. In the case before us here, the reference is to opportunity for action in the kingdom of heaven as it is being advanced upon the earth (Matt.16:19; cf. Is.22:22; Jn.10:3). No one has the ability to do a single thing for God's kingdom without His authority, without His power, without His permission and access (Is.26:12; Zech.4:6; Jn.15:4). All that we do "for Him" can only be done in the power of His Spirit, through the gifts He has provided, in accordance with His plan for the ages in Jesus Christ. When such authorization is forthcoming, however, then nothing can stand in the way of the authority and power of the Lord: what God has locked, no one can unlock; what God has opened, no one can shut. The opportunity for spiritual advance and service to God provided to the believers of Philadelphia came from Him, the Messiah, David's greater Son who, as Savior of the world, has "opened" the gates of eternal salvation to all who would follow Him. This description in this context is an indication to the believers of Philadelphia that despite being "locked out" of what had been for centuries the only church organization, their opportunities for personal growth and fellowship with the Lord and for service to Him were entirely a matter under His control. Rather than feeling the sting of reproach on account of being *excluded* from

their former associations, they were to take great comfort from these words, for they are here *included* in the power of God's plan to do His will. For without God, who can stand? But God is well able to make all those stand firm who follow Him (Rom.14:4).

Christ's Particular Message:

1. "I know your works. Behold, I have provided an open door before you which no one can shut": The open door represents spiritual opportunity (cf. Acts 14:27; 1Cor.16:9). Since this door of opportunity has been unlocked and opened up by the Lord Himself, it is genuine and not subject to curtailment by the powerful church-visible from which Philadelphia has separated herself. The provision of a clear way to seek God through a counter-organization truly dedicated to Him, the endurance of and perseverance through all contrary opposition, the pursuit of His truth in an organized and systematic way, and the transmission of it around the world are key characteristics of Philadelphia's four centuries, achievements or "works" which, while they may not have received the recognition of the world, were known by the Master to whom they were dedicated.

2. "Because you have a little power and have given heed to My Word and have not denied My Name, behold, I am going to give you some of those from Satan's synagogue who claim they are Jews and are not but are lying. Behold, I will make them come and worship at your feet and they will know that I have loved you": We may not be perfect, and we may not exploit and apply all the resources God gives us; we may only have or deploy "a *little* power", but in God's hands that little seed can grow, like mustard, into a massive tree. Whatever their faults, the Philadelphia era believers did make the most important investment that one can make in life. They seeded time, energy, their gifts and their material resources into the pursuit and the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. For this most prudent of investments, they are recognized by our Lord, for their works are "known", meaning that they have been found acceptable by Him, and as such they will endure forever. The "little power" brought to bear by these believers is directed toward personal spiritual growth ("*[you] have given heed to My Word*" – for the process of knowing, believing, and living the Word of God forms the basis for all spiritual growth), and towards service and ministry on His behalf ("*[you] have not denied My Name*" – for witnessing to and for Him, by word and by deed, by Christian living, Christian witnessing, and Christian service is to fully acknowledge the Name of the One who bought us).

As a result of their dedication and service – in spite of opposition and pressure from those who (falsely) claim to be the "one true Church" – our Lord also promises the Philadelphians that some of that number (described here as "the synagogue of Satan", since they represent the pseudo-church, and not, as they claim, the true Church) will eventually come and acknowledge that it is within the ranks of Philadelphia that God's favor, God's Church truly resides. These adherents of the church-visible "claim to be Jews" (that is, claim to be the true people of God), but are lying (to themselves and to God). Throughout the course of the era of Philadelphia, from its inception to its end, there has indeed been a steady stream of individuals who, while beginning in that old,

spiritually dead organization, have come to see and understand who it is that is truly of God, and have, to their credit and eternal benefit, in true repentance abandoned the false and grabbed hold of the true, just as the original reformers and their followers did. In the end, this is the greatest sort of encouragement for the slighted, outcast Philadelphians, and the greatest proof of their salutary residence within the love of God ("*they will know that I have loved you*").

It is necessary to briefly discuss the reference to "Jews", here, as this quotation has often been misrepresented. The writer of this passage (the apostle John) was Jewish, and he is here quoting the Messiah, the God-man who is Jewish in His humanity. Later in the book of Revelation, the exalted status of Israel is undeniable (cf. the 144,000 from Israel in chapters seven and fourteen, and the New Jerusalem with its gates of the twelve tribes: Rev.21:12). Being Jewish is thus a decided advantage in the book of Revelation, a point verifiable in scripture generally (cf. Rom.3:1-2). And that is *also* the case in this passage – the "synagogue of Satan" here only *claim* to be Jews. They are *lying*, and are, in fact, not Jewish at all. The negative connotations of the context therefore fall entirely upon the spiritually dead pseudo-church of the reformers' day who are being criticized for falsely identifying themselves as God's people. There is thus absolutely nothing in this passage which is in any way anti-Semitic, and such meaning can only be derived by means of gross and willful misinterpretation.

The identification of the dead, organized church on the threshold of the Reformation as "those who claim they are Jews and are not" is a telling one. For since the days of its first decline, in addition to the many features which recalled pagan forms, there had also been much about the corrupt church-visible that deliberately mimicked ancient Israel. Temples (cathedrals), sacrifices (sacraments), ephods (vestments), a ruling high priest (pope), legalistic interpretations of the Mosaic law (canon law), tithing, are just some of the more obvious deliberate attempts to cast the organization in the role of a "new Israel". This trend clearly marks an attempt to gain in (pseudo) authority through such an identification, but God knows who are truly His, who are truly the "Israel of God" (Gal.6:16).¹⁰²

3. "Because you have kept My command to persevere in Me, I will also keep you from the hour of testing which is about to come upon the entire inhabited world to put the inhabitants of the world to the test": The first point to notice here is that this promise has already been fulfilled. The era of Philadelphia has passed, as have all the great believers who served in her ranks, who "*kept My command to persevere in Me*", that is, those who obeyed our Lord's "word" to them to continue in their faith and faithfulness to Him throughout their lives. They, individually and collectively, *were* kept from experiencing the Great Tribulation, for that cataclysmic event is still future even now. The believers of the era of Philadelphia endured much: a difficult and costly separation, a period of extended persecution that followed, and the trial of reconstructing a visible church that would truly seek and serve God. They met the challenge of developing true and effective educational and scholarly communities for the preparation of teachers, and the challenge of expressing and exporting their zeal for God at home and abroad in biblically correct ways. They persevered in their faith in spite of "dungeon, fire and

sword", and they met the secular tests to faith which followed in Philadelphia's latter years, preferring to the end to believe in God and to trust in His scriptures rather than in the cancerous, materialistic atheism (most visible in its Darwinian manifestation) that dominated her final century. Having been tested repeatedly and having met every test, Philadelphia is blessed with the relief of deliverance from the final, most horrendous test fated to befall mankind before our Lord's return: the Tribulation.¹⁰³ In this blessing she stands in sharp contrast to our own era of Laodicea, who, having deceived herself in every prior test, will be forced to face that most severe testing in the history of the Church, a trial which cannot be ignored or explained a way, and one in which the true worth of every believer's faith will be laid bare for all to see.

4. "I am coming quickly. Hold on to what you have that no one takes your crown [away]": In divine terms, given that "a thousand years is as a day" (Ps.90:4; 2Pet.3:3-10), the Lord's return is indeed not far off (nor any of the events which precede it). Secondly, in terms of the very short span of every individual human life, the interval between the present and our blessed (personal) reunion with our Lord is but a brief moment distant (a perspective of which no believer can ever afford to lose sight). Lastly, while Philadelphia is promised a respite, for us today this really is a complete and urgent reality: it will not be long now before these things take place. And that is really the main point for the Philadelphia era believers – indeed for all believers – to garner from this passage. For as we saw in part 1 of this study (see section V., Rev.1:3 in loco), this principle of the imminency of the end times is an important and recurring theme in scripture, particularly in the book of Revelation. In spite of any and all other chronological information (like the promise to deliver Philadelphia, or indeed the entire schema of the Church Age as given in the messages to the seven churches), the "end" is nevertheless imminent. For the principle of "imminency of the end times" (the exact point made in this verse) means that God has the right (since our Lord's victory at the cross) to put these events in train *at any time* (whether we with our weak human logic find that contradictory or not). Therefore, we believers must be prepared for these events *at all times*.

As to the second sentence covered above, the phrase "what you have" refers to the progress in spiritual growth and ministry made by the Philadelphians, individually and collectively, while "holding on" refers to perseverance in the good behavior which has resulted in this progress in the first place. This is a sobering set of statements. For the clear implication of our Lord's words here is that, regardless of past accomplishments (even exceptional ones like those of the Philadelphians), there is no point at which the Christian can afford to rest on his laurels. As long as we are in this vineyard, it is because the Lord has left us here for a purpose. In universal terms, that purpose will always involve continued and continuing sanctification (separation from sin and evil), spiritual growth (based upon all our good applications of truth, learning and living the Word, prayer, etc.), and serving Him (functioning with our gifts, in the ministries, according to the effects that He provides). Only by continuing to press forward on all these fronts are we assured of not drifting backwards (Heb.2:1), and only by so doing do we ensure our "holding on" to the results and rewards of "*what you have [accomplished]*".

Thus forward progress is the only truly safe approach to the Christian life, the only way to make absolutely sure that we do not "lose our crown" of reward promised to all who have faithfully followed Jesus Christ in this life. For every believer who attains spiritual maturity rates at least one crown, the "crown of righteousness" (2Tim.4:8). For spiritual advance and growth to the point of maturity followed by a life that exemplifies this growth *confirmed in testing*, the "crown of life" is promised (Jas.1:12), and the highest prize is the "crown of glory", reserved for those who fulfill the call of their personal ministries (whatever these may be) in a fashion acceptable to the Lord (1Pet.5:1-4).¹⁰⁴ That all who are effective in the Christian life will receive at least one crown is certainly good news. But this verse also serves as a stark reminder that the loss of that crown (and of everything which such loss entails) is a distinct possibility if we are negligent about "holding on" and slipshod in our efforts to persevere along the path which our Lord has shown us and commanded us to walk in. This is especially true inasmuch as this particular caveat is addressed to believers of Philadelphia, even though their collective behavior comes in for some of the highest praise of any of the seven eras of the Church.

Christ's Promised Rewards:

1. "The one who wins the victory I will make a pillar in the temple of My God and he shall never go out again": This blessed promise, made to all victorious believers, that is, to all followers of Jesus Christ who complete their earthly lives with their faith in Him intact, has often been misunderstood. Clearly, we who have trusted in Jesus for the resurrection of our bodies, and whose hope is firmly set upon having a glorious new habitation just like His (Rom.6:5; 8:11; 1Cor.15:45-49; 15:53; 2Cor.5:1; Col.3:3-4; 1Jn.3:2), an eternal personal temple for the indwelling of God (compare Jn.4:21 with 1Cor.3:16 and 6:19; cf. Eph.2:20-21; 1Pet.2:4-5), are most assuredly *not* going to be turned into literal stone pillars in eternity.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, within the New Jerusalem, our final, eternal home, *there will not even be a temple*, let alone one filled with believers metamorphosed into columns of rock (Rev.21:22). No, this is a metaphor, and a blessed one which in a truly wonderful way emphasizes the solidity of our eternal fellowship with our God and with our Lord Jesus Christ. For *just like* a pillar is an integral and irremovable part of the unity of a temple, *so by way of comparison* we shall be integral and irremovable parts of God's eternal family, and in an indescribably and wonderfully intimate way. From the day of our resurrection, we shall be in full and tangible reality what we are now in essence: united with Jesus Christ as part of His Body the Church forevermore. No relationship any of us has ever known on this earth can come close to the intimacy and the wonder which we shall all experience on that day with the Father and with the Son as part of them forever in an experiential way (Rom.6:3-5; 2Cor.5:17; Col.3:1-4). This incredibly encouraging promise is all the more comforting to the believers of Philadelphia who found themselves essentially "put out" of the visible church of their day, excluded from all the architecturally great temples with all their high ritual, pomp and circumstance. Though they knew in their hearts that they were right and had to do what they did in separating from the dead traditional church, this knowledge did not completely eradicate the emotions of loss, shame, and fear. With these few words, our Lord more than restores everything they had lost by choosing what

they knew was pleasing to Him, promising them a better fellowship with God Himself, and one that will never end.

2. "And I will write upon him the Name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem (which is going to come down from heaven from My God), and My new Name": We have already made mention of our future renaming as a reflection of the role we have played in the Lord's service here on earth (see above under Rev.3:12). This engraving of each believer with God's Name and with the name of our eternal abode, the New Jerusalem, and with the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the ultimate badge of "belonging". To such a complete degree will we belong to the Father and the Son from the day our eternity commences, and to such a complete degree will we be a part of the glorious eternal city, New Jerusalem, that we will actually bear these identifying names. This is an extremely encouraging promise for believers of all eras, especially in times of isolation and shunning. For the systematically excluded, rejected, harried and despised believers of the era of Philadelphia, its meaning is all the more powerful. There is also a clear contrast here (one most important for us who are the cusp of the end times to appreciate) between these three eternal names on the resurrected bodies of faithful believers on the one hand, and the "mark of the beast" to be tattooed on the mortal bodies of those who have rejected God during the Tribulation on the other (Rev.13:16-17; 14:9; 14:11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). For those who receive the mark of the creature confirm their condemnation (and their names have, as a result, been removed from the Book of Life: Rev.13:8; 17:8), but those who refuse to take the mark to save their mortal lives, will be marked as members of the family of God and the Bride of Christ in the paradisaical New Jerusalem, memorialized forever by these blessed names (cf. Is.56:5; 62:2; 65:15; Rev.2:17; 3:12; 14:1; and compare Rev.19:12-16):

And they [believers] will see His face, and His name [will be] on their foreheads.
Revelation 22:4

Like Abraham and so many faithful believers before them, the Philadelphians were, in a sense, pilgrims wandering on this earth (cf. Heb.11:38; 1Pet.1:1). They may have felt abandoned; they may have been homeless (in the sense of being cast out of their former organization). But, for us as well as for them, the future fellowship with the Father and the Son and their permanent residence in the New Jerusalem which is "coming down from heaven" are wonders not to be compared to any privation, exclusion or suffering this life may offer us, even in the depths of the Great Tribulation to come, if only we would see these matters with our Lord's eyes. And of these things on that day there will be no doubt, for we shall bear these names of glory on our persons forever.

7. Laodicea: "The Era of Degeneration" (1882 to 2026 = 144 years)

Revelation 3:14-22:

(14) And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: "This is what the Amen says, the reliable and truthful Witness, the origin of God's creation. (15) I know your works, that they are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! (16) As it is, because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I am about to vomit you out of my mouth. [I will vomit you out], (17) because you say "I am rich and have become wealthy and know no lack". And you do not realize that it is you who are the one who is wretched and pitiful and poor and blind and naked. (18) I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become wealthy, and white clothing so that you may be clothed and so that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed, and salve to rub on your eyes, so that you may see. (19) As many as I love, I reprove and discipline. So become zealous and repent. (20) Behold, I am standing at the door and knocking. If anyone will listen to my voice and open the door, I will go in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. (21) The one who wins the victory, I will grant him to sit with Me on my throne just as I also have won the victory and have taken my seat with my Father on His throne. (22) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Laodicea represents our current era, that is to say, sadly, the era of the degeneration of the Church. The first thing to note is that we need to be careful here to make a distinction between the degeneration of the present and the corruption of the era of Sardis. For what has been happening in our own day (both as it is reflected in current events and in the prophetic description given by our Lord in Revelation 3:14-22) is not so much a willful rebellion against God as it is spiritual atrophy and growing complacency. In other words, we Laodicean Christians, collectively speaking, very much resemble the younger brother in our Lord's parable who verbally expressed an eagerness to do His father's will when called upon, but never got around to doing anything in fact (Matt.21:28-31). This sort of complacency is the chief characteristic of our era, the final era of the Church before our Lord's return. And it is indeed a character trait which commonly results from relative ease of life and material prosperity. Scripture is clear enough on the subject of God's intolerance of complacency (cf. Deut.8:10-20; 31:20; 32:15; Ps.123:4; Prov.1:22; Is.32:9-14; Ezek.28:5; Hos.13:6; Amos 6:1-7; Zeph.1:12-13). The entire reason for continued creature existence in this post-fall world we inhabit is to give us the opportunity to make a choice for Him. By this is He glorified.¹⁰⁶ And even in the case of those who turn against Him contrary to His first, best will for them, He is nevertheless glorified in the justice with which He treats them (Ps.51:4; Rom.3:4). But those who are complacent, lukewarm about the central issue of our existence, that is, our attitude towards God and His Son, for all such His patience is limited (especially in the case of those who profess to be His) as Christ's words to us here indicate so clearly.

We of Laodicea think that we have it all, but in spiritual terms we fall far short of previous eras. Our era is in fact the only one which receives no positive comments whatsoever from our Lord (until the final promise given to those who "overcome" which is common to all seven messages). Even in the case of Sardis, the era of corruption, we find "a few persons . . . who have not befouled their clothing". For in an era of reprobation such as Sardis was, it was no doubt inevitable that some would reject the trend of willful rebellion against God, choosing to follow Him instead. Not so the era of Laodicea, where rather than movement away from Him or towards Him, there is

precious little movement at all. The bland complacency and self-satisfaction which has permeated the last hundred plus years of the Church on earth has produced a general approach to Christianity so neutral, so lukewarm, that there is little to assertively shrink back from or to wholeheartedly embrace. Put another way, in a collective sense the church visible of our day (in all of its myriad manifestations and organizations) stands for very little in terms of depth, in terms of fire of conviction, in terms of spiritual fervor. It is, to use Christ's word, "lukewarm", neither willfully reprobate, nor deeply dedicated to serving Him. Like the younger brother in the parable cited above, we talk a very good game, but are essentially inert when it comes to truly following and serving Him.

The previous era of the reformers, that of Philadelphia, was not, as we have pointed out, perfect, but their "little power" with all its kinks and blemishes was sufficient to earn Christ's praise, and to vouchsafe for them deliverance from the coming "great hour of testing", the Tribulation (Rev.3:10). By way of contrast, it is precisely because of our collective need for refinement that our era will not only terminate in this fast-approaching terrible time destined to "test all those who live on the earth", but will do so in truncated fashion, with Laodicea serving out not even half of the years of the previous five eras.¹⁰⁷ For the Philadelphians "kept My command to persevere in Me", and that is the difference. We of Laodicea have, by and large, drifted into gray compromise, not out of cowardly fear or arrogant rebellion, but rather out of convenience, comfort, and complacency. This can be seen in nearly every church and church organization. Serious prayer and personal sanctification, serious discipleship to Jesus Christ, and, in particular, serious study of the Word of God by lay and clergy alike, grow rarer with every passing year. Is it not ironic that in a time when, generally speaking, Christians have more resources, more time, more opportunity, more freedom than ever before to pursue our Lord, His Word, and His will for our lives, that we, as a group, are guilty of putting aside that best part in favor of the vain pursuits of this world (cf. Lk.10:38-42)? That is the very definition of lukewarmness, namely, paying God a sort of lip-service, and, as a substitute for true discipleship, getting involved in "Christian activities" which we may find fun, interesting and entertaining but which are mere distractions from the hard work we know in hearts constitutes true spirituality and contributes to true spiritual growth. Worse yet, we have a tendency to justify this approach to ourselves – as if God could be persuaded that the colossal squandering of the time, resources and opportunities we have been given should be justified on the basis of our "good intentions" (Gal.1:10).

This tendency to self-justification of our flawed approach to the Christian life can be seen in the etymology of the name chosen for our era, "Laodicea", a compound word of two Greek morphemes meaning at the root level "people" and "just", and admitting of the translation "the [self]-justifying crowd". There is a subtle difference between this meaning and that of the Nicolaitans ("the people conquer"), for, in that former instance, it was a case of a decidedly non-Christian, actually anti-Christian element attacking and invading the church visible. In our own day, it is more a question of we Christians adopting a very lackadaisical approach to seeking God (if seeking is even the correct word), then taking comfort in our self-established low standards of who we should be and what we should be doing. Mega-churches which focus on entertainment, easy-

listening Christianity-for-everybody approaches, and an overall "relativistic" philosophy that seeks inclusion to the detriment of truth (removing the "offense" of truth, we might say: cf. Gal.5:11) are symptoms of this lukewarm trend. This trend has brought matters to such a pass in these latter days that almost the only religious fire and zeal still to be found originates from cults and heresies (and is therefore pointless as being "not according to true knowledge": cf. Rom.10:2).

Relativism, the intellectual counterpart of spiritual apathy (lukewarmness), began infecting the churches early on in the era of Laodicea. That such a philosophy and method of approach to Christian truth must necessarily result in superficiality of thought is *prima facie* obvious. More distressing yet is the fact that our relationship with Jesus Christ can never be deep and pure and fiery apart from the concentrated power of the truth contained in scripture. To ignore the teachings of the Bible or to diminish their importance in any way is, by default, to ignore the dynamic potential of a close relationship with Him with the result that everything in the spiritual life suffers, especially the individual ministries to which each and every one of us have been called.

The (relative) political stability, material prosperity, and scientific progress which followed in the wake of the era of Philadelphia was, from the standpoint of opportunity, a blessing, for it provided heretofore unheard of possibilities for individual Christians. In no other era have Christians collectively had as much time, as much freedom, and as much availability of necessary materials (everything from scriptures in original languages, opportunities for education, books, pamphlets, and potentially well-trained teachers) for spiritual advance. But as so often happens in the secular realm, the "prosperity test" is a difficult one for most human beings to handle, and followers of the Lord are in no wise immune.

Jeshurun grew fat and kicked – [Yes,] you grew fat and heavy and were sated – so that he abandoned God who made him, and considered foolish the Rock, His Savior.
Deuteronomy 32:15

In times of persecution (such as obtained during much of the Reformation), true priorities are easier for believers to maintain. For only by standing firm with God is there any deliverance, and the folly of relying upon secular forces is made clear for all to see. Following the subsiding of such forces and in a world of growing tranquility (at least as far as the Church is concerned), one in which the religion of science and material prosperity has been progressively gaining sway, the advantages to the church visible of compromise are, from the worldly perspective at any rate, very clear. On the other hand, the disadvantages of an other-worldly focus, from an acquisitive, material point of view, are also abundantly evident.

Small wonder then that, even among Christians, more are familiar with the teachings of Charles Darwin than with those of Charles Hodge. These two are, in spiritual terms, appropriately symbolic figures at the beginning of the Laodicean era.¹⁰⁸ Hodge, perhaps the last, great Bible-oriented theologian of worldwide stature, represents the high point of applied linguistic, systematic and historical knowledge to the search for truth from

the scriptures by spiritual means and on God's terms. Darwin, on the other hand, represents the rise in influence of an entirely different philosophical point of view: an empirical search for "answers" (one can hardly call it truth) from the material world apart from God and apart from the Bible. The former looked to God alone for direction, the latter to Man and Man's scientific prowess with hardly a glance in God's direction. While no one would wish to turn back the scientific-technological clock, it is fair to say that the ascendancy of the Darwinian point of view and the decline in terms of general favor of Hodge's approach within society at large (that is to say, the increasing reverence paid to science from all quarters, and concomitant decrease in respect for seeking the truth from God's Word) has made no little contribution to the general character of this last of the seven Church eras. Even Sardis, as we have just noted, had "some who had not stained their garments", but in Laodicea, most all of us are guilty of being over-proud of things we ought not to be proud of at all (prowess in the material world), and are in general less interested in the Lord and in the Bible than any previous generation of the Church. That is not to say, dear reader, that there are not some of us intent on "bucking" this trend (one would hope that the writing and the reading of these words is an indication of just such a healthy attitude), but we are still all children of our times, so that we all need to take to heart our Lord's words directed specifically to us and examine ourselves on this score (Ps.139:23-24; 2Cor.13:5; Gal.6:4).

Those of us who do stand firmly with the Bible are constantly asked to defend such a position from its philosophical base, as if it were an outrageous, outlandish, and completely unbelievable point of view in light of the modern world's vast materialistic knowledge. Assaults on scripture and its authority, however, are all too often "born well" (i.e., accepted as reasonable) in a turning of proper values on their head analogous to the Corinthian rejection of Paul's inspiration and authority (2Cor.11:20; cf. Jn.5:43). And just as the Corinthians were more responsive to those who treated them poorly (2Cor.11:20; cf. their response to Paul's reluctant use of harsher methods: 2Cor.7:8-16), so in our own era those seeking something more than lukewarmness are often drawn in by hyper-authoritative false teachers and cults (who likewise "enslave, exploit, take advantage, push, slap in the face": 2Cor.11:20). This sad state of affairs is the result of a failure by both leaders and followers, by "clergy and lay". For, in general terms, our Laodicean era has seen for the most part rank and file Christians not respecting the authority of teachers and leaders as they should, and teachers and leaders not being worthy of their respect in the first place. The instances where both ends of this essential equation have been adequately fulfilled have been few and far between. What has been lacking from all parties is true commitment, true dedication, a true willingness to sacrifice and strive for what we claim with our lips is the most important thing in our lives, our relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ, to learn to be like Him and to truly follow Him, joining fully in the ministry to which He calls us (and we are all called to something).

In our defense, it is possible to say that the satanic attack upon the fire of Christian zeal in our era has been incredibly subtle and effective. Rather than a direct assault upon our existence, values and standards, the adversary has instead been playing a game of enervation since the beginning of the nineteenth century, seeking the gradual atrophy of

fervent spirituality and unreserved faith rather than blatant apostasy (a perfect preparation for just such an apostasy which will indeed break forth during the Tribulation's first half). One can trace this tactic through all areas of human life and society during the Laodicean era. Whether it be Darwinism and scientific relativism (i.e., what truth there is must be sought in the material realm), psychoanalysis (i.e., human rather than divine means of problem-solving), or the growing scholarly skepticism about the Bible (i.e., "higher criticism" et al.),¹⁰⁹ myriad "modern" societal trends have as their practical effect the diminution of faith. And this attack has been two-pronged. For not only have we been resoundingly and continually told by the pillars of the scientific and scholarly community that our faith has been misplaced, but we have also been tempted by the offering up of science and technology as a *substitute* for God's truth. Ideally, we who believe in God ought to be able to avail ourselves of whatever is at hand in our day for personal sustenance and the prosecution of our individual ministries (provided we do so in a sanctified way) without at the same time trusting in these worldly media as if they were the means of that sustenance (every truly good thing we have comes from God: Jas.1:17; cf. Job 1:21). But every time we are led *to rely* on the things of this world instead of upon Him, our faith is undermined, and it has certainly been a trend of the modern age that the development, expansion and exultation of scientific, material and technological means has led to a corresponding rise in their valuation in our collective thinking (a trend against which believers need to guard themselves carefully).

On the science and technology side of things, this is particularly evident in the realm of medicine, where Satan uses the latent fear of death so universally human as a powerful hammer to blunt the believer's faith by encouraging a *reliance* upon the healing arts to the neglect of God when bodily troubles arise (Heb.2:15; cf. Ex.15:26; 23:25; Ps.103:3; 107:20; Hos.11:3). On the academic side, the subtle corruption of simple faith in the truth of scripture can be clearly seen from late nineteenth and twentieth century trends in the "scholarly" treatment of the Bible. Source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, archaeological revisionism, scientific attacks on the accuracy of the Bible, the "quest for the historical Jesus", attempts to isolate the true "kerygma" of the Gospels, demythologization, etc., etc., all represent a self-indulgent, self-glorifying quasi "search for the truth" of the Bible in word, but in deed are dedicated to destroying it (out of arrogance and jealousy for its true power). We have in just a few short generations come to the place that great institutions of learning expressly founded to teach and understand the Bible are now only interested in its refutation (to the extent that they are concerned about it at all).

The fact that Laodicea is also the only one of the seven Church eras where there is no external or internal opposition mentioned (besides "dead" Sardis where the true believers are forced to withdraw entirely) means that by the time of our era the leaven of complacency has so thoroughly permeated our collective thinking that it is scarcely possible to make a distinction anymore between right and wrong, at least as far as the teachings of the various visible church organizations are concerned. The result is a situation where instead of opposing groups expressing sharp points of view, we find one largely homogenous collection of groups (differing only in the superficialities of appearance) which is "neither hot nor cold". The effectiveness of this satanic strategy of

relativism is clear. For instead of posing a direct challenge to the truth, the compromise of faith brought on by the progression of prosperity, laziness, loose standards, and apathy about the Word of God, has gradually rendered the Church of our era (taken collectively) a largely insipid, superficial, vapid, and "lukewarm" institution. In terms of our dedication to the Word of God, the Person and the teachings of Jesus Christ, this "easy-listening" Christianity, as we may characterize it, has essentially reduced the vigor of a great symphony performed live to recorded "elevator music" playing in the background – it may be recognizable as music on some level, but it is not the same thing, not the *real* thing. In just this same way, our "Christianity" has all too often become something merely gratuitous and incidental for the purpose of light entertainment, rather than something to be treasured, respected, and given our full attention.

The entertainment portion of this equation is one upon which we should reflect for a moment. In all serious undertakings, it is very easy for an element of entertainment (ostensibly employed to gain attention) to become the end as well as the means. It may well be asked, if the God of our salvation and the sacrifice of His Son are not sufficient in themselves to gain our attention, then to what end entertainment? But pleasant and pleasurable distractions are virtually the only thing left in much of what passes for Christianity in our day. For lukewarm Christians, fun-filled services of little or no true spiritual content seem a perfect way to enjoyably "cover the base" of their responsibility to God. This comes close to being the very definition of the "lukewarmness" for which Christ indicts us in these verses. This trend to lukewarmness in all of its aspects – science over faith, materialism over spirituality, glossy appearance over inner reality, quantity, celebrity, and enjoyment over quality, true substance, and sacrifice – has the effect of rendering us all the more vulnerable to the Great Apostasy predicted during Tribulation's first half which is all too soon to come.

Christ's Self-description:

1. "This is what the Amen says, the reliable and truthful Witness, the origin of God's creation": All of these elements in Christ's description of Himself to us speak to the authoritative nature of His words. That is to say, contrary to the entire fundamental attitude of our era, we are not the font of truth and authority – rather it is Jesus Christ who, as the Head of Church, is the ultimate and the only true source of truth, our ultimate and our only true authority (1Cor.11:3; Eph.1:22; 5:23; Col.1:18; 2:19).

The "Amen": As "the Amen", Jesus is the truth (Jn.14:6), and the One who ratifies and declares truth. The word amen, a Greek transliteration from the Hebrew, means "in truth", or "truly". Therefore as a title for our Lord, it clearly underscores the fact that He not only truthfully represents the truth, but that He *is* the truth. This is an important attention-getter for the constituents of a Church era who make it plain by our actions and our words that we believe it is we who have all the answers. The folly of establishing one's own standards, then judging oneself (favorably) by such self-developed standards, is patently obvious and incredibly arrogant (and is declared to be so by the scriptures:

2Cor.10:12-13). The only correct and proper standard of faith and practice for Christians is the Bible, the very words of our Lord Jesus Christ who is the "Logos", the Word of God (Jn.1:1-2; 1:14; 5:39; 6:63; 8:47; 17:8; 18:37; 1Jn.1:1; Rev.19:13; cf. Is.55:11; Jn.17:17; Rom.10:17).

The "Witness": In refutation of our false assertions about ourselves (claiming to be rich and wealthy when we are really blind, naked and poor in spiritual terms), Christ is here a "Witness" to the real truth of the matter, a witness who is both "reliable" (i.e., "faithful" in all He reports), and "truthful" (i.e., the content of His witness is completely accurate). Therefore we are without excuse before Him no matter how we might excuse ourselves in our own eyes, for He knows what we are really like, knows what we really esteem. As the reliable and faithful Witness, truth issues forth from Him, not from us. We may belittle the scripture in our thoughts and words, and by our deeds, but His Word still reigns supreme. Moreover, the day is fast approaching when all our self-deception of this sort will melt away in the brilliant light of His presence, on His return to rule the world in righteousness, when the secrets of our hearts will be laid bare, and all the truth will out (Rom.2:16; 1Cor.4:5; cf. Eccl.12:14; Is.26:21; 1Cor.3:13; 2Pet.3:10).

The "Origin of creation": Although we are merely creatures of Christ's making, as the Father's Agent, Jesus is the very "Origin of creation" (Jn.1:3; 1Cor.8:6; Col.1:16; Heb.1:2). This final phrase in our Lord's self-description deliberately recalls the many passages of scripture where the arrogance of the created thing ("the pot") is held up for ridicule in the face of the power and authority of the Creator (the "Potter": Is.29:16; 45:9; 64:8; Jer.18:6; Rom.9:20-24). As this title makes plain, it is surely we who must take our lead from Him, and not the other way around. Consideration of His innate authority as the One who has made us ought to be corrective of the attitude endemic in our era that would have us dictate to Him what is acceptable and what is not.

Christ's Particular Message:

1. "I know your works, that they are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! As it is, because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I am about to vomit you out of My mouth.": Christ's initial comment here about the quality of our collective work in the era of Laodicea is quite a shocking one, and is clearly meant to hit us where it hurts. For if there is one thing which believers of this era might think to put forward in their defense it is precisely this: "we may be found wanting in our zeal, spirituality and spiritual growth, but surely our *works* must in some way make up for our faults!" This is a common and a dangerous error made by all too many believers and pseudo-believers throughout the ages. The idea that we can ever "do something for God" is an entirely erroneous, arrogant, and blasphemous notion (1Cor.4:7; cf. Rom.11:35). We were not saved by our works but by grace (Eph.2:8-9; cf. Rom.11:6). How then do expect to be rewarded for our works apart from grace (Phil.2:13; Eph.2:10)? Yes, it is true, a large part of God's purpose for our lives as believers in Jesus Christ is to perform "works worthy of our repentance" (Matt.3:8; 5:16; Lk.3:8; Acts 26:20; Gal.6:9-10; 2Thes.3:13; Tit.2:14; 3:1; 3:8; 3:14; 1Pet.2:12; 2:15). But it often escapes the notice of the inhabitants

of Laodicea, who are more impressed with their own works than with the gifts and especially with the Gift which God has given us, that it is in fact God who has given us everything we have, "breath and life and everything else" (Acts 17:25). Indeed, we would not be able to serve Him were it not for the fact that He has given us all distinct spiritual gifts, particular ministries, and has foreordained their effectiveness (1Cor.12:4-7). He has given us His Spirit to guide, empower, and encourage us in our service (Zech.4:6). And He has *even prepared the very works we should do* in eternity past (Eph.2:10). It should be very clear to all serious, Bible-reading Christians that we have absolutely no basis for boasting before Him because of works which we have done (Rom.4:2), for we can do nothing apart from Him (1Cor.12:3). True good works are, moreover, part of a spiritual continuum in the Christian walk. It should go without saying that for such works to be valid, the person in question must be a believer in Jesus Christ (for there is no salvation by works). Furthermore, it is only after growing spiritually, recognizing one's distinctive gifts, and preparing for the unique ministry God has ordained for each of us individually, that production becomes most effective. In other words, anything that is not done according to God's plan, according to His will, and according to His ground rules, is likely to be only slightly effective, if indeed it is even to be adjudged "good works" by Him at all. Jesus is the true Vine, and we are merely branches in Him; as He told us, only by "remaining in Him" can we bear true fruit (Jn.15:1-8). That is to say, only by being truly His disciples are we in a position to produce works which are not "lukewarm", works which truly glorify our God (Jn.15:8).

So therefore we may say that a "cup of cold water given in the Lord's Name" – a right thing done in a right way from right motivation – will not lose its reward (Matt.10:41-42), but millions given only ostensibly on Christ's behalf, or from wrong motivation, or to a bad cause, not in accord with God's plan, are pointless exercises in self-promotion at best (and arrogant attempts to advance our own pseudo-righteousness at worst). This error, of seeking salvation and personal righteousness by works, became institutionalized in the pre-reform church-visible, and was no small contributing factor to the death of spirituality in that institution. For it is the essence of arrogance to assume that God needs anything from us (Rom.11:35). How are we any better than idol-worshipping pagans when we take such an approach (Acts 17:24-25)? We may take it as a matter of faith based upon our Lord's words here that there is much that is being done in the church visible on earth in our day which is ostensibly for Christ, but which is in reality only "wood, hay and stubble", works of the flesh issuing forth from false motivation and destined to be burned when Christ evaluates our lives (1Cor.3:12-15).

Such is our Lord's evaluation of Laodicea's "works" *in the aggregate*. Clearly, not everything done in this era has been to no avail, but the fact that this indictment is a true indication of Laodicea's character should give us all pause. The command following this blanket evaluation to "become zealous and repent" is therefore one which all believers of our era should take to heart, no matter how much we may feel that it does not apply to us personally. For if the logic of our Lord's words here has any meaning it is that to the extent that we *do feel* this assessment is for others, *to just that extent* it is likely to be

applicable to us. It is, after all, those in these verses who think themselves rich and well off (in a spiritual sense) who are in reality poor and naked and blind.

The need to prod ourselves to take to heart Christ's command to us to "become zealous and repent" is all the more pressing given our Lord's clear disgust here with the attitude of complacency (with which Laodicea is infected). Complacency, the state of being (spiritually) neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm as far as our enthusiasm for God is concerned, is largely a question of priorities. We say that we love and value God . . . but how much? He loved and valued us enough to make the ultimate sacrifice of His own Son on our behalf. His love, His "zeal" has been made clear by this supreme "work" on our behalf, and by all His myriad, manifold and miraculous works of care and concern for us. What do we have to show in return? The answer in the case of Laodicea is "not very much at all", for her works are "neither hot nor cold", not the stuff of intense love and sacrifice, not the stuff of true "zeal".

When it comes to priorities in the era of Laodicea, God is only one among many, and, generally speaking, not the top priority. For a zealous/jealous God (such as our God is), a God who demonstrates His zeal toward us every day and did so once and for all so overwhelmingly in the gift of His Son (1Jn.4:10), this lukewarm attitude of esteeming Him, but not terribly highly and not first and foremost beyond all other persons and things (whether gods, idols, or false priorities), is an abominable one ("You shall have no other gods before Me" is the *first* commandment: Ex.20:3). The only acceptable attitude in His eyes is the one Paul confesses: to count the world and all that is in it (apart from God) as "rubbish", and to count everything accomplished and gained or capable of being accomplished and gained in this world as nothing in comparison to gaining Jesus Christ's approval on that day to come (Phil.3:7-11).

It is just this eternal perspective which most consistently eludes our era. In contrast to the unequivocal faith of earlier times, one hears today a constant litany of doubt, doubt about heavenly realities, about eternal life after death, about eternal rewards, about the resurrection. And even where these truths essential to a healthy and zealous Christian walk are accepted, their logic is all too often not being applied to the way we are living our lives. For while Paul's "for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" ought to be our point of view (Phil.1:21), all too often the attitude is rather one of prizing the present life and fearing death. Fear of death, doubting the glories to come, and a hyper-myopic focus upon this earthly life are all, in the case of believers, symptoms, symptoms of a consistent failure to learn and apply the truths of the Bible, of poor priorities translating themselves into a poor appreciation and application of the true realities, in short, of lukewarmness, both in cause and effect. For as true zealous followers of Christ, we must understand and believe that God rewards our faithful service here on earth (Heb.11:6; cf. 1Cor.3:8; Heb.6:10; 11:26; Rev.11:18; 22:12), believe in the surpassing value of the rewards to come as compared to anything to be gained on earth (Rom.8:18; 2Cor.4:17; cf. Matt.6:19-20; Phil.1:23), and believe in the resurrection (Jn.11:25; 1Cor.12:19). Through such deeper realities, we have been liberated from the need to fear death (Heb.2:14-15; 1Jn.4:16-18; cf. 1Cor.15:54; 2Tim.1:7-10). What we have in the future is so much better than anything this world offers, it is on those things to come that we are to

put our focus (Col.3:1-4). It is not this present world we are to love (Jas.4:4; 1Jn.2:15-17; cf. Lk.14:26-27; Jn.15:19), but the one to come where our true citizenship lies (Phil.3:20).

In addition to being attributable to lukewarmness in the way we are living our Christian lives (i.e., in spiritual immaturity as a result of a failure to grow spiritually in spite of all opportunities to seek God and His truth), this culture of Christian doubt is in no small part a function of the relativism mentioned earlier. Part of the problem is that we, as an era, have accepted an apparent reality not only dictated by the eyes, but also reinforced by the authorities of this world, giving far too much heed to such preachers of relativism, while paying far too little attention to the words of God on this subject. We need to remember that there are no truly independent agents in this world. We are not our own. Therefore we believe what we listen to, what we give our attention to (whether it be to the diabolical ruler of this world or to the Spirit: Gal.5:16-18). There is no denying that we as a Church era have been overly concerned with the noise and wisdom of this world, the scientific, technical and cultural babble that spouts forth in an uninterrupted stream from every media outlet. But how much attention do we pay to God? How much time and effort do we devote to seeking Him and His counsel? How often do we read our Bibles? How often do we pray? How much time and effort do we spend on seeking out and understanding the teaching of His Word? For we are here in this world not to allow it to recast God in our thoughts through a weak appreciation of the truth (i.e., relativism: cf. Jer.23:26), but instead to completely *transform* our worldly thinking through His truth and His Spirit (Rom.12:2; Eph.4:22-24; cf. 2Cor.5:17; Col.3:9-10).

These are all things the great believers of the past knew and understood (through solid grounding in the Bible and its teachings), so much so that these things were set deep in their hearts as fundamental principles of all they thought and said and did. For those who really and truly believe the truth, the truth will influence everything in the life, and apart from such belief in the truth, there can be no true enthusiasm and zeal. Temporary, short-lived fervor may be worked up or induced by a variety of means (e.g., pep-talks, inspirational music, or emotional rituals), but such pseudo-zeal dissolves like the morning mist just as soon as the stimulus that produced it is removed, and it is of absolutely no use under the pressures of life (let alone the pressures of the coming Tribulation). In the place of consistent teaching of the Word of God, teaching which delves into every aspect of God's truth and into every portion of the scriptures, we have in this era of Laodicea settled for a series of superficial and simplistic approximations of what the Bible has to say on a number of important fronts. Three key examples of this unhealthy trend include the teachings of "the rapture", "organizational security", and "eternal security" (all three of which we have studied in the past: see [Peter's Epistles #27: "Three Doctrines which Threaten Faith"](#)). The importance of preparing for the Tribulation has been undermined by the simplistic and incorrect teaching of "the rapture". The importance of taking personal responsibility for spiritual growth has been undermined by the mistaken emphasis on church membership and denomination-centered Christianity. The importance of individual sanctification and discipleship to Jesus Christ has been undermined by the erroneous teaching of "once saved, always saved". All three of these teachings, oversimplifications to the point of incorrectly

stating the scriptural view, are examples of how inattention to the Bible has contributed to the lukewarmness of our era. For if we were not to have to face the Tribulation, if we were spiritually "on the right track" merely on the basis of participating in an organization, and if we were secure for all eternity no matter what we did in this life, then a great deal of the natural motivation for the zealousness God requires from us would be lacking. Such is not the case in fact, but in the minds of many of those in our era who should be the most zealous, faulty teachings of this sort which are seen as true serve to quench much of the ardor for Him that would otherwise be theirs.

Akin to these three prominent false teachings that enervate faith is the notion that material prosperity on this earth, especially extraordinary material prosperity, is the ultimate and necessary result of a close relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We have treated before in some detail the fallaciousness of this idea (known in its most extreme form as "the prosperity gospel"), but what needs to be pointed out here is that even a tacit or barely conscious assumption that our material wealth is in some way related to the attainment on our part of some exceptional spiritual status is inevitably a misreading of events and incredibly dangerous in the bargain.¹¹⁰ God does bless in material as well as spiritual terms, and it is true that some great believers of the past were the beneficiaries of astounding worldly blessings. Job, Abraham, and David are all recorded in scripture as owing their exceptional wealth and status to God – but how many of us would wish to experience the exceptional trials and tribulations these three great men of God endured? And which of us honestly thinks that believers today are spiritually superior to those of the early Church when poverty, especially as reckoned in today's terms, was the rule among the community of the faithful (cf. Acts 2:44-45; Jas.2:5-7; 5:1-6)? Yet even among the relatively impoverished believers of that day, it is the poverty stricken Philippians who receive scriptural praise – superior to that of the more well-off Corinthians (compare Phil.4:10-19 with 2Cor.8:1-9:5).

So consider your calling, brothers, namely [the fact] that [there are] not many who are wise by fleshly standards, and not many who are in positions of power, and not many of privileged birth [who have been called to Christ]. But God has instead chosen what is foolish from the world's point of view, that He might put to shame the wise. And He has chosen what is weak from the world's point of view, that He might put to shame the strong. And He has chosen what is ignoble from the world's point of view, yes, what is considered completely worthless, of no account whatsoever, that He might do away with what does count [in the world's opinion], so that no flesh may boast before God.
1st Corinthians 1:26-29

The principle stated in these verses applies equally to the matter of personal wealth, whether acquired or inherited. Relative prosperity is a circumstance of life and ultimately depends upon our Lord's providence and disposition. To the extent that material wealth enables a person to accomplish the purpose God has for him (such as in the case of the gift of giving: Rom.12:8), it may be considered a spiritual asset. But to the extent that it alienates the believer from God (as wealth has a tendency to do), it may be rightly considered a spiritual liability. This is the real point behind our Lord's command to the "rich young ruler" to give all that he had to the poor (Matt.19:16-26). Christ was

not telling all His future disciples to liquidate all our assets to the point of having nothing (for this would leave us without the means to serve God: cf. Lk.22:35-36), but rather to depend and rely upon Him rather than amass wealth (Matt.6:19-24; cf. Job 31:24-28; Ps.49:6; 52:7; 62:10).

Satan's accusatory words directed at Job, "strike everything he has and he will curse You to your face", were, in the normal course of things, entirely wrong as the devil no doubt knew (Job 1:11). For it is **prosperity** that has a tendency to detach most of us from God, while hardship has exactly the opposite effect (Ps.78:34-35; cf. Deut.4:30; Hos.5:15). Job, Abraham and David were all exceptional in that they continued to revere and walk with God to an extraordinary degree *in spite of the fact* that they had already been made rich and powerful by Him. It is no coincidence, therefore, that each of these three were also called upon to undergo exceptional testing to demonstrate the genuineness of their faith and the depth of His mercy as an example to us all (Heb.11:17-28; cf. Rom.15:4). A far more common reaction to material prosperity, whether or not it comes as a blessing from God, is to grow negligent in respect to our relationship with Him, and to make the faulty assumption that the presence of such *wealth* is an indication of spiritual *health*. The result of this more common human reaction to prosperity is the very complacency we see in the case of Laodicea (Deut.8:10-20; 31:20; 32:15; Prov.30:7-9; Is.32:9-14; Ezek.28:2-5; Hos.12:8; Amos 6:1-7; Zeph.1:12-13).

When I fed them, they were satisfied. Once they were satisfied, their hearts became arrogant and they forgot Me.
Hosea 13:6

When we consciously or subconsciously take credit for our prosperity and arrogantly begin to think of ourselves and our possessions as of the highest importance, then God is diminished in our eyes – but that does not in any way mean that He is diminished in fact! For all our present material well-being, Laodicea is not the Millennium. And in the progression of Church eras related above, it seems clear that the material prosperity we enjoy today is much more the result of residual blessing from the era of Philadelphia than from our own efforts (in a manner analogous to spendthrift children enjoying an inheritance from thrifty parents). For all those who feel that we are on the threshold of even greater material wonder (as a result of our "great efforts" and "great spirituality"), what a shock it will be to find the era of Laodicea "vomited out" instead, deposited not into a time of unprecedented blessing, but straight into the Tribulation, and there complacency will come to an end.

Let us therefore resolve to combat this dread complacency which is so characteristic of our time. Let us put God and His Son first in our hearts and first in our lives. If we do esteem Him beyond everything else in life, then we will seek Him and seek His truth – not as a matter of occasional interest, but as a matter of sincere and consistent devotion. If we do this, then lukewarmness will cease, and good works that are definitely "hot" in God's estimation will follow as a matter of course, hand in hand with our spiritual growth.

2. "[I will vomit you out], because you say "I am rich and have become wealthy and know no lack". And you do not realize that it is you who are the one who is wretched and pitiful and poor and blind and naked. I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become wealthy, and white clothing so that you may be clothed and so that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed, and salve to rub on your eyes, so that you may see":

Laodicea's estimate of their spiritual situation is entirely incorrect. In contrast to the humility of a Paul, who, erring on the side of caution, refused to become overconfident about his own spiritual status (exceptional in the extreme though it was: 1Cor.4:3-5; Phil.3:10-14), believers in the era of Laodicea have a tendency to assume the best, even though the spiritual circumstances suggest the opposite (cf. 1Cor.4:7-8). Laodicea assumes she has cause for rejoicing and ought to be envied by others, but in spiritual things she is in wretched shape, an object of pity for all who see things aright. Laodicea assumes she is rich, inferring spiritual riches from material ones, but in reality she is in dire spiritual poverty, in spite of (and, in part, because of) her material wealth. She may have constructed massive and impressive church buildings, but the spiritual content of what is going on in them is lamentable in the opinion of our Lord. Laodicea assumes she is well-dressed, but by and large her deeds are unacceptable to God, and she is unwittingly walking around naked, her shame visible for all with spiritual sense to see. In short, Laodicea assumes she knows it all, but in fact she is blind to the true nature of her spiritual condition, and her arrogant self-esteem has been entirely misplaced. Collectively speaking, Laodicea is in for quite a shock at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ.

As individual believers of this era, therefore, it certainly behooves us to give heed to these verses and to make sure that we are not following in this shameful pattern which is characteristic to Laodicea in general. To do so, we need to follow Christ's specific instructions here. Our Lord commands all of us to "buy from Me" gold, clothing, and eye salve. The "gold refined by fire" (for representing our achievements) stands for genuine spiritual accomplishment, that is, acceptable production for God (cf. Matt.6:19-24; 1Cor.3:12-15). The "white clothing" (for covering shame) represents personal sanctification, that is, a Christian walk that brings honor to our Lord rather than reproach (cf. Is.61:10; Zech.3:4; Rev.3:4-5; 7:9-14; 16:15; 19:14).¹¹¹ The "eye salve" (for clarifying the vision) symbolizes spiritual discernment, that is, true wisdom and enlightenment which come from spiritual maturity (Matt.6:22-23). All three of these "purchases" (rewards for true works done for God, a holy life, and wisdom) are results of spiritual growth, and the process of spiritual growth is the "coin" with which they are procured. What is most important in the Christian life cannot be bought with money. It takes commitment and dedication to the painstaking process of spiritual growth to achieve the genuine production, sanctified walk, and spiritual discernment which are part and parcel of the mature Christian's life for Jesus Christ. Consistent, disciplined, and heartfelt Bible reading, prayer, Bible study, the application of Bible principles to our lives, and production from our spiritual gifts to aid the rest of the Body of Christ in this

same endeavor constitute the fundamentals of this process, with each part becoming deeper, more effective, and more blessed the closer the believer walks with Christ.

Tragically relying upon material wealth instead, too many of our era of Laodicea have rejected (by omission or commission) this admittedly demanding process in favor of mere appearances. Our Lord's word to them is a clear reproof. Whether one rejects or neglects the Word of God (instead of reading it, praying according to it, being taught by it, living it, and serving in accordance with it), though this may seem to make for an easier life and therefore be "wise" in the eyes of the world, such a course of action is, in truth, complete folly (Job 5:13; Jer.8:9; 1Cor.3:19).

3. "As many as I love, I reprove and discipline. So become zealous and repent. Behold, I am standing at the door and knocking. If anyone will listen to My voice and open the door, I will go in to him and dine with him, and he with Me": Reproof (*elengchos*; ἔλεγχος) is generally verbal, while discipline (*paideia*, παιδεία) is more normally corporal, but the two are sometimes blended together as they are here to suggest the whole gamut of warning and punishment.¹¹² What we have here is a very clear picture of our Lord getting the attention of the lukewarm believers of Laodicea through a series of measures which escalate from verbal threats to serious and painful punishments. As this verse makes clear, He would not be acting in this way towards us if He did not love us. It is certainly comforting for us to be reminded of the fact that our Lord's "rod and staff" are ever used with an attitude of love and mercy, and always for our own good (Ps.23:4; Heb.12:4-11). At the same time, however, punishment, no matter how fairly and lovingly administered, and no matter how positive in its ultimate effects, is still painful and embarrassing to experience (2Cor.7:8-12):

Now no punishment is a cause of rejoicing as it is being experienced, but rather of regret – only later does it bear fruit for those who have been trained through it – the fruit of [personal] righteousness that makes one whole and complete.

Hebrews 12:11

Therefore there can be no doubt about the fact that the preferable course of action is for us to respond to this general reproof before the matter becomes personal between us and Him, and before it escalates to *paideia*, tangible disciplinary measures taken by our Lord to straighten out our individual Christian walk. Inasmuch as this is a message to all of Laodicea, the primary application of these verses is to our Church era as a whole. Christ is "standing at the door", and is "knocking". And while it is true that this has individual application (He is getting our attention, and if we respond, our fellowship with Him will be wonderfully enhanced as it should be: "I will . . . dine with him and he with Me"), from the collective point of view He is "at the door" in the sense that His return at the conclusion of the end time events we are studying is imminent for us in the era of Laodicea: between His 2nd Advent and where we are now stands only what is left of our era and the intervening Tribulation. His "knocking" indicates, again on the collective level, the ultimate attention-getting event in the form of the Tribulation (where lukewarmness will be virtually impossible). And for all who respond to this call in those dark times (rather than falling away in the Great Apostasy), we shall indeed

"sup with Him" at His victory celebration on that grand and glorious day, the wedding supper of the Bride, His Church (Is.25:6-8; Rev.19:6-9).

The only way to respond for us who read these words today, however, is on an individual basis. Therefore the command to "become zealous and repent" is one that we are definitely meant to take personally. In Greek, the word translated here "repent" is *metanoëo* (μετανοέω), a verb whose root meaning is "to change one's mind". The problem is that the two most obvious renderings of this word (i.e., "repent" and "change your mind") each run the risk of conveying a meaning which is not there in the original Greek. The notion of changing one's mind seems a relatively easy prospect, of no particularly great cost or consequence, but, while that can be true in the abstract, *metanoëo* is only used in the Bible for decisions of serious moment. There is a difference, to use an example, between changing one's mind about what to order for lunch, and about whether or not to marry a particular person, and biblical *metanoëo* is always of the latter order of magnitude. That is to say, biblical *metanoëo* is always a deeply felt and potentially life-changing "change of mind", a turn around in one's thinking on an issue of fundamental importance, often, as here, a determined turning away from a wrong course of action back to God. That is why the word has been translated "repent" above. But while this is the traditional meaning of repentance, that is, turning away from sin and evil and back to God, the word has acquired a certain amount of "baggage" over the years, and often provokes a reaction not completely in keeping with its true meaning. For while there is an emotional element in the process of turning away from sin and back to God, repentance is achieved only to the extent that we truly, deeply and fundamental "change our minds" about our present course. It is not achieved by the intensity of emotional outbursts. Emotion surely accompanies true repentance, but true repentance is not based upon emotion, and is certainly not dependent upon the intensity of emotion which the penitent person may wish to demonstrate. For God is concerned with what we are really thinking deep within. He is neither fooled nor persuaded by impressive, visible displays of emotional regret which may or may not accurately reflect what is going on in the heart (and are often notoriously short-lived). It is possible to be truly repentant, to take Christ's words here to heart and embark faithfully on the true path He has laid down apart from an outward display. On the other hand, it is also possible (and it is a very common thing indeed) for an individual to feel such regret that an outward display is made, and yet slip back into the old ways soon after, not holding course after the "expression of repentance" (cf. those who the parable of the sower initially receive the Word with joy, but fall away in times of trial: Matt.13:20-21). The lukewarm believers of Laodicea are commanded here by Jesus Christ to make a fundamental change in their thinking, to recognize the error of their half-hearted ways, the wrongness of their evaluation of their own spiritual life, and to turn away from their compromised and compromising pattern of placing the material here-and-now in front of their commitment to the Lord. To do so in truth is true repentance.

The positive side of this equation is found in the other closely related command "become zealous". Just as the Laodiceans are to turn away from spiritual inertia, so they are to turn towards the right path, towards spiritual growth, the increase of their love,

production, good works, faith and hope beyond this life, that is, to turn towards Jesus Christ with all their hearts. Although we are considering this command second, our Lord places it first, indicating that once one has truly determined in the depths of the heart to make Him their all-in-all, then turning away from everything that compromises this decision will tend to follow as a matter of course: once we truly commit ourselves to competing in this race, the disciplined lifestyle necessary to do so effectively will be an easier task in that the motivation for doing so is already present (cf. 1Cor.9:24-27; Phil.3:14; 2Tim.2:5; Heb.12:1).

Of the two commands, "become zealous" is clearly the more emotional of the two, so that the area where many of us would wish to place and confine emotion (namely repentance) is less dependent upon emotion in God's eyes, and the area where many of us would wish to reduce or exclude emotion (namely the Christian life after repentance: Laodiceans resist being seen as "zealots") is more needing of emotional commitment in God's eyes. For while it is a very common thing in this era of Laodicea to want to make a "once and for all" re-commitment to the Lord of a very emotional nature, then relax (since the "work" is done), in God's eyes, as shown by these two commands, the situation is exactly the reverse. We should instead become zealous about living the Christian life, about our role in God's plan, about our intended production for Him. We should make spiritual growth with all its good consequences our first priority, and be excited about the prospects of our life for God! Should we do so, maintaining a "new attitude" will be a natural result (in contrast to our previous, lackluster life lived for ourselves alone). For our God is a God who is "jealous" and "zealous"¹¹³ about us for our good, unwilling for any of His creatures to perish (Matt.18:12-14; Jn.12:47; Acts 17:27; 1Tim.2:4; 2Pet.3:9; cf. Lam.3:33), unwilling to let any of us who have chosen for Him waste our lives with false objects of devotion (Ex.20:5; 34:14; Deut.4:24; 5:9; 6:15). He has shown us no cold unemotional side in His desire for our salvation, but rather one characterized by the most sublime love, sacrificing in our behalf the One He loved before the world began (Jn.3:16; Rom.5:8; 1Jn.4:10). It is no wonder then that He both commends and commands a godly zeal – that is, a genuine attitude of heart manifest in consistent application of the Word rather than external emotional displays – from all those who would respond to this great love of His in the proper way (Num.25:13; 2Cor.11:2; Tit.2:14; 1Pet.3:13; cf. 1Cor.12:31; 14:1; 14:39; 2Cor.7:7; 7:11; 9:2; Gal.4:18). We ought, then, to respond to this command from our Lord Jesus Christ, and become "zealots" for doing God's work in this world (Tit.2:14; 1Pet.3:13), boiling in our enthusiasm for Him and His Word (Rom.12:11), and refraining from any and all substitutes, for our God "is a jealous God" (Ex.34:14).

With our Lord "standing at the door and knocking", it is certainly high time for us to respond, as individuals and as a Church era, that we may experience the power and intimacy of close fellowship with Him before personal and collective discipline begins, before the onset of the Great Tribulation to come. It is time for us to realize and admit that our entire lukewarm approach is wrong, that it is wrong to "put God on the back-burner", so to speak, wrong to put our spirituality in a box, wrong to pay Him lip service without any true follow-through or deep commitment, wrong to live our lives as if we were not really Christians at all while all the time professing that we are, wrong to claim

that Jesus is the most important thing in our lives, while in reality running after other "gods", wealth, success, fame, pleasure, the excessive enjoyment of the things of this world to the exclusion of the One who made it, wrong to keep Him at arm's length and to give no truly serious attention at all to the main point of our lives, which is to live for Him, to do His will, and to work our "corner of the vineyard" in the way He would have us to do.

To accomplish the fundamental change of attitude required here by our Lord, we must both *hear* and *respond* to His words in a meaningful way. It does no good to express sorrow and regret for a short season, then "return to our vomit" (for in this way we risk being "vomited out": compare 2Pet.2:22 with Rev.3:16). It does no good to be like the man who looked in the mirror only to go on his way and let the true image of himself fade from his consciousness (Jas.1:22-25). To accomplish what our Lord commands and demands here requires a determined and dedicated change in our entire way of thinking, a commitment to put Him first, a commitment to the process of spiritual growth and production to which we have been called.

Christ's Promised Rewards:

1. "The one who wins the victory, I will grant him to sit with Me on my throne just as I also have won the victory and have taken my seat with my Father on His throne": While one would not wish to underestimate the profound and sublime blessedness of intimate fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ here and now in this present life ("supping with Him": Rev.3:20; cf. Jn.14:23; 15:4; Rom.8:9-10; 2Cor.13:5; Gal.2:20; Eph.3:17; Col.1:27; 1Jn.2:24; 3:24; 4:13-16), it is nevertheless beyond all dispute that "to be with Christ is better by far" (Phil.1:21-23). One of the many surpassing blessings promised to those who "overcome" and win the victory of faith is that of sharing in His kingly rule during the coming Millennium (Rom.5:17; 1Cor.4:8; 2Tim.2:12; Rev.1:6; 5:10; 20:4-6; cf. Rev.22:5). Later in Revelation, we are actually given to see the fulfilment of this promise, with resurrected believers occupying "thrones", symbols of our authority as we participate in the administration of our Lord's earthly kingdom for a thousand years (Rev.20:4-6). While this promise is similar in nature to that given to Thyatira of exercising "authority over the nations" (Rev.2:26-27), here we are actually promised a "sharing of the throne" together with our Lord Jesus Christ, suggesting an intimacy with Him in the administration of His worldwide kingdom that is truly remarkable and worthy of anticipation. This particular promise, therefore, is especially apropos of the situation in which we find ourselves in this last era of the Church Age. For the prospect of sharing the closest intimacy with Jesus Christ in the future contrasts markedly with the reality of our era's characteristically lukewarm response to Him at present. The message to us from this juxtaposition of disparate situations is clear: to share His throne then, we had best respond to Him and His commands now, considering Him the most important thing in our lives – as in fact He is (Jn.14:23; 15:4).

With this promise, moreover, we have our first and only indication that there are indeed some in Laodicea who have been walking the way Christ would have us walk (or at least who will respond to His "knocking" and do so). That this extraordinary privilege of sharing in His throne has been promised to the least extraordinary of the seven Church eras is less surprising when one considers the fact that Laodicea will terminate by emptying into the Tribulation. The "victory of faith" in that last terrible period preceding Christ's return will require the most zealous dedication, a reality reflected by the fact that the image of "the throne" here is picked up in Revelation 20:4-6 by the "thrones of the martyrs", individual believers, many of them no doubt saved during the era of Laodicea before the commencement of the Tribulation, who zealously choose to die for Jesus Christ rather than compromise away their faith in that most terrible crucible of testing. Many in the era of Laodicea have chosen to "sit upon the laurels" of the past. But for those who choose instead to zealously follow the Lamb wherever He leads, the ultimate "session" with Him in the sharing His throne awaits.

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."
Revelation 2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:29; 3:6; 3:13; 3:22

Footnotes:

1. The historical testimony for placing the death of John later is somewhat contradictory and entirely unconvincing. The "evidence" that does survive is derivative – both the traditional date of the book of Revelation and that of John's death are suspiciously juxtaposed with Domitian's admittedly fierce persecution of the Church. But Irenaeus' statements from which these dates are largely derived (see especially *Adversus Omnes Haereses* 5.30.3: Irenaeus is good on theological issues but notoriously deficient in chronological matters) are in themselves confusing and open to interpretation. It is easy to see how early historians without any particular evidence would naturally wish link John's death with a martyrdom at the hands of Domitian. For details and commentary see R.H. Mounce, The Book of Revelation (Grand Rapids 1998) 12, n.60, and R.H. Charles, The Revelation of St. John v.1 (Edinburgh 1920) xlv-1. However, as was argued in part 1, Revelation is best taken as having been written toward the end of the emperor Nero's reign. For Nero is the sixth king who "now is" at John's time of writing (Rev.17:10: see discussion in part 3B, section II.1.c.4), the last of the Julio-Claudian emperors to be followed in the far future by the "seventh king" (antichrist). Therefore that John's death should occur shortly after the writing of this final book of the canon and prior to the end of the Old Testament dispensation of temple worship (which ought not extend past the point of the Church's full operational status with the passing of the apostles) is far a more likely construction of events.

2. See n.1 above.

3. See the discussion of "dispensations" in section II.5 of part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement".

4. It will be recalled as well that the number "12" (i.e., the "duo-decade") is also the base unit of days in the Jewish ceremonial calendar, reflecting the proportion of believers in each of the four Ages of Human History. See section II.8.c of part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement".

5. See in particular "The Day of the Lord Paradigm" in part 1 of the present series, section IV.1.b.

6. See section II.8.c of part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement".

7. Time and space will not permit a detailed consideration of the phenomenon of water baptism, a topic to be covered in Bible Basics: Part 6B: Ecclesiology. It must suffice here to point out that in New Testament passages which discuss the issue of baptism the focus is almost universally upon the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the blessed reality of unity with Christ that accompanies the salvation of every believer, with no ritual (and no water) in view (see especially Eph.4:5; and cf. Rom.6:3-4; 1Cor.12:13; Gal.3:27; Col.2:12; Tit.3:5-6; 1Pet.3:21 [no "water" in the Greek]).

8. For example, Paul goes to some lengths to describe the qualifications of deacons and elders (1Tim.3:1-13; Tit.1:5-9), but gives no suggestions about how these are to organize their church(es). Peter says nothing on the subject at all, and John in particular, although the last of the apostles, is most deferential in the use of his own authority, even in some very taxing circumstances (cf. 3rd John). We may compare the situation that confronted Moses in the organization of early Israel (Ex.18:13-26). Although he would be given the most specific guidance on many subjects, administration was something that demanded flexibility as to time and circumstances; it fell to the lot of his gentile father-in-law to suggest better arrangements.

9. Consider also Gal.1:6-9; 4:8-11; 4:19; Heb.5:11-14.

10. This is an important caveat to keep in mind for all seven Church eras. The things that interest historians, the things that were recorded in the past, do not represent the complete record of events. We can only hope to achieve an approximate parity in matching the divinely inspired assessment of events during these seven time periods as given here with the non-inspired broad strokes of "Church history" as it has been preserved for us.

11. See the series Peter's Epistles, lessons #10-14.

12. This system, the devil's "world-system" of control, is the main theme of part 4 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Satan's World System". For his implementation of that system in human history, see also "Satan's Counter Strategy" in section III of part 5 of the

Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement". Additional information on false teaching and the infiltration of the true Church is also to be found in part 3A of the present series, section II, "the Great Apostasy". See also the special Read your Bible: Protection against Cults.

13. It is also the case that unverified rumors (which may be slanderous lies) should be paid no heed: these are inevitably more damaging to those who are innocent, for the truly guilty often take pains to squelch and conceal reports of their offensive behavior. After all, on at least one occasion, our Lord was doubted by the population of Jerusalem on the false grounds that He "was from Nazareth, not Bethlehem", which was, however, the true place of His birth (contrary to the rumor: Jn.7:41-42; cf. Matt.2:1).

14. For detailed commentary and consideration of the devil's temptation of Eve, see Peter's Epistles #27, and part 3 of The Satanic Rebellion: "The Purpose, Creation and Fall of Man" (section IV.1-2).

15. See especially the discussion on so-called "eternal security" in Peter's Epistles #27: Three False Doctrines that Threaten Faith.

16. Cf. Dr. James Rosscup's, "The Overcomer of the Apocalypse," Grace Theological Journal, 3:2 (Fall, 1982) 261-86.

17. The "tree of life" as it will exist in the New Jerusalem is covered in part 6 of the present series. For a discussion of the original "tree of life" in the garden of Eden, see section IV *passim* of part 3 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "The Purpose, Creation and Fall of Man". For the "seven Edens", see section II.6 of part 1 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall".

18. See A.C. Gaebelien, The Revelation, p.35f; et vid. lexica.

19. These principles are discussed under "The Uniqueness of Israel" in section II.8.b.i of part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement".

20. See especially part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section II.8, "Evidence for the "Seven Days" Interpretation".

21. In addition to our incomplete sources, some of these persecutions overlapped imperial reigns, with that of Septimius Severus continuing in North Africa under his successor Caracalla's reign, and that of Marcus Aurelius extending into the reign of Commodus (wherein it eventually died down).

22. The doctrine of crowns is covered in detail in lesson #18 of the Peter's Epistles series and in part 6 of Coming Tribulation, section I.7, "The Judgment and Reward of the Church".

23. From paragraph 50 of his Apologeticum: *Plures effcimus quotiens metimur a vobis; semen est sanguis Christianorum*.

24. The troubles which both the eastern and western halves of the empire suffered during the fourth and fifth centuries, especially the barbarian invasions, undoubtedly contributed to this perspective.

25. Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church (3rd rev. ed.: New York 1970) 102.

26. See part 4 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Satan's World System".

27. In terms of organization, Paul's instructions to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:13-35), and to Titus concerning the situation on Crete (cf. Tit.1:5-9), John's instructions to Gaius (3Jn.1:3-10), and Peter's instructions to elders in general (1Pet.5:1-4) all indicate a large degree of local autonomy in individual churches, even while the supremely authoritative administrative gift of apostleship was still functioning. These and other passages strongly suggest that while there is no biblically ordained system of local church organizational structure (beyond the presence of gifted men to administer and teach), the existence of extra-local super-organizations is not a biblical development. This subject will be covered in detail part 6 of Bible Basics: "Ecclesiology".

28. See part 4 of this series, "The Great Tribulation".

29. It is true that no mention of "deeds" (Greek: *erga*) is to be found in the case of Smyrna either (the only other church with a largely positive report), but then Smyrna is the one era wherein persecution and martyrdom were the rule – these were her works, so that our Lord says not "I know your deeds", but "I know your *tribulation*" (Greek: *thlipsis*, the root word of *the* Tribulation) and your poverty, *but you are rich*. (Rev.2:9).

30. Interestingly, Balaam's name admits of a similar etymology, for it is possible to see in the two elements of which it is built, the Hebrew words for "lord" (*Baal*) and "people" (*am*), yielding a potential meaning of "the people are lord [or even God]".

31. Compare the stone set before Joshua the high priest in Zechariah 3:9 as a symbol of sin removed, the basis for our redemption in Jesus Christ. The color white as an indication in this context of sins cleansed is well known (cf. Is.1:18), and it is interesting to note that also in the secular world of this time, white was the color of acquittal: compare Ovid *Metamorphoses* 15.41, where a white "pebble" was used by jurymen to acquit (with a dark one used to record a guilty verdict).

32. See section III.f of part 1 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall". For the fact that part of the "name" here includes our new tribal affiliation within Israel, see section II.9.b, "Israel the ultimate organization", in part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", and see especially part 6 of this

present series, section VII.7, "The Gemstone Foundations and the Tribal Gates of New Jerusalem".

33. The name is a combination of two Greek elements, the first from the verb *thuo* (θύω), meaning "to offer sacrifices", and the second from the adjective *ateires* (ἀ τειρής), meaning "unwearied/untiring".

34. We should note, moreover, that the listing of spiritual infidelity first in the sequence, that is, *before* the participation in idolatry, is a clear indication that the situation has worsened since the days of Pergamum (since now the more severe offense comes first).

35. During this time period the "imperial Roman church" and the "imperial papacy" truly came into their own. True enough, one finds the roots of such behavior in the previous Church era. Consider for example Leo I (dubbed by contemporaries "the secret western emperor"), or Gregory the Great (ca. 590-640). But, beginning with the reign of Charlemagne and the establishment of the "Holy Roman Empire", it was in the era of Thyatira that the Roman see and the papacy began to effectively assert their power throughout Christendom in an ever tightening marriage of church and state. The pseudo-Isidorian decretals, the particularly venal papacy of Benedict the 9th (who became Pope at the age of only twelve years old and later sold the office for several thousand pounds of silver), and Pope Hildebrand's use of excommunication to humiliate and control the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry IV (1076), are just a few outstanding symptoms of this "Jezebel-trend".

36. For a discussion of similar events in the beast's worldwide religion, see parts 4 and 5 of this series.

37. It is tempting to see in the widespread elimination of so many nominal "Christians" during the next era's "black death" (mid-fourteenth century) a partial fulfillment of this prophecy, clearing away much dead wood and allowing the opportunity for spiritual rebirth (a development which would, in the event, wait upon the era of Philadelphia).

38. It is important to note that God's "mysteries" are either known only to Him, or are brought to light by Him for *all* those who truly want to know Him and His truth (Matt.13:11; cf. 1Cor.2:7; 1Cor.15:51). The "mystery" of Christ, and of the uniting of the gentile believers to His people Israel is essentially synonymous with the gospel (see The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5, under "The Church and the Mystery of Christ"), a mystery which has truly been "shouted from the roof-tops" (Lk.12:3), and which will be proclaimed worldwide in many spectacular ways before the end comes (Matt.24:14; Rev.14:6).

39. This theme of light versus darkness and day versus night to represent good versus evil is found often in scripture (cf. 1Thes.5:2-8). For a detailed treatment of the theme see part 2 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "The Genesis Gap", section II.2.

40. See part 1 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall", section III.a, "The Morning Star".
41. See section 5 of part 1 of this series under "The seven churches' angels".
42. See section 5 of part 1 of this series under "The seven spirits".
43. For more on the issue of faith and production, see in particular Peter's Epistles, Lesson #14: "Believing and Spiritual Growth", and Lesson #24, "Faith Dynamics".
44. See Peter's Epistles, lesson #13, "Sanctification".
45. The subject of the resurrection is covered in detail in part 5 of this series. See also Peter's Epistles: Lesson #20: "The Resurrection".
46. Now that all judgment has been committed to Him, our Lord Jesus Christ is the Judge of the living and the dead (Jn.5:22-27; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom.14:9-12; 2Tim.4:1; 1Pet.4:5).
47. See the discussion under "Ephesus" above. The issue of Church is to be covered in part 6B of Bible Basics: Ecclesiology. Even a cursory reading of Acts will show that the apostles and company did not proceed from a dogmatically specific blue-print on this score, but rather combined old approaches and new ideas in a very practical way, adapting what was flexible (organization) in order to serve the true goal (the gospel of Jesus Christ: salvation, sanctification, spiritual growth, and service to Him).
48. See Peter's Epistles: Lesson #13: "Sanctification".
49. For a more detailed discussion, see "The Uniqueness of Israel" in section II.8.b.i of part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement".
50. On the misapplication of this passage in support of the so-called "pre-tribulational rapture", see Peter's Epistles #27: Three False Doctrines that Threaten Faith.
51. The doctrine of crowns is covered in Peter's Epistles, lesson #18, "Eternal Rewards", and in part 6 of this series, section I.7, "The Judgment and Reward of the Church".
52. For more on our eternal body, see Peter's Epistles, lesson #20, "The Resurrection".
53. See "Man created for the glory of God" in section I.3 of part 3 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "The Purpose, Creation and Fall of Man".
54. See the discussion above in the general introduction to this section on the Seven Churches.

55. Hodge, who died in 1878, is most famous for his Systematic Theology, a careful combination of the best of the reformed teachings along with a scholarly apologetic directed against the new religion of science. Darwin, best known for his Origin of the Species, died a few years later in 1882. According to the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, he "gradually became more and more of an agnostic in religion." Darwin therefore is paradigmatic of the Laodicean Christians, waffling and wavering until finally allowing his skepticism and faith in science to quench his faith in God (apparently). One might also include F. Delitzsch (d. 1890) as a middle figure between these two. Delitzsch, a great man whose works are still of tremendous value to those pursuing biblical truth today, began to waver in his old age (under the influence of his secularly inclined son, in this writer's opinion), eventually giving credence to "modern" text-critical views of the Old Testament. In this way, it is possible to see his life as a paradigm of the transition from the Philadelphia reformers to the "modern" Laodiceans, as faith breaks down under the influence of "scientific proof".

56. Wellhausen's work ca. 1871 may be taken as the origin of source criticism, while Gunkel, ca. 1901, marks the inception of form criticism.

57. See section I.2 of part 4 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Satan's World System". Additionally, there are a number of e-mail responses on this topic posted at the Ichthys website.

58. Compare the very obvious analogy in Revelation 16:15 where clothing represents just such personal sanctification, while the lack of it occasions shame.

59. e.g., these same two roots are also paired in the Hebrews 12:5 quote of Proverbs 3:11.

60. "Jealous" and "zealous" are the exact same word in Hebrew: *qana`*, קנא. The root idea is of redness in the face, betokening a deep inner stirring that may be for positive ("zealous") or negative ("jealous") ends. See BDB in loco.

Chart

The Coming Tribulation: A History of the Apocalypse

Part 2B

The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation: Revelation 4:1 - 7:17

Introduction: Having received in chapters two and three a complete panorama of the events of the entire Church Age from the divine point of view, we are now given in chapters four through seven a vivid glimpse of the heavenly reality at the end of the era of Laodicea on the threshold of the commencement of the Tribulation. Just as the discourse of the seven churches explained to us how God interprets the two thousand years of Church Age history, so in a similar way this unveiling of events at the true center of the universe, the very throne room of God Almighty, presents vividly to our view the divine initiation of the final phase of human history prior to the assumption of visible rulership of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ. And in this blessed heavenly prelude to the Tribulation, a revelation of the true focal point of the *kosmos* where the Father and the Son sit enthroned, we have brought home to us in a compelling way the unseen reality of who it is that truly controls time, history, and everything which unfolds before our eyes. For without the events described in chapters four through seven, there would be, there could be no commencement of the Tribulation, the time of "birth pangs" wherewith this world must labor before the brilliant and glorious Kingdom of the Son of God is brought forth into the historical light of day.

I. The Heavenly Prelude: Revelation 4:1-11

Revelation 4:1:

After this I looked and, behold, a door was standing open in heaven. And the voice which I had heard before (sounding to me like a trumpet) was saying, "Come up here, and I will show you what must happen after these things!"

After this: With these first two words, John tells us that the vision of the divine initiation of the Tribulation follows directly after the vision of Christ and His message to the seven churches. It is more than interesting to note that Christ's message about the seven eras of the Church Age is given on earth, because it has been played out on earth, but that the vision of the heavenly scene on the threshold of the Tribulation (i.e., the content of chapters 4-7) takes place in heaven, because it is played out in heaven. The trends of the Church Age have been in large part a function of the collective decisions of earthly believers over the past two millennia, but the unleashing of the final epoch in Satan's control of the earth will be initiated in heaven by God's will and according to His time table.

A Voice like a Trumpet: To compare Christ's voice here to the sound of a trumpet, as was also done in Revelation 1:10, is not insignificant (i.e., this is not the only comparison possible as we see for example in Rev.1:15 where His voice is also compared to "the sound of many waters"). Just as literal trumpets are used as a sign of warning, sounding the alarm to make preparations for battle (Num.10:9; Josh.6:4-9; Jer.4:19; 1Cor.14:8; cf. Rev.8:2-13; 9:1; 9:13-14; 10:7; 11:15), so this simile apprises us of the need to take to heart the warning inherent in the description of the Tribulation which will follow. In chapter one, the proclamation of the trends of the seven eras of the Church (and the

characteristic dangers to each, whether internal or external) was likewise given in Christ's voice to sound an alarm. That previous warning, however, was issued from the earth, for it is on the earth and from the earth that the battle of the Church Age has been and is being waged with heavenly support (Matt.16:18; cf. Matt.11:12; 2Cor.10:4; Eph.6:10-18). The voice here in this context which promises to tell John of the coming tribulational events also belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ (as the one to whom this Revelation belongs: Rev.1:1), but here it originates from heaven (cf. "come up here!"). This is because the events of the Tribulation, the birth pangs which precede the birth of the Kingdom, must be unleashed from heaven (see below on "the breaking of the seals" and removal of the Spirit's restraining ministry), aggressively directed from heaven (cf. the two witnesses, the expulsion of the devil from heaven, the seven trumpet judgments, the seven last plagues, etc.), and brought to a final, victorious conclusion from heaven with the glorious return of our Lord to assume His rightful rulership of the world (Rev.19:11-21; cf. Ps.110:1). The description of our Lord Jesus Christ's voice here as again being similar to that of a trumpet has the same essential meaning as it did in Revelation 1:10, namely, to emphasize the fact that this message is one of warning, sounding the alarm to all who will listen to prepare themselves for the intense trial of tribulation which lies ahead.

The Door: In the visions of God, John sees heaven opened (cf. Ezek.1:1; Matt.3:16; Acts 7:56; 10:11; 2Cor.12:1-5; Rev.19:11), and is spiritually ushered into the "third heaven", the unseen throne room of God.¹¹⁴ This door opens into the third heaven through the barrier of the heavenly sea (on which see below). Now it is an exceptional thing to think of sinful mankind being able to penetrate beyond the veil of heaven, and such a thing is only possible in any sense or at any time because of the work and the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ who by His death broke down for us this barrier between God and sinful mankind (Eph.2:14-18; 4:7-10; Col.2:13-15; Heb.9:24). Jesus is the only true door into heaven (Matt.7:13-14; Lk.13:24-25; Jn.10:7-9; 14:6; cf. Ps.118:19-27), for He is the One whose blood has opened an entrance for us into the very presence of God Himself (Matt.27:51; Heb.10:19-20). Only through Him, and in Him, and by following Him where He has gone (Heb.6:19-20; cf. Heb.2:10 [Greek]; 12:2), can we too enter into the holy of holies for fellowship eternal with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit forevermore (Lk.23:43; Rev.3:21).

After these things: The only possible antecedent for this phrase is the content of chapters two and three immediately preceding, that is, Christ's messages to the seven churches. Therefore this phrase must refer to the events which will take place after the close of the final message to Laodicea at the end of its 144 year history. "After these things" thus directs our attention to the events of the Tribulation which will occur at the conclusion of the final Church era of Laodicea not many years hence from our present point in time. Conversely, this simple phrase also validates the interpretation of the seven churches as historical eras, for they are what precede the tribulational events whose unfolding John will witness once the seventh seal is opened.¹¹⁵ This two-fold division of events between the Church Age and the Tribulation is also exactly what we find in Christ's initial description of what was to be revealed to John in this prophecy: "both the things that are [in the process of] happening (i.e., the entire Church Age), and

the things that are going to happen after them (i.e., the Tribulation and events following it)" (Rev.1:19).¹¹⁶

As pointed out above, it was necessary for John to see the trends of the Church Age from the earth, but inasmuch as the Tribulation is the beginning of the Revelation of Jesus Christ "from heaven" (cf. 2Thes.1:7), heaven is the proper place from which to view this sequence of events which will begin and be brought to a close from the very throne room of God. Hence the command which directs John to enter the third heaven to receive this prophecy of tribulational events.

Revelation 4:2-11:

(2) Immediately I came to be in the Spirit, and, behold, a throne had been placed in the [third] heaven, and [some] One was sitting [upon it]. (3) And the One sitting [on the throne was] similar in appearance to a gemstone of jasper or sardius. (4) And there was a rainbow around the throne similar in appearance to [something] made of emerald. And encircling the throne were twenty-four [other] thrones. And on the[se] thrones twenty-four elders were sitting, dressed in white clothing. And on their heads were golden crowns. (5) And from the throne [of God] come forth flashes of lightning, voices and peals of thunder. And there [stood] burning before the throne seven lamps of fire, which are the seven spirits of God. (6) And in front of the throne [was something] like a sea of glass similar to crystal. And in the midst of throne, encircling the throne, were four living-creatures, laden with eyes in front and in back. (7) And the first living-creature was similar to a lion. And the second living-creature was similar to a young bull. And the third living-creature had a face similar to a man's. And the fourth living-creature was similar to an eagle in flight. (8) And [as to] the four living-creatures, each one of them had six wings apiece, laden with eyes roundabout and within. And they have no rest day or night, saying, "Holy, Holy, Holy [is the] Lord, the Almighty God! The One who was, and who is, and who is coming!" (9) And whenever the living creatures give glory, and honor, and thanks to the One who sits on the throne, the One who lives forever and ever, (10) the twenty-four elders will fall down before the One who sits on the throne, and will worship the One who lives forever and ever, and will throw their crowns before the throne, saying, (11) "[O] our Lord and our God! You are worthy to assume [this] glory, and honor, and power, because you have created all things, and because of Your will they exist and were created."

In the Spirit: This is the same exact phraseology in the Greek as we saw in our treatment of Revelation 1:10. "I came to be in the Spirit" is John's way of describing prophetic "ecstasy" (literally, a "standing outside of oneself"), that is, that divinely induced prophetic state also seen in the cases of other inspired writers of scripture (Num.12:6; Ezek.1:1; 1:3; 2:1; 8:3; 40:2; Dan.10:1-7; Micah 1:1; Zech.1:8; 4:1; Acts 10:10; 11:5; 22:17; 2Cor.12:1-4; 2Pet.1:20-21; Rev.4:2; 17:3; 21:10; cf. Is.6:1ff.; Jer.1:4-19; Hos.1:1-2; Amos 8:1; 9:1). Now John has been in this same prophetic state since hearing Jesus' voice telling him to "write" (Rev.1:10-11). The repetition of this phrase here does

not imply any change or alteration of John's state. Rather, these words are given by way of explanation to describe the manner of John's rapid change of venue from earth to heaven in "the visions of God", that is, it is accomplished in a wholly spiritual way by means of the Holy Spirit (cf. Ezek.8:3; 40:2; 2Cor.12:1-4).

The Heavenly Temple: Although not specifically mentioned here as such, it is clear from elsewhere in the book of Revelation (and from elsewhere in scripture) that John has here been brought into the heavenly temple of God (Rev.7:15; 11:19 [twice]; 14:15; 14:17; 15:5; 15:6; 15:8 [twice]; 16:1; 16:17; cf. 2Sam.22:7-10; Is.6:1-4; et al.). Here and throughout the book of Revelation we see the true purpose of the real temple of God (represented symbolically on earth by the Jewish temple and tabernacle: see especially Heb.9:1-28). That purpose is, namely, to function as the residence of God Himself, as His temporary "battle headquarters", so to speak, from which He will continue to survey and direct earthly events until returning to the new earth in total victory at the end of human history (Rev.20-22). The portion of the "temple" wherein John now finds himself is the throne room of what might also be described as God's heavenly "palace". For while the Greek word used here (*naos*, ναός) does mean "temple", the Hebrew word which it translates (in both the Septuagint and the New Testament) means both "temple" and "palace" (*heychal*, היכל). The fact that this heavenly residence is indeed both the temple and palace of our God is certainly clear from the description of the throne, the regal appearance of the Father, and the attendance upon Him by and operation of His royal, heavenly court. In any event, the distinction in this case between a temple and a palace is one which would have been largely lost upon most ancient cultures who made almost universal use of the "god as king" and "temple as god's palace" motif (cf. the single word for both concepts in Hebrew). Moreover, *our* God is indeed Ruler of the universe, so that any place He might choose to reside, permanently or temporarily, would in fact become the "palace of palaces" as the abode of the Great Almighty King (Ps.5:2; 9:7; 10:16; 24:9-10; 29:10; 47:7; 84:3; 145:1; Is.6:5; 43:15; Jer.10:10; Ezek.43:7; Dan.4:34-35; Amos 9:6; Mal.1:14; 1Tim.1:17; Rev.15:3).

The Lord is in His holy temple [or palace: *heychal*, היכל]. The Lord, His *throne* is in the heavens.

Psalm 11:4a

Although John sees the things mentioned in these verses in the form of a vision, the throne and all the paraphernalia of God's throne room in the third heaven are true heavenly realities, and are here described as they existed then and as they most certainly exist now. This is true even though God is spirit, and does not require this or any other localized residence in the material universe, whether on the visible earth or in the invisible third heaven (1Kng.8:27; Acts 17:24-25). For the sake of His creatures, however, both human and angelic, this discernible "headquarters" has been established, so that both angels and men may witness our Lord's overall divine control of the universe (cf. 1Kng.22:19-21; Job 1-2), and, in particular for our purposes here, His reassertion of direct and visible control over the earth in the Person of His Son. For it is precisely for the purpose of reestablishing direct and visible divine rule over the earth

that God is seen here about to unleash the Tribulation, the time of "birth-pangs" that must precede Christ's return. It is precisely for the purpose of viewing the preliminaries of the re-establishment of God's Kingdom *on earth* in the Person of His Son that John has been brought to heaven:

The Lord said to My Lord, "Sit down at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."

Psalm 110:1

But as for Me, I have anointed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain.

Psalm 2:6

Rejoice exceedingly, Zion, My daughter. Raise a shout, Jerusalem, My daughter. Behold! Your King will come to you.

Zechariah 9:9a

While pagan cultures may see god-in-heaven and man-on-earth as the natural state of affairs, it is important here to re-emphasize that, from a biblical point of view, God's "tenting" in the heavens is a temporary state of affairs, just as the separation of Man from God is temporary, with both conditions being the result of creature rebellion (Satan's revolt for the former, Adam's fall for the latter). And while in pagan cultures the divinity is often something to be kept in a pacified state so that man may "go about his business", in the true biblical view of things, it is Man who is the trouble, and who has only been rescued from trouble by the intervention of God through the gift of gifts, our Lord Jesus Christ. This personal, spiritual deliverance is at present on the cusp of blossoming into global, material deliverance, as our God is about to render decisive judgment upon the earth and upon all His unrighteous foes in the course of the coming Tribulation, and is about to re-establish His direct, sovereign rule over the earth in the Person of the Messiah. At the conclusion of this victory, once *all* enemies have been placed under the Messiah's victorious feet (1Cor.15:25), the Father also will once again "tent among men", when perfection, righteousness and complete harmony have finally been restored to the "new heavens and the new earth" (2Pet.3:10; Rev.21:1), with all evil and evil-doers having been removed from both heaven and earth forevermore (Rev.21:2-23; 22:1-4).¹¹⁷

And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is [now] with men. And He will tent with them, and they will be His people, and He Himself will be their God."

Revelation 21:3

The heavenly furnishings described here by the apostle John are the true types "according to whose pattern" the structure and furniture of the earthly tabernacle were constructed (Heb.8:5; cf. Ps.80:1; 99:1; Col.2:17; Heb.10:1). As the earthly tabernacle was constructed at God's command for the purpose of communicating to His people important information about the true heavenly temple (Heb.8:5), the symbolic

meanings of the Jewish tabernacle and its furniture *must* be considered here in order to prepare us for the descriptions of their heavenly counterparts, both those mentioned here and those mentioned later in the book of Revelation.

The Earthly Tabernacle and Temple as a Type of the Heavenly Temple:

1. The Court (see Exodus, chapters 25-40):

a. The (Inner) Court: This is also known as the "court of the priests" in Herod's temple. Surrounded by a barrier in the case of both the tabernacle and the later temple, this enclosure represents the sanctified community of believers on earth who have entered through the gate (i.e., Jesus Christ: on our Lord as "The Door", see above), accepting His sacrifice which confronts them at the point of entry in the form of the brazen altar (a type of the cross). The enclosure or "barrier" of the court which separates unsaved mankind from those who have been sanctified by God represents the "enmity" of God toward sin which is only removed in Jesus Christ (Eph.2:11-22), who is the only gate or door into the place of fellowship with God while still on earth. As types which speak of our *earthly* experience (acceptance of Christ and entrance into the court of fellowship with God on earth, or rejection of Christ and exclusion from this same court), the court along with its physical enclosure are not represented in the *heavenly* temple.

b. The Brazen Altar: There is also no corresponding item of furniture for the brazen altar in the heavenly temple. That is because this altar represents the cross (1Cor.5:7; Heb.9:11-14; 1Pet.1:19), the place of Christ's sacrifice on our behalf, which sacrifice was accomplished *on earth*. The brazen altar is to be distinguished from the "altar of incense" which is the true counterpart of the altar mentioned later in Revelation chapter four (see below).

c. The Laver: This is also known as the "sea" in the court of Solomon's temple (1Kng.7:23-26; 2Kng.16:17; 2Chron.4:2-5; Jer.27:19). The laver-sea is the only piece of furniture from the earthly court which has an ostensible counterpart in the heavenly temple. Inasmuch as the court represents the earth, the relationship to the laver-sea of the somewhat similar "glassy sea" which appears in God's heavenly temple needs to be explained here in brief.

In Revelation 4:6, the "sea of glass similar to crystal" is actually the watery upper layer of the heavens, the "waters above" that form the circular "vault" of the heavens that stands between the twin heavens of sky and space and the third heaven, the place of the temple of God (Gen.1:6-7; Is.40:22). Therefore in the heavenly sea we are looking at the "top layer" of the heavens, so to speak. The fact that the earthly laver-sea which represents this heavenly sea is both concave (in terms of the brass container) and flat (in terms of the upper surface of the water contained) is also significant, for each of these two parts represents important aspects of the true heavenly picture, with the bronze standing for the firmament of the heavens and the water for the heavenly sea above it (cf. Is.40:22 quoted below). From the vantage point of the third heaven, the place of

God's heavenly temple (above the sky-universe), the flat surface of the heavenly sea is what is immediately visible. From our perspective here on earth, however, the heavens have a concave or "vaulted" appearance (as anyone looking up at the sky can attest), and it is this earthly perspective which is represented in the similarly concave shape of the tabernacle's water-filled half-sphere made of bronze:

He [is the One] who sits [enthroned] above the *circle* of the earth (i.e., the "circular ceiling-vault" of the heavens as viewed from the earthly perspective), and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers [in His sight]. He [is the One] who stretches out the heavens like a **curtain** (cf. Ps.104:2), and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in (i.e., the "flat" appearance of the combined heavenly sea and firmament of the heavens looking down from the third heaven).

Isaiah 40:22

Taken as a single composite of two things exhibiting a different appearance from either side, it is therefore not surprising that the heavens and the heavenly sea should receive this dual representation in the organization of the tabernacle-temple, that is, the tabernacle's curtain representing the view from the third heaven (as seen in the above quote), and the laver-sea representing the view from earth. Importantly, moreover, this twin representation also serves to emphasize two distinct aspects of mankind's relationship to God. For on the one hand, the actual "waters above" in concert with the "firmament of the heavens" clearly serve to *separate* geographically God's "dwelling" in the third heaven from Man's abode here on earth. The outer curtain of the tabernacle beyond which only the priests can go and the inner veil beyond which only the high priest (as a type of Christ in ascension) could go effectively convey this principle of separation of Holy God from sinful man. On the other hand, the heavens also *reflect* the glory of God (a fact obvious to anyone who has ever contemplated the awesome nature of the universe), and all mankind is aware of God from their testimony (Rom.1:18-20; cf. Job 38:1-38; Ps.8:1-4; 19:1-6; 97:6; Acts 17:24-31). The laver-sea, made of bronze and filled with water, had the reflective qualities of a mirror (and, in fact, was originally *made* of mirrors: Ex.38:8). Anyone gazing into the laver-sea could not help but to catch the reflection *both* of himself *and* of the sky above. Thus, with its unique reflective qualities, the laver-sea effectively conveyed the symbolism of sinful mankind contemplating itself against the backdrop of the awesome heavens of God which stand between Him and us. Bronze, incidentally, symbolizes judgment (cf. the brazen altar), and thus emphasizes the dire nature of this reflective comparison. So whether looking down into the laver-sea and catching the sky's reflection, or up into the actual heavens above (which are represented in turn by the curtain of separation), man is forced to appreciate his flawed character and God's perfect character and is thus put into the proper frame of mind to receive His gracious help, eternal life in the Person of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. When we do thus properly "reflect" on these things, the correct response is to turn to Him in faith for salvation and forgiveness (represented by washing with the water of purification in the laver-sea: cf. Eph.5:26).¹¹⁸ This symbolism of reflection seen in the laver-sea is a well-attested quality of the heavens, which are ever

"pouring forth" God's witness of Himself to the world (and are thus a surrogate for His Word, the best "reflector" of Him which we possess; cf. Ps.8:1-4; 97:6; Rom.1:18-20):

(1) The *heavens recount* the glory of God, and the *firmament tells* of the work of His hands. (2) One day after another pours forth [His] words, and one night after another declares [His] knowledge. (3) There is no tongue or culture that cannot understand their voice (i.e., of the heavens/firmament). (4) Their design has gone out into (i.e., "is visible throughout") the entire earth, and their words to the end of the world. He has set a tent for the sun within them (i.e., hidden it in the heavens/firmament's night sky), (5) and from this it goes forth like a [resplendent] bridegroom from his [wedding] canopy. [The sun] exults to run its course like an athlete [does]. (6) Its starting line is at one end of the heavens, and its circuit [takes it] to the ends [of the sky]. And nothing is hidden from its view.

Psalm 19:1-6

Can you spread out the sky into a *firmament* like He does, like a solid *mirror* which has been cast [of metal]?

Job 37:18

(22) Be doers of the Word and not merely hearers, deceiving yourselves. (23) Because if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, such a one is like a man who recognizes his natural face in a *mirror* – (24) for in this case, though he recognized himself, he straightway went about his business, soon forgetting what he looked like. (25) But he who sets his gaze upon the perfect law of freedom (i.e., scripture – the perfect mirror of the heart) and sticks with it, and is not a [mere] forgetful hearer [of the Word], but a doer of deeds [inspired by the Word], that man will be blessed in his "doing".

James 1:22-25

For at the present time our perception [of heavenly things] is like [viewing] a *dim reflection in a mirror*. But then [when we meet the Lord] we will see [Him] face to face. Now I have only partial knowledge, but then my knowledge [of Him] will be complete, just as He has always known me.

1st Corinthians 13:12

d. The tabernacle and the first curtain: We have already explained how that the curtain of the tabernacle represents the sky and the universe beyond it, thus effectively demonstrating the impossible distance between man and God from the standpoint of human effort (on the inner veil, see below). For who can "ascend to heaven to bring Christ down" (Rom.10:5-10; cf. Deut.30:12-14)? Clearly, there could be no way into the heavenly tabernacle (whose earthly access was impossible for all except those representing God) except through God's gracious dispensation. For, as the Levitical rites made clear, the only way behind the veil representing the heavens (and thus the only way to pierce the veil of eternity by analogy), was through the blood of a perfect victim

slaughtered on behalf of the sinful worshiper (a crystal clear symbol of the sacrificial death of our Savior on our behalf). The tabernacle was itself composed of four layers:

1) An outer layer of dark, leathery "sea-cow skins", symbolizing the firmament of the sky, glistening, shimmering, with a blue-black watery appearance, and impenetrable to the eye.

2) A layer of ram skins dyed red, symbolizing the only Mediator between man and God, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Lamb without spot or blemish, shedding His blood in order to remove this barrier of separation and reconcile us to God, without which sacrifice it was impossible to penetrate

3) the "tent" of goat-hair, representing the vast space separating us from the holiness and holy residence of the Father in the third heaven, a chasm only penetrable through the blood of the Lamb (cf. Heb.1:3; 6:19-20; 9:11-14; 9:24-25; 10:20).

4) An innermost layer of linen, blue (reflecting the heavenly origin of the only One who can give us access), purple (reflecting the royalty of the only One who can give us access), and scarlet (reflecting the sacrifice of the only One who can give us access). This layer was also embroidered with cherubim, symbolizing the holy abode of God, the third heaven lying above the firmament of sky and space (unreachable apart from Christ).¹¹⁹

When He had accomplished the cleansing of [our] sins, He took His seat (i.e., beyond the veil) at the right hand of the Majesty on high.
Hebrews 1:3b

Since we have, therefore, a Great High Priest who has passed through the heavens (i.e., as through the veil), [even] Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our profession [of faith in Him].
Hebrews 4:14

(19) And this hope [truly] is what "anchors" our lives, a secure and solid [anchor of hope] which penetrates [behind] the veil (i.e., the heavens) into the inner place (i.e., the heavenly holy of holies) (20) where our vanguard, Jesus, has entered on our behalf, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.
Hebrews 6:19-20

(1) The sum of what we have said is this: we have a High Priest of such [amazing] quality that He has [actually] taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of Majesty in heaven, (2) a Minister of the holy things and of the true tabernacle which the Lord has pitched, not man. (3) For every priest is appointed to present offerings and sacrifices. Wherefore it was necessary for Him also to have something to offer. (4) Now if He were [ministering] on earth, He would not have been a priest, inasmuch as there are already those who present offerings according to the law [of Moses]. (5) These minister in [what is a] copy and a shadow of the [actual] heavenly [tabernacle], just as command was given to Moses as he was about to complete the tabernacle. For He says, "See to it that

you make everything according to the pattern shown to you on the mountain (i.e., Sinai).”

Hebrews 8:1-5

(11) But Christ has already arrived [in heaven] as [the true High] Priest of the good things to come, [having passed] through the [veil of the] greater and more perfect tabernacle, that is, the one which is not of this creation (i.e., through the heavens and into the third heaven). (12) Nor was it through the blood of goats and bullocks, but through His own blood (i.e., His death) that He entered once and for all into the [heavenly] holy of holies, having wrought eternal redemption.

Hebrews 9:11-12

2. The Holy Place (see Exodus, chapter 25-40):

In the tabernacle and later temple there are two spaces, commonly referred to as the holy place and the holy of holies respectively. The holy place, the outer space and the larger of the two rooms, contained the table of the bread of presence, the altar of incense, and the golden candlestick, and was representative of the fellowship between God and sanctified believers in paradise. From before the creation of man, to Eden, to paradise below the earth, to the present third heaven, to eternal New Jerusalem, although the location of "paradise" has been variable, the most fundamental aspect of it has always been the same: it is the place where God's creatures enjoy untrammelled fellowship with Him.¹²⁰ At present, ever since our Lord's crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, His passage "through the heavens" into the heavenly Holy of Holies, "paradise" has meant the third heaven, the heavenly temple and dwelling-place of God the Father. Christ's ascension into heaven "split the veil" of the heavens, rending through His blood the barrier of separation between man and God, opening the way of "access" to the Father for all who believe and follow His Son (cf. Eph.2:18; 3:12), for He is the only entrance, He is the only way into heaven (Matt.7:13-14; Lk.13:24-25; Jn.10:7-9; 14:6; cf. Rev.3:7-8; 19:11), and He is in a very literal way our "leader" into the heavenly holy of holies (our *archegos*: Acts 3:15; 5:31; Heb.2:10; 12:2). That is why at Jesus' death, the moment when He had completed His victorious life and sacrifice perfectly in every way, the Father caused the temple's physical veil to be split open, graphically demonstrating for any and all who would not refuse to see it the reality of His provision of salvation symbolically portrayed in the very temple which speaks entirely of Jesus' work: with the cross an accomplished fact, man can now enter into the very presence of God – but only on the basis of our Lord's sacrificial death (compare Matt.27:51 with Heb.10:19-20). For Christ's work removed the veil-barrier of enmity and estrangement (erected by man through the sin of our first parents) making possible our reconciliation to the Father, so that we may now stand in His presence through the blood of Christ (Rom.5:1-21; 2Cor.5:17-21; Eph.2:14-18; Col.1:19-22; cf. 1Pet.3:18).

In anticipation of our Lord's sacrifice (which was acceptable to the Father in every way), the Father had mercifully delayed judgment upon sin until the time when He gave His own Son to be a means of propitiating all sin for those who put their faith in Him

(Rom.3:25-26; 2Cor.5:19; cf. Acts 14:16; 17:30). This salvation – forgiveness of sin and provision of eternal life – extends not only to all who have trusted in Jesus since the cross, but also to all those who sought forgiveness and eternal life from God before the cross, trusting in His promises and in His promised One to come so clearly portrayed in the tabernacle and all its rites, so clearly foreshadowed and prophesied throughout the Bible (e.g., Ps.22; Is.52-53; Lk.24:25-27). Because the way to the Father was not opened until Jesus' sacrifice and ascension to Him, the righteous who died before these events, "the conjunction of the ages" (Heb.9:26; cf. Mk.1:15; Rom.5:6; Gal.4:4; Eph.1:10; 1Tim.2:6), were taken after death to an interim "paradise" below the earth, a place of blessing to be sure, but still separated from the presence of the Father by the veil of the heavens, to await the fulfillment of the Messiah's mission. This is the "hell" to which our Lord descended after His death on the cross before His resurrection – not a place of torments (although part of Hades was and still is reserved for that function), but rather, in the case of all those who died in the Lord from Abel until Jesus' resurrection, a place of rest and repose in which to await the opening of the way into the heavenly inner sanctum through the blood of Christ. It is to this interim paradise that Jesus refers when on the cross He tells the believing thief "today you will be with Me in paradise" (Lk.23:43; cf. Lk.16:19-31).¹²¹

Since our Lord's resurrection from the dead, ascension to the third heaven, and session at the right hand of the Father, there is now nothing to hinder departed believers from entering into the presence of the Father along the "newly opened and living way" that Jesus has made for us into His presence (cf. Jn.14:2-3; 17:24; Heb.1:3; 4:14; 6:19-20; 8:1-5; 9:11-12):

(19) Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence in this entrance of ours into the [heavenly] holy of holies by the blood of Jesus, (20) an entryway through the [heavenly] veil [of separation] which is new¹²² and alive and which He has consecrated for us, that is [through the sacrifice] of His flesh (cf. Heb.10:10; 10:18), (21) and since we have [this] great high priest over the household of God, let us approach [the throne of grace (cf. Heb.4:16) to pray] with a truthful heart in complete faith, (22) our hearts sprinkled [clean] of [any] bad conscience and our bodies washed with pure water [of the Word (cf. Eph.5:26)].
Hebrews 10:19-22

This tangible reality of believers liberated from the necessity of occupying a temporary abode (i.e., the underground paradise of *sheol*) and free to anticipate their destined home with God in heaven after death was promised by our Lord (Jn.14:1-6; cf. Jn.12:26; 17:24), and is clearly visible in the biblical descriptions of believers now actually in the presence of the Father and the Lamb (2Cor.5:8; 12:1-6; Phil.1:23; Heb.12:22-23; cf. Rev.6:9; 7:9-17). Moreover, it is also clear from a number of passages that our Lord, when He made His actual and highly symbolic journey through the heavens and into the Father's presence, led "captivity captive" (Eph.4:8; cf. Ps.68:18), freeing from the subterranean paradise known as "Abraham's bosom" all the faithful who had previously died (Ps.146:7b; Is.14:17b; 42:7; 49:9; 61:1; Lk.23:43; cf. Lk.16:19-31), and taking them in His train up to the third heaven (Jn.14:2-3; cf. Ps.68:24-27; Jn.17:24; Col.2:15;

1Pet.3:18-22; Rev.1:18). Since the veil of the heavenly temple of God (i.e., "the third heaven", the "antitype" or true location represented by the Holy of Holies in the earthly tabernacle) has now been split open by Christ's victory, there is no further distinction in heaven between the Holy Place (representing the previous subterranean compartment of *sheol*, "Abraham's bosom") and the Holy of Holies, with saved, departed humanity now resident in the presence of the Lamb and of the Father. For it is into this genuine "Holy of Holies" in heaven above that Christ entered in company with all those who had previously died in the Lord and had previously been awaiting this momentous event in the paradise below:

For Christ did not enter into a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one. Rather, *He entered into heaven itself*, so as to present Himself before God [the Father] on our behalf.

Hebrews 9:24

Since then there is now no distinction in the heavenly temple of God between the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place (the separating veil having been removed by Christ), we should not be surprised to see in the description of the heavenly temple in Revelation (describing as it does matters after the fact of the ascension) the placement of objects within this true Holy of Holies which, in the earthly tabernacle-temple, were reserved for the Holy Place. So while we shall cover here under the sub-heading of "the Holy Place" the altar of incense, lamp, and table of the bread of presence, the reader is asked to keep in mind that in the forthcoming description in Revelation these articles are seen to appear within the heavenly temple proper (i.e., the genuine Holy of Holies).

In the holy place of the earthly tabernacle, three items are present: 1) the golden table, 2) the golden lampstand, and 3) the golden altar of incense. All three of these furnishings represent Jesus Christ, with the gold standing for His deity (as rare, precious, glorious), the acacia wood (of the table and altar) beneath symbolizing His humanity (as fragile yet perfect), and with each item symbolizing a particular aspect of His sacrificial incarnation:

a. The Golden Table: The *golden table* holding the bread of the presence (i.e., God present with us in the Person of Christ; cf. "Immanuel": Is.7:14; Matt.1:23), represented the life-giving nature of the *Person* of Christ for all who partake of Him, "the Bread of life" (Jn.6:32-58; 1Cor.11:23-26).¹²³

b. The Golden Lampstand: The *golden lampstand*, fed by the empowering oil, which symbolizes the Holy Spirit (Is.11:2; Rev.1:4; and cf. Lk.4:18), represented the life-giving nature of the *message* of Christ for all who receive it and accept Him, "the Light of the world" (Jn.8:12; cf. Jn.1:4-9; 3:19-21; 9:5; 12:46; Eph.5:8-15; 1Jn.1:5-7; 2:8-10).¹²⁴

c. The Golden Altar of Incense: The *golden altar of incense*, emitting a sweet savor rising up into the holy of holies, represented the life-giving nature of the *work* of Christ, acceptable to the Father in every way and rising up in resurrection and ascension into His presence (Eph.5:2; cf. Gen.8:21; Heb.1:3), pointing the way to heaven in Him who is

the "Way" for all who follow Him (Jn.14:2-3; 14:6; cf. Ps.118:19-27; Matt.7:13-14; Lk.13:24-25; Jn.10:7-9; 17:24).

Of these three, the altar and lampstand are specifically mentioned as present in the heavenly temple of God (Rev.4:5; 6:9). Neither is the table truly absent, however, for the "Bread of Life" Himself is seen to come before the Father in chapter four (in a related symbol, that of the Lamb of God which also speaks of our fellowship with Him through partaking of His body and blood: Jn.5:25-58; 1Cor.5:7), and, given the representation of the Church collective as "the Body of Christ" and the fact that the table contained the perfect number of twelve loaves, we may also see in the believers who appear "below the altar" a symbolic complement to the "Bread of Life" Himself in His Church, His Body and His Bride (cf. Rev.6:9).¹²⁵ Like a new garden of Eden then, the third heaven, God's inner sanctum or heavenly temple, is the place where all of us blessed to die in the Lord are now privileged to enter. There, in the tabernacle-paradise of God, we shall begin our "face-to-face" fellowship with Him and with our Lord Jesus Christ which we shall from that point on enjoy forever more. These three articles also speak of God's eternal provision for us in this paradise to come: 1) the table of bread speaks of physical sustenance and life, eternal life; 2) the lampstand of light speaks of spiritual illumination and truth, divine truth; 3) the altar of incense with its sweet aroma speaks of physical and spiritual joy, everlasting joy. For since Jesus has split the veil of the heavenly Holy of Holies, our "Holy Place" after departing this earth is now in the very presence of God Himself.

3. The Holy of Holies (see Exodus, chapters 25-40): The holy of holies in the tabernacle-temple represented the heavenly temple of God, inaccessible to any human being, even to saved humanity after death, until the veil which separated it from the holy place should be removed by the Messiah, Jesus Christ (cf. Matt.27:51; Mk.15:38). This earthly holy of holies, the place entered only by the high priest on the Day of Atonement (Heb.9:7; cf. Lev.16:1-34), was, in its shape, a perfect cube (cf. Ex.26:16; 36:21). This was also true in Solomon's temple (1Kng.6:20), and will be true in the millennial temple as well (Ezek.41:4).¹²⁶ Significantly, the New Jerusalem will also be a perfect cube (Rev.21:16), an understandable feature given that it will be, in effect, the last "temple". For in this final paradise, God will return to earth to "tent" with saved mankind forevermore, pitching His "tabernacle", the New Jerusalem, on the new earth (Rev.21:3-4; cf. Rev.21:1). There will be "no temple" visible in the New Jerusalem because "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (Rev.21:22). For the entire New Jerusalem will function at that blessed future time as the final and ultimate Holy of Holies, a perfect cubicle space (representing the perfection of the Trinity in height, width, and breadth: cf. Eph.3:18), wherein all of saved humanity will be accommodated and dwell in the presence of God for all eternity (Rev.21:3-4).

a. The Mercy Seat: The golden "mercy seat" or atonement cover, as it is also called, represents God's throne (see immediately below for the heavenly throne). Made completely of gold (befitting His deity), the mercy seat was flanked by two golden cherubs (just as the heavenly throne is attended by the actual cherubim). It was between

these two golden cherubs that the Lord told Moses "there I will meet with you" (Ex.25:22), so that the image given by the mercy seat of God's heavenly throne is beyond symbolic: within the tabernacle and temple, this is the place where the glory of God, the resident or *Shechinah* glory, actually did dwell. Here, between the golden cherubim above the mercy seat, the *Shechinah* glory, a Christophany of the Son representing the Father's sovereign session in the heavenly Holy of Holies, actually did shine forth as the Light of the world (Heb.1:3a: "He [Jesus] is the shining forth of [the Father's] *glory*, the precise image of His essence"; cf. Jn.8:12; Rev.21:23-24).¹²⁷ It was also upon this mercy seat or atonement cover that the high priest sprinkled the blood of sacrifice only once a year on the Day of Atonement (Heb.9:7; cf. Lev.16:34), manifestly symbolizing the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins "once and for all" (Rom.6:10; Heb.7:27; 9:12; 9:26; 9:28; 10:10; 1Pet.3:18), as the Father looks down with complete acceptance on His Son's "shed blood" (Heb.1:3b; 9:12; 10:12).¹²⁸

b. The Ark: The "ark of the covenant" is the premier symbol within the tabernacle of our Lord Jesus Christ. For while the entire tabernacle along with its rituals and sacrifices speak of our Lord and His saving work (with the altar of incense, the table of the bread of presence, and the golden lampstand specifically representing clear types of Him as we have just seen above), in the ark we have a picture of Christ in resurrection, ascended to the Father, and seated intimately with Him (the sacrifice of the cross being an accomplished fact). This union can be clearly seen in the close and intimate association of the ark and the mercy seat, the latter representing the Father's throne, the former representing the Son in contiguous union with that throne (literally and figuratively: cf. Ps. 2:6-12; 110:1-6; and cf. Jer.3:16-17 where the throne of the Lord replaces the ark in the millennial kingdom). Moreover, the ark and its mercy seat always appear together and are often described collectively as "the ark" (e.g., 1Sam.3:3-7:2). Thus, in a very real sense, the ark and mercy seat are "one" just as Jesus and the Father whom they symbolize are "One" (Jn.10:30). Finally, the particular picture given by the ark and mercy seat is that of the unity of the resurrected Christ with the Father, with the Messiah, human and divine (i.e., the ark is made of acacia wood covered with gold, so that now His divinity is in full view in contrast to the First Advent), now seated in victory at the Father's right hand (Ps.110:1; Rom.8:34; Eph.1:20-22; Phil.2:9; Heb.1:3; 12:2; 1Pet.3:22).

As we are told in Hebrews 9:1-5, the ark originally contained 1) a jar of manna (Ex.16:33-34); 2) Aaron's rod that budded (Num.17:10); 3) the tables of the Law (Deut.31:24-26; 1Kng.8:21). Each of these items speaks of God's provision and man's rejection of that provision (both originally with Adam, and subsequently, as illustrated by the behavior of Israel as typical of mankind in general). God provided perfect bodily sustenance for man (the trees of Eden for Adam, manna for the Israelites), but man rejected this gracious provision (Adam by eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the Israelites by "grumbling" [the jar of manna]: Gen.3:6; Ex.16:11-12; cf. Ps.78:17-22). God provided perfect temporal protection for man (the security of the garden for Adam, the leadership of Aaron and Moses for the Israelites), but man rejected this gracious provision (Adam by failing to heed God's warning, the Israelites by challenging Moses and Aaron's right to lead [the rod that budded]: Gen.2:17;

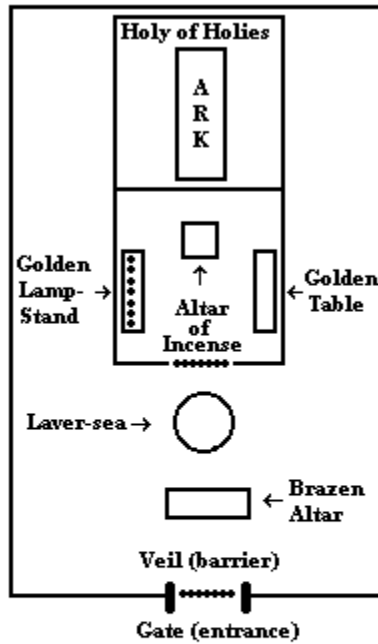
Num.16:41). God provided perfect spiritual provision for man (the tree of life for Adam, the Law for the Israelites), but man rejected this gracious provision (Adam by violating God's verbal warning, the Israelites by violating God's written law [the stone tablets]: Gen.3:11; Ex.32). The inclusion of a symbol of each of these three essential categories of human rejection of divine provision (physical, temporal [for freedom of choice], and spiritual) directly *within* the ark is a highly significant representation of Jesus "bearing our sin in His body" (1Pet.2:24; cf. Matt.26:26; Rom.7:4; 1Cor.11:24; Heb.10:10).

For this reason it is not surprising that the ark is also described as the "ark of the covenant", for it is the death of Jesus Christ which fulfills God's earlier covenant of anticipation (for no such covenant/testament is valid apart from a death: Heb.9:15-18), while inaugurating a New Covenant of forgiveness through the sprinkling of the precious blood of the Lamb, our Savior (Matt.26:28; 1Cor.11:25; cf. Is.42:6). Christ bore the curse of the first covenant (Gal.3:13), that He might abolish the barrier of sin and reconcile us to God through His body, sacrificed on our behalf (Col.1:22). And this symbolism is reflected by the contents of the ark, with the blood spilled upon the mercy seat which covers it, graphically and effectively representing His sacrifice for sin. In spite of man's rejection and rebellion, God would provide salvation (and subsequently has), a fitting testimony to His inimitable and unsearchable grace which this, the ark of the Testimony, so effectively teaches (cf. Ex.25:16; 40:20-21). Through His sacrifice, moreover, Jesus has renewed all of these provisions in spite of man's initial rejection of them. For He is the Bread of Life (cf. the manna) in whom we shall never hunger again (Jn.6:25-58; Rev.2:17); and He is the Branch (cf. the budding staff) whose perfect Kingdom shall never end wherein we shall dwell for all eternity (Is.4:2-6; Rev.3:21); and He is the Fulfiller of the Law and the Word of God (cf. the tablets of the Law inscribed with the words of God) with whom we shall enjoy sweet fellowship forevermore (Rom.10:4; Rev.3:12). Jesus sacrificed Himself for these and for all the sins of all mankind, that all mankind might be blessed with this eternal life through faith in Him – the most blessed of all promises, and clearly taught by the symbolism of the ark.

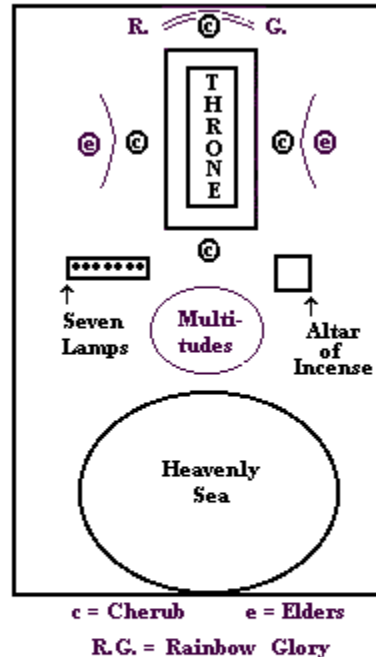
This symbolism of the ark helps to explain why there is no counterpart for it per se immediately visible in the heavenly temple: the mercy seat's counterpart is present in the Father's throne, with the glorious presence of the Father Himself corresponding to the *Shechinah* glory of the tabernacle. But the ark represented the Son, and the Son too is already present, seated at the Father's right hand "in the center of the throne" (the very place we expect to find the ark, contiguous with the "mercy seat", that is, the throne: Rev.5:6). Therefore, just as the *Shechinah* glory finds its true antitype only in the Father Himself, so the ark, the most important symbol of the Son, finds its true antitype only in the Son Himself (so that the symbol is not missed: cf. Jer.3:16-17). When our Lord does make His first appearance in the heavenly temple in chapter five, it is appropriate that it be as the victorious "Lamb as having been slain", for it is through His sacrifice that He has won the right to "open the book", and bring on the final events which will lead to the establishment of His kingdom (cf. Rev.5:9-10).¹²⁹

Having concluded our treatment of the earthly tabernacle and its furniture, we may now return to our exegesis of Revelation chapter four, keeping in mind the discussion above

as we move on to consider John's description of the heavenly temple.



Earthly Tabernacle (not to scale)



Heavenly Temple

The Throne:

[B]ehold, a throne had been placed in the [third] heaven, and [some] One was sitting [upon it].

Revelation 4:2b

Inasmuch as God is the King of the universe, it is not surprising that a throne as a symbol of His divine kingship is often mentioned or implied in scripture (1Kng.22:19; Ps.2:4; 9:7; 29:10; 47:8; 113:5; 123:1; Is.6:1; 66:1; Matt.23:22). Moreover, the throne is particularly prevalent in the book of Revelation as a symbol emphasizing the Father's ultimate authority (Rev.5:1; 5:7; 5:13; 6:16; 7:10; 7:15; 19:4; 21:5). As we have just seen, God's heavenly throne is represented in the Jewish tabernacle and temple by the "mercy-seat" above the ark of the covenant with its attendant golden cherubim, the place where God "meets" with His servants, the place of the resident *Shechinah* glory of God (Ex.25:10-22; Lev.16:2; Num.7:89; Heb.9:1-5). The earthly "golden throne" which was placed above the ark of the covenant represented this real throne of God attended

by real cherubs whereon He manifests His Presence as John beholds it here (cf. 1Sam.4:4; Ps.80:1; 99:1; Dan.7:9-10; Rev.4:6-9).¹³⁰

Several important characteristics of the Father's heavenly throne (most of which come to light in the course of Revelation, but which are not necessarily obvious to the reader at the throne's first mention in this context) need to be pointed out here:

1. The Throne is awesome and impressive beyond anything in the human frame of reference: God's throne is high and lofty (Is.6:1), with the appearance of a sapphire (Ezek.1:26; 10:1; cf. Ex.24:10), attended by a royal lifeguard of fiery cherubim (Ezek.1:4-28; cf. Is.6:1-4; Ezek.8:2), issuing forth the fire of judgment (Dan.7:9-10), releasing blasts of thunder and lightning (Rev.4:5), and voices (Rev.4:5; 16:1; 16:17). The throne of God is, therefore, an awesome and formidable thing (Is.63:15), appropriate for the Great Almighty God enthroned thereon.

2. The Throne has the form of a chariot: The earthly "mercy-seat" of gold, covering the ark of the covenant (of which the golden cherubs form a part), is described in 1st Chronicles 28:18 as a "chariot", and this is consistent with descriptions of the heavenly throne throughout scripture. For example, in Daniel 7:9, the fiery throne has "wheels", and the descriptions of the throne in the book of Ezekiel can be interpreted in no other way (see especially Ezek.1:4-28; 10:9-22; cf. Ps.132:7), for as described by Ezekiel this throne is clearly a mobile instrument of battle wherewith God makes visitation of the earth, especially for the purpose of rendering divine judgment (cf. Hab.3:3-15).

3. The Throne is now occupied also by the Lord Jesus Christ: Ancient chariots of war typically carried two combatants (cf. 1Kng.22:34), and while it is not immediately apparent, it becomes clear in chapter five that our Lord Jesus Christ is indeed sharing this throne, where He has been seated with the Father in victory since His ascension, awaiting the time when all of God's enemies will be laid low (Rev.3:21: "The one who wins the victory, I will grant him to sit with Me on My throne just as I also have won the victory and have taken My seat with My Father on His throne"; cf. Ps.110:1; Rom.8:34; Eph.1:20-22; Phil.2:9; Heb.1:3; 12:2; 1Pet.3:22). The close proximity of Father and Son after Christ's session will become evident shortly when the Lamb appears "standing in the center of the throne" (Rev.5:6)¹³¹

4. The Throne is attended by cherubs who are an intimate part of it: The cherubim, the highest ranking angelic creatures, are God's "honor guard, life guard, body guard" (see the detailed discussions in the series The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation).¹³² As such, it is understandable that they are closely associated with His heavenly throne, so close, in fact, that a bit later they are described as essentially one with that throne. For just as the Lamb is "in the middle of the throne" (Rev.5:6), so the four cherubs are identically described as "in the middle of the throne" (Rev.4:6). It is true that in the verse just cited, the "four living creatures" (i.e., the cherubim: see the references listed in the previous note) are also described as being "around the throne" as well as "in the middle of" it, a combination of characterizations which nicely describes their position as guardians proportionally positioned around the throne (from which

positions they also provide this "chariot throne" with locomotion, their wings being closely interlocked with its wheels: Ezek.1:4-26; 10:6-17; cf. Is.6:1-6; Rev.4:6; 4:8; 4:9; 5:6; 5:8; 5:11; 5:14; 6:1; 6:6; 7:11; 14:3; 15:7; 19:4; and see references to previous studies in the previous note):

The Lord reigns. Let the nations tremble. He is enthroned above the cherubim. Let the earth shake.

Psalm 99:1 (cf. Ps.80:1; Is.37:16)

In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God; He heard my voice out of His temple, and my cry came before Him, even into His ears. Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because He was wroth. There went up smoke out of His nostrils, and fire out of His mouth devoured; coals were kindled by it. *He bowed the heavens and came down*, and darkness was under His feet. And He **rode upon a cherub**, and did fly; yea, He did fly upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness His secret place; His pavilion round about Him was *dark waters* and thick clouds of the skies. At the brightness that was before Him His thick clouds passed, hailstones and coals of fire. The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave His voice: hailstones and coals of fire. Yea, He sent out His arrows and scattered them; and He shot out lightnings, and discomfited them.

Psalm 18:6-14 KJV

Although this is indeed a highly poetic passage, it should be clear, given our discussion immediately above, that much of the "imagery" here is clearly more than just that. God is spirit, and His being, if it could be defined in material terms, would exceed the bounds of the universe to an infinite degree. But God does display Himself in visible form (as in our immediate context of Revelation chapter four), and when He does so, the nature of the theophany is entirely consistent with the picture painted by David in this Psalm. The cherubs are real and they do perform the function of locomotion for God's battle chariot (Ezek.1:4-28; 10:9-22). They do have wings (Is.6:1-6; Rev.4:8), and are sometimes described in terms of the wind or closely associated with it (Ps.104:4; Heb.1:14; cf. Zech.5:9; Rev.7:1).

5. The Throne is set atop the heavens: What is true of the cherubim in Psalm 18 quoted above is also true of the heavens. That is, just because something is poetically expressed does not make it theologically inexact (cf. Ps.68:4; 77:16-18; 104:1-4; Hab.3:3-15). David's words give us a description of God's manipulation of the universe which is much closer to being literal than metaphorical, for they clearly describe His visitation of the earth by "compressing" the heavens ("He bowed the heavens and came down") so that only the separating waters of the heavenly sea continue to shield Him from view ("His pavilion round about Him was dark waters and thick clouds of the skies"). The same can also be seen from two theophanic visitations of the earth by God of which we have a good deal of detail from scripture (i.e., His appearances to the Jewish elders at Sinai, and to Ezekiel at the river Kebar: Ex.24:10; Ezek.1:22-28; 10:1). The "waters above" the heavens are described in the Exodus passage as a "pavement" under God's feet, and in Ezekiel as a "firmament" above the heads of the cherubim. Now the "waters above" are

technically separate from the firmament of the heavens which separates them from the earthly sea (Gen.1:6-7), but these two descriptions are entirely appropriate for what amounts to the "top layer" of the firmament of sky and space. In each of these descriptions, therefore, these normally far distant upper waters are now visible, after the separating barrier of the twin heavens has been greatly compressed or "bowed". It should be noted that on each of these occasions God remains technically *separated from* the earth and the world by the barrier of waters, rather than completely "penetrating" the heavens and actually *coming into* the world and onto earth – an eventuality which would require instantaneous and utter destruction of that sinful, corrupt world (cf. 2Pet.3:10-13; Rev.6:14; 20:11; 21:1). Only by becoming human as well as divine could God come into the world to save us without first destroying us, that is, only in the Person of Jesus Christ, the God-man and only Mediator between God and Man (Jn.1:1-18; 1Tim.2:5).¹³³ Thus in all three of these instances referenced above, we have the same essential picture of God's chariot throne pressing down on the heavens from a location atop the waters above them (i.e., from the third heaven), leading us to conclude that all three instances are straightforward descriptions of the heavenly reality of God's throne "resting" upon the combination of firmament and heavenly sea above it.

Secondly, as evidenced by its name, the third heaven itself is located above the "two heavens" of atmosphere and universe we often collectively call "the heavens".¹³⁴ Inasmuch as the throne of God (occupied as that throne is by the Father Himself) is the central feature of the heavenly temple (with which the third heaven is itself essentially synonymous), it is not surprising that we see here in Revelation this same picture of God's throne sitting astride the (two) heavens which, together with the heavenly sea that forms its upper layer, separate the third heaven from the earth below. God's throne is in fact so closely connected to this firmament upon which it rests that it can itself legitimately be described as essentially a part of "God's throne":

Thus says the Lord, "*The heavens are my throne, and the earth My footstool. Where is the house you would build for Me? Or where is the place of My rest?*"
Isaiah 66:1

(34) But I say to you, do not swear at all, not by heaven, *because it is the throne of God,*
(35) and not by the earth, because it is the footstool of His feet, and not by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the Great King.
Matthew 5:34-35

Finally, the close connection between God's chariot-throne and the heavens and sky can also be seen in its description in Ezekiel (1:26; 10:1) as "like a sapphire stone". This is the very quality ascribed to the "pavement" of sky in Exodus 24:10, and in the translucent blue of the sapphire we have a perfect picture both of the brilliance of the heavens along with its sea of heavenly waters (with which the throne is so closely associated).

With this scriptural connection between the sky-heavens and the throne of God in mind, the persistent imagery one finds in scripture linking God's visitations of earth with

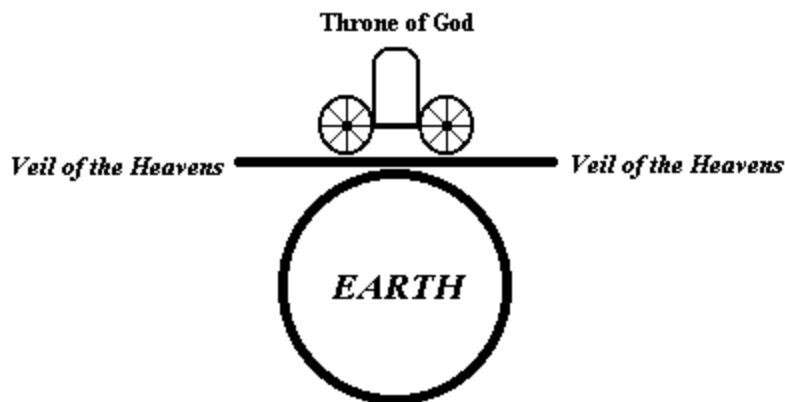
meteorological phenomena of the sort described in our quotation of Psalm 18 above makes all the more sense. Inasmuch as God's chariot-throne in a very real sense "rides the sky" and the waters above it, it should come as no surprise that thunder, lightning, storms, clouds, hail and the like are common representations of the great power of the Almighty in His superintendence of the earth (e.g., Ex.19:16-18; Lev.16:2; Deut.33:26; Ps.50:3; 68:4; 68:33; 104:1-4; Is.19:1; Nah.1:3). For it is from the third heaven and through this "veil" of sky and water that God manifests Himself (Acts 9:3; 26:13; Rom.1:18; Heb.12:26; 2Pet.1:18), keeping His visible form concealed from the eyes of mankind so that their choice for or against Him in the Person of His Son may remain a genuine one, not unduly influenced by the overwhelming and awesome nature of His presence (Ex.33:20; Jn.1:18; 6:46; 1Tim.6:16; 1Jn.4:12).

6. The Throne pours forth the fire of divine judgment: The celestial representations of divine power mentioned above are especially prominent in the book of Revelation, and this is not accidental. For, most commonly in scripture, the presence of thunder, lightning, black storm clouds, whirlwinds and the like are indications of divine *judgment* (as is the case in Psalm 18 above), and Revelation is primarily concerned with the Tribulation, the time of the greatest and most severe divine judgment leveled upon the earth and its inhabitants in the history of mankind's habitation of earth (cf. Dan.12:1; Matt.24:21; Mk.13:19; Rev.16:18; and see part 1 of this series). Inasmuch as fire is the premier symbol of divine judgment (compare the fire and brimstone rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah, the fires of hell, the lake of fire, the fire of the altar where the sacrifice was burned representing Christ's death for us on the cross), it should not seem at all odd that the very *source* of the divine fire of judgment is the Father's heavenly throne (Dan.7:9-10; cf. Ps.97:2-3; Matt.3:11). Indeed, the liquid fire which proceeds from the chariot-throne of God is the very origin of the "lake of fire", the divine instrument of final judgment upon all who have chosen to rebel against Him (compare Dan.7:11 with Matt.25:41 and Rev.20:11-15). This is apparently not an original and necessary characteristic of the Father's chariot-throne, for there are indications in scripture that His intensity of light and fiery brilliance have only become problems for His creatures on account of their own sin and rebellion (cf. the "stones of fire" in Ezek.28:16 turning into "fire coming out of you [Satan]" in Ezek.28:18 as a result of his rebellion). God is a "consuming fire" (Deut.4:24; Is.33:14; Heb.12:29), and dwells in light which is "unapproachable" now (1Tim.6:16; cf. Ps.104:2; 1Jn.1:5-7), but once this present world is consumed by fire (2Pet.3:10-13; Rev.21:1), and this mortality we bear has taken on immortality (1Cor.15:53-54), then we shall revel in the brilliant presence of God the Father and the Lamb who will be our light forever (Rev.22:4; cf. Jn.1:4-9; 3:19-21; 1Jn.1:5-7; Rev.1:15-16).

7. The Throne is only temporarily located in the third heaven: The present location of God's throne is also a result of creature rebellion. We know from Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 that God's throne, God's dwelling, was originally on the earth.¹³⁵ Creature rebellion, specifically, Satan's revolt, created the rift between God and His creation, necessitating either an immediate incineration of that creation or a separation (out of mercy) between God's Presence and the world until such time as He should effect reconciliation on His own terms, namely, *re-creation* on the basis of His Son's sacrifice (cf. 2Cor.5:17-19;

Col.1:20; Rev.21:5). When all God's enemies have been put under His feet, death and the corrupt world will be eradicated as well (1Cor.15:24-26), and at that future time, at history's end, the New Jerusalem will come to earth – the new earth, which will be the dwelling of God for all eternity to come, and God will be all and in all (1Cor.15:27-28; Rev.21-22). This explains the very precise language used here in Revelation 4:2, "a throne *had been placed* in the [third] heaven". Were this the normal, natural, and eternal location of the throne, we should have expected the simple verb "to be" here. But the third heaven is God's battle headquarters from which He is in the process of subduing the devil's rebellion (the victory now secure through the successful mission of the One sent to earth for us), and His throne is a battle chariot, only temporarily removed from earth. Just as the earthly ark was carried by four Levites and accompanied the armies of Israel into battle against their enemies, so the heavenly throne is "carried" by four cherubs, and represents the militant posture of God towards the rebellious creature-rule over the earth in the person of Satan and his angels. The heavenly throne is destined to return at the end of time when sin and death have been completely eradicated from the universe, and every enemy subdued, judged, and disposed of. At that blessed time, we shall see the fire of judgment turn to blessed illumination (compare Rev.20:14-15 with Rev.21:23-25; 22:4), and the waters of judgment to blessed invigoration (compare Rev.21:1 with Rev.22:1-2), for no longer will there be any separation of God from His creatures, nor any further need of it (Rev.21:5; 21:27; 22:15). No longer will there be any need for God's penetration of the separating heavens through unique "Advents", whether of the Son (1st Advent: Jn.3:13; 3:31; 6:33; 6:38; 6:42; 6:50; 2nd Advent: 1Thes.1:10; 4:16; 2Thes.1:7; 1Pet.1:11; Rev.19:11-21), the Spirit (Jn.14:15-17; 15:26-27; 16:13-14; Acts 2), or the Father (Rev.21:2-3; cf. 1Cor.15:24), for on that day God will truly be "with us" (cf. "Immanuel": Is.7:14) in all three Persons, in every way (1Cor.15:28), and for all time to come – and so shall we ever be with Him (1Thes.4:17)!

The throne of God is therefore not located in some remote corner of the universe, nor is heaven so far away that there is little concern for what is happening on the earth. Far from it. The third heaven is, in theological terms, directly on the other side of the separating barrier of the veil of the heavens (sky, atmosphere, and waters above) which Jesus has already pierced (Heb.4:14; 7:26; 9:11-12; cf. Eph.4:7-10; Col.2:15). Now more than ever, the final and complete dissolution of that barrier (already breached by our Lord) is an imminent and impending reality, a fact brought home by the presence here in Revelation 4:2 of the first thing that meets John's eye after entering behind the veil, namely, the throne of God.



The Appearance of the Father:

And the One sitting [on the throne was] similar in appearance to a gemstone of jasper or sardius.

Revelation 4:3

Without doubt, the reason why the throne, covered immediately above, lacks in this context the detailed description which John might have given it is because, as impressive as that throne is, it pales in comparison to the appearance of the One seated upon it. God the Father does not have a physical human body (as Christ does have since His virgin birth), but it is clear from the initial description of the Occupant of throne as the "One *sitting*" that the appearance of the Father here is in the nature of a "theophany", that is, a divine manifestation of His Person in the likeness of human form for the sake of fellowship with His creatures.¹³⁶ God's willingness to make Himself visible to and approachable by His creatures in this way is part and parcel of His great love for us (manifest most clearly in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, given to suffer and serve as a true human being during His 1st Advent, and destined to be revealed in exquisite glory during His 2nd Advent).

In this passage, John describes what to him at this moment is the most salient feature of the enthroned Father, namely, that He is "similar in appearance to a gemstone of jasper or sardius". To better understand what is meant by this phrase, we need first to consider several other passages of scripture which likewise speak of the Father's appearance while seated in theophany on His glorious throne.

1. In Exodus 24:10-17, we are told that "the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire" (cf. Ex.19:18), an impression of His glorious Presence reflected by other scriptures as well, such as the burning bush in Exodus 3:1-15, and the pillar of cloud and fire in Exodus 13:21-22. Compare the description of Christ's eyes in Revelation 1:14: "His eyes were like a fiery flame".

2. In Isaiah 6:1-5, His apparel is described as awesome and impressive, for "the train of His robe filled the temple". Compare the description of Christ's impressive attire in Revelation 1:13: "dressed in a long robe with a golden belt tied around His waist".

3. In Ezekiel 1:27 (cf. Ezek.1:4; 8:2), His body is said to resemble "glowing metal" [NASB, NIV], where the obscure Hebrew word in this phrase, *chashmal* (חַשְׁמַל), refers either to gold (so W.J. Schroeder), brass (so C.F. Keil), or amber (so KJV), or electrum, an alloy of gold and silver (so Septuagint). Common to all four possibilities is the sparkling quality of the material which recalls the orangish color of fire and gives the Father's appearance a tangible, substantive aspect. Compare the description of Christ's feet in Revelation 1:15: "like white-hot bronze when super-heated in a furnace".

4. In Ezekiel 10:4, His glory is called "radiant" or "brilliant" (cf. Ezek.43:2), so intense that it occasions a cloud which fills the temple (cf. Rev.15:8, where the source of the smoke is also the glory of God; cf. also Is.6:4). God, who *is* light (1Jn.1:5), and who dwells in light so "unapproachable" that it is impossible for a man to see Him and live (1Tim.6:16 and Ex.33:20) has clearly *made it* possible here for John to do in the third heaven what is not within the realm of human capacity or survivability to do on earth, namely to view the very glorious image of God without being consumed by His brilliance. Compare the description of Christ in Revelation 1:16: "His face shone like the sun in its glory".

5. In Daniel 7:9-10, the Father's clothing is described as "white as snow" and His hair "white as wool". Compare the description of Christ in Revelation 1:14: "His head and his hair were as white as wool or as snow".

6. In Ezekiel 43:2, His voice is "like the sound of many waters" (cf. Ps.29:3-9; 46:6; Ezek.1:24). Compare the description of Christ in Revelation 1:15: "His voice was like the sound of many waters".

The resemblance pointed out here in almost all particulars between the appearance of the Father and that of our glorified Lord Jesus Christ as He appeared to John in Revelation chapter one is hardly accidental. For the Son is the very "*shining forth*" of [the Father's] glory", and "the *precise image* of [the Father's] essence" (Heb.1:3a; cf. Jn.1:14; 2Cor.4:4; Phil.2:6; Col.1:15). Jesus Himself tells us that whoever has seen Him has indeed seen the Father (Jn.14:9; cf. Jn.1:18; 12:45). After all, as the Father's unique representative (1Tim.2:5-6; Heb.8:6; 9:15; 12:24), the One anointed to reconcile the world to Him and Him to the world (2Cor.5:17-20; Col.1:19-20; Heb.10:7), the One sent

into the world to be the true Light of the world (Jn.1:4-9), it is really Jesus who has been seen on this earth in all theophany that has occurred on the earth.¹³⁷

The description of the Father in Revelation 4:3 as being like a "jasper or sardius" gemstone refers to the appearance of His "body" and is reminiscent of the description of Christ's feet as like "white-hot bronze" (as well as to the "glowing metal" description in Ezekiel 1:27). The jasper referred to here is a dark colored stone (black to red to purple), while the sardius is also characterized by fiery earth-tones (orange to red). Moreover, the latter's Hebrew equivalent is the *`odem* (אֲדָמָה), whose similarity to the name "Adam" is not coincidental (אָדָם, *`adham*).¹³⁸ For the name "Adam" means "ruddy" and refers to the earth-tone color of the first man whose body was taken directly from the earth. In choosing to represent Himself in the form of a man whose "body" exhibits a similar hue (albeit with a brilliant glory never before borne by man save our resurrected Lord), the Father here signals all who read the words of this prophecy of His clear intention and purpose to reestablish divine rule and residence *with man on the earth*, a reality certainly future in the New Jerusalem (Rev.21-22).

The Rainbow:

And there was a rainbow around the throne similar in appearance to [something] made of emerald.

Revelation 4:4a

The rainbow we see in the sky is a reflection or projection of the visible appearance of the glory of God (compare Ezek.1:26-28 with Gen.9:9-17 and see below). Here in Revelation 4:3, however, John sees the real thing, that is, the actual glory of God which surrounds the Father and His throne in all its iridescent brilliance. Typically, this brilliance of the glory of God is so overwhelming that it cannot even be directly viewed by mere human beings, let alone properly described (so that in earthly manifestations it is usually described merely as a "brightness"). But, as discussed above, John is here enabled to see these heavenly sights which would normally be impossible for any mortal man to view. His description of the rainbow is similar to that given by Ezekiel (as seen here in C.F. Keil's translation with emphasis and explanations added):

(26) Over the expanse (i.e., the firmament or "compressed" barrier of the heavens: see above) above their heads (i.e., of the four cherubs) was to be seen, like a sapphire stone, the figure of a throne: and over the figure of the throne was a figure resembling a Man above it. And I saw like the appearance of glowing brass (or electrum or amber: see above), like the appearance of fire within the same (i.e., within the figure of the Man) round about; (27) from the appearance of His loins upwards, and from the appearance of His loins downwards, I saw as of the appearance of fire, and a shining light was round about it. (28) *Like the appearance of the (rain)bow*, which is in the clouds in the day of rain, was the appearance of the *shining light* round about. *This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Jehovah.*

Ezekiel 1:26-28a [C.F. Keil]

This passage makes it patently clear that the rainbow and the glory of the Lord are synonymous. Therefore, in Revelation 4:3, the "rainbow around the throne" can only be understood as the manifestation of that glory for all who have capacity to see it, and we may well imagine that its brilliance, brightness, and iridescence exceed by orders of magnitude the reflection of that glory in the earthly rainbow whose appearance we are occasionally blessed to see.

In terms of its color, John describes the rainbow as "similar in appearance to [something] made of emerald". We should not, however, imagine that the color of the rainbow is totally or even predominantly green (the usual color associated with this particular gemstone). But the emerald was the most valuable gemstone in wide circulation in the ancient world (the diamond and ruby being rare and relatively unknown). This consideration, coupled with the sparkling, flashing quality of the emerald no doubt prompted John's description of the rainbow-aura of God's glory as being "emerald-like". It should also be noted that using a gemstone as the primary point of comparison for the rainbow suggests to us that it is a much more tangible and tactile phenomenon than the reflection we sometimes see. Finally, in addition to its status as most precious jewel, and in addition to its sparkling character, one other factor may have influenced John's choice of the adjective "emerald-like" once it seemed appropriate to represent the rainbow's palpable, sparkling, and impressive appearance by reference to a gemstone, namely, the fact that the name of its Hebrew counterpart (*bareqeth*, ברקת) means "flashing" or "glittering", and would thus be most evocative of this rainbow's brilliant, refulgent nature.

The fact of this rainbow's overwhelming brilliance should be kept in mind, for it is, as we have just seen, the effulgent shining forth of the glory of the Lord, and without any earthly shielding of the glory at that. This is an important point of which to take note, for whenever God has "revealed" His glory on earth, it has always been in shielded form (for otherwise no flesh could survive the experience of viewing it). When Moses sought to see the glory of the Lord, the Lord responded "You are not able to see My face, because no man can see Me and live" (Ex.33:19-20). When God *does* reveal His glory to Moses immediately thereafter, He also makes it clear that this is a "partial revelation" rather than the "direct view" John is here receiving (Ex.33:21-23). Even in cases of the partial revelation on earth of the glory of the Lord, moreover, its intensity and fiery nature is overwhelming (Ex.40:34-38; Lev.9:23-24; 2Chron.7:1-3; Is.6:5; Ezek.1:28; Matt.17:5-6; Lk.2:9). As we have explained above, the world is at present separated from the full glory of God by the barrier of the heavens, and at history's end when His glory comes back to earth at last, that barrier and the corrupted world beneath it (which cannot stand the light) will meet with fiery destruction and be replaced with a blessed new heavens and new earth "where righteousness dwells" (Is.65:17; 66:22; 2Pet.3:10-13; Rev.21:1; 21:5; cf. Is.34:4; Rev.6:14; a blessed new world of which we believers are already positionally a part: cf. 2Cor.5:17).

The rainbow is thus an important symbol of God's peace, prosperity, and restoration following the impending judgment of the Tribulation, and foreshadowing His final return to earth when God's glory will no longer be seen only "in the heavens" but also on

the earth (cf. Rev.21:23 "the glory of God gives it light"; Rev.22:5 "the Lord will give them light"). The rainbow is well-known by all readers of scripture as God's sign, God's promise of mercy upon the earth given after the great flood (Gen.9:9-17). Thus, the appearance of His glory in rainbow form here anticipates the blessed divine calm after the coming storm of the Tribulation. By allowing John to see His glory in this "blessed aftermath" form of the rainbow, God is assuring him and us that in spite of the devastating nature of the coming Tribulation, earth will not be completely destroyed, but will instead be delivered from the hands of the wicked and restored to the most blessed peace and prosperity it has ever known in the coming Kingdom of His Son.¹³⁹ And when those thousand years have run their course, the day will come when all that is corrupt and wicked in this world will be burnt away by this same glory of God when He returns to the new earth to live with us forever (Rev.21:1-8). On that day, the fiery judgment of the glory of God will never again be visible or necessary, and His glory will instead be seen only as the most exquisite and intense light, more brilliant, more blessed, more beautiful than any rainbow human eyes have yet beheld.

The Elders:

And encircling the throne were twenty-four [other] thrones. And on the[se] thrones twenty-four elders were sitting, dressed in white clothing. And on their heads were golden crowns.

Revelation 4:4b

The twenty-four elders are high-ranking angels, not human beings as is sometimes assumed. At this point in John's narrative, the Tribulation has not yet begun, the resurrection of believers has not yet taken place, and the judgment seat of Christ (with its concomitant rewards to individual believers) is still future – all events which would need to precede any enthroning of human elders in heaven. Furthermore, we know that until Christ's ascension there were no human beings in heaven at all (that is, until He "led captivity captive", bringing the pre-cross believers from the subterranean paradise through the heavens and into God's heavenly temple in the third heaven: see the discussion above under "the Holy Place"). We also know that there are many believers still on the earth at present (with untold myriads yet to come in the Millennium), and it would be most strange if these were not to have "elder representation" too (assuming these elders to be human). In short, an already completed, adjudged, rewarded, and resurrected human college of elders at this juncture is not possible as none of these conditions have yet been fulfilled for the human family of God. Therefore, these elders must be taken to be angels (a conclusion strengthened by the fact that their appearance and behavior is in every way similar to and consistent with the other angelic creatures John describes in Revelation).

Indeed, as we have seen before, these elders are extremely high ranking angelic creatures, second in rank only to the cherubim.¹⁴⁰ This is reflected by the fact that they are located the closest to God after the cherubs, seated on thrones around the throne of God (Rev.4:4). Along with these thrones, their crowns also speak to their exalted status (cf. Is.24:22-23; Rev.4:4; 4:10; 5:5-6; 5:8; 5:11; 5:14; 7:11; 7:13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4), and we

have suggested before that the "thrones" mentioned in Colossians 1:16 are a comparable rank of fallen angel invented by the devil in imitation of the elders. These elders, as the highest ranking angels not directly associated with the throne of God as the Lord's "bodyguard" (i.e., the cherubs), are apparently the chief officials of the six angelic clans who remained loyal to God during Satan's rebellion (with each clan supplying a college of four elders). The presence, appearance, and worship of these twenty-four elders are thus a reminder to all who consider this heavenly scene of the great value of being and remaining loyal to the Lord, and of the exceptional benefits promised to those who excel in the struggle in which we are now engaged.¹⁴¹

Lightning, Sounds and Thunder:

And from the throne [of God] come forth flashes of lightning, voices and peals of thunder.

Revelation 4:5a

These are all portents of impending judgment (cf. Is.29:6), as can be seen from 1) the fact that the same three elements occur in combination after the sounding of the seventh trumpet, which is the last warning before the beginning of the Great Tribulation, the Tribulation's final phase (Rev.11:19; cf. Gen.19:24; Ex.9:23-34; 19:16-19; 20:18; 1Sam.7:10; Job 37:1-5; 40:9; Ps.18:7-15; 29:3-9; 77:17-18), and 2) the fact that lightning, sounds and thunder also reappear together following the seventh bowl judgment, the final tribulational judgment preceding the battle of Armageddon (Rev.16:18). That here these signs of incipient judgment proceed from the throne of God is not unprecedented (cf. Is.6:4; Ezek.1:4; 1:14; 1:24-25; Rev.8:5; 11:19; 16:18), neither should it be completely unexpected. For while God's presence and glory are indeed blessed for all who have been "made perfect" (Heb.12:23), His brilliant holiness and righteousness spell impending doom for all who persist in opposing Him. For His enemies, the throne of glory is indeed a chariot of war, ready to unleash upon a corrupt and rebellious world the just judgment necessary to cleanse the heavens and the earth once and for all and restore everlasting peace in the new world without end. We may take comfort and encouragement from the awesome and terrifying nature of these warning signs. For when God gives warning, whether to individuals or to the world at large, He does so in an unmistakable way that makes crystal clear the consequences of failing to heed His warnings (cf. Heb.12:18-21) – nothing could be more gracious on His part.

The Seven Lamps of Fire:

And there [stood] burning before the throne seven lamps of fire, which are the seven spirits of God.

Revelation 4:5b

All three members of the Trinity are present in the heavenly temple. The Father (whose appearance we have discussed above), the Son (present with the Father on His throne: Rev.5:6), and the Spirit, represented by these "seven lamps of fire". That these seven lamps "which are the seven spirits of God" represent the Holy Spirit is clear from

Revelation 1:4-5, where these same "seven spirits" are mentioned by John in between the Father and the Son:

(4b) Grace to you and peace from the One who is and was and is coming (i.e., the Father), and from the seven spirits (i.e., the Holy Spirit) which are before His throne, (5) and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth.

Revelation 1:4b-5a

The Greek word for these "lamps", *lampas* (λαμπάς; the origin of our English word "lamp"), is not to be confused with the "lamp-stands" of chapters one and two (*lychnia*, λυχνία: Rev.1:12-13; 1:20; 2:1; 2:5; 11:4). A "lamp", such as we have here in Revelation 4:5, is the actual *source* of the light. In the ancient world, these were generally small, oblong, ceramic trays, with a narrow throat that held a wick which drew and burned olive oil from the basin of the lamp. A "lampstand", on the other hand, was a platform which *served to support* the lamp. As vessels of the Holy Spirit (1Cor.6:19-20; cf. Rom.6:13-19; 12:2; 1Pet.2:5), we believers, whether individually or, as in the case of the seven churches, collectively, are "lampstands", that is, *instruments* of God who are used by Him to facilitate the shining forth of His Word and His witness in this dark world (Matt.5:15-16; Eph.5:8; Phil.2:15; 1Thes.5:5). The *source* of light, however, the "lamp" which provides the light we hold aloft, display and reflect, is God the Holy Spirit (2Cor.3:17-18; cf. Gal.5:16-25).

The manifestation of the Spirit in the symbol of "lamps" thus not only expresses His role in God's plan of enlightenment, of empowerment, and of witness to the world (cf. Jn.16:5-15), but also maintains His posture of being ever "felt but not seen" as the invisible yet powerful "energizer" of that plan. Like the wind (and the word for wind and Spirit are of course the same in Greek: *pneuma*: πνεῦμα), He is not visible to the eye of man, but is yet ubiquitous and powerful (Jn.3:8; cf. Gen.6:3; Zech.4:6; Jn.14:16-17; 1Cor.12:3; Gal.5:16-26).¹⁴² The fact that the Spirit is represented by *seven* lamps emphasizes the perfect and complete nature of the empowerment, enlightenment, and witness He provides (Is.11:1-3; Zech.3:8-9; 4:2; 4:6; 4:10; Rev.3:1; 5:6; cf. Is.42:1; Matt.3:16-17; Jn.3:34; 16:12-15).

These lamps, moreover, are said to be "lamps of fire", and further, to be "*burning* before the throne". The Spirit is often represented in terms of fire and heat (Acts 2:3; 18:25; Rom.12:11; 1Thes.5:19; Jas.4:5 [Greek]; cf. 1Sam.11:6; Ps.69:9; Jn.2:17), a reference to His warming, quickening, and inspiring of God's people, that they should be not lukewarm like the Laodiceans (Rev.3:15-16), but zealous for our Lord (Matt.22:37-40; Tit.2:14 [not NIV]; 2Pet.3:12; cf. 1Cor.9:24; 1Tim.4:10 [not NIV]; 6:12), that they should not "quench" the Spirit's fiery influence, (1Thes.5:19), but take fire themselves in the cause of Jesus Christ (Rom.12:2; 2Tim.1:6-7; cf. 1Tim.4:14). This reminder of the Spirit's illuminating, purifying, warming, empowering, and inspiring ministry should be comforting for the generation at the edge of the Tribulation, reminding us of God's

perfect and continuing guidance, protection, provision and comfort for all believers through the indwelling of His Spirit, no matter how dark the days to come:

(15) For as many as are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery [leading you] back to fear, but you have received a Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, "Abba, my Father!" (16) The Spirit Himself [thus] testifies to our spirit that we are God's children. (17) And if we are God's children, then we are also His heirs, even fellow heirs of Christ – that is, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we might also be glorified together with Him.

Romans 8:15-17

The Sea:

And in front of the throne [was something] like a sea of glass similar to crystal.

Revelation 4:6a

In front of the throne John sees something "like a sea of glass similar to crystal". This "sea" (Greek *thalassa*: θάλασσα), is the original (or antitype) of which the laver-sea of the tabernacle-temple was merely a representative type. It is in many respects like a true earthly sea (both are represented by the same word in Greek), but John uses the word "like" here (Greek: *hos, ὡς*) to show that there is a significant difference. This sea is "glass-like" and "similar to crystal" in its appearance, the same essential description we noted above upon encountering this identical phenomenon in the books of Exodus and Ezekiel:

And they (i.e., the elders of Israel) saw the God of Israel. And under His feet was something like a brick-work pavement of [blue] sapphire, translucent as the heavens themselves.

Exodus 24:10

And there was something resembling a firmament shimmering like ice awesomely stretched out over the heads of the living creatures.

Ezekiel 1:22

The nouns ice, glass, and crystal, and the adjectival descriptions sapphire blue, shimmering, and translucent might indeed all be used of an impressive body of water in a solid state, an interpretation borne out by the names "pavement" and "firmament" in the passages above. Moreover, the appearance of the laver-sea provides a similar impression, for although it was filled with water in a liquid state, the reflective surface of the solid bronze basin would have given that water a shimmering, translucent and even blueish appearance (when it caught the sky's reflection: cf. Job 37:18). As indicated in our earlier treatment of the earthly laver-sea, this solid or "frozen" heavenly sea which John is viewing here is in fact nothing less than the "waters above" from the Genesis account of the earth's restoration.¹⁴³

(6) And God said, "Let there be a firmament in the middle of the waters, and let it separate between waters and *the* waters." (7) And God made the firmament to separate between the waters which were below the firmament and *the* waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. (8) And God called the firmament "heavens".
Genesis 1:6-8a

These "waters above" are, in effect, the final, solid layer resting on the "top" of the firmament (or heavens), and in concert with the heavens perform the function of separating Holy God from the corrupted world, a fact which helps to explain why they can be described in similar terms to the barrier of the heavens (i.e., "pavement" and "firmament" in Exodus and Ezekiel respectively).¹⁴⁴ One also occasionally finds in scripture, mostly in poetic contexts, instances where the atmosphere of planet earth and its moisture are described as if they comprised the two heavens and the "waters above" along with the moisture contained in the atmosphere (i.e., where these two sets are conflated for poetic effect in phenomenological "language of appearance" along the lines of describing the sun as "setting" when really it is the earth which is rotating: cf. Ps.104:13). However, the existence of this heavenly sea in Revelation 4:6 far above the earthly atmosphere shows clearly that Genesis 1:6-8 is not a "poetic" or "confused" account (which somehow fails to perceive or acknowledge the existence of a universe beyond earth's atmosphere), but that, on the contrary, the "firmament of the heavens" described there is indeed meant to be understood as *both* of the two heavens (sky and space together), just as God names it to be with the dual form "heavens" (Gen.1:7),¹⁴⁵ and just as one would assume it be as the place of the sun, moon, and stars (Gen.1:14-19). Once we accept the Genesis account of the reconstruction of the heavens at face value, that is, as a "firmament" comprising everything between earth and the third heaven and truly dividing two massive sets of waters on each side, then not only is the existence of this heavenly sea in Revelation 4:6 clarified, but other passages of scripture fall into place as well, passages which likewise describe the "waters above" not as atmospheric moisture, but as a separate division of the original waters now far above the known universe (e.g., Ps.104:3; cf. Isaiah 40:22):

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, all the fountains of the great deep were broken open, and all the sluice gates of the heavens were opened up (i.e., releasing the waters above).
Genesis 7:11

Praise Him, you heavens of the heavens, and you, O waters above the heavens.
Psalm 148:4

(5) But something escapes their notice in asserting this (i.e., that God's judgment will never come), namely, that there were heavens long ago too, and an earth, which was [re]established out from under water (i.e., the "waters below" collected into seas) and through [the midst of] water (i.e., the "waters above" separated from the "waters below") by the Word of God – (6) [and that it was] through these two [sets of waters] that the world of that time (i.e., in Noah's day) was [again] deluged by water [from above and

below] and destroyed.
2nd Peter 3:5-6

In the first passage above, the earth is flooded by an abundance of waters which come from below the earth *and* from *above* the heavens (which is the origin of both blessing and judgment: cf. Ps.78:23; Is.24:18; Mal.3:10). Both sets of waters here are given equal emphasis in regard to the volume of water which completely deluged the earth, and this combination of two sets of waters (neither of which is visible to the human eye) gives the lie to skeptical evaluations of the great flood which calculate the generation of such a huge volume of water as impossible (for the waters topped the highest of earth's mountains by more than twenty feet, something not possible if the volume of water in the present seas was alone the source of the great flood: Gen.7:20).

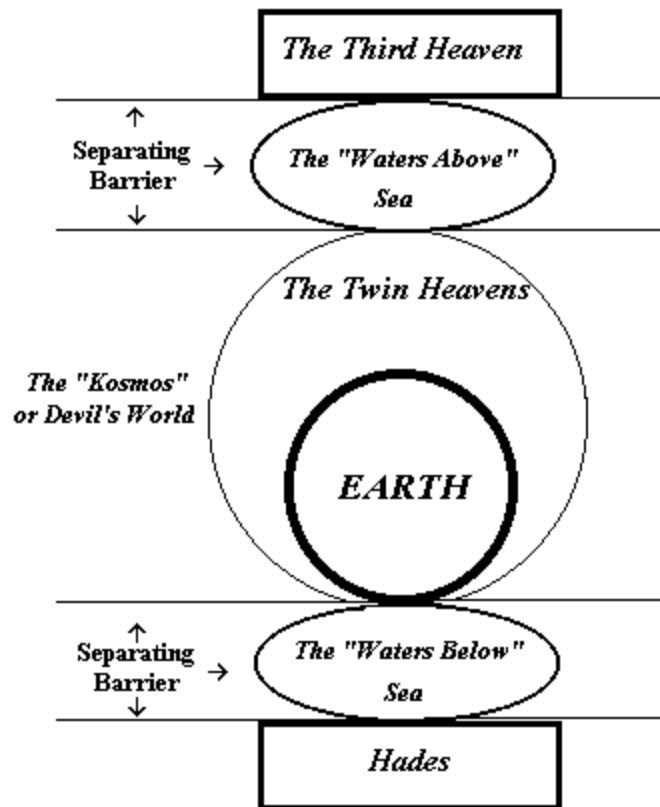
In the second passage above, the phrase "heavens of the heavens", often also translated "highest heavens" is a reference to the third heaven located above the twin-heavens of sky and space (cf. verses 1-3 of the same Psalm and Ps.115:15-16). The second half of Psalm 148:4 treats the layer of water between this third heaven and the (other) two heavens, making it abundantly clear that these "waters above" cannot be mere atmospheric moisture, but must instead be the second set of waters divided by the Genesis 1:6-7 firmament, far above the atmosphere at the very "top" of the universe.

In the third passage above, the heavens of Genesis 1:6-7 have this same separating function. Peter's juxtaposition of the heavens, the earth, and the two sets of waters shows clearly that it is the "heavens which existed long ago" which are the first means of re-establishing the earth (i.e., by dividing the two sets of waters). For the earth has come "out of water" (i.e., it appears above the waters as they fall down into their collecting place, the earthly sea), and "through [the midst of] water" (i.e., the heavens as a firmament have split the waters below from those above for earth's benefit, making possible the collection into seas of the waters below).¹⁴⁶

Again, although these "waters above" and the twin heavens upon which they rest are really two separate things, they are nevertheless both far "above" the earth, and are therefore occasionally described as being of a piece (precisely as in the description of this layer of water as "firmament" as we have seen in Ezekiel 1:22-28 and 10:1). In fact, the Hebrew word for heavens (*shamayim*, שמים), though the precise etymology is disputed, very probably means "place of the waters" (i.e., it is phrase meaning "there [are the] waters" = *sham-mayim*, שם-מים), which meaning would represent an allusion both to the (atmospheric) waters within the first heaven and to the boundary "waters above" them in the second (though these "waters above" are technically distinct from the heavens as we have seen).¹⁴⁷ Finally, the conflation of these "waters above" with the firmament of the heavens is also clearly represented in the construction of the laver-sea as we have seen above. For in this earthly representation of the heavenly sea, it is the water which represents the heavenly sea proper, while the brazen container technically represents the containing, restraining firmament of the heavens:

Will you hammer out with Him a firmament for the clouds, [which is] hard as a mirror which has been forged [of bronze]?
Job 37:18

These "waters above" also serve an important separative purpose. Just as the firmament was re-constructed by God to separate and restrain the two sets of waters (Gen.1:6-7), so the "waters above" serve to separate the third heaven, the holy temple of God, from the corrupted world beneath. This separating function is clearly visible as well in the case of the "waters below" which stand in the progression of heaven-earth-"waters below" (cf. Ex.20:4) between the earth and the subterranean chambers of Hades beneath it (Job 26:5-6). That is why, for example, Hades is also occasionally referred to as the "abyss",¹⁴⁸ in exactly the same conflation of technically distinct regions as we saw in the use of "firmament" for "waters above the firmament" in Ezekiel chapters one and ten – because Hades is far beneath these "waters below" and can only be accessed through them, it can be described in biblical terminology as part of the same conglomerate (in the same way that since both the heavens and the "waters above" must be penetrated in order to reach the third heaven, these two technically distinct regions can for many purposes be considered as if they were of a piece, just as the laver-sea and its waters are considered a unit). This separating function of the "waters below" also explains why in Revelation 20:13 it is "the sea" which is said to "give up her dead" – *not* because there are any departed spirits in the sea, but rather because the sea is the separating layer which "locks in", so to speak, the unsaved dead beneath, in Hades (Job 26:5-6; 38:16-17).¹⁴⁹ The "waters above" likewise perform an analogous separating function, forming an important wall of division between the holy precinct of the third heaven above them and the *kosmos* of the devil, Satan's corrupt world, which lies below them. Viewed schematically, therefore, the two sets of waters may be represented in the following way:



Thus both sets of waters are, in theological terms, "separating seas", dividing "death and Hades" from the (corrupt) world of the living in the case of the "waters below", and the (corrupt) world of the living from the holy abode of God in the case of the "waters above". Without this separating, shielding function of the heavens (of which this frozen sea of Revelation 4:6 is the upper "crust"), the currently corrupt heavens and earth would "flee away" in the presence of the awesome glory of the Holy Lord God Almighty (Rev.20:11; cf. Ps.97:5; 102:25-27; Is.13:13; 24:19-20; 34:4; 51:6; Hag.2:6-7; Matt.5:18; 24:35; Lk.21:33; 1Cor.7:31; Heb.12:25-29; 2Pet.3:10-13; 1Jn.2:17; Rev.6:14; 21:1). It is important to note, however, that despite the present separation of holiness above from corruption below (a separation without which continued existence of our world would not be possible), God has in no way isolated Himself from the world. On the contrary, He has always maintained a powerful and comprehensive witness to this world, through the very nature of His creation, through the ministry of human and angelic agents, and finally and most significantly through the sending and the sacrificing of His own beloved Son (compare Heb.1:1 with Jn.3:16). And the day *will* come when this barrier of water no longer separates us from God, when God Himself has purged with fire the world we know (2Pet.3:10-12; cf. Is.26:21), when instead of a corrupted *kosmos* there will be new heavens and a new earth "where righteousness dwells" (2Pet.3:13; cf. Is.65:17; 66:22), when God Himself will dwell among us on that new earth (Rev.21:3; cf. Is.25:6-9; Ezek.37:27; Zech.2:10), and when the brilliant glory of His being will no longer be

incompatible with the world's continued existence, but will be instead the light whereby we walk (Rev.21:23-24; 22:5). On that blessed and glorious day, from thenceforth and forever there shall be "no more sea" (Rev.21:1). On that blessed and glorious day, the only thing resembling the waters below shall be waters of life which flow down from before the Lord (Rev.22:1-2; cf. Is.55:1; Ezek.47:1-12; Joel 3:18; Zech.14:8; Rev.22:17), and the only thing resembling the frozen waters above shall be the crystal of which the New Jerusalem is built (Rev.21:18-21). Instead of serving as a temporary liquid barrier between Hades and the world of the living (through which the unsaved dead must inevitably pass), the waters of life will flow freely for everlasting blessing and fellowship with Him. And instead of being a frozen barrier separating us from His holiness (as the waters above now do), the brilliantly crystalline walls and streets of the New Jerusalem will provide a permanent, abiding, solid home of unprecedented blessing forevermore.

Finally, as the last barrier between the abode of God and the world below, all access between these two must come through this heavenly sea. Such "passage ways" through the heavens and the waters above them into the presence of God are variously described in scripture:

1. As "sluices" in the heavens (cf. Gen.7:11; 8:2; 2Kng.7:19; Is.24:18; Mal.3:10):

(1) Then Elisha said, "Hear the Word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord, 'At this time tomorrow, a seah of flour for a shekel, and two seahs of barley for a shekel in the gate of Samaria'". (2) And the officer upon whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God and said, "Behold, if the Lord were to *make sluices in the heavens*, could this thing come to pass?" And [Elisha] answered him, "Behold, you are going to see [it] with your eyes, but you will not eat of it".

2nd Kings 7:1-2

2. As "doors" in the heavens (cf. Ps.78:23-25):

After this I looked and, behold, a ***door was standing open in heaven***. And the voice which I had heard before (sounding to me like a trumpet) was saying, "Come up here (i.e., *through* the door), and I will show you what must happen after these things!"
Revelation 4:1

3. As an "opening" in the heavens (cf. Ezek.1:1; Matt.3:16; Jn.1:51; Acts 10:11; Rev.19:11):

(55) But [Stephen], being full of the Holy Spirit and looking intently into heaven saw God's glory and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. (56) And he said, "Behold, I see *the heavens opened up*, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

Acts 7:55-56

4. As traversed by a "ladder", "ramp", or "stairway" through the heavens (cf. Amos 9:6 [Hebrew]):

And [Jacob] dreamed, and, behold, there was *a ramp (or ladder) standing on the earth, and its top reached the heavens*. And, behold, ***the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.***

Genesis 28:12

All of these passages refer to the same thing, namely, the accessibility of the third heaven only through tightly controlled means which preserve the separation between holy God above and the corrupt world below. This accessibility involves divinely provided temporary apertures which penetrate the heavens and the barrier of upper waters in order to allow God's messengers, the angels, to accomplish His will on earth and then return into His presence. As creatures who, in addition to being spiritual, are also of this corrupt earth, human beings would never have been able to enjoy the same access through the protective barrier of the heavens and the "waters above", had it not been for the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ who is "the way" (Jn.14:6; cf. Matt.7:13-14; Lk.13:24-25; Jn.10:7-9; and cf. Ps.118:19-27), who has gained this access for us (Eph.2:18; 3:12), and who has given us the hope of passing through this same barrier as those who belong to Him (Heb.6:19-20; 9:24-25; 10:20; cf. Matt.27:51):

And He said to him, "Truly, truly I say to you, you will [all] see heaven standing open, and the angels of God ascending and descending unto the Son of Man".

John 1:51

To return to the scene in the third heaven, the sea of upper waters is thus not only a separating barrier between God's heavenly temple and the world below, but also an access point. This latter function helps to explain the appearance "on the sea" of the tribulational believers as they endure the fiery Great Persecution (Rev.15:2). In this respect, then, the heavenly sea of "waters above" seems also to act in the capacity of an "observation port" of sorts for the heavenly throngs witnessing the events unfolding on the earth below. Scripture provides few details of such heavenly observation of the earth, but it is clear that angelic kind is very aware of what is happening here below (Job 1-2; 1Kng.22:19-22; Lk.15:10; 1Cor.4:9; 11:10; 1Pet.1:12), and there are also indications that departed believers, now in residence in the third heaven, may also be able to view earthly events in this way (Jn.8:56; Heb.12:1; Rev.6:10). If so, this sea seems to be the "viewing lens" for such observation, although it is important to note that God is so overwhelmingly glorious and wonderful in Person that such earthly events will no doubt only be of interest from the heavenly perspective to the extent that they reflect His glory and the progress of His plan.

The Four Living Creatures:

And in the midst of throne, encircling the throne, were four living-creatures, laden with eyes in front and in back

Revelation 4:6b

These four "living creatures" are the cherubs (or cherubim, to use the Hebrew plural). The cherubs are the highest ranking angelic order and we have had occasion to discuss

them in detail several times in the past.¹⁵⁰ The Hebrew word "cherub" (*cherubh*, כְּרֻב) is cognate with an Akkadian root apparently meaning to praise or worship, and this is certainly descriptive of one of the main duties of the cherubim, who attend the throne of God, continually praising Him (Is.6:1-7; Rev.4:8; 5:8; 5:14; 7:11-12; 19:4).¹⁵¹ These angels are also called "seraphs" in Isaiah chapter six, a reference to their fiery appearance (cf. Ezek.1:5; 1:13; 8:2; cf. Deut.4:24; Ps.104:4; Ezek.28:14).¹⁵² As in the case of Satan, the original cherub replaced by these four, the cherubim or "living creatures" attend, transport, and guard the throne of God, a duty which explains the plethora of eyes which fill their bodies and wings (i.e., as symbols and means of constant vigilance: Rev.4:6; 4:8; Ezek.1:18; 10:12). Before the devil's rebellion, there was only one cherub (Satan), who represented the relationship between God and angelic creation, standing as a type of the anti-type "angel of the Lord", namely, Jesus Christ in His pre-incarnate manifestations.¹⁵³ Following the devil's rebellion and Satan's removal from this privileged position, the symbolism of the cherub changes, with the devil's four replacements now representing the God-man Jesus Christ in His role as God's Mediator between God and *Man* in the four ages of human history (see Part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion, section II.4, "The Four Ages of Human History):

- The bullock face (Gentile age) is a picture of Christ the suffering Servant. The bullock not only bears burdens (as Christ bore our sins: cf. Is.53:4), but is also the most esteemed sacrificial animal, whose blood was shed under the Old Testament economy as a symbolic representation of Christ's promised work on our behalf (Lev.1:5ff.).
- The lion face (Jewish age) is a picture of Christ as the promised Messiah. The lion is the symbol of the tribe of Judah (Rev.5:5; cf. Gen.49:9-12), and has a messianic connotation throughout the Old Testament (cf. Num.23:24; 24:9). The generation of Israel to whom He came was ready to embrace the lion (the Messiah as avenging warrior), but stumbled over the bullock (the Messiah as self-sacrificing servant).
- The human face (Church age) is a picture of Christ as the incarnate, visible Savior of the world. He is *the* Son of Man (Matt.9:6; Jn.9:35), the archetypal human being who is truly human in every way apart from sin (Heb.2:14 with 4:15), the last Adam (1Cor.15:45). The Church, composed of all believing Jews and gentiles, is His body here on earth, not yet glorified as indeed He was not glorified until after His work on the cross was completed (Jn.17:1-5).
- The eagle face (Millennial age) is a picture of Christ exalted in resurrection and victorious in battle. Glorified by the Father for His victory at the cross (Eph.1:19b-23), following His resurrection and ascension He is now seated at the right hand of God the Father until the day of His return (Ps.110). At that time (the Second Advent), He will fulfill all the messianic prophecies recorded in the scriptures and will rule the world in glory for a thousand years (Eph.3:10-12; Col.1:20). With its connotations of forbidding majesty and awe (Deut.28:49; Jer.48:40; 49:22; Ezek.17:3; 17:7; Dan.7:4; Hos.8:1; Hab.1:8), the eagle is an appropriate symbol for Christ's majestic and awe-inspiring double victory, first at the cross (with its accompanying resurrection, ascension and

session at the Father's right hand), and ultimately at the Second Advent (Matt.24:28; Lk.17:37; compare the picture of the glorified Christ at Rev.1:12-16).

Of all human features, the face is at once one of the most memorable and expressive, making it a most effective means for the type of symbolic representation discussed above. Although their bodies resemble human form (Ezek.1:5), the four faces of the cherubim are unique, and stand symbolically for the various aspects of our Lord's earthly ministry just described. In this way, the faces of the cherubim reflect the glory of the Son of God instead of their own glory, just as, ideally, the world should see the face of Christ in us, His servants, when we walk as He commanded us to do (2Cor.3:18; cf. Matt.16:24; Jn.13:15; 1Cor.11:1; 2Cor.2:15; Gal.4:19; Eph.5:1; 1Thes.1:6; 1Pet.2:21).

The order of the cherubs given in Revelation 4:7 (Lion-Bullock-Man-Eagle) has the following significance:

- The symbol of the historical Age of Israel is placed first.
- The symbol of the coming Kingdom of Israel is placed last.
- These two symbols enclose the two symbols of the predominantly gentile ages, of which . . .
- The symbol of the Age of the Gentiles is placed first.
- The symbol of the Church Age (where gentiles are grafted into Israel) is placed next to it.
- Thus Israel and Kingdom Israel enclose the gentiles and the mystery gentiles (Eph.3:6).

The symbolism thus rendered of Israel enclosing the gentiles and the gentiles fulfilling Israel is at once powerful and appropriate, for Christ, whose Person and work these four ages and their corresponding cherub-faces represent, is the One who fills and completes everything in every way (Eph.1:23; cf. Eph.1:9-10).¹⁵⁴

Holy, Holy, Holy: This refrain is the same as we find in Isaiah 6:3 (with the Greek "holy" *hagios* [ἅγιος] being the exact equivalent of the Hebrew "holy" *qadosh* [קדוש]). The structure of the strophe is also similar in both cases:

Holy, Holy, Holy
[is the] Lord of hosts!
The whole world is full of His glory!
Isaiah 6:3b

Holy, Holy, Holy
[is the] Lord, the Almighty God!

The One who was, and who is, and who is coming!
Revelation 4:8b

The phrase "Almighty God" is essentially a Greek equivalent for the Hebrew "Lord of hosts" (and is frequently found as such in the Septuagint). Therefore, only the third line of the strophe is significantly different. In that third line, in the quote from Revelation, not only is the eternity of God emphasized, but also His imminent advent, a reality that is only fully revealed in this final book of scripture. For in the two final chapters of Revelation, it is made clear that, after Christ's millennial reign, the Father too will return to the earth, and God will be "all in all" forevermore (1Cor.15:28; Rev.21:2-8; 22:1-5). The complete victory of God and His complete restoration of all things for the better is thus now being proclaimed continually in His presence by the cherubim.¹⁵⁵

Although the Greek of verse eight states that the four cherubs are "saying" these words, that does not exclude the possibility that they are doing so in musical form. For both at Revelation 5:9 and 15:3, the same formula is used in conjunction with singing, and the fact that these words are in the form of a poem or song makes it a likely possibility that we are to take "holy, holy, holy" as a hymn of praise to God (compare with Rev.5:8; 5:14; 7:11-12; 19:4). The original cherub, Satan, for example, was endowed with a magnificent musical apparatus (the "tabrets and pipes" of Ezek.28:13).¹⁵⁶ In any case, we can be sure that the proclamation of "holy, holy, holy" is most impressive indeed, for at the similar rendition of this refrain by the cherubs in Isaiah, the doorposts and threshold of the temple were shaken while the temple itself filled with smoke (Is.6:4).

John further describes this (probably) musical worship on behalf of the cherubim as giving "glory, honor, and thanks to the One who sits on the throne, the One who lives forever and ever". In this phrase we have perhaps the perfect definition of what it means to worship God aright, namely, to acknowledge His glory, to bestow upon Him all due honor, and to give thanks to Him for who He is and what He has done. It is also both interesting and important to note that, while this refrain may be delivered in musical form, there has been no attempt by John even to characterize the melody, much less reproduce it. This fact should remind us in no uncertain terms that what is really important are the true words of God. The Word of truth is the most powerful and important thing we possess, and must not even be compared to musical accompaniment, no matter how stimulating or sublime (as with the Psalms; cf. Ps.138:2b [Hebrew]; Heb.4:12). With their fiery bodies, triple set of wings, and marvelously expressive and symbolic faces, the four cherubs undoubtedly make an impressive sight as they sing forth these words before the throne of the Living God – but it is their words that we have been given to consider:

Holy, Holy, Holy
[is the] Lord, the Almighty God!
The One who was, and who is, and who is coming!
Revelation 4:8b

The Twenty-Four Elders and their Worship:

(9) And whenever the living creatures give glory, and honor, and thanks to the One who sits on the throne, the One who lives forever and ever, (10) the twenty-four elders will fall down before the One who sits on the throne, and will worship the One who lives forever and ever, and will throw their crowns before the throne . . .

Revelation 4:9-10

As we saw above, these elders are high ranking leaders of the angelic clans, their crowns and thrones being indicative of their rank and merit.¹⁵⁷ The worship of these twenty-four elders is entirely in keeping with this new and revised worship of the cherubim (i.e., the change of the third stanza of the strophe to reflect the imminent return of the Father now that, from the prophetic perspective John is given to see here, the Tribulation and the end times which it inaugurates are about to begin). Often overlooked in the exegesis of Revelation 4:10 is the fact that the "falling down before Him", the "worshiping", and the "casting of their crowns" are rendered in the Greek by *future* tenses.¹⁵⁸ John's use of the future here is truly significant, designed to make clear that what we are viewing is not a part of the continual behavior of praise coming from the cherubim, but part of the anticipation of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, as the twenty-four elders engage in a special form of worship to celebrate the incipient commencement of the final phase of God's plan. Therefore we should assume that these verses are describing the very first such session of the angelic elders at a "pre-Tribulation congress" of the elect just prior to this direct and visible intervention by God into human history. This is also clear from the content of the worship the elders express, words which emphasize this reassertion of direct divine control over the earth (through initiating the Tribulation), and the right of the Lord Almighty as the Creator of all to bring on the final phase of history at this point (commencing with the 2nd Advent of Jesus Christ).¹⁵⁹

[O] our Lord and our God!

You are worthy **to assume** [lit. "to take"] this glory, and honor, and power, because you have created all things, and because of Your will they exist and were created.

Revelation 4:11

Synopsis: Without question, chapter four paints for us an awe-inspiring and impressive picture of the heavenly scene. The sapphire throne, the glassy sea, and the burning lamps, the fiery cherubim and high ranking elders, and in the middle of it all the glorious Person of the Father with the rainbow of His glory around Him – sights defying human capacity, and overwhelming for any mortal man apart from being in a divinely provided ecstatic state (such as John is in)! We should take a moment to visualize these glorious things, and to remember that they are real, more real than the tangible world we inhabit. For this picture gives us a blessed foretaste of the wonders to come for all who have put their trust in Him and in His Son.

II. The Lamb and The Scroll: Revelation 5:1-14

Revelation 5:1-14:

(1) Then I saw in the right hand of the One sitting on the throne a scroll, with writing on its front and on its back, sealed with seven seals. (2) And I saw a powerful angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to undo its seals?" (3) And no one in heaven, nor on the earth was able to open the scroll or to look inside of it. (4) And I began to cry much, because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look inside of it. (5) And one of the elders was saying to me, "Don't cry! Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, He has won the victory [so as to be worthy] to open the scroll and to undo its seals." (6) And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing [there, looking] as if He had been slain, with seven horns and seven eyes (which are the seven spirits of God sent out into the entire earth). (7) And He came and took [the scroll] from the right hand of the One sitting on the throne. (8) And when He took the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell [down] before the Lamb, each with a lyre and golden bowls of incense, which [incense] is as prayers of the saints (i.e., Christ's sacrifice which validates our prayers is represented by the incense; see part 3). (9) And they sang a new song, saying, "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain and have purchased with your blood for our God [men] from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, (10) and have made them into a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will rule upon the earth!" (11) And I looked and heard, as it were, the voice of many angels around the throne and [around] the [living] creatures and [around] the [twenty-four] elders, and their number was myriads upon myriads and thousands upon thousands, (12) [and they were] saying in a loud voice, "The Lamb who has been slain is worthy to take the power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing (13) and every created thing in heaven and on the earth and in the sea and everything in them." Then I heard them saying, "To the One who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb [be] the blessing and the honor and the glory and the power for ever and ever!" (14) And the four living creatures were saying, "Amen!". And the [twenty-four] elders fell [down] and worshiped.

In chapter four, John gave us a detailed description of the glorious scene in God's heavenly temple. Chapter five begins the heavenly prelude to the Tribulation, the initiation of the process – through tribulation – of the reestablishment of direct divine rule over the earth in the Person of the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is important to remember that this book of Revelation is *about* Jesus Christ (i.e., it authorizes, describes, and effects "the revelation" *of Him* to the world), and so it is fitting that He be introduced last in this description of the heavenly scene for the purpose of emphasizing all that is about to take place, that is, the events which must precede His return.

The description above of the Messiah's inauguration of the Tribulation (through His opening of the "book" or scroll) as a prelude to His assumption of power over all the

earth is very closely parallel to the similar description in Daniel chapter seven (which follows Daniel's vision of the four beasts, the last of which represents the kingdom of antichrist):

(9) I kept looking until thrones were set down and the Ancient of Days (i.e., the Father) took His seat. His attire was white as snow, as was the hair of His head, [white] like the purest wool. His throne was aflame with fire, and its wheels were a blazing fire. (10) A river of fire was flowing, and it poured forth from before Him. Thousands upon thousands were ministering to Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him. The court was seated and the books were opened. (11) Meanwhile, I kept looking on account of the sound of the arrogant words which the horn [antichrist; cf. verse 8] was speaking. I kept looking until he was killed and his body destroyed and given over to the burning fire. (12) As for the remaining beasts, their dominions were taken away, but an extension of life was given to them for an appointed time and season. (13) I kept looking during my vision of that night, and behold – with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming up, and He approached the Ancient of Days (i.e., the Father) and they brought Him before Him. (14) And to Him was given dominion and honor and a kingdom, so that all nations and peoples and tongues should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away, and His kingdom one which will not be destroyed.

Daniel 7:9-14

In this passage, wherein Daniel is focusing upon the end of the tribulational period, we nevertheless find a number of important similarities to Revelation chapter five (where the scene described is just prior to its commencement).

1. The appearance of the Father is similarly described. In both passages He is seated "in state" in His capacity as Ruler and Judge of all. This serves to emphasize the character of the proceedings in both passages as in the nature of a judicial and/or regal pronouncement. God's control and disposition of history are clearly in view.
2. The angelic court is comparably described, with their uncountable numbers expressed in near identical language. Multiple "thrones" are mentioned in both passages, and the fact that they are "set up" on this particular occasion in the Daniel passage indicates that, as we have suggested above, rather than being a continual situation the session of the angelic elders is a special preliminary to the Tribulation and the 2nd Advent which follows it.
3. The proceedings themselves are also comparable. In both cases a written record figures prominently, and in both cases these books or scrolls contain the decrees of God which form the basis for the attendant judgment (compare the analogous situation preceding the great flood: Ps.29:10). Parallel too is the fact that the judgments which precede the Messiah's assumption of power serve the purpose of vindicating God's persecuted people (compare Dan.7:22 with Rev.15:1-2).

4. The picture and presentation of the Son is similar (though Daniel's vision includes by conflation the ascension which has already historically taken place by the time of John's vision, and the judgment of Satan with its concomitant filling up of the lake of fire).

5. Finally, the results of the proceedings are identical, with dominion over the earth given to the Messiah.

A major part of the significance of the similarities between these two passages (to be sure, not the only resemblances to be found between the books of Daniel and Revelation) is the point that in both books the process of divine regal-judicial judgment upon the earth and upon the forces of evil which control it is an essential preliminary step and a necessary prerequisite to the Messiah's return and to the establishment of His universal rule. Simply put, both Revelation and Daniel tell us plainly that the Tribulation is part and parcel of the "revelation of Jesus Christ", the "birth pangs" of judgment which must precede the wondrous birth of His glorious kingdom:

(4) And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one deceives you. (5) For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ (i.e., the Messiah)', and they will deceive many. (6) And you are going to hear about wars and reports of wars. See to it that you are not shaken [by these reports]. This must happen, but it is not the yet the end [of the Tribulation]. (7) For a nation will rise up against a nation, even a kingdom against a kingdom (i.e., the northern confederacy against the southern alliance). And there will be earthquakes and famines from place to place. (8) But all these things are the beginning of *birth pangs*.

Matthew 24:4-8

The Scroll: As codex style books had not yet been invented at the time Revelation was written,¹⁶⁰ the word "book" here (Greek: *biblion*, βιβλίον; from which the word "Bible" comes) is actually a scroll or roll. This particular scroll, representing the book of Revelation, has writing on both its inside and its outside, an indication of the intensity of events during the Tribulation (cf. Ezek.2:9-10). In this regard, we may also be correct in seeing some symbolism here of the division of the Tribulation into two discrete parts, with the second or "back" part by far the more onerous of the two (for the rear or *verso* of any papyrus roll was always the more difficult to write upon because its fibers ran at right angles to the flow of the scribe's hand). Very significant here are the seven seals which prevent the book or roll from being read. In earthly documents, such waxen seals were stamped with the signet ring of the document's author, thereby both verifying its authenticity and at the same time preventing any unauthorized tampering. If such a document were a will or other legal bequest, no action could be taken until such seals were broken in a proper and authoritative way. Such clearly is the symbolism here, and it is through the victory provided by His death that the Lamb, our Savior, has won the right to open these seals at the appropriate time (cf. Dan.12:4; 12:9), thus bringing on the execution of the contents of this decree, namely, the establishment of His Kingdom through the intermediary event of the Tribulation, the process by which all His enemies are made "the footstool of His feet" (Ps.110:1).

As to the seven seals, which must be opened before this decree is put into effect, these have a dual symbolism, representing on an individual basis the events which are released by their removal, and on a collective basis the force which now restrains them, namely, God the Holy Spirit. The former (i.e., the "effects" of the opening of each seal) are covered in section IV, while the latter, the restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit, will be considered first (in section III).

The Victorious Lamb: We can hardly imagine the ecstasy John must have experienced in the presence of these heavenly wonders, glorious sights so intense as to be beyond human endurance and continence (compare Dan.8:27 and 10:7-11 with Rev.19:10 and 22:8-9). And as the final glory, a sight which John and all believers long for as the central focus of their hope, we now behold the Lamb of God, our victorious, risen Lord Jesus standing at the Father's right hand!

Our Lord is here described as "The Lion of the Tribe of Judah", "The Root of David" and "The Lamb who has been slain". Important titles, filled with symbolism about who He is and what He has done for us. The first two titles emphasize His undisputed royalty and His exceptional lineage (compare Gen.49:9-10 and Is.11:1 respectively), foreshadowing thereby, in His imminent return to earth and assumption of the Kingdom to come, the fulfillment of all God's promises to His people Israel. However, it is the title and description "Lamb" which receives by far the most emphasis here, both from the repetition of the title (repeated four times in this chapter) and from the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ is here described as appearing *as a Lamb*, and one "having been slain" at that, symbolism that leaves us in absolutely no doubt that it is through His sacrificial death on our behalf that He has won the right to rule the world.

For Jesus is "the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn.1:29; cf. Jn.1:36; 1Pet.1:19; Is.53:7). He is the One whom all the Old Testament sacrifices prefigure, so that "Lamb" is a perfect description of Him and of His saving work, the life He gave up for us and for the whole world. Indeed, all Old Testament animal sacrifice speaks of our Lord's death on the cross. The lamb without spot or blemish represents His perfect Person (He was willing to come into the world to fulfill the Father's plan), while the blood shed in sacrifice represents His perfect work (He was willing to die on the cross, the Just for the unjust, that we might have eternal life).

So it is important to remember as we study this book about the "revealing" of Jesus to the world, His glorious return and coronation as the Ruler of the world (and the cataclysmic events which precede it), that this right to rule was won at the greatest cost: Jesus had to come into this world as a true human being, run a perfect course under the most intense opposition anyone has ever faced, then suffer and die in our place in order to win back the world from the evil one and to win us out of the devil's deadly grasp (Col.1:13; Heb.2:14-15; 1Jn.3:8). Christ's session at the Father's right hand (following His resurrection and ascension) shows beyond any doubt the completeness of His victory (Col.2:13-15; cf. Eph.4:7-10), the Father's approval of that victory (Col.1:19; cf. Is.42:1; 49:6; Matt.3:17; 17:5), and the imminence of our Lord's return to take His

rightful place as Ruler of the world as a result of that victory (Ps.110:1; Matt.28:18; Jn.17:2; Rom.16:20; 1Thes.4:16-17; Heb.1:3-4; 2:8-9):

(11) And while every [other] priest has received a temporary appointment for service and for repeatedly offering the same sacrifices which are never able to take away sins, (12) this [One] offered one sacrifice for sins for all time to come, then took His seat at the right hand of God, (13) waiting from thenceforth until [the time when] His enemies should be made a footstool for His feet.

Hebrews 10:11-13

Therefore, though Jesus appears here as a Lamb "having been slain" (symbolizing His sacrifice), the fact that He is yet alive is testimony to the reality of His resurrection, and is at the same time a powerful affirmation of His victory over sin and death (1Cor.15:54-57; cf. Is.25:7-9; Hos.13:14; Matt.12:20; Rev.1:18). Moreover, the seven horns and seven eyes represented on the Lamb are potent symbols of His coming reign, with the horns signifying the completeness of the power that is now His for rulership (cf. Deut.33:17; Ps.18:2; 112:9; Zech.1:18), and with the seven eyes signifying the completeness of His empowerment by the Holy Spirit for rulership (cf. Is.11:1-3; 42:1-4; Zech.4:1-10; Jn.3:34). Therefore this is not only the Lamb of sacrifice John sees, but also the victorious Lamb, having already destroyed the power of Satan's world rule (based on universal sin and death: Heb.2:14-15; cf. Lk.10:18; Acts 26:18; Rom.16:20), and about to permanently wrest control of that world rule from the evil one:

These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, because He is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, and called, and elect – and faithful are those with Him. Revelation 17:14

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven saying, "The world Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ has [now] come, and He will rule forever and ever. Amen."

Revelation 11:15

This symbolic use of the visible image of a Lamb (in contrast to the true appearance of Christ as seen in Rev.1:12-16) is a well-precedented teaching device used in prophetic biblical passages (e.g., Dan.4:9-18; 7:2-14; 8:1-12; Zech.1:18-21; 5:5-11), and one which is paralleled in the book of Revelation as well (e.g., the woman representing Israel: Rev.12:1-6; the beast representing antichrist: Rev.13:1-8; the whore representing Babylon: Rev.17:1-8). The picture of the Lamb representing Christ thus all the more effectively reminds us of the Son's sacrifice, of its acceptability to the Father, and of the fact that it is through this sacrifice, His saving work on the cross, that He has shown Himself worthy to take the scroll and assume rulership of the world.

It is also significant that the Lamb is said to be "standing" in the middle of the throne. Our Lord's posture here is an indication of the imminency of the Tribulation's commencement. That Christ has now risen to His feet, although the Father had said to "sit at My right hand" until the time when this final period of judgment in preparation

for His Kingdom should begin, is a definite sign that this process of subduing the evil one and all his minions is about to commence:

The Lord said to My Lord, "Sit down at my right hand, *until* I [start to] make your enemies a footstool for your feet."¹⁶¹

Psalm 110:1

(19) So repent and turn back [to God] for the blotting out of your sins, so that times of revival may come from the Lord, (20) and so that He may send to you the One acknowledged as the Christ [Messiah], [namely] Jesus, (21) who must remain in heaven (lit., "whom heaven must receive") *until* the times of the restoration of all things of which God has spoken through the mouths of His holy prophets from of old.

Acts 3:19-21

Our Lord's victory at the cross established His authority beyond question, a supreme authority which was confirmed in His session at the Father's right hand (Matt.28:18; Jn.14:2-3; Eph.1:20-23; Phil.2:9-11; Col.1:13-20; 2:15; Heb.2:14-15 Rev.1:18). Christ has been seated (Acts 2:32-36; 5:30-31; Rom.8:34; Heb.1:3; 12:2), prisoners have been freed (Ps.146:7; Is.14:17; 42:7; 49:9; 61:1; Matt.12:29; 1Pet.3:22), and gifts have been given (Ps.68:18; Jn.16:7; Eph.4:8). It only remains now for the victorious Lamb to take the scroll and open its seals, thus inaugurating the final period of the devil's earthly rule, a period to be brought to a dramatic end at the return of our glorious King (Rev.17:14), the blessed event so eagerly anticipated by all Christians (Matt.6:10; 1Cor.1:7-8; 16:22; 1Thes.1:10; Tit.2:13; Jas.5:8).

Along with rising to His feet, Christ's taking of the scroll from the Father's right hand (the side where our Lord is now seated) is also a future event which John is privileged to see and we are blessed to read. This event too will happen just prior to the beginning of the Tribulation (and is still future at the moment of writing). Once the Lamb has risen and taken the scroll, nothing is left but to open this divine decree of the scroll of Revelation, the event which will set the tribulational events in train.

The New Song:

"New" songs are special songs of praise and worship composed for unique occasions (Ps.33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Is.42:10), and, as in the case of the hymn of the 144,00 Jewish witnesses martyred by the beast (Rev.14:3), this song marks a special occasion. As the heavenly audience looks on in anticipation, the four cherubs and the twenty-four elders, the highest ranking angelic creatures, begin to sing a special, inaugural hymn to commemorate the beginning of the Messiah's Kingdom come:

1) The Chorus of Angelic Rulers: The first stanza is performed by the cherubs and the twenty-four elders alone. Stanza number one emphasizes the Lamb's worthiness to

begin the final phase of history (by opening the scroll) based on His sacrificial death which redeemed the Church (as a replacement for fallen angelic kind).¹⁶²

"You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain and have purchased with your blood for our God [men] from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made them into a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will rule upon the earth!"

2) The Chorus of the Holy Angels: The second stanza is sung by the other elect angels (exclusive of the cherubim and the elders). Stanza number two emphasizes the results of the Lamb's worthiness and the effect of His opening of the scroll (thus launching the end times), namely, His assumption of authority over the entire world along with all the honors pertaining thereto.¹⁶³

"The Lamb who has been slain is worthy to take the power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing and every created thing in heaven and on the earth and in the sea and everything in them."

3) The Doxology: The final portion of this "new song" (also performed by the angelic choir) is specifically in the form of a doxology, a singing of praise to the Father and the Son.

"To the One who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb [be] the blessing and the honor and the glory and the power for ever and ever!"

This hymn is followed by a final pronouncement of the truth and blessedness of these facts as the four living creatures add their "Amen!" (a Hebrew word meaning "truly", or "in truth"). Then the elders fall down and worship the Father and the Son, a fitting conclusion to this heavenly psalm of praise which proclaims the worthiness of the Lamb to initiate the final stage of history, beginning with the fiery Tribulation, followed by His cleansing with fire of the threshing floor of Armageddon, and the final burning up of all His enemies at the end of history at the conclusion of His millennial reign – righteous judgments all, and all based upon His victory at the cross, His own baptism of fire suffered for you and me:

(49) "I came to cast a fire upon the earth, and how I wish that it were already kindled!
(50) But I have a baptism to undergo [first], and how I am pressed until it be completed!"

Luke 12:49-50

III. The Restraining Ministry of the Holy Spirit

Before we begin our exposition of the seven seals, we need first to consider the Spirit's ministry of restraint, for it is that ministry which is of primary significance in the symbolism of the seven seals overall. As mentioned above, waxen seals, stamped with

the signet ring of the originating party, were a means of preventing unauthorized opening of important, sealed documents (such as wills, deeds, or official communications). By the same token, the legitimate opening of such a document necessarily entailed putting the will, declaration or decree into effect. Given that the scroll we are considering here is *the* revelation of Jesus Christ (a process which reaches its dramatic conclusion in our Lord's 2nd Advent, but which is preceded by all the events of the Tribulation), the seals on this scroll are clearly meant to symbolize restraint on the commencement of the last times until God's good time. For once the seals are opened, the end times do indeed commence almost immediately thereafter (as described in Revelation chapters six through eight).

In these seven seals, therefore, we are to see a prohibiting force which prevents the onset of the darkest period in human history before its appointed time. Only God is capable of such restraint, and it is clear both from this context and from other passages of scripture that it is indeed God the Holy Spirit whose restraining ministry is being represented by these seven seals. Seven objects of clear divine connection are characteristically symbolic of the Holy Spirit, for example, the seven spirits (Is.11:1-2; Rev.1:4; 3:1), the seven lampstands (Zech.4:2; Rev.4:5), and the seven eyes (Rev.5:6; Zech.3:9; 4:10). In all these cases, the ministry is perfect, powerful and largely invisible – felt, but not seen as is characteristic of the Spirit (Jn.3:8; cf. 1Kng.19:11-12).¹⁶⁴ As the seven spirits suggest perfect divine empowerment in the Spirit, the seven lampstands perfect divine illumination by the Spirit, and the seven eyes perfect divine oversight with the Spirit, so the seven seals are meant to convey a perfect ministry, in this case, the perfect divine restraint through the Spirit which prevents the premature launching of the end times before the appointed time (as well as the restraint of the conditions and actions pertaining thereto). This ministry of the Spirit involves both the restraint of the human heart and of the devil's plans, and, in consequence, forestalls the divine judgment destined to fall upon the excesses proceeding from each of these prime sources of evil.

1. Previous Restraining Ministries: Scripture offers some important precedents of the Spirit's work in preventing evil from crossing all bounds (thereby destroying freedom, the opportunity to choose for God). Two instances in particular are specifically described in the Bible, and we may infer from these that the Spirit's ministry in restraining evil is a wide-ranging and virtually comprehensive one, even when not specifically described in scripture (as implied in such passages as Gen.11:6; Deut.32:8; Job 12:23; Ps.74:17; Jer.18:7-10; Acts 17:26-28):

(1) Before all else, God created the heavens and the earth. (2) But the earth came to be ruined and despoiled – darkness lay upon the face of the abyss while God's Spirit brooded [or "hovered"] over the surface of its waters.

Genesis 1:1-2

And God said, "My Spirit will not strive with Man forever in their sinful manner of life – for this [is the way of] flesh. Therefore his days shall be 120 years."
Genesis 6:3

In the first instance above, we see the Spirit (following the devil's rebellion) preventing any further satanic activity on the devastated earth – before the appointed time (i.e., before earth's re-creation and the creation of Adam and Eve).¹⁶⁵ In the second quotation above, we see described the protective ministry of the Spirit restraining and preventing Satan and his half-angel, half-human cohorts from annihilating true humanity – until that threat is removed (i.e., until the coming of the great flood which destroyed this demon seed from off of the face of the earth).¹⁶⁶

In addition to the two cases above, both involving high-profile deterrence of direct satanic interference in earthly affairs, we also know that the Spirit is active in the restraint of human behavior. In this respect, the Spirit's ministry of "binding" may be seen as an opposite side of the coin to His ministry of "loosing", providing power to all that is good in the latter case, while depriving of power all that is evil in the former (cf. Matt.16:19; 18:18; Jn.20:22-23; Acts 5:3; 5:9). And were it not for this general and all-encompassing ministry to accentuate good and inhibit evil, it is clear that at the very least we would be inhabiting a far more savage world than is now the case (if indeed it should even be possible for mankind to survive without the Spirit's "leveling of the playing field").

2. The Mystery of Lawlessness: On the individual level too, the Spirit has always been active in the restraint of sin and evil – not to the point of removing the individual's right to choose, but, on the contrary, in working to preserve that right. This is true not only from the point of view of protecting believers from others, but also from themselves. Examples of the former include Saul and his men being prevented from harming David (1Sam.19:20-24), and Paul and his companions' protection by preventing their entering of Asia and Bithynia (Acts 16:6-7). The Spirit's "sealing" of all believers in this present age demonstrates in particular the protective direction His ministry often takes (2Cor.1:21-22; Eph.1:13-14; cf. Ezek.9:1-11; Jn.6:27; 1Pet. 1:1-2):

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God with whom you were *sealed* for a day of redemption.
Ephesians 4:30

As the above verse shows, the Holy Spirit's protective ministry is a counterpart of His ministry of empowerment. As believers in Jesus Christ, we are all blessed to have the Holy Spirit in us, and even as this "seal" marks us out as God's own property, a blessed sign of the protection we have in Christ, at the same time the Spirit works in us to intensify, empower and support our Christian walk and all our service to the Body of Christ. Even as we can take comfort in the fact that we are marked out as God's possessions (a warning to all the minions of evil against unauthorized interference), so we should also take special care ever to respond to the Spirit's guidance, and not to resist Him. In this respect, the Holy Spirit's influence not only helps us to do what is

right, but also to resist what is wrong (a clear example of His restraining ministry; cf. Matt.12:31; Acts 5:1-11; 1Thes.5:19; Jas.4:5):

Thus the flesh (i.e., the sinful nature of Man) sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit sets its desire against the flesh. For these two are antithetical to each other, and so the result is that it is not your own will that you are carrying out.

Galatians 5:17

These general principles we have studied before (and the reader is directed to the references contained in the two previous footnotes). However, two specific features of the Holy Spirit's overall ministry of restraint which especially concern us here are His hindrance of unbounded "lawlessness", and His thwarting of the arrival of antichrist. Both of these particular aspects of His restraining ministry are directed towards inhibiting Satan's control of the world, with the first placing limits on the devil's disruption of human life before the time of the Tribulation, and the second preventing Satan from bringing his chosen instrument of world domination onto the world stage before that future time. With the removal of the restraints provided by the Spirit which the world now enjoys, both of these horrible events will ensue, namely, the intensification of "lawlessness" and the arrival of "the lawless one". The opening of the seven seals which hold the Lamb's book of revelation closed signifies the removal of this restraining ministry, allowing the devil and his forces (both human and demonic) to begin the prophesied series of tribulational events. Without this removal of restraint and until this removal of restraint, Satan is powerless to begin his final earthly offensive (characterized by unparalleled "lawlessness") or to institute his ultimate earthly kingdom (ruled by the man of "lawlessness"). This coming trend of increased sinful and evil behavior (beyond the bounds of anything earth has yet experienced) and the rise to power of the most sinful and evil ruler in world history are intimately interconnected events, as can be seen from the apostle Paul's conjoining of the two:

(6) Even now you know what it is that restrains [antichrist's arrival] so that he will be revealed [only] in his own time. (7) For the mystery of lawlessness (*anomia*) is already at work – it is only the Restrainer [who keeps things in check, and will] until He moves out of the way. (8) And then the lawless one (*anomos*) will be revealed . . .

2nd Thessalonians 2:6-8a

With his use above of cognate vocabulary (*anomia* – *anomos*), Paul makes it clear here that the coming lawlessness which we are already experiencing now in principle (but which will break loose unrestrained when the seven seals are opened) is both a prerequisite preparation and a necessary condition for the coming of the lawless antichrist. Satan's progressive inroads into human society at all levels and in all places are a lawlessness which is "already at work", but cannot be brought to the fever pitch necessary to bring about antichrist's world domination until the Spirit's restraint is allowed to wane as the Tribulation begins (that is, not until the seven seals are opened). John gives a similar description of current satanic trends culminating in the Tribulation when he discusses the "spirit of antichrist" – and it is the very fact that many

"antichrists" are active in the present age which tells us that we are on the threshold of the Tribulation:

Children, it is [now] the final hour, and just as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many "antichrists" have arisen – that is how we know it is the last hour.
1st John 2:18

Simply put, the exponential expansion of the present "mystery of lawlessness" is a prophesied, unprecedented expansion of sin and evil world-wide which will occur during the Tribulation as a direct removal of the barriers put up by the Spirit and the devil's consequent exploitation of this opportunity. This is the essential meaning of the opening of the seven seals, symbols of divine restraint which prevent these trends from coming to full fruition before the time (1Tim.4:1-3; 2Pet.3:3-7; 1Jn.2:18; Jude 1:17-18).

(1) So be aware of this, that in the last days there will be difficult times. (2) For [in those times] there will be men (i.e., false teachers; cf. chap.2) concerned only for themselves, devoted to money, egotistic, arrogant, blasphemous, not concerned for their parents, ungrateful, irreverent, (3) implacable, slanderers, uninhibited, savage, despising the good, (4) betrayers, impetuous, megalomaniacal, devotees of pleasure rather than lovers of God, (5) possessing an [outward] appearance of godliness, but [in reality] having rejected its [true] power. From such men turn away.
2nd Timothy 3:1-5

And we should not suppose that this list is meant to be complete – its purpose is only to give us the flavor of the path human behavior will take during the Tribulation. For in the absence of both invisible and visible restraints (i.e., the Spirit's restraining ministry on the one hand, and the force of nationalism and law on the other), the darkest side of human nature will be revealed as never before. Certainly we can see all of these characteristics today in individual cases and at particular times (cf. Rom.1:18-32), but in the Tribulation these will represent the consistent norm of behavior for the vast majority of the world's population, not only making the world an even more terrible place to live than it is now, but also furnishing an extremely fertile ground for the devil's operations, a horrible state of affairs that will affect even believers, as our Lord has warned us:

And because of the proliferation of *lawlessness* [during the Tribulation], the love of many will grow cold.
Matthew 24:12

We should take note of the progression here for it is most informative: the special "lawlessness" now operative (i.e., Satan's intensified efforts to expand his world system) will increase out of all previous proportion with the opening of the seven seals (i.e., the removal of the Spirit's restraint) which begins the Tribulation. This will be followed at the Messiah's return by a restriction of lawlessness more complete than at any prior time in human history (Rev.20:1-3). Through this progression, God is showing the world that:

- 1) some restraint of creature depravity is necessary for the world to function at all.
- 2) when such divine restraint on the lawless inclinations of the human heart is removed, mankind (with the devil's help) runs headlong towards its own destruction.
- 3) the unparalleled blessings of the age to come require as a prerequisite an even more intensive restraint of natural human "lawlessness" (and satanic interference) than has ever yet been the case.

Seen in this light, the removal of divine restraint upon evil during the Tribulation is a deliberate demonstration of the inability of man to accomplish anything apart from God – except his own destruction. In the course of this fateful period the devil's wickedness and true intentions will be laid completely bare (cf. Rom.7:13), so that God the Father will gain for Himself surpassing glory in subduing the creature in preparation for the glorious reign of His Son (Ps.110:1; Heb.10:13; cf. Ex.14:4; Is.63:12-14).

3. The Restraint of the Man of Lawlessness: As a [fallen] angelic creature, the devil's ability to interfere and intervene in earthly events, though substantial, labors under certain limitations. For Satan is "the prince of the power *of the air*" (Eph.2:2), a phrase which pithily suggests the restrictions on an angelic creature's influence when operating in the human realm.¹⁶⁷ Without question, the devil has made great strides in the development of a world system for manipulating and indirectly controlling the human race (see Part 4 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Satan's World System"). In order to make this control complete and direct, however, Satan's attempt at world domination during the Tribulation requires a human face, a human agent, namely, "the man of lawlessness", otherwise known as antichrist. Paul's discussion of these events in 2nd Thessalonians chapter two makes a clear connection between antichrist's "revelation" to the world and the removal of Holy Spirit restraint symbolized in the opening of the seven seals which we are studying in this context:

(3) Do not let anyone deceive you in any way. For [the 2nd Advent cannot come] unless the Apostasy [the great falling away of the faithful in the first half of the Tribulation] has already occurred, and the man of lawlessness [antichrist] *has been revealed*, that "son of destruction" (cf. Jn.17:12 of Judas), (4) the one who will oppose and exalt himself against every so-called god and object of worship to such a degree that he will take his seat in the temple of God and represent himself as being God. (5) Don't you remember that I was telling you these things while I was still with you? (6) Even now you know what it is (i.e., the Spirit) that restrains [antichrist] so that *he will be revealed* [only] in his own time. (7) For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work – it is only the Restrainer [who keeps things in check, and will] until He moves out of the way. (8) And then the lawless one *will be revealed*, whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the Spirit of His mouth, and will annihilate with the appearance of His coming.
2nd Thessalonians 2:3-8

The "revelation" of antichrist described above is to be understood as a loose antithesis to the revelation of our Lord (the true Christ of whom *anti*-Christ is a deliberate

counterfeit). That is to say, antichrist's rise to power and his "unveiling" to and acceptance by the unbelieving world as a god (though to true believers in Jesus Christ he will be unveiled and revealed as what he really is) will only be allowed to occur once the Tribulation has begun, and only after the deliberate and purposeful removal of Holy Spirit restraint symbolized in these seven seals.

IV. The Seven Seals: Revelation 6:1-17

In the first place, it should be recalled that these seven seals taken together represent the Holy Spirit's restraining ministry vis-à-vis the future Tribulation and its characteristic trends, and, secondly, that these seals have heretofore kept closed the "book" which is the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ to the world at His Second Advent, the time when He ushers in His glorious millennial kingdom. That return and reign can only come *after* the prophesied period of satanic excess and divine judgment upon it known as the Tribulation, and the Tribulation in turn cannot occur until God, and specifically the Lamb, opens the seals (that is, commands the removal of the seven-fold Holy Spirit restraint) which prevent the onset of the Tribulation before its time. This twin perspective is important when considering the opening up of the separate seals in chapter six, because this process has so frequently been misunderstood and misconstrued.

The first thing to note about the opening up of the seals and their concomitant descriptions is that, in stark contrast to the later trumpets and bowls (with which they are often wrongly grouped and compared), these seal-descriptions *do not* portray events in process (as opposed to the trumpet and bowl judgments which are "real time" occurrences), nor are they representative of specific divine judgment per se (except in so far as the entire Tribulation can be so characterized).¹⁶⁸ On the contrary, the opening of each of the six seals of chapter six are all accompanied by *previews* of broad trends to come once the Tribulation begins, and it is the opening of the seventh seal, the last impediment to the launching of the apocalypse, which finally begins the action in earnest. The six seals of chapter six give a chronological overview of the major trends of horrendous distress and disruption that will characterize the seven years (resulting from antichrist's satanic activities and the ultimate divine response to them), with seal-trends one through four coming fully into play in the first half of the Tribulation, and seals five and six reserved for the second half or "Great Tribulation". Thus through careful attention to and understanding of the six seals, the reader of Revelation is given a framework for *all* the events to come even before the opening of the seventh seal and consequent initiation of the Tribulation per se.

The so-called "four horsemen" of seals one through four are symbols representing specific tribulational trends (as is the case with seals five and six as well), and are *not* actual entities in their own right. This is an especially important point to grasp given the recurrent mistranslation of these verses which one finds in most English versions: as will be seen from the translations given below, the four living creatures do *not* address their respective "horsemen" with the command "come!", but in reality are addressing John with the dual commands "come *and see!*" (commands followed in each of the four

cases by the appearance of one the sequential symbolic horsemen for John to view, consider and record).

In scripture, especially in prophecy, it is far from uncommon to use such symbols, that is, graphic representations of otherwise amorphous entities or events, in order to make the lesson at hand more easily understandable (the beasts of Daniel chapter two representing coming world kingdoms, and the woman of Zechariah chapter five representing wickedness are notable examples of this phenomenon). Revelation, moreover, is itself filled with exactly this sort of metaphor or "teaching example" (the woman Israel in chapter twelve, for instance).

So while direct parallels are often drawn between the "four horsemen" and the horsemen and charioteers in the book of Zechariah (in chapters one and six respectively), there is an important distinction to be drawn between the two: the riders in Zechariah in both cases are actual angels, messengers and agents of God sent forth on specific missions by Him, while the "four horsemen" here in Revelation chapter six are not real individuals but symbols intended to embody certain trends of the Tribulation which will result from direct satanic rule through the person of antichrist. A similar situation is encountered when we consider the often adduced parallel between these "four horsemen" and the "four deadly judgments" of Ezekiel 14:21. For the four divine judgments of Ezekiel originate with God and are directed at evil, while these trends of the "four horsemen" are blanket curses upon the earth that result from unrestricted satanic operation.

It is true that horsemen cover ground rapidly and extensively like the angelic riders of Zechariah so that the theme of rapid and complete proliferation is common both to them and to the "four horsemen", and it is also true that the disruptions created by antichrist's diabolical rise to power unleash trends that are very similar to the direct divine judgments described in Ezekiel chapter fourteen. Nevertheless, just as the difference between *symbols* of satanic trends and *actual* divine agents is critical in the first case, so the difference between ancillary satanic causation (the curses associated with antichrist's rule) and deliberate divine judgment (as in Ezekiel) is of critical importance in the second.

What all this means is that the "four horsemen" are unique, both as symbols and in the effects they prophetically proclaim. Indeed, they *must* be unique, because the Tribulation will be a unique period of satanic rule, different in nature and in degree from any other period of human history (as our Lord has told us, and as we have emphasized from the beginning of this series).¹⁶⁹

For those days will see a *tribulation* the like of which has never occurred from the beginning of God's creation of the world until now, and never will occur again.
Mark 13:19

The "four horsemen", the consecutive trends which accompany antichrist's rise to power and administration of his satanic kingdom, represent patterns of activity destined to

occur during the first half of the seven-year Tribulation. On the other hand, the fifth and sixth seals represent the most important events of the Tribulation's second half or "the Great Tribulation", namely, the Great Persecution (seal five), and the divine response to it (most notably the ten "bowl judgments" and the final judgments of Armageddon which accompany the Second Advent). This distinction between first half trends (seals 1-4) and second half events (seals 5-6) helps to explain why there are only "four horsemen", that is, because the horsemen are symbols which represent the pervasive evils of satanic rule heretofore largely restrained (a development which forms the focus of the Tribulation's *first half*), and would therefore be inappropriate and potentially confusing as symbols of *specific events* during the Tribulation's *second half*. The seventh seal (Revelation chapter eight) has an altogether different symbolism, because, as the final seal, its opening represents the actual beginning of the tribulational trends and events which the first six seals preview. Each seal is treated individually below, but a synopsis will be helpful at this point:

The Tribulation's First Half (four major trends):

1. **White horse: Antichrist's Conquests**: the trend of warfare and aggression
2. **Red horse: Civil Discord**: the trend of lawlessness and political destabilization
3. **Black horse: Economic Constraint**: the trend of economic dislocation and famine
4. **Pale-green horse: Accelerated Mortality**: the trend of plague and rampant death

The Great Tribulation (two major events):

5. **Martyrs: the Great Persecution** (of believers by antichrist and his religion)
6. **Judgments: the Second Advent** (with its preliminary and concomitant judgments)

1. The White Horse: Antichrist's Conquests

Revelation 6:1-2:

(1) And I saw when the Lamb opened one[, that is the first,] of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, "Come and see!"
(2) And I looked, and behold, [there was] a white horse, and the one sitting on it had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and did conquer.

The white horse symbolizes the trend of military aggression by antichrist and his forces. As the Roman color of victory, therefore, white is most appropriate for representing the successful conquests of antichrist, the coming ruler of revived Rome.¹⁷⁰ This is the first major tribulational trend, wherein antichrist's initial territorial expansion is

accomplished both by overt military means and also through deceit, subterfuge, and guerilla tactics (the symbolism behind the bow, on which see below; cf. Dan.11:21-45). This trend (and indeed the arrival and unveiling of antichrist) could not happen without the opening of this seal of Spirit restraint (cf. 1Thes.2:1-8).

It is important to understand that the rider on the white horse is *not* Christ, but *anti*-Christ. As his name implies, antichrist is a "pseudo-Christ" in many respects, a diabolically deliberate counterfeit who will deceive many. That the representation of him and the trend he represents at the beginning of the Tribulation should bear some resemblance to our conquering Lord is therefore quite understandable (cf. Rev.19:11-16). Antichrist wears a crown, but his is an athletic wreath (Greek *stephanos*: στέφανος), inferior in both quantity and quality to the multiple royal diadems worn by the Messiah (Greek *diadema*: διάδημα in Revelation 19:12). Antichrist comes forth at the very beginning of the Tribulation to conquer a kingdom which will not endure (the first seal), whereas the Messiah returns at its end to win a victory and a Kingdom which will know no end (at the Second Advent).

And antichrist is given "a bow", a weapon whose biblical and historical connotations are often ignoble. That is to say, the bow is much more of a guerilla-type weapon in the ancient world, a weapon of stealth rather than one of bold confrontation (contrast the impressive, sharp broad-sword proceeding directly for the Messiah's mouth: Rev.19:15), and this distinction would not have been lost on John's contemporaries. The employment of horse-archers by the Scythians and the Parthians of that day, while effective, was outside the paradigm of Greco-Roman "fair play", and would most definitely have had a negative connotation for the original readers of Revelation. This aspect of antichrist's weaponry is consistent with Daniel's account of antichrist's insidious and devious rise to power, accomplished as much through terrorism, coup d'état and intimidation as through overt military conquest (cf. Dan.11:21ff.). And in Ezekiel's description of the tribulational invasion of Israel prior to Armageddon, antichrist, under the generic gentile name "Gog", is also described as carrying the bow:

(1) And you, son of man, prophesy against Gog, and say, "Thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I am against you, Gog (i.e., antichrist), chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. And (2) I will fetch you back, and conduct you, and bring you up from the far reaches of the north. For I will make you come to the mountains of Israel. (3) Then I will strike *your bow* from your left hand, and make *your arrows* fall from your right hand'".
Ezekiel 39:1-3

Finally, none of the positive elements we find in the descriptions of our Lord – His fiery eyes, impressive white robe, majestic names, etc. (cf. Rev.1:12-16; 19:11-16) – are to be found in this first description of the conquering antichrist. Just as this symbol gives an outward appearance of majesty at first (but upon closer inspection proves hollow), so it is with antichrist, who will demand and receive worship from an awe-struck world, but will in turn only lead his followers to their complete destruction (cf. 2Thes.2:1-12).

2. The Red Horse: Civil Discord

Revelation 6:3-4:

(3) And when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come and see!" (4) And I looked, and behold, another horse, a red [one], came out, and it was given to him who was sitting upon it to take away peace (i.e., create civil discord), and [to bring it about] that they (i.e., people) might slay one another. So a large sword was given to him.

The red horse symbolizes the trend of civil discord, civil strife, social upheaval, the breakdown of law and order, the evaporation of civility, an increase in crime, political persecutions, revolutions and the like. This second tribulational trend is both a direct and an indirect result of the devil's activities spearheaded through his antichrist. For Satan will be actively involved in the subversion of law and order and of civil peace (as indeed he always has been), in order to corrupt and undermine these sources of inherent resistance to antichrist and his bid for world power and control. The removal of Holy Spirit restraint symbolized in the opening of this second seal coupled with the unprecedented intensity of satanic activity in the Tribulation will serve to accelerate these effects beyond anything now imaginable in so short a time.¹⁷¹ At the same time, moreover, the universal breakdown in social harmony and social institutions will tend to have a cascade effect, with each societal devolution tending to reinforce and further accelerate social degeneration worldwide. The Spirit's restraint on such things at the present time, to be removed with the opening of this second seal, is well-known (cf. Gal.5:17-26).

As the color of blood, red is a natural choice to symbolize the horseman who represents violent internal strife (i.e., the unquestionably "bloody" slaughter and the sword whereby it is accomplished in verse four).¹⁷² For as the history of the world amply attests, foreign conquest is often less bloody than the violence which accompanies internal revolution. It must be emphasized here, moreover, that the red horse is *not* "war" in the sense of conflict between two separate nations (which is covered in full by the first seal), but represents instead the gory violence of internecine conflict. As it was in the case of the trend toward military conquest represented by the first seal, revolution and civil strife have also always been with us. However it is the unparalleled *intensity* of the trend which is being communicated here, an intensity which, once again, proceeds from the removal of divine restraint, and the intensified efforts of the devil. The resultant hardening of the world's population as "wickedness increases and love grows cold" (Matt.24:12-13) will provide one of the Tribulation's most disturbing and horrible trends as human behavior, never particularly uplifting when seen from the scriptural point of view, is prophesied to take a dramatic turn for the worse (1Tim.4:1-3; 2Tim.3:1-9), a factor which will be both a result and a contributory effect of this trend toward social breakdown. Indeed, a significant part of antichrist's conquests will be accomplished through just such rebellions (cf. Dan.11:21-24), and, on the other hand, a significant portion of his power will flow from his "reorganization" of society and the establishment of a new social system whose only true purpose will be to deepen his hold

on his kingdom and make his followers all the more dependent upon and beholden to him (cf. Dan.11:36-39). Finally, the fact that the second horsemen will "take peace from the earth" indicates that the period immediately preceding the Tribulation may be one of relative tranquility, a state of affairs which would only make the extraordinary bitterness of the Tribulation itself that much more difficult to bear (cf. Dan.11:21; 11:24).

3. The Black Horse: Economic Constraint

Revelation 6:5-6:

(5) And when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, "Come and see!" And I looked, and behold, [there was] a black horse, and the one who was sitting upon it had scales in his hand. (6) And I heard something like a voice in the middle of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of flour for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and don't [even] trouble [yourself over] the oil and the wine".

The black horse symbolizes the trend of extreme economic controls, scarcity and constraint. As in the case of the second horseman, so also here a goodly portion of the hardship described will result from the series of aggressive wars and internal dislocations represented by the first two seals. This active interference in all aspects of economic activity will be one of the key means which will be employed by antichrist to tighten his grip on power (through strict controls on all spheres of commerce) and also to earmark the lion's share of production for the exclusive use of his followers (as a means of reward). The notorious extension of this strategy in the Tribulation's second half to religious persecution is well-known (Rev.13:16-18).

As the color associated with starvation, black is most fitting to symbolize the trend of scarcity represented by the third horseman (Job 30:30; Lam.4:8-9; 5:10; cf. Is.50:3). By any estimate, the prices quoted here are extreme. The ratio of the value of barley to wheat is consistent with what we know of ancient pricing, but the prices themselves indicate that the average employed person of that time will need all of his/her income for subsistence. A denarius represents the standard day's pay for a working man (cf. Matt.20:2), but a quart/liter/*choenix* of milled flour (roughly the equivalent in nutritive value to three times its weight in unprocessed barley) will barely suffice for an individual, let alone a family. Therefore we are to see in these prophetic words control of *wages* and control of prices, limiting radically (and artificially) the consumption of all who are not on antichrist's "team". The phrase "and see thou hurt not the oil and wine" (KJV – most versions similar) is often misunderstood. The command is directed to the prospective buyer (not to the horseman), and suggests that, for the average person who is not part of antichrist's privileged few, anything beyond the most basic and essential staples will be priced out of reach (cf. Prov.21:17), so much so that there will not even be any need to be on the lookout for a "good price", because they will never be in range (as long as antichrist's kingdom endures).

It must also be said here that the black horse is *not* mere dearth, but control by design of production, prices, distribution, capital, etc. Although famine has always been with us on this planet, and its intensification is indeed a sign and a characteristic of the Tribulation (Matt.24:7), the trend depicted here is, once again, a "man-made" one, an outrageous and untenable economic situation brought on by antichrist's policies. For just as communist and fascist regimes "redistribute wealth" upon ascension to power (i.e., engage in theft on an almost unimaginable scale), so it will be in case of antichrist, and we fully expect his activities to surpass even the horrendous historical examples of the past hundred years (cf. Dan.11:24; 11:39).

Therefore the "scales" in the hand of the third horseman are a *weapon* of economic control and torment equivalent to the first horseman's bow (for accomplishing devious conquests) and the second horseman's sword (for fomenting internal insurrection). This deliberate and artificial system of rationing and price controls will no doubt seem appealing to many at first, but it will soon promote horrendous scarcity for all but the rich and privileged followers of antichrist (cf. Lev.26:26; 2Kng.7:1; Ezek.4:16).

4. The Pale-green Horse: Accelerated Mortality

Revelation 6:7-8a:

(7) And when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come and see!" (8) And I looked, and behold, [there was] a pale-green horse, and the one who was sitting upon it was named "Death", and Hades followed with him.

The pale-green horse symbolizes the trend of a monumental increase in the incidence of death. The reference to "Hades", the place of the (unbelieving) dead, following closely and immediately after Death, is a vivid symbol of the intensification and rapidity of tribulational mortality (i.e., with no space or lag at all between the coming of "Death" and internment in "Hades"). This expansion and acceleration of the rate of mortality will result from a variety of factors, specifically, the war, revolution, and famine of the preceding three horseman-trends. As the color of decay and putrefaction, pale-green is a natural choice to represent death and its corruption.

It must be emphasized here that the pale-green horse does *not* merely represent the increasing number of deaths resulting from the wars, insurrections, and economic scarcities represented by the first three horsemen, but an expansion of mortality in its own right resulting from the cheapness with which antichrist will treat the lives of his subjects (cf. Prov.14:28). For a large element in elevating this trend of mortality to levels so far not yet seen in the history of the world since the great flood will again be deliberate policy choices on the part of antichrist. In addition to the deaths and degradation of health brought on by the trends of the first three horsemen, the rider on the pale-green horse represents death in his own right. For we may expect antichrist, in his zeal for world conquest (given the nearly unlimited means required for such a course

of action) to redirect resources from all of life's essential areas, namely, medicine, law and order (beyond mere martial control), and environmental protection. The resultant expansion in plague and disease, crime, and environmental hazards (coupled, of course, with the contributions of the first three horsemen) will greatly increase both the risk and the incidence of mortality for all but the very few.

In a sick way, this expanded mortality rate, hitting hardest the young, the old, and the infirm, will also accomplish antichrist's bidding by eliminating consumption by "non-productive" members of society. We can be relatively sure, therefore, that ultimate effect of this massive redirection of resources from health, safety, and environmental sectors will not be unanticipated by antichrist (or unwanted). Just as the bow, sword, and scales represent "weapons" whereby antichrist furthers his self-serving trends, so also in the same way "Hades" mentioned here must be seen as a tool for accomplishing his satanic objectives, in this case, the freeing up of resources by death for his megalomaniacal purposes.¹⁷³

[4b.] Summary of the Four Horsemen

Revelation 6:8b:

And authority over the fourth [part] of the earth (i.e., antichrist's kingdom) was given to them (i.e., to the four "horsemen" collectively) to kill with sword (war and revolution, the first two horsemen), and famine (the third horseman), and death (the fourth horseman), even at the hands of *the* beasts of the earth (i.e., antichrist and his false prophet as agents of the four trends).

The reader is enjoined to attend with special care to the fact that this second half of verse eight (above) *does not* apply to the fourth horseman individually (as is usually supposed), but is instead a summary statement, applying to all four of the horsemen collectively. Not only have the sword (the violence of war and revolution) and famine (resulting from economic dislocation) already been assigned to the first three horsemen, but there is also the problem that death (i.e., increased mortality resulting from pestilence and other consequences of antichrist's policies) and Hades (the place of the unsaved dead prior to the last judgment) can in no biblical sense wield the sword. In the case of Hades, its accompaniment of death (i.e., the accelerated rate of death) is merely to symbolize the horrendous increase of mortality – it actually "follows after" death closely. But the idea of Hades as an agent, even in symbolic terms, is a mistaken borrowing from classical mythology, and has no part in the interpretation of scripture. On the other hand, the interpretation evident in the expanded translation of this half verse given above shows the clear relationship between this summary statement and the respective roles of the four horsemen, adding important additional information in the process.

The "sword" refers collectively to both the first and second horsemen, combining them in this summation because, strictly in terms of the *means* through which death comes,

the violence represented by the sword is an apt symbol for each of these first two. The switch in vocabulary (from *machaira* [two-edged sword] in verse four to *rhomphaia* [broad-sword] here in the second half of verse eight) signals that the "sword" here, a weapon of violence technically different from either of the weapons given to the first two horsemen, combines symbolically *both* types of overt violence represented by the first two seals, namely, war and revolution. As a weapon shunned by the Roman legions (who used the *machaira*), the Thracian *rhomphaia*-sword of verse eight combines both the first seal's notion of a foreign weapon, and the second seal's notion of a sword-like instrument of violence (similar but not identical to the *machaira*-sword precisely because it is meant to be understood as including the bow in its symbolism as well).

The word "famine" here also expresses the *means* by which the third horsemen's trend brings about death, and "death" itself as used here in verse eight is a synonym for "plague" or "pestilence", a precedented biblical use (disease being the number one *means* through which the fourth horsemen will accomplish his task).¹⁷⁴ Finally, the phrase, "even at the hands of the beasts of the earth" requires some comment because it is so often supposed that this is a reference to death by wild animals. Now while it would not be wrong to expect problems in this regard on account of depopulation resulting from the four trends of the first four seals (cf. Deut.7:22), death from wild animals will almost certainly be a minuscule consideration as compared to the deaths caused by war, social degeneration, economic catastrophe, and pestilence. Even more to the point, nowhere in the actual treatment of the trends of antichrist's policy (i.e., within the individual treatment of the four horsemen) are "wild beasts" even hinted at. Passages such as Ezekiel 14:21 are often adduced as parallels here, but to place agricultural, sparsely populated, ancient Israel side by side with urbanized, highly populated modern Europe (the kingdom of antichrist where these trends first apply: see immediately below), is very much an "apples and oranges" comparison. It must also be remembered, moreover, that the four horsemen of the first four seals symbolize trends which result from *antichrist's* satanic activities and are not divine judgments per se (as they most definitely are in Ezek.14:21), further rendering this false comparison moot. For it is the devil and his antichrist who are now under restraint, but who will be allowed to unleash their destructive policies once the day comes when the scroll and its seals are to be opened (cf. 2Thes.2:3-12).

If the word "beast" (Greek *therion*: θηρίον) in verse eight above were to refer to literal wild animals, it would be the only instance in several dozen occurrences in Revelation where that would be true. For in all of the many other uses of "beast" in the book, we have only unmistakable references either to antichrist or to his false prophet (see Rev.13:1 and 13:11 *in loc.* in CT 5). Additionally, the Greek preposition *hypo* (ὕπο: translated above "at the hands of") is normally and properly used only of human agents, not of instruments, of people, not of things or animals. That is to say, "at the hands of" is another indication, grammatical this time, that we have here individuals characterized as "beasts" rather than actual wild animals. Indeed, as we have seen above, antichrist and his administration (including the false prophet as the most prominent human supporter of his coalition: Rev.13:11-18) are the ones responsible for these four deadly trends, so that we would be remiss to take "at the hands of *the* beasts" any other way.¹⁷⁵

These beasts are "of the earth",¹⁷⁶ and given that Satan too will be thrown to earth during the Tribulation (Rev.12:7-9), and is described throughout the book as "a dragon" (a horrible beast if ever there was one; cf. Rev.12:3), we can see in the phrase "at the hands of the beasts of the earth" the infernal false-trinity who will be responsible both for these first four tribulational trends, and for all of the ensuing horror which is the Tribulation. For it is antichrist, the beast, who is unleashed by the removal of the divine restraint represented by these four seals (2Thes.2:3-12), directed by the beastly dragon, Satan (Rev.13:1; cf. 2Thes.2:9), and supported by the beast-like false prophet (Rev.13:11), so that as we have said from the beginning of this discussion, the seals-removed (whence the four horsemen come forth) show the trends of the beast's administration of his kingdom which will briefly come to dominate the world (cf. Rev.13:12; 17:8).

The phrase in our context "a fourth part of the earth" is likewise also often misconstrued. For this is not a reference to a fourth part of the world's population, but refers instead, just as it says, to a "fourth part *of the earth*" (exactly as in the trumpet judgments where the areas affected are also very precisely spelled out: e.g., Rev.8:7 "a third of the earth"; 8:8 "a third of the sea"; 8:9 "a third of the ships"; 9:15 "a third of mankind"). The qualifying phrase here, "of the earth", tells us that the initial sphere of these four trends launched by antichrist's activities will be confined to a quarter of the world in terms of geographical limits. That is to say, the initial trends toward wars of conquest, social unrest, economic meltdown, and accelerated mortality will be concentrated in antichrist's own kingdom (which comprises a fourth of the world in biblical terms). In common scriptural designation, the earth is indeed divided into four quadrants, north, south, east, and west, (often represented by the four winds which in turn stand for these four directions: Jer.49:36; Ezek.37:9; Dan.7:2; Matt.24:31). We may compare the four angels standing at the "four corners of the world" in Revelation 7:1, the devil's deception at the end of time of all the nations "in the four corners of the earth" in Revelation 20:8, God's regathering of Israel in Isaiah 11:12 "from the four corners of the earth", and the four chariots of divine visitation of Zechariah 6:7 who go forth "throughout the [entire] earth" (i.e., one to a quadrant, north, south, east and west). Moreover, in biblical geography, Israel is at the world's center, so that these four quadrants are to be identified relative to her own central location. As the home of God's chosen people, "whence is the Christ according to the flesh", and as the geographical focus of world events from the divine point of view, it should not be at all surprising to believers that Israel should be so described (Rom.9:5):

Thus says the Lord God, "This is Jerusalem. I have placed her in the center of the nations, and round about her [I have placed] the earths (i.e., areas of *the earth*). Ezekiel 5:5

The particular "fourth part" of the earth here in the context of the four seal-trends of antichrist's kingdom is certainly therefore that very kingdom. Further, Daniel chapter eleven identifies antichrist as "king of the north" in the process of describing his wars with the "king of the south" wherein a large part of the Tribulation's first half will be consumed (cf. Dan.11:40-45). We also know from elsewhere in Daniel and from

Revelation that this "northern kingdom" is roughly equivalent to the Roman Empire of John's day, a "revival" of sorts of that ancient kingdom (see respectively Dan.9:26 and Rev.17:9-11; cf. also Dan.2:40-44; 7:7-25; Rev.13:1-4; 17:1-15). Add to this picture the fact the "kings [and therefore kingdoms] of the east" will be relatively uninvolved in the main events of the Tribulation until they are summoned for Armageddon (Rev.16:12-14), and the further fact that the "Babylon" of Revelation chapters seventeen and eighteen is both somehow a part of the beast's kingdom, yet distinct from it (and must therefore represent the one so far unnamed quarter of the earth, namely, the west: compare Is.14:3-20 with Rev.17:16-18), and we arrive at the following general division of the world at the time of the Tribulation:

North: Europe [antichrist's initial ally and conquest]

South: Africa and the Middle East

East: Asia and the Pacific

West: Western Hemisphere [Babylon, antichrist's homeland]

All this is an admittedly brief composite sketch of a number of important passages and extensive teachings, the explication and exegesis of which are found in parts 3 through 5 of this series. However, it is hoped that this overview will be useful in helping to understand the initial applicability of the first four seals, namely, that they will be first and foremost evident within the realm of antichrist's victorious conquests. The beast's initial area of conquest is Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Near East, the seat of Rome's power, against which antichrist will proceed through alliance, subterfuge, intimidation, and open hostilities from his original base of power, symbolic Babylon (of which he is king: Is.14:3; alternatively Tyre: Ezek.28:1-19; cf. Is.23:1-17; Ezek.27:1-36). While these facts clearly imply that Babylon, the west, will be spared the worst of these four deadly trends in the early part of the Tribulation, it should be kept in mind that Babylon, an object of jealousy and loathing to the rest of antichrist's subjects, will be virtually destroyed near the Tribulation's end (Rev.17:16 - 19:3).

We also need to mention here the relationship between the four horsemen and the four cherubs (i.e., the "living creatures"). The text of Revelation chapter six (i.e., the "first"¹⁷⁷, second, third, and fourth pairs in verses one, three, five and seven respectively) makes it clear that the horsemen are introduced by the cherubim in the same order in which these angelic creatures appear in Revelation chapter four, giving us the following series of couplings:

1. Lion-face: White Horse

2. Bullock-face: Red Horse

3. Human-face: Black Horse

4. Eagle-face: Pale-green Horse

Inasmuch as the faces of the cherubs represent aspects of the God-man Jesus Christ in His role as God's Mediator between God and man, while the horsemen represent trends of the kingdom of the false-Christ, Satan's surrogate Messiah, the juxtaposition of the two is significant. For we have in this collocation a clear and telling contrast between the wonderful aspects of Messiah and His coming Kingdom on the one hand, and the horrible trends of antichrist's satanic kingdom on the other:

1. The lion-faced cherub's introduction of the rider on the white horse contrasts the righteous conquering Lion of Judah with the evil conquering beast, antichrist.
2. The bullock-faced cherub's introduction of the rider on the red horse contrasts the suffering Servant sacrificing Himself for the world with the self-aggrandizing antichrist willing to sacrifice the world for himself on the altar of strife and warfare.
3. The human-faced cherub's introduction of the rider on the black horse contrasts the Bread of Life giving Himself to provide the world eternal sustenance with the greedy antichrist, taking away mankind's material sustenance.
4. The eagle-faced cherub's introduction of the rider on the pale-green horse contrasts the resurrection and eternal life provided by Christ with the death and corruption provided by antichrist.

All four of the trends represented by the four horsemen are far from unique in the history of the earth. It is rather the intensity, rapidity and extensiveness of these four deadly trends which are unique. And just as the number four symbolizes completeness of coverage in terms of the earth, so the fact that the horsemen are four in number symbolizes the comprehensive nature of the distress and tribulation destined for those within the sphere of antichrist's rule. These four deadly trends show us distinctly what it will be like to live in a world under the devil's thumb (for all of these trends are direct result's of antichrist's deliberate policies), and should serve to reinforce our appreciation of the fact that everything in this world not directly related to God is, at its core, nothing but vanity. As believers, we know that permanence, security, safety and stability in this world is not much more than an illusion. How much more will this truth not be obvious for those who first bear the brunt of the aggressive, seditious, avaricious, and malignant policies of Satan's chosen man! For though he will promise peace, harmony, prosperity and justice, antichrist will deliver the opposite for all but his most dedicated followers. For all who have chosen instead to follow the Son of God, this preview of the coming regime which the four horsemen represent makes for a sobering warning of the spiritual preparations we would be well-advised to make before that day arrives.

5. The Slain: The Great Persecution (9-11)

Revelation 6:9-11:

(9) And when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the fifth seal, I saw below¹⁷⁸ the altar the living persons who had been slain because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained. (10) And they cried out with a loud voice, saying "How long, O Master, holy and true, will you [wait and] not render judgment and vindication for our blood upon those who dwell on the earth?" (11) And a white robe was given to each one of them that they might rest yet a little while longer until their brothers who were destined to be killed in the same fashion should also fulfill [their course].

As did the first four seals, the fifth seal also represents the removal of divine restraint, specifically the removal of divine limitation on the deliberate slaughter of believers for their faith (i.e., "martyrdom").¹⁷⁹ As in the case of the first four seals, it is not the fact of the trend in view (for the conquest, social strife, famine, and plague they represent have always been present), but the extent to which this persecution will go (as a result of the lifting of the Holy Spirit's mollifying ministry described here). There have been martyrs for God in the devil's world since Abel, and as we saw in the previous installment of this series in our study of the seven churches, the era of Smyrna was noted for the persecutions which believers had to endure. There were martyrs throughout the Reformation, and martyrdom still occurs in our day in countries where Christianity is violently opposed (even if this fact is not generally acknowledged in the west). But in the Tribulation, specifically, in its second half, the "Great Tribulation", the martyrdom of believers for their faith in and faithfulness to Jesus Christ will exceed all previous persecutions by many orders of magnitude. The fifth seal thus represents the "Great Persecution" which will be an inaugurating feature of the Tribulation's second half. Following the massive falling away from the faith in the Tribulation's first half (the "Great Apostasy"), and beginning with the martyrdom of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists (see section V below), this will be a world-wide persecution of believers on a scale never yet witnessed in human history (cf. Is. 24:16; Jer.9:4; 12:5-6; 31:2; 45:1-4; Dan.7:21; 7:25; 8:10; 11:33-35; 12:1; 12:7; Mic.7:1-7; Zeph.2:3; Matt.13:21; 24:9; 24:21; Mk.13:19; Lk.21:12-19; Jn.15:20; 16:1-3; 1Pet.4:12-19; Rev.7:9-17; 12:17; 13:7-18; 14:1-20; 15:2-4). Discussion of the details of this persecution must await its proper place (part 4 of this series, "The Great Tribulation"), but we should note here that the opening of this fifth restraining seal represents the first trend confined exclusively to the Tribulation's second half (confirming that the seals reflect a chronological sequence).

The martyrs of the past, of the present, and of the Great Persecution to come all have in common the fact that they are killed because of their fidelity to the truth. It is precisely because they are true believers in Jesus Christ and genuine witnesses to Him, the Word of God, that they have, do and will earn the world's hostility and, as a consequence, have their lives taken away by henchmen of the evil one. Every believer should be clear about the fact that genuine dedication and faithful commitment to Jesus Christ carries with it the potential for such a death (no matter how improbable that may seem under present circumstances). For it is not the lukewarm or pseudo-believers who run the risk of martyrdom, not the compromised or the compromising who incur the world's enmity and the devil's attention, but only those who have truly placed Jesus Christ first in their

lives regardless of consequence who will ever even potentially face this danger. For all those who do meet this fate, however, we may rest assured that they have not done so apart from the benevolent will of God, and that such an end, far from being shameful, is in fact the most glorious possible transition from this world to the next which a believer in Jesus Christ may be privileged to have, for martyrdom is truly "sharing the sufferings" of our Lord, demonstrating thereby through such faith and faithfulness the power of God and of His Word (cf. Matt.5:10-12; Mk.10:38-39; Jn.21:19; Acts 5:41; 7:54-60; 22:20; 2Cor.1:5-7; Phil.1:20-30; Col.1:24; 1Pet.4:13-14; Rev.2:10; 2:13; 14:13; 17:6).

(35b) Some [of these great believers of the past] were tortured, refusing release, that they might obtain a better resurrection (i.e., worth more to them than their lives; cf. Ps.63:3). (36) Others endured ridicule and beatings, and even chains and imprisonment. (37) They were stoned, sawed in half, killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goat hides. They were deprived, persecuted, abused. (38) The world was not worthy of them. They wandered the deserts and the mountains, making their homes in caves and fissures in the earth. (39) And through their faith, all of them became witnesses [to the world] (lit., "were martyred") . . .
Hebrews 11:35b-39a

The specific description of the martyrs here in Revelation chapter six whom John is given to see deserves special comment, for they are described as "the living persons ["souls"] of the men [people] who were slain". What is significant about this description is the use of the word "living person" (Greek *psyche*, ψυχή), often (confusingly) rendered "souls" (cf. the similar usage of Rev.18:13 & 20:4).¹⁸⁰ In true biblical usage, however, this "*psyche*-soul" is the whole "person", body and spirit, with stress upon the inner self, and, by definition, all such "persons" are *alive*. The message, therefore, is clear: the devil and his minions may remove us from this world, if it so pleases God for His own glory, but they can never really take away our lives.

(31) "But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what God spoke to you when He said, (32) 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'? (32) He is not a God of the dead, *but of the living*."
Matthew 22:31-32

"And do not fear those who can kill the body, but are not able to take (lit. "kill") your [true] life. But fear rather the One who is able to destroy both life and body in hell."
Matthew 10:28

Despite the earthly appearance of things, all these "living individuals" whom John sees here are indeed alive and well, eagerly awaiting the coming day of God's vengeance upon the world that slew them. Nor have they been "left naked", for the "white robe" each of them has received is a symbol of the interim body each of us receives to house our spirit and preserve our life until the day of resurrection we so eagerly anticipate (2Cor.5:1-3).¹⁸¹

The opening of the fifth seal represents the end of the previous restraint on martyrdom, relatively speaking. For the believers in view here "below the altar" in verses nine through eleven are not those who die at the hand of antichrist and his followers (who are described as " their brothers who were destined to be killed in the same fashion"). Rather, these believers are all those who have been martyred up until that future time. They are still awaiting the Lord's righteous recompense to be leveled upon the earth and its inhabitants, and waiting also for their resurrection, which, as in the case of future rewards, must await the fulfillment of our entire echelon of resurrection (1Cor.15:23; cf. Heb.11:39-40). The intensity and magnitude of the persecution to come is evident from a comparison of these martyrs (who are not described as and do not appear to be numerous, although they represent all those who have so died for the Lord from Abel until the Tribulation's mid-point) and those who are going to be "coming out of the Great Tribulation", who are said to be "a great multitude which no one could count" (Rev.7:9).

6. The Earthquake: Divine Judgment and the Second Advent

Revelation 6:12-17:

(12) And I saw when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the sixth seal, a great earthquake occurred, and the sun became black like hairy sackcloth, and the moon became entirely like blood [in appearance], (13) and the stars of heaven fell to the earth like a fig tree casting its fruit when shaken by a strong wind, (14) and the heaven retreated like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and hill was moved from its place. (15) And all the kings of the earth and the prominent men and the generals and the wealthy and the powerful and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and the rocks of the mountains. (16) And [thus] they say to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of the One who sits upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, (17) because the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand [before them]?"

Although there are seven seals, the sixth seal is the last to represent tribulational trends per se. That is because the opening of the seventh seal in chapter eight is synonymous with the actual commencement of the Tribulation. Just as this sealed scroll in the Lamb's hand cannot be unrolled and read until every last one of its seals has been opened, so the Tribulation and glories to follow (which this scroll represents) cannot begin until the restraining ministry of the Spirit has been completely "taken out of the way" (cf. 2Thes.2:6-8).

The sixth seal represents the Second Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, along with all the events which accompany that glorious day (the battle of Armageddon in particular). Clearly then, this sixth seal compresses many events and details into a very brief though powerful sketch (and we can see in the reduction from four seals to two to cover the more eventful Great Tribulation a representation of the unprecedented intensity and

rapidity of these dramatic events to come, a phenomenon to which we have been calling attention since the beginning of this study: see especially part 1 on Rev.1:1).

The Lord is angry with the nations; His wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them, He will give them over to slaughter. Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will send up a stench; the mountains will be soaked with their blood. All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree.
Isaiah 34:2-4 NIV

Characteristic features of the Second Advent which occur here and are also well-known from Old Testament prophecy include the great earthquake (Is.29:6; Ezek.38:19; Hab.3:6; cf. Zech.14:3-5; Rev.6:12), the supernatural darkness (Is.13:10; 60:2; Ezek.32:7; Joel 2:31; 3:15; Zech.14:6-7), and the dissolving of the heavens and the falling of the stars (Is.13:10; 34:4; Matt.24:29), all of which bring terror to the inhabitants of the earth in the face of the impending wrath of God (Is.2:10; 2:19-21; 34:2-3; Hos.10:8; Mal.3:2; Lk.21:25-26; 23:30). On the subject of "falling stars", it should be pointed out that the Bible does not express itself in terms of modern scientific terminology. That is to say, a "star" in our contemporary usage means something very technical, quite different in size from these meteor showers which precede our Lord's return (Matt.24:29; Mk.13:25). In addition to the massive world-wide earthquake that will rock every mountain and hill, and to the period of supernatural darkness just prior to His advent, these intensive meteor showers will melt the courage of all who oppose Him (and occasion the reaction described in verse seventeen above).

(9) Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, a mighty day of anger and intense wrath, to make the earth desolate and remove her sinners from upon her. (10) For the stars of heaven and the constellations will not flash forth their light. The sun will grow dark on its course and the moon will not pour out its light. (11) Then will I punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity. I will bring an end to the arrogance of the proud and bring down the haughtiness of the ruthless. (12) I will make men more rare than gold, and mankind than the choice bullion of Ophir. (13) Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will quake from its place, on account of the anger of the Lord and on the day of His fierce wrath.
Isaiah 13:9-13

The "rolling up" of the heavens described here (cf. Ps.102:25-27; Is.51:6; Matt.24:35; Heb.1:11-12; 12:27; 2Pet.3:10-11; Rev.21:1), is, additionally, both representative of the eviction from heaven of Satan and his followers (cf. the angels elsewhere described as stars, often falling/fallen ones: Judg.5:20; Job 25:5; 38:7; Is.14:12-13; 40:26 [c. Lk.2:13]; Lk.10:18; Jude 1:13; Rev.1:16; 1:20; 2:1; 3:1; 8:10-11; 9:1; 12:1-4), and is also a preview of the dissolution of the present heavens and earth for the new heavens and earth which will constitute the eternal kingdom of the Father (Is.65:17; 66:22; Matt.13:43; 1Cor.15:24-28; 2Pet.3:13; Rev.21:1-2).

V. The Sealing of the 144,000: Revelation 7:1-8

Revelation 7:1-8:

(1) And after this, I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, so that a wind might not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. (2) And I saw another angel coming up from the rising of the sun with a seal of the Living God. And he shouted in a loud voice to the four angels to whom it had been given to harm the earth and the sea, (3) saying, “Don’t harm the earth or the sea or any tree until we place a seal upon the foreheads of the servants of our God.” (4) And I heard the number of those sealed, 144,000 sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:

(5) from the tribe of Judah, 12,000 sealed,
from the tribe of Reuben, 12,000,
from the tribe of Gad, 12,000,
(6) from the tribe of Asher, 12,000,
from the tribe of Naphtali, 12,000,
from the tribe of Manasseh, 12,000,
(7) from the tribe of Simeon, 12,000,
from the tribe of Levi, 12,000,
from the tribe of Issachar, 12,000,
(8) from the tribe of Zebulun, 12,000,
from the tribe of Benjamin, 12,000,
from the tribe of Joseph, 12,000 sealed.

The Four Angels of the Four Winds:

The four winds mentioned here are instruments of divine judgment (Jer.49:36-37; cf. 1Kng.19:11; Job 1:19), and the four elect angels who control them are the agents who administer that judgment on God's behalf:

(1) Then I turned and lifted my eyes and looked, and, behold, four chariots were coming forth from between two mountains, and the mountains were mountains of bronze. (2) And with the first chariot were red horses, and with the second chariot were black horses, (3) and with the third chariot were white horses, and with the fourth chariot were dappled horses, strong ones. (4) And I answered and said to the angel who was speaking with me, “What are these, my lord?” (5) And the angel answered me and said, “These are *the four winds of heaven*, going forth from standing by the Lord of the entire earth. (6) And among them, the black horses are going to the land of the north, and the white ones have gone behind them, and the dappled ones have gone to the land of the south, (7) for they are strong, and they went and made request to go and to go about throughout the earth. And He (i.e., the Lord) said, ‘Go! Go about throughout the earth!’ And they went about throughout the earth. (8) Then He shouted to me and said, ‘Look! Those going to the land of the north have set My Spirit [of wrath] upon the land of the north!’”

Zechariah 6:1-8

Whereas Zechariah was given to see the whole process of their deployment from the presence of the Lord represented by the angels who control them, in Revelation chapter seven we see the four winds already in position, set to be unleashed upon the earth.¹⁸² In both instances these destructive winds are controlled by angels who, while they are directing them in Zechariah six, are seen to be holding them back in Revelation seven. In Zechariah's description, the process of divine judgment has already been set in motion, with the main recipient of divine wrath being the "north country" (note the translation of verse eight above, often mistranslated in the versions). The four winds in our context, Revelation chapter seven, are not being directed against any particular region or country as a means of destruction (as were the two winds sent to destroy historic Babylon in the Zechariah six passage above), but are instead on the point of being released upon the entire world to administer God's warning judgments (i.e., the "trumpet judgments").

As we saw above, the phrase "the four corners of the earth" (Rev.7:1) is a common biblical way of referring to the earth in its entirety, and here stresses the completeness of the coverage and worldwide effect which the warning judgments of these four angels and their winds will administer (Ezek.37:9; Dan.7:2; 8:8; Matt.24:31). It is important to understand that the "four winds" and their angels do not permanently reside at the earth's "four corners" – they stand before the Lord in eager anticipation of His mandates for judgment as Zechariah six makes clear. But here they have been pre-positioned in anticipation of the opening of the final seal, at which point they will begin without delay the seven-fold series of the "trumpet judgments", God's systematic series of warnings to humanity to repent delivered at the Tribulation's inception. Specifically, the four angels of the four winds are responsible for directing the first four trumpet judgments, all of which originate from the sky (respectively, hail and fire hurled down upon the earth, a blazing mountain thrown down into the sea, the Wormwood star cast upon the world's waters, and the smiting of the light of the sun, moon and stars). As we see them here in Revelation seven, the angels are told to maintain their restraint of the winds until the sealing of the servants of God has been accomplished, suggesting a period of calm before the storm of the Tribulation breaks forth (cf. the "half hour" = a half year of silence and calm in heaven following the opening of the seventh seal: Rev.8:1).

The 144,000:

This passage tells us little about the 144,000 themselves or their ministry beyond the fact of their selection by tribe and their sealing. However, from the further description in Revelation 14:1-5, and from the parallel and prophetically foreshadowing ministries of the twelve (Matt.10:1-42; Mk.6:7-12; Lk.9:1-6) and of the seventy (Lk.10:1-20) sent out by our Lord, it is possible to reconstruct the essential course of their ministry. And while its full description appears in the next installment of this series dealing with the Tribulation's first half (that is, the time frame for the work of 144,000), it will be helpful to put forth here at their first mention the main points about the 144,000 confirmable by scripture (especially in light of the many heresies and cults which not only

misinterpret chapter seven, but also use it to further their own agendas in spite of the actual teachings of the Word of God).

We may note at the outset that, just as the 12 and the 70 described in the gospels were sent out as representatives of our Lord to prepare the hearts of His countrymen for the nearness of the Kingdom, spiritually speaking (Matt.10:7; Mk.6:12; Lk.9:2; 9:6; 10:1; 10:9; cf. Lk.9:52), so the 144,000 are likewise representatives of our Lord, sent out to prepare the hearts of His countrymen for the coming of the Kingdom in its tangible reality. Thus, both these First and Second Advent messengers have a similar role and a similar function, for all are Jesus Christ's special representatives. And as His special representatives, it is fitting in the case of the 144,000 not only that they will adhere to the same mandates set down by our Lord for the 12 and the 70, but also that they will approximate His life and His walk (in so far as those born of the flesh can).¹⁸³

Characteristics of the 144,000 and their Ministry:

1. They are Jewish: Our Lord, in His humanity, is clearly Jewish (Lk.3:23-38; Rom.9:5), and these 144,000 are just as clearly described as belonging to the twelve tribes of Israel (12,000 from each tribe named). There is no justification in the Greek text here (or, for that matter, in any English translation this author has seen) that would lend credence to any other view than that the 144,000 are literally of Jewish ancestry. Just as clearly, they are also Christians, that is, Jewish believers and followers of Jesus Christ, "servants of our God" (Rev.7:3).

Many attempts have been made over the millennia to read these verses in some other way, to see this passage as somehow symbolic or the descriptions as somehow not precisely literal, but it is important to emphasize here that all such attempts have no basis, no foundation, no justification in scripture. It is certainly true that the 144,000 are "biblical celebrities", and it is only natural that a Christian reading these verses might wish to be a part of their unique and wonderful ministry (even though it ends in martyrdom, or perhaps even because of this fact). However, just as even great apostles like John and James who might have wished for things which were beyond them (i.e., to sit beside Jesus on His right and on His left: Matt.20:20-23), have had to defer to the will of God in such honors, so in the case of the 144,000 membership in this elite group comes only through God's election, according to God's will, and it behooves every believer to humbly, patiently and zealously accept the role, the ministry, and the place that he/she has been appointed by God in His grace, and not to be tricked into trying to arrogate to him/herself a position that is not in the will of God (cf. Lk.14:7-11). The 144,000 are *of Jewish ancestry*, coming from the tribes described in the translation above. Moreover, what is meant by "Jewish ancestry" is also clear, and must not be subjected to interpretive gymnastics. While it is true that a person of Jewish ancestry today cannot be expected to know his/her tribal affiliation, by and large those of Jewish ancestry are aware of their Jewish heritage, just as those of gentile patrimony are aware that they are not Jewish. Given the *importance* in the ministry of the 144,000 that they be conversant with Jewish traditions and culture, it also seems very unlikely that any

sizeable part of their number will be made up of persons who may be "Jewish and not know it". For while this is certainly a theoretical possibility, the main thrust and focus of the work of the 144,000 will be to "the lost sheep of Israel", a ministry that would be difficult to fulfill without the proper cultural perspective. Everything points to the 144,000 being not only nominally Jewish, but also Jewish by culture, steeped in the traditions of their people the better to witness to them.

Time and space do not permit here an exhaustive refutation of the many "ten lost tribes" scenarios. Suffice it to say that the Bible provides sufficient evidence to conclude that even if all those exiled in the Assyrian deportation perished within a few generations (or became entirely secularized), there could easily still be sufficient stock from each of these ten tribes within that portion of the Jewish nation not conquered for the perpetuation of their blood-lines and the fulfillment of this prophecy *without* requiring recourse to bizarre theories about the present location or composition of the "ten lost tribes" (cf. 1Chron.9:2; 2Chron.10:17; 11:13-17; 15:9; 30:6; and chapter 34 passim). In any case, even if some of the far-fetched theories one hears did turn out to have any merit, it would still be a case of "Jews who knew nothing of Judaism", eliminating such people from consideration in the ministry discussed here for the reasons explained above. Nor can it be maintained that John's listing of the 144,000 is a "spiritualization" of chosen gentiles. Nowhere in the Bible are gentiles ever described individually as Jews, especially to the point of assigning them to specific Jewish tribes. So while it is true that, in this world, gentile and Jewish believers alike are all one in Christ spiritually (Gal.3:28; Eph.2:12-18), and while it is true that, in eternity, we of the gentiles who have followed Christ will be made one with Israel in reality (Eph.3:6; cf. Rom.8:16-17; 8:32; 1Cor.12:2; Gal.3:29; Phil.3:3; 2Pet.1:4),¹⁸⁴ nevertheless, while we are in this world, there is a physical distinction, with pride and precedence of place and stature belonging to those of Jewish ancestry (Rom.3:1-2; 9:4-5; 11:11-24; Gal.2:15; Phil.3:4-6).

It is not necessary that all or even most of these 144,000 come from the present state of Israel. Indeed, given the present widespread distribution of the Jewish people, and the clear necessity for the audience of the 144,000 to receive the gospel message in their own particular languages as well as from their own unique cultural perspective, that would be an unlikely development. Furthermore, the fact that the angel who announces the sealing of the 144,000 gives his message to the four angels *at the four corners of the earth* is a certain indication that the *whole earth* is meant as an area which must be protected while the 144,000 are sealed (and that they, therefore, are located all over the world). That the 144,000 are all Jewish with no gentiles included should not be taken as in any way derogatory to the role of gentiles in the plan of God (any more than the fact that they are single men and virgins should seem to demean the role of women or married persons). Rather, it must be understood that this is a unique ministry with a unique purpose and thus has correspondingly unique requirements, most especially the need to understand the Jewish point-of-view, and to avoid giving offense (Matt.27:18; Acts 13:43-45; 17:5; 22:21-22; Rom.10:2; cf. Lk.15:25-32).¹⁸⁵

There is a passion, a "zeal" for God deep set in the Jewish heart. Reading and re-reading the Psalms, for example, one cannot help but be deeply moved by the profound and

vibrant love for and appreciation of God these songs exude, often exemplifying a degree of passion for Him that seems impossible to completely emulate. It is often hard for gentiles to comprehend this special feeling for the Almighty on the part of His special people, especially in regard to its persistence even when locked in the hardness of unbelief. For this "zeal" is at present by and large resistant to Christ (Rom.10:2; cf. Prov.19:2). One of the astounding and glorious things about this ministry of the 144,000 is that when once Israel is confronted by the undeniable witness of God ministered by these Jewish witnesses, many of their countrymen will indeed turn to Jesus, and do so in a most passionate and zealous way. This radical turn-around, where negative zeal will be at once transformed into positive passion is reminiscent of the experience of the apostle Paul, who, on his way to destroy the Church, was transformed in his heart into one of its most firm foundations by the miraculous intervention of our Lord (Acts 9:1-22; 22:3-21; 26:9-23). The 144,000 will indeed prove their bona fides through the working of miracles (see below), but an even more profound miracle will be the radical and zealous change of heart on the part of so many previously rock-hard hearts as the chosen people of God turn to Christ in large numbers around the world in response to this perfect ministry given at the perfect time.

2. They are male: Our Lord is male, and so are these 144,000 who are chosen to spread the good news of His imminent return to the lost sheep of Israel. Throughout this section and in Revelation chapter fourteen where they are also described, the Greek adjectives and participles which agree with the 144,000 are masculine. The parallel cases of the twelve (who were all males) and the seventy (who are likewise exclusively described with masculine modifiers) also indicate that all of the 144,000 will be men. One may also say that it is difficult to see how the description of the 144,000 as never having had relations "with women" can be understood in any other way. The fact that the 144,000 are male should not be taken as in any way derogatory to the role of women in the plan of God (any more than it should seem to demean the role of gentiles or married persons). Rather, it must be understood that this is a unique ministry with a unique purpose and thus has correspondingly unique requirements. This particular characteristic of the 144,000 is understandable in light of Jewish tradition, in particular the restriction of ministry roles to men even before the Mosaic Law. Given that one of the top priorities for making this ministry as effective as possible is, as we saw in the previous point, the avoidance of giving offense in the Jewish cultural context, the use of an all male cadre would seem to be a necessity. For this principle we may recall the words of the apostle Paul, who, as far as he was able, made himself "all things to all people", adapting himself to the backgrounds of his audience whatever their backgrounds may have been, the better to win as many lives as possible for Christ (1Cor.9:19-23).

3. They are virgins: Our Lord remained a virgin throughout His earthly life, and this is also a characteristic of the 144,000 precursors who will begin to turn the hearts of Israel back to Him. For the description of the 144,000 as virgins in Revelation 14:4 is by no means symbolic. In addition to the fact that one finds nothing in the context that would lend itself to such an interpretation, the statement "for they are virgins" is, after all, a further explanation of the statement that these young men "have not fallen into sin with

women (i.e., been seduced by them)". It is important to understand that no blanket indictment of women is meant here. Rather, this is a simple statement to the effect that the entire group of the 144,000 are not only *single, unmarried* men, but also that in their single status they have *never* had illicit sexual relations. As it was with our Lord, so it will be with the 144,000, and the unmarried part of this equation is equally as important as the point that they have kept themselves chaste. For by keeping themselves uninvolved, they have also kept themselves from what would be a major impediment for men about to undertake a ministry of the nature of the one the 144,000 are called to complete. For, as we shall discuss in more detail below, these witnesses will be called upon to live an itinerant life of the greatest sacrifice, enduring privation and persecution, and ending in martyrdom. It could hardly be fair for any spouse or for any family to have their breadwinner removed to partake in such an ordeal. Nor could it fail to compromise the ministry of such a witness to have a wife and family at home somewhere, deprived of his fellowship and support, and quite likely forced to share in a measure of the persecution that comes his way. Clearly, God expects every one of us to do right by those who are dependent upon us (cf. 1Tim.5:8), so that the only way the 144,000 could possibly make the sacrifices called for by their unique ministry is to first make the sacrifice of committing themselves to a life of celibacy and abstinence. In this they follow our Lord, as well as some of His greatest apostles (Paul, and probably John; cf. 1Cor.7:7-8; 9:5-6).

Nor should we take this special sacrifice and commitment of the 144,000 to diminish in any way the role of the married, widowed, or divorced in God's plan (any more than it should seem to demean the role of gentiles or women). After all, Moses, David and Peter were married, as were, obviously, the mothers of Jesus and John the baptist (to name but a very few outstanding believers). Rather, it must be understood that this is a unique ministry with a unique purpose and thus has correspondingly unique requirements. In addition to the need to be without the responsibility of marriage and free to undertake the heavy responsibilities of this ministry without compromise, the fact of their virginity will also form an important contrast to the growing sexual immorality of the world at that time, a trend which will be increasingly blended into the resurgent idolatry and its immoral rites which will explode in the Tribulation, culminating in the entirely degenerate religion of antichrist wherein he will be the overt object of worship.

4. They are sent to evangelize Israel: Our Lord became a "Minister to the circumcision" (Rom.15:8; cf. Acts 3:26), sent "to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matt.15:24; cf. the twelve: Matt.10:6), and the mission of the 144,000 has essentially the same objective, except that theirs is a worldwide ministry preceding Christ's 2nd Advent, rather than a localized ministry during Christ's 1st Advent. This does not mean that evangelism among the gentiles and by the gentile members of the Church will not continue, nor that there will not be extraordinary grace provision for disseminating the truth going hand in hand with the extraordinary warning judgments coming from God (cf. the proclamation of the "eternal gospel" worldwide by the angel in Revelation 14:6-7). But it is entirely appropriate that God's own special people should receive their own specialized ministry (cf. Acts 3:25-26; 13:46; Rom.1:16; 3:1). The command not to go "to the gentiles" applies equally to the 144,000 just as it did to the twelve (Matt.10:5; 10:23), and apparently to

the seventy (cf. Lk.10:1), just it was also an operative principle of Christ's 1st Advent ministry (cf. Matt.15:21-28; Mk.7:24-30; Jn.1:11; Acts 3:26; Rom.15:8). This approach is entirely understandable when one considers that all these ministries have in common as their fundamental purpose to prepare Israel for her Messiah. "Repent (i.e., turn to God in truth), for the Kingdom is at hand (i.e., Christ is about to return)" will therefore be the clarion call of the 144,000, just as in the case of the twelve and the seventy (Matt.10:7; Mk.6:12; Lk.9:2; 9:6; 10:9; cf. Lk.9:52).

We should not take this to mean that the 144,000 will have no contact whatsoever with gentiles – we may compare our Lord's gracious ministering to the Syro-Phoenician woman (Matt.15:21-28; Mk.7:24-30), the Samaritan woman (Jn.4:1-42), and the Roman centurion (Matt.8:5-13; Lk.7:1-10). But as with our Lord who was sent to Israel and maintained this preeminent focus to His ministry to the end, so shall it be with the 144,000. And there is also an important sense in which this impressive, worldwide ministry, ending as it will in what will constitute the Tribulation's first massive wave of martyrdom, will be a witness in and of itself to the entire world of the power and the truth of God's gospel (Matt.10:18). Paul had said that his ministry to the gentiles had the added purpose of "provoking" his countrymen to the effect, he hoped against hope, that they should believe in Christ, if only out of a competitive spirit (Rom.11:13-14; cf. Phil.1:15-18). In a sense, this phenomenon will be reversed in the Tribulation, with the ministry of the 144,000 and the Jewish response to it providing the "provocation" that will at least be grounds for gentile response. In this respect, we see another facet of the re-emergence of Jewish leadership and prominence in the Church not witnessed since apostolic times.¹⁸⁶

5. They are given the authority to perform miracles: In addition to the suffering they alleviated and the prophecies they fulfilled, Jesus' miracles were given Him by the Father as a badge of His authority that clearly marked Him out as the true Son of God and the Messiah (Jn.5:36; 10:25; 10:38; 14:11; cf. Matt.11:1-6; Lk.7:18-23). Our Lord's delegating of the ability to perform similar miracles to the twelve, to the seventy, and in the time to come to the 144,000 has a similarly important purpose. For many can claim to be speaking with the authority of God (and during the Tribulation this claim will be made falsely to a degree never yet witnessed), but who can act with the power of God unless God has empowered that person? Demonstrating the power and authority of God has always been a prime purpose of miracles, and we may compare Moses at the Red Sea and Elijah on Mount Carmel as outstanding examples of Israel responding to clear "signs" given by God through the hands of His anointed ones (cf. Ex.14-15 and 1Kng.18:20-40 respectively; cf. Matt.12:38-42; 1Cor.1:22). In a similar fashion, the miraculous works that will be given to the 144,000 to do will serve to demonstrate to all those whose hearts are not hardened to an exceptional degree that their message is true. This validation of their message – a gracious act on God's part on behalf of His people, will enhance the effectiveness of their ministry, doubtless leading many who would otherwise not have done so to return to God by the only true path, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the One and only Messiah. Specifically, the miracles they are given to

perform are reminiscent of the miracles of our Lord (and of His apostles in the early days of the Church):

- Healing the sick (Matt.10:1; 10:8; Mk.6:7; Lk.9:1-2; Lk.10:9; compare Matt.4:24 *et passim* in the gospels; and Acts 5:15-16; 8:5-7; 28:8-9). The rapid and dramatic nature of this healing will leave no doubt about its divine origin. Further, the removal of disease will be, as always, a poignant symbol of the forgiveness of sin through faith in Jesus Christ (cf. Is.53:4-5; Lk.5:17-26).
- Driving out demons (Matt.10:1; 10:8; Mk.6:7; 6:12; Lk.9:1; 10:17; 10:20; compare Lk.8:26-37 *et passim* in the gospels; and Acts 5:16; 8:7; 16:16-18; 19:11-13). There is doubtless more demon possession in our own day than we are aware, and it is certain that in the Tribulation to come, the present restraints upon this form of satanic control will be significantly reduced, making the miracle of true exorcism both obvious and welcome. Further, the removal of demons will be, as always, a poignant symbol of deliverance from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light through faith in Jesus Christ (cf. Lk.10:17-18; Col.1:13-14).
- Raising the dead (Matt.10:8; compare Mk.5:37-43; Lk.7:11-17; 7:22; Jn.11:1-44; and Acts 9:36-42; 20:7-12). Few miraculous acts will be as dramatic and as difficult to contest as restoring life to the dead. For instance, we know in the case of our Lord that His raising of Lazarus occasioned much interest (Jn.12:9) and much opposition (Jn.11:45-47; 12:10). Further, the raising of the dead will be, as always, a poignant symbol of deliverance from the grave into eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ (cf. Jn.11:23-25; Eph.2:6; 1Jn.3:14).
- Miraculous protection from dangers (Lk.10:19; compare Lk.4:28-30; Jn.7:30; 8:59; 10:39; and Acts 12:1-10; 28:3-6). Not only will they be protected in ways beyond the ken of the human eye (i.e., their sealing; see below), but they will also receive the benefit of visibly miraculous deliverance from overt mortal hazards as a testimony to and further validation of their truthfulness.

As with all such activities, we may assume that as was the case in the past, so with the 144,000, their miracle-working activities will not be overly extensive, but will be designed to win an open-hearted hearing from the lost sheep of Israel in whatever community they are presently operating (i.e., healing, exorcism and the like will be *the means* rather than the end of their ministry).

6. They are subject to a special code of conduct: Jesus' servant life-style, most perspicuous in His deliberate self-limitation in the taking on of true humanity and operating within human constraints throughout His 1st Advent (Phil.2:5-10; cf. Is.42; 49; 52-53; Matt.20:28; Lk.22:27; Jn.1:1 with 1:14; 5:18; 10:30; 14:9; 17:5; Rm.8:3; 9:5; 2Cor.8:9; 1Tim.2:5-6; 3:16; Heb.2:9-18; 10:5-10), provides a pattern for the analogously sacrificial lives of the 144,000.¹⁸⁷ In addition to the maintenance of celibacy (see point 3 above; cf. Is.53:8), the special "code of servant conduct" under which the 144,000 will operate will be similar to the one our Lord adopted in many other important respects as

well. This life of extreme commitment, total dedication, and complete sacrifice (even to the point of death), will serve to remove, as it did in the case of our Lord, any and all doubt about their loyalty to God, or about God's endorsement of them, or about the veracity of their message (for all objective observers). In this sojourner lifestyle, there will truly be no "conflicts of interest" whatsoever, and no reason for the fair-minded to have the slightest suspicion that the 144,000 would undertake such a difficult ministry for anything even approaching selfish motives. In short, as it was with our Lord, their character and the character of their message will be righteous in every detail and at all times. As John sums up their lives and ministries in Revelation 14:5, "no lie was found in their mouths, for *they are blameless*". In everything they do, the 144,000 will, like our Lord, conduct themselves in a transparent, honorable, above-board, and consistent way, with the result that they will silence all possible legitimate criticism through their flawless behavior (a principle that every believer should note and take to heart: cf. 1Pet.2:15):

- Their help (healing, etc.) and their message will be offered on a grace basis, without charge (Matt.10:8).
- They will be entirely dependent upon God's day by day provision (Matt.10:9-10; Lk.9:3; 10:4).
- Their ministry will be conducted in a serious and purposeful fashion (Lk.10:4).
- They will maintain an itinerant lifestyle (Lk.9:6; Matt.10:11; 10:23).
- They will maintain an overt and above-board dependence upon the charity of those they minister to (Matt.10:11-15; Lk.9:4; 10:5-7), but without any opportunity to amass surplus (i.e., only "room and board", *trophe* in Matt.10:10).
- They will maintain an overt and above-board policy of seeking and accepting support, searching diligently for a "worthy" house (a policy which will entail many nights spent in the open in travel and prior to finding a "worthy" house: Matt.10:11-15; Lk.9:4; 10:5-7).
- They will maintain an overt and above-board policy of removing themselves from a particular mission field only 1) when the mission is completed (Matt.10:11; Lk.9:4; 10:7); 2) if the town proves unworthy (Lk.9:5; cf. 10:10-12); 3) if forced to leave by persecution (Matt.10:23).
- They will be careful and circumspect in every aspect of their manner of life, thereby not giving offense on their own behalf in any way, but keeping the focus on the gospel message (Matt.10:16-17).
- They will make their complete faith in God obvious to all from the total reliance they will display in His protection in times of trouble (Matt.10:16-20).

- They will conduct their ministries courageously, openly proclaiming the gospel in spite of any and all consequences (Matt.10:26-31).
- They will resolutely demonstrate uncommon perseverance in a variety of threatening circumstances (Matt.10:32-39).
- They will courageously continue their ministries despite threats and opposition, departing only at the point when persecution makes further work impossible (Matt.10:23).

7. They will face stiff opposition: Implied in our Lord's commands in these passages to be bold, to be brave, to fear not, and to take up His cross, is the fact that this ministry will be accomplished in the face of and in spite of stiff opposition which will take many forms. Clearly, one of the last things that devil desires is this successful evangelizing of the lost sheep of Israel. Not only will the 144,000 face privations natural to the course of such an itinerant, day-to-day ministry, but there will also be specific persecutions (Matt.10:17-23), followed at the end of their three and one half year term by martyrdom (cf. Rev.14:1-5 compared with Rev.13). Even in the course of their day to day ministering (as we may conclude from a reading of all the pertinent passages: Matt.10; Lk.9; 10; Rev.7; Rev.14) the 144,000 will be spoken against vociferously not only by gentile unbelievers, but also by those of their fellow Jews who have determined in their hearts not to accept their witness and return to God through Jesus Christ (Matt.10:17; 10:21; cf. Is.6:9-10; 53:1; Jn.1:11; 12:37-41). They will be betrayed by their own family members (Matt.10:21; 10:35-37), hated by all men (Matt.10:22), slandered (Matt.10:24-25), imprisoned, tortured and falsely accused (Matt.10:17-20), persecuted (Matt.10:23), knowing no peace (Matt.10:34), running their course as did our Lord, as did his apostles among ravening "wolves" (Matt.10:16; Lk.10:3), faithful until the appointed end when they will give up their lives in the service of God's gospel (Matt.10:39; Rev.14:1-5).

8. They will receive miraculous protection during the days of their ministry: As the previous point makes clear, given the tremendous opposition, seen and unseen, which the 144,000 will face, there could be no question of effective ministry without special divine protection to allow these faithful witnesses sufficient opportunity to carry out their assigned tasks. It is true that this special seal of God lends a definite measure of validation to the ministry of the 144,000 (cf. Jn.6:27), but it is clearly the specialized protection of God which we are to see as the essential meaning and effect of the sealing we are studying here in our context of Revelation 7:1-8.¹⁸⁸ As the well-known parallel in Ezekiel makes clear, the supernatural mark or "seal" placed on the foreheads of the 144,000 represents a special divine warning to refrain from any attempts to destroy these unique witnesses before the appointed time (Ezek.9:1-6).¹⁸⁹ Just as in Ezekiel, this mark will not be visible to the human eye, but all angelic creatures, fallen and elect, will clearly see and understand its meaning. The purpose of seals in antiquity was often to provide an unmistakable mark of ownership (as in the case of documents validated with a signet ring), and that is the clear analogy here. By placing His own seal on these witnesses, God guarantees their security on His own authority. All who see the seal

understand that these 144,000 remain under God's own special protection as His own unique property.

The timing of this sealing is significant. As we find ourselves in the middle of this digression between the sixth seal and the seventh seal (the opening of which commences the Tribulation, as we have seen), the angel of verse two who comes "from the rising sun" (i.e., from the east, the direction of the Messiah's return: Is.41:25; 63:1; Ezek.43:4; Zech.14:4; Mal.4:2; Lk.1:78; 2Pet.1:19; Rev.19:17) commands the four angels who administer the first four trumpet judgments at the Tribulation's inception not to commence until the sealing of the 144,000 is complete. Clearly, then, the sealing of these unique ministers will take place just *before* the Tribulation's commencement, a fact which underscores the importance of this ministry in God's plan on account of the equally critical importance to that plan of the conversion of a large segment of Israel. This conversion, which, as we shall see in due course, will not be universal (cf. Zech.13:8-9), will be accomplished in two phases, with the first phase coming as a response to the witnessing of the 144,000 (these are those who later flee from antichrist: cf. Rev.12:1-16), and the second phase occurring at the return of our Lord (Joel 2:30-32; Zech.12:10; Rom.11:25-27; Rev.1:7).

With the opening of the first six seals and the imminent commencement of the Tribulation, the restraint (on lawlessness and the activities of the evil one) that had previously obtained generally throughout the world must now be disbursed individually (i.e., the individual stamp of protection on the 144,000 which this seal represents). Given our Lord's promise that the Spirit will be with us always (Jn.14:16; cf. Eph.1:13-14), we understand that this sealing of the 144,000 witnesses will be an additional mark of protection, guaranteeing not only their resurrection (a primary result of the Spirit's sealing: Eph.4:30), but also affording them the requisite opportunity for ministry. This invisible seal on their foreheads which marks them out as special servants of God will thus provide a very sharp contrast to the visible "mark of the beast" on the foreheads and hands of those who have rejected God (Rev.13:16-18; 14:9-11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). This seal, moreover, is an assurance from God to the 144,000 themselves of His special superintendence of their lives and ministries. Jesus has told them not to be afraid in spite of all the opposition detailed above (Matt.10:26-42), and this special sealing is an encouragement and a reminder that God will indeed protect them just as He said He would.

9. They will be martyred at the conclusion of their ministry: The appearance of the 144,000 with our Lord on the heavenly Mount Zion (i.e., in the heavenly temple: see section I above) directly following the description in chapter thirteen of the beast, his false prophet, and their methods of forcing as much of humanity as possible into a system of satanic idolatry paints a very clear picture. The 144,000 are no longer on earth, but in heaven. In fact, they have been "redeemed *from* the earth" (Rev.14:3) as the first to be martyred "for God and for the Lamb" (Rev.14:4). As the events of chapter thirteen focus upon the Tribulation's mid-point, that is, the transition between the first half of the seven years and the "Great Tribulation" of the second half, we are forced to conclude that the 144,000 are the first to fall at the hands of the beast for their refusal to

worship him as the first martyrs of the Great Persecution.¹⁹⁰ Their lives protected until their ministry of evangelism has been completed (cf. Lk.21:12-19), the 144,000 will have the great honor of offering up those same lives to our Lord in the supreme sacrifice of martyrdom, a witness that will resound through the ages and for which they shall receive great reward. Finally, the statement in Matthew 10:23 that these witnesses (i.e., the 12 and, by prophetic application, the 144,000) "will not finish [evangelizing] the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes" not only confirms that this will be a worldwide ministry ("cities of Israel" meaning for the 144,000 any town with a significant Jewish community) directed at evangelizing the Jewish people, but also makes quite clear that the 144,000 will be busily employed at this task until they are martyred (well before the return of the Messiah as we shall see).¹⁹¹

The Course of the Ministry of the 144,000:

1. Some particulars of their ministry: Although scripture does not tell us much about the operational niceties of their ministry, that is, their call, its time, its nature, or the administration and deployment of this large force of evangelists, it is likely that their ministry is intimately connected with that of the two witnesses of Revelation chapter eleven. For just as the twelve, and the 70, and John's disciples did not operate in a vacuum, but were selected, commissioned, and sent out by Jesus and John respectively (cf. Matt.10:7; Mk.6:7; Lk.9:1-2), so it seems certain that the 144,000 must also operate under specific, earthly direction. The most likely, indeed the only candidates for this supervisory role (whether in Revelation or the rest of scripture) are these "two witnesses" (that is, Moses and Elijah, the prophetic counterparts of Jesus and John respectively).

While we shall not be taking up the details of that "two witness ministry" until part three of this study, it needs to be emphasized here by way of essential preview that these two are indeed none other than Moses and Elijah, two unique servants of God, both of whom left this earth in likewise unique fashion (2Kng.2:11-18; Jude 1:9), and both of whom are prophesied to be key figures heralding the return of the Messiah (compare especially their presence at Jesus' transfiguration: Matt.17:3-13; cf. also Mal.4:4-6). Of critical importance in this regard is also the fact that these two witnesses are responsible for "restoring" Israel, that is, for ministering to a revival that will turn the hearts of many in Israel back to God through faith in Jesus Christ (Matt.17:11; Mk.9:12; Acts 3:21), *the very ministry* to which the 144,000 are also dedicated as we have seen (cf. also John the baptist's First Advent ministry which closely parallels Elijah's future ministry: Matt.17:13).

When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the Lord your God and obey his voice.
Deuteronomy 4:30 ESV

Just as the two witnesses are to conduct a ministry that will gain worldwide attention from its central location in Jerusalem (Zech.4:11-14; Rev.11:1-13), so the ministry of this

famous pair will be projected, augmented and paralleled by the ministries of thousands of other pairs serving around the globe (72,000 pairs, to be precise). We may deduce, therefore, that to Moses and Elijah will fall the task of visibly selecting, commissioning, and sending out the 144,000 after God has sealed and drawn these future martyrs of the Lamb to Jerusalem through His Spirit (cf. Matt.23:34; Lk.11:49). And it will be from Jerusalem that they will be sent forth into their separate mission fields. Whatever questions about the composition of the 144,000 there may be in the minds of contemporaries or even among this elite group itself will be removed as their hearts prompted by the Spirit lead them to journey to Jerusalem where they will be subsequently selected and commissioned by two of the greatest prophets of all time, Moses and Elijah.

We may be sure that the 144,000 are destined to come in for close scrutiny from the evil one and his henchmen from the very beginning of this process whereby they will be recruited and sent forth to witness to the world Jewish community. For this reason, they will receive the special protection of sealing even before their official selection at wherever place they happen to be located worldwide prior to the opening of the seventh seal, a process that will require a multiplicity of elect angels (cf. verse three, "until *we* place a seal upon the foreheads of the servants of our God").

As to their specific distribution and the deployment of their ministry, we can do little more than speculate. Some have understood the number of the 70 of Luke chapter ten to correspond to the symbolic number of the gentile nations (i.e., "seventy" of them are listed in Genesis chapter ten). Subtracting a double complement for the state of Israel (i.e., 2000 "teams"), one could assume that this number of now 70,000 to be a "thousand team per country" symbolic counterpart of the Luke parallel. But it is doubtful that even so we would be left with any clear indication of distribution and deployment. For while it is true that the diaspora is truly worldwide, yet the numbers of Jewish residents in some countries obviously far exceeds the size of the Jewish community in other nations (not to mention the practical impossibility of applying the original Genesis ten list to the current hodgepodge of nations wherein the world is presently organized). Then too there are issues of accessibility, concentration, responsiveness – many things, in fact, that may only be ascertained with divine help. We may assume that larger Jewish communities will receive more sets of "hands" for the work at hand, and that cultural, geographic and linguistic abilities will be taken into account (with individuals likely being sent back to their countries of origin), but this is only surmise. One thing that is clear from scripture, however, is that despite the seemingly large number of teams, these missionaries will have plenty of work to do, for they will not "complete the cities of Israel" before they run out of time (Matt.10:23).

2. The content of their message: The content of the message preached by our Lord Jesus Christ, as well as by John, Moses and Elijah, the 12, the 70, and the 144,000 is all one and the same, namely the gospel of the kingdom, the call to repent and turn back to God through faith in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. There is also, it must be said, an

urgency to the message so given in all these cases, precisely because of the imminence of events:

a. Jesus (Mk.1:14):

From this time forward, Jesus began to proclaim and say, "Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is near."

Matthew 4:17

b. John (Acts 13:24):

(1) And in those days, John the baptist came upon the scene, making proclamation in the desert of Judah (2) and saying, "Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is near."

Matthew 3:1-2

c. Moses and Elijah (Rev.11:3; 11:6; 11:7):

(4) Remember the Law of *Moses*, My servant, which I commanded him on Horeb concerning all Israel, [with both its] statutes and judgments – (5) behold, I am about to send you *Elijah* the prophet before the coming of the Day of Lord, [that] great and awesome [Day], (6) so *that he may restore [to God] the hearts* of the fathers along with [their] children and the hearts of the children along with their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with complete devastation.

Malachi 4:4-6

d. The 144,000 (based on the parallels of the twelve and the 70 as we have seen above):

"Go and make proclamation, saying, "The Kingdom of Heaven is near.""

Matthew 10:7

And they went forth and made proclamation that [people] should repent.

Mark 6:12

And He sent them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

Luke 9:2

And going forth they made circuit of the villages, giving the good news and healing everywhere.

Luke 9:6

And after this the Lord also appointed seventy others and sent them forth two by two before Him to every city and place where He was going to go.

Luke 10:1

"And heal the sick in [that town] and say to them, 'The Kingdom of God has come near to you'".

Luke 10:9

"And the dust of your city which has stuck to our feet we are brushing off [as a witness] against you. But know this – that the Kingdom of God is near."

Luke 10:11

In Revelation 17:6, where they are called "witness-martyrs of Jesus", the 144,000 are given special consideration even above the others who will die for our Lord during the Tribulation. This title both stresses the special relationship which the 144,000 will have with Him (cf. Rev.14:1-6), and the fact that the content of the gospel message of the Kingdom which they preach is nothing else than the Person and work of Jesus Christ, of whom they are both witnesses and martyrs.

3. The results of their ministry: Again, we are not given precise information as to the number of their countrymen that the 144,000 will help to turn back to God in Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, a couple of points should be kept in mind. In the first place, as is often the case in difficult mission fields, in God's Kingdom (where one who repents is rejoiced over more than ninety-nine who do not require repentance) results are not necessarily measured in sheer numbers (and that some of the "cities of Israel" will unquestionably prove more fruitful than others is not something to be laid entirely at the feet of the teams doing the evangelizing). The mere fact of this worldwide witness will be an accomplishment and a prodigious result in and of itself. Secondly, we may safely assume that around the fringes of their ministry, much interest will be generated in the gentile community (especially from the miracles the 144,000 are given to perform), leading to many opportunities for evangelism among non-Jewish observers of these events. Thirdly, it is not only those who repent and are restored to God at this time who should be taken into account when considering the results of this ministry. The work of the 144,000 and the ministry of Moses and Elijah with which it is intimately linked will, no doubt, leave many questions in the minds of those Jews who do not return to God through Jesus Christ at this time (that is, during the Tribulation's first half). However, we know that many more *will* turn back to Him at the very hour of His Second Advent, when they "look upon Him whom they have pierced" in viewing the returning Messiah face-to-face (Rev.1:7). The groundwork for this (massive) conversion of the Jewish people at the very end of the Tribulation is certainly that which is to be laid by Moses and Elijah in company with their 144,000 evangelist agents. For it will be this body of work, this distribution of the gospel message in Jewish terms by Jews to Jews lying dormant in their hearts until that day, that will, in company with the visible presence of Christ, produce the prophesied repentance at His return.

(30) For I will display wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. (31) The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the Day of the Lord, that great and terrible [day]. (32) And it will come to pass

that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.
Joel 2:30-32

And I will pour out on the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem a Spirit of grace and repentance. For they will look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they will grieve for Him like the grieving for an only son, and they will [weep] bitterly for Him like the bitter [weeping] for a firstborn son.
Zechariah 12:10

(29) Immediately following the tribulation of those days, the sun will grow dark and the moon will not give out its light, and the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (30) And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven. And then all the tribes of the earth will mourn and will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and much glory.
Matthew 24:29-30

(25) Brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery (and so think more of yourselves than you should): hardness has come over a part of Israel until the time when the fullness of the gentiles has come in [to the family of God]. (26) And it is in this [following] way that all Israel will be saved just as it is written:

The Deliverer will come from Zion. He will expel ungodliness from Jacob. (27) And this will be My covenant with them when I take away their sins.
Romans 11:25-27

This having been said, there are nevertheless a sizeable (though unspecified) number who will respond directly to the message of the 144,000 (cf. Zech.10:9: "Though I scatter them among the peoples, yet in distant lands they will remember me." NIV). In Revelation chapter twelve (and elsewhere: Matt.24:15-22; Mk.13:14-23; Lk.21:20-24), we find a large remnant of Jewish believers in Israel who are persecuted by antichrist immediately following the Tribulation's mid-point and are subsequently forced to flee into the desert for refuge. Since this remnant is to all appearances not currently existent, we must conclude that it comes into being as a result of the ministries of the two witnesses and of the 144,000 (both of which will come to an end just prior to this persecution). Following his unsuccessful attempts to eliminate this new remnant of Jewish believers, antichrist will expand his operations against Jewish believers worldwide (and against believers in general: Rev.12:17). Scripture does not say, but it does seem probable, that a portion of this new remnant in Israel may have assembled there from elsewhere in the world in response to the ministering of the 144,000 (just as they themselves were drawn to Jerusalem and the ministry of Moses and Elijah).

4. Parallels to the ministry of Christ, and also of John, Moses, Elijah, and the Apostles:
The ministry of the 144,000 bears many resemblances to the most impressive divine ministries which have preceded them. These parallels are important to take note of, because they emphasize both the importance and the nature of the ministry of the

144,000, both points which we have been stressing since the beginning of this section. For the 144,000 are all . . .

- Jewish males: As are Christ, John, Moses, Elijah, and the apostles.
- Unmarried: As are Christ, John, Elijah, and Paul.
- Miraculously protected: As are Christ (Lk.4:28-30; Jn.7:30; 8:59; 10:39), Moses (Num.16-17), Elijah (2Kng.1), and the apostles (Acts 12:1-10; 28:3-6).
- Evangelists to Israel: As are Christ (Matt.15:24; Lk.2:34), John (Matt.3:7-10; Lk.1:67-80), Moses, Elijah, and Peter (Gal.2:7).
- Preachers of restoration to God: As are Christ (Lk.4:14-21), John (Lk.1:17; Jn.1:7), Elijah (Mal.4:4-6), and the apostles (Acts 3:17-21).
- Performers of exceptional miracles: As are Christ (Mk.5:37-43; Lk.7:11-17; Jn.11:1-44), Moses (Ex.4:1-17; Acts 7:36), Elijah (1Kng.17:17-24), and the apostles (Acts 9:36-42; 20:7-12).
- Subject to a demanding "code of conduct": As are Christ (Matt.4:1-11), John (Matt.3:4; Lk.1:80), Elijah (1Kng.17:1-16), and Paul (1Cor.4:8-13; 2Cor.4:7-12; 6:3-10; 11:16-33; Phil.3:7-11).
- Confronted by fierce opposition: As are Christ (Lk.4:29; Jn.7:1; 8:40), John (Matt.14:1-5), Moses (Acts 7:39), Elijah (1Kng.18:16-17; 19:1-2), and the apostles (Acts 5:17-42).
- Consistent in flawless behavior (Rev.14:4-5): As is Christ (Jn.8:46; Acts 8:32-35; Heb.4:15; 1Pet.1:19).
- Serving a three and one half year ministry: As did Christ, Elijah (Jas.5:17), and John.¹⁹²
- Martyred at the conclusion of their ministry (Rev.14:3): As was John (Matt.14:6-12), and the apostles (cf. Jn.21:18-19), following in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- The first to be so martyred in the Great Persecution (Rev.14:4): Following in the footsteps of Christ (Matt.10:38; 16:24; 20:23; Mk.8:34; Lk.9:23; 14:27; Jn.21:18-19; cf. Lev.23:9ff.; 1Cor.15:23).

5. The omission of the tribe of Dan: As is well-known, there are twelve tribes of Israel, but one of the tribes, that of Joseph, is generally referred to as two tribes (Ephraim and Manasseh), based upon the adoption by Jacob of his grandsons (Gen.48:1-22) and the double portion he assigned to Jacob thereby at that time (Gen.48:22 in the Hebrew). Any list of twelve that fails to combine Ephraim and Manasseh will therefore of necessity exclude one of the other tribes, and the tribe which fails to make the list of the 144,000 here in our context is that of Dan (with Manasseh and "Joseph", that is, Ephraim, receiving separate listing).¹⁹³ The deficiencies of the tribe of Dan are

numerous, and many reasons could be adduced for its failure to make this list, but the overarching reason for Dan's non-inclusion within the ranks of the 144,000 is the fact that antichrist will be descended from this tribe (Gen.49:16-18; cf. Gen.3:16). This removal of one of the twelve tribes for betrayal and satanic allegiance parallels the removal of Judas from the number of the twelve apostles (replaced by Paul). The details of antichrist's origin (including his Danite provenance) will be considered in part 3B of this series.

6. Their reward: Because our Lord gave Himself in the most spectacular and gracious way imaginable, God the Father has "exalted Him to the highest place", giving Him "the Name that is above every Name, that at the Name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Phil.2:9-10). The principle seen here of the greatest rewards accruing to the greatest sacrifices is also true in the case of the 144,000, who will be the first to receive a unique and preeminent martyrdom during the Great Persecution (Rev.14:4), a special, memorial anthem (Rev.14:3), and a unique place beside the King of Kings and Lord of Lords forevermore (Rev.14:4).¹⁹⁴ So important is their ministry that those who support them, even in seemingly trivial ways, will be rewarded as well (Matt.10:13; 10:40-42).

VI. The Multitude in Heaven: Revelation 7:9-17

Revelation 7:9-17:

(9) After this I looked and, behold, [there was] a huge multitude which no one was able to number from every nation and tribe and people and tongue standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes and with palm branches in their hands. (10) And they were shouting in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God, the One who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!" (11) And all the angels had taken their stand around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures. And they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, (12) saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might belong to our God forever and ever! Amen!" (13) And one of the elders who was speaking with me replied, "These people dressed in white robes – who are they and where have they come from?" (14) And I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who are about to come forth from the Great Tribulation. And they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (15) For this reason they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple. And the One who sits upon the throne will pitch His tabernacle over them. (16) They will neither hunger nor thirst again, nor will the sun beat down upon them nor any burning [heat], (17) because the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and will lead them to fountains of living water (lit., "fountains of waters of life"), and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes".

With the ministry of the 144,000 set in train, there is now no question but that during the Tribulation's first half the gospel message will be made widely available for all the

lost sheep of Israel, no matter where they may be scattered over the face of the earth. This unique presentation of the gospel will contrast sharply with the worldwide "evangelism of evil" by the beast and his false prophet for his false anti-Christian religion in the Tribulation's second half. A significant part of that campaign to rid the world of truth and replace the true worship of God with overt Satan worship will be the active and aggressive attempt to exterminate believers from off of the face of the earth. This is the "Great Persecution" which was the subject of the fifth seal in Revelation 6:9-11, and as the "heavenly prelude" of chapters 4-7 comes to an end (the subject of this installment, part 2B), we see here the other side of that general persecution which shall claim first the 144,000, then this multitude "which no one was able to number from every nation and tribe and people and tongue". All those who have fallen in that great time of martyrdom to come are seen here not as objects of pity, but as victors, holding palm branches that betoken both their own personal victory and also the coming victorious return of the Lamb. It is true that victors in the Roman arena were given *palmae* or palm branches (cf. the "palm of victory" in Martial 29.9). However, the important reference here is to the palms of "Palm Sunday", that is, the branches that should properly have been used during the "feast of booths", which festival proclaimed the coming of the Messiah-King and the beginning of the Kingdom (and so on "Palm Sunday" were used out of proper context by those who ushered Jesus into Jerusalem and who were hoping for Him to take up the crown at that time, failing to understand that the cross, symbolized by the Passover whose true time it was, must come first: cf. Ps.118:26-27).¹⁹⁵

In our discussion of the fifth seal, we have already elaborated upon the interim, pre-resurrection state occupied by these martyrs (and also by all who shall have died in the Lord from Adam and Eve onward until the future day of our resurrection at Christ's return), both the interim body (represented here by the white robe) and their blessed, fully conscious status quo (obvious from their enthusiastic worship in the verses above). The expansive repetition of the situation of the tribulational martyrs at this particular point in the book, that is, directly before the Tribulation commences in earnest in John's narrative, is of extreme importance. That is because it is critical for believers to keep firmly in mind their ultimate blessed end despite the horrors to come, to remember the complete control God maintains over the process of history, and to remain focused on the fact that even in the most horrendous death (as the world sees things) there will be for these martyrs the most sublime victory. For the "victims" of antichrist will be following in the footsteps our Lord, who, though to the eyes of the world He endured the most humiliating end in human history (cf. Ps.22; Is.52-53), yet in God's deeper and greater reality had truly accomplished the greatest divine victory in world history, the victory of the cross whereby we have all that we have, our eternal life (cf. Phil.2:5-11).

As good as the interim state described here will be – and it will be very good: perfect worship of God in heaven itself, being with Him and He with us, serving the Lamb, our Lord Jesus, face to face, freed from pain, and toil, and tears forevermore, enjoying our victory in a body better than anything now existing in the world – we should also remember that our final state in resurrection, fully rewarded, in the New Jerusalem will be far better still! So whether those of us who are destined to enter that future

Tribulation (which grows closer with every passing day) have as our task from God to witness for Him through death, or to demonstrate our faithfulness to Him through continuing to live in the midst of the Great Tribulation, in life or in death let us dedicate ourselves to serving Him as best we can, and to being the best witnesses for Him that we can be, however He has chosen for us to manifest that witness (Phil.1:20-23). Indeed, the only result from which we should shrink is the dreadful prospect of apostasy, a fate which, sadly, will befall large numbers of our fellow believers in the course of that terrible time to come.

VII. Signs of the Coming Tribulation

As we contemplate this scene of the martyrs on the cusp of the Tribulation, we cannot help but understand the importance of preparing spiritually for this crisis of all crises before it befalls us, especially when we consider our own proximity to these very events. For we have already made the point previously in this series that, in Theological terms, the Tribulation is imminent.¹⁹⁶ Inasmuch as there remain no major events of unfulfilled prophecy between us and the commencement of the end times, there is certainly no justification for contemporary believers to let down their spiritual guard and assume, as King Hezekiah did, that we have no need to worry since there will be "peace and security" in our day (Is.39:8). For it may well be, dear reader, that you personally will be relieved of experiencing that bitter time – but that is not something upon which you may definitively count.

We can see building throughout the Church Age a growing body of trends which are consonant with the end (i.e., disturbing developments in technology, the international arena, society and the visible church, to cite but a few examples), a steady laying of the ground-work for the next "Tower of Babel", morally, politically, socially, indeed, in every aspect of the "world system" which the present ruler of this kosmos has established and seeks to expand in eventual world domination through the person of his antichrist.¹⁹⁷ But it must be pointed out that none of these trends, no matter how alarming in the present moment, are able in and of themselves to give contemporary Christians definite guidance as to where we presently find ourselves on the pre-Tribulation continuum. To put it another way, things are indeed bad, spiritually speaking, and getting worse, but this only informs us that we are indeed headed toward the Tribulation, not when that final conflagration will occur. Beyond the obvious conclusion to be drawn from this fact, namely, that believers ought to take advantage of every opportunity for spiritual growth and preparation "while the sun still shines" (Jn.12:35-36; Heb.3:13), especially given the depth of the darkness about to fall, it is also understandable that Christians would wish to know, as far as the Bible affords clear guidance, what definitive signs they may watch for in anticipation of some warning that the Tribulation is on the point of commencing. The short answer to this question is that there are few, if any, clear indications of imminent commencement. Most of the "signs" given by scripture are warnings of imminent events *within* the Tribulation (the Great Tribulation and the 2nd Advent in

particular). However, it will be our purpose in this final section to outline what scripture does have to say about the start of the Tribulation.

Fallacies about the Start of the Tribulation: We must begin with what is not true because of the large body of misinformation at present abroad on this topic. Below are four common misapprehensions concerning the commencement of the Tribulation:

1. Fallacy #1: The prior removal of believers from the earth by the so-called "Rapture" removes the urgency of this issue: We have had occasion in the past to show that scripture is unmistakably clear as to the time of the resurrection of the Church, namely, just prior to the return of our Lord at His 2nd Advent (for such is the unequivocal meaning throughout the New Testament of the "coming" [*parousia*, parousia] described in 1Thes.4:16).¹⁹⁸ From one point of view, the precise time of our future resurrection may seem to be of only passing consequence in comparison with weightier issues of the faith. But the problem is that the belief in an "escape" from the Tribulation ahead of time goes a long way toward removing any and all urgency for spiritual preparation for it. "Rapture wishful-thinking" is a spiritually dangerous condition precisely because it is based upon a (potentially disastrous) misinterpretation of the Bible.

2. Fallacy #2: The unknowable nature of the time removes the urgency of this issue: It is true that the Bible does not provide us with an explicit calendar of coming events, and that it is therefore impossible to state with dogmatic authority the precise day on which the Tribulation will begin. However, that does not mean that believers are relieved of the responsibility of considering this matter, of watching and waiting, of gleaning what may be known from scripture, and of doing everything within the capabilities they have been given to prepare spiritually for that coming time. The negative aspects of this second fallacy are thus twofold: 1) the idea that seeking to know is wrong-headed, even possibly blasphemous, undermines proper seeking of guidance from the Bible; 2) the idea that since precise knowledge of the exact time is unavailable that therefore no spiritual preparations are necessary undermines proper efforts to prepare spiritually. This combination of misapprehensions creates a "head-in-the-sand" effect which is inimical to scriptural searching and spiritual preparation – exactly the opposite of what scripture enjoins.

For that we should watch carefully is clear (Matt.24:42-52; 25:1-13):

(54) And [Jesus] was saying to the crowds, "When you see clouds coming up at dusk, you immediately say 'A storm is coming', and that is what happens. (55) And when [you notice] the south wind blowing, you say 'There'll be a hot spell', and that is what happens. (56) Hypocrites! You know how to evaluate the appearance of the earth and the sky, but how is it that you don't know how to evaluate this [critical] time?"
Luke 12:54-56

And that we should prepare carefully while we can is equally clear (cf. Matt.7:24-27; 25:14-30):

(35) So Jesus said to them, "For a little while yet, the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so the darkness doesn't overtake you. (36) While you have the Light, believe in the Light, that you may become sons of light.

John 12:35-36

Matthew 24:36 ("No one knows the day or the hour") is neither a command nor an excuse for believers to make a virtue out of ignorance and willfully ignore the issue. For one thing, Matthew 24:36 is speaking about the *precise* timing of the 2nd Advent, not, that is, the timing of the Tribulation's commencement, but of its termination (cf. Zech.14:7). And even so, the fact is that, just a few verses earlier (Matt.24:22), Jesus had told us that the variation of the precise timing of the 2nd Advent would be a matter of days, not of weeks or months, and certainly not of years.¹⁹⁹ Secondly, this statement about the unknown day and hour comes in the immediate context of the parable of the fig tree (verses 32-33), whose stated lesson is that one can and indeed *should* be on the lookout for that particular future event – one cannot know the precise hour, but the faithful believer can and should form a close approximation of that coming time.

3. Fallacy #3: The fact that the world has not been completely evangelized removes the urgency of this issue: A future completion of world evangelism is not an unfulfilled prerequisite for the commencement of the Tribulation. Leaving aside consideration of the geographically extensive proclamation of the gospel already achieved in past two millennia, Matthew 24:14 (cf. Mk.13:10) is also describing events within the Tribulation (not prior to it), and the universal (further) proclaiming of the gospel is thus something said to precede the 2nd Advent ("then the end will come"), not the beginning of the Tribulation (for one fulfillment, see Rev.14:6-7).

4. Fallacy #4: The fact that the momentous nature of tribulational events requires recognizable antecedents removes the urgency of this issue: The flood speed at which Tribulation events will move (after the restraint of the Spirit is lifted) will be unprecedented in the history of the world (cf. Rev.1:1 and the treatment of that verse in part 1 of this series). For as Daniel says, "the end will come like a flood" (Dan.9:26). What this means in terms of our present discussion is that the entire landscape of the political, social, economic, even technological status quo will undergo such massive changes *after* the Tribulation begins that it is extremely difficult to say with authority that the Tribulation *cannot* commence until some particular set of political, social, economic or technological circumstances are already in place.²⁰⁰ Therefore it is a definite mistake for believers to assume that before the Tribulation begins, they will be confronted with a set of facts that makes its onset unmistakable and incontrovertible. That is simply not necessarily going to be the case, so that we cannot afford to relax our thinking on the grounds that we are sure to have plenty of advanced warning.

The Proper Attitude of Anticipation: Clearly, forgetting about God (cf. 1Sam.12:9), choosing our own ways instead of His ways (Is.66:3), and failing to remain awake and alert at this critical juncture in God's plan for the ages constitute the wrong approach

(Matt.25:1-13). Failure to appreciate the critical moment of God's visitation when it comes is a classic sign of backsliding and apostasy (Lk.19:44; cf. 1Pet.2:12).

Instead, in terms of our own individual lives and in terms of the plan of God on the larger, world-wide stage, we need to be very aware that His visitation can come at any time, and we need therefore to be as ready as we can be for it, whenever it should come (Matt.24:42-43; 25:13; Mk.13:33-37; Lk.12:37; Acts 20:31; 1Cor.16:13; Eph.6:18; Col.4:2; 1Thes.5:6; 1Pet.5:8; Rev.16:15):

But when the Son of Man returns, will He find faith on the earth?
Luke 18:8b

(34) "Watch out for yourselves lest your hearts be burdened down in debauchery and drunkenness and earthly cares, and that day fall upon you suddenly like a trap [snapping shut]. (35) For it will come upon all those who dwell upon the face of the earth. (36) So *be alert at all times*, praying that you might have the strength to endure all these things which are going to happen, and to stand before the Son of Man."
Luke 21:34-36

(9) Let us not put Christ to the test, as some of them [the Exodus generation] did and were killed by serpents. (10) And let us not complain, as some of them complained, and were killed by the Destroyer. (11) These things happened to them as an example to us, and were written to warn us – we who live at the culmination of the ages. (12) So let him who thinks he stands firm beware lest he fall.
1st Corinthians 10:9-12

(1) But concerning the times and the seasons (i.e., the time-line and the specific events within it), brothers, you have no need for anyone to write you. (2) For you yourselves know full well that the Day of the Lord is coming just like a thief in the night. (3) When [people] are saying "Peace!" and "Safety!", at that precise time destruction will fall swiftly upon them, just like labor pains on a pregnant woman. (4) But you, brothers, are not in darkness that [this] Day [of the Lord] should catch you out like a thief. (5) For you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness. (6) So let us therefore not sleep like the rest [of unbelieving mankind], but be awake and alert. (7) For those who sleep do so at night. And those who get drunk do so at night. (8) But since we are of the day, let us put on the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of hope (i.e., confidence) of salvation. (9) Because God has not appointed us for wrath, but for [taking] possession of [our] salvation (i.e., for resurrection) through our Lord Jesus Christ, (10) the One who died on our behalf, that, whether we stay awake or sleep (i.e., pass on to heaven), we will be alive together with Him [on that day of resurrection].
1st Thessalonians 5:1-10

Possible Indications that the Tribulation is about to Begin: As the parable of the fig tree shows plainly enough, we believers are responsible to remain alert to whatever clear and obvious signs God may choose to give to us as warnings of His

impending judgments (Matt.24:32-33; Mk.13:28-29; cf. Lk.21:29-31). The question here is whether there are any *specific* signs listed in scripture of the impending commencement of the Tribulation for which believers should be on the lookout. Trends, as we have pointed out above, may give us reason to be on heightened alert. After all, God never brings to the point of birth and then fails to deliver (Is.66:9). But this principle does not supply specifics. Given the rapidity with which tribulational events are prophesied to progress, a prior era of exceedingly prosperous and peaceful times (cf. Gen.41) is just as likely a precursor to the Tribulation as one characterized by growing troubles and difficulties (and something in-between is equally possible as well). Therefore, much of what passes in contemporary Christian media for "being on the alert for the Tribulation" must be rejected out of hand. In all cases where scripture does not definitively point to a particular event as a tribulational prerequisite, the most a Christian can do is to take note, and continue to prepare (something he/she ought to be doing in any case!). We will treat here three of the most prominent possibilities that suggest themselves on this point:

1. The Rise of the Beast: We will have occasion in part 3B of this series to consider in detail the rise of antichrist, the development of his empire, and his campaign of world conquest (so that what occurs here should be understood to be a cursory examination only). Even taking into account the rapidity of tribulational events, it does seem to stand to reason that a personality of the uniquely perverse nature of antichrist coupled with the celebrity status he will enjoy from the very moment of his rise will at least have to be visible to *some* degree on the world stage prior to the actual commencement of the Tribulation (even if his true identity is not completely verifiable from the start). A reading of Isaiah chapter 14, Ezekiel chapter 28, Daniel chapters 8-12, 2nd Thessalonians chapter 2, and Revelation chapters 13 and 17 will give a very clear impression of his personality, methodology, and career. Daniel's statement that he will be a "despicable person – and they will not bestow upon him the honor of the kingdom" is clearly consonant with the many other passages that suggest a rise to power by unconventional means (a circumstance arguing for a very low profile prior to his tribulational rise to power). 2nd Thessalonians chapter 2 and Revelation chapter 13, on the other hand, are very clear in ascribing miraculous, demonic powers to antichrist, and, as the seed of Satan (Gen.3:16), we may expect him to be somewhat super-human (along the lines of the Nephilim of Genesis 6).²⁰¹ But it is certainly not clear that antichrist's use of his exceptional powers will come to the fore in an obvious way *before* the Tribulation commences. Eventually, we shall have "the number of the beast" to work with, and it is possible that this proof of antichrist will afford believers a litmus test even before the Tribulation begins. However, it is equally possible that his "name" which is consistent with 666 will be one which antichrist will choose *after* his ascension to power (hence not verifiable before the Tribulation). It would seem at first consideration that an internationalist movement that stresses antichrist's political goals of a one-world state ultimately based upon his claim of messianic status would be hard to miss, even in its earliest antecedents. But it should be pointed out that history provides many intriguing parallels which ultimately proved false. After all, a totalitarian regime inimical to the Jews coming to span most of the old Roman Empire closely linked with a state that claimed to be a revived Rome in Italy seems like a perfect match with the antichrist

scenario (we are speaking, of course, about Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy). This intriguing parallel proved not to be the genuine article, suggesting that believers should be extremely circumspect when it comes to pronouncing any contemporary figure "the antichrist".

2. The reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem: One feature of the tribulational landscape which would seem to be absolutely essential, but which is not yet historically visible, is the reconstructed temple in Jerusalem.²⁰² Revelation 11:1 makes reference to the "temple of God", complete with its altar and, in verse two, its inner court,²⁰³ and, as becomes clear from the rest of the chapter, John has in his view the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem whence the two witnesses will conduct their ministry along with the 144,000, events which, as we have just seen, take place during the Tribulation's *first* half. Additionally, in 2nd Thessalonians 2:4 antichrist is said to take his seat in "the temple of God", an event which takes place in the middle of the Tribulation (Dan.11:31; cf. Dan.12:11; Matt.24:15; Mk.13:14; Rev.13). We also know that it is at the Tribulation's midpoint that antichrist will suspend the temple rites (Dan.9:27). All three of the above cases require a temple in Jerusalem dating from the Tribulation's early days, and are certainly consistent with a scenario that posits a temple rebuilt in Jerusalem *before* the Tribulation begins.²⁰⁴ It is also equally possible, however, that the two witnesses, Moses and Elijah, are responsible for this rebuilding. Central to their ministry, as we have suggested above, is the theme of "restoration", which, while it is unquestionably focused upon repentance and spiritual restoration (cf. Mal.4:4-6), may very well include the resuscitation of the temple rite (cf. Zech.4:14 in the context of chapter four which is one of the rebuilding of the second temple). Finally, given the fact that massive embellishment of the temple structure and precinct as described in Ezekiel 40-44 is assuredly accomplished by the returning Messiah (see the previous footnote), the structure with which we shall have to do during the Tribulation may be anything but elaborate, and a hasty reconstruction is not only possible, but might be necessary in light of current political obstacles to such a move. Therefore we cannot say that the reconstruction of the temple at Jerusalem will be a clear and unmistakable *precursor* to the Tribulation's arrival any more than we could count on antichrist's prior ascendancy to warn us before the time.

3. The conclusion of the two millennia: The reader is asked to recall that in part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, we made an extensive study of the chronological architecture of God's plan for the ages as it is presented in scripture. Germane to our discussion here are the findings that the Age of the Church began in 33 A.D., will run for two complete millennia, and includes in its count the seven years of the Tribulation (overlapping with the last "week" of the Jewish Age). This combination of circumstances, if correctly appraised, would yield a starting date for the Tribulation of 2026 A.D. (most likely in the fall of that year). If this calculation be correct, then without question it would give believers very precise guidance about that time to come (not to mention motivation for prior preparation). This author is very aware of the controversial nature of this projection, and the reader is encouraged to consider that the date offered has been

calculated on the following interpretive assumptions (see part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series for details):

1. The seven millennial day interpretation is taught in scripture and meant to be understood and applied.
2. The Church Age will last for two millennial days or 2000 years.
3. The Church Age commences following the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.
4. These events took place in 33 A.D.
5. The Tribulation belongs to both the Church and Jewish Ages and is therefore to be subtracted from the 2000 year total when calculating the start of the Tribulation.
6. The half hour of silence in heaven at the breaking of the seventh seal (Rev.8:1) signifies a half year grace period that shifts the start point from spring to fall.
7. Scripture gives no indication of either shortening or lengthening of this time-line, and therefore no such change of schedule is anticipated.

While it is this author's firm conviction that all of the above assumptions are indeed correct and should be accepted, the reader is enjoined again to prepare for the Tribulation as if it might occur at any time (for it is, as we have repeatedly maintained, "imminent" according to scripture). Clearly, variation on any one of the above assumptions would invalidate the projection given. And we would be remiss in failing to point out that it is certainly within the power and authority of the Almighty to make whatever alterations He may wish to this scriptural chronology whenever He should wish to do so, whether of lengthening or of shortening. Nevertheless, what we have been given in the Bible, we have been given for a purpose, and it would be equally remiss not to report what may be learned from scripture on such an important point (cf. Acts 20:20; 20:27). Having said this, we must emphasize yet again that it is certainly the prudent course (and the course being followed and recommended by this author) to make every effort to be prepared spiritually for the Tribulation whenever it should come.

Finally, while we may not recognize antichrist's rise before the fact, we may not be presented with a rebuilt temple prior to the Tribulation, and we may not (perhaps should not) be willing to rely on the chronological projection provided by the "seven millennial day" architecture of history, we should at least have confidence that we *will* have clear indications of the Tribulation's commencement *after the fact*. The miraculous ministries of the two witnesses and the 144,000, the conversion of a large portion of Israel to Jesus Christ, the falling away of a large portion of the church visible into apostasy, antichrist's predicted rise to power, the terrible trumpet judgments – these and all of the details of the coming Tribulation which we have been blessed to receive in the pages of the Bible will at the very least give all believers who turn to scripture for answers very clear and definitive proof of the start of that final seven years before our

Lord's return. Let us therefore take care to make ourselves ready for these trials before the fact, lest we find ourselves in the number of those upon whom that day comes unawares (1Thes.5:4).

The Coming Tribulation: A History of the Apocalypse

Part 3A

From the Seventh Seal to the Two Witnesses: Revelation 8:1 - 11:14

by Dr. Robert D. Luginbill

Introduction: Four major trends, two divine and two satanic, dominate the events of the Tribulation's first half (the subject of our present study). Within each of these two pairs, we find one trend concerned with the spiritual matters and one with the temporal events which characterize those first three and one half years. These four trends are on, the spiritual level, the massive falling away from truth on the part of believers on the one hand (the -- Great Apostasy: section II), and the unique movement of worldwide evangelism on the part of the 144,000 on the other (represented by the two witnesses who direct them: section V), and, on the level of world events, the rise to power and military expansion of antichrist on the one hand (Part 3B), and God's warning judgments to the world on the other (the Trumpet Judgments: section III):

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	Satanic		Divine
Spiritual level:	The Great Apostasy	< >	Worldwide evangelism
Temporal level:	The Rise of Antichrist	< >	Worldwide warning judgments

With the removal of Holy Spirit restraint (covered in detail in the previous installment of this series, part 2B), the increasing lawlessness of the world will be preeminently evident in its rejection of truth (even on the part of former believers who will fall into apostasy in great numbers). This rejection will fly in the face of the unparalleled evangelism of the world

Jewish community by the 144,000 under the direction of Moses and Elijah. A similar opposition of trends will be seen in the unprecedentedly swift and complete accession to power on the part of antichrist, coupled with his correspondingly impressive political and military successes, contrasted to the equally extraordinary worldwide judgments that will emanate from God, designed to warn the world of these dangers. These pairs of trends are entirely interconnected. For just as the warning judgments will also serve as a call to repent and turn back to God, so the rejection of the remarkable evangelism which will fill the world at that time will serve to invoke God's judgment. And just as this wholesale rejection of truth on the part of believers and unbelievers alike at that time will leave them completely vulnerable to antichrist's charisma and appeal, so his rise would be impossible without this prior worldwide diminution of respect for the truth.

I. The Seventh Seal: Revelation 8:1-5

Revelation 8:1-5:

(1) And when He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. (2) And I saw the seven angels who stood before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. (3) And another angel with a golden censer came and stood by the altar, and much incense was given to him so that he might offer it for the prayers of the saints on the golden altar in front of the throne. (4) And smoke from the incense went up from the hand of the angel before God for the prayers of the saints. (5) Then the angel took the incense holder and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it to the earth. And there occurred thunderous voices²⁰⁵ and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

As our Lord opens the last seal in the scroll which decrees His revelation to the world, the unveiling thereby of the details contained within it of all the horrific events which must precede His glorious return produce an awed silence in the heavenly temple which is said to last for "half an hour". As is common in biblical usage, hours, days, weeks, etc. often stand for larger time periods in purely human terms (a device whereby the insignificance of worldly events as compared to heavenly control and divine sovereignty over time is emphasized).²⁰⁶ Such is undoubtedly the case here as well, and it is best to see this particular "half hour" as a one half year delay in the unleashing of the Tribulation, a circumstance which postpones the beginning of the end times from the spring (the time of the crucifixion; see the previous footnote for reference) to the fall, thereby bringing it about that both the beginning of the Tribulation and its end at our Lord's return seven years later will coincide with the time of the Jewish fall festivals (Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Succoth ["booths"]) to which festivals these events symbolically correspond.²⁰⁷

1. The Seven Archangels with the Seven Trumpets: Although not explicitly identified as such here, these seven angels "who stand in state before God" (literally a Greek perfect tense), are, in fact, archangels (cf. "I am Gabriel, who stands before God" in Lk.1:19). That is why they are "the" seven angels, the definite article here serving to distinguish them from the angelic rank and file. It will be remembered from our previous treatment of angelic duties that the archangels (also known as princes [*sariym*], and rulers [*archai*]), occupy a

primarily martial office (we may think of them as equivalent to "generals").²⁰⁸ Their duties include not only combat with satanic forces (Dan.10:13-14; Rev.12:7-8), but also making proclamations (i.e., "orders", often accompanied by the military trumpet: cf. 1Thes.4:16), and, as in our context here, the administration of divine judgments upon the earth. As can be seen both from this passage and from Revelation 15:7, they constitute a college of seven (Gabriel and Michael being the only two named in scripture) who stand before the heavenly throne, ever ready to carry out God's mandates. They are the highest ranking angels to undertake such missions on earth, the cherubs remaining with the chariot throne, and the elders before it in the third heaven (Dan.8:16; 9:21; 10:13; 10:20-21; 12:1; Lk.1:19; 1:26; Eph.1:21; 1Thes.4:16; Jude 9; Rev.7:2; 15:7). The archangels often have paraphernalia appropriate to their particular missions; e.g., trumpets for proclamation (as here in our context where they serve a monitory function); the seal of God for special marking (as at Rev.7:2); bowls for pouring out judgment (as in Rev.15:7).

2. The Incense for the Prayers of the Saints: Under the Mosaic law, the preparation of incense and its use was very carefully prescribed (Ex.30:34-38; cf. Lev.10:1-2; Num.3:4; 26:61; 2Chron.26:16-20) – and for good reason. In the symbolic function of Jewish ritual, which, as we saw in our previous study, closely mirrors the heavenly realities (cf. Heb.10:1), the offering of incense represents acceptability in approaching God through intermediary means (Ezek.20:41; cf. Lev.16:12-13). The incense is "salted", pure, and holy (Ex.30:35; cf. Lev.2:13; Matt.5:13; Mk.9:50; Lk.14:34-35), and, in the analogy, the work of Christ in the fiery judgment of the cross is like this incense, sending up a "pleasing aroma" into the presence of the Father as it burns (cf. 2Cor.2:16). Therefore the redolent smell of the earthly incense when burned has its primary application as a memorial to the sacrifice of sacrifices on the brazen altar of the cross, expressing the complete acceptability in the Father's eyes of our Lord's death on our behalf:

And walk in love, just as also Christ loved you and gave Himself up as sacrifice and offering for a sweet smell to God.

Ephesians 5:2

Since, as this image of the incense shows, our Lord's substitutionary death is completely acceptable to the Father, a sweet savor (which the incense reproduces) satisfying His righteous demand for the propitiation of all our sin, it has also opened up the floodgates of grace for all who turn to God through faith in Jesus Christ. For this reason, the image of the incense has a further application, namely, to express the validation or *rendering* acceptable of everything done in His Name. That is clearly the main thrust of the image of the incense used here in verse two, where its sweet savor is said to rise up *for* the prayers of the saints.²⁰⁹ In other words, these prayers are made and considered completely valid through this heavenly incense – though not through the incense per se, but rather by the empowering sweet aroma of the victory of Jesus Christ on the cross which the incense represents.

3. The Angel with the Censer and the Golden Altar: The angel here, is not identified by rank, but is clearly subordinate to the elders (from whom he receives the incense), and is likewise not a member of either the college of the cherubim or the archangels. Given the

important nature of his duties, he may very well be of the fourth elect angelic rank, the "authorities".²¹⁰ This angel mediates the offering of the incense – not the prayers of the saints. Angels frequently carry out God's responses to the prayers of His people (e.g., Dan.10:12-14), but it is Jesus Christ who is the Mediator between God and man (Gal.3:19-20; 1Tim.2:5; Heb.8:6; 9:15; 12:24), and it is through His work, the sweet aroma of the cross, that our prayers are rendered valid and acceptable to the Father.

The earthly counterpart for the altar mentioned here is not the "brazen altar" (which speaks of the cross), but the golden altar of incense in the holy place (see part 2B). This second, earthly altar which stood beside the inner veil of the Holy of Holies was necessary to represent the heavenly altar we see here, and was so closely connected with the Holy of Holies that Paul in Hebrews can accurately describe it as actually "in" the Holy of Holies (Heb.9:4). That is entirely appropriate when we consider the symbolism of the golden altar, namely, a picture of the glorified Christ entering into the presence of the Father on our behalf.

As we pointed out in our last installment of this series, there is no place for a brazen altar of sacrifice in heaven. To redeem sinful mankind, Christ had to come to earth, taking on true humanity in order to die for all humanity. After this victory of victories, having passed through the veil of the heavens, Christ is shown through His session at the Father's right hand to have successfully and acceptably performed His blessed sacrifice on behalf of us all. But while a brazen altar in the presence of the Father would be inappropriate for this reason, the presence of this memorial altar of incense is most fitting, in order to recall and to affirm the validity of His sacrifice (recalling in its fire the intensity of His suffering, and in the aroma it produces the acceptability of that work). That is the chief function of both the earthly and heavenly golden altars, whereon no animal sacrifice is ever placed, only the incense whose fragrant aroma brings these wonderful truths back to memory. The heavenly golden altar thus stands for the verification and proclamation of the acceptability of Christ's work, both symbolizing the resurrected and glorified victorious Messiah entering into the presence of the Father on our behalf (exactly the same symbolism portrayed by the earthly golden altar), and recalling His work in the sweet savor of the incense burned thereon.²¹¹

In the golden altar, therefore, we have a clear picture of our Lord Jesus Christ in His role as our High Priest, the One who has accomplished the critical sacrifice, having entered into the true Holy of Holies, and having won for us our redemption through His own blood (Heb.7:11-28).

The sum of what we have said is this: we have a High Priest of such [amazing] quality that He has [actually] taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of Majesty in heaven, a Minister of the holy things and of the true tabernacle which the Lord has pitched, not man. Hebrews 8:1-2

While the Levitical high priest offered every year an animal sacrifice on his own behalf and then sacrificed for the people, Christ offered Himself once for all (Heb.9:11-12; 9:24-28), and it is as a result of His selfless sacrifice that we now have access to this very throne room of heaven through His priestly mediation. As a result, we see here in our context our

prayers being quickened by His work on the cross which the incense recalls, a sweet smell to our God. Jesus, our advocate seated at the right hand of the Father, makes intercession for us, for our prayers (Heb.7:25; 1Jn.2:1; cf. Jn.14:13-14), and it is this blessed reality which is being portrayed symbolically in the image of the heavenly incense. The incense, a memorial to His sacrificial death and the Father's acceptance of it, here is seen to blend indistinguishably with the prayers of those He has bought, rendering them valid and acceptable as they rise up before the Father.

4. The Saints and their Prayers: As we have seen many times in the past, the true biblical meaning of the word "saint" is much different from the general notion of it in our popular culture.²¹² In biblical terms, a saint is a believer in Jesus Christ, the word itself calling attention to the fact that God has separated that person from the profane world through grace as a result of saving faith. None of the many words used to describe believers is more appropriate in our present context of the incipient Tribulation, because during that terrible time to come as at no other time before or since the believer in Jesus Christ will be clearly seen and see himself/herself to be spiritually divorced from this world even as he/she is yet physically in it. For while it has been all too possible in (relatively) good times for believers to appear and function as if they were just another part of the world, during that time to come the immense intensity of suffering, of demonic attack, of spiritual polarization, and of pressure to apostatize will render partial complicity with the world a virtual impossibility – except at extreme risk to one's faith (cf. Lk.18:7-8; 21:36). During the Tribulation, as we have repeatedly said, there will be almost no middle ground, so that believers who hold fast to their faith will be clearly visible as saints indeed, not perfect in this world, but unmistakably separated from it in their reliance upon Him whose Kingdom is not of this world (Dan.11:32-35; cf. Dan.7:18-27).

While this passage teaches the principle of the rendering of our prayers acceptable to the Father through the Son's sacrifice, a pleasing aroma before our God, the specific prayers in question here have to do with judgment upon evil and the bringing of justice through divine rule to the earth. To put things in terms of "the Lord's prayer", these prayers are those which respond to the first half of that model prayer (Matt.6:9-10), rather than to the second half (Matt.6:11-13). For while the second half of our Lord's model prayer for us deals with the three essential spiritual aspects of our own personal situations (i.e., provision ["bread"], forgiveness ["debts"], and protection ["deliver us"]), the first half deals with our anticipation of and petitioning for the establishment of God's rule on earth, whereby evil will be judged and justice established in the millennial Kingdom of our Savior:

Our Father, the One in heaven,
Let your Name be regarded as holy,
Let your Kingdom come,
Let your will be done as it is in heaven so also on earth.
Matthew 6:9-10

A worldwide fear and respect for God, the establishment of His Son's Kingdom on the earth, and the implementation of divine rule on earth, His "will", is an appropriate desire and longing for all believers at all times in history, given the ubiquitous evil of the this world

now in the grip of the evil one.²¹³ And inasmuch as all growing believers will experience first hand the opposition of the evil one and his minions in this evil world, we all have reason to offer such prayers on occasion (cf. Ps.94; 2Thes.1:4-10).²¹⁴ But during the Tribulation, this longing for God to put things right throughout the world, to put the "fear of God" into all His creatures, to establish His direct rule over the earth, and to render divine justice worldwide, will be a particularly acute and universal desire among those who continue to call upon His holy Name. These are the prayers we see rising up before Him in our context, prayers offered since the world of man began, but growing in number and intensity throughout the Tribulation. God has always answered these prayers in His own way, and now, commencing with the beginning of the Tribulation, is answering them literally and word for word. For the Tribulation is, as we have said many times before, the time of "birth pangs" which must precede the Messiah's return and the glorious day of His reign. Judgment must come before blessing, and it is through His divine judgments of the Tribulation which precede the blessings of the coming Kingdom that all of these prayers find their ultimate fulfillment.

And when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the fifth seal, I saw below the altar the living persons who had been slain because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained. And they cried out with a loud voice, saying "How long, O Master, holy and true, will you [wait and] not render judgment and vindication for our blood upon those who dwell on the earth?"

Revelation 6:9-10

Our Lord's return, including all the events which precede and follow it, will answer these prayers in full, and our anticipation of this truth is a solace that will help sustain our faith, should it be our lot to patiently endure those most difficult seven years in prayerful yearning for the One who will set all things right.

Hear what the unrighteous judge [in this parable] says! And [if he is compelled to do right] will not God perform vindication for His elect who call out to Him day and night? Indeed, He is patient with them (i.e., in their perseverant praying). And I tell you that He will perform their vindication swiftly. But when the Son of Man returns, will He find faith on the earth?

Luke 18:7-8

In light of our Lord's extremely direct words above, we need to steel ourselves in advance for whatever may come, and make a pledge to ourselves to commit all our grievances against this evil world and its evil administrators into God's hands, trusting with rock-solid faith in the eventual and timely resolution of all our concerns at the hands of our Lord Himself. This is, of course, the proper attitude and the proper approach for Christians at all times. How much more will that be true of those upon whom the intense pressures and persecutions of the Tribulation fall! For no matter how oppressive and grinding those pressures may be, we know with certainty in our hearts that our prayers for relief and for justice are rising like the sweet aroma of burning incense before the heavenly throne, made valid and acceptable by what Jesus did for us (Ps.141:2).

5. The Thunderous Voices, Lightning, and Earthquake: The casting down from heaven of fire from the altar (a clear symbol of divine judgment) which occasions these results is the first definite indication that the Tribulation has now begun.

"There will be *great earthquakes* along with famines and pestilence in various places. And *great and terrifying signs* will appear from heaven."
Luke 21:11

All other potential prior indications of the Tribulation's exact beginning are merely that, trends and possible events which should put us on alert, but which will not provide us with indisputable information about the specific time of the Tribulation's commencement.²¹⁵ These terrifying portents will be the first indisputable warning to the world of impending judgment to come, and, for those few who will take warning, a clear and unmistakable call to repent and turn to God. For the coming Kingdom will now be very near at hand, and it's righteous Judge standing directly before the door (Rev.3:20; cf. Matt.24:33; Mk.13:29).

But what exactly do these heavenly signs that the Tribulation has begun actually entail? First, the voices, flashes of lightning, and earthquake all occur *on the earth* as a result of the angel's action in throwing the heavenly fire of judgment earthward. Secondly, taken together they form a panorama of warning, which is audible (the voices), visible (the flashes of lightning), and palpable (the earthquake). It will be impossible for any inhabitant of earth to ignore them, for, thirdly, these signs will be perceptible *worldwide* (that is, throughout the earth taken as a whole, the only meaning which "earth" may bear here [just as in all of the other 70 plus occurrences of the Greek word *ge* [γῆ] in Revelation]). Fourthly, it must be understood that the "voices, flashes of lightning, and earthquake" are all literal. When the Tribulation does commence, these unprecedented worldwide phenomena will be an unmistakable sign to everyone upon the earth that the Tribulation has begun (whether or not they choose to appreciate that fact).

The "thunderous voices" are loud, roaring noises, resembling yet distinct from thunderclaps. These are in fact the very words of God (cf. the voices which proceed from the throne of God: Rev.4:5). They will not, however, be verbally comprehensible to most of the inhabitants of the earth (cf. Jn.12:28-30; 2Cor.12:4; Rev.10:3-4; 11:15; 11:19; 14:2).²¹⁶ The flashes of lightning will likewise be spectacular to a degree unequalled in human experience, not in the least because they will be perceived simultaneously around the globe. And it is this feature of the earthquake as well which will be unmistakably remarkable, for it will be the first truly worldwide earthquake in the history of mankind – but not the last. In company with the other two elements in this trio of monitory phenomena, worldwide earthquakes will also occur in the middle of the Tribulation as a sign that the Great Tribulation has begun, and just prior to Armageddon to presage our Lord's return at the Second Advent. In both the second and third occurrence of this triple warning we see an accelerating trend, with the Great Tribulation warnings being accompanied additionally by a worldwide plague of hail (Rev.11:19; cf. Rev.8:7), and with the Second Advent warnings being proportionally even more astonishing and devastating both in terms of its earthquake

(Rev.16:18-20; cf. Is.29:6; Ezek.38:19; Hag.2:6-7; Zech.14:3-5; Heb.12:26; Rev.6:12-17) and its own plague of hail (Rev.16:21).

No doubt, at that future time of the Tribulation's commencement the unbelieving world will attempt to explain away these amazing events as some combination of meteorological and geological peculiarities. But we may see in these clear warning signs a blessing from God in that they will leave those who truly are disciples of His Son in no doubt about the fact that the Tribulation has definitively begun. There will certainly be other indications in the days and months that follow which will affirm the validity of this fact (i.e., all of the other prophesied tribulational events which it is the purpose of this series to explicate). But it may well be asked in the case of those whose hearts are so hardened that they refuse to heed this first three-fold miraculous warning whether any proof will ever be enough? For those who can deny the significance of unprecedented lighting which illuminates the entire world (cf. our Lord Jesus Christ who is the true Light of the world: Jn.1:4; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46), for those who can deny the significance of the reverberating voices heard round the world (cf. God the Father whose words have gone out into the entire world: Ps.19:1-6; Is.55:10-11), and for those who can deny the significance of such a unique earthquake which is simultaneously felt everywhere in the world (cf. the Spirit's invisible yet universally felt power: Gen.1:2; Zech.4:6; Jn.3:8), no warning, no matter how seemingly undeniable, is likely to be sufficient. But for us who do heed the words of our God, this triple sign will be a very clear message about what it means to be on the wrong side of His mercy. For us who fear and respect Him, there is truly nothing to fear from this world, but for those who do not reverence or fear Him so as to heed these warnings, there is every reason to be afraid. For it is indeed "a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb.10:31).

See to it that you do not ignore the One who is speaking [to you]. For if those [of the Exodus generation] did not escape when they ignored the one who was giving them warning from the earth (i.e., Moses), how much more shall we [not escape, if we] turn away from the One [giving us warning] from heaven? His voice shook the earth at that time [at Mount Sinai], but now He has made [us] this promise, saying, "Yet once more shall I shake not only the earth, but also heaven". And this "once more" clearly indicates the [coming] transformation of things which may be shaken as things which have been made [by Him], so that the [coming] things which cannot be shaken may abide forever. Since, therefore, we have received a Kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude so that through it we may serve God in a pleasing way with reverence and fear. For our God is a consuming fire. Hebrews 12:25-29

II. The Great Apostasy

1. Definition, Etymology, Process and Prophecies of the Great Apostasy

a. Definition: The Great Apostasy is a massive falling away from the faith by a third of Christians predicted to begin during the Tribulation's first half and destined to reach its culmination during the Great Persecution of the Tribulation's second half (Rev.12:4; also in Matt.25:1-13, where the five virgins whose oil fails represent the one third who apostatize,

while those whose oil suffices are the believers who remain alive and faithful until our Lord's return: the martyrs, the other third, are omitted in that parable). The Great Apostasy is prophesied both by our Lord and by His apostles, and is to be found in certain Old Testament passages as well (see below). Although often subsumed in descriptions of the Great Persecution (which is responsible for producing the intensive final phase of apostasy), the Great Apostasy is a crucial event of immense significance in its own right. This is evident from Paul's use of it as one of the two most identifiable features of the Tribulation. In 2nd Thessalonians, Paul cites the fact that the Great Apostasy had not yet happened (along with the fact that antichrist had not yet been revealed) to disprove false claims that the resurrection had already occurred. It would be impossible, Paul argued, for the resurrection, an event *coterminous with* our Lord's return at the end of the Tribulation, to precede events which must occur *during* the Tribulation. Clearly then from Paul's reasoning the Great Apostasy (again, along with the unmistakable appearance of antichrist on the world stage) will be an event of such shocking magnitude that no Christian will be able to live through it and still be in any doubt about whether or not it has happened (cf. the similar analysis used by our Lord in Matt.24:3-14, and by Peter in 2Pet.3:1-13).

Rather than an event which will occur on a specific day, the Great Apostasy is a progression which reaches its climax during the Great Persecution, and which is inextricably linked with that persecution, for it is the intensified pressure of persecution that brings apostasy to its peak (Matt.24:4-14). As the book of Revelation is first and foremost "the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Rev.1:1) whose return in glory has the relief of the persecuted and the judgment of the persecutors as one of its main immediate results (cf. 2Thes.1:4-10), it is understandable that Revelation should emphasize persecution over apostasy. This is undoubtedly why most of the passages in Revelation dealing with this dual phenomenon concentrate on its persecution aspect (cf. Rev.6:9-11; 7:9-17; 12:12-17; 13:10; 13:11-18; 14:13; 14:14-16; 15:1-4; 16:5-6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:1-2; 20:4).

That said, there is one passage in Revelation which does give us specific information about the Great Apostasy, and while we shall not neglect Revelation 12:4 in its proper place in part 4 of this series, it is appropriate for that verse to constitute the starting point for our discussion of this great "falling away" from the faith.

And [the dragon's] (i.e., the devil's) tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven (i.e., both fallen angels and fallen believers) and threw them to the earth (i.e., their rebellion or apostasy and consequent association with them in their fall).
Revelation 12:4a

This description in Revelation 12:4 of the great dragon (the devil) sweeping away a third of the stars of heaven and casting them to the earth has a dual application. The "stars" refer both to fallen angels and to apostate believers (for the former, see Judg.5:20; Job 25:5; 38:7; Is.14:12-13; 40:26 [cf. Lk.2:13]; Lk.10:18; Jude 1:13; Rev.1:16; 1:20; 2:1; 3:1; 8:10-11; 9:1; 12:1-4; for the latter, see Dan.8:10; 12:3; 1Cor.15:40-42; Phil.2:15; Heb.11:12; Rev.12:1). Just as Satan seduced one third of angelic kind into joining him in his rebellion against God before human history began and thus caused them to "fall", so during the crucible of the Tribulation he will seduce one third of believers away from Christ and likewise "sweep them

down to the earth" (i.e., cause them to fall from their holy, heavenly status). We have had occasion in the past to explain this passage's meaning for the Satanic Rebellion (and the reader is encouraged to review that discussion).²¹⁷ But that Revelation 12:4 also applies to believers caught up in the Great Apostasy is evident from the very close parallel provided by Daniel, where the "little horn" (i.e., antichrist, a type of the devil and his agent on earth) is given the leading role in this process.²¹⁸

And [the little horn] (i.e., antichrist as a type and representative of the devil) magnified himself against the host of heaven (i.e., the family of God, men and angels both), and he cast down to the earth some of the host (i.e., antichrist seducing believers into apostasy) and some of the stars (i.e., Satan having seduced angels into rebellion) and he trampled them underfoot (i.e., their rebellion or apostasy in association with him leading to their subsequent destruction; cf. Dan.7:7; 7:19; Rev.11:2).
Daniel 8:10

By thus sub-categorizing the fallen "host" into **both** apostate believers *and* fallen angels, Daniel 8:10 makes it clear that we are to make use of a similar dual application in the case of our parallel passage, Revelation 12:4 (exactly as suggested above). Like Revelation 12:4, Daniel 8:10 may seem to conflate the timing of events (i.e., pre-history for the fall of one third of the angels, future history for the fall of one third of tribulational believers), but, in fact, the context of Revelation 12:4 explicitly reveals that the final fulfillment of this prophecy (cf. Rev.12:7-9), that is, the actual, literal casting of Satan and his angels from heaven down to the earth is contemporaneous with the beginning of the Great Apostasy's period of culmination, namely, the Great Tribulation, precisely the time when the pressures of the Great Persecution which characterizes that three and a half year period will bring the process of apostasy to a fever. In so far as they apply to the believers who are going to "fall away" during the Tribulation, therefore, Daniel 8:10 and Revelation 12:4 between them provide us with two particularly crucial details about the course of the Great Apostasy:

1) The Great Apostasy will come about as a direct result of intensified satanic activity administered by antichrist and directed against believers.

2) Fully one third of the believers on earth at that time will "fall away" from the faith.

In regard to the first point, it should be noted that such intensified diabolical activity was previously restrained to a very large degree (as indeed antichrist himself, Satan's "man of lawlessness" has been kept from appearing before his time: 2Thes.2:3-12), but will be possible during the Tribulation on account of the suspension of the Holy Spirit's worldwide ministry of restraint (2Thes.2:6-7).²¹⁹ Secondly, the "one third" figure is also something that should give us pause (compare Dan.11:33-35 and Zech.13:8-9). Understand that this represents one third of the number of *actual* Christians, not of the total population of those worldwide who may at that time identify themselves as Christians. The difference between these two figures (of actual versus putative Christians) is likely to be immense. No one can know the hearts of men except God, but if past history and experience provide any guide at all, it is very likely that only a small percentage of those who classify themselves as Christians when asked about their religious affiliation will genuinely be followers and

disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. Abraham, after all, gave a deliberately minimalist "worst case" assessment of the number of the "righteous" in Sodom, yet still managed to overestimate their true number (Gen.18:32).²²⁰ The massive number of merely nominal Christians who will quickly put aside all pretense to Christianity during that future time of testing (and then join whole-heartedly in the beast's religious movement) are **not** a part of this "one third" number. The apostates in question here are, on the contrary, genuine believers in our Lord who will exchange their precious faith for worthless and temporary worldly concerns under the pressures of that terrible time to come (cf. Dan.11:30-35).

Since men began to call upon the name of the Lord (Gen.4:26), and since the early days of the Church era (Phil.3:18; 2Tim.4:10), there have always been those who started well, but stumbled in their faith for one reason or another and so fell away from Christ (Matt.13:20-21; Mk.4:17; Lk.8:13; cf. Gal.5:4-7; 1Tim.4:1). But that fully one third of the true Church militant (which is itself only a fraction of the "church-visible") should turn away from Jesus Christ is a terrifying and sobering prospect which should leave those of us who have been commanded to prepare spiritually for the cataclysmic events to come in no doubt about the importance of the task before us (Matt.24:13; Lk.18:8; 21:36). The import of the message of the "one third" who turn away from the Lord into apostasy is clear: there will be tremendous spiritual peril during the Tribulation for any and all whose faith is not solidly grounded on the Rock (Matt.7:24-27; Lk.6:46-49). Time and space do not permit us here to revisit the refutation of the false doctrine of "eternal security" (which denies even the possibility of believer apostasy), but an objective reading of any of the numerous New Testament passages which conflict with it should be sufficient to make clear the principle that our salvation requires us to faithfully maintain our faith in Jesus Christ steadfast until the end (e.g., Matt.7:24-27; 10:33; Lk.6:46-49; 14:34-35; Jn.15:5-6; Rom.11:17-23; 1Cor.6:9-11; 10:6-12; 15:2; 2Cor.13:5; Gal.5:19-21; Eph.5:3-7; Col.1:21-23; 1Tim.6:9; 6:20-21; 2Tim.2:12-13; Heb.2:1-3; 3:6-19; 10:35-39; 2Jn.1:8-9).²²¹ It will only be those who do endure in faith until the end that will be saved (Matt.24:13), and the Tribulation will present a greater challenge to the continuation of faithfulness and faithful discipleship than any other period in human memory.

b. Etymology of Apostasy: The English word "apostasy" is a transliteration of the Greek word *apostasia* (ἡ ποστασία; cf. 2Thes.2:3), and means, etymologically, a "standing away" (*apo* = "away"; *stasia* = "standing") or "separation" from something. The act of willfully turning away, forsaking, or "rebell[ing]" from someone or something is the most common application of this word throughout the ancient Greek language (cf. Acts 21:21, where it is translated "to forsake" by KJV and NASB, and "to turn away" by NIV). In terms of Old Testament parallels, *apostasia*, along with its cognate verb, *aphistemi* (cf. Acts 5:37), is represented by a rather large number of Hebrew words that express this same concept of turning away from God. For example, one of the more common such noun/verb pairs in Hebrew are the noun *meshubah* (מִשְׁבָּה; lit., "turning back" or apostasy) and its cognate verb *shubh* (שׁוּב; lit. "to turn back" or apostatize). And while we find a large number of terms for this concept in both languages, the main idea provided by the corresponding Greek and Hebrew vocabulary is unmistakable: "apostasy" is nothing less than a turning away from, a forsaking of, or a rebelling against God, that is to say, a complete rejection of His authority

on the believer's part, a "turning of one's back" to God, while "turning back" to the world instead (cf. Jn.15:1-7; Rom.11:17-23).²²²

And he who was sown on the rocky places, this is the one who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy. He has no roots [to his faith], however, but lasts only a short time. So when tribulation or persecution occurs on account of the Word, he is immediately tripped up (*skandalizetai*; i.e., he apostatizes).

Matthew 13:20-21

And these [second types] who are sown on the rocky places are similar. Whenever they hear the Word they immediately receive it with joy, although they have no root [of faith] in themselves, but are only temporary [believers]. When tribulation or persecution because of the Word comes [their way], they are immediately tripped up (*skandalizontai*; i.e., they apostatize).

Mark 4:16-17

And those [whose seed of faith fell] on the rock do receive the Word with joy when they hear it. However these [types] have no root [to their faith]. They believe for a while, but in time of testing *they apostatize (aphistantai)*.

Luke 8:13

Apostasy is thus, at its root, the death of faith, the rejection by a onetime believer of his Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ. As the gospel passages above from the parable of the sower make clear, it is most often "tribulation" and "persecution", the costs of discipleship, which are the decisive factors in causing a quondam believer to abandon his or her faith in preference for what seems at the time an easier road (cf. "tribulation" and "persecution" being characteristic of the first and second halves of the Tribulation in the Great Apostasy and Great Persecution respectively).

For if after having escaped the defilements of this world by recognizing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ they should be overcome [spiritually] by becoming involved again in these foul things, then they have become worse off than they were before. For it would have been better for them not to have accepted the Righteous Way in the first place, rather than – once having accepted this holy command [for *faith* in Christ] committed to them – to now ***turn their backs on it***. And so in their case this proverb is true: "The dog has returned to his vomit, and the sow, though washed, to her muddy sty".

2nd Peter 2:20-22

c. The Process of Apostasy: Although the essential mechanics of apostasy should be obvious enough from the above discussion, it is important for us to clarify here just how it is that a person may lose faith in Jesus Christ. Turning away from God and away from the Person of His Son is, in general, not always immediately obvious to others, and, rather than an event, is more often a process wherein the believer progressively violates his conscience, giving himself over to sin to such a degree that he is eventually forced to make a final choice between God and repentance on the one hand, or sin and reprobation on the other. For, at

some point, continuing on the wrong road far enough and willfully enough will eventually and inevitably lead to the complete breakdown of the conscience and result in the "shipwreck" of faith:

I give you this command, Timothy my child, in accordance with the prophecies that were made long ago about you, that you conduct a good campaign, one that is in keeping with [those predictions], holding onto your faith and to a clean conscience (cf. 1Tim.1:5-6) – which [conscience] some have rejected (lit., "pushed away") and [have thus] suffered *the shipwreck of their faith*.

1st Timothy 1:18-19

As this passage tells us, it is impossible to continually ignore the Spirit's conversation with the conscience without suffering damage to one's faith (1Tim.4:1-2; Tit.1:15; cf. Eph.4:30; 1Thes.5:19; Heb.10:29). It is impossible to continually oppose God and His will without likewise doing harm to one's faith (1Pet.2:11). And it is impossible to continually choose what is displeasing to God without becoming more and more reluctant to "look Him in the face" (Jn.3:20; Eph.5:11-14). Inevitably, the path of ignoring God and rejecting His will damages, diminishes, and desensitizes the conscience, and thus (in the absence of repentance) leads eventually to the obliteration of one's faith. And when the believer stops believing altogether, then he/she is no longer a believer (Matt.24:10-13). The specific, biblical process involved here is the "hardening of the heart", that is, in the case of believers, a gradual loss of response and sensitivity to one's conscience, to the known will of God, and to one's commitment to following Jesus Christ as a true and faithful disciple (all of which are really one and the same thing).²²³

Make sure, brothers, that none of you develop an ***evil heart of unbelief*** (i.e., lack of faith) by *turning away* (lit. "apostatizing") from the living God. Rather keep encouraging each other every day as long as we still call it "today" (i.e. still remain in this world), lest any of you *be hardened [in heart] by the deception of sin*. For we all have a share in Christ, *as long as we hang on* to that original confidence [of our faith] firmly to the end, as it says:

Today if you hear His voice,

Don't harden your hearts as they did at the provocation [at Meribah].

For who provoked Him, though they had heard? Did not all of them who came out of Egypt under Moses' leadership do so? And with whom was He enraged for forty years? Wasn't it the very people who had sinned, then dropped dead in the desert? And to whom did He swear that they would never enter into the [place of] rest [He had promised], but to those who had been disobedient to Him? Now we see that they were unable to enter into this [place of rest] *because of their unbelief* (i.e., their loss of faith).

Hebrews 3:12-19

These verses are a veritable primer on the process of apostasy. Here we see that having an "evil (i.e., hardened) heart of unbelief" is essentially synonymous with entering into apostasy (etymologically "turning away" from God, as we have seen). These two phenomena go hand in hand and both proceed from an identical source, namely, the poor choices of the person in question. For, as in the case of the Exodus generation in the passage above, it is by our own will that we harden our hearts, and it is by our own will that we turn away from

God. Turning toward Him, following Him, advancing on the right path – all these are good and proper decisions which bring us nearer to our Lord. Turning away from Him, following our own desires, leaving the right path – all these are poor and dangerous decisions which alienate us from our Lord. We have said in the past that our essential purpose here on this earth is to make our choice for or against God in the Person of His Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – but this is not a once and for all decision.²²⁴ Discipleship, being a believer in Jesus Christ and a faithful follower who lives to please Him, that is a day by day picking up of our cross (and every day presents its own challenges: Lk.9:23; cf. Matt.6:34; Eph.5:16; Col.4:5). Jesus told us to "count the cost" of discipleship before committing ourselves to following Him (Lk.14:26-34). For the life of a true disciple in Jesus Christ is definitely not without its costs, and it would be better never to embark on that road in the first place than to begin to follow Him only to turn away later (2Pet.2:20-22). As the passage quoted above makes clear, it is "sin's deception" which causes our hearts to lose sensitivity to what Jesus would have us do.

This does not mean that all apostates are engaged in a pattern of sinning which is obvious and overt (outrageous sexual or criminal behavior, for example). Sin comes in many forms, and, in the author's observation, the types of sin which are more often associated with apostasy are largely sins of the heart like jealousy, envy, bitterness and anger, just the sort of attitudes that are wont to dominate the heart when a person blames God for personal tribulations and disasters (as Jesus tells us in the passages from the parable of the sower quoted in the previous section: Matt.13:20-21; Mk.4:16-17; Lk.8:13). But whatever the type of sin to which a believer gives his whole-hearted allegiance (as opposed to a temporary failure later repented of and confessed), it is just this sustained and determined pattern of choosing *against* God and *for* what displeases Him that hardens the heart, deadens the conscience, alienates us from God and God from us, and eventually puts faith to death, for we cannot simultaneously serve both Christ and sin (cf. Prov.28:13-14).

Don't you understand that if you give your allegiance to anyone to obey them as servants, then you truly are their servants when you obey them? [And that this is true] whether [you give yourselves] to sin, which results in death (i.e., of faith), or whether [you give yourselves] to obedience [to Christ], which results in righteousness?
Romans 6:16 (cf. Jn.8:31-38)

We all sin (1Kng.8:46; Ps.130:3-4; Prov.20:9; Eccl.7:20; Rom.3:23), but in our continuing relationship of faith with our Lord we are instructed to confess our sins, and are promised forgiveness when we do (1Jn.1:9; cf. Ps.32; 51). In addition to giving us comfort about the forgiveness of our sins, the apostle John, in his first epistle, tells us in no uncertain terms that we are indeed all sinners so that this need to confess our sins whenever we commit them is very real (1Jn.1:5-10). But John *also* says that his purpose in writing is "that you may not sin" (1Jn.2:1), and then, throughout the course of the letter, goes on describe the believer as someone for whom sin does not even seem possible (cf. 1Jn.3:6; 3:9-10; 5:18). This is not a contradiction. Rather it is a confirmation that the Christian way of life is one of obediently following Jesus Christ (where sin is an anomaly), and not a life where one can

choose one's own way in all things without serious and even eternal consequences. We have to own up to our mistakes, and we have to understand that sin, even when forgiven, has consequences both natural and divine, as in the case where our sinful actions may hurt someone and damage our relationship with them while at the same time occasioning discipline from the Lord (Heb.12:4-13). But for the true Christian, sin is a deviation from our journey of pilgrimage in the service of Jesus Christ. Through repentance and confession we get back on that straight and narrow road, and in doing so make it clear to ourselves and to all who observes us, angels and men alike, that we are truly committed to our faith in Jesus Christ, and that our lapse was but a momentary departure from our true purpose rather than some new purpose we have now embraced.²²⁵ However, should that "temporary deviation" continue to develop into a new and firmly fixed orientation, we risk the defiling of our consciences and the hardening of our hearts against God – we risk our faith:

Every one is tempted by his own lust, being dragged away [by it] and enticed [by it]. Then, should lust conceive (i.e., should the person give in to it), it gives birth to sin. And sin, should it be fully carried out to the end (i.e., should the person give in to a life of sin), produces death (i.e., the death of faith).

James 1:14-15

If anyone sees his brother engaged in a pattern of sinfulness which does not lead to death (i.e., is a deviation rather than a complete turning away), let him ask [forgiveness on his brother's behalf], and life will be given to him (i.e., forgiveness and deliverance will result), that is, in those cases where those sinning are not [sinning] unto death. There is sin which leads to death – I am not telling you to pray in that case. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin which does not lead to death (i.e., temporary deviation, confessed and repented does not result in death).

1st John 5:16-17

Let us not put Christ to the test, as some of them (i.e., the Exodus generation) did and were killed by serpents. And let us not be complaining, as some of them complained, and were killed by the Destroyer. These things happened to them as an example to us and were written to warn us (i.e., to avoid similar apostasy) – we who live at the culmination of the ages (i.e., at the doorstep of the Tribulation). So let him who thinks he stands firm beware lest he fall (i.e., from faith; cf. Rom.11:22).

1st Corinthians 10:11-12

The best way to avoid apostasy, really the only sure way, is to commit and dedicate oneself to the task of marching forward on the road to Zion, faithfully following our Lord Jesus Christ who is the *only* Way to eternal life (Jn.14:6).

d. Prophecies of the Great Apostasy:

1) In 1st Timothy 4:1, the apostle Paul tells us that the Great Apostasy is an explicit teaching of the Holy Spirit. He also informs us of what this means in strategic terms, namely, that

those who abandon the Christian faith during the Tribulation will not merely become largely neutral unbelievers (as is sometimes the case today), but instead will become willing and active participants in the new, syncretic satanic system (religious, political, social, etc.) which will be offered up by the devil and his antichrist as a hostile alternative to faith in Jesus Christ. Given that this system will have as one of its main objectives the eradication of true faith from the earth (through accelerating pressures that lead eventually to the violence of the Great Persecution in the Tribulation's second half), we can see that in the case of such individuals the pattern of becoming active "enemies of the cross of Christ" will be completely fulfilled (Phil.3:18).

The Spirit explicitly says that in the end times (i.e., during the Tribulation) ***certain men will rebel (lit., "apostatize") from the faith***, giving their allegiance [instead] to deceitful spirits and demonic doctrines.

1st Timothy 4:1

2) In 2nd Thessalonians 2:1-4, as mentioned at the outset of this section, Paul sees the Great Apostasy as an event proportional in its significance to the revelation of antichrist. In order to prove his point that the resurrection had not yet occurred, the apostle focuses the Thessalonian believers on two unmistakable events that must precede the resurrection whose occurrence or lack thereof could not be subject to misinterpretation. Along with the revelation of antichrist, such also will be the Great Apostasy. The Thessalonians could easily look within their own ranks and see that there had in fact been no massive defection into apostasy, and certainly not one in which a large number of their former fellow believers had now given their complete allegiance to the advancement of the cause of Satan and the elimination of the Church. As in the passage above, these verses show a clear connection between those who will turn away from Christ and the rise of antichrist and his system, making it likely that fallen former believers will play a decisive role in the advancement of the beast.

So we ask you, brothers, in regard to the coming our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling together to Him [at His return], that you not be so easily moved from your correct understanding [of these matters], nor disturbed [by doubts about what you should know to be true] – not even if [this "new information" purports to come] through a spirit, or an [inspired] word or a letter supposedly from me, declaring that the Day of the Lord is already upon us. Do not let anyone deceive you in any way. For [the Second Advent cannot come] unless ***the [Great] Apostasy*** has first occurred and the man of lawlessness, [antichrist,] has [first] been revealed, that "son of destruction" (cf. Jn.17:12 of Judas), the one who will oppose and exalt himself against every so-called god and object of worship to such a degree that he will [even] take his seat in the temple of God and represent himself as being God.

2nd Thessalonians 2:1-4

3) In Matthew 24:3-13, Jesus is responding to a question from His disciples about the timing of these eschatological events. In this respect, our Lord's response puts the Great Apostasy (as well as other events) to similar use as in the passage above. That is to say, the

disciples had wanted to know when He would return, and Jesus tells them that before His return all the "birth pangs" of the Tribulation must precede (including the Great Apostasy). In verses four through six, Jesus tells His disciples of trends which will be in play throughout the time preceding His return. And, indeed, throughout the Church Age there have been and continue to be deceivers who represent themselves as Him (cf. 1Jn.2:18), and there have been and continue to be conflicts and threats of conflicts which seem (at the time) to be of such moment as to have apocalyptic significance. Our Lord's message in the opening part of this passage is a threefold one, telling us first that we should not be deceived by any false Christ, nor thrown from our proper Christian walk by fearful anticipation of world events. Secondly, we are told that such deceivers and such potentially deceptive circumstances will be a characteristic of the days to come (i.e., of the entire Church Age). Thirdly, and most germane to our present study, is the message which these words imply, that is, that the actual Tribulation will be so indisputably characterized by one particular false Christ, namely antichrist, and its events so obviously dominated by the series of world conflicts predicted to precede our Lord's return, that there will be no possibility of failing to recognize these things for what they are by those who have given proper attention to scripture. For both of these two Church-Age-long trends will find their exemplars and their ultimate fulfillment during the Tribulation in the person of the arch-antichrist, and in the playing out of his campaign of world domination respectively.

With verse seven, our Lord sums up the Tribulation's first half which He then explains in verse eight to be the beginning of the "birth pangs", namely, the first half of the seven year period which directly precedes His return. In His synopsis of these events, the division of the world into two power blocks and the "world war" which ensues (ultimately leaving antichrist in essential control of most of the earth) is the event sequence He offers us as an unmistakable, signature sign of the Tribulation's first half, noting as well that both conspicuous man-made disasters caused by intensified evil (detailed by the seven seals: Rev.6:1-17) and unprecedented divine judgments upon this intensified evil (detailed by the seven trumpets: Rev.8:6-11:19) will likewise characterize this period. We reach the Great Tribulation itself in verses nine through thirteen, where our Lord describes the Great Persecution and the culminating phase of the Great Apostasy as a single, composite phenomenon. Believers (who have turned apostate by the time of the Great Tribulation's commencement) betray other believers, resulting in tribulation, that is, in all manner of persecution including imprisonment, execution, and worldwide antipathy to all true followers of Jesus Christ (verse 9). This intense persecution causes many more to "fall away", a further round of betrayal, and increased hostility by these new apostates toward their former brethren (verse 10). In this environment of ever intensifying pressure and persecution, Satan will then launch a deceptive assault directed primarily at those who still remain faithful to Christ (verse 11: explained in verses 23-24 as a new round of false prophets who, with the help of satanically empowered "signs", will falsely proclaim that Christ has already returned). The combination of these horrific events will finally cause the love even of some of those who have endured to this point to be quenched (verse 12; see below under "Causes of the Great Apostasy"), and it is only those who hold out until the final trumpet when our Lord returns who will be saved (verse 13). Thus apostasy will reach its peak and its culmination under the pressures brought to bear by the Great Persecution

in the Tribulation's second half. However, as is the case with the rise of antichrist, the Great Apostasy will begin and grow from the moment the Tribulation commences.

(3) And when He sat down on the Mount of Olives, His disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us when these things will be, and what the sign is of your return and of the end of the age?" (4) And Jesus answered and said, "See to it that no one deceives you. (5) For many will come in My Name, saying, 'I am the Christ', and they will deceive many people. (6) And you are going to hear about [actual] wars and impending wars. Make sure you do not become [overly] alarmed [by such things]. For [these things] must happen, but this is not yet the end [of the Tribulation]. (7) For [before that end] a nation will rise against a nation, even a kingdom against a kingdom (cf. Dan.11:25-30; 11:40), and there will be famines (i.e., man-made disasters) and earthquakes (i.e., divine judgments) in various places. (8) But all these things are [merely] the beginning of the birth pangs (i.e., the first half of the Tribulation). (9) Then (i.e., the beginning of the second half or Great Tribulation) men will betray you [bringing you] into tribulation, and will put you to death, and you will be hated by all of the nations on account of My Name. (10) And at that time **many will fall away** (i.e., will apostatize) and will betray each other and will hate each other, (11) and many false prophets will arise and will deceive many. (12) Now because of the increase of lawlessness [at that time], *the love of the many will cool*. (13) But he who endures until the end, this [is the one who] will be saved."

Matthew 24:3-13

4) There are also a series of passages in the book of Daniel which connect the Great Apostasy's opening up into a full flood with the Tribulation's mid-point.²²⁶ As one might expect, these passages all focus upon the land of Israel, but, in terms of apostasy, betrayal and persecution, the events described here have a worldwide applicability. Daniel 8:10-12 demonstrates the connection between apostate believers and the beast's Great Persecution of those who remain faithful. Daniel 8:23 shows that the period of completion of the Great Apostasy is contemporaneous with the career of antichrist (i.e., the Great Tribulation; cf. Dan.8:24-25). Daniel 11:30-35 deals mostly with the Great Persecution and its specific course in Israel, but here as well we see the pattern of increased polarization with apostates and unbelievers actively in the devil's camp on the one side, and those who remain fully committed to the Lord flatly opposed to them on the other.

And [the little horn] (i.e., antichrist as a type and representative of the devil) magnified himself against the host of heaven (i.e., the family of God, men and angels both), and he cast down to the earth some of the host (i.e., antichrist seducing believers into apostasy) and some of the stars (i.e., Satan having seduced angels into rebellion) and he trampled them underfoot (i.e., their rebellion or apostasy in association with him leading to their subsequent destruction; cf. Dan.7:7; 7:19; Rev.11:2). He even magnified himself against the Prince of the host (i.e., Christ). The daily sacrifice was abolished by him, and the holy place (i.e., the inner court) was desecrated. And along with the daily sacrifice, the host (i.e., believers) fell into his power **on account of [the] rebellion** (i.e., the Great Apostasy, with persecution advanced through the help of apostates; cf. v.13). And he threw truth to

the ground, and was successful in whatever he did.
Daniel 8:10-12

And at the end of their kingdom (i.e., during the Tribulation), when *rebels are being confirmed* [in their apostasy], there will arise a stern-faced king (i.e., antichrist), well versed in deception.
Daniel 8:23

(25) Then he (i.e., the king of the north, antichrist) will rouse up his power and desire against the king of the south with a great force, but the king of the south will mobilize for war with an equally great force which will also be very powerful. Nevertheless, he (i.e., the king of the south) will not be able to stand [against the king of the north], for they shall devise plots against [the king of the south]. (26) For those who eat his choice food (i.e., his inner circle) will break him, and his force will flood away, and many will fall slain. (27) And though these two kings set their hearts on evil and speak lies at the same table (i.e., a peace conference), it will not prosper, for there will yet be an end to the period [of the Great Tribulation]. (28) Now as he (i.e., antichrist) returns to his own land with great booty, his heart will be set against the holy covenant, so that he will take action [against it] and [then] return to his own land. (29) During this period he will return and attack the south [again], but the circumstances of this campaign will not be like those of the first one. (30) For ships of Kittim (i.e., the western "Babylon") will attack with him [so that he will be victorious]. Then he will be stricken [as if dead], but will revive. And he will be enraged at the holy covenant, so that on his return [to Israel from the far south] he will take action [against it] (i.e., ending the sacrifices, setting up the abomination, taking his seat in the temple). And he will give his support to those who abandon the holy covenant. (31) For it is from him that the military forces will issue forth which will pollute the sanctuary (i.e., ending the ministry of Moses and Elijah), remove the daily sacrifice, and set up the abomination of desolation. (32) And with enticements he will seduce [people] to violate the [holy] covenant, but the people who know their God will continue to hold fast to it. (33) And those among the people who have insight will teach the people who will be persecuted by sword (i.e., martyrdom), and flame (i.e., torture), and captivity (i.e., imprisonment), and plunder (i.e., confiscation of property), for some time. (34) And when they are persecuted, they will receive a little help, yet many will ally themselves to them under false pretenses. (35) For even from among [the ranks of] those who have insight, some will be persecuted, in order to refine, purify, and cleanse them until the final end. For [it is] yet to come at its appointed time.

Daniel 11:25-35

2. The Situation of the Church and "church-visible" on the Eve of the

Tribulation: To fully understand the phenomenon of the Great Apostasy, it is necessary to understand the difference between the church-visible and the true Church of Jesus Christ. Simply put, just as "not all Israel is Israel" (Rom.9:6), so not all who represent themselves as Christians really are believers in and followers of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we are not talking here about the fact that many Christians are not particularly interested in the Word of God or that many Christians are not carrying on their Christian lives in a particularly sanctified way (sadly, many are not). It is possible, though dangerous in the extreme, to be a

marginal Christian, to be "lukewarm", yet still be a member of Christ's fold. Clearly, those who fall into this category (and in this most complacent of Church periods, that of Laodicea,²²⁷ the percentage is appallingly high) will be in the gravest danger of losing faith and salvation under the spiritual pressures of the Tribulation. But, marginal though they may be, they are still Christians as long as they maintain their faith in Jesus Christ (even if that faith is on "life support"). The distinction we are making here is between true Christians (of whatever stripe) and those who, while in reality not Christians at all, represent themselves as believers in Jesus Christ. Those who genuinely believe in and follow our Lord are Christians. Those who do not, are not, even though they may identify themselves as Christians and may belong to "Christian" organizations. In the author's estimation, the size of this "church-visible" greatly exceeds the size of the true Church militant (i.e., true believers currently alive on earth), and this unfavorable proportion is likely to increase the nearer we draw to the Tribulation, trending even higher and picking up momentum once the Tribulation begins. The twin dangers of complacency and pseudo-Christianity will contribute in no small measure to making the true Church particularly vulnerable when the Tribulation does hit, especially inasmuch as prophecy suggests an exceptional period of calm and prosperity just prior to its inception:²²⁸

But concerning the times and the seasons (i.e., the time-line of future prophecy and its specific events), brothers, you have no need for anyone to write you. For you yourselves know full well that the Day of the Lord (i.e., God's eschatological time of judgment beginning with the Tribulation) is coming just like a thief in the night. When [people] are saying "Peace!" and "Safety!" (i.e., just before the Tribulation begins), at that precise time destruction will fall swiftly upon them, just like labor pains on a pregnant woman (i.e., the tribulational judgments culminating in Armageddon will begin).

1st Thessalonians 5:1-3

This dual phenomenon of complacency within the Church in our final era of Laodicea and an ever growing proportion of unbelievers within the church-visible is creating serious impediments to spiritual growth in our own time, and will be the cause of increasing spiritual danger for all Christians at that future time. Consider the negatives today of an environment where entertainment and socializing are given priority and where the search for truth and the teaching of truth is stifled. Within "Christian" churches where these circumstances obtain (at present more the rule than the exception), spiritual growth, drawing near to Christ and learning how to better serve Him, is a nigh on impossible task – when it happens, it happens in spite of rather than because of such groups. Now consider that during the Tribulation, when the proportion of unbelievers has increased and false teaching has spread, what dampening of enthusiasm for the truth must then occur in Christian groups that are marginal even now! Indeed, we may expect that during the Tribulation by far the majority of main-line Christian groups and organizations will be or will shortly become anything but truly Christian, and this shift of organized Christianity from mere ineffectiveness to outright hostility to truth and true spirituality will serve to have a very chilling effect on all those who are striving to serve their Lord in a good and proper way. For when nearly all of the identifiable "Christian" churches and organizations have melted into one single matrix not merely of complacency about the inclusion of unbelievers and of tolerance of false doctrines (the case today), but actually of aggressive

hostility towards any attitude of true dedication to Christ and of any correct understanding of the truth, then all true believers and genuine followers of Jesus will stand out as misfits as never before. This will be a test of faith unlike any in history, and, alarmingly, a test which many will fail, swelling the ranks of the Great Apostasy.

a. The Hardness of Unbelieving Pseudo-Christianity (The Seven Woes): Organized Judaism of our Lord's time presents a close parallel to the situation described above. Controlled largely by the scribes and Pharisees, the religious establishment of that time had become every bit as divorced from the true grace and power of God as will be the case for organized "Christianity" in the Tribulation (cf. Matt.23:5). Jesus' characterization of the spiritually dead "church-visible" of His own day gives us a very clear picture of what true believers will be up against once the church-visible of that future day makes a similarly clean break from the truth.

1) The Pseudo-Christian establishment hinders salvation for its members:

So woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you lock up the kingdom of heaven [right] in front of people. For you yourselves are not going in, nor do you allow those about to do so to [actually] go in.

Matthew 23:13

It is understandable if regrettable that those who have rejected the one way of salvation, faith in Jesus Christ, should attempt to prevent the salvation of their fellow members and so "close up heaven" to them. For to allow true discipleship on the part of others in their midst would be, in a way, to repudiate everything they themselves stand for. That is why even today those who do not follow the true way of salvation do all in their power to deny it to others as well (as is evident in the case of all so-called "Christian" groups who teach salvation by works, thus denigrating faith in Christ alone). For such people, Jesus Christ and His gospel are embarrassments (cf. Lk.12:9). Any real truth, any genuine belief in Christ within their ranks is a source of trouble, of complications, and, to put it bluntly, just "uncomfortable". As children of him who is the father of the lie, they are naturally hostile to the truth (Jn.8:44).

2) The Pseudo-Christian establishment reaches out to hinder salvation for others seeking God:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you scour land and sea to make a single convert, and when he becomes [one], you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

Matthew 23:15

Propagating their false teachings is at once the best way to gain adherents and strength on the one hand, while reducing as far as possible the ranks of those who are truly seeking God. By coopting those who are searching for God and keeping them from true salvation, they avoid potential adversaries and suborn instead the zeal of these unfortunate converts

for their own purposes. Furthermore, such conversions give them confidence in the rightness of their twisted approach (a point evident in all cults today).

3) The Pseudo-Christian establishment adds forms and rituals which obscure truth:

Woe to you, you blind guides who say, "Whoever swears by the temple has no obligation, but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obliged". You fools and blind men! For what is greater, the gold or the temple which makes the gold holy? And you [also] say, "Whoever swears by the altar has no obligation, but whoever swears by the sacrifice which is on it is obliged". You blind men! For what is greater, the sacrifice or the altar which makes the sacrifice holy? Therefore whoever swears by the altar swears both by it and by everything on it. And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by the One who dwells in it. And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.
Matthew 23:16-22

This is more than being more impressed with material things which appeal to earthly greed than with the underlying spiritual realities (i.e., the gold and the sacrifices instead of the temple and the altar which give them spiritual meaning). Beyond this failure to appreciate the spiritual truths which underlie the legitimate rituals described here, the pseudo-Christian establishment actually adds its own false strictures to the truth and thereby obscures that truth. This tendency to create and emphasize false precepts over the genuine Word of God is a trend which will dominate the whole warp and woof of the secularized pseudo-Christianity of the Tribulation (as it is indeed becoming more and prominent in our own day, even in evangelical circles).

4) The Pseudo-Christian establishment uses minor, partial obedience to obscure major truths:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you give a tenth of your mint and of your anise and of your cummin, but you have neglected the weightier parts of the Law, [namely], justice and mercy and faith. You ought to do the former – but not neglect the latter! You blind guides! You [are careful to] filter out the gnat, but [then] you swallow down the camel!
Matthew 23:23-24

Equally incompatible with the truth of the Word of God is the tendency described above to over-emphasize minor *applications* of the truth out of context (even otherwise correct ones), while ignoring the actual *teachings* of the Bible which give them meaning. Like saying "grace" over a stolen meal, divorcing even legitimate Christian practices from their true spirituality not only results in a pointless exercise of pseudo-devotion to God, but, worse to tell, also has the effect of obscuring those important underlying truths upon which all such applications were originally based. In company with the third "woe", this practice will help to rob organized pseudo-Christianity of any true relationship to Jesus Christ whatsoever (a trend on the rise in our own day as well, present wherever "the teachings of men" are put forth as if they were the words of God: Is.29:13; Matt.15:9; Mk.7:7; Col.2:22b).

5) The Pseudo-Christian establishment gives the appearance of holiness, but is not holy:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they teem with robbery and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup so that its outside may also be [truly] clean.

Matthew 23:25-26

It is true that the tradition of "baptizing" eating utensils (among many other things) was a well-established extra-biblical tradition that attained a force beyond its true importance (an application divorced from its true spiritual significance as in the case of the fourth "woe" above), and one which had previously been criticized by our Lord (cf. Matt.15:1-11). However, as becomes apparent only after the comparison is completed (and so hits home with even more force), the "cup and dish" refer to *the scribes and Pharisees themselves* – they are the utensils which are clean only on the outside, but inside their true nature is seen to be greedy and licentious. It will thus be another characteristic of the organized pseudo-Christianity of the Tribulation to be "holy" in appearance, to present a sanctified exterior in terms of all behavior which may be readily observed, but to be devoted to sin and evil on the [secret] inside. Thus the "superficiality" which the leaders as well as the rank and file of the church-visible of that future day will exhibit will not only be a question of no depth of true spirituality, but actually of the reverse of what appears on the surface, with evil lurking below (cf. 2Tim.3:5).

6) The Pseudo-Christian establishment gives the appearance of spiritual life, but is dead:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you resemble whitewashed tombs which, while they appear to be beautiful on the outside, on the inside are filled with dead men's bones and all uncleanness. This is just how you are. On the outside you appear to men to be righteous, but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Matthew 23:27-28

In addition to appearing to be holy while being profane in reality, pseudo-Christianity of the Tribulation will appear to be spiritually *alive* but will in reality be entirely *dead* to God. They may have impressive buildings, fascinating rituals, beautiful music, electrifying sermonizing, etc., but inside these attractive tombs only spiritual death will be found.

7) The Pseudo-Christian establishment appears to be for God, but is really hostile to Him and His:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you restore the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and you say, "If we had been [alive] in the days of *our fathers*, we wouldn't have participated **with them** in [their shedding of] the blood of the prophets". So then you are your own witnesses against yourselves that you are [indeed the] sons of those who murdered the prophets.

Matthew 23:29-31

Finally, and of extreme importance for us who stand on the threshold of these things, tribulational pseudo-Christianity will give the appearance of being on God's side while in reality being enemies of God and eager destroyers of all those who truly believe in and follow His Son. In this last case, our Lord's interlocutors are tripped up by their all too eager desire to associate themselves with the establishment of the past (i.e., they call the murderers "our fathers"), whereas if they had truly regretted what had been done, they would have been quick to disassociate themselves entirely from such evil deeds. But, as it is, they are more interested in laying claim to the power and prestige of the establishment of the past than to clear themselves of blame for the slaughter of God's people. It is exactly this willingness to choose privilege over true holiness that led the religious establishment of Jesus' day to kill their own Sovereign Lord, and will lead their spiritual successors into hearty complicity with the slaughter of the Great Persecution.

Behold, for this very reason (i.e., to prove your true nature) I am going to send to you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that there will come upon you all the righteous blood [ever] spilled upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation (i.e., unbelievers of this type).

Matthew 23:34-36

So while we may see in a large part of established "Christianity" at the Tribulation's inception a well-organized, well-financed system, with beautiful churches, beautiful music, and beautiful superficial sentiments, beneath the whitewashed surface there will be no truth, no faith, no love of Jesus Christ, only dead men's bones. And the hostility which will usher forth from our erstwhile brothers and sisters at that time, while it may begin with mere ostracism and calumny, will end with open persecution of the most severe sort in the cause and service of the beast.²²⁹ The above example of the "seven woes" should give us pause, for if nothing else it illustrates that where there is smoke, there is fire. Dead pseudo-Christian organizations (of which there are plenty in our own day) may seem to pose no threat under present circumstances. However, just as soon as circumstances change (and change they will in the Tribulation, much for the worse), such organizations will be ready-made and willing co-conspirators both for the advancement of the process of the Great Apostasy and also for the implementation of the Great Persecution. The reason for the nature of such groups is not a matter of accident: these spiritually dead organizations reflect the hardened hearts of the individuals who make them up.

b. The Vulnerability of Lukewarm Believers (The Problem of Complacency): In addition to the problem of unbelievers and organizations which are Christian in name only, the second major factor which will contribute mightily to the Great Apostasy is the endemic problem of lukewarmness among the majority of genuine Christians as the Tribulation begins. We have already seen that this final era of the Church before the inception of the Tribulation, the era of Laodicea, is characterized by lukewarmness, that is, a lackadaisical attitude towards Jesus Christ, the Word of God, and the separate roles we have each been called to play in

God's plan.²³⁰ The overwhelming characteristic of believers in this period (and we can expect the trend to intensify as the Tribulation approaches) is one of apathy when it comes to building faith, growing through the Word of God, drawing closer to Jesus Christ, and preparing for and putting into practice the gifts, ministries and effects that God has ordained for us (cf. 1Cor.12:4-7; Eph.2:10).²³¹

One could go on at great length as to the causes of such indifference toward the Lord Jesus who bought us, but it is sufficient here to point out that in its essence this appalling attitude stems primarily from ***loving the world more than Jesus***. Because of Jesus, our sins have been forgiven, and we have been delivered from the fiery death that awaits those who have rejected Him (Rom.5:9-10). Because of Jesus, we look forward to being resurrected in a body whose glory will render insignificant all of the suffering, pain, and trials we are enduring in this present flesh (Phil.3:20-21; cf. 2Cor.4:17-18). Because of Jesus, we are looking forward to a new earth and new heavens where righteousness dwells, where all the rot and evil of this present world will never again be called to mind (Is.65:17). Because of Jesus, we are not of this world – we may be in it for a time, but He is in us, and we live through Him and for Him (Jn.17:16-23). Through Jesus, we have been crucified to this world and it to us (Gal.6:4). Jesus is our life, and for us living is Jesus, pure and simple, so that death is all gain, because it will unite us face to face with the One we love so much forever more (2Cor.5:8; Phil.1:21).

These things are all true. We believe these things. So why do we not live them? In the era of Laodicea, in a time when materialism is king, when the world provides so many distractions, so many opportunities to partake of them, and so many fears lest all these "wonders" we depend upon both for survival and for entertainment be taken from us, turning our hearts away from the world is no simple task. Therefore the worldly attitude of Laodicea, trending farther and farther away from the Lord with every passing day, is, in some respects, understandable. But that does not make it any less regrettable. In an era when such pressures exist, and when the "normal" thing for Christians is to pay not much more than lip-service to their faith, true devotion to Jesus must be all the more jealously guarded. For complacency about God and His grace to us in the gift of His Son is not only a despicable thing for a Christian, it is also a highly dangerous thing, and at no time will that be more true than during the Tribulation's Great Apostasy. The Lord *is not pleased* with complacent disciples. The Lord *is pleased* with passionate disciples. Therefore when it comes to the choice between fervor for Jesus Christ or apathy concerning our relationship with Him, it is clear from scripture what a good Christian should be, one who loves our Master fervently from the heart, faithfully following Him and His example throughout this earthly life, prizing Jesus and our relationship with Him above all earthly treasures and considerations, making His good pleasure our first and foremost priority:

1) A good Christian should be zealous for Christ:

"As many as I love, I reprove and discipline. So become zealous and repent."
Revelation 3:19

NOT lukewarm about our relationship with Him:

"I know your works, that they are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! As it is, because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I am about to vomit you out of My mouth."

Revelation 3:15-16

2) A good Christian should be a dedicated lover of God:

"Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the Law". And [Jesus] answered him, "You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart and your whole soul (i.e., inner person) and your whole mind".

Matthew 22:36-37

And [Jesus] answered and said, "You shall love the Lord your God from your whole heart and your whole soul (i.e., inner person) and your whole mind and your whole might".

Mark 12:30

NOT a lover of this world:

Don't be a lover of this world, nor of what is in this world. If anyone is a lover of this world, a [genuine] love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world and its lust are passing away, but whoever does God's will is [going] to stay [alive with God] forever.

1st John 2:15-17

3) A good Christian should be a friend of Jesus Christ:

You are My friends, if you do what I command you. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know what his master is doing. But I have called you [my] friends, because everything which I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

John 15:14-15

NOT a friend of this world:

You adulterously unfaithful people (i.e., unfaithful to God through dalliance with the world)! Don't you know that friendship with the world means hostility toward God? Whoever wants to be a friend of the world establishes himself as an enemy of God.

James 4:4

4) A good Christian should be on fire with the Holy Spirit:

In regard to your enthusiasm, do not be hesitant, but be boiling with the Spirit.
Romans 12:11

NOT working against the Spirit's kindling of our zeal:

Do not put out the Spirit's fire.
1st Thessalonians 5:19

5) A good Christian should be making the most of every opportunity for Christ:

Walk wisely in regard to those outside [the Church], redeeming the time (i.e., making the most of every opportunity; cf. Eph.5:16).
Colossians 4:5

NOT making full use of this world:

And those who use this world [should] not [be] as those who make full use of it. For the [present] form of this world is passing away.
1st Corinthians 7:31

6) A good Christian should be single-minded toward God:

And I will give them a single heart and a single way so that they may fear Me all their days for their good and that of their children after them (cf. Ezek.11:19; 1Cor.7:35).
Jeremiah 32:29

NOT double minded toward God (i.e., vacillating in heart between God and the world):

And if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask from God who gives freely and without reproach to all and it shall be granted to him. But let him ask in faith without doubting. For the one who doubts is like a wave on the sea, being blown and cast about. Let not that man think that he will receive anything from the Lord, [for he is a] double-minded man, unreliable in all his ways (cf. Ps.12:2; 119:113; Jas.4:8).
James 1:5-8

7) A good Christian should be passionate for Christ and His Church:

If [you have] any comfort in Christ, if [you have] any encouragement from [God's] love, if [you have] any fellowship with the Spirit, if [you have] any sympathy and compassion [for fellow believers], then make my joy full by being of one mind, of one love, of one heart, thinking the same thing, doing nothing out of selfish competitiveness or self-importance, but in humility, considering each other as more important than yourselves, with each of you looking out not for himself but for each other. Have the [very same] attitude which also

Christ Jesus did.
Philippians 2:1-5

NOT complacent about God and His people:

Woe to you who are complacent in Zion, and to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria, you notable men of the foremost nation to whom the people of Israel come! Go to Calneh and look at it; go from there to great Hamath, and then down to Gath in Philistia. Are they better off than your two kingdoms? Is their land larger than yours? You put off the evil day and bring near a reign of terror. You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fatted calves. You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile; your feasting and lounging will end (cf. Deut.31:20; 32:15; Is.32:9-14; Hos.13:6; Zeph.1:12-13).
Amos 6:1-7 NIV

8) A good Christian should be following God with an "undivided heart":

Teach me, O Lord, Your way [that] I may walk in Your truth. Make my heart one (i.e., undivided), that [I may] fear Your Name.
Psalm 86:11

NOT wavering between following God and the world:

Then Elijah approached the assembled people and said, "How long will you continue limping (i.e., like you were "Baal dancing"; cf. v.26) on two divided [opinions]? If the Lord is the [true] God, then follow after Him. But if Baal is, then follow after him".
1st Kings 18:21a

9) A good Christian should be one who remembers at all times what the Lord has done for us:

For [on this matter] I received [directly] from the Lord what I passed on to you, namely that on the night on which He was betrayed He took bread and having blessed it He broke it and said, "This is my body which is [offered up] on your behalf. Keep on doing this in order to remember Me". And in the same way [after eating] He took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant [made] by my blood. Keep on doing this as often as you drink [it] in order to remember Me".
1st Corinthians 11:23-25

NOT one who forgets the Lord in good times:

When you eat and are satisfied and bless the Lord your God on account of the good land which He has given you, take care for yourselves lest you forget the Lord your God so as not to keep His commandments, judgments, and statutes which I am commanding you [to

keep] this day. Lest, when you eat and are satisfied and build fine homes and dwell [in them] and your cattle and sheep multiply and your gold and silver increase and everything you have increases, your heart become proud and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery, He who led you through the great and awesome wilderness with its deadly snakes and scorpions, a thirsty place without water, He who brought forth water for you from the flinty rock, He who in [this] desert gave you manna to eat (of which your fathers had no knowledge), in order to afflict you so as to test you that it might go well with you in the future. Lest you say in your heart, "My strength and my own hand has produced this wealth for me". [Rather] that you may remember the Lord your God, that it is He who gives you the strength to produce wealth, [and] that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers as it is this day. Deuteronomy 8:10-18 (cf. Hos.13:6)

10) A good Christian should be one who delights in the Word of God:

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of mockers. But the teaching (*torah*) of the Lord is his delight, and in His teaching (*torah*) he meditates day and night.
Psalm 1:1-2

NOT one who is complacent about learning the Word of God:

We have much to say about this [subject of Christ's priesthood], but it is difficult to communicate [such advanced things to you] because your ears have become lazy. And although by this time you ought to be [capable of] teaching [such things], you need someone to teach you what the basic principles of God's truth are again! You have turned [back] into [spiritual infants] who need milk and [can] not [yet tolerate] solid food!
Hebrews 5:11-12

11) A good Christian should be one who truly worships God:

But the hour is coming, and in fact has already arrived, when the true worshipers [of God] will worship the Father in spirit (i.e., spiritually: our spirit responding to His Spirit) and in truth (i.e., truthfully: our heart responding to His truth). Indeed, it is just such worshipers that the Father is seeking. For God is spirit, and those who worship Him must do so spiritually (lit., in spirit) and truthfully (lit., in truth).
John 4:23-24

NOT one who offers mere lip-service to Him:

And the Lord said, "Because this people approaches [Me only] with their mouths, and honors Me [only] with their lips, but their heart is far from Me, and because their fear of Me [consists only in] the commandment[s] of men taught [by tradition], therefore, behold, I am about to deal awesomely with this people in a most awesome way, so that the wisdom of

the wise will perish, and the discernment of the discerning will be hidden [from them]".
Isaiah 29:13-14

12) A good Christian should be one who sincerely loves Jesus Christ:

The grace [of God] be with all of you who love our Lord Jesus Christ with complete sincerity (lit., "with incorruptibility").
Ephesians 6:24

NOT a hypocrite (i.e., literally meaning "actors", one who only pretends to love God for show):

So when you give to charity, do not have a trumpet blown in front of you like the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets so that they may receive glory from men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full [by doing this].
Matthew 6:2

13) A good Christian should be exclusively devoted to the one true God:

You shall not bring (lit. have) other gods before My face.
Exodus 20:3

NOT an idolater who vacillates between God and some other object or priority:

And I will stretch out My hand over Judah and over the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and I will cut off from this place the remnant of Baal along with the name of his ministers and along with his priests, [all] those who on their roofs worship the host of the heavens, all his worshipers who swear by the Lord, but also swear by Malcom (i.e., "Molech").
Zephaniah 1:4-5

14) A good Christian should be one who holds God in the highest esteem:

Therefore, says the Lord God of Israel, I had certainly said that your house and the house of your father would walk before Me forever, but now, says the Lord, far be [that] from Me! For those who honor Me I will honor, but those who despise Me will be held in low esteem.
1st Samuel 2:30

NOT one who shows little regard for God:

"A son honors his father, and a slave his master, but if I am their Lord, where is the reverence due Me?" The Lord of hosts is speaking to you priests who despise His Name.
Malachi 1:6a

15) A good Christian's heart should always look to where Christ is above:

Therefore since you have been resurrected [positionally] with Christ, be seeking after the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your hearts (lit., minds) on the things above, not the things on earth.

Colossians 3:1-2

NOT be set on earthly things:

For many are walking (about whom I have been telling you and now tell you with tears) as enemies of the cross of Christ. The end [of this course of theirs] is destruction, their god is their appetite, and they glory in things of which they should be ashamed. They have their minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is a heavenly one, and it is from there that we expectantly await our Savior, Lord Jesus Christ.

Philippians 3:18-20

16) A good Christian should be one who strives always to please Jesus:

Our ambition [as Christians], therefore, whether in this body or out of it, is be pleasing to our Lord.

2nd Corinthians 5:9

NOT someone who only seeks to please himself:

We who are mature (lit., able) should bear the weaknesses of those who are immature (lit., not able) – [and] not [only seek to] please ourselves. Let each one of us strive to please his neighbor for [what is truly] good in order to bring about [that person's] edification (i.e., spiritual growth). For certainly Christ did not [seek to] please Himself, but [instead fulfilled the principle] just as it is written, "the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen upon Me" (i.e., He accepted the world's reproaches in witnessing to God rather than having concern for Himself).

Romans 15:2-3

Throughout this sampling of passages (and, indeed, throughout the Bible), whether explicitly or implicitly passion for God is strongly commended while complacency toward our Lord (along with the inevitable and concomitant love of the world) is strongly condemned. Complacency is thus a serious problem for the Church at large and for individual Christians in particular ***precisely because*** of this "zero sum" opposition between the two alternatives. For either we truly love Jesus Christ more than anything else, or the truth is that we love the world more than Him. And if we do love the world more than the Lord, then at the very least we risk rendering our faith so fragile and vulnerable that it may well not survive serious testing or tribulation, not to mention *the* Tribulation (Matt.13:20-21; Mk.4:16-17; Lk.8:13).

It is important to point out that the passion for God referred to here is *not* primarily an emotional issue. Emotion is present in true passion for God, to be sure, and for those who

truly do love Jesus Christ with all their heart and soul and mind and might, there is indeed tremendous positive emotion to be experienced. But this genuine emotion *follows* commitment, dedication, faith and faithfulness. Such genuine emotion and passion are *the result* of the determined and consistent following of Jesus Christ in true discipleship, *not the means* to loving God more than the world. One cannot come to love Him more than the world by generating emotional displays. One cannot substitute an hour or two a week of weeping and wailing, enthusiastic singing, demonstrative praying (or whatever one's vehicle and preference of emotional expression may be) for reading, studying and being taught the Word of God, treasuring and contemplating it, and diligently putting it into practice in one's life in Christian walk and ministry. Real passion for our Lord is often expressed in a quiet and still manner, coming to know Him through the Bible, communing with Him in private, heart-felt prayer, following Him by leading the life He would have us live, and honoring Him by ministering to His Body, our fellow Christians, according to the gifts and ministries He has assigned (Jn.21:15-17). True zeal is not in the show of zeal (cf. Rom.10:2), but in the power of truth at work in the inner-man (Eph.3:16-19), expressing itself in deeds of faith, hope and love (1Thes.1:3). For us to work up a temporary "blush" of emotion without true substance behind it means nothing to God, for our God is a God who tests the validity of these emotions to show to the world, to the heavenly hosts, and to us as well whether they are indeed genuine and deeply rooted or merely a passing performance (Ps.7:9; Jer.11:20; 17:10; 20:12; Rom.8:27; 1Thes.2:4; Rev.2:23). It does no good to be like the younger brother in Jesus' parable who responded with a show of emotion and enthusiasm to His Father's call, but never got around to doing the hard work of His Father's will (Matt.21:28-31). For true disciples of Jesus Christ who are advancing resolutely on the pilgrimage to Zion which is this earthly life (Gen.47:9; Ps.23; 39:12; 84:5-7; Matt.7:14; Jn.14:6; Acts 19:9; 19:23; Heb.11:13-16; 1Pet.1:1), genuine emotion flows naturally from growing closer to God day by day.

A Psalm of David. When he was in the Desert of Judah. O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for You, my body longs for You, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen You in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love (lit., mercy) is better than life, my lips will glorify You. I will praise You as long as I live, and in your Name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise You. On my bed I remember You; I think of You through the watches of the night. Because You are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me.

Psalm 63:1-8 NIV

These words are from one who truly loved God with all his might in spite of the pressures of life, and are also for us who genuinely aspire to do the same. We who truly follow Jesus Christ with all our hearts and know this world for what it is, a dry and thirsty land, we who have set our hopes on the life to come and not on this passing corruption our eyes behold, we are with David in the desert of Judah, with Moses, Joshua and Caleb in the wilderness of Sinai, with Abraham, Isaac and Joseph, only sojourning on this earth while we faithfully serve and patiently wait for our Lord (1.Cor.1:7; Phil.3:20; 1Thes.1:10; 2Tim.4:8; Tit.2:13; Heb.9:28; Jas.5:7-11; cf. Rom.8:23-25; Gal.5:5; 1Tim.6:14), for His glorious return and His

glorious victory, loving Him in the meantime more than our lives (2Cor.5:8; Phil.1:21; cf. Heb.11:24-27; 1Pet.1:8), and keeping ourselves from infatuation with the world (Jas.1:27; 2Tim.2:2-4). But for those who are overly preoccupied with the world, and whose emotions are stimulated only artificially and occasionally, compromise and complacency about commitment to Jesus inevitably make love and faith very fickle. Those who feel that they have somehow already attained the goal of the Christian life are merely deluding themselves (1Cor.4:8; cf. Phil.3:12-14), so that all their protestations of love and loyalty are usually little more than clouds and mist.

What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears. Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets, I killed you with the words of my mouth; My judgments flashed like lightning upon you. For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.

Hosea 6:4-6 NIV

The choice is this: do we love, esteem and prize Jesus our Lord above everything in this world (cf. Ps.16:2), or do we put the world first, with all its cares, concerns and delights? The more we appreciate and know the truth, the less lovely the world becomes (Jas.4:4; 1Jn.2:15-17; cf. Matt.10:37-39; 16:24-26; Lk.14:25-33). But the more we neglect our spiritual growth and walk and ministry and the continually deepening relationship with our Lord that flows therefrom, the more complacent, the more lukewarm we become. In truth, it is folly to seek comfort, self-definition, or security in this ephemeral world rather than in the Lord who bought us, with whom we will be forever, and whom we claim to love beyond all else. Conversely and perversely, Christian complacency takes for granted the one thing we ought to be concerned about (i.e., our relationship with Jesus Christ), and instead worries about the things of the world which we ought to take for granted by faith:

And we know that, for those who love God, He works everything together for good – [that is to say,] for those who have been called according to His plan.

Romans 8:28

For this reason I tell you [to] stop worrying about your life, that is, [worrying about] what you will [have to] eat. And stop [worrying] about your body, that is, [worrying about] what you will [have to] wear. Isn't your life more [meaningful] than food? And isn't your body more [meaningful] than clothing? Look at the birds of the sky – they neither sow, nor reap, nor gather into granaries. And [yet] your heavenly Father feeds them. You are more important than they are, aren't you? Now which of you can add a foot and a half to his height by worrying? Why then do you worry about clothing? Consider well the wild lilies – how [it is] that they grow, though neither toiling nor spinning. But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his glory used to clothe himself like one of these. And if God dresses the wild plants in such a way – here today but thrown into the oven tomorrow – will He not all the more do so for you, O you of little faith? So don't worry, saying "What shall we [have to] eat?" or "What shall we [have to] drink?" or "What shall we [have to] wear?" After all, these are the things that the gentiles are frantically pursuing. Now your heavenly Father knows you need all these things. Therefore seek first the Kingdom and its righteousness, and then

all these things will be given to you in addition. So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself: there is [already] sufficient evil in any given day [without you adding to it ahead of time].

Matthew 6:25-34

The choice between passion and complacency comes down to a question of priorities, choices we make (or fail to make) every day in this short pilgrimage upon which we are embarked. For those who remain at ease instead of advancing in their Christian lives as our Lord has called us to do, there is spiritual danger now, but danger beyond our dreams (or nightmares) when once the Tribulation shall commence. We have seen that many Jews will return to God in the Tribulation's opening days. For us of the Laodicean era, it would be best to emulate their courage and zeal before those future pressures begin. For we are on the threshold, and our Lord is knocking. It is high time to arise and let Him in.

3. The Causes of the Great Apostasy: As bad as things may be from a spiritual point of view here in the latter days of the era of Laodicea, they will worsen by an order of magnitude as soon as the Tribulation begins. The falling away from Jesus Christ by an unprecedented number of our fellow brothers and sisters is something we may be capable of understanding before the fact, but not something we can emotionally prepare for in full should it be ours to experience. It will come as a tremendous shock when these prophecies are actually fulfilled, no matter how well versed we may be on the details ahead of time. But it is for that very reason absolutely crucial for those of us who have counted the cost of our discipleship and are determined to stay faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ, come what may, to gain every possible bit of scriptural insight and to make every possible bit of spiritual preparation before these events unfold. It therefore behooves us to spend a sufficient amount of time on the factors which will contribute to bringing this unparalleled mass apostasy about.

a. The unleashing of the "mystery of lawlessness": In pagan usage the Greek word *mysterion* (μυστήριον) generally refers to secret information known only to the initiates of a cult or secret society.²³² In the majority of cases where the word is used in the New Testament, the "mystery" in question is a revelation of divine truth (cf. Rom.11:25; 1Cor.15:51; Rev.1:20), that is, some portion of the Word of God which possesses a power and influence which is not to be underestimated (e.g., Matt.13:11; Mk.4:11; Lk.8:10; 1Cor.4:1; Eph.1:9; 6:19; Col.1:24-27; 1Tim.3:9). For example, in the case of the gospel, a "mystery" not fully "revealed" until the revelation of Jesus Christ in the flesh (Rom.16:25-26), we are told that it is the "power" of God to save all believing humanity (Rom.1:16). Ultimately, therefore, the mystery of God is Jesus Christ, His incarnation, His two advents, salvation through His death for all mankind including the gentiles, and our union with Him (Col.2:2). He is the focus of God's plan for history, and all things, all truth thus pivot around Him who is the truth, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The mystery of Him has now been revealed to the world through His life, His death, His resurrection, and through the completion of the scriptures, the final book of which is His "revelation" (the centerpiece of our present study; cf. Rev.1:1).

As it is employed in 2nd Thessalonians 2:7, however, the word "mystery" in the phrase "mystery of lawlessness", rather than being used to refer to the invisible power resident in the divine truth of Jesus Christ, refers instead to the corrupting influence of the devil's lies ("lawlessness" being the result of accepting these lies). Lies are, after all, Satan's stock and trade (Jn.8:44), but the essential untruthfulness of his doctrine is largely veiled from the unbelieving world (2Cor.4:4; cf. Is.6:10). Only in Jesus Christ is this veil removed so that the truth of God floods in and the devil's falsehoods are exposed for what they really are (2Cor.3:13-18).

The phrase "mystery of lawlessness" thus sums up the totality of the invisible efforts made by Satan to undermine God's truth with his own lies as he attempts to block God's plan while furthering his own "kingdom of this world" (Rev.11:15).²³³ By substituting his lies for God's truth, Satan has, throughout human history, been making and continues to make substantial inroads into the visible forms of divine restraint which protect human society at all levels and in all places, invisibly attacking law and order, weakening nationalism, promoting false religion, and seeking by any and all means to desensitize the human conscience so as to embolden sinful and evil behavior worldwide. This explains how Paul can describe this powerful unseen influence as "already at work", for it is essentially another name for the implementation of the devil's counter-plan, now and in the future, which will culminate in the reign of antichrist, Satan's pseudo-Messiah.²³⁴

Even now you know what it is that restrains [antichrist's arrival] so that he will be revealed [only] in his own time. For *the mystery of lawlessness* is already at work – [and] it is only the Restrainer [who keeps things in check, and will] until He moves out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed . . .
2nd Thessalonians 2:6-8a (cf. Jn.8:36)

This same invisible force or power now kept in check by the Spirit's restraining ministry but destined to be unleashed in the last times is also described by the apostle John in 1st John 4:3 as the "spirit of antichrist". In that passage "spirit" refers to an unseen influence in exactly the same way as "mystery" does in the phrase "mystery of lawlessness". "Lawlessness" and "antichrist" are also essentially identical as results of the satanic influence described in both passages because antichrist is the embodiment of the principle of lawlessness, being the "man of *lawlessness*" (2Thes.2:3; compare 2Jn.1:7 where anyone who rejects Christ is an "antichrist"; cf. 1Jn.2:18). Further, in both of these passages the satanic influence that leads to lawless behavior and to the rejection of God's truth is seen to be already at work, and is in both passages the implication of increasing danger once the Tribulation begins is clear enough. When the restraining ministry of the Spirit is removed and the Tribulation does begin, lawlessness will be unleashed and antichrist will come onto the scene, two events which are really part and parcel of the same thing, namely, the release of satanic influence on the world to a degree never before seen. Thus both passages are able to make this close connection between antichrist and the satanic influence even now at work because the ultimate implementation of satanic influence on earth will come when the devil sets up antichrist to rule the world as his pseudo-Messiah during the Tribulation, a

circumstance which will result in the now unseen satanic influence taking on a visible, direct, and personal form, and that without present restraints.

In the same context of 1st John chapter four, we are given a third synonym for this invisible diabolical pressure, namely, "the spirit of error", with the word "error" referring to the wandering away of individuals, institutions and nations from God's truth once they have become susceptible to this satanic "spirit", "mystery", or influence (1Jn.4:6). This is the same "error" soon to be empowered by God during the Tribulation in the case of all those who respond to the devil's lies and follow antichrist, a prediction which occurs in the very same context and in direct connection with the "mystery of lawlessness" we are discussing here (2Thes.2:11, see immediately below).

Several important similarities occur in all three of these passages above (i.e., 2Thes.2:6-8; 1Jn.4:3; 4:6): 1) all three describe a satanic influence presently at work in the world; 2) all three imply by their contexts and phraseology that this influence directly opposes God's truth; 3) all three describe the results of this influence in terms of alienation from God's truth; 4) all three predict, implicitly or explicitly in their contexts, that this influence, presently restrained, will be released during the Tribulation in the form of Satan's direct rule of the world through his antichrist.

Thus all three of these passages make it clear that the devil's successes in corrupting humanity are being accomplished primarily through his clever use of the lie to seduce mankind into error and away from the truth,²³⁵ not only the truth about God Himself (i.e., His true nature and the true way of salvation through Jesus Christ), but also the truth about God's law as expressed in the human conscience, natural and human law, and nationalism.²³⁶ The upward trend in the "mystery of lawlessness" can be seen in the increasing degeneration of individual morals and societal standards, economic globalism, political internationalism, and one-world religious ecumenicalism. Few Christians who have had occasion to observe the course of human civilization over the last half-century are likely to have many doubts about the existence of this trend or its acceleration as we draw ever nearer to the end times.

But while the "mystery of lawlessness" is already at work and experiencing ever greater success, it cannot be brought to the fever pitch necessary to introduce antichrist's world domination (the culmination of Satan's plan in the person of his pseudo-Messiah) until the Spirit's restraint is allowed to wane as the Tribulation begins.²³⁷ For it is precisely that ministry which is currently preventing the devil from launching his tribulational offensive of world-conquest through antichrist along with all that it entails, and at the same time preventing the human race from lapsing into an even more lawless state than is presently the case. For the Spirit's restraining ministry not only prevents the devil from doing all that he would do now (and in the Tribulation will do), but also prevents the human race from responding to his lies and influence to the extent that they might do now (and in the Tribulation will do).

Even when the Spirit's ministry of restraint is temporarily removed, God, as we have seen, will not leave His people bereft of support. The 144,000 undergo a special sealing of the

Spirit, and we are fully confident that God's provision and protection for all believers who are sealed with His Spirit will continue uninterrupted (2Cor.1:21-22; Eph.1:13-14; 4:30; cf. Ezek.9:1-11; Jn.6:27; 14:16-17; 1Pet. 1:1-2). However, that does not change the fact that life will become fundamentally more oppressive for all the inhabitants of the earth, believers included. For the intensified diabolical activity of the Tribulation (previously restrained to a very large degree) coupled with the unleashing of human sinfulness (now under Holy Spirit restraint) in a way unprecedented in our experience will combine to produce the full unveiling of the "mystery of lawlessness", a synergy of satanic efforts and human degeneracy destined to flourish in this benign environment of greatly reduced restraint. This "mystery of lawlessness" is, as scripture says, already at work, and accounts in large part for the accelerating worldwide trend toward evil so apparent in our own day. But in the Tribulation, in the absence of the current restraint, it will be more intense in its effects by an order of magnitude and will help to produce greater pressures on believers than are currently even imaginable, thus contributing mightily to the Great Apostasy (the subject we are studying here).

As difficult as all this may be to contemplate (and it will be even much more difficult to endure), we must remember that a major part of the divine purpose for the Tribulation, the birth pangs that must precede our Lord's return (Matt.24:8; Mk.13:8), is to place the example of mankind's situation without restraint under Satan's rulership in direct contrast to the situation of mankind under the perfect millennial rule of Jesus Christ. Between the garden of Eden and the millennial Eden (where God reigns and mankind obeys),²³⁸ we clearly see throughout the intervening history of the world the horrors of humanity's subjection to the devil's rule. And at no point will the evil of Satan's dominion be more obvious or more horrific than during the Tribulation, the time of Satan's greatest control and the time of the least divine restraint (making the contrast with the Millennium which follows all the more stark).²³⁹

We have also been making the point from the inception of this series that one of the main reasons why the Tribulation will be so difficult to experience personally, so "bitter in the stomach", is that the extraordinary pressures exerted upon mankind therein will leave no middle ground, but will instead force everyone living upon the earth into uncompromising allegiance either to God or to the devil. Instrumental to this intensive and unparalleled polarization is an important corollary to the "mystery of lawlessness", namely, the "empowerment of error" which God will send upon the unbelieving world at that time. This future "empowerment of error" is a step beyond the presently operative "spirit of error" of 1st John 4:6 (a synonym for the "mystery of lawlessness" as we have just seen). In tandem with the removal of restraint upon lawlessness (via the cessation of the Holy Spirit's restraining ministry), this "empowerment of error", a unique facilitation of human self-deception, will drive unbelievers the world over into active allegiance to the devil as never before in the service of his earthly minion, antichrist, so that the true lawless nature of mankind apart from God (through faith in Christ), and apart from God's institutions (morality, law and nationalism) will be glaringly obvious.²⁴⁰

And then the lawless one (i.e., antichrist) will be revealed, [that same one] whom the Lord Jesus will slay with the breath of His mouth and destroy when He appears at His [glorious]

return – [that same lawless one] whose appearance [will come about] through Satan's **empowerment** [and will be] accompanied by every [sort of] false miracle, both signs and portents, and by every [sort of] unrighteous deception [designed] for those who are perishing, [namely those who will believe these lies] because they did not open themselves up to the love for the truth so as to be saved. And for this [very] reason God is going to send upon them *an empowerment of error* (i.e., facilitating it; cf. Ex.14:4) so that they may believe the lie in order that they may be condemned, [even all those] who have not believed the truth but have [instead] approved of unrighteousness.
2nd Thessalonians 2:8-12

This passage shows us that just as antichrist's appearance on the stage of history will come about through Satan's "empowerment" and will be associated with all manner of deceptive activities, so the unbelieving world of that time will receive a special "empowerment" to hasten their belief in these deceptions and their infatuation with antichrist. This empowering of antichrist by Satan and the false signs and miracles which lend power to his deceptions will be possible, as we have seen, only because of the removal of the Spirit's restraining ministry. But in order to bring complete polarization to the world, in order to make unquestionably clear who is for God and who is for the devil, God Himself will also send a special "empowerment of error" upon unbelievers (all who have already rejected Him and His truth) with the result that they will embrace antichrist and all the satanic lies he represents (thus removing as neutral parties the present vast middle-ground of non-believing good citizens who, though they have no use for Jesus Christ, are at present moral and law-abiding in the main, and are for the most part not overly active in supporting the devil's cause).

The Greek word *pláne* (πλάνη) translated here as "error" (literally, a "wandering"; cf. the "planets" which "wander" through the sky) is the same one used in the phrase "spirit of error" in 1st John 4:6. In that context we saw that the "error" in question represented the satanic lie as a totality, and the same is true here as well. But in order to show the difference between this passage referring to future events and the other passages just studied which speak to the present operation of satanic influence, it will be helpful to place together here the operative phrases from all four:

- "The mystery of lawlessness" (2Thes.2:7) = present satanic influence leading to lawlessness (active rejection of all forms of God's truth).
- "The spirit of error" (1Jn.4:6) = present satanic influence leading to "wandering" from the truth of God in all its forms.
- "The spirit of antichrist" (1Jn.4:3) = present satanic influence leading to antichrist-like behavior which rejects the truth of God in every way.
- "The **empowerment** of error" (2Thes.2:11) = **future divine facilitation** of unbeliever susceptibility to the satanic influence of the previous three passages during the Tribulation.

The critical fact that the "empowerment of error" is a divine facilitation of creature free will has been largely and widely misunderstood (as reflected by its mistranslation in most of the major versions: "strong delusion" KJV, "powerful delusion" NIV, "deluding influence" NASB). Traditional translations focusing on the idea of "delusion" miss the two key points here that 1) this is a *facilitation* of the free will of unbelievers (rather than an overriding of their right to choose), and 2) this is an empowerment to believe and serve the devil, one which *comes from God* rather than Satan. But these are precisely the two important aspects of the tribulational "empowerment of error" which distinguish it from the other three phrases dealing with present day satanic influence in the world.

First, the "error" or "wandering" here is an *active* behavior on the part of unbelievers who receive this empowerment, not a *passive* experience. That is to say, these unbelievers are not being violated against their will, rather, their will is being *empowered* to break through the divinely erected barriers that currently would prevent them from ever believing and serving Satan to the degree that the world of that day will do (cf. Jer.5:5; Hos.4:2). They will be given exceptional "latitude to wander" from God's truth into the arms of the devil and his antichrist, but the *desire* to do so will come entirely from them, their choosing, their free will. Secondly, this empowerment comes from God, yet it is in no way contrary to His righteousness. As He did with the Pharaoh of the Exodus (Ex.14:4), God is simply giving the unbelieving world of the tribulational period a special ability to overcome the present psychological barriers that would cause even an unbeliever to tread lightly. This is merely a variation on a theme of what we presently see at work in the world. For if anyone were to suddenly behold Jesus in all His glory, or God Almighty on His holy throne, they would doubtless be unable to refrain from worship and "belief" of a sort – but not really out of what we would consider "a free choice" (cf. Jas.2:19). The glory of God, the overwhelming reality of the truth of Him, is necessarily veiled from the eyes of the world so that the choice for or against God, for or against His Christ, may come from the heart and be a genuine reflection of every person's legitimate free will. In a similar way, the human conscience and normal human trepidation in regard to the power of law are powerful restraining forces that keep the majority of the unbelieving human race in check. Just as looting and lawlessness intensify whenever law and order break down, so during the Tribulation the psychological and physical leeway unbelievers will have to wander from God's truth without being overcome by fear and foreboding or hindered by legal and social pressure will be dramatically increased, and the result will be a near unanimous allegiance to antichrist on the part of those who lack faith in Jesus Christ.

While it is only during the Tribulation that God will "empower error" to such an exceptional degree that it will encompass virtually all unbelievers, the principle of God allowing those who *willfully* reject Him and who *willfully* reject His truth to plunge ever deeper into error and delusion is operative even today. That principle is given its most detailed expression by the apostle Paul in the first chapter of the book of Romans (compare Jeremiah chapter two). Here we see the consequences which befall those who willfully reject the truth of God and of His law (i.e., who reject both the truth He provides about His own existence leading to salvation, and also the truth He provides about basic law and morality necessary for even unbelievers to live in peace and decency):

[In contrast to the righteousness of God which is being revealed (i.e., dispensed) through faith (vv.16-17)], God's wrath is being revealed (i.e., dispensed) from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness – on men who suppress the truth in their unrighteousness. For that which can be known about God [from everyday experience] is obvious to them, because God has made it obvious. His nature, though invisible, is nevertheless plainly apparent, and has been since His foundation of the world, for it may be clearly inferred from this creation of His – [this is true of] both his eternal power and his divinity – so that they are without any excuse: they knew about God, but they neither honored Him as God nor thanked Him. Instead, they gave themselves over to [the] vanity [of this world] in their speculations, and their senseless hearts were filled with darkness. Claiming to be wise, they became foolish, for they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for images and likenesses of corruptible men, of birds and beasts and reptiles. For this [very] reason, God abandoned them to corruption in the lusts of their own hearts, that they might mutually defile their bodies (i.e., the very thing they lusted to do). [And so] they exchanged the truth of God for the lie [of the devil], and worshiped and served the creature [Satan] in place of the Creator who is [worthy to be] blessed forever. Amen. [Yes,] for this [very] reason God abandoned them to defiling passions. For their females exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones, and likewise also the males abandoned natural relations with the female and burned with desire one for another, males for males, acting out their shamefulfulness in full, and in their own [flesh] fully receiving the reward due *for their error (pláne)*. And just as they did not see fit to keep God in their hearts, God abandoned them to their unfit minds, to do things which are not fitting, filled up with every [sort of] unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, full of envy, murder, strife, guile, maliciousness, gossips, slanderers, God-forsaken-[and]-forsaking, insolent, arrogant, boasters, devisers of evils, not concerned for their parents, unthinking, unreconcilable, uncaring, unmerciful, men who though they had full knowledge of God's righteous decree, namely, that those who do such things are worthy of death, not only did [such] things themselves, but even commended those who made it their practice [to do them].

Romans 1:18-32 (cf. Mark 7:20-23)

As in the case of the 2nd Thessalonians chapter two passage, it is deliberate and willful error which begins this process and leads to God "abandoning" such individuals to their own lusts and devices, wherein they proceed from bad to worse. In our own experience and observation of the world we can clearly see this pattern in the case of most career criminals, terrorists, and morally degenerate types. However, these are still, blessedly, the exception among the unbelieving population of the world. For while the majority of the world's population has, tragically, rejected the knowledge of God which leads to salvation (i.e., the recognition and acceptance of the existence and essential nature of God from observing the world He has made leading then to the gospel of Jesus Christ), by far most unbelievers are law-abiding citizens (i.e., they have *not* rejected the morality, law and nationalism set up by God that the world may continue to function in relative peace and normalcy at most times and in most places so that there may be continued freedom to choose for Him and His Son). But rather than merely "abandoning" only the willfully reprobate among the unbelieving population to the full fury of satanic influence, during the Tribulation God will actually

enable and empower the entire unbelieving population to choose wholeheartedly for the devil's deceptions embodied in the person of his antichrist.

The full unleashing of the "mystery of lawlessness" during the Tribulation coupled with its corollary principle, the "empowerment of error", will combine to largely eliminate the middle-ground position for unbelievers who, though at the present moment they are sleep-walking through life apart from God, are, in the majority of cases, not actively giving themselves over to sin and evil to such a horrendous degree, and are for the most part not openly and actively enlisting themselves in the devil's undertakings in any obvious fashion.

During the Tribulation, with law and nationalism practically eliminated as stays against Satan's operations, and with the removal of the restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit, the middle ground position will be completely undercut, and God will hasten the process of demanding choice from the world by empowering those who choose against Him and Jesus Christ to throw aside all restraint and actively ally with Satan instead.

I came to cast a fire upon the earth, and how I wish that it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo [first], and how I am pressed until it be completed! Do you think that I have come to bring about unity (lit., "peace") on the earth? No! I tell you [I have come] rather [to bring about] division. For from now on there will be five in one house divided three against two and two against three. And they will [all] be divided "a father against his son and a son against his father and a mother against her daughter and a daughter against her mother and a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law".

Luke 12:49-53

The fact that in the Tribulation there will for this reason be few neutral parties will greatly increase the strain upon believers, further contributing to the bitterness of life, and hastening the process of the Great Apostasy in the case of all those lukewarm believers whose faith is not up to withstanding such pressure.

So be aware of this, that in the last days there will be difficult times. For [in those times] there will be men (i.e., false teachers; cf. chap.2) concerned only for themselves, devoted to money, egotistic, arrogant, blasphemous, not concerned for their parents, ungrateful, irreverent, implacable, slanderers, uninhibited, savage, despising the good, betrayers, impetuous, megalomaniacal, devotees of pleasure rather than lovers of God, possessing an [outward] appearance of godliness, but [in reality] having rejected its [true] power. From such men turn away. Of this sort are those who [even in our own day] worm their way into households and take captive the [spiritually] weak²⁴¹ who are loaded down with sins, leading them astray with various lusts, [victims who consequently,] though always learning, are never able to accept the truth. In the same way that [Pharaoh's court magicians] Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, for their minds have been corrupted and they have been found wanting concerning the faith. But they will not keep on striding forward forever. Their folly will become obvious to all, just as in the case of those

two.

2nd Timothy 3:1-9

Here we have a chilling view of the behavior pattern we can expect during the Tribulation which will come about as a result of the "empowerment of error" principle as we saw it stated in 2nd Thessalonians 2:8-12. Comparing these verses to the previously quoted Romans 1:18-32 passage, we can easily see that the similarities, especially the lists of sinful trends and characteristics, are for all intents and purposes identical. The main *difference* between Romans 1:18-32 and what we have in the passage quoted immediately above is that in Romans chapter one these behavioral trends flow from God's permissive **allowing** of error, a principle presently operational in our own day primarily affecting that minority of unbelievers who willfully and deliberately reject all categories of truth (including basic morality, law, and good citizenship). However, in the 2nd Timothy chapter three passage above we see the results of God's active *empowering* of error which will affect nearly *all* unbelievers and to a degree not yet experienced, as the previous majority middle-ground of nominally moral, law-abiding, patriotic unbelievers melts away. Even today, all unbelievers are in the devil's grasp (cf. Eph.2:1-5; 2Tim.2:25-26; Heb.2:14-15), but, prior to the "empowerment of error", most are not willfully and actively carrying out Satan's agenda (being restrained from doing so by conscience, morality, and law). As a result of this shift from God's "allowing and abandoning" to "facilitating and empowering" of the self-delusion that comes from rejecting truth, the Tribulation will be a time of little or no gray-area between the active and committed adherents of the devil on the one hand (constituting the vast majority of the world's population at that time) and the dedicated followers of Jesus Christ on the other (constituting an embattled and, especially during the Tribulation's second half, persecuted minority).

By actually facilitating error during the Tribulation rather than merely allowing it as is presently the case, God will graphically demonstrate beyond all doubt the real thoughts and intents of unbelievers' hearts by *empowering* them to do what they really want to do but had previously been restrained from doing on account of God's mercy directed toward the world at large (cf. Rev.16:8-11):

And *[all] the rest of mankind* who were not killed by these plagues directed at them (i.e., the warning judgments of the Tribulation's first half) *did not repent* of the works of their hands so as not to worship demons and idols made of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood, which are not able to see or hear or walk about, nor did they repent of their murders nor their potions nor their sexually immoral acts nor their thefts.

Revelation 9:20-21

Of particular note in this passage is the role played by witchcraft and sorcery through the use of various philters indicated by the word "potion". Along with other words of this same root (from which we derive pharmacy and pharmaceutical), the Greek word *pharmakon* (φάρμακον) is never used in the New Testament apart from witchcraft and sorcery (cf. Gal.5:20; Rev.18:23; 21:8; 22:15), since, from the biblical point of view, mind-altering drug use is always demon-related. Compare, for example, the use of hallucinogenic agents in the Eleusinian mysteries, a crucial element in the production of "ecstasy" (or "error" as we

should say) in such cults which is often overlooked. In this clear collaboration between drug use and devil-worship, we see how in the Tribulation the true satanic nature of all anti-God practices will be made crystal clear, and those who partake of them left with no excuse.

Negotiating this world is difficult enough for believers under present circumstance, and the difficulty of how to relate to unbelievers is no small part of the problem. Inasmuch as the difficulty of this problem will increase astronomically during the Tribulation when virtually the entire unbelieving population turns actively hostile under the leadership of antichrist, we need briefly here to compare the mechanics and effects of unbeliever degeneracy at the present time with the acceleration predicted to take place once the Tribulation begins. While the scope, magnitude and circumstances of the "empowerment of error" will be quite different from the "abandoning to error" operational today, its mechanics and effects are identical. In both cases the initiation of the process is found in the unbeliever's rejection of God's truth. In neither case is God causing the unbeliever's descent into self-inflicted spiritual blindness, hardening of his own heart, searing of his own conscience, and engaging in ever accelerating sinful and evil behavior. In both cases rejection of God's truth and God's will inevitably leads the person involved into believing the devil's lies and carrying out the devil's will instead of his own will (for no one is really their own free agent except when it comes to making the choice of whether to serve God or Satan: cf. 1Cor.12:1-3).

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you no longer walk as the unbelievers (lit., "gentiles") walk in futility of mind, darkened in thought, and separated from the life of God because of the [deliberate] ignorance (i.e., arising from rejection of truth) that is in them because of the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity [to God's truth], they have given themselves over to sensuality to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

Ephesians 4:17-19

But while both at present and in the future this process of unbeliever descent into error has at its core the rejection of truth (i.e., a failure to believe God), and proceeds, if unchecked by law and morality, to desensitize the conscience and harden the heart, there are presently limits imposed by the Spirit's ministry of restraint which, working together with the conscience and with the visible divine institutions, restrict both the degree of degeneracy to be allowed in most individuals, and the extent to which lawlessness may advance worldwide. These restraints and barriers arrest the process in most cases, at least to some degree. During the Tribulation, however, in the absence of the Spirit's ministry and with the diminution of all other restrictions, the barriers of conscience and morality will provide little resistance to the divine empowering of the unbelieving will to devote itself to sin and evil. The most pertinent biblical parallel we have for this stepped up "empowerment of error" is the case of Pharaoh and his army who were allowed to oppose God beyond what, under normal circumstances, a human being would be capable of doing in the face the manifest and undeniable power of God (Ex.14:4; 14:17).²⁴² These dual pressures (of removed divine restraint and empowered hardening of the conscience) will barbarize the world's unbelieving population as never before, and will consequently subject believers to

enormous stress, breaking the fragile faith of many, and thus contributing significantly to the Great Apostasy.

As Christians, believers now made one with Jesus Christ, we are no longer of this world (Jn.17:14-16). We remain here, not as a part of the world, but as His witnesses of light in a world of darkness (1Pet.2:9). Through our continuing loyalty to Him, we demonstrate to all who observe us (men and angels alike: 1Cor.4:9; 11:10; Heb.13:2; 1Pet.1:12; cf. 1Tim.3:16) the genuineness of our faith and of His faithfulness in preserving us in this hostile environment.²⁴³ We are not of this darkness (Acts 26:18), but, just as Jesus was sent into this world to serve for our eternal benefit, so we remain in this world in order to serve our Lord Jesus Christ (Jn.17:18; 20:21; 1Cor.5:8; Gal.6:9-10; Phil.1:21; Jas.2:14-26; cf. Matt.28:18-20). It is therefore not at all surprising that the world hates us just as it hated Him (Jn.15:18-19; 17:14; 1Jn.3:13), or that we are commanded to hate our lives in this world (Jn.12:25; cf. Lk.14:25-34) and to have no love for it (Jas.4:4; 1Jn.2:15-17). Furthermore, and particularly pertinent to our present discussion, we are told to be circumspect about the relationships we have in this world which are not Christian-based (cf. 1Cor.7:39; Eph.5:5-7).

Don't let yourselves be mismatched together in the yoke with unbelievers (i.e., in any close, intimate association). For what partnership does righteousness have with immorality, or what fellowship does light have with darkness? What agreement is there between Christ and Belial (i.e., the devil)? What agreement is there between God's temple and idols? For we are the temple of the Living God, just as God has said: "I will dwell among them and walk among [them], and I will be their God, and they will be My people. Therefore come out from the midst of them (i.e., the ungodly) and separate yourselves" says the Lord, "and do not touch anything unclean. Then I will receive you and will be to you as a Father, and you will be to Me as sons and daughters" says the Lord Almighty.

2nd Corinthians 6:14-18

And yet it is also patently clear that, as witnesses of light to the world, we are not to completely isolate ourselves from it (cf. 1Pet.2:12), we are not to put our light under a bushel (cf. Lk.11:33).

You are the light of the world. A city built on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and [so] it illuminates everything in the house. Let the light within you shine in this way before men, so that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:14-16

Disassociation from other Christians who are behaving shamefully is indeed mandated (1Cor.5:11-13). However, we cannot and should not try to remove ourselves physically from the world so as to prevent any contact whatsoever with unbelievers.

I wrote you in my [previous] letter not to consort with immoral persons – not [that you should] altogether [refrain from having any contact whatsoever] with greedy, crooked, and

idolatrous people, for in that case you would have to depart from this world [entirely]!
1st Corinthians 5:9-10

Maintaining the proper relationship with the unbelieving and secular world thus offers Christians who are truly committed to following Jesus Christ a unique challenge. How do we keep ourselves pure from the world (Jas.1:27; cf. Jn.17:17; 17:19; Rom.12:2; 2Pet.1:4; 2:20), while at the same time continuing to live in it and conduct our essential activities, some of which are not only necessary but are a witness to unbelievers when performed honorably as unto the Lord (Acts 20:34-35; Eph.4:28; Col.3:23; 2Thes.3:6-12; cf. 1Pet.3:1-2)?

And [we encourage you] to make it your ambition to live quiet lives and to attend to your own business and work with your own hands as we commanded you, so that you may maintain a seemingly walk towards those outside [the Church] and have need of nothing.
1st Thessalonians 4:11-12

This has always been a narrow path to traverse, even at times and in places of little or no outright persecution from the state or society in general. In the Tribulation, however, because of the removal of restraint upon and empowerment of human sinfulness and evil, the level of difficulty Christians will encounter while interacting with the secular world will increase by an order of magnitude. In the past, except in times of exceptional persecution, a Christian could expect at least some degree of civility in relations with the unbelieving world at large, and, because of the hedge of nationalism, at least some safe haven in the world where sufficient law and order existed for the practice of true Christianity (cf. 1Tim.2:1-2; and see Rom.13:1-7; 1Pet.2:13-17). Antichrist's world-wide government will change all that, and in the vacuum of restraint left by the cessation of the Spirit's ministry, with no one to convict the world of its evil (cf. Jn.8:36), and with the same spirit of facilitating self-deception poured out upon all unbelieving humanity that allowed the Pharaoh of the Exodus to reach new heights of lawlessness, the process of searing consciences and hardening hearts will accelerate. The point where most of humanity is reduced to a unprecedentedly lawless and sinful state will be reached with shocking rapidity, leaving believers to lament the times and increasing exponentially the challenge of living in the world without compromise while at the same time maintaining Christian love. Even for Christians of strong faith who refuse to wither in this intense heat, the increasingly barbaric and hostile pagan world will be by far an even more difficult place to live for Jesus Christ than is the case at present.

How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but You do not listen? Or cry out to You, "Violence!" but You do not save? Why do You make me look at injustice? Why do You tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. Therefore the law is paralyzed and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous so that justice is perverted.
Habakkuk 1:2-4²⁴⁴NIV

Keep this foremost in your mind: in the end times mockers will come [on the scene], ridiculing [the truth] and acting out of their own selfish lusts, saying, "Where is that 'return'

He promised? Everything is the same now as it was since the beginning of the world, since the time our forefathers passed on."

2nd Peter 3:3-4

But you, beloved, remember the words of the apostles of our Lord, spoken to you before, that at the end of the age there will be mockers who will behave after the manner of their own unholy lusts.

Jude 1:17-18

Do not believe a friend. Do not put your confidence in a companion. Guard the entrances of your mouth from her who lies in your bosom. For a son will treat his father disgracefully, and a daughter will rise up against her mother, and a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law. A man's enemies will be those of his own household.

Micah 7:5-6 (cf. Jer.9:4-6; Matt.10:34-35; Lk.12:51-53)

And at that time **many will fall away** (i.e., will apostatize) and will betray each other and will hate each other.

Matthew 24:10

Thus the release of so much vile activity in both the seen and unseen realms will make life in the Tribulation very difficult to endure for believers in particular, especially since this base of degenerating behavior will be layered upon the diabolical world-system under antichrist, a system which in turn will bring about an unprecedented deluge of divine judgment upon the earth. The principle that removing restraint upon evil (be it through law, or conscience, or divine agency) results in exacerbating wicked conduct is both intuitive and evident enough from numerous historical and contemporary examples. More importantly, it is also well documented in scripture (cf. Jer.5:1-5):

1) Removing the restraint of swift execution of the law accelerates criminal behavior:

When the penalty for evil deeds is not quickly enforced, men's hearts are filled with thoughts of doing evil.

Ecclesiastes 8:11

2) Decline in cultural and moral standards encourages wicked behavior:

The wicked strut confidently about, when what is despicable is exalted in the eyes of men.

Psalms 12:8

3) Empowerment of the wicked accelerates their evil and discourages righteous behavior:

When the righteous exult [in victory], it is most beautiful [to behold], but when the wicked rise [to power], men hide themselves.

Proverbs 28:12 (cf. 28:28)

4) Rejection of God's standards accelerates lawlessness:

When there is no [respect for] divine communication (lit., "vision" [from God]), the people are unrestrained, but he who obeys the Law will be blessed.

Proverbs 29:18

5) Rejection of God's Word and increasing criminality accelerate the breakdown of restraint:

Hear the Word of the Lord, O sons of Israel, for the Lord has a quarrel with the people of [this] land. For there is no truth, no mercy, no knowledge of God in the land. [Only] cursing, and deception, and murder, and adultery. They have broken through [all restraints], and bloodshed responds to bloodshed.

Hosea 4:1-2

6) Increasing lawlessness reduces restraint to the point of stifling righteous expression:

For I know that your transgressions are many and your sins are numerous. You oppress the righteous man, you take bribes, and you turn the innocent away [from justice] at the gate. So the prudent man keeps quiet at [such a] time [as] this, for it is an evil time.

Amos 5:12-13

7) Rejection of truth reduces restraint to the point of making righteous behavior dangerous:

Since truth is lacking, he who turns aside from evil makes himself a prey.

Isaiah 59:15

All of these results and more of the principle that removed restraint produces a corresponding increase in wickedness and lawlessness will obtain from the time of the cessation of the Holy Spirit's restraining ministry and the corresponding "empowerment of error" until our Lord returns. What is to be noted here in particular is that the reduction thereby during the Tribulation of the vast mass of humanity to a heightened state of sinful and lawless behavior will tend to demoralize the righteous and will thus be a major contributor to the acceleration of the Great Apostasy as we have it from our Lord Himself:

(12) Now because of the *increase of lawlessness* [at that time], the love of the many will cool. (13) But he who endures until the end, this [is the one who] will be saved.

Matthew 24:12-13

Our Lord's words about the exceptional endurance required for deliverance at the end of this quotation in *verse thirteen* must be digested in order to properly appreciate what is meant in the preceding *verse twelve*. That is to say, exceptional endurance will be necessary to survive with faith intact this environment of legal and ethical anarchy. For the trend will be for this increase of lawlessness and the corresponding degradation in quality of life which will accompany it to occasion a worldwide hardening and souring of attitudes on the

part of almost everyone, unbelievers and believers alike (i.e., "the many" in this verse, or *hoi polloi*; Greek: οἱ πολλοί). To use an analogy, it is much easier to reflect Christian love and cheerfulness when you are well and feeling well than when you are sick, and likewise much easier to do so when things are rolling along nicely for you than when you are under some sort of difficult pressure or testing. The unequaled lawlessness of the Tribulation, played out against the backdrop of antichrist's government and God's judgments upon the world as a result, will make life so bitter that it will be as if a large burden of chronic sickness and pressure were piled upon the backs of the entire population of the world ("the many") – in addition to whatever troubles each individual already possesses. Given these conditions, it should come as no surprise whatsoever that human kindness, civility, and tolerance (the meaning here in Matt.24:12 of *agape*; Greek: ἀγάπη) often present to at least some degree under favorable circumstances, should virtually disappear from the world, as the charitable inclinations of nearly everyone on planet earth experience a "cooling" under the pressure of tribulational events, the increase of lawlessness in particular.

Jesus' warning to us His followers in verse thirteen to be on guard against this danger tells us in no uncertain terms that this pressure will figure large in the apostatizing of many lukewarm believers (the normal status quo, unfortunately, for the majority of Christians in this final Church era of Laodicea: see part 2A of this series). For if one's love is already lukewarm, what can it become if it cools further than outright cold? As the essential Christian virtue, love cannot be disassociated from faith (Gal.5:6; cf. 1Cor.13:13; Eph.1:15; Col.1:4-5; 1Thes.1:3; 2Thes.1:3). And we know that when faith is truly cold it is truly dead (the analogy being to the life leaving the body: 2Kng.4:34 and Jas.2:17-26; cf. Rom.12:11). Cold love is therefore essentially equivalent to no faith (cf. 1Cor.13:2b). The lack of warmth in the "body" of Christian virtue is a sign that one has allowed one's faith, love and hope to die under the pressures of persecution (i.e., apostasy has set in):²⁴⁵

And he who was sown on the rocky places, this is the one who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy. He has no roots [to his faith], however, but lasts only a short time. So when **tribulation or persecution** occurs on account of the Word, he is immediately tripped up (i.e., he apostatizes).

Matthew 13:20-21

And these [second types] who are sown on the rocky places are similar. Whenever they hear the Word they immediately receive it with joy, although they have no root [of faith] in themselves, but are only temporary [believers]. When **tribulation or persecution** because of the Word comes [their way], they are immediately tripped up (i.e., they apostatize).

Mark 4:16-17

And those [whose seed of faith fell] on the rock do receive the Word with joy when they hear it. However these [types] have no root [to their faith]. They believe for a while, but *in time of testing* they apostatize.

Luke 8:13

In addition to the lawlessness-induced trend of unbelievers becoming cold and sullen and of lukewarm believers becoming apostate, we must also take our Lord's words at Matthew

24:12-13 to mean the cooling of love even among believers who were previously zealous for Him. This is a sobering thought for committed disciples of Jesus Christ, and a warning to make the most of the time at hand to prepare spiritually for the troubles ahead. For, as always, the only way to be sure of salvation and spirituality is to keep marching ahead in spiritual growth. Finally, one very positive point we need to be careful not to miss in this passage is Jesus' qualification of His statement: "the love *of the many* will cool". This means that, on the one hand, not every believer who is a zealous disciple of Jesus Christ will allow tribulational pressures, horrendous as they will be, to adversely affect their Christian walk (indeed, given the multitude of martyrs the Tribulation will produce, the number in this category will be large in gross terms if not in percentage of world or Christian population: cf. Rev.7:9-14). Therefore we have every reason to hope that at least *some* portion of the lukewarm population of Laodicea will, under these pressures, be prodded in the opposite, positive direction, responding to our Lord's injunction to "become zealous and repent" (Rev.3:19). This is indeed encouraging news for warm and lukewarm alike, but it goes without saying that those of us who have already committed ourselves to be zealous for Jesus Christ here and now rather than awaiting the "shock treatment" of the Tribulation to provide motivation will have much cause to be grateful for any and all spiritual growth and preparation we are able to make ahead of that trying time. For while this present world is already a very dark place in spiritual terms (Jn.1:5 cf. 2Pet.1:19), a kingdom of darkness (Col.1:13) dominated by the forces of darkness (Eph.6:12) from which darkness we have been called forth into God's light (1Pet.2:9; cf. Eph.5:8; 1Jn.2:8-9), nevertheless, the spiritual darkness of the Tribulation will be so intense as to make this present time seem daylight by comparison (cf. Is.21:11-12; 59:9-21; 60:1-2; Joel 2:1-2; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph.1:14-15; Jn.9:4; 1Thes.5:1-8). Let us therefore resolve, if that dark time should come upon us, to stay faithful to the light of truth until our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the glorious Day Star, rises at last and puts an end to that terrible night:

Yet I consider the prophetically inspired Word (i.e. the Bible) even more reliable (i.e., than the transfiguration of vv.16-18). You too would do well to pay the closest attention to it (i.e., scripture), just as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the Morning Star rises (i.e., the Second Advent).

2nd Peter 1:19

b. The dearth of Bible teaching: This second major cause of the Great Apostasy is an exclusive concern of believers. While the unleashing of lawlessness and consequent degeneration of the behavior of unbelievers will only affect believers indirectly (by increasing the external pressures on faith), the coming dearth of genuine Bible teaching anticipated during the Tribulation will have a direct negative impact contributing to apostasy. As in the case of the former cause above, so in this case it will be almost exclusively the lukewarm members of the Body of Christ adversely affected by this coming famine of spiritual food. For having been complacent about solid spiritual nutrition in good times, they will find turning to substantive Bible teaching in hard times a difficult transition, especially considering that it will be very hard to find (cf. 1Sam.3:1; 28:6; Prov.29:18; Mic.3:4-7).

"Behold, days are coming", says the Lord, "when I shall send a famine upon the earth. Not a famine of bread nor a drought of water but [a dearth] of hearing the words of the Lord. [Men] will stagger from sea to sea, and will wander from the north to the east to seek the Word of the Lord, but they will not find [it]".

Amos 8:11

Therefore you will stumble in the daytime, for even the prophet[s] have [already] stumbled with you by night. My people are destroyed for lack of [the] knowledge [of God]. Because you have rejected [this] knowledge, I will reject you from being a priest to Me. Because you have forgotten the teaching (*torah*) of your God, I also will forget your sons.

Hosea 4:5-6

In the passages quoted and listed above, the common element in the dearth of the Word of God is a prior rejection of that Word by those who are supposedly God's people (clear from the contexts of Amos eight and Hosea four). What we have here in principle, in the historical examples given, and in the Tribulation to come, therefore, is not our God holding back truth from those who love Him, but an unwillingness on His part to continue supplying good teaching to those who have chronically and willfully rejected it in favor of false teaching or even no teaching at all (Is.28:9-13; Ezek.20:3-4; 20:30-31; Matt.13:11-17; Mk.4:12; Lk.8:10).

The Lord will be with you if you will be with Him. And if you seek Him, He will be found of you, but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you. For many days, Israel was without the God of truth, and without a priest to teach, and without teaching (lit., *torah*). But in her distress she returned to the Lord God of Israel and sought Him and He was found of her.

2nd Chronicles 15:2b-4

And He said to me, "Go and say to this people, 'Hear well, but do not comprehend. See well, but do not understand'. Harden the heart of this people, make their ears heavy, and blind their eyes, so that they may not see with their eyes, nor hear with their ears, nor understand with their hearts, nor repent and be healed".

Isaiah 6:9-10

This lack of demand for the Word of God is certainly in keeping with the trends of our own day, the final Church era of lukewarm Laodicea (see part 2A of this series). For we can already see at work in our time a demand-driven consumer Christianity which seeks out entertainment rather than substantive teaching of the Word of God.

For the time will come when they will not put up with sound teaching, but will [instead], desiring to have their ears scratched, heap up by their own [devices] teachers to match their specific lusts. And they will turn their ears from the truth and resort instead to fictions.

2nd Timothy 4:3-4

Finally, there is another cause of the dearth of spiritual food during the Tribulation which has nothing to do with present apathy. We know from Revelation chapter thirteen alone that antichrist's worldwide religion will make it very difficult for those Christians who truly

follow and worship God to survive physically. Therefore it is not amiss to assume that the beast and his false prophet will add to this physical persecution a spiritual one as well, making it illegal and next to impossible for believers to assemble or share with each other the fruits of their spiritual gifts. Nothing, of course, is impossible for God, and so we can be confident that we will never lack the essential spiritual food we need for our spiritual well-being. That does not mean that we will have it as good as we have it now, however, and this is certainly something to keep in mind when we forgo opportunities to take in the Word of God, opportunities which are going to be much rarer in that future day. So while the dearth of Bible teaching during the Tribulation will not come as direct result of the overall present day apathy in the Church, in the case of individual believers who are apathetic to the Word now, that future shortage of teaching will be all the more difficult to bear (in the same way that those who are malnourished suffer more in times of famine than those who are hale and hearty when it begins).

God provides for all our needs. But it is well to consider while there is still time and opportunity to address the issue that *part* of His provision is advanced warning which allows his children to prepare ahead of time. Just as God sent word through Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams that seven years of famine were ahead (and it is no accident that this is the exact length of time of the Tribulation), so we ought, as Joseph advised Pharaoh to do, take every possible advantage of the years of prosperity that precede the famine that we may have abundant spiritual resources – spiritual preparation and spiritual maturity based upon hearing, learning, believing and applying the teachings of the Word of God – to weather that dark time ahead (Gen.41:1-57). After the famine has started is far from the best time to begin.

So Jesus said to them, "For a little while yet, the Light is among you. Walk while you have the light, so the darkness doesn't overtake you. Indeed, the person who walks in darkness doesn't know where he is going. While you have the Light, believe in the Light, that you may become sons of light."

John 12:35-36

c. The rise of false teaching: In addition to the pressure exerted by increased lawlessness and the difficulties created by the dearth of spiritual food, a third major cause for the massive apostasy among believers during the Tribulation will be the prevalence of persuasive false teaching. Our Lord's teachings in particular are replete with warnings about the danger of deception and the need for alertness during this troubling period ahead (Matt.24:5-6; 24:11; 24:24-27; 24:42; 25:13; Mk.13:5-6; 13:9; 13:23; 13:33; 13:35; 13:37; Lk.12:40; 17:23; 21:8; 21:36; cf. 2Thes.2:3-12; 1Tim.4:1-5; 2Tim.3:1-13), so that we would do well to spend some time here studying this threat.

1) The persuasiveness of tribulational false teaching: While the pressure of rampant lawless behavior will push believers toward apostasy and the famine of spiritual sustenance will reduce their resistance to apostasy, the false teaching of the Tribulation will exert a tremendous *pull* on believers who are not solidly grounded in the truth. The devil has always gone to great lengths to make his false doctrines attractive, and all who buy into them are said to be caught in his snare (2Tim.2:25-26). However, the conditions we have

been studying which will exist during the Tribulation (lawlessness, empowerment of error, shortage of Bible teaching, general hardships of an unprecedented nature, etc.) will definitely contribute to the receptiveness of the world to Satan's grand offensive against the truth of God, and will help to create the complete spiritual polarization we have been studying which is destined to strip away the present atheistic and agnostic skepticism so that the "sword" may clearly divide the world into the two camps (Lk.12:49-53), believers and those committed to the devil's pseudo-Messiah.

To begin with general principles, perhaps the most important thing to understand about false teachers and the false teaching they purvey is that they are skilled at giving the *appearance* of being true and of teaching the truth even while they are false and teach only lies:

- They turn truth upside down, "putting bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter" (Is.5:20).
- They teach man-made precepts as if they were from God (Matt.15:9).
- They deceive through flattery to serve their own appetites (Rom.16:17-18).
- They preach a different gospel and a different Jesus to seduce believers (2Cor.11:3-4).
- As servants of Satan, they are only masquerading as servants of Christ (2Cor.11:13-15).
- They show a zeal for their converts, but for evil purposes (Gal.4:17).
- They have no scruples in the use of trickery to deceive their listeners (Eph.4:14).
- They spread false teaching like gangrene and oppose the truth (2Tim.2:14-3:9).
- They claim to know God but deny Him with their every action (Tit.1:16).
- In their greed, they make up stories in order to better exploit their listeners (2Pet.2:1-3).
- They entice people to follow them by appealing to their lusts and desires (2Pet.2:17-22).
- After infiltrating Christian fellowship, they teach that grace is a license to sin (Jude 1:3-4).
- They gain a following by advancing themselves and flattering others (Jude 1:16).
- They claim to be important persons in Christ's Church, but in reality are wicked (Rev.2:2).

In addition to effectively (and wrongly) portraying themselves as true and as teachers of truth, other common factors which link the false teachers described in these passages include their methodology of flattering, seducing and lying to their victims, promoting their own glory and prosperity at the expense of their victims, and having concern only for themselves even as they exploit those who believe their lies. Since Satan's deception of Eve in the garden, the devil has always been adept at using attractive lies and half-truths to

deceive and mislead (Jn.8:44; Eph.6:11), and at no time will this method be more evident than during the Tribulation (Matt.24:5; 24:24; Mk.13:5-6; 13:22-23; Lk.21:8; 2Thes.2:3-12; 1Tim.4:1; 2Tim.3:1-9; 2Pet.3:1-17; 1Jn.4:1-6). Lying, deception, and leading into error through persuasive appeals to men's hidden desires are all part of the essential methodology of false teaching, a methodology which is in sharp contrast to that of genuine teachers of the Word of God who eschew all such deceit (Jn.7:18; 2Cor.4:2; cf. 2Cor.1:12; 1:18-24; 12:16-17).²⁴⁶

In conceptual terms, satanic false teaching is a progression. First, the devil undermines God's authority, convincing his victims that God is untruthful, unable or unwilling to help, and, in general unnecessary and irrelevant in the face of "more important" issues (cf. the assurances given to Eve, "You will not die"; Gen.3:4). Next, Satan advances the idea that we are, can be, or will be like God if only we follow his program instead of God's (cf. the tempting of Eve, "You will be like God"; Gen.3:4). Finally, in the case of those who buy into the devil's first two lies, Satan attempts to convince them that by carrying out their desires (and the devil's will) they are actually helping God (cf. Eve's willing participation in the temptation of Adam with self-righteous satisfaction; Gen.3:6). The first lie, motivated by greed and fear, focuses our attention upon attaining temporal security here and now (instead of on the issue of eternal life), thus ignoring the key fact of our mortality and the need to find a solution from God alone. The second lie, motivated by subjective pride, focuses our attention upon ourselves, seeking to establish and affirm our own glory (instead of on our need for forgiveness), thus ignoring the issue of our essential sinfulness and the need for a Savior. The third lie, motivated by objective arrogance, focuses our attention upon our own deeds and accomplishments, seeking to demonstrate our ability to "do good" apart from God (instead of realizing that there is nothing we can do to help God), thus ignoring the issue of our own flawed character and our need for rebirth through Jesus Christ. The devil tells us that it is this short life and this world which are important, not the triumph over death in eternal life in the world to come through Jesus Christ. The devil tells us to esteem ourselves, instead of realizing that we are sinful and in need of someone to wash away our sins. The devil tells us that what we do is good, while in truth our efforts to "better the world" apart from God are serving Satan's cause. This three-fold system of deception has many aspects which we do not have time to discuss here in full (see the preceding footnote), but it should be noted that Satan's ministers inevitably come back to these same three themes in all of their craftily concocted false teachings, preaching the material instead of the spiritual, self-worth instead of total depravity, and doing good as they define it instead of truly serving God.

We can expect Satan's false religion of the Tribulation to make full use of this progression as never before. The activities of antichrist, his success and pseudo-miracles, will persuade many that he and his worldly system are the hope for the troubled world of that time and that God's promises are untrue and His prohibitions of no account ("You will not die"; cf. 2Pet.3:1-18). The promises made by this false religion will be as enormous as they are egregious – offering life from the dead and semi-divine status in the same way that the beast will appear to have been "resurrected" ("You will be like God"; cf. 2Thes.2:9-12). Finally, in turning the fury, frustration and blood-lust of the world against the family of

God, Satan will have fully convinced his followers that they are "doing good" (willing participation in the destruction of others with self-righteous satisfaction; cf. Jn.16:2).

A further common element in all three phases of the progression of the satanic system of lies, both conceptually and specifically in its tribulational manifestations, is the fact that the devil is always careful to proffer things that people actually *want* (whether their desire is an open one or well-hidden from the world's eyes):

a) A tangible and visible solution to the political and economic problems of the day, especially if such a solution promises benefits for each individual in a personal way, is a common aspect of all strongman totalitarian movements, and we can expect this to be even more so the case during the Tribulation to the extent that the problems and discomfort of that time will be more acute than ever before: God promises to take care of His people forever as well as providing for their essential needs day by day; Satan promises abundance in this world for those who forsake God and follow Him (of course the devil is lying and will never keep his promises of provision whereas God is ever faithful and ever true, but following God takes faith).

b) A promise of immortality and/or promotion to demigod status has long been a feature in many religions which operate on a salvation by works basis, and we can expect that during the Tribulation when the incidence of death and terror will be higher than ever before this appeal will be all the more persuasive, especially since on the one hand failure to join the beast's religion will lead to persecution, and, on the other hand, antichrist's apparent resuscitation from the dead and performance of miraculous signs will seem to give credence to this message: God promises an eternal life with Him and His Son for His people who wait patiently for that day; Satan promises power in this world for those who forsake God and follow him (of course the devil is lying and can never keep his promises of promotion whereas God is ever faithful and ever true, but following God takes hope).

c) A scapegoat whose destruction is to be considered an act of good is a very appealing prospect for the unbelieving world and a common element in political and religious movements that have sought world-domination, and we can expect it to be all the more so during the Tribulation when there will be both a more integrated and universal world-order than ever before and when the horrific nature of the events of that time will seem to cry out for an appropriate victim to blame: God commands us to love even our enemies; the devil claims that we are doing good when we destroy those who oppose him (of course the devil is lying and has no true concern for those who forsake God and destroy themselves by helping him, whereas God has shown us the true way to live, but following God in this way takes love).

When we put all these things together, the difficulties of the Tribulation, the unprecedented level of satanic activity and false teaching directed towards the deception of mankind, and the removal of restraint upon the darkness that is within the unbelieving heart, the unprecedented progress that the devil will make in enlisting mankind to his standard during that future time of trouble should not come as a complete surprise. It will not be the methodology of Satan per se which will be different during the Tribulation (for he has been

employing the same methodology of deception since his seduction of a third of angelic kind).²⁴⁷ Rather it will be the degree to which he will be successful in the implementation of his deceptions under antichrist, a quantum leap beyond the considerable successes visible in our own day.

And when He sat down on the Mount of Olives, His disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us when these things will be, and what the sign is of your return and of the end of the age?" And Jesus answered and said, "See to it that no one deceives you. For many will come in my Name, saying, 'I am the Christ', and they will deceive many people."

Matthew 24:3-5

I fear [for you] lest in some way, just as the serpent deceived Eve with his craftiness, [so too] your thoughts may be [in the process of being] corrupted [and led astray] from the sincerity and holiness [you had] towards Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims a different Jesus whom we have not proclaimed, or if you get a different spirit [from him] which you did not get [from us], or a different gospel which you did not receive [from us], you tolerate [these lies] well enough.

2nd Corinthians 11:3-4

[*Let us grow spiritually*] . . . that we may no longer be immature, swept off-course and carried headlong by every breeze of so-called teaching that emanates from the trickery of men in their readiness to do anything to cunningly work their deceit.

Ephesians 4:14

Put on the full armor of God, so that you may be able to stand firm against the tricks of the devil.

Ephesians 6:11

See to it that no one be taking [control of] you as [though you were] plunder through the [so-called] study of wisdom (lit., "philosophy") and deception [which is] devoid [of truth], [which] agrees with human tradition, [which] agrees with [speculation about] the material principles of the world, but [which does] not agree with Christ.

Colossians 2:8

The Spirit explicitly says that in the end times (i.e., during the Tribulation) certain men will rebel (lit., "apostatize") from the faith, giving their allegiance [instead] to deceitful spirits and demonic doctrines.

1st Timothy 4:1 (cf. Jer.8:5)

Wicked men and tricksters (i.e., false teachers) will continue to "make progress" for the worse, [both] deceiving [others] and deceiving themselves [as well].

2nd Timothy 3:13

All things are pure for those who are pure [themselves], but for those who have defiled themselves and do not believe, nothing is pure. Indeed, both their mind and their conscience has been befouled. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny

[Him], being detestable, disobedient [to the truth], and unfit for any [truly] good work.
Titus 1:15-16

Who is the liar if not the one who claims that Jesus is not the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.
1st John 2:22

And the great dragon, the ancient serpent, the one called Devil and Satan, was thrown down; even he who deceives the entire world was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.
Revelation 12:9

And [the beast's false prophet] will deceive (lit., present tense) those who dwell upon the earth through the signs which will be given to him to perform before the beast.
Revelation 13:14a

And the beast was seized and the false prophet with him (the one who had performed the signs before him with which he had deceived those who took the sign of the beast and worshiped his image). The two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with sulphur.
Revelation 19:20

[The angel with the key to the Abyss] threw [Satan] into the Abyss and closed it, putting his seal upon it, so that [the devil] might not deceive the nations any longer until the thousand years had elapsed. After this, he must be released for a short while.
Revelation 20:3

And when the thousand years were completed, Satan was released from his prison, and he came forth to deceive the nations which [reside] in the four regions (lit., "corners") of the earth, Gog and Magog (whose number is as the sand of the sea) in order to marshal them together for war.
Revelation 20:7-8

2) The persuasiveness of the tribulational false religion: The beast's tribulational religion is properly a subject for part 4 of this series (and will be taken up during our study of Revelation chapter thirteen). However, it is necessary at this point to discuss in brief some of its main aspects in order to demonstrate that its attractiveness will be a second feature which will lend momentum to the persuasiveness of the false teaching destined to be endemic during the Tribulation. As a focus for and a mainstay of that false teaching, the one-world religion of antichrist will make a major contribution to the causation of the Great Apostasy.

We should mention first of all that there are any number of close analogies to the phenomenon of this future religious movement prophesied to mimic true, biblical Christianity in many persuasive ways. Nearly all non-Christian religions share common

characteristics which present parallels carefully designed by Satan to lure human beings away from the true God. Almost all call upon "God" or gods; almost all have a "sanctified place of worship", a collection of holy writings, a cadre of trained priests (or teachers, or administrators, etc.), and a colorful collection of religious rituals and paraphernalia; almost all claim to be a way to God, and almost all promise some sort of solution or answer to the ultimate concern of human mortality. Such spin-offs from the true, biblical worship of God, both cults and spiritually dead denominations alike, are particularly dangerous for new or as yet immature believers who are in the process of seeking God. For in many cases it takes wisdom, discernment, diligent reading of the scriptures, and often much digging into the real beliefs of such groups to be able to see clearly that what they are worshipping is in fact *not* really God (for the true worship of God requires a genuine and unpolluted faith in His Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: Jn.14:6).

What is true today we can expect to be even more so the case with the beast's religion during the Tribulation. This new religion will not spring forth out of nowhere, but will be preceded instead by a worldwide ecumenical movement in which most "Christian" denominations will doubtless participate. We can expect both the precursor religious movement and the beast's religion proper (which will take over this movement in the middle of the Tribulation) to be highly syncretic. That is to say, they will in all probability include, tolerate, and encourage virtually all religious practices and beliefs as being a part of "the holy", with exclusivity and dogmatism (e.g., claiming that faith in Jesus is the only way of salvation and that the Bible is the only inspired Word of God) being just about the only views not tolerated. In this way, those who are determined to follow the truth wherever it leads will be relegated to the fringes of society, while, on the other hand, the magnetic draw of being part of this all-inclusive and exciting new development will be tremendously powerful. We can, of course, see the same trend already at work in our own day in a very similar way. But during the Tribulation this trend will accelerate, and the ecumenical movement will gel to a degree and with a speed difficult for us to envision or anticipate at present (especially in the absence of Holy Spirit restraint). During the second phase of the tribulational false religion's development, that is, the establishment of antichrist (and Satan) as the object of worship, intense persecution of those who resist will produce the final installment of apostasy, driving into the arms of the beast those whose faith is not strong enough to endure the challenge of potential martyrdom. A brief perusal of some of the salient characteristics of this future religion should suffice to demonstrate its potential for persuasiveness and its corresponding effectiveness in contributing to the process of apostasy:

a) It will mimic Christianity: A very large part of the deceptive element of the tribulational false religion will be the deliberate lengths to which it will go to give the appearance of being "true Christianity". This is nothing new, of course. One can easily point today to half a dozen major denominations and many cults which claim to be the only true Church of Christ (even though Christ's true Church is composed of all who have faith in and are faithful to Him, quite apart from any organizational affiliation at all). However, two major points will mark out the beast's tribulational religion as significantly different. First, during its ecumenical first phase this false religion will coopt and incorporate many groups and denominations that do include Christians (at least at that point). Only after the

Tribulation's mid-point, when antichrist takes his seat in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem and unveils his new religion in all its sordid particulars will the practice of true Christianity within this polyglot accretion of ecumenicalism become completely impossible. Secondly, during that second phase, with the help of his false prophet (and of Satan's power) antichrist will portray himself as the fulfillment of all world religion, *and of Christianity and Judaism in particular*. For he will be the devil's "Messiah" (hence the name "anti-Christ", the prefix conveying the meaning of a substitute as well as of an opponent: cf. 1Jn.2:18-23; 4:3; 2Jn.1:7), taking his seat in God's own temple in his new world-capital of Jerusalem (2Thes.2:4), and proclaiming himself as "the Christ" (Matt.24:5; 24:23-24; Lk.21:8). The parallelisms do not end here, but suffice it to say that the "con job" which the false trinity of Satan, antichrist, and the false prophet will perform upon the inhabitants of the earth will be so effective that it will even put pressure upon the faith of "the elect" (cf. Matt.24:24; Mk.13:22). How much more then should we not expect such measures to draw into apostasy those who are not solid in their faith (the rule rather than the exception in our current Laodicean era), and all those who have previously allowed themselves to be coopted along with their organizations, especially in the midst of the manifold pressures and horrors of the Great Tribulation?

Although the false religion of the Tribulation will superficially mimic Christianity in both its ecumenical phase and in the full-blown beast-worship which follows, one will not have to do much more than scratch its whitewashed surface to see that its teachings will be far removed from God's truth, consisting of concocted rites and regulations (Matt.15:9). The substance of those teachings will point somewhat subtly toward idolatry during its first phase, but will develop into an unapologetic and idolatrous worship of the beast and his image in the second (2Thes.2:4; Rev.13:11-15). There are no true gods besides the One true God, so that behind every pagan, non-Christian "deity" lurks not a god but a demon (1Cor.8:4-6; 10:20-21). For this reason, all idolatry is at its root the worship of demons and fallen angels, and, since these are in no way operating independently, all idolatry is thus the worshiping of Satan, making idolatry, angel-worship, and devil-worship all one and the same thing, a blasphemous rejection of the Creator in favor of His rebellious creature (cf. Col.2:16-23; Heb.1-2; 2Pet.2:10-12; Jude 8-10). At no time will this be at once more clear and more obscure than during the unveiling of the beast's religion during the Tribulation's second half. Pseudo- and marginal "Christian" denominations of our own day are already deeply conflicted on the issue of idolatry, with the practice of worshiping images, dead human beings, and angels at an all-time high of acceptability. The miracles and wonders that will be wrought by antichrist and by his false prophet on his behalf will be more than enough to convince the unbelieving world as well as, sad to say, many who are weak in faith, that this new religion with its new "Messiah" are the genuine article. But behind the beast we find Satan rather than God (2Thes.2:9; Rev.16:13), and in this false religion with its false trinity a culmination of all that has been behind pagan religious activity from the beginning: the outright worship of Satan, an objective that has always been first and foremost in the devil's priorities (Matt.4:9; Lk.4:7; cf. Is.14:13-14; Ezek.28:17). Only those of pure heart and sound doctrine, committed to following the Lord whatever the cost, will be able to discern between the true light and this highly deceptive darkness, and we should not be fooled as to the intensity of the persuasiveness which the tribulational false religion will effuse. Antichrist will be a half-angel, Satan's seed, and empowered by the evil one to perform

miracles that amaze the world. His rise will be meteoric, and we can expect him to exert a personal magnetism that will put all previous human exemplars of charisma in the shade. With antichrist as its false Messiah, this false religion will arguably be, in fleshly terms, the most "exciting" thing the world has yet seen. To some he will seem a god. For those who are of the profession of materialism he will be more than happy to be esteemed an extra-terrestrial. And for those who have been or are in the process of being coopted from Christian and pseudo-Christian groups alike, his angelic roots will be promoted in an unashamed and unabashed display of idolatry in its truest sense, the worship of angels, demons, and the devil.²⁴⁸ Faith, the unbending belief in what one knows to be true from the Word of God (no matter what the eyes may see), will be necessary to resist the unprecedented persuasiveness of the temptations which the tribulational false religion will deploy.

b) It will go to great lengths to be attractive and appealing: This point is often misunderstood. Conventional wisdom about the tribulational false religion has it as forbidding in aspect and terrifying in operation. Nothing could be further from the truth, especially during its first phase. For, on the contrary, the ecumenical world-religion which will morph into outright worship of the beast will go to great lengths to welcome, engage, and assure anyone and everyone with whom it has contact. It will put on a friendly face and stop at nothing to appear attractive, entertaining and wholesome. Just as Satan made use of a friendly agent to deceive Eve (i.e., her pet serpent),²⁴⁹ so he always has endeavored to enclose his lies and deceit in packages which look as attractive as possible. As in all the other aspects of the false religion of the Tribulation, so also in its projection of apparent benevolence, sincerity, and affability, it will represent the pinnacle of Satan's efforts in this regard. Those of us who experience these pressures first hand may also expect to have our friends and relatives "evangelizing" aggressively for it. They will certainly have plenty of incentive to do so, and not only in respect to promises made for such activities. There will unquestionably be penalties to pay for having close associations with true Christians who refuse to "convert" (even if these lie in the past alone), and this is a trend which will intensify in bloody earnest when the Great Persecution of the Tribulation's second half begins.

It is not only the religion itself in all its teachings, trappings and regalia that will defeat current expectations by being much more attractive and less threatening in appearance than is now supposed. The clergy for this coming religion will be equally charismatic and equally innocuous (at least to the eye). Judas furnishes a helpful parallel for this new order of minister. To all human appearances, Judas was the best of the lot. He was no doubt the best dressed, the best groomed and the most responsible of the twelve (entrusted with the common purse as he was, and well-provided for by his thefts from it: Jn.12:6; 13:29). So much was this the case that when Judas left the last supper in order to betray our Lord, his fellow disciples apparently never even suspected that it was he (compare Lk.22:24 with Jn.13:21-30). So it will be with the false religion's clergy. We can expect them to be fine speakers (Rom.16:17-18; Col.2:4), adept at the use of persuasive words (1Cor.2:1-5), masquerading most effectively as ministers of light (2Cor.11:13-15). But in reality they will be in the employ of Satan, cashing in on the false use of the Word of God (1Tim.6:5; Tit.1:11; 2Pet.2:1-3), selling out like Balaam (2Pet.2:14-15), betraying the Lord like Judas, and, like

Cain (Jude 1:11), willing to use whatever means necessary to gain their ends (Eph.4:14; 1Tim.4:1-3). They will look to all the (unbelieving) world as if they are true servants of God, and many will undoubtedly call themselves "Christians" (cf. Zeph.1:4-5; Rev.3:1), but the people who truly know their God will not be deceived by such wolves in sheep's clothing (Dan.11:32; cf. Lev.10:1-3; Num.16:1-50; Jer.23:9-40; Ezek.13:10-23; Zeph.3:4).

Beware of the false prophets who are going to come in among you in sheep's clothing, but underneath they are ravenous wolves.

Matthew 7:15 (cf. John 10:12)

For I know that after my departure fierce wolves will enter in among you who will not spare the flock. And even from among your own number [of elders] men will rise up and speak twisted things in order to entice the disciples (i.e., believers) to follow them. So be alert, remembering that for three years I did not stop warning each of you [about these dangers] day and night with my tears.

Acts 20:29-31

I am amazed that you have had such a rapid change of mind away from the One who called you by the grace of Christ – to a different gospel (which is [really] not another [gospel at all]). Rather [the case really is that] there are certain men [there] who are throwing you into disorder, men who desire to pervert the gospel of Christ. But [even] if I myself – or even *an angel* out of heaven – should preach to you something out of keeping with what I have preached to you, let him be cursed!

Galatians 1:6-9

c) It will utilize classic satanic methodology: In order to optimize its persuasiveness, the tribulational false religion will employ all the techniques of propaganda the devil has utilized since the beginning. These classic tactics of persuasion will be (as they have always been) focused upon gaining a hearing, then acceptance in principle, then an embracing of the lie. The evangelistic "pitch" of the tribulational religion's false gospel will rely upon all the familiar methods which have always been used by Satan and his subordinates to win human beings over to falsehood:

- Its "gospel" appeal will include an element of truth: Half-truths are a notoriously effective way of undermining the *real* truth, and we know for a fact that this common deception will figure large in the beast's religion. To take the two most salient examples, there *will* be a world kingdom established by God, but that will be Christ's kingdom, not antichrist's regime (though the false religion will claim divine favor for the kingdom of the beast), and there *will* be a world ruler anointed and appointed by God, but that will be Jesus Christ our Lord at His return, not antichrist (though the false religion will proclaim him as the true Messiah). In both examples there will be superficial similarities which support these lies (a united world rule and a world ruler with seemingly miraculous powers respectively), and we should be prepared to see this pattern of half-truths repeated in the superficial mimicking of virtually every aspect of true Christianity by the tribulational religion of antichrist.

- Its "gospel" appeal will be highly syncretic: This point is the converse or "flip-side" of the above. In addition to containing some elements of truth to cloak the larger lie, the institutions, practices, and doctrines of the false religion of the tribulation will also embrace widely disparate approaches and beliefs, including, so far as is possible, almost every organization's pet ideas and customs. "Swearing by God . . . yet also by Malcom" will be a hallmark of this syncretic faith (Zeph.1:5). But compromise of the truth in principle is just as deadly for believers as accepting a lie covered in a veneer of truth.
- Its "gospel" appeal will be delivered by a friendly agent: The ministers, evangelists, and spokesmen for this new religion will be among the world's most powerful, influential, and popular people (cf. Is.23:8; Rev.18:3). The power celebrities wield in influencing the weak-willed and weak-minded into various bizarre, cult-like, and anti-Christian activities should be clear to anyone who reads the newspaper. The difference between contemporary practice and what will occur during the Tribulation will be both qualitative and quantitative. For it will not only be fringe celebrities involved in evangelizing for the beast's religion, but very nearly the entire complement of "Who's Who", including those with good and solid reputations.
- Its "gospel" appeal will exude a familiarity with God: The words "God" and even "Jesus" will be salted liberally into the conversations of everyone involved in both phases of the tribulational religion. From those who are its formal representatives in particular we can expect a very polished evangelical appeal that suggests a deep intimacy and familiarity with God and all things divine. Though the truth will be exactly the opposite, giving the appearance of being "close to God" is a classic way for agents of the devil to allay the fears of their intended victims, portraying themselves as "ministers of righteousness" (2Cor.11:14-15).
- Its "gospel" appeal will contain a legitimizing of secret desires: Just as the saying "you can't cheat an honest man" has much merit, so in the case of satanic deception it is the lack of love for the truth that makes human beings vulnerable to the devil's lies in the first place. And, inevitably, when one is lackadaisical about the truth and lazy about following God diligently (or entirely disinterested in either), one fleshly desire or another will generally rise to fill the void. Whether subtly or obviously, the devil never fishes without bait. Behind every cult, every satanic lie, and, without question, behind the coming false religion, one finds an offer from the devil to fulfill and to justify some sinful desire hidden in the heart. Whether it is to offer through service and participation something one does not yet have but lusts for, or to justify some current behavior or past deed about which one feels guilty, all organizations of which the devil approves, and certainly this future one which will be most directly under his control, offer something of value to potential participants. This is not, of course, to suggest that the devil actually "delivers" on these promises, for he and his have no true interest in justice for or in the welfare of their victims.
- Its "gospel" appeal will be extra-biblical: The quickest and best way to "smoke out" any cult or demon-influenced group is to examine their attitude toward the scriptures. Any group that claims to be "of God" which downplays the importance of reading the Bible for oneself is inevitably and invariably headed in the wrong direction, at the very least. And when mere

discouraging of independent consultation advances to prohibition or denigration of the Bible, one can rest assured that God is not present in that group. The tribulation false religion, syncretic as it will be, will in all likelihood hold the Bible in low esteem, granting equal or greater weight to other "great books", and placing its own doctrines and new "sacred writings" in the place of honor.

d) It will be inclusive and exclusive at the same time: This dual character of the false religion will also contribute to its persuasiveness. The fact that it will be a "big tent" organization will encourage individuals from all walks of life to join, and we should also not underestimate the persuasive appeal of the band-wagon effect that will occur once its ecumenical phase has begun. With seemingly everyone everywhere being pulled into its orbit, the power of the group and the desire to belong to something that virtually everyone else is joining will prove too much for most people to resist. But even as the majority of the world's population is being sucked in, the fact that those who choose to take their stand with the Word of God are not included will also make this new organization exclusive, containing only those who have embraced this "one true church", and this "one true religion" (creating a sort of "crusade" effect which will later be directed against genuine believers during the Great Persecution). Remaining aloof from such pressures will not be an easy matter, and for those who do the situation will not be a simple one with which to cope. For before the first half of the Tribulation has come to an end, the situation will doubtless be much like that faced by Noah and his family, who, being the last remaining remnant of true humanity, were doubtlessly ostracized and ridiculed by the hybrid population of the antediluvian world of that time.²⁵⁰ And just as it was a very difficult matter to resist the nearly unanimous peer pressure to join in Nimrod's movement to build the tower of Babel, so at this future time dissent will pay a heavy price.²⁵¹ Going in the opposite direction from everyone else is never easy. How much more will this not be true during the Tribulation when former Christians, friends and relatives are eagerly beckoning the few hold-outs to turn around? For those who do join, the promise of being "safe" within this near universal organization will seem genuine. For those few who refuse, choosing instead to remain loyal and faithful to Jesus Christ, ostracism and ridicule will soon turn to threats, coercion, and persecution, culminating in the Great Persecution which characterizes the Tribulation's second half, the Great Tribulation.

e) It will be tolerant and intolerant at the same time: Vis-à-vis the behavior and ancillary beliefs of its own members, the tribulation false religion will be extremely tolerant. There will be "many gates" of entry, and "many ways" to pursue its false spirituality. This will be true even in the case of practices which are exact opposites, for example:

- It will embrace both hedonism and asceticism: On the one hand, the false religion of the tribulation will profess pleasure and the "godliness" of indulging in it, proclaiming universal forgiveness (apart from faith in Christ or repentance) and denying any divine judgment for any sort of excess (cf. Col.2:16; 2:20-23; 1Tim.4:3; Heb.13:9). On the other hand, it will also preach an austere self-denial and strict dietary regulations, threatening judgment for violations without any valid reference to Christ or true biblical usage (cf. 2Tim.3:1-5;

2Pet.2:1-2; 2:13-14; Jude 1:18-19). Both of these "ways", though contradictory, will be embraced as acceptable for converts, and it must be noted that about the only common features they do share are that both are, in their very essence, hostile to a grace-based life of faith and obedience to Jesus Christ, and that neither has scriptural legitimacy (cf. Rom.14:17; 1Cor.8:8; 10:30; 1Tim.4:4-5).

- It will permit both licentiousness and abstinence: What is true in material matters generally (eating habits being the most common application in the first antithesis immediately above), will also be true in regard to sexual behavior and the use of alcohol and other behavior-altering substances. Idolatry has always been known for its licentiousness in these regards from ancient times. It is also quite common to find a brand of celibacy and self-denial in all such matters in many false religions. The false religion of the Tribulation will allow either "way" as a valid method of serving the beast. Antichrist himself will be non-conventional in his approach to these things, exhibiting behavior that is amoral and "above" normal human conventions (Dan.11:37 in the context of verses 36-39). Neither approach, however, will have any validity in God's eyes.
- It will express itself in both emotionalism and rationalism: Both wild ecstasies and dispassionate cerebral "worship" will characterize the followers of this coming false religion. Neither those who prefer a cold, analytical approach, nor those who crave emotional release will be excluded. But in either case, the true worship of God the Father and Jesus Christ in Spirit and in truth will be rejected.

Thus this new religion will have something for everyone, and will legitimize, justify and "bless" excesses of behavior on both extremes of the spectrum. Little wonder then that all those who are not committed to following Jesus wherever He leads will be easily intrigued and seduced by such an all-inclusive, all-forgiving, all-tolerating system that at the same time seems entirely authoritative, embracing all (non-biblical) traditions, and yet manages to be novel in and of itself.

As touching the beliefs and behavior of true Christians, however, the coming false religion will be extremely intolerant. For we know the truth: Jesus is the only gate of entry to the Father (Jn.10:7), and He is the only truth, the only way, and the only life (Jn.14:6). The absolute nature of our faith (and the fact that its elimination is a prime objective of the devil and a major purpose behind this coming false religion) guarantees that this most "tolerant" of all religions will be unwilling to abide true Christianity or accept the survival of true Christians. This combination of extreme tolerance and extreme intolerance will also be very persuasive, for it is our nature as human beings to crave complete carte blanche for any behavior when the object is ourselves, and to admire unyielding intolerance of "aberrant" behavior when the object is someone else.

3) The persuasiveness of tribulational false signs: One particular aspect of tribulational false teaching that deserves special mention in regard to its contribution to promoting apostasy is the effective use to which false signs will be put by antichrist and his false prophet. For scripture is very clear that the signs performed by these two in the power of the devil will be unprecedented in human history, and will play no small part in winning

over the majority of the world's population (Mk.13:22; Rev.13:3-4; 16:13-14; 17:8; 17:11; 19:20).²⁵²

For [during the Tribulation] false Christs and false prophets will arise and will perform great miracles (lit., "signs") and wonders [sufficient] to deceive even the elect, if [that were] possible.

Matthew 24:24

[Antichrist's] appearance [will come about] through Satan's empowerment [and will be] accompanied by every [sort of] false miracle, both signs and portents, and by every [sort of] unrighteous deception [designed] for those who are perishing, [namely those who will believe these lies] because they did not open themselves up to the love of the truth so as to be saved.

2nd Thessalonians 2:9-10

And [the beast's false prophet] [will] perform great miracles (lit., "signs"), even making fire come down from heaven to the earth in front of everyone. And he [will] deceive those who dwell upon the earth on account of the miracles (lit., "signs") which have been given to him to perform in the presence of the beast, even commanding the inhabitants of the earth to make an image of the beast, [that is] of him who received the [deadly] stroke of the sword and [yet] came [back] to life. And it was given to him to provide a spirit for the image of the beast so that the image might speak, and [it was also given to him] to bring it about that as many as refused to worship the image of the beast might be put to death.

Revelation 13:13-15

But no matter how miraculous such signs may appear to unbelievers, we Christians walk by faith, not by sight (2Cor.5:7; cf. Prov.3:5). Therefore as faithful followers of the Living Word, our Lord Jesus Christ (Jn.1:1-14), we must be careful always to put our total faith in the Word of God above anything and everything our eyes may see, and trust in what our Lord has told us through His Bible even in the face of such overwhelmingly persuasive "miracles" which may seem to contradict what we know from scripture to be true:

I will bow myself in worship toward your holy temple, and I will give thanks to your holy Name on account of your mercy, and on account of your truth, for You have *magnified Your Word above Your entire Name.*

Psalms 138:2

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there without watering the earth, so is the Word which goes forth from my mouth. It will not return to Me in vain without accomplishing what I please, and it will be successful in whatever [purpose] I have sent it forth.

Isaiah 55:10-11

"Is my Word not like fire?", says the Lord, "And [is it not] like a hammer which can smash to bits a rocky mountainside?
Jeremiah 23:39

Why do you call [to Me, saying] "Lord, Lord", but you do not do *what I say*?
Luke 6:46

The Word [Jesus Christ] existed at the very beginning,
and there was reciprocity (i.e., co-divinity) between the Word and God [the Father].
And the Word was God.
This One both existed and enjoyed reciprocity with God from the very beginning.
Everything came into being through Him, [Jesus Christ],
and without Him, nothing has come into being which has in fact come into being.
John 1:1-3

Search the scriptures (since you assume by how you read them that you have eternal life)!
These are the very scriptures that bear testimony about Me.
John 5:39

Jesus said to [His disciple, Thomas], "Because you have seen Me you have believed?
Blessed are those who have not seen and have [yet] believed!"
John 20:29

For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he might instruct Him? But we possess the
very mind of Christ (i.e. the Holy Spirit illuminating the scriptures which are Christ's very
thinking).
1st Corinthians 2:16 (cf. v.12-13)

[Let us] not [be] having [any] regard for what can be seen, but [instead] for what cannot be
seen. For the things which can be seen are ephemeral. But the things which cannot be seen
are eternal.
2nd Corinthians 4:18

For we are walking [our Christian walk] through faith [in the Living and written Word], not
through appearance.
2nd Corinthians 5:7

All scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for admonishing, for correcting,
and for training in righteousness.
2nd Timothy 3:16

[Jesus] is the shining forth of [the Father's] glory, the precise image of His essence, the One
who sustains the universe by His mighty Word . . .
Hebrews 1:3a

For the Word of God is living and powerful; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even to the point of being able to divide the spirit from its earthly life and the marrow from its bones; it acts as a judge of our heart's intentions and emotions.

Hebrews 4:12

It is faith [in the Living and written Word], moreover, that substantiates what we hope for. [Faith] provides proof of things unseen.

Hebrews 11:1

For I did not follow concocted tales in making known to you the power and the coming return of our Lord, Jesus Christ, but was an eyewitness to His majesty. For when He had received honor and glory from God the Father, these words sounded forth to Him from God's majestic glory: "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased." And these words I myself heard as they were delivered from heaven, for I was with Him on the holy mountain (cf. Matt.17:1-8). Yet I consider the prophetically inspired Word (i.e. the Bible) even more reliable (i.e. than what I saw with my own eyes). You too would do well to pay the closest attention to this [prophetically inspired Word], just as to a lamp shining in a dark place (cf. Ps.119:105), until the day dawns, and the Morning Star rises (i.e. the Living Word, Jesus Christ, returns), pondering in your hearts this principle of prime importance: no single verse of prophetically inspired scripture has ever come into being as a result of personal reflection. For true prophecy has never occurred by human will, but only when holy men of God have spoken under the direction and agency of the Holy Spirit.

2nd Peter 1:16-21

What we have seen from the beginning, what we have heard and seen with our eyes, what we have observed and touched with our hands – this is about the Word of life[, Jesus Christ].

1st John 1:1

Such powerful encouragement for us to put our faith in the Word even in face of overwhelming visual evidence to the contrary is buttressed even further by the clear directions given by Paul to Timothy and applicable to all pastors to put a like and equal main emphasis upon teaching the truth of the Word (rather than performing miracles, even if legitimate and possible):

Until I (i.e., Paul) come, devote yourself to [public] reading [of the scriptures], to encouragement [through preaching], to teaching [the Word].

1st Timothy 4:13

Let those elders who lead well be held worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the Word and in teaching.

1st Timothy 5:17

Be zealous to present yourself to God [as one] approved [in what you do], a workman who does not need to be ashamed, [like a skillful carpenter] "cutting straight" the Word of truth.
2nd Timothy 2:15

Proclaim the Word! Keep at it, whether circumstances are favorable or not! Reprove, rebuke, [and] encourage with all patience [in your] teaching!
2nd Timothy 4:2

Yes, scripture is clear. It is the Word of God, the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, to which we are to give our attention, not the things which our eyes may see or our ears may hear. No matter how amazing, how unprecedented, how thoroughly persuasive the "miracles" or "signs" we may behold, we are to count them as nothing if they are contradicted by the Word of God (compare Jer.10:2 with Lk.21:25-26). This principle which has such critical implications for our conduct in the Tribulation also has an important application for us today on the threshold of that terrible time here in the Church era of Laodicea. For we live in a time when the Church, rather than giving precedence and pride of place to the teaching of scripture, is increasingly fascinated with the material world, with human works over the words of God, with experiences and emotional highs, with erstwhile miracles, healing and tongues, with hoopla, fanfare and carnival rather than the serious study of the Bible. The building up of a good conscience, of a good value system, and of proper, biblical priorities now will not only be helpful but may also be crucial in our successful navigation of the trials to come. On the other hand, undue attention now to the very sort of spectacles which will be used to such good effect by the beast and his false prophet during the Tribulation, not only places the believer in a very weak spiritual position now, but may well contribute to his or her apostatizing from Jesus Christ under the pressures of that terrible time ahead.

4) The persuasiveness of coopted organizations: This point also deserves separate coverage under the rubric of the contribution to the process of apostasy made by the false teaching of the Tribulation. We have already seen in regard to the persuasiveness of the satanically inspired "miracles" which will characterize the Tribulation that they will be amazingly powerful to the point of putting serious pressure even on the faith of the elect (Matt.24:24; Mk.13:22). In spite of these pressures, dedicated believers in Jesus Christ will continue to follow what the Bible says rather than what their eyes see, no matter how miraculous these things may seem. They will apply all the appropriate scriptures instead of leaning on experience:

If a prophet arises in your midst, or a dreamer of dreams, and prophesies for you a sign or a wonder, and [even] if the sign or wonder comes to pass which he predicted for you, [and if he then] says "Let us follow after other gods" ([gods] whom you have not known or served [before]), **do not listen** to that prophet or to that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to find out whether [or not] you [truly] love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your being (lit., "life").

Deuteronomy 13:1-3

Dedicated believers in Jesus Christ will continue to give heed to the scriptures in preference to any sign or wonder or miracle which contradicts them. They will apply the "Christ test" in the case of all spiritual leaders and pastors, just as they do today:²⁵³

Beloved, don't believe every spirit [of every so-called prophet], but test the spirits [of these "prophets" to see] whether [or not] they are from God. For many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this [test] you [will] know [whether or not a person has] the Spirit of God. Any spirit (i.e., a person or organization) which professes that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but any spirit which does not profess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not from God. And this [latter] is the [spirit] of the antichrist, which you have heard about, that he is coming, and [even] now [his spirit] is already in the world.

1st John 4:1-3

Sadly, however, many who are weak in faith will cave in to these pressures, and in very many instances they will be led into doing so from the top down. For in all too many individual cases of apostasy, it really will be a matter of lambs being led to the slaughter by the very leaders and organizations whose job it is to shepherd them. Indeed, all those who currently find themselves in denominations which are only marginally Christian or whose leaders and "teachers" are doing a poor job as representatives of Jesus Christ have already been compromised to an extraordinary degree. Based upon the predictions and analogous scriptures covered in the sections above, we should have every expectation that these weak and/or venial leaders will be quick to succumb to antichrist's exploding world-ecumenical movement, and only too willing to drag most of their membership along behind them (even as they have continued to be dragged along into spiritual apathy in our own day). This will be all the more true during the Tribulation's second half when antichrist's "wonders" will be added to this witches' brew of false motivations. For the performance of such unbelievable signs and miracles will endow this coming false religion with a tremendous amount of emotional authority (with only the firm determination to put scripture ahead of what is visible being capable of resistance). It should be noted by way of an aside here that our current world is more vulnerable to such deceptions than was ever the case in the past. To a world that sees itself as sophisticated and knowledgeable to a degree not seen before in history, this statement no doubt will seem ludicrous. But it is true nonetheless. For it is precisely our present preoccupation with materialistic explanations for everything that happens in the world that will make us all the more vulnerable in the face of the beast's miracles, signs so profound that they cannot easily be denied or explained away. For those who know their God, the occurrence of such phenomena will not overly impress – completely convinced of the power of the immaterial over the material, we Christians use the Bible as our guide to distinguish between signs and miracles that are of God and those that are not. But to the vast majority of humanity, the experience of undeniable extra-material events will prove too powerful to resist. And for those leaders and members of putative Christian groups which are spiritually weak or even dead, these wonders will be all that is necessary to "prove" that the beast is "the one", and that his new religion is the only "true way".

What this means in practical terms is that once such organizations and denominations sell out completely to the ecumenical movement and thereafter allow themselves to be

incorporated into the beast's religion in toto (during the final three and a half years), those believers who have kept fellowship with them up to and into the Tribulation will find it increasingly difficult to escape their grasp. The problem of freeing oneself from an organization which has come to be synonymous in one's mind with faith is somewhat akin to sinking into quicksand while unconscious: even if one "comes to" and recognizes the dire nature of the situation, escaping the terrible pull is still no easy matter. We can see this same phenomena playing out in many denominations even today, as unbelieving elites continue to move their charges further and further away from God and the Bible, while many of the rank and file, though far from happy with these developments, allow themselves to be dragged along (out of misplaced loyalty, tradition and inertia). But regardless of the reason for apostasy, every individual believer is responsible to the Lord for remaining faithful to Him. The fact that he or she may have been influenced by his or her leaders into apostasy is no excuse:

And there arose among the people false prophets, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will introduce destructive false doctrines – even denying the Master who bought them – and will bring swift destruction on themselves. ***And many will follow their lascivious ways so that the way of truth will be subject to blasphemy on their account.***

2nd Peter 2:1-2

For by pouring forth [statements] of outrageous folly, [by appealing to] fleshly lusts, and by making use of every [sort of] sensuality, [these false teachers] entice *those who [previously] had truly escaped* from those who live [such] lives of deception (i.e., the false teachers). [These false teachers] promise [weak believers] freedom [from a disciplined life], though they themselves are truly slaves of corruption. For by what[ever] one is mastered, to this is he enslaved. For if after having escaped the defilements of this world by recognizing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ [these weak believers] should be overcome [spiritually] by becoming involved again in these foul things, then they have become worse off than they were before. For it would have been better for them not to have accepted the Righteous Way in the first place, rather than – once having accepted this holy command [for faith in Christ which was] committed to them – to turn their backs on it now. And so in their case this proverb is true: "The dog has returned to his vomit, and the sow, though washed, to her muddy sty".

2nd Peter 2:18-22

Therefore while it is one thing for pagan religions and dead denominations containing few Christians in their ranks to be pulled into the orbit of the beast's religion, the coopting of groups which are comprised of at least some genuine believers will be yet another powerful factor in aiding and abetting the practice of apostasy. In the end, it will make little difference whether it was the band-wagon principle, the continuing authority of the denomination in question, the fear of being shunned, discriminated against, or persecuted, or the outright deceptions discussed above which play the dominant role in pulling believers into apostasy along with the organizations to which they belong. Continuation in a relationship which is spiritually harmful cannot help but compromise and threaten faith:

Do not be deceived: bad associations corrupt good morals.
1st Corinthians 15:33

The current trend in our Laodicean age toward apathy to the truth and a desire for entertaining substitutes which "scratch the ear" will, during the Tribulation, greatly assist the process of assimilation and cooption of Christian groups by Satan and his antichrist into their worldwide religion.

For the time will come when they will not put up with sound teaching, but will [instead], desiring to have their ears scratched, heap up by their own [devices] teachers to match their specific lusts. And they will turn their ears from the truth and resort instead to fictions.
2nd Timothy 4:3-4

The Spirit explicitly says that in the end times certain men will rebel from the faith, giving their allegiance [instead] to deceitful spirits and demonic doctrines.
1st Timothy 4:1

This process, moreover, will not only proceed from top to bottom, but also from bottom to top. For not only will it be a case of leadership subverting membership, but also the other way around. As false teaching and false teachers begin to aggressively infiltrate Christian and erstwhile Christian groups, many of the rank and file in these groups (whether apostate Christians or unbelievers all along) will put pressure on the leadership from the "grass roots" to join in. Under such pressure (and faced with rebellion or expulsion), only the staunchest leaders will be able or willing to offer any resistance, daring to lose their jobs, reputations, and worse. Given that the groups we are talking about here are already deeply mired in spiritual apathy, we can expect such resistance to be inconsequential, and can further expect most of the leadership of such groups to accommodate to the wishes of the majority of their constituency. We may call this phenomenon "the golden calf compromise". For just as Aaron was quick to heed the demands of the rebellious mob that confronted him in Moses' absence (even though he was certainly aware of the wrongness of his actions: cf. Ex.32:1-4), so the vast majority of spiritual leaders in all but the most dedicated Christians groups will likewise buckle under the internal pressure to compromise with the ecumenical developments of the Tribulation's first half. And just as Aaron may have foolishly thought he could still steer this horrible idolatry in God's direction by calling the golden calf's feast a "feast to the Lord" (compare Ex.32:5 with 32:6), so it may well be that some of the leaders constrained by these pressures may convince themselves that they are sticking with their groups for the sake of good. In reality, however, when the final opportunity for separation comes, failing to avail oneself of it will only mean spiritual disaster. Moreover, in the case of the leadership, by remaining and accommodating they will only be giving false comfort to their truly Christian charges, and be helping to blind them to the fact that staying with these organizations once they have been fatally compromised can only lead to apostasy. It is well to note that the Israelites became restless and vulnerable to such outrageous apostasy only when Moses, a well-known type of Christ (cf. Ex.32:1; Acts 7:40: a return as if from the dead), had been away a long time – and just before he returned at that. So also in this case it will be just before Christ's return, and at the lengthiest point of His absence, that the Great Apostasy will claim so many of our fellow believers, with the most prominent

leadership of the Church (analogous to Aaron) being swept up in their rebellion out of fear. And just as the rebellious Israelites of that time sought another leader other than Moses to "take them back to Egypt" (Neh.9:16-17; cf. Num.14:1-4), so in their apostasy these former Christians will join with unbelievers the world round in embracing a new savior, one who will promise them a worldly heaven on earth, namely, the antichrist.

In this capacity it is at least worth asking whether so-called "Christian" groups may not constitute antichrist's original base for his ecumenical movement (as opposed to being a later target). Since the beast will begin with politics, we may posit that the ecumenical movement (which will only later develop into a universal, idolatrous religion) will be an essentially political formation at its inception. As we shall soon see (and have already discussed by way of preview in our coverage of the four horsemen), the Tribulation's first half will be a time of exceptional upheaval. Antichrist will doubtless gain much political support by promising political solutions to the horrendous world conditions of that time. Given the propensity of many religious and even Christian groups to become involved in political causes "for good", it is not far from the realm of the possible to suppose that antichrist will make full use of this tendency. Since the initial development of ecumenical cooperation will be political in nature rather than doctrinal (with "cooperation" and coercion in the realm of belief coming only later), it is easy to see how many Christians of poor discernment might be able to embrace this movement and still allow themselves to think they were doing something "Christian" (even as they were actually falling away from the truth and from Christ). Using Christian and semi-Christian groups as a base would have very clear advantages for antichrist, whose entire false religion will later come to be based upon claiming that he is the Messiah.

4. The Refining of the Remnant: One of the reasons for the astonishing abandonment of the Lord during the Great Apostasy will be the unprecedented degree of deception unleashed by the devil and his two earthly minions, the antichrist and his false prophet (Dan.11:32-35; Matt.24:11; 24:24; Mk.13:22; 2Thes.2:9-12; 1Tim.4:1-5; 2Tim.3:8-9 with Ex.7:11 & 7:22; Rev.13:13-14; 19:20). This assault will pour forth a veritable ocean of falsehood which will overwhelm all but the truly elect (Matt.24:24; Mk.13:22). If there is a silver lining in this terrible cloud of apostasy, it is to be found in the refining of the faith produced by the pressures of the Tribulation of all those who are truly God's people. It is true that the refining of the hearts of His people, the strengthening of faith and the testing of our commitment to Jesus Christ are givens in every era:

Rejoice in this [salvation to come], even though at present it may for a time be your lot to suffer through various trials so that this validation (lit., "assaying") of your faith [which results from your successful passing of these tests] may result in praise, glory and honor for you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. For this [validation process] has a greater benefit [for you] than [is true in the case of] gold, which, while it is also proved by fire, ultimately perishes (e.g., in contrast to the eternal rewards of faith proved genuine through testing).
1st Peter 1:6-7

For He knows my path. He has tested me (i.e., "has assayed the value of [my faith like one does gold bullion]"). I will come forth like gold [from the crucible].
Job 23:10

The smelter for silver and the crucible for gold, but the Lord is the One who tests hearts.
Proverbs 17:3

Behold, I have refined you, but not like silver – it is a furnace of affliction in which I have tested you.
Isaiah 48:10

However, as we have said from the beginning of this series, one of God's purposes for the Tribulation is to draw a very vivid distinction between those who have chosen for Him and those who are not willing to do so.

Seventy sevens have been decreed for your people and your holy city, *to complete the rebellion and consummate sins* (i.e., bring apostasy to the full), to atone for iniquity and bring in everlasting righteousness (i.e., the saving work of Christ), and to seal up vision and prophecy and anoint the holy of holies (i.e., the coming of the Kingdom).
Daniel 9:24

In the Tribulation there will be no middle-ground. Only those who are sure and solid in their faith in Jesus Christ will be able to avoid being drawn into apostasy and the false religion, and at the same time endure the emotional pounding of the Tribulation and all that it will encompass.

Because you have kept My command to persevere in Me, I will also keep you from the hour of testing which is about to come upon the entire inhabited world ***to put the inhabitants of the world to the test.***
Revelation 3:10

For in addition to all the unprecedented difficulties of that time, our faith will also be pressured from all quarters, from false prophets and false Christs (Deut.13:1-4; Matt.24:5; Matt.24:10-13; Mk.13:6; Lk.21:8; 1Jn.2:18; 4:1-5; 2Jn.1:7), from false Christians infiltrating our fellowship (Dan.11:34; Gal.2:4; Jude 4), from the departure from our fellowship of those we love (1Jn.2:19), from dissension in our ranks (1Cor.11:19), and from the increasing alienation and persecution we will feel and experience from "Christian" groups who will actively ridicule us for our perverse persistence in our faith. This last point is very important to understand. For the refining of the remnant of true believers during the Tribulation will be much more a matter of believers separating themselves rather than being separated out. Everyone likes a growing church, and during the ecumenical movement of the Tribulation's first half the "churches" who compromise with it will grow as never before. Within there will be excitement, hoopla, entertainment – everything but Christ. Without there will be isolation, revulsion, contempt – but for the sake of Christ (Heb.10:33-34; 13:11-13; cf. 2Cor.1:3-11). Those who are not pure will fall away into

apostasy during this terrible time, but those who are pure will be purified even further, so that when our Lord does come (Rev.22:11), He will come to a people ready and prepared (cf. Lk.1:17), and He will come to rescue and avenge them:

And it will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God! We put our hope in Him that He would deliver us [and He did]! This is our Lord. We put our hope in Him. Let us rejoice and be glad in His deliverance!"

Isaiah 25:9

Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, He will come with vengeance; with divine retribution He will come to save you."

Isaiah 35:3-4 NIV

The persecution of the true Church and the Lord's retribution at the Second Advent are the twin foci of the Great Tribulation from the divine point of view. Small wonder then that the Tribulation will be a winnowing process designed to separate the wheat from the chaff so that the Bride to whom our Lord returns will be holy and pure in every way (Ps.45; Eph.5:25-27; Rev.19:7-8).

John answered them all and said, "I am [symbolically] baptizing you with water. But One who is more powerful than I am is coming, [One] whose sandal thong I am not sufficient to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit . . . *and with fire!* His winnowing fork is in His hand, [ready] to cleanse His threshing floor and gather the grain into His barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Luke 3:16-17

For believers, therefore, the Tribulation will not be a time of pointless suffering, but rather a time of purposeful purging, refining, and purifying of all those who have genuinely committed themselves to following Jesus Christ faithfully to the end (cf. Jer.9:7; Jn.15:2).

And even from among [the ranks of] those who have insight, some will be persecuted, in order to refine, purify, and cleanse them until the final end. For [it is] yet to come at its appointed time.

Daniel 11:35

And [during that time of the end] many will purify and cleanse themselves, and will be *refined* (lit., "smelted in a crucible"). But the wicked will act wickedly, nor will any of the wicked understand. But those who give [these matters] careful attention will understand.

Daniel 12:10

If past biblical parallels of such periods of refinement can provide any guide whatsoever, we may expect the remnant refined in this way to be small indeed (at least relative to the billions worldwide who currently identify themselves as Christians). Only three escaped from Sodom (Gen.18:16 - 19:29), only eight escaped the great flood (Gen.7:7; 1Pet.3:20), only 600 dared to throw in their lot with David during his trials in the Judean desert

(1Sam.22:1-2; 23:13; 27:2; 30:9; 1Chron.12:1-22), only 7,000 refused to "bow the knee to Baal" during Jezebel's apostasy (1Kng.19:18; Rom.11:1-6). Throughout human history, the number of the elect has always been but a tiny fraction of the total human population, and even within the apparent community of believers there have inevitably been many who were lukewarm and many who were not believers at all. Just as "not all Israel is Israel" (Rom.9:6-33; cf. Ezek.5:2-4; 5:12; 20:35-38; Zech.13:8-9), so it should not be surprising that not all who claim to be part of Christ's Church truly are. However, the significant difference between the present time and the Tribulation is that, in the midst of that crucible to come, all those who are not dedicated to Jesus above everything else in their lives will be winnowed out, and poured out like dross into apostasy.

Although your people may be like the sand of the sea, O Israel, [only] a remnant of them will return. [For] a final reckoning has been decreed, overflowing with righteousness. For the Lord is about to accomplish a reckoning [which is both] final and [firmly] decreed in the midst of the entire earth.

Isaiah 10:22-23

When the rush to join the new ecumenical movement and the false religion it spawns does come, we who have trusted in Christ for our salvation must remember that the presence of a crowd does not guarantee the presence of God. Even though we may be pariahs and outcasts in the eyes of the world (Ps.84:5-7; Heb.11:13-16; cf. 1Chron.29:15; Ps.39:12; 63:1; 119:19; 1Cor.7:29-31; Heb.11:37-38; 13:13-14; 1Pet.1:1; 2:11; 1Jn.5:19), God is no "respector of persons", nor is He influenced by appearances as the world is (Rom.2:11; Eph.6:9), nor is He impressed by mere numbers. What impresses God is the attitude of our hearts (1Sam.16:7; Ps.51:17; 147:10-11; Is.29:13; Jer.12:2; Matt.10:26; Lk.8:17). He sees us for what we really are, His own children – if we but stay true to this faith, faithful to the end:

See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us to [actually] be called children of God! And [that is just what] we are! For this reason the world does not understand us because it has not understood Him. Beloved, we are already the children of God, but what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when He[, our Lord Jesus Christ,] is revealed [to us at the resurrection], we will be [exactly] like Him, and so will see Him exactly like He is (i.e., at the resurrection, we will have new bodies exactly like our Lord's and know Him as we are known by Him: cf. 1Cor.13:12).

1st John 3:1-2

So strive all that much more than, brothers, to make your calling and election secure through these good works. By devoting yourselves to these things (i.e., virtue, growth and the Christian production which springs from faith) you shall never be tripped up along your way. For it is by such means that your path into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be smoothly and generously paved.

2nd Peter 1:10-11

So then, my brothers, just as you have always been obedient [to the truth], not just when I was present [with you] but even more so now in my absence, go to work on your salvation

with fear and trembling.
Philippians 2:12

In terms of historical analogies, the situation and experience of the Thessalonian believers presents a very close parallel to what genuine Christians will have to face during the Tribulation. They too were attacked by false teachers (cf. 1Thes.4:13-18 with 2Thes.2:1-3), and found themselves under the most severe testing (1Thes.1:6; 2:14; 3:3-4; 2Thes.1:4-7), a combination of circumstances which led the apostle Paul to be greatly concerned about their spiritual welfare (1Thes.3:1-5). But, in spite of everything, they triumphed over all threats to their faith through their joyous reliance on the Word of God (1Thes.1:6; 2:13; 3:6; 2Thes.2:13; cf. 1Thes.1:3), becoming a model to their contemporaries and to us of how believers should behave in tribulations great and small (1Thes.1:7; 2Thes.1:4). Like the wise virgins in our Lord's parable (Matt.25:1-13), we too must commit ourselves to stocking up on the oil of truth while it is yet day, that our lamp of faith may not be extinguished during that dark night to come. Instead of allowing ourselves to become over-focused upon this present world in the relative calm of the moment, we should do all that we can to prepare for the struggle ahead, remembering that we are but pilgrims on this earth, walking but a Sabbath day's journey every day, one day at a time, on our way to Zion, following the example of those who have gone before:

These all died [while still walking] in faith, though they had not received the [fulfillment of their] promises. But [while they lived] they did catch sight of [these promises] from a distance and saluted them, [so to speak], thus making it plain [to all the world] that they were [in effect] strangers and sojourners on the earth. For people who express [their faith] in this way make it quite evident that they are eagerly in search of a homeland [other than the world they now pass through]. Indeed, if these [believers'] hearts had yearned for the [land] from which they had departed, they would have had [ample] opportunity to turn back. But they were zealous for a better place, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God. He has, in fact, prepared a city for them.
Hebrews 11:13-16

As those upon whom the end of the ages is about to come (1Cor.10:11), we who have determined to remain faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ, come what may, must have no illusions about either the difficulty of the task that lies ahead, or the subtlety of the testing through which we must pass on our way to safe deliverance.²⁵⁴

Bless our God, O peoples, and make the sound of His praises heard. He has preserved our lives, and has not let our feet stumble. Yes, O God, You tested us, and You refined us as [one] refines silver. You brought us into the [prison] fortress. You set tribulation upon us (lit., "on our loins"). You made men ride over our heads. We went through fire and water. But in spite [of all this] You have brought us forth into [a place of] refreshment (i.e., deliverance).
Psalm 66:8-12²⁵⁵

When the whirlwind passes by, the wicked are no more, but the righteous will stand firm forever.

Proverbs 10:25

When calamity comes, the wicked are brought down, but even in death the righteous have a refuge.

Proverbs 14:32 NIV

Let us not put Christ to the test, as some of them (i.e., the Exodus generation) did and were killed by serpents. And let us not complain, as some of them complained, and were killed by the Destroyer. These things happened to them as an example to us and were written to warn us (i.e., to avoid similar apostasy) – we who live at the culmination of the ages (i.e., at the doorstep of the Tribulation). So let him who thinks he stands firm beware lest he fall.

1st Corinthians 10:9-12

Finally, although the parable of the wheat and the tares has its true fulfilment at the end of our Lord's millennial reign (Matt.13:24-30; 13:36-43), the principle of leaving the tares to grow in company with the wheat certainly has a direct application here. The tares or weeds among the good grain represent unbelievers mixed into the Church-visible by Satan in such a cunning way that only God is capable of discerning the good from the bad. This is certainly reflective of the situation we see today in our own Church era of Laodicea. To this moment, God has, for the most part, left the tares to grow beside the wheat so as not to judge the whole Church in a general "uprooting". Under the pressures of the Tribulation, however, it will rapidly become apparent who are of "the wheat" and who are of "the tares" as our Lord begins to make the distinction between the wicked and the righteous progressively clear (one of the Tribulation's salient characteristics as we have repeatedly seen). Viewed from this broader perspective (which takes in both believers and unbelievers in the Church-visible in one panoramic view), the process of refining, winnowing, separation, and selective harvesting of the elect initiated by the Great Apostasy will also reveal by this very separation the identity of the reprobate tares now largely hidden from our earthly eyes (Lk.3:16-17; compare also the parable of the net which gathers good and bad: Matt.13:47-50; and the parable of the wedding banquet where some who show up are not worthy: Matt.22:1-14; Lk.14:16-24).

Now the field is the world. And the good seed, these are the sons of the Kingdom. But the tares are the sons of the evil one.

Matthew 13:38

III. The Trumpet Judgments: Revelation 8:6 - 9:21

1. The Purpose of the Seven Trumpet Judgments: The seven trumpet judgments are literal "plagues" in the biblical sense (cf. Rev.9:20, and compare 8:12 *eplege* and 9:18 "these three

plagues"). That is, they are calamities visited by God upon the earth which are not confined to physical diseases (cf. the plagues of frogs, gnats, and flies in Exodus chapter 8, all of which are also called "judgments" in Ex.6:6: Hebrew *shphatiym*, שפטים). As in the case of the ten plagues the Lord inflicted upon Egypt some three and a half millennia ago (Ex.7:14 - 12:30), and also in the case of the seven bowl judgments, still looming as we study them here (Rev.16:1-21), the seven trumpet judgments are clearly just that, instances of divine punishment leveled upon exceptional evil (Is.26:20-21; cf. Lev.26:14-39; Deut.28:15-68; 1Kng.16:29 - 17:1). These judgments will occur after the Tribulation is already well underway (see below for chronology) in response to unprecedented spiritual degeneration on the one hand (i.e., the Great Apostasy), and unprecedented lawlessness and growing satanic control in the secular arena on the other (the policies of antichrist's kingdom being the preeminent manifestation as outlined in the first four seals of Rev.6:1-8). But while a large part of the purpose of these judgments is indeed to express God's wrath upon the exceptional apostasy, degeneration, lawlessness and evil which will flourish during this time, we would be remiss not to point out that the fundamental purpose of these judgments is one of warning. Numerous scriptural parallels make it clear that, in the Bible, the primary significance of blowing the trumpet is the sounding of an alarm at moments of crisis (e.g., Num.10:1-9; Josh.6:1-5; 6:20; Jer.4:19-21; 6:1; Hos.5:8-9; Amos 3:6; Zeph.1:15-17; 1Cor.14:8), occasionally giving warning of impending divine judgment in particular (see esp. Ezek.33:1-20 and Joel 2:1). And as we have previously seen, the seven trumpet judgments of Revelation fulfill the symbolism of the feast of Trumpets, a festival which also bespeaks warning and the need for preparation, and which occurs at a place in the Jewish ceremonial calendar where it represents the beginning of the Tribulation's first half (just as the Day of Atonement symbolically marks the inception of the Great Tribulation proper).²⁵⁶ The Great Tribulation will be, as we have seen, the period of the most intense horror, suffering and trial that mankind has ever experienced. For unbelievers (and for believers vulnerable to apostasy), the stakes are even higher than the torments ahead. In the Tribulation's second half, antichrist will force mankind to swear allegiance to his master Satan or suffer the consequences (i.e., taking the "mark of the beast": Rev.13:16-17). Scripture is clear that the voluntary receipt of this mark removes all possibility of future repentance and is thus equivalent to a self-imposed sentence of condemnation (cf. Rev.14:9-11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). With the eternal futures of every inhabitant of the earth about to hang in the balance in this dramatic way, intense and unmistakable warnings are not only appropriate, they are in fact a gracious act of a loving God, giving even the hardest of hearts a last chance to see and accept the truth before it is too late.

2. The Chronology of the Seven Trumpets: In our treatment of the seven seals of Revelation chapters six through eight, we saw that the seal-trends, while commencing in the sequence in which they are listed, were not episodic. That is to say, once a seal is opened and the trend it represents begins, there will be no respite until Christ's return (e.g., the consequences of antichrist's rule represented by the first four seals will not be eradicated until the Second Advent). The seven trumpet judgments, by way of contrast, while they too occur in sequence like the seals *are* episodic. Like the plagues upon Egypt prior to the Exodus, each trumpet judgment lasts for a specific length of time and comes to an end before the next one in the sequence commences. Since these plagues are indeed judgments from God, and since they are clearly parallel and analogous to the judgments upon Pharaoh

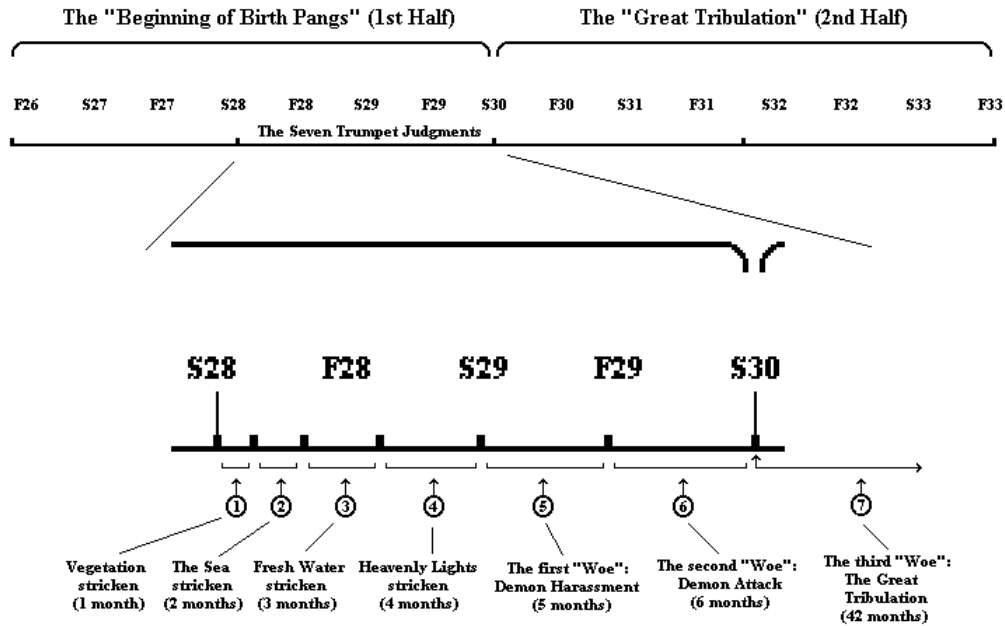
and Egypt (clear types of antichrist and his kingdom respectively), it is certainly appropriate that each blow should be felt by the unbelieving world individually and discretely, so that the fact of their divine origin may not be easily explained away (as was also the case prior to the Exodus).

As to the specific chronology of these seven trumpet judgments, it is important to note that they have been very precisely calibrated by God. For in regard to the sixth trumpet judgment Revelation 9:15 states that the four angels who administer it had been made ready for its precise "hour and day and month and year", and in the case of the fifth trumpet judgment we are also told at Revelation 9:10 that the plague of scorpion-like pain will last for five months (the temporal reference being to the length of the plague itself, not to the duration of the suffering as is commonly supposed). This last point combined with the principle of the accelerating duration and the accelerating intensity of each of the seven trumpet judgments (the final trumpet, after all, is the Great Tribulation, the most intense period of judgment in history, lasting for the full 42 months of the seven year period's second half), means that we can project their relative lengths: the fact that judgment #5 lasts five months invites us likewise to assign a corresponding number of months to each of the first six trumpets (excluding the seventh trumpet which, as we have said and will see in detail in part 4 of this series, represents the Tribulation's entire second half, that is, the Great Tribulation). The net result of adding this ascending number of months (i.e., 1 month for trumpet #1, plus 2 months for trumpet #2, plus 3 months for trumpet #3, plus 4 months for trumpet #4, plus 5 months for trumpet #5, plus 6 months for trumpet #6) is a total of 21 months, exactly one half of the 42 month total of the Tribulation's first half:

The Seven Trumpet Judgments of Warning

(Revelation 8:6 - 11:19)

— The Tribulation —



It will be seen from the diagram above that these six judgments have been placed in immediate sequence directly prior to the commencement of the Great Tribulation (instead of at the very beginning of the Tribulation or, alternatively, spaced out in one fashion or another throughout the first 42 months). There are nearly irrefutable reasons why these judgments should precede and then run directly into the Great Tribulation as indicated in the figure above:

1) The principle of acceleration argues for understanding things in this way. Just as the ten plagues of the Exodus were increasingly severe (see below), so we ought to expect things to get progressively worse as these judgments proceed. The extension of the duration of these plagues as indicated in the figure above will certainly contribute to the growing weight of judgment and add force to the warnings they provide (following the principle of increasingly severe punishment for recurrent misbehavior that applies not only in secular legal systems around the world but also in the expressed divine approach to reprobate conduct: cf. Lev.26:14-39; Deut.28:15-68).

2) As even casual readers of Revelation are aware, there are clear parallels between the seven trumpet judgments and the seven "bowl" judgments of Revelation chapter 16. Pertinent to our discussion here is the fact that the seven bowl judgments immediately precede and lead directly into Armageddon and the Second Advent, and are likewise

clustered sequentially in the second half of the Great Tribulation's 42 months (see part 5 of this series). Therefore it would be highly unusual if the deliberately parallel trumpet judgments were arranged in a markedly different manner.

3) The function of the trumpets is to provide warning through judgment (i.e., a merciful last attempt on God's behalf to shake the inhabitants of the world out of their spiritual hardness before the horrors of the Great Tribulation begin, and before the acceptance of the mark of the beast destroys all possibility of repentance). It therefore certainly stands to reason that these seven trumpet judgments would be grouped immediately before the event they are designed to warn against (i.e., the Great Tribulation). It would make little sense for the seven trumpet judgments to be concentrated at the outset of the Tribulation, a situation which would grant an inexplicable 21 month period of respite before the Great Tribulation begins. The same may be said about distributing the first six trumpet judgments over the entire 42 months of the Tribulation's first half. One can imagine that the respite provided by either of these alternative arrangements would tend to be counterproductive to the purpose of warning given mankind's notorious ability to forget and ignore with the passage of time even the most horrendous events. There is, in fact, no discernible gap between these judgments and the seventh trumpet as described in Revelation, leading us to deduce a seamless continuum between warning and punishment – just as was the case in the Exodus.

4) The narrative of the seven trumpet judgments does in fact lead directly into the Great Tribulation with no discernible gap or interval (e.g., Rev.10:6-7; 11:1-14; and compare Rev.11:15-19 with chapters 12-13 wherein are contained events that relate exclusively to the Great Tribulation). Scripture gives us little choice but to "anchor" the end of the trumpet judgments directly to the Great Tribulation (especially since the seventh trumpet is the Great Tribulation).

3. The Ascending Intensity of the Seven Trumpet Judgments: Not only do the trumpet judgments expand sequentially in terms of their duration (being 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 42 months long respectively), but they also exhibit a progressive intensification in terms of the painful effects they produce:

- **Trumpet #1: Vegetation Stricken:** A third of the earth is scorched, and a third of its grass and trees are burned up, but *no* human fatalities are mentioned.
- **Trumpet #2: The Sea Stricken:** A third of the creatures in the sea are killed, and a third of all ships destroyed, unquestionably resulting in *some* human fatalities.
- **Trumpet #3: Fresh Water Stricken:** A third of the world's fresh water is poisoned with the result that there are *many* human fatalities.
- **Trumpet #4: The Heavenly Lights Stricken:** While no fatalities are mentioned in conjunction with this one third reduction in the delivery of heavenly light, this is the first judgment wherein *all* human beings and *all* portions of the world are adversely affected.

The suffering caused by this diminution of light should not be underestimated (cf. Rev.16:10-11).

The administrators of these first four trumpet judgments are the four angels of Revelation 7:1-3, "to whom it had been given to harm **the earth** and **the sea**".²⁵⁷ For all four of the above judgments are targeted directly at either "the earth" (i.e., land), or at "the sea" (i.e., the waters of the earth), or, in the case of the fourth judgment, both (i.e., deprivation of light affects all living things). In this they are different from the last three trumpet judgments where, rather than the earth and the sea, *human beings* are directly targeted as the objects of the judgments, and human suffering and death the main rather than merely the ancillary result. Of further significance is the fact that the last three trumpet judgments, while decreed by God, are carried out by demonic forces.²⁵⁸ This is a further, clear indication of the progressive intensification of these judgments. Indeed, these final trumpet judgments are so much more severe in nature than the preceding four that they are given the name "the three woes" (compare Rev.8:13 with 9:12; 11:14; 12:12).

- **Trumpet #5: The First Woe: Demon Harassment:** The entire unbelieving population of the earth is affected.
- **Trumpet #6: The Second Woe: Demon Destruction:** An entire third of the world's population is killed.
- **Trumpet #7: The Third Woe: The Great Tribulation:** The "third woe" is, as discussed above, synonymous with the Great Tribulation (cf. Rev.12:12). While exact numbers are not provided, this three and one half year period will produce the most staggering loss of life in raw terms that has ever taken place (cf. Is.13:12). The slaughter that will take place at Armageddon alone boggles the mind (Rev.14:17-20; cf. Ezek.39:4-6; 39:11-20), and the bowl judgments of Revelation chapter 16 which precede it are clearly more dire in their effects than the trumpet judgments (which collectively claim the lives of over a third of the world's population). Finally, the fact that the Great Tribulation lasts for 42 months, exactly *seven times* as long as the sixth trumpet judgment which precedes, also does much to signal the incomparably more horrendous nature of this last judgment (cf. Matt.18:22). For as terrible as the first half of the Tribulation will be, in comparison to the Great Tribulation unleashed by the seventh trumpet it is only the "beginning of woes" (Matt.24:3-13).

4. **The Effects of the Seven Trumpet Judgments on Believers:** As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we rightly and prudently view the coming events of the Tribulation with sanctified concern. Though we are not fearful and are firm in our faith regarding our Lord's ability to deliver us from all threats, we are nonetheless perfectly justified in taking the warnings concerning the coming Tribulation to heart – indeed, we would be spiritually negligent if we did not. Scripture provides us with a very detailed version of these future events not for their entertainment value, but precisely so that we may take measures now to become spiritually prepared for the Tribulation when it comes – a salutary course of action even if it be God's will for us to be spared enduring the Tribulation proper (for as those who are

"sharing in the sufferings of Christ", we shall certainly see our share of personal tribulations). One point in which we may have great confidence concerns these very judgments, the seven trumpet judgments (and the bowl judgments of Revelation 16 as well). For these judgments are just that, divine punishment upon the world of *unbelievers*, and especially upon those who are actively supportive of antichrist and his regime. These seven plagues are not, therefore, meant or intended to harm God's people. The Tribulation will be the most difficult time in history for believers to endure, but not because of either of the two sets of punitive judgments being considered here. Just as the 144,000 were sealed by God so as to be spared the plagues soon to be delivered by the four angels of Revelation 7:1-3, so we may have every confidence that not only are these judgments not meant for the people of God, but that we also shall be spared the worst of their effects.

In Revelation 9:4, only those who do not have the seal of God on their forehead are harmed by the scorpion-like sting of the demon army of Abaddon-Apollyon. By this we may understand that believers will not be subject to this plague. As we saw in our previous treatment of the 144,000 (in part 2B of this series), the seal of God "on the forehead" technically refers to special mark of authority given to that elite group. However, as we have also pointed out in that connection, all believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit of God (2Cor.1:21-22; Eph.1:13-14; 4:30), and scripture provides several close parallels of divine protection in similar circumstances, where God's people are protected even as God's enemies are judged. The most poignant and applicable of these are 1) the mark placed on the foreheads of the righteous in Jerusalem to protect them from the coming slaughter (Ezek.9:1-6); and 2) the Passover mark placed on the doors of believers to protect them from the Destroyer who was to kill all the first-born of the Egyptians (Ex.12:7-13).

In regard to the first parallel in Ezekiel, all who do not have the mark are to be destroyed, but all who have the mark are to be spared. In this way, God makes a sharp distinction between those who "mourn" over the apostasy of the day and those who are complacent and participating in it. This sharp distinction between God's friends and God's foes is clearly the point in Revelation 9:4, and it is equally clear, given only two categories, that all believers fall into the category of being associated with the righteous 144,000 rather than with those who reject God.

As to the second parallel in Exodus, it is most instructive that the purpose of the mark on the door is "that *no* destructive plague may touch you when I strike Egypt" (Ex.12:13). And even in the absence of some similar mark, the Israelites were spared the negative effects of the nine plagues which preceded (cf. Ex.8:22; 9:4-6; 9:26; 10:23). In all His judging of Pharaoh and the resistant Egyptians, God is deliberately and purposefully "making a distinction" between them and His people (cf. Ex.8:23; 9:11; 10:6; 11:7), splitting the entire population of Egypt into two categories: those who are God's people and those who are not (exactly as in Rev.9:4). Especially given the fact that the Exodus is a prophetic "type" of the Tribulation (consider the parallel between Pharaoh and his kingdom on the one hand and antichrist and his kingdom on the other), we should therefore see the reference in Revelation 9:4 to the "those with the mark of God on their forehead" as applicable to all believers generally and not restricted to the 144,000 exclusively (even though this special

sealing applies only to them), for believers approve and support the ministry of the 144,000, whereas unbelievers reject and oppose them.

Similarly, in Revelation 9:20-21, those not killed by the six plagues still fail to repent of their godless deeds. Here, not even the 144,000 are mentioned, but we are clearly not meant to understand that for this reason they now fall into the category of "the rest of mankind" who continue in their blasphemous ways. Thus in Revelation 9:20-21 we see the same sharp distinction of the world into two discrete camps with no middle ground (a main theme and a main purpose of the Tribulation, as we have repeatedly pointed out). Without question, therefore, Revelation 9:4 is meant to reassure us that, as in the Exodus plagues, and as in the fall of Jerusalem, those who truly belong to God will be spared the judgment of God, even though the times may otherwise be exceptionally difficult to endure. We may have to pass through fire and water (Ps.66:12), but by God's grace and through God's mercy we shall do so, confident of being spared the righteous judgments which consume His enemies:

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.
Isaiah 43:2 NIV

Get out, My people. Go into your rooms and close your doors behind you. Hide yourselves for a little while until My indignation has run its course (i.e., until the Tribulation is over). For behold, the Lord is about to come forth from His place in order to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity. And the earth will reveal the blood shed upon it, and conceal its slain no longer.
Isaiah 26:20-21

What is true for all believers who are carefully following the Lord, however, may not be so easily vouchsafed for those who are falling into apostasy. As a time of sharp division and distinction between the people of God and the followers of the devil the Tribulation will be a period of little or no middle ground, and we must expect for all who do not fall into the protected category of faithful believers being considered here to fall instead into the unprotected category of those who suffer the effects of the judgments. The background for the quotes from Isaiah above, it should be recalled, is military defeat on a massive scale as a result of widespread apostasy (cf. 2Chron.28). The seven trumpet judgments likewise fall upon an evil, recalcitrant, and apostate world, with only the true and faithful followers of our Lord protected from their effects. We who have determined in our hearts to belong to the latter category and not to fall into the former need to be prepared for the world's reaction to these events as well. Just as with recent events in this country when all suggestions that attacks and disasters might have something to do with divine judgment have been met with blind (and godless) outrage, so we may expect the world to be completely unresponsive to these seven trumpet judgments, unrepentantly finding no fault with its evil and apostasy. Indeed, Revelation 9:20-21 tells us exactly that. But we faithful followers of Jesus Christ will be protected from these things, and, just as importantly, we may have complete confidence that the difficult times which are about to befall this world

are definitely not of our making. Quite the contrary. These judgments and all the divine judgments of the Tribulation are actually *for the benefit* of believers (as will be even more obvious in our treatment of the bowl judgments, specific divine punishment upon the unbelieving world for their persecution of the true Church; cf. Rev.16), and so we should be joyful in the face of them (Ps.97:8; Rev.16:5-6; cf. Ps.48:11; Rev.8:3-5; 18:6-7). When presented with these events, therefore, we believers need to remember that they are signs that the return of Lord and our ultimate deliverance is drawing nearer, encouraging one another to hold onto our faith solid and strong until that glorious day.

"And there will be signs in the sun and the moon and the stars, and on the earth there will be [great] distress among the nations [who will be greatly] bewildered by the roaring of the sea and [its massive] waves, [and] men will lose heart out of fear and expectation of what is about to come upon the inhabited world. For the luminaries of the heavens will be [powerfully] shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and much glory. When these things begin to happen, stand up and raise up your heads, because your redemption is near." Then He told them a parable. "Look at the fig tree and all its leaves. When they have already come out [like this], you can see for yourselves by examining it that summer is near. So also when you see that all things have come to pass, know that the Kingdom of God is near."

Luke 21:25-31

Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, He will come with vengeance; with divine retribution He will come to save you."

Isaiah 35:3-4 NIV

1. Vegetation Stricken (8:6-7)

Revelation 8:6-7:

(6) And the seven angels with the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound [their trumpets]. (7) And the first [angel] sounded [his trumpet]. And fiery hail [of meteorites] mixed with blood appeared and was cast to the earth. And the third part of the earth was scorched, and a third part of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

As explained in figure #1, the first trumpet judgment will commence exactly half way through the first half of the Tribulation, and will last for one month. It will be remembered that at the very outset of the Tribulation, following the opening of the seventh seal, the world had received an unmistakable divine warning of its commencement in the form of unexplainable thunderous voices, an unprecedented display of lightning, and a worldwide earthquake (Rev.8:1-5). But far from taking warning, by the time of this first judgment nearly two years later, the world will have witnessed a series of developments which should

have removed all doubt about the lateness of the hour. For at the mid-point of the Tribulation's first half . . .

- Antichrist will not only have gained power in his own country, "Babylon", but will be well on his way to establishing his kingdom, "revived Rome".
- The Great Apostasy will be well underway.
- Antichrist's false religion will be gaining ground worldwide in tandem with his world political movement.
- The ministry of 144,000 will be in full swing.
- The ministry of the two witnesses, Moses and Elijah, will be in full swing.
- The temple will have been rebuilt (in some form or other).
- The trend of unprecedented worldwide lawlessness will be painfully apparent.
- The trends of the four seals will be commencing within the beast's kingdom (with effects and ramifications far beyond).

All these events will be treated in their proper places, but for our purposes here it is sufficient to note that none of these developments will have done much to awaken the unbelieving world. All of our indications from the Bible are that by this time most hard hearts have grown harder and far too many soft hearts have grown hard, so that it is now high time for the warning judgments to begin.

The overall plan for human history, of which this first trumpet judgment is a part, is God's, and the delegated authority by which it is released is the Lamb's (as seen in His opening of the seals; cf. Jn.5:22-30). The agent of its administration, however, is one of the four angels of chapter seven whom we have identified above as an "authority", the rank directly below the archangels who sound these seven trumpets. As we have seen in the past, these high ranking angels undoubtedly have numerous subordinates (compare the existence of legions of elect angels in Matt.26:53; cf. 2Kng.6:17), and, as their ability to restrain the world's winds implies (Rev.7:1), are endowed by God with exceptional powers to manipulate celestial phenomena (the province of these first four trumpet judgments).²⁵⁹ In addition to this direct, unseen angelic agency working from the ultimate and delegated authority of God the Father and the Lamb, we must also mention here that there will be intermediate human agency involved in these judgments as well, for they will be proclaimed and visibly "unleashed" on the world at the word of the two witnesses, Moses and Elijah. This will be analogous to the way in which the plagues of the Exodus were mediated by Moses (Ex.7-11), and the judgments of his day were mediated by Elijah (the three and a half year drought in particular: 1Kng.17:1; Jas.5:17). In this connection, it is significant that drought and the turning of water into blood are given specific mention at Revelation 11:6 in company with "every kind of plague", since these two plagues best characterize the historical ministries of these two men in their mediation of divine judgment (Rev.11:6): turning water into blood is

the crucial third "sign" given to Moses by the Lord to validate his authority (Ex.4:9 with Rev.11:5-6), and Elijah is most famous in the respect for the three and half year drought that plagued the Northern Kingdom (cf. Jas.5:17 with Rev.11:5-6).²⁶⁰

The Greek word for hail (*chalaza*, χάλαζα) is used for anything which falls from the sky (meteor showers included).²⁶¹ Given the close and deliberate analogy here between the "fiery sulphur [rocks]" which fell on Sodom and Gomorrah (where vegetation was also stricken: Gen.19:23-25), and the "hail-stones of fire" which will fall on the armies of the beast at Armageddon (where blood is also involved: Ezek.38:22), we must understand this hail in the same way, namely, as a shower of "meteorites" which descend to the earth in a dramatic and spectacular way (cf. Ps.11:6).²⁶²

This judgment, however, will be unique, first of all because of the tremendously dire effects it will produce on a scale completely unprecedented in the memory of human experience. A full one third of the earth will be devastated by the fires these incendiary bodies produce, destroying thereby a third of the world's trees, and setting all of its verdant grasslands ablaze. Implied in the phrase "a third of the earth" is the massive accompanying damage that these worldwide fires must inevitably entail for man-made structures of every sort, and we are to understand that a considerable loss of human life will ensue from the extensive series of conflagrations that will be caused everywhere on earth to such a degree that an entire third of the planet's land masses will be so affected (distributed around the world and not localized in one particular area). Nevertheless, just as the Exodus generation and the faithful of Elijah's day were spared the direct effects of the divine judgments themselves (though they were they were not immune to all of the concomitant hardships these judgments occasioned), so we may assume on the basis of the example of God's protection of His people Israel during the Exodus judgments mediated by Moses (Ex.8:22; 9:4-6; 9:26; 10:23), and His preservation of the lives of those who did not bow the knee to Baal during the judgment upon Israel mediated by Elijah (1Kng.19:18; cf. 1Kng.18:1-4; Rom.11:2-4), that those who are truly His will likewise enjoy a measure of protection from this and the other trumpet judgments, despite the difficulties and widespread destruction they will produce (e.g., Moses and Aaron are not afflicted with boils in Ex.9:11).

The second aspect of this judgment which marks it out as unique and no mere freak of nature will be the intentional inclusion of blood within the meteorites responsible for these fires. It is important to note that, just as in the case of other "blood judgments" in Revelation (Rev.8:8; 11:6; 14:20; 16:3-6) and those of the Exodus (Ex.7:17-21; cf. Ps.105:29), the blood here described as being mixed with the "fiery hail" is literal blood (cf. Ezek.38:22). The inclusion of blood (no doubt contained within the fiery, hollow spheres, and visibly splattering upon impact) will constitute a clear message to the inhabitants of the earth that this is not merely an accidental though horrific meteorological phenomena, but rather is an unmistakable act of divine warning and judgment. For supernaturally occurring blood of this sort is a deliberate and well-known symbol of divine displeasure and impending wrath (Joel 2:31; Rev.6:10; 6:12; cf. Gen.9:4-6; Lev.17:1-16; Is.26:21; 2Pet.3:10). It is a warning against the shedding of innocent blood (which antichrist and his followers

will ignore), and a threat of the judgment of blood from God Himself upon all who scorn the warning (which judgment will be carried out in full at Armageddon).

While believers will receive a large measure of divine protection during this plague, that does not mean that we will be spared of all its consequences (cf. Jer.45:1-5). The massive worldwide fires produced by this first trumpet judgment will cause many individual dwellings to be destroyed, and we cannot say for certain that our homes will be unaffected. What we can say for certain is that God will provide for our every need in spite of the horrendous nature of this judgment (Ps.37:25; Phil.4:19; Heb.13:5-6), and that through it He will surely work everything out for us for our good (Gen.50:20; Rom.8:28).

2. The Sea Stricken (8:8-9)

Revelation 8:8-9:

(8) And the second angel sounded [his trumpet]. And [something] like a huge mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea, and a third part of the sea became blood, (9) and a third part of the creatures in the sea died, [even of all] those possessing breath (i.e., fish and mammals). And a third part of the ships were destroyed.

The same agencies obtain in this second trumpet judgment as we saw operating in the first. The judgment is decreed by God, is part of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, is heralded by an archangel, administered by one of the four "powers" (i.e., the angels of the winds of Rev.7:1-3), and mediated by the two witnesses. While the first trumpet judgment was dramatic, the appearance in the heavens of such a monstrous portent and its subsequent descent to earth with such horrific results clearly marks this second judgment out as of greater import than the first. This fiery meteorite, mountainous in its size, will strike the earth's seas and cause unheard of devastation in this second realm of operation (just as the first did on the land). While the many meteorites of the first trumpet judgment fell everywhere on earth, destroying a third of its vegetation in the process, this large, fiery meteorite's impact will be centralized, striking in one particular area with its devastating effects then radiating outward. The first such effect will be the turning of an entire third of the world-sea into blood (also radiating out from the point of impact). As was the case when the Nile was turned to blood (Ex.7:14:2-4), natural processes will eventually dilute and dissipate this mass of concentrated contamination, but not until an entire third of the animate creatures in the sea are killed because of its noxious effects (as happened to the fish in the Nile as well: Ex.7:18: 7:21; Ps.105:29). The second devastating effect of this colossal meteorite strike will be the destruction of a third of the world's ships, undoubtedly stemming from the tsunamis that travel outward from the point of impact and the severe vortex it will create which will swallow up everything in the vicinity. In addition to the significant loss of life which will occur aboard this large number of ships lost at sea, there will unquestionably be heavy casualties on many islands and coastlines from the astounding waves such an event must produce (cf. Lk.21:25-31), making this judgment almost certainly more fatal than the first. We also note that, as detailed in the time line given above, the effects of this judgment

will be twice as long as those of the first (for this judgment's effects will endure for two months). Finally, the blood accompanying it, in addition to being a warning sign as we saw above, now actually becomes a means to administering part of this second judgment.

While believers will also receive a large measure of divine protection during this plague, that does not mean that we will be spared of all its consequences either (cf. Jer.45:1-5). The devastation caused by this second trumpet judgment will have a massive negative economic impact (occasioned by the loss of a third of the world's shipping, the dislocation to the food supply stemming from the loss of a third of the world's fisheries, and the devastation of many of the world's coastal areas). We cannot say for certain that our livelihoods and economic situations will be unaffected. What we can say for certain is that God will provide for our every need in spite of the grievous nature of this judgment (cf. Ps.37:25; Phil.4:19; Heb.13:5-6). We must with complete faith cast all our cares upon Him, secure in the absolute conviction that He does care for us (1Pet.5:7; cf. Ps.55:22), and put all worry for material things aside, confident in the knowledge that our God knows our every need and will continue to supply them no matter what the historical circumstances may be (Matt.6:25-34).

3. Fresh Water Stricken (8:10-11)

Revelation 8:10-11:

(10) And the third angel sounded [his trumpet]. And an asteroid (lit., "a large star") fell from the sky, burning like a torch, and it fell upon a third part of the rivers and upon the sources of [their] waters. (11) And the name of the asteroid was called "Absinth" (i.e., "Wormwood"). And the third part of the waters turned into absinth (i.e., "wormwood"). And many of the people [of the earth] died from these waters, because they had been made bitter.

The progression of falling objects, increasing in size through each judgment, continues here, taking us from the "hail" of the first trumpet judgment (i.e., meteorite fragments), to the "mountain" of the second (i.e., a very large, intact meteorite), and now to a "star" (i.e., a small asteroid). The Greek "large star" must be understood in terms of the times in which the book of Revelation was written. Clearly, should a "star" of whatever size in the sense in which we use the word today impact the earth, complete and immediate vaporization of the entire planet would result. But the Greek word *aster* (ἄ στήρ), refers to any luminous heavenly body (whether meteoroids, asteroids, planets, or even stars). The "largeness" of the "star" is likewise not to be understood from an absolute point of view, but in comparison to the visible size of other luminous heavenly bodies: when this asteroid enters the atmosphere, it will be most impressive compared to anything else visible in the sky. That is true even in comparison to the mountainous meteorite of the second trumpet judgment, for this asteroid will not only be larger, but will also be brighter. It will not only

be glowing red with fire [reddish light], but will emit extremely bright, white-hot light like a "lamp".

Several things are implied by the fact that this asteroid falls upon a third of the world's rivers and springs. First, instead of the sharp angle of descent probable in the case of the falling bodies of the first two trumpet judgments, it is likely that this asteroid will enter the earth's atmosphere obliquely and in a gradual descent, thus heightening its worldwide visibility and producing a visual effect even more dramatic than was the case in the previous two judgments. Secondly, in order to achieve the outcome of contaminating a third of the world's rivers and springs, it is further likely that this asteroid will gradually disintegrate on its extended journey through the earth's atmosphere (possibly ending in a final explosion), with the result being that the asteroid's substance will then be spread throughout the atmosphere in the form of noxious fallout. The fallout thus produced will be sufficient to contaminate a full one third of the world's supply of fresh water, and this dire occurrence will have the effect of killing "many of the people of the earth". Although it is not specified here that one third of the world's population is destroyed (as is often wrongly assumed from this passage), this third trumpet judgment will nevertheless produce more fatalities than the second. Given the increase in the number of deaths, the more lengthy nature of the judgment (lasting for three months according to our projection above), and the fact that this judgment will begin with an event even more dramatic than the other two (i.e., the widely visible brightness of the descending asteroid), we can clearly see the pattern of accelerating judgment continuing.

"Wormwood", moreover, is not an angel (as is sometimes supposed), but merely the name given to this asteroid on account of the effects it produces. Although we need not understand this asteroid as being entirely composed of "wormwood", we are meant to take the production of "wormwood" in the affected streams and springs as literal (just as in the case of the first trumpet judgment where the meteorite fragments contained literal blood, and also in the case of the second where the large meteorite produced literal blood).

"Wormwood" or "absinth" is a bitter plant of the genus *Artemisia*, often used in a metaphorical sense in scripture on account of its exceptionally embittering properties (cf. Deut.29:18; Prov.5:4; Jer.8:14; 9:15; 23:15; Lam.3:15; 3:19; Amos 5:7; 6:12). It is true that the effect of the fallout this asteroid produces will, in any case, be to turn one third of the world's fresh water so bitter that it cannot be drunk. However, as was true of the literal blood of the first two trumpet judgments, the presence of literal "wormwood" will be an unmistakable sign to all the inhabitants of the earth that this judgment has come about from the hand of God, and could not possibly have occurred in any other way. The symbolic nature of the wormwood is also important. Just as blood is a sign of coming divine retribution upon outrageous acts that require the blood of the perpetrators, so "wormwood" recalls the poison and the bitterness of idolatry, the turning away from God unto Satan in an overt, willful, and organized way, a key characteristic of the devil's tribulational false religion as we have seen.

See to it that there not be among you any man or woman or family or tribe whose heart is turning away this day from the Lord your God so as to go and serve the gods of these nations. See to it that there not [spring up] among you [any such] root producing poison

and wormwood (i.e., the bitterness caused by idolatry: cf. Heb.12:15).
Deuteronomy 29:18

As to the effects of this judgment, the text of Revelation 8:11 clearly states that many people will die "from the waters, *because they had been made bitter*". Since wormwood itself is not poisonous, we must assume that the deaths indicated here come as a result of the extensive contamination which will render the waters so affected essentially undrinkable (in the same way that the plague of blood made the waters of the Nile undrinkable for the Egyptians: Ex.7:18: 7:21; Ps.105:29). Thus dehydration itself over this extended three month period, along with the concomitant weakening of overall health such extreme dehydration will produce, is the main proximate cause of the deaths predicted here. At Mara, during the Exodus, a similar bitterness of the waters prevented the Israelites from drinking them (Ex.15:22-26). In that case, God was testing His people's hearts to see whether they would trust Him in temporary hardship, and we would certainly wish to do better in this drought of fresh water than they did and not grumble against the Lord. After all, as believers we can expect to survive this plague either because our own sources of water will be unaffected (i.e., the "third part" will not include our places of residence just as the land of Goshen was consistently spared during the Exodus plagues; cf. Ex.7:14-24), or because of some as yet unspecified provision or purification of the water we need to stay alive (compare Moses' and Elisha's healing of bitter waters: Ex.15:25; 2Kng.2:19-22; and God's providence in the case of Elijah: 1Kng.17:1-10; 19:6). Just as God has never stinted in giving us the waters of eternal life in abundance (Rev.21:6; cf. Is.55:1; Jn.7:37-39; Rev.22:17), so we may have absolute confidence in Him that He will not withhold the water we need to sustain our physical lives, even in the midst of the most terrible drought the world has ever seen.

Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle. They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them in their distress. He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle. Let them give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love (lit., "mercy") and His wonderful deeds for men, for He satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.

Psalm 107:4-9 NIV

He turned the desert into pools of water and the parched ground into flowing springs;
Psalm 107:35 NIV

4. The Heavenly Lights Stricken (8:12)

Revelation 8:12:

And the fourth angel sounded [his trumpet]. And the third part of the sun, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars were stricken, so that the third part of them might be darkened, and so that the day might not shine forth a third part of its [light], and the night likewise.

As with the previous three judgments, the fourth trumpet judgment begins in the heavens (the province of the four angels of the winds: Rev.7:1), but affects the earth (which they were instructed not to harm before the sealing of the 144,000: Rev.7:2-3). In contrast to the previous three judgments, no mediate cause is given (i.e., no meteorite fragments, meteor, or asteroid), and no specific divine sign is rained upon the earth (i.e., no blood mixed with hail, no turning of waters to blood, no turning of waters to wormwood). The very fact of the lack of any appreciable cause for this pronounced dimming of all the heavenly lights, however, will again serve notice on the inhabitants of the world that this worldwide phenomenon can only be of divine origin (for there will be no adequate scientific explanation for this dramatic and unprecedented occurrence). Like the supernatural darkness of the Exodus (Ex.10:21-29; Josh.24:7; Ps.105:28; and cf. Ex.14:19-20), like the supernatural darkness that attended Christ's judgment on our behalf at the cross (Matt.27:45; Mk.15:33; Lk.23:44-45; cf. Ex.12:6; 29:39-41), and like the supernatural darkness that will precede the Second Advent (Is.5:30; 13:10; 60:2; Ezek.32:7-8; Joel 2:2; 2:10; 2:31; 3:15; Amos 8:9; Zeph.1:15; Zech.14:6-7; Matt.24:29; Mk.13:24-25; Lk.21:25; Rev.6:12; 16:10-11), such things are beyond human rationalization and will effectively communicate the intended divine warning to the world to repent while there is still an opportunity to do so (cf. Rev.9:20-21).

The increased length of this judgment (four months long, according to our projection), its worldwide coverage (for there will be no place on earth which is unaffected by this plague), and the universal pain it produces (everyone will be affected by this diminution of light), all mark out this plague as worse than the three which precede it. We have no specific indication here of loss of life, but given the fact that there has been an acceleration of mortality up to this point, and that the next two plagues also result in progressively greater loss of life, we can assume that over this four month period as well many more will die than was the case in the previous trumpet judgment. Part of this death toll will no doubt be due to accidents, the harmful effects of the resulting cold (it will occur during the worst part of the winter in the northern hemisphere), loss of productivity, depression, and general negative health consequences.²⁶³ Although it is easy to do as we read these things in the comfort of our homes before the fact, we should in no way underestimate the intense emotional and physical harm that such a drastic reduction in light will produce. In Revelation 16:10-11, a similar judgment of darkness is specifically said to produce pain of the most severe sort (cf. the "palpable" darkness of Ex.10:21). This judgment will indeed focus the attention of the unbelieving world, and it should not be lost on us (though through the hardness of their hearts it will largely be lost on them) that this darkness is meant to be a sign and a portent of divine judgment (cf. Gen.1:2; Ezek.32:3-10; Acts 13:11), and a foretaste of the horrors of the lake of fire, the fiery yet supernaturally dark place of judgment into which all those who do not repent of their evil will eventually be consigned (Matt.8:12; 22:13; 25:30).²⁶⁴

In spite of the terrors this judgment holds for the unbelieving world, we have faith that God will provide for those who are faithful followers of His Son. Just as the Israelites had light in their homes while the Egyptians were visited with supernatural darkness (Ex.10:23b), so we are completely confident that we will have all the physical light we need. And not only that, but we are also completely confident that we will have abundant light in our hearts, an

illuminated joy that comes from ever fixing our gaze upon Him who is the Light of the world, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Jn.1:4-5; 1Jn.1:5). Therefore in this and in every plague that befalls the earth during those dark days, we must exercise godly patience and perseverance (Is.26:20-21), remembering that these portents reassure us that our Lord is near (Lk.21:25-31).

Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for the gracious and compassionate and righteous man.
Psalm 112:4 NIV

[4b. The Three Woes (8:13)]

Revelation 8:13:

And I saw and heard a solitary eagle flying in mid-heaven saying in a loud voice, "Woe, Woe, Woe to the inhabitants of the earth on account of the remaining proclamations of [each] trumpet [which] the three [remaining] angels are about to sound".

The solemn warning given here (along with the dire consequences it presages) serves to distinguish and separate emphatically the next three judgments from the four which preceded them. As both a bird of prey and a carrion eater, the eagle is a natural symbol both for impending attack and for the deadly consequences of defeat. Therefore the eagle who calls out in a loud voice from the sky above is first a general portent of divine wrath and judgment as can be clearly seen from the following passage in Hosea (cf. Jer.48:40; Ezek.17:1-24; Hab.1:8):

Put the *trumpet* to your lips [to blow it] (i.e., as a sign of *warning*). For [it is] as if an *eagle* [is hovering] over the house of the Lord (i.e., as a sign of impending *judgment*). For they have transgressed against my covenant, and they have sinned against my teaching (lit., *torah*). Israel cries out to Me, "O my God, we know You!" But Israel has forsaken the good, and an enemy will pursue him.
Hosea 8:1-2

Secondly, as we have seen in our study of the eagle-faced cherub (Rev.4:7; cf. Ezek.1:10; 10:14), the eagle is also a specific symbol of the Messiah soon to come, who likewise appears in mid-heaven, visible to every eye, when He returns to execute judgment upon all His enemies and claim His Kingdom at the Second Advent (Rev.1:7; cf. Ps.110; Matt.24:28; Lk.17:37). With its connotations of forbidding majesty and awe (Deut.28:49; Jer.48:40; 49:22; Ezek.17:3; 17:7; Dan.7:4; Hos.8:1; Hab.1:8), the eagle is an appropriate symbol for Christ's majestic and awe-inspiring double victory, first at the cross (with its accompanying resurrection, ascension and session at the Father's right hand), and ultimately at the Second Advent which is in view here (Matt.24:28; Lk.17:37).

The announcement of multiple tidings of disaster through the repetition of the word "woe" is not unprecedented in scripture (as we saw in our treatment of Jesus' seven woes in Matt.23:13-39 in section II.2.a above; cf. also Is.5:8-30; 10:1-19; Zech.11:17). What all the passages cited have in common (including the very numerous use of single "woes" throughout the Bible) is that the word "woe" looks forward to the divine consequences of abandoning God (in the case of believers), or of opposing God (in the case of unbelievers). That is to say, the inspired use of "woe" in scripture is generally reserved for proclamations of impending judgment upon the objects of God's wrath (and that is always so in the case of repeated "woes"). Therefore the first thing that believers who are contemplating these terrible judgments to come need to keep in mind is that their dire consequences are meant for unbelievers and apostates, not for those who are keeping faith with and staying faithful to Jesus. Even though the effects of these last three trumpet judgments will be even more catastrophic in nature than the four which have come before, not a hair on the head of a single believer in Jesus Christ will fall to the ground without the express counsel and foreknowledge of our God (Lk.21:18). Specifically, the fifth and sixth trumpet judgments are administered by demons and will affect only unbelievers. Even during the seventh trumpet judgment, synonymous with the Great Tribulation as we have seen (cf. Rev.12:12), believers will continue to have complete protection from God's judgments upon the world (most perspicuously in the seven bowl judgments, including Christ's victorious return).

Jerusalem staggers, Judah is falling; their words and their deeds are against the Lord, defying His glorious presence. The look on their faces testifies against them; they parade their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it. *Woe* to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves. ***Tell the righteous that it will be well with them***, for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds. ***Woe to the wicked!*** Disaster is upon them! They will be paid back for what their hands have done.

Isaiah 3:8-11 NIV

This is not to say, as we have already stressed, that for this reason believers will have an easy time of things during the Tribulation – far from it. The severe dislocation of human life and society from almost every point of view which will obtain during the Tribulation (and increase in severity with every passing day) cannot help but place tremendous pressures upon God's elect. This is in fact the point behind the name "the Tribulation" as we have seen in the first part of this series. Moreover, during the Great Tribulation there will be a worldwide persecution of the true Church of Jesus Christ such as has never occurred in the history of the world and never shall again thereafter. But even though it be our lot to suffer alienation, contempt, persecution, imprisonment, and even martyrdom (as many who are alive at that time most definitely shall), we must train ourselves ahead of time to take comfort in the fact that none of these things will come against us *from* God. Rather they will be *for* God as He uses us for His glory, demonstrating for all the world of men and angels to see the faith and faithfulness of those who are called by His Name, all those who have dedicated their lives to the Lamb whatever the cost, even should that entail the loss of their lives to witness on His behalf.

[But in contrast to those who receive the mark of the beast and worship him], the saints have perseverance, [even] those who in this way (i.e., by refusing to receive the mark or

worship the beast) keep God's commandments and [retain] their faith in Jesus (viz., even though it may cost them their lives).

Revelation 14:12

5. The First Woe: Demon Harassment (9:1-12)

Revelation 9:1-12:

(1) And the fifth angel sounded [his trumpet]. And I saw a star (i.e., an angel), which had descended from heaven to the earth. And the key to the shaft [which leads down] to the Abyss was given to him. (2) And he opened the shaft of the Abyss, and smoke came up from the shaft like smoke from a great oven. And the sun and the atmosphere were darkened by the smoke [which came forth] from the shaft. (3) And locusts came out of the smoke [and descended] onto the earth. And the power [to harm people] was given to them just like earthly scorpions have the power [to harm people]. (4) And it was told to them not to harm the earth's grass, or any green plant (lit., "thing"), or any tree, but only the people without the seal of God on their foreheads. (5) And they were given [the power] – not to kill these [people] – but [to bring it about] that they might be tormented [by this plague] over a five month period. And the torment these [locusts inflict] is like the torment [inflicted] by a scorpion when it stings a man. (6) And in those days people will seek death but will not find it, and will wish to die, but death will flee from them. (7) And the appearance of the locusts was similar to [miniature] horses made ready for battle (i.e., in full battle gear). And on their heads were something like crowns similar to gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. (8) And they had hair like women's hair (i.e., long), and their teeth were like lions' teeth. (9) And they had breastplates like [the] iron breastplates [men wear into battle]. And the sound of their wings was like the sound of many chariot horses charging into battle. (10) And they had tails [similar to those] of the scorpions they resemble. And it is in their tails that they have the power to harm people over [this] five month period. (11) They [also] have a king over them, the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is "Abaddon" (i.e., "Destruction"), and in Greek he has the name "Apollyon" (i.e., "Destroyer"). (12) The first woe has passed. Behold, two woes are still coming after these things.

The trend which we have observed in all of the trumpet judgments thus far of intensification can also be seen in this fifth judgment. Although it is true that these locusts are prevented from actually delivering mortal wounds, they will afflict the *entire* world (save for believers), and inflict such pain over a five month period that, whenever stung, the affected individual will wish that he or she were dead. This plague will thus produce a long-lasting wave of terror among all the inhabitants of the world who do not acknowledge God. We should also not underestimate the panic and distress that the appearance of these locusts will produce, namely the intimidating clouds in which they will come, their fierce

individual appearance, and the psychologically debilitating effect of the constant threat of being stung with such dire consequences.

It needs to be understood at the outset here that this woe, like the one following, is conducted through the agency of demons (i.e., fallen angels). God often makes use of evil human agents for His own divine ends (e.g., the chastisement of Israel by Assyria and Babylon, and the destruction of New Babylon by antichrist in Rev.17:17). This is true also in respect to His utilization of the devil and his lieutenants as is the case here (cf. Paul's handing over of offending believers to Satan in 1Cor.5:5; 1Tim.1:20).²⁶⁵ It says much about the unapproachable wisdom of God and the blind folly that evil always induces that Satan and his followers are so easily and completely turned to accomplish God's bidding, failing to appreciate that the "opportunity" He offers in such cases is entirely counterproductive to their interests. But such is ever the case, for our God works *all things* together for good, and nothing that happens in this short span of human history (or has or shall) is unknown to Him or unplanned by Him. For God has so constructed His infinitely wise plan as to bring evil to contradict, refute, and condemn itself, while giving all of His creatures who are willing to embrace Him and His Son the gracious opportunity to do so.

The locusts here are controlled (i.e., possessed) by demons in the same way that the legion of demons cast out by our Lord took possession of the herd of swine at Gadara (Matt.8:28-34; Mk.5:1-17; Lk.8:26-37). The measure of control they are given over these locusts is clearly more complete than in that earlier case, enabling them to carry out God's judgment upon the unbelieving world. Even so, they must comply with the divine directive to restrict their depredations to that unbelieving population. As in the case of the beast's destruction of Babylon, an event that will be seen by antichrist as helpful to his cause and yet will actually be accomplishing the will of God, so also in this instance we should not rule out the possibility that Satan will see these two demon-administered plagues (i.e., both the fifth and sixth trumpet judgments) as positive steps toward the establishment of his own kingdom even though God is using them for righteous judgments which He has sovereignly determined. The willingness of this horde of fallen angels to afflict the very human beings who have likewise chosen to reject God shows irrefutably the complete lack of concern for humanity in general which characterizes Satan and his followers, in spite of the fact that the evil they embody and espouse often masquerades as humanism, civilization, and "good".

A number of factors point to the truth of the above interpretation which identifies this plague as being conducted by demon possessed locusts. Although it is not obvious from an English translation, the command not to harm believers or vegetation is not technically given to the locusts: the Greek word for locust (*akris*, ἡ κρίς) is feminine, but the "them" of verse four is masculine, and refers to the demons who possess these locusts (the same holds true for the forms found in verses five and seven). Secondly, in the incident of the swine herd at Gadara (Matt.8:28-34; Mk.5:1-17; Lk.8:26-37), scripture gives us a solid parallel of divine permission given to a large group of demons to enter and direct the bodies of physical creatures (although as we have pointed out above, in Revelation 9:1-12 the control is more complete so as to accomplish God's particular purpose here). Finally, as in the next trumpet judgment, this judgment is administered in a unique way. Although in both the fifth and sixth trumpet judgments the plague is initiated from above (by the "star" here, and

by a command coming from the golden altar of incense in the following judgment), nevertheless in both of these cases the phenomena which are responsible for the effects of the judgments originate not from the heavens above (as was the case of the celestial phenomena of the first four trumpet judgments), but instead proceed from below the earth, and, to be precise, from the Abyss, namely, that compartment of Hades exclusively known as the place where certain demons now not presently at liberty have been incarcerated (cf. 1Pet.3:19-20; 2Pet.2:4-10; Jude 1:5-7; Rev.13:1; 20:1-3).²⁶⁶

The "star" that has descended to the earth with a key which opens the shaft leading to the Abyss is (as in the case of the angel coming down from heaven with a key to everything having to do with the Abyss proper: Rev.20:1-3) an elect angel, a messenger and servant of God, and most likely an "authority" (as in the case of the four angels who administer the first four plagues).²⁶⁷ And while the angel of Revelation 20:1-3 has a key which accesses the entire Abyss, this angel's key unlocks its entry shaft only. The distinction here is important and its essential meaning can be seen in the fact that the angel of chapter twenty also has "a chain" with which he locks away the devil within the Abyss. Thus that second key to the Abyss proper (as opposed to only its entryway) includes not only the power to open and close the subterranean dungeon, but also to lock and unlock all the restraints therein. In contrast, the opening up of the entryway to the Abyss as we have it here only makes it possible for the incarcerated demons within *who are not otherwise enchained* to exit and participate in this plague. In addition to the future enchaining of the devil in Revelation 20, we also know from elsewhere in the Bible that there are certain other demons who are indeed not only incarcerated in the Abyss (a.k.a. Tartarus), but also bound with restraints therein (2Pet.2:4; Jude 1:6). These are they fallen angels who were involved in Satan's attempt to fatally pollute the human race through the Nephilim (Gen.6:1-2).²⁶⁸ And it will be that more heavily guarded group of demons who will be "released" or "loosed" (i.e., unchained) so as to effect the *sixth* trumpet judgment. On the other hand, the demons involved here in the prosecution of the fifth trumpet judgment are fallen angels who have for other reasons and at other times been imprisoned (but not otherwise bound). The legion of demons cast out by our Lord at Gadara begged Him not to confine them in the Abyss (Lk.8:31), so that we may conclude from this incident that fallen angels who violate the restrictions God has placed upon them are indeed consigned to this subterranean prison. Judging from the enormous number of locusts possessed by them in this plague (enough to afflict the entire earth), and the correspondingly large demon army necessary to possess them, we can say for certain that these violations must have been a relatively common thing throughout human history (a fact which in and of itself should impress upon us the magnitude and the significance of the unseen conflict that rages around us between the forces of Satan and the elect angels of our God).

The locusts described here are not mere symbols for an unseen divine agency (as is the "hornet" which the Lord sent before the Israelites to rout their enemies: Ex.23:28; Deut.7:20; Josh.24:12).²⁶⁹ They are real, and will be fully visible to the inhabitants of the earth (and therein lies a large measure of the terror they will produce). Nor do the locusts themselves come out of the Abyss, but rather they emerge from the cloud of smoke once it has already exited from the Abyss.²⁷⁰ They will be tangible, material, earthly creatures even though there is as yet nothing like them on earth. What is being described here is different

from other instances of God's use of insects already extant and summoned for some divine purpose (e.g., the flies and locusts of Ex.8:20-32 and 10:1-20, or the flies and bees of Is.7:18). These locusts will be miraculously produced by divine agency in the same way that the Lord brought forth swarms of gnats from the dust of Egypt (Ex.8:16-19). That was a miracle which the talented court magicians of Pharaoh were not able to reproduce, and which they testified to as "the finger of God" at work (Ex.8:19). We have already seen that the first three trumpet judgments will be accompanied by the supernatural production of natural substances (blood in the first two judgments and wormwood in the third). So while it is certainly true that the locusts described here are unique, both in terms of their appearance and in terms of their power to sting, they will nevertheless be literal, genuine locusts, created instantaneously by God for the purpose of inflicting this fifth plague. Just as the Lord caused gnats to spring forth from the dust of Egypt, so here He causes locusts to spring forth from the smoke which issues out of the shaft of the Abyss (Rev.9:3 does explicitly state that these locusts "came out of the smoke").²⁷¹ The issuing forth of the smoke from the shaft of the Abyss clearly signals its opening and the potential for general upward egress in the manner of the smoke. We may therefore conclude that the demons also come forth with the smoke, and take possession of these supernaturally possessed locusts from the instant of their creation.

The sting of the scorpion is notoriously painful so that it would be difficult to underestimate the intensity of the suffering which this plague will produce as these swarms of locust spread out to cover the entire earth. As painful as these stings will be, however, it must be pointed out that their effects will *not* last for five months. Rather, five months is the length of this judgment's total duration. For that entire period, the population of the world will be afflicted by these swarms, and it stands to reason that many individuals will be stung more than once, with each instance bringing such torment that the sufferer would gladly choose death to gain relief (but will apparently be unable to take his or her own life due to incapacitation).

Revelation 9:4 states that only those who have "the seal of God on their foreheads" are exempted from the attacks of these locusts. This statement, however, must be interpreted in the light of verse twenty which seems at first glance to lump *all* those still alive in the aftermath of the first six trumpet judgments into the category of unbeliever, whereas we know for a fact that there will still be many believers alive on the earth at this time (both Jewish and gentile, some destined to fall in the Great Persecution, others destined to experience the living resurrection at the moment our Lord returns). Given that we have also seen that the sealing which all believers enjoy through the Holy Spirit is likewise a mark of divine protection (2Cor.1:21-22; Eph.1:13-14; 4:30; cf. Ezek.9:1-11; Jn.6:27; 1Pet. 1:1-2), we can be assured that all believers will likewise be spared the locusts' sting just like the 144,000 to whom this phrase refers. As its name portends, the Tribulation will provide believers with more than enough trouble of our own, much of which will be uniquely ours, the satanic pressures to apostatize and the Great Persecution in particular. Therefore since the main purpose of these trumpet judgments is for warning the unbelieving world of the dire consequences of continued resistance to God, it more than stands to reason that all

believers will be afforded the divine protection which is ascribed here to the 144,000 as those who preeminently carry God's message during the first three and one half years.

To return to the locusts, they are also instructed not to harm any plant life. This is significant in that the stripping bare of all vegetation is usual locust behavior (a fact which makes the unique, supernatural origin of these locusts all the more evident). The choice of locusts as the visible perpetrators of these horrendous stings is, however, no accident. Locusts fly (unlike scorpions), making them all the more unavoidable and thus all the more fearsome. Locusts have been a common element in many biblical plagues (Ex.10:1-20; Deut.28:38; 2Chron.7:13; Joel 1:4-7; 2:1-10; 2:25; Amos 4:9; 7:1-3), making them a clear symbol of judgment. Finally, the behavior of locusts is reminiscent of an organized force as they swarm, advancing like an army and irresistibly covering everything in their path (cf. Judg.6:5; 7:12; Joel 1:4-7; 2:25; Nahum 3:15-16), making them a harbinger of the final conflict of Armageddon.

*Blow a trumpet in Zion, and raise the alarm on my holy mountain. All the inhabitants of the earth are distressed, because the Day of the Lord is coming, because it is near at hand. A day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and deep gloom. An army great and mighty is [coming], spreading itself out over your mountains like the dawn. There has never been anything like it since the beginning of time and never will be again in latter times from generation to generation. Fire devours in front of them, and behind them flames are set ablaze. In front of them the land is like the garden of Eden, but behind them is a desolate desert and nothing escapes them. *Their appearance is like that of horses, and they race forward just like mounted cavalry. Their clatter on the mountains is like that of chariots, like the sound of fire devouring chaff, like a mighty army arraying itself for battle. Before them the nations writhe in anguish and every face turns pale. They rush on like mighty men. Like men of war they storm the wall. They all keep their ranks and all march straight ahead. They do not crowd each other. Each maintains his file. They throw themselves at the defenses. They do not falter. They charge into the city. They rush the wall. They go up into the houses. They enter into the windows like a thief. The earth trembles before them and the heavens quake. The sun and the moon grow dark and the stars contract their light.**

Joel 2:1-10

In this passage Joel is describing a contemporary divine judgment by means of a plague of literal locusts (cf. esp. Joel 1:4). However, the passage is also to be taken in both a near and far term prophetic sense, drawing on the locusts as a compelling analogy to the coming Assyrian invasion (a near-term divine judgment; cf. Amos 6:14 with 7:1), and to the army that will gather against the Lord at Jerusalem just prior to the Second Advent, a far-term divine judgment (cf. the very next verse, Joel 2:11; also cf. the "Day of the Lord" in v.1 above, and Joel 3:9-16).²⁷² Moreover, the similarities between this passage and the description of the demon-possessed locusts of Revelation 9:1-12 are difficult to ignore. In both cases, the locusts are a warning, and in both cases, they resemble horses and military formations. We must conclude, then, that just as the locusts of Joel's day provided an analogy for the near term Assyrian invasion and the far distant Day of the Lord, so the locusts which John sees are meant to provide a preview by way of analogy to the coming assembly of the fearsome armies of the beast at Armageddon. This goes a long way toward

explaining the extensive description we are given of these locusts in our context of Revelation chapter nine, both as to their terrifying appearance and their intimidating behavior. Indeed, the appearance of their bodies (like horses arrayed for battle), their humanoid faces, the gold crown-like apparatus on their heads (analogous to awe-inspiring insignia), their fang-like teeth (indicating fierceness; cf. Joel 1:6), their long hair (they are wild and barbaric), their iron breast-plates (military protective gear), and the awesome sound they make (like an army of chariots) all point to a very close and specific preview of the army prophesied to be mustered by antichrist at the end of the Tribulation.

Son of man, set your face against Gog (i.e., antichrist) of the land of Magog (i.e., Babylon, the home kingdom of the beast) [he who is] chief prince of Meshech and Tubhal (i.e., Revived Rome). Prophesy against him and say "Thus says the Lord God. Behold, I am against you, Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubhal. And I shall bring you back [here again] (i.e., for Armageddon). For I shall put my hooks in your jaw and make you come, [you] and your entire *army of horses and horsemen*, all of them fully arrayed [in battle gear] (i.e., both horses and horsemen; cf. Rev.9:7: where the locusts look like "horses made ready for battle"), a vast multitude, all of them with shields and bucklers and carrying swords For you will come from your place, from the far north, you and many peoples with you, *all of them riding horses*, a huge multitude and a vast army. And I will bring you up against my people Israel like a cloud covering the earth. At the end of days (i.e., in the last days, the Tribulation: cf. Is.2:2) it will come to pass that I will bring you against my land so that the nations may know Me (i.e., understand who I am) when I show forth my holiness in their sight by [destroying] you, O Gog'.

Ezekiel 38:2-4; 15-16

A further indication that this judgment is meant to preview the beast's Armageddon campaign is to be found in the fact that the prince who commands this army of demon-possessed, supernaturally produced locusts is analogous to Gog-antichrist.²⁷³ This is clear not only on the basis of the parallels discussed above, but also from his Greek name, Apollyon, meaning "Destroyer", a title which is not only descriptive of antichrist's career, but is also linked prophetically to the idea and vocabulary of destruction as one of the beast's salient characteristics (Is.14:20; Dan.8:25; 9:26; cf. Jer.51:25; 2Thes.2:10).²⁷⁴

6. The Second Woe: Demon Destruction (9:13-19)

Revelation 9:13-19:

(13) And the sixth angel sounded [his trumpet]. And I heard a voice from the golden altar which is before God saying to the sixth angel with the trumpet, (14) "Release at the great river Euphrates the four angels who are in bonds [in the Abyss]". (15) And the four angels were released who had been kept from killing the third part of mankind until that very hour and month and year. (16) And the number of their mounted armies was two myriad myriads (i.e., 200 million) – I heard this [very] number. (17) And the appearance of the horses and those who rode upon them as I saw them was thus: [the riders] had body-armor

of red, blue and yellow, and the heads of their horses were like lions' heads, and from [the horses'] mouths came forth fire and smoke and sulfur. (18) And the third part of mankind was killed by these three plagues, [that is] from the fire and the smoke and the sulfur which issued forth from [the horses'] mouths. (19) For the power of the horses [to kill] is in their mouths and in their tails. For their tails resemble snakes with heads, and with these they harm [people].

As we saw in the last installment of this series (and in section I.3 above), the golden altar (from which the voice proceeds which commands the release of this vast demon army) represents Jesus Christ in His glorified, resurrected state. We have already seen our Lord depicted as the Lamb who was slain; now we see Him again symbolically portrayed, but here as the glorious resurrected Son of Man around whom the martyrs of the Tribulation cluster (Rev.6:9). The golden altar of incense speaks of the validation and efficacy of all of our Lord's earthly work and of His complete victory during the First Advent. It is therefore most appropriate that this command to unleash the demon army should issue forth from this altar. For the depredations of this demon horde presage (in a manner very similar to what we saw in our treatment of the fifth trumpet judgment above) the Armageddon campaign wherein His victory of the Second Advent will be won. If the locusts resembling mounted cavalry foreshadowed antichrist's armies of Armageddon, so much the more is that true of these demon riders and their mounts (cf. Ezek.38:2-14). That this is so can especially be seen from the fact that this is the last divine judgment to occur before the commencement of the Great Tribulation proper (which is synonymous with the seventh trumpet judgment), the final period of history before Christ's return and His victory at Armageddon. But while the symbolism of this judgment is similar to that of the fifth trumpet, one critical difference which we should note at the outset is that the means of delivering this last pre-Great Tribulation judgment will be invisible. For unlike the visible locusts of the previous judgment, these demon armies will be imperceptible to the human eye; only the dire effects they produce will be visible.

This plague, prepared precisely for the very hour on which it will be launched, will last for the longest period of all of the first six trumpet judgments (i.e., six months), and will terminate in the Great Tribulation itself. Thus the trend toward intensification which we have noted throughout the trumpet judgments continues here, and is also manifest in the vast numbers of those who will afflict the inhabitants of the earth: although the number 200 million is often described as being merely a biblical way to represent an uncountable host, John's insistence that he "heard this very number" is a clear indication that we are to take it literally. The overwhelming number of human casualties (an entire third of those still alive at this point), and the very nature of this plague also emphasize this point of intensification. For these verses clearly describe fire, smoke and sulfur exploding out of nowhere to destroy the lives of their hapless targets in a terrifying fashion, and the very fact that the people of the earth will not be able to see the source as John does will tend to increase their despair and terror.

Although lacking the uniquely terrifying visible effects of fiery, smokey blasts of sulfur seen here, there are a number of scriptural parallels to plagues inflicted by unseen agents of

destruction: 1) the Destroyer of the Exodus (Ex.12:23); 2) the plague which broke out against the people of Israel (Num.16:46); 3) the destroying angel who was stayed at the threshing floor of Araunah (2Sam.24:15-17); and 4) the band of destroying angels who slew Job's family (Job 1:12-19; cf. Ps.78:49). We should also note that in every one of the above examples, including this sixth trumpet judgment, we can clearly see our God setting limits to the destruction for the sake of His elect: 1) the Passover destroyer is stayed by the blood placed on the Israelites' doors (with the blood in the form of a cross symbolizing the sacrifice of Christ that has redeemed us from death: Ex.12:22-23); 2) the plague that breaks out in Numbers chapter sixteen is stayed by the incense of Aaron's censer (with the sweet savor representing the acceptability of Christ's atonement on our behalf: Num.16:46-48); 3) the destroying angel responsible for administering the plague resulting from David's numbering of the people was stayed at the threshing floor of Araunah (the future place of the altar which represents the work of Christ on the cross for us all: 2Sam.24:18-25); and 4) Job and his wife were protected, and, in the end, blessed beyond measure (Job 42:7-17). In the case of the sixth trumpet judgment, the plague's parameters, while chilling, are yet very precise. This is true both in terms of duration (i.e., the six months preceding the Great Tribulation), and in terms of magnitude (i.e., one third of humanity, and no more). And we should remember that, like the Exodus plague of the first born, this judgment will not fall upon those who belong to Jesus Christ.

Scripture also offers examples of the similarly visible yet likewise supernatural fire in our context: 1) the fire of God called down upon the soldiers of Ahaziah by Elijah (2Kng.1:10-12; cf. Lk.9:51-56); 2) the fire called down by the two witnesses, Moses and Elijah, on their enemies (Rev.11:5); 3) "the fire of God" falling upon Job's flocks and herdsmen (Job 1:16); and 4) the satanically empowered fire called down by the beast's false prophet (Rev.13:13). The last two examples in particular are very close to what will transpire during the sixth trumpet judgment, with satanic forces given permission to produce such miraculous effects. All of this, however, will only serve to further the plan of God, just as our Lord made use of Pharaoh's free will to accomplish His own divine purposes:

Indeed, for this very reason I have raised you [Pharaoh] up, namely, to demonstrate my power to you and to proclaim my Name in all the earth.
Exodus 9:16 (cf. Rom.9:17)

To return to the specifics of our context, there is a near universal misconception which holds that the four commanders and their demon legions mentioned here are currently "*bound* at the great river Euphrates". In fact, as is indicated from the translation given above, the prepositional phrase "at the great river Euphrates" gives the point of their release, not the place of their incarceration (i.e., it should be taken with the imperative *lyson*, not with the participle *dedemenous*). When we combine the context with what we know about the status of fallen angels not currently at liberty, the translation "*release* at the great river Euphrates" becomes by far the preferable one. Elsewhere in scripture it is always the Abyss (Tartarus) which is the place of demon incarceration (Is.14:9-20; 24:21-23; Lk.8:31; 1Pet.3:19-20; 2Pet.2:4; Jude 1:6; Rev.9:1-2; 9:11; 20:1-3; 20:13-14). During the previous trumpet judgment, certain demons were allowed to exit the Abyss, but these were released merely by opening the entrance shaft (i.e., they were "in jail", but not in manacles:

Rev.9:1-3). We may compare Paul and Silas jailed at Philippi in Acts 16:24, and Peter imprisoned in Acts 12:6. In both cases the apostles were restrained even within their cells as an extra measure of security (though that was not the case for all prisoners: cf. Acts 16:27). The fallen angels and their commanders in question here are those spoken of by Jude, demons of exceptional temerity who were involved in the Genesis chapter six violation of God's ground rules for the contest in which we now find ourselves, and who are now *tangibly* restrained in addition to being confined in the Abyss (cf. 1Pet.3:19-20; 2Pet.2:4-10):

And the angels who did not keep to their own realm but deserted their proper habitation (i.e., the demons of Genesis chapter six) He has imprisoned in the gloom below (i.e., in the Abyss) in everlasting **chains**, in anticipation of the judgment of that great day.
Jude 1:6

The Abyss has a point of entrance (the shaft of Rev.9:1), and this has now been unlocked (Rev.9:1-2; cf. Rev.20:1), and is not said to be re-locked until the return of our Lord (Rev.20:3). Now that the prison door stands open, for these demons and their generals who are still in chains below to come forth and fulfill their destructive purpose, it remains only to release these "bound" fallen angels from their individual bonds.²⁷⁵

The place of their release, "the great river Euphrates", is significant. For just as Israel is the geographical center of the earth from the divine point of view (Ezek.5:5), so the Euphrates, which runs through the heart of the Babylonian kingdom, has ever been the geographical center of satanic opposition. This fact is most notable in Nimrod's plot to enslave the entire human race to demon worship at the tower of Babel,²⁷⁶ and in the symbolic designation of antichrist's tribulational core kingdom as "Babylon", the future "universal" kingdom which will make a similar attempt to forcibly unite the entire human race for evil purposes (Rev.14:8; 17:18; 18:24; cf. Dan.2:42-43). It is therefore appropriately symbolic that it is from this significant geographical point that the four *sarim* and their armies spread out to plague the entire world.²⁷⁷ At the same time, the association of antichrist's Babylon with these demon hordes foreshadows its coming destruction, for in a few short years it will be nothing more than a desolate place where demons dwell (Rev.18:2). One other point should also be mentioned in regard to this location. The divine geographical center of the world, the land of Israel, is also the point at which the angels make their passage between earth and the third heaven (Gen.28:12). While the exact location of the shaft leading down to the Abyss is not mentioned in our context, it is possible that the invisible entrance to Tartarus is near this very location, namely, at the great river Euphrates, in relatively close proximity to the ramp that leads upward (making the choice of directions for all creatures all that much more symbolically clear).

As to the riders and their mounts, we have already pointed out that they will be invisible to the world of that future time (though it is given to John to see them in this prophecy and to describe them to us). 2nd Kings 6:11-17 gives us a close parallel of a large, supernatural army which is real and yet invisible to human eyes. In that previous case, we are told that Elisha's servant could not see them at first, but that when his eyes were opened in response to Elisha's prayer "he saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (v.17; cf.

Zech.1:8). The supernatural cavalry in both of these cases is invisible yet real. We have seen in the past that angelic beings often have accouterment which, while invisible to the human eye, is also real (the trumpets in our context, for instance). It is also true that angelic beings appear to be able to manifest themselves in a variety of ways for which we have no earthly frame of reference. For example, the four cherubs who attend the chariot throne of God have a four-fold visage which is apparently unique among angelic kind, and it is probable that they were not originally so endowed: Satan was the original cherub (Ezek.28:14-16), and was only replaced by the college of four after his fall. Furthermore, though angels are generally described as having a glorious appearance, so much so that John is moved to worship the one speaking with him at Revelation 22:8-9 (cf. Lk.2:9), they may also manifest themselves in an earthly form which approximates that of ordinary human beings (Gen.19:1-3; cf. Heb.13:2). And the armies of heaven which will accompany our Lord at his Second Advent (of which we shall be a part), are also described as riding on white horses (Rev.19:14).

Putting this information together, we find nothing in this description of the demon armies of the sixth trumpet judgment which is not consonant with and paralleled by scriptural descriptions elsewhere. For neither the fact that these demons take on a unique appearance (i.e., the three-fold color of their armor), nor the fact that they are mounted on these terrifying and extraordinary supernatural steeds falls outside of the realm of what is biblically possible and precedented. Scripture does not provide us with the specifics of either the limits or the possibilities of angelic self-modification of appearance, or of their ability to procure supernatural items (such as the horses in this context). What we can say is that these demons and their supernatural chargers are real, and that while they will be invisible, the fiery blasts of smoke and sulfur that issue forth seemingly from nowhere to kill a third of those still alive will be all too visible to the inhabitants of the earth. It is probable that the three colored body armor worn by the demon riders is meant to symbolize the threefold manifestation of this destructive plague, with red representing the flames, blue the smoke, and yellow the sulfur.

7. The Hardness of the Unrepentant (9:20-21)

Revelation 9:20-21:

(20) And the rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues directed at them (i.e., the warning judgments of the Tribulation's first half) did not repent of the works of their hands so as not to worship demons and idols made of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood, which are not able to see or hear or walk about, (21) nor did they repent of their murders nor their potions nor their sexually immoral acts nor their thefts.

We have already considered this passage in section II.3.a above (the unleashing of the "mystery of lawlessness"), pointing out that during the Tribulation God will, in the manner of His allowing Pharaoh to harden his heart beyond normal human parameters, allow the

unbelieving world of that future time to indulge in idolatrous behavior beyond anything yet seen on earth. The growing pervasiveness and prevalence of idolatry in our own day should not be underestimated. For in addition to clearly pagan practices, it should also be remembered that 1) worship of any sort directed towards anyone but the true God our Father through His Son our true Lord Jesus Christ is idolatry, and 2) placing anything before Jesus in one's heart (be it self, or money, or any number of desires and false priorities) is idolatry (cf. Eph.5:5; Col.3:5).

These two verses are a potent and chilling summary statement about the inherent negativity of the world's unbelieving population whose hardness of heart has endured these six judgments and not been moved to repentance. In spite of God's grace, in spite of their suffering, they have not and they will not take warning so as to turn away from evil and towards God. These verses make an important point for believers to understand vis-à-vis unbelievers and human free will in general. The determination and certainty with which so many will continue to flout God and his warnings shows beyond any doubt that everyone who chooses against God in this life does so from the considered decision of their own free will. In terms of our attitude as ambassadors of the good news of Jesus Christ, we should remain enthusiastic about sharing the gospel, but we should never forget that the decision lies in the heart of the person receiving the truth.

IV. The Angel and the Little Scroll: Revelation 10:1-11

Revelation 10:1-11:

(1) And I saw another powerful angel coming down from heaven with a cloud wrapped around him. And the hair of his head and his face were like the sun, and his legs were like pillars of fire. (2) And he had a little scroll in his hand which had been unrolled. And he set his right foot on the sea and his left [one] on the land. (3) And he cried out in a loud voice like a lion roaring. (4) And when he cried out, seven thunders gave forth their utterances. And I was about to write all that the seven thunders had spoken, when I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up all that the seven thunders have spoken, and do not write these things down!" (5) And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted his right hand to heaven (6) and swore to the One who lives forever and ever, the One who created heaven and everything in it and the earth and everything in it, that there would be no further delay (lit., "time"), (7) but that in the days of the seventh angel's call, when he is about to blow his trumpet, the mystery of God will be concluded in the exact manner in which He has proclaimed its good news (lit. "gave its gospel") to his servants and to his prophets. (8) And the voice which I heard from heaven was speaking to me again and saying, "Go and take the scroll which has been opened and is in the hand of the angel who has taken his stand on the sea and on the land." (9) So I went over to the angel, telling him to give me the scroll. And he said to me, "Take it and eat it, and it will make your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey." (10) So I took the scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was like sweet honey in my mouth, but my stomach was filled [past capacity]. (11) And they said to me, "You must prophesy further about many peoples

and nations and languages and kings" (i.e., the course of human events during the Great Tribulation prior to the Second Advent).

The precise **timing** of these events is crucial to understanding the particular meaning of their symbolism. The "strong angel's" descent to earth and proclamation come at the conclusion of the second woe, the last event of the Tribulation's first half, and precede the beginning of the third woe, which is synonymous with the Great Tribulation (introduced by the seventh trumpet in Revelation 11:15-19). The oath sworn by this angel (to the effect that "no further delay" will occur before the entire mystery of God shall have been concluded) launches us immediately forward in time, past the entire Great Tribulation on whose threshold we now stand at this point in the narrative, to the point where our Lord returns in complete and total victory. The overall message of chapter ten is therefore one of great hope and exceptional encouragement for all believers. For even as the Great Tribulation is about to begin, we are given to understand unmistakably that God's victory in Jesus Christ, and our victory in Him, is absolutely sure and certain on the other side of that unprecedented conflagration. With this in mind, the symbolism of chapter ten becomes clear.

1. The Powerful Angel is a Type of Christ: Just as in the case of the two angels who harvest the earth in Revelation chapter 14, this powerful angel represents Jesus Christ.²⁷⁸ Here we see the angel descending from heaven to the earth, anticipating the Second Advent of our Lord, and all the features which John observes are indicative and symbolic of that glorious return:

- The cloud: Just as this angel is "wrapped in a cloud", so our Lord will return with "clouds" of heavenly armies (of which we shall be a part: Matt.24:30; 26:64; Mk.13:26; 14:62; Lk.21:27; 1Thes.4:17; Rev.1:7; cf. 1Cor.15:51-52; Rev.19:14).
- His hair and face: This description is highly reminiscent of the appearance of our Lord to John in chapter one. In that context (Rev.1:14), His head and hair were unique for their bright whiteness; here they shine "like the sun" in a clear manifestation of His divine glory. At the transfiguration, another preview of our Savior's glorious return, His face likewise "shone like the sun" (Matt.17:2).
- His legs: The fiery appearance of the angel's legs here is also evocative of the "white-hot bronze" appearance of Jesus' feet as He appeared to John in chapter one (Rev.1:15; cf. Rev.2:18).
- His posture: Standing on the surface of the land (the realm of mankind: cf. Gen.1:26-28; Ps.115:16) and on the surface of the sea (the realm of the devil: cf. Rev.13:1) at one and the same time is a clear indication of our Lord's coming dominance of the entire earth. That is, the angel's posture here symbolizes Christ's imminent conquest of the entire world at the Second Advent (cf. Rev.11:15).
- The lion's roar: As the "Lion of Judah", this metaphor is clearly symbolic of our Lord (Rev.5:5; cf. Gen.49:9-12; Is.31:4).

- The scroll: This scroll **is** the book of Revelation (Rev.10:9-10; cf. Ezek.3:1-3), bitter to experience, but sweet to read (see our discussion in part 1 of this series, section I). Since Revelation is about the revealing of Jesus Christ to the world, the presence of this book or scroll of Revelation in the angel's hand is a clear sign that he is a type of Christ (Rev.5:6-7).²⁷⁹
- The completion of the mystery: As the Word of God, Jesus Christ is Himself the mystery, and, by application, the completion of His Body, the Church, is the completion of the "mystery of God".²⁸⁰ This phrase thus refers to the resurrection to take place at the point of our Lord's return to the world at His Second Advent, an event which only Jesus is authorized to bring about on the basis of His victory at the cross (Lk.10:18; Jn.16:33; 19:30; Col.2:15; Rev.5:5).

2. The Oath is a Guarantee of Victory: We have it from the book of Hebrews that since God cannot lie, when He does make use of an oath it serves to lay stress upon the validity and reality of His words (Heb.6:13-18). The unalterable certainty of Jesus' coming victory is hereby divinely guaranteed. And the timing of this guarantee is very important, for here we have God assuring us that on the other side of the greatest period of tribulation the world has ever seen there will be complete and total victory over all of the forces of evil which will hold sway within that period, a guarantee given here *even before the Great Tribulation begins*. This is part of the "good news" or gospel of Jesus Christ, for it includes along with Jesus' conquest of the world our gathering together with Him (1Thes.4:13-17), our resurrection (1Cor.15:23), and our reward (Rev.11:18; 22:12). We are indeed saved *by* the power of the gospel (Rom.1:16-17), and we are saved *for* a glorious eternal future with the One we love so much. Indeed, the significance of the angel's descent from heaven is precisely to evoke the idea of the return of our Lord from heaven on that great day, with the touching of his feet to land and sea a sign of the coming complete control over all the earth that our Lord Jesus Christ will exercise throughout His millennial reign. The lifting up of the angel's hand is yet a further indication both of the divine authority he has been given to make this proclamation and of the unalterable certainty of the fulfillment of these words (cf. Deut.32:40).

3. The Mystery is a Promise of Deliverance: The guarantee that the mystery of completing the Church (i.e., our resurrection as explained above) is certain of fulfillment in a very short time is truly a great encouragement. It is in fact "good news" since our resurrection and eternal re-uniting with Jesus is a large part of the gospel (cf. verse seven in our context: "the mystery of God will be concluded in the exact manner in which He has proclaimed its *good news* to His servants and to His prophets"). Though we may be called upon to undergo the Great Tribulation, these words are a source of solace and comfort to us, because they make it plain to us that in God's eyes that period of testing will be short indeed. This promise focuses our attention on the blessed *result* that will come out of that darkest of all historical periods. And it will be of critical importance for all believers who find themselves confronted with it to keep this perspective in mind. The time is short. If we will but endure a little while, there will be nothing but unimaginable joy on the other side.

For yet a little while, how short, how short [the wait], and He who is coming shall come, nor will He delay. "And [in the meantime] my righteous one shall live by his faith, but if he shrinks back, My heart takes no pleasure in him."

Hebrews 10:37-38 (cf. Habakkuk 2:3-4)

Get out, My people. Go into your rooms and close your doors behind you. Hide yourselves for a little while until My indignation has run its course (i.e., until the Tribulation is over).
Isaiah 26:20

4. The Scroll is a Sign of Fulfillment: The scroll or "little book" is, as we have said, the Book of Revelation. In the ancient world, of course, "books" were papyrus scrolls. Because of the limitations of that technology, an epistle of the size of Revelation would take up the greater part of the usable writing surface of such a scroll (hence we have the "book" of Revelation, etc.). Not only are the words which describe the final fulfillment of God's plan in Jesus Christ and His revealing to the world written down as the crowning book of the Word of God forever, but they are also depicted as such in this vision, with the angel who symbolizes Jesus returning to earth holding these very words, this very scroll, in his hand. And it is "opened", that is, unsealed and unrolled, meaning that its complete fulfillment is imminent. John is also given to eat the scroll, a clear demonstration of the unalterable fulfillment of the things written therein – we shall experience all the sweet blessing of their complete fulfillment (even if the actual experience of the Great Tribulation causes us indigestion).

5. The Thunders are a Prediction of Judgment: Since the seven thunders speak in response to the angel's lion-like roar, and since the angel is meant to be seen as portraying Christ's return to earth at the Second Advent, it is probable that the utterances which John is told not to report here correspond to proclamations given by our Lord in connection with His victorious return. Thunder often reflects the awesome majesty of God and presages divine judgment (cf. Ex.9:23-34; 19:16-25; 1Sam.2:10; 7:10; 12:17-18; Job 40:9; Ps.29:3-9; 77:18; Rev.4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18; 19:6; and compare Mk.3:17 with Lk.9:54-55). Given the symbolism of this angel, therefore, the thunders most likely represent specific judgments associated with our Lord's Second Advent.

You will experience visitation (i.e., the judgment of Armageddon) from the Lord of Hosts [Himself], with **thunder** and quaking [of the earth] and a loud voice, with tempest and whirlwind and devouring flames of fire. And the hordes of the nations mustering against Ariel (i.e., "Jerusalem") will become like [just] a dream in the visions of the night, even all those who camp against her and her fortress and besiege her.

Isaiah 29:6-7

Coming here as they do, just prior to the Great Tribulation but in anticipation of God's overruling and undoing of everything the adversary undertakes during that terrible time, it would seem that the seven thunders must be giving specifics about the divine response (in the form of awe-inspiring judgments) to the abominations of Satan and his antichrist. What the thunders actually say was indeed perspicuous to John as we are told – he was only forbidden by a heavenly voice from writing down their precise content (v.4). This situation

is paralleled in 2nd Corinthians 12:4, where Paul makes mention of things heard in heaven itself which cannot now be made known.²⁸¹ Nevertheless, we do know much about the heavenly scene from Revelation and elsewhere, even if we are not told all of the specifics. An additional reason for the "sealing up" of the voices of the thunders at this point is made clear in verse eleven of our context: John must still prophesy for us about the events of the Great Tribulation before we are given to see the judgments God will bring about at the *close* of that terrible period, so that it is not yet appropriate to discuss them. Extrapolating from other scriptures, we may postulate that the seven thunder-judgments are exactly those seven judgments recorded in prophecy to occur in close proximity to our Lord's return (a subject which we, like John, shall take up in detail at the proper time):

1. Babylon destroyed (Rev.18).
2. The Armies of Armageddon destroyed (Rev.19:1-21).
3. The Beast and the False Prophet consigned to the lake of fire (Rev.19:20).
4. The Incarceration of Satan and his Demons (Rev.20:1-3).
5. Fire upon Magog and the Coastlands (Ezek.39:6; cf. Rev.20:9).
6. The Regathering and Purging of Israel (Ezek.20:34-38; cf. Rev.21-22).
7. The Judgment of the Church (Rom.2:16; 2Cor.5:10; cf. Rev.2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4-6).

V. The Two Witnesses: Revelation 11:1-14

We find the description of the two witnesses and their ministry placed here, just *after* the vision of the powerful angel in chapter ten and just *before* the sounding of the seventh trumpet in the second half of chapter eleven. It is inserted here for a reason. The ministry of the two witnesses covers the entire first half of the Tribulation, but is terminated by antichrist on the eve of the Great Tribulation. Since the end their ministry is included, this description could not be placed earlier without anticipating the end of Tribulation's first half. Coming here as it does directly between the powerful angel's prophecy of victory at the end of the Great Tribulation and the seventh trumpet's commencing of those final three and one half years, the description of the two witnesses and their ministry serves to sum up the Tribulation's first half from the divine perspective, and to set the stage for the conflagration ahead. Through an examination of their ministry at this point we are given to see what has been happening on earth from the point of view of God's witness of truth which goes hand in hand with His judgment (grace and mercy even in the midst of judgment).

Revelation 11:1-2:

(1) And a reed was given to me like unto a measuring rod, [with the One who gave it to me] saying, "Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and [count] the worshipers within it[s precincts]. (2) But exclude this inner court and do not measure it. For it has been handed over to the gentiles, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months" (i.e., during the Great Tribulation which will begin after the events of chapter eleven).

This begins the fulfillment of the command of Revelation 10:11 about John's imminent prophesying of tribulational events. The measurement of the temple and its altar (along with the count of the worshipers), the exclusion of the inner court (i.e., the so-called "priest's court which contained the brazen altar),²⁸² and the prophecy of the forty-two months of gentile control of Jerusalem (which is clearly seen to overflow into the temple here) give us a short, effective synopsis of events "on the ground" during the Tribulation. For here on the one hand we see the rebuilt temple (it can be measured), the restored Jewish rites (obvious from the altar), and evidence of a significant Jewish revival of genuine faith (these are true worshipers of God so numerous it takes effort to count them). On the other hand, we are also told that in relatively short order this temple precinct will be taken over by unbelievers, and that Jerusalem itself will be under the control of hostile forces for three and a half years (at least to some degree). It is important to note at the outset that in this entire chapter only verse two (the prediction of forty-two months of gentile control) describes events which will take place during the Great Tribulation (by way of foreshadowing). Everything else in this chapter takes place during the Tribulation's first half. While we can see the beginning of the fulfillment of verse two in the later half of this chapter (as the two witnesses are opposed and slain by antichrist), actual control of Jerusalem and antichrist's defiling of the temple and its grounds will occur after the seventh trumpet sounds and the Great Tribulation begins (all of which will be covered in Part 4 of this series).

The Forty-Two Months: This period of time wherein the gentiles will "trample" Jerusalem is, as explained above, a reference to the Great Tribulation (which commences with the seventh trumpet directly after the termination of the two-witness ministry discussed in chapter eleven). Our Lord makes a similar reference to the trampling of Jerusalem by gentiles in Luke 21:24, and tells us that this situation of gentile intrusion and conquest will continue "until the gentiles' times have been fulfilled", that is, until His Second Advent brings antichrist's control of Israel and Jerusalem to a violent and immediate conclusion. It will be useful at this point to summarize the various scriptural designations for the forty-two month time period covered by the Great Tribulation:

- In Daniel 7:25, the saints of the Most High (i.e., believers) are said to be handed over into the power of the little horn (i.e., antichrist and the Great Persecution) for "a time, times, and half a time", a biblical way of expressing the three and one half years of the Great Tribulation.²⁸³
- In Daniel 9:27, "the people of the prince which is to come" (i.e., antichrist as the ruler of revived Rome) will make a treaty during the last "seven" and break it in the middle of the "seven", that is, during middle of the seven years at the outset of the Great Tribulation.

- In Daniel 12:7, the angel speaking with Daniel declares that it will be "a time, times, and half a time" before the persecutions stop and everything comes to an end, that is, the Great Tribulation will last three and one half years.
- In Revelation 11:2, our context, the gentiles (i.e., the army of antichrist) will afflict Jerusalem for 42 months, that is, during the entire three and a half year period of the Great Tribulation (albeit under varying circumstances).
- In Revelation 12:6, the woman Israel is said to be protected for 1,260 days, that is, during the whole 42 months of the Great Tribulation (expressed in standard 30 day months).
- In Revelation 12:14, the woman Israel is said to be protected for a time, times, and half a time, that is, during this same period of the Great Tribulation's three and a half years.
- In Revelation 13:5, the unbridled reign of antichrist is said to last for 42 months, that is, for the duration of the Great Tribulation.

The one (often misunderstood) exception to the pattern above where all the references are to the Tribulation's second half is the verse immediately following our context, Revelation 11:3. In that passage, although the 1,260 day period is identical in length to that of the final forty-two months of verse two, the time being described in Revelation 11:3 is that of the ministry of the two witnesses, an event which takes place during and is contemporaneous with the Tribulation's *first* half (i.e., *prior* to the Great Tribulation or second half of the seven year period of the Tribulation). It is no doubt thus the only one of the above three and a half year periods to be expressed in these terms (i.e., 1260 *days*) precisely in order to distinguish it from the others as the only such period designating the *first* half of the Tribulation as opposed to the second half or Great Tribulation.

The Tribulational Temple: While the "forty-two months" of verse two refer to the Great Tribulation, the remainder of this section of chapter eleven (up until the seventh trumpet of verse fifteen) is a description of events which take place during the Tribulation's first half. We see here for the first time in the book of Revelation that while the unbelieving population of the earth has been undergoing a series of horrific judgments, a significant revival has been taking place in Israel. As part of this revival, the temple has been reconstructed, and John is here invited to take precise measurements of all its dimensions. The temple rite has also been reinstated as we may conclude from the presence of the altar which meets the Mosaic specifications (implied by the command to measure it). And a considerable number of genuine worshipers (large enough that they will have to be counted with some effort) is present paying homage to God, a clear indication that by this point the revival associated with the ministry of the 144,000 witnesses has born significant fruit.

The description of the measuring rod given to John is purposely reminiscent of the scene in Ezekiel chapter 40 and following. In that passage, Ezekiel is brought to the millennial Jerusalem and sees a "man whose appearance was like bronze" (i.e., a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ). Our Lord there holds a similar rod in His hands wherewith He likewise measures the millennial temple complex. It is no doubt for this reason that Revelation 11:1 has only the participle "saying" and does not identify the speaker, for, as we

learn later in verse three, the speaker is also divine, and is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, whose servants the two witnesses are (i.e., they are "My servants"; cf. Matt.16:28 - 17:13). From this set of facts we may deduce that the rebuilding of the tribulational temple is divinely ordained and supervised, for it corresponds to divine specifications of measurement (and it is given to John by our Lord to see for himself that this is true).²⁸⁴ The restoration of the temple rite must also therefore have come at God's behest (cf. the pattern of restoration recorded in Ezra chapter 3 and following), with the worshipers also legitimate followers of God, namely, those of Israel who have turned to Jesus Christ through the ministry of the 144,000 witnesses. The fact that these true, legitimate, and divinely ordained things (i.e., the temple, its rites, and the mass of worshipers) are here directly juxtaposed to and opposed by anti-God "gentiles" (i.e., antichrist and his followers) who will shortly defile the temple and thus of necessity interrupt its rites and scatter the worshipers is further evidence that the restored temple and worship of God therein has truly been of God, for God, and by God.

Inasmuch as the Tribulation is an era of restoration jointly shared by Israel and the Church in which Israel once again claims the leadership role, it should come as no surprise that we find here the reinstatement of the temple rites in a rebuilt temple.²⁸⁵ Coming as it will after so long a hiatus, and coming as it will as a direct result of two messengers sent from God, there will be no confusion about the meaning of the renewed sacrifices: rather than shadows of things to come, it will be clearly understood that these are memorials to the already accomplished work of Christ (i.e., these rites will be different in purpose from the Mosaic sacrifices just as the millennial sacrifices will be; cf. Ezek.45:13-25). This principle of the "restoration of Israel" (that is, a turning of their hearts back to God and a reinstatement of appropriate worship), is, as we have already seen in the case of the ministry of the 144,000, very closely associated with the two witnesses and their ministry:

Remember the Law of *Moses*, My servant, which I commanded him on Horeb (i.e., Sinai) concerning all Israel, [with both its] statutes and judgments – behold, I am about to send you *Elijah* the prophet before the coming of the Day of Lord, [that] great and awesome [Day], so that he may **restore** [to God] the hearts of the fathers along with [their] children and the hearts of the children along with their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with complete devastation.

Malachi 4:4-6

And behold, *Moses* and *Elijah* appeared and were talking with Him (v.3). And His disciples questioned Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that *Elijah* must come first (i.e., before the Kingdom)". And He answered, saying, "*Elijah* is coming, and he will *restore all things*".

Matthew 17:3; 17:10-13 (cf. Mk.9:4; 9:11-12)

So repent and turn back [to God] for the blotting out of your sins, so that **times of refreshment** may come from the Lord, and so that He may send to you the One acknowledged as the Christ [Messiah], [namely] Jesus, who must remain in heaven (lit., "whom heaven must receive") until the times of *the restoration of all things* of which God has spoken through the mouths of His holy prophets from of old. For *Moses* said, "The Lord

God will raise up for you from among your brothers a Prophet like me".
Acts 3:19-22a

These passages closely connect the future spiritual restoration of Israel to the two witnesses and their ministry. Given that in our context of Revelation chapter eleven the two witnesses are also placed in close association with the rebuilt temple, the revived rites, and the reinvigorated worship, we may conclude that the rebuilding of the temple and the restoration of the godly worship associated with it is indeed directed by these two heralds of the Kingdom.

We would certainly be hard pressed to choose two other Old Testament figures more suited to spiritual revival and the reestablishment of the orthodox worship of the Lord. Moses was sent to a people far removed from the Lord and mediated to them the covenant written by God Himself (Gal.3:19). Elijah was sent to a people long in the grasp of pagan idolatry, and presided over a great and dramatic spiritual victory on Mount Carmel (2Kng.18:16-46). Elijah's rebuilding of the altar of the Lord on Mount Carmel foreshadows his leading role in rebuilding the temple during the Tribulation (1Kng.18:30-32), and Moses, of course, oversaw the construction of the original tabernacle, its furniture, and the rites ordained by God to serve it (so that there could be no better person to oversee its restoration: Ex.25:40). We should also point out at this juncture that the time required for the reconstruction of the (relatively small) temple itself need not be prohibitively time consuming. The massive structure of Herod's design (which took so long to build: Jn.2:20) was in fact an elaboration of the original second temple rather than the temple proper. Chapters 40-43 of Ezekiel which describe Ezekiel's vision of the massive millennial temple complex are also consistent with this interpretation. The temple structure itself (Ezek.40:48-49) is relatively modest, and, as in the case of the second temple set in the midst of Herod's massive complex, constitutes only a small part of the overall design. It is thus entirely consistent with the scriptures which deal with this subject to posit that Moses and Elijah rebuild the temple proper, leaving its elaboration (as described in Ezekiel and elsewhere) for the millennial reign of our Lord as indicated by the following passages:²⁸⁶

The entire flock of Kedar will be gathered for you. The rams of Nebaioth will serve you. They will be sacrificed as acceptable offerings on My altar. And as for My glorious house (i.e., the temple), *I shall glorify it.*
Isaiah 60:7

The entire glory of Lebanon will come to you, the fir, the pine, and the cedar together, to beautify My holy place (i.e., the temple), the place of My feet. And *I shall glorify it.*
Isaiah 60:13

(12) And He said to me, "Thus says the Lord of Hosts: Behold a Man – 'Branch' is His name (i.e., the Messiah; cf. Is.4:2; 11:1; 53:2; Zech.3:8). And He will branch out from His place and will build [up] the temple of the Lord. (13) For it is He who will build [up] the temple of the Lord. And He will raise up [its] glory. And He will sit and rule [as King] upon His throne. And He will [also] be Priest upon His [kingly] throne. For there will be a [unity of]

consultation between the two [offices]”.²⁸⁷
Zechariah 6:12-13a

Behold, I am about to send [forth] My messenger, and **he will prepare** the way before Me. Then the Lord whom you are seeking will suddenly **come to His temple** (i.e., it is already built in "preparation" for that great day).
Malachi 3:1

Moses and Elijah will possess all the divine authority necessary to complete this third and final temple in the correct, godly and sanctified fashion just as God has ordained it. All problems of time, placement, politics, and logistics will dissolve under the leadership of these two divinely appointed, divinely inspired, and divinely empowered heralds of the Kingdom of our coming Lord Jesus Christ.

Revelation 11:3-4:

(3) And I shall grant [life] to My two witnesses, and they shall prophesy dressed in sackcloth for 1,260 days (i.e., for the three and a half years which precede the above mentioned forty-two months). (4) These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the Lord of the earth.

As we have maintained in previous studies and suggested above, the two witnesses are none other than Moses and Elijah, brought back to life for this extraordinary ministry (albeit resuscitated rather than resurrected). Although not named here, the fact that they are called by the Lord "My two witnesses" is significant, for this mode of expression indicates that these are two definite and specific individuals who need not even be named.

1. The two olive trees and the two lampstands: The appearance of the two witnesses here in context with the reconstructed (third) temple also leads us to connect them to the detailed description of "the two anointed ones" of Zechariah chapter four who are prophetically associated with the second temple's reconstruction. Zechariah's description of these two throughout chapter four is critical to understanding the meaning of the symbolism of the olive trees and the lampstands. In Zechariah's vision of a single, solid gold lampstand with seven lamps, there are two olive trees standing by the lampstand on the left and on the right (Zech.4:3). When he asks the meaning of this vision, Zechariah is first told "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit" (Zech.4:6). This part of the answer explains not the details of the vision's symbolism, but rather the overall principle that it will be God's Spirit which empowers the rebuilding of the temple. Inasmuch as the second temple was not reconstructed without divine help, and given that the two witnesses are a prophecy connected to a future rebuilding (i.e., there is no further mention of them in the rebuilding of the second temple), we may conclude that the rebuilding of the third temple seen in Revelation chapter eleven will also be accomplished by God's Spirit, and that its reconstruction will be overseen by the two witnesses of Zechariah four (who *are* mentioned as being present after its construction in Revelation chapter eleven). This is clearly the main

reason for the Spirit's inclusion of the "two anointed" in Zechariah's vision. The vision thus has both a near and far term application, namely, to look to that future reconstruction by analogy in order to provide present encouragement, and thereby also to provide us with the prophecy of "two anointed ones" and their involvement in that future rebuilding (the same sort of analogy we have so often seen used in the case of the "Day of the Lord").

The name given to these two in Zechariah, generally translated "anointed ones", is actually "sons of oil". True, this is a Hebrew idiom (whereby "sons of" represents membership in a category), but the usual translation makes the idea *passive*, whereas it should be taken *actively*. The translation "anoint-*ing* ones" gives the correct sense, because, like the word "witness" used in Revelation, it indicates that they are *conduits* of God's power and God's light rather than merely being recipients. This is the point behind the symbolism in Zechariah 4:12 where the two olive trees pour out their oil into the lampstand's golden bowl. The lampstand has seven lamps which are "the seven eyes of the Lord" which range throughout the earth. These "eyes" are often mistaken to have a purely investigative purpose, but, just as the human eye can sparkle and reflect light, so the Hebrew word *'ayin* (אֵין) sometimes refers to an object's appearance as a reflector of light as well (Lev.13:5; 13:37; 13:55; Num.11:7; 22:5; 22:11; 1Sam.16:7; Ezek.1:4; 1:7; 1:16; 1:22; 1:27; 8:2; 10:9; Dan.10:6; cf. Prov.23:31). Similarly, these two witnesses will be the primary "reflectors" of the light of God's truth during the gathering darkness of the Tribulation.

Zechariah's seven lamps which are also seven eyes are identical in symbolism to the seven Spirits of Revelation chapters four (where lamps = spirits) and chapter five (where eyes = spirits). In all these cases, we have to do with the perfect seven-fold witness of the Holy Spirit, shedding forth God's light to illuminate the darkness of this world, making use of human agencies, but always in behalf of Him who is the true Light, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ("Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit": Zech.4:6).

And there [stood] burning before the throne seven lamps of fire, *which are* the seven spirits of God.

Revelation 4:5 (cf. Rev.1:4; 3:1)

And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing [there, looking] as if He had been slain, with seven horns and seven eyes *which are* the seven spirits of God sent out into the entire earth.

Revelation 5:6 (cf. Rev.1:4; 3:1)

In the context of Zechariah chapter four, the lampstand and its lights are clearly speaking of just such a witness of God's light in the world during the dark time to come (just as we saw the Church in its seven eras represented as a series of lampstands giving forth God's witness of light to the world: Rev.1:20).²⁸⁸ Empowering this tribulational witness of light are the "two anoint-*ing* ones", the two witnesses, Moses and Elijah. During the dark days of the Tribulation, they and the ministry of the 144,000 directed by them, will constitute the major witness of God's light in the world, just as in our own day that witness is provided by the Church. In this vein, it is important to stress again that it is Jesus who is *the* Light of the world, and that whether it be Israel in particular, or His Church in general (which, or

course, is inextricable from true Israel; cf. Rom.11:11-24), or these two unique men of God and the ministry they will direct, we are all merely reflectors of that one true Light, and we all receive our ultimate empowerment from Him, from His Spirit.²⁸⁹

"Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit" says the Lord of Hosts.
Zechariah 4:6

2. The two pillars: In the portico or entrance porch of the first temple, Solomon placed two massive bronze pillars, one on the north side, and one on the south. These pillars, flanking the threshold of the temple like two giant guardians, would doubtless have been in the mind of anyone hearing Zechariah's vision of the olive trees and the lampstands, especially had they lived long enough to have seen that first temple before its destruction (as some of the older people indeed had: Ezra 3:12; Hag.2:3; cf. Zech.4:10). Columns are, in any case, originally architectural representations of trees and the same was true of the lampstand (i.e., with its "flower-like cups, buds, blossoms, and branches"; cf. Ex.25:31-32). Moreover, when one considers that the lampstand within the holy place was not far removed from these two pillars (and that it was also designed to represent a tree: Ex.25:31-40; 37:17-24), the connection between it and the pillars on the one hand and the lampstand in Zechariah's vision with its two olive trees on the other is hard to ignore. We may add to this picture that the unique and unparalleled verbal phrasing used in both Zechariah 4:14 and Revelation 11:4, "who are standing by/before the Lord of the earth", suggests a permanent and stable positioning, exactly in the manner of pillars.

Virtually everything else in the temple had a symbolic and prophetic meaning (see part 2B under "The Earthly Tabernacle and Temple as a Type of the Heavenly Temple"), and the lampstand itself is, as we have also seen, a type of our Lord Jesus Christ.²⁹⁰ It is therefore more than likely that Solomon's naming of these two pillars is prophetic. Moreover, Revelation 3:12 provides a close parallel for connecting temple columns to individual believers: "The one who wins the victory I will make *a pillar* in the temple of My God and he shall never go out again". We believers will be, in resurrection, integral and irremovable parts of Christ's Body, just as these two "pillars" will "stand before the Lord" forever. Indeed, without just such a prophetic and symbolic purpose, for Solomon to have given names to these two inanimate columns of bronze would have been, at the very least, a puzzling thing to do. As it is, if we connect the two pillars with the other sets of pairs treated above, all of which we have already shown to refer to the same two individuals (i.e., the two olive trees, the two lampstands, the two anointing ones, and the two witnesses are all one and the same), then the names of the columns at the entrance to Solomon's temple will be seen to be significant as well.

The Hebrew word for pillar, *'amudth* (עמוד; viz., "a standing thing"), is derived and virtually indistinguishable from the verb used in Zechariah 4:14 of the anointing olive trees who are "*standing* by the Lord", making the connection between these pillars and our two witnesses even more certain. Just as the two witnesses, the anointing ones, the two lampstands, and the two olive trees all "stand [solidly like pillars] by/before the Lord of the earth", so these two pillars stood solidly on either side of the entrance to the first temple (which contained the lampstand). The one on the north side was named *Boaz*, while the one on the south was

called *Jachin* (1Kng.7:21). *Jachin* is to be translated "He (i.e., the Lord) establishes", while *Boaz* means "strength in Him". Both of these names sum up the careers of the two witnesses Moses and Elijah respectively. *Jachin* is erected first and *Boaz* second (just as Moses' first earthly ministry preceded that of Elijah), and *Jachin* takes the first place of honor on the south (i.e., the "right hand" as the temple faced east with the ark or chariot throne oriented in that direction), while *Boaz* stood on the north, the second most honorable place. In a similar way, while Elijah's ministry was remarkable in every way, Moses' was superior (compare Paul's use of Moses' ministry as the closest parallel to that of the ministry of our Lord in Hebrews chapter three). Their ministries, after all, served somewhat different purposes. Moses was the Lord's instrument for effectively "establishing" the spiritual groundwork for Israel through his mediation of the Law ("He establishes"), while Elijah presided over a significant overture from the Lord for spiritual revival (renewed "strength in Him").²⁹¹ From the divine viewpoint, history has always been supported by these twin pillars of original establishment of the truth and restoration to the truth, with both pillars ever looking to Him who is the truth, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the "Lord of all the earth". At His right and left hand these two witnesses stand as solidly as columns of bronze. To serve directly by the Lord's side is clearly a preeminent honor. When the mother of James and John requested this privilege for her sons, our Lord's response was ". . . to sit at my right or left is not for Me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared" (Mk.10:40; cf. Lk.14:8-11). For even though the twelve apostles of our Lord will indeed occupy unique positions ("judging the twelve tribes of Israel", i.e., to be heads of the twelve divisions of the family of God: Matt.19:28; Lk.22:30), it is to Moses and Elijah that this most prestigious honor will fall. Being so close to our dear Lord for all eternity is indeed an exceptional and sublime reward, earned in the case of these two by exceptional earthly service on not one, but two occasions.

But I, [in contrast to the wicked,] will be like an olive tree flourishing in the house of My Lord, for I have trusted in the mercy of God forever and ever.
Psalm 52:8

3. The restoration ministries: During the Tribulation, two main areas of restoration will need to be addressed for the ministry of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000 to be effective: 1) the temple and its rites will need to be restored as a focus for renewed Jewish worship; and 2) the hearts of a large number of their countrymen will need to be won back to their Lord and ours, Jesus Christ the only Messiah. As God's instrument in founding, constructing and instituting the original tabernacle along with its statutes and ceremonies, no more authoritative person than Moses can be imagined. As God's instrument in His most dramatic offer of spiritual revival in Israel's history, one, we might add, which took place in spite of the most severe opposition from a pagan government which had wedded satanic worship to the governance of the state (reminiscent of antichrist and his false prophet), no more highly qualified person than Elijah can be found. Moreover, the future ministries of both of these great men of God in restoring and multiplying the remnant of Israel during the Tribulation's first half is sufficiently documented in scripture.

"The Lord Your God will raise up from your midst, from among your brothers, *a Prophet like me* (i.e., the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom Moses will be analogous in type). You must give heed to Him, just as you requested from the Lord your God at Horeb (i.e., Sinai) on the day of your assembly [there], when you said, 'May I not hear the voice of the Lord My God any longer, nor see this great fire lest I die!' Then the Lord said to me, 'They have done well in what they have said. I will raise up for them from the midst of their brothers *a Prophet like you*. And I will put My words in His mouth, and He will tell them everything I command Him. And it will come to pass that the person who does not listen to My words which He will speak in My Name, that I will require it of that person' (i.e., hold him responsible)."

Deuteronomy 18:15-19

Elijah's future return is more generally accepted and understood because in Old Testament prophecy the antitype of our Lord is stressed rather than the type (i.e., the Messiah instead of Moses), but in the case of His herald, it is the type who is set in the forefront of prophecy rather than the antitype (i.e., Elijah instead of John the baptist).²⁹² So while the passage above does have a general application for all of the true prophets of God (cf. the following verses 20-22), it is also clear from the emphasis it places upon a single prophet that we have to do here with a future coming of a single Person who would proclaim the Word in a way so preeminent that only Moses' ministry is worthy of comparison (cf. Lk.9:8; Jn.1:21; 1:25; 1:45; 6:14; 7:19; Heb.3:1-6). The sublime fulfillment of these verses is therefore in the first coming of our Savior (cf. Acts 3:22-26; 7:37). This fact, however, does not preclude a final application of the passage to Moses' return. For while the salvation of Israel has indeed been accomplished by our Lord's first advent, present and prophetic circumstances still require just such a preeminent prophet to resurrect the true worship of God, and, other than our Lord whose return must await the Tribulation's conclusion, no one is more "like Moses" than Moses himself. In John 1:25 we find both sets of types and antitypes linked where, speaking to the Messiah's herald, John the baptist, the type of Elijah, the Pharisee's disciples ask, "So why are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?". It is generally accepted that one half of this pair of types will precede Jesus' return (i.e., Elijah). Given the consistent linkage of the two in scripture, there is no more likely candidate to be identified as the second witness than Moses.

Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him on Horeb (i.e., Sinai) concerning all Israel, [with both its] **statutes and judgments** – behold, I am about to send you *Elijah* the prophet before the coming of the Day of Lord, [that] great and awesome [Day], so *that he may restore [to God] the hearts* of the fathers along with [their] children and the hearts of the children along with their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with complete devastation.

Malachi 4:4-6

The first thing to note about the passage above, a fact usually overlooked in interpretation, is that Moses also figures prominently in this prophecy. The specific mention of Moses in connection with "remembering" the Law with all its "statutes and judgments" foreshadows the reinstatement of the temple rite in the reconstructed temple. "Remembering the Law", in fact, comes first, and is followed by the heart-restoration said to be mediated by Elijah. As

in our other parallels, Moses is first, then Elijah, indicating that the rebuilding of the temple and the reinitiating of the sacrifices will be instrumental in and fundamental to the spiritual revival (Elijah's area of expertise) and the ministry of the 144,000. Incidentally, in both passages quoted above, Sinai is called by its alternative name, "Horeb", which means "devastation" in Hebrew. This appellation brings to mind the desolate spirituality of Israel which will obtain when the two witnesses begin their ministry, and the concomitant need for complete restoration not only in terms of spiritual response, but also of the main concrete features of the Law (namely, the rebuilding of the temple and the reconstitution of its rites, Moses' area of expertise; cf. also Ex.32-34).

So repent and turn back [to God] for the blotting out of your sins, so that *times of revival* may come from the Lord, and so that He may send to you the One acknowledged as the Christ [Messiah], [namely] Jesus, who must remain in heaven (lit., "whom heaven must receive") until the *times of the restoration* of all things of which God has spoken through the mouths of His holy prophets from of old. For Moses said "The Lord Your God will raise up for you a *Prophet* like me".

Acts 3:19-22

In the context above, Peter is referring to our Lord Jesus Christ when he mentions the Prophet who was to come in order to explain to his contemporaries that Jesus was that Prophet in the most direct fulfillment of Moses' prophecy. But it is significant that in this context of *future* revival that precedes our Lord's return (i.e., "so that times of revival *may* come" and "Jesus, who must remain in heaven *until* the times of the restoration"), that Moses is mentioned, once again the inseparable type to our Lord's antitype whenever the issue of the future revival and restoration of Israel comes up. Also present in the passage above is the dual focus of the two witnesses' ministry, both revival (the spiritual aspect represented by Elijah) and restoration (the visible aspect represented by Moses). That both aspects of preparation for Jesus' Second Advent should be so mentioned is not surprising, for it is through the persons of both of these two witnesses that God will prepare His people for His return.

For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John [the baptist]. And if you are willing to accept [this], he himself (i.e., John) is [typical of] Elijah who is destined to come [in the future].

Matthew 11:13-14

And He answered and said, "Elijah is coming [in the future] and will [then] *restore* all things. And I tell you that Elijah has [also] already come [in true type] and they did not acknowledge him, but did to him such [terrible] things as they desired. In the same way the Son of Man is also going to suffer at their hands".

Matthew 17:11-12 (cf. Mk.9:12-13)

In both of the above passages, our Lord confirms to His contemporaries the still future coming of the actual Elijah. His true type, however, had already come (i.e., John the baptist), just as Moses' true type was standing there among them (i.e., our Lord Himself,

the Prophet about whom Moses spoke). The return of Elijah, the type of John, will be accompanied by the return of Moses, the type of Christ.

To help illustrate this point, a few words are in order here concerning some of the similarities between this dual set of types and antitypes .²⁹³

- The two witnesses minister for three and one half years (Rev.11:3), as did John and our Lord Jesus Christ.²⁹⁴
- John ministered "in the spirit and power of Elijah"(Lk.1:17), while Christ spoke of Moses' testimony about Himself (Jn.5:45-46; cf. Lk.24:44), and typicality to Himself (Jn.3:14).
- Elijah's extensive exile in the wilderness (1Kng.17:1-9) provides the type for John's ministry in the wilderness (Is.40:3-5), while Moses' forty days on Mount Sinai (Ex.24:15-18) is a type of Jesus' forty days in the wilderness of testing and communion with God (Matt.4:1-11).
- Elijah's persecution by Jezebel and Ahab (1Kng.19) is typical of John's persecution by Herod and execution at Herodias' behest (Matt.14:1-12), while Moses' disappearance and reappearance to His rebellious congregation (Ex.32:1) is typical of Christ's death and resurrection appearances to His doubting disciples (Jn.20:9; 20:25).
- Both John and Jesus were martyred (although this word hardly does justice to our Lord's unique sacrifice of Himself for the sins of the world), just as the two witnesses will be.
- Both Jesus and Moses are mediators of the New and Old Covenants respectively, wherein they represent man to God and God to man (Gal.3:19-20; 1Tim.2:5; Heb.8:6; 9:15; 12:24), while both John and Elijah called their countrymen to repent and adhere to these covenants (1Kng.18:21; Matt.3:1-2).
- Only Moses spoke with the Lord face to face (Ex.33:11), and only Christ has seen the Father (Jn.1:18), while both John and Elijah received special communication from our Lord Himself when they faltered in their faith (1Kng.19:9-18; Lk.7:18-28).

4. Miracles: Another point at which the ministries of the witnesses are clearly parallel to those of Moses and Elijah is their association with exceptional miracles (cf. Rev.11:6, where "blood" and "drought" are two of the most notable plagues actually accomplished at the hands of Moses and Elijah respectively). We have already drawn the parallel between the trumpet judgments and the ten plagues called down upon Egypt by the Lord through Moses' agency. The ten Egyptian plagues, as we shall see below as well, also bear a strong resemblance to the plagues personally administered by the two witnesses later in chapter eleven. Indeed, there is very little in the Exodus which is not typically present in the Tribulation, which represents a sort of "sea" through which believers must pass to reach the safety of the other side (i.e., antichrist and Pharaoh, Egypt and Babylon, etc.).²⁹⁵ Besides Moses, no other Old Testament believer was responsible for administering more numerous and more impressive miracles than Elijah (e.g., the bottomless jars of oil and flour, the raising of the widow's son, the heavenly fire which consumed the altar sacrifice, etc.).²⁹⁶

Apropos of our point here is that supernatural blood was the crucial third “sign” given to Moses by the Lord to validate his authority (Ex.4:9 with Rev.11:5-6) – *precisely the same supernaturally validating sign of the first two trumpet judgments* – and that by Elijah’s word and through his prayer no rain fell for three and one half years – *precisely the same period of the two witnesses’ ministry*, that is, the first half of the Tribulation (Lk.4:25; Jas.5:16-18; c. Rev.11:5-6).²⁹⁷

5. The Transfiguration: One of the clearest proofs of the identity of the two witnesses is their appearance with our Lord at His transfiguration (Matt.16:28-17:13; Mk.9:1-13; Lk.9:27-36). That event is expressly stated to have been a prophetic foretaste of our Lord's Second Advent and the coming of His kingdom (i.e., His *parousia*: 1Pet.1:16; cf. Matt.16:28; Mk.9:1; Lk.9:27). Given that the passages which deal with the transfiguration mention both Moses and Elijah, the literal Moses and Elijah, in connection with this preview of Christ's return, it is natural and necessary to connect them with the two witnesses of Revelation chapter eleven who herald that very return. After the event, Jesus' disciples asked Him only about Elijah and He responded in kind. But our Lord's response, that Elijah would come "first" (i.e., before the Second Advent which His recent transfiguration had previewed), gave them (and give us) no reason to suppose that *both* of His famous interlocutors on the mountain would not do so. Moses' presence on the mountain *with* Elijah thus serves to demonstrate that, following our Lord's death and resurrection (also represented in this context: cf. respectively Lk.9:31 and Jesus' glorified, resurrection-like appearance), *both* will precede His return (as the two witnesses to and heralds of that return).

6. The bodies of Moses and Elijah: Moses and Elijah have been physically dead for thousands of years. Their return in a real, tangible, physical way therefore requires some explanation. First of all, as Christians, we accept God's ability to raise the dead, and we all expect to enjoy this blessing in the resurrection to come – that is our Christian hope (cf. 1Cor.15:12-19). The return of Moses and Elijah will not, however, be a case of *resurrection*, but of *resuscitation*. Although the later is admittedly not a word used in scripture, scripture does clearly make this very distinction between those on the one hand who are brought back to this earthly life (and are again subject physical death just like the rest of us), and those who, on the other hand, once raised in true resurrection, are no longer subject to death (1Cor.15:54).²⁹⁸ The ruler's daughter, the widow's son, and Lazarus, all brought back by Jesus (Matt.9:18-26; Lk.7:11-17; Jn.11:1-44), Tabitha brought back by Peter (Acts 9:36-42), and the boy brought back by Paul (Acts 20:7-12), the young boys brought back by Elijah and Elisha respectively (1Kng.17:17-24; 2Kng.4:8-37), the dead who rose following the crucifixion (Matt.27:52-53), and all of the other examples of this miracle whether recorded in the scriptures or not are without exception examples of what we are calling here "resuscitation" rather than "resurrection", because in all of these cases the individuals later died again physically. The only exception to this so far in the working out of the plan of God is the true and genuine *resurrection* of the humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ. The next echelon of the resurrection will not take place until He returns to earth to claim all that is His, "those who are His at His coming" (i.e., the Bride of Christ: 1Cor.15:23). Then and only then will we receive our eternal bodies over which death no longer has any power (Rev.20:6). Since Moses and Elijah reappear physically *before* the Second Advent, and since they are in fact killed by antichrist at the end of their ministry, we may say of a

certainty that what we have here is indeed a case of resuscitation rather than of resurrection.

In the cases of both Moses and Elijah, their departure from this life the first time was absolutely unique (as indeed it will also be the next time: Rev.11:11-12). Elijah's departure in the heavenly chariot needs no great elaboration (2Kng.2:1-18). Elisha's extensive search after the fact (at the request of the company of prophets) demonstrates that no physical trace of his body was left behind. In Moses' case, we are told that he was "buried" in the valley opposite Beth Peor (Deut.34:5-6). However, we are also told in the same verse that "to this day no one knows where his grave is". One would have thought that Moses' grave would have been of no small interest for that as well as for all later generations, if it were but possible to know the location. Deuteronomy 34:6 actually attributes the burial to God Himself, and Jude clarifies the situation: the "burial" was only temporary (thus explaining why the site could not be known). Jude 1:9 explains that, like Elijah's physical body, Moses' body too was uniquely taken to heaven by angelic agency, an operation which was carried out by the archangel Michael and contested by the devil. Thus, the physical bodies of both of these two extraordinary servants of our Lord left earth in an extraordinary way (and thus kept from physical decay), precisely so that they might later return via resuscitation after so many years in an equally remarkable and unprecedented way.

7. Unfinished Business: One other significant factor common to the ministries of both of these great believers is that their ministries were cut short. Moses did not enter the promised land and it was left for Joshua to settle the Israelites in Canaan. Elijah did not complete his ministry of revival and miraculous witness, but was succeeded in his work by Elisha. Neither man enjoyed great spiritual response from the congregation to whom each ministered so exceptionally, and both men were, in effect, "replaced" by God on account of momentary lapses in their otherwise magnificent service to the Lord (each of which was motivated in no small part by their reaction to this lack of response).²⁹⁹ In anger at the abuse heaped upon him by his stubborn charges, Moses violated God's specific instructions at Kadesh (i.e., Meribah: Num.20:1-13; Ps.95:8). In fear for his life from the pagan government which the people did not overturn after the miracles on Mount Carmel, Elijah temporarily abandoned his ministry and retreated to the desert (1Kng.19:1-4). In both cases, each was temporarily acting contrary to his own character (Moses, normally the most humble of men [cf. Num.12:3], reacting in arrogant anger, and Elijah, normally so courageous [cf. 1Kng.18:8-19], reacting in self-pity and fear). Both men recovered swiftly from what may seem to us understandable and perhaps even minor transgressions, but the termination of these great ministries as a result of their failings shows us an important biblical principle: to whom much has been given, much is expected (Lk.12:48). Perhaps only a handful of believers in the history of the world have attained anything like the spirituality of these two men, and even fewer have been entrusted with ministries of the magnitude they enjoyed. With such great privilege comes great responsibility. Scripture is very clear about the fact that both men's ministries were prematurely terminated (Num.20:12; Deut.1:37; 3:23-26; 32:48-52; 1Kng.19:15-18; 2Kng.2:9-10; Ps.106:32-33). It is more often the case than not that, for those who are otherwise committed and dedicated to serving Jesus Christ, improperly reacting to unexpected and unwelcome circumstances will produce either unrestrained fear or uncontrolled anger (in turn motivating un-Christian

and self-destructive actions and behaviors). For whether one falls prey to sin out of either fear or anger, both emotions when untempered suggest a lack of faith in God's disposition of events. Fear suggests to us (falsely) that God will not protect us when we fall into sudden dangers (as in Elijah's case, although he was normally a man of exceptional zeal: 1Kng.19:10), while anger suggests to us (falsely) that God will not vindicate us when we fall victim to exceptional abuse (as in Moses' case, although he was normally a man of exceptional humility: Num.12:3).

In the return of Moses and Elijah, therefore, we once again see the awesome grace of God at work. For both men are going to be given a "second chance", so to speak (although, in comparative terms, the rewards they have already earned even without this new opportunity will be surpassed by few if any). This observation helps to explain the symbolism of the posture of the two witnesses (1Kng.18:15 [KJV]; Lk.23:33; Jn.19:18; cf. Ex.33:21; 1Kng.19:11). Along with the olive trees, lampstands, and columns, they are standing rather than sitting. Just as the Lamb stands up to receive the scroll from the Father's hand to begin the Tribulation which terminates with His glorious return (Rev.5:6; cf. Ps.110:1), so the standing posture of Moses and Elijah in all of the citations and analogies given above indicates that their work is not yet done.³⁰⁰ They will return to earth once more to set the capstone on two of the most spectacular performances in history of believers in the service of our Lord.

The main duties of Moses and Elijah during their forty-two month ministry have in the main been adumbrated above and covered in the previous installment of this series. They will

- 1) bring about the reconstruction of the temple (see above).
- 2) reconstitute the temple worship (see above).
- 3) direct the ministry of the 144,000 (see Part 2B of this series).
- 4) be involved in the earthly direction of the trumpet judgment plagues, as well many other similar plagues of more limited scope (see below).

In regard to their direction of the 144,000, it should be mentioned here that by their very celebrity Moses and Elijah will facilitate that ministry. By being the "lightning rods" of world ire at the plagues which God will bring upon the earth in those days, Moses and Elijah will deflect the attention of that enraged world from the 72,000 pairs of witnesses.³⁰¹ These two will be the target of the world's wrath (Rev.11:7-10), so that persecution will not fall upon the 144,000 until Moses and Elijah have been called back to heaven for the last time (Rev.14:1-5). While they do minister, they will also be beacons of light in an ever darkening world, and particularly to their own countrymen, as they serve to rekindle the light of Israel on behalf of Him who is the Light of the world (compare Is.42:6; 49:6 with Jn.8:12; 9:5; 11:9).

One last similarity between the original ministries of both Moses and Elijah appropriate to emphasize here is the point made above that, despite their own extraordinary devotion to the Lord and the exceptional nature of their respective ministries, neither man experienced great response from those ministered to. In Moses' case, only Joshua and Caleb proved faithful out of the entire congregation of Israel (cf. Num.26:65), and in Elijah's case as well, the revival was limited at best and we are given no indication that it ever gained traction with the populace as a whole (witness the fact that the regime of Ahab and Jezebel did not come to an end even after the events on Mount Carmel: 1Kng.19:1-3). Both men's failures, moreover, came as a direct result of their reaction to this lack of response (cf. Num.20:10-11; 1Kng.19:10). It is therefore a testimony to the mercy, grace and faithfulness of our Lord that both of these great believers will at last be allowed to experience a significant positive response to their efforts in ministry, as a large portion of Israel turns back to Jesus Christ through their work and that of their associates, the 144,000.

Revelation 11:5-6:

And if anyone wishes to harm them, fire proceeds out of their mouths and devours their enemies. And if anyone should wish to harm them, he must die in this way. These [two] have the power to close up the sky so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophecy, and they have power over the waters to turn them to blood and to strike the earth with every [sort of] plague as often as they wish.

This overtly miraculous and obviously divine protection extended to the two witnesses is beyond anything the world has yet witnessed. That is true even taking into account the previous earthly ministries of Moses and Elijah, wherein they experienced from God a level of miraculous shielding that was arguably also beyond what any other believers have ever known. For example, Moses' enemies were swallowed up by the earth (Num.16:28-33) and turned leprous in an instant (Num.12:1-15), while at least on one occasion Elijah's enemies were devoured by heavenly fire (2Kng.1:9-14). Here, however, we see fire coming out of the *very mouths of the two witnesses themselves*, destroying their enemies without any mediation from God (i.e., it does not come as the result of prayer, nor does it come from heaven, but directly from them as a result of their own will). This is a unique and unprecedented situation, for nowhere else in scripture are imperfect human beings, no matter how great they may be as believers, given similar powers. From these facts we may safely conclude that 1) the spirituality of the two in question here far exceeds what even most of the great believers of the Bible were ever capable of producing, for it would take an incalculable degree of humility, restraint, spiritual maturity, and a near complete harmony with the will of God *not* to abuse such power, and 2) the opposition these two will face from the devil and his forces, seen and unseen, will likewise be unprecedented to make such unique powers necessary. This combination of unparalleled power and extraordinary opposition makes it entirely necessary, therefore, for the two God has chosen for this special ministry to be exceptional believers. Only two great men of God of the caliber of Moses and Elijah could ever be equal to either aspect of this task (i.e., humility in power, the hallmark of Moses, and courage in the face of opposition, Elijah's key trait).

The second point to note here is the relationship of the two witnesses to the trumpet judgments. True enough, the "closing of the heavens", the "waters turned to blood" and the "plagues" described in context are not part of the trumpet judgments per se. But while it is not explicitly so stated, the very mention of these additional powers given to the two witnesses draws an association that no one who will experience those horrendous days to come will be likely to miss. That is to say, even were Moses and Elijah *not* given a manifest role in the trumpet judgments themselves, their power to produce very similar judgments during the exact same period of time would lead almost anyone to make such a connection. And, indeed, there is a connection, for God customarily assigns human beings the role of mediation in His overt judgments of the world (as in the case of many of the Old Testament prophets). Moses did not produce the ten plagues against Egypt, nor did Elijah call down the three and a half years of drought upon Israel by his own authority (cf. Jas.5:17-18). Nevertheless, God arranged both of those events in such a way so as to make it clear that each of these prophets was the "point man", for want of a better expression, in God's administration of the respective judgments. Pharaoh and king Ahab certainly saw them as such (cf. Ex.8:8; 9:27-28; 12:31-32; 1Kng.18:17; cf. Jas.5:17-18). In most such cases, God provides an earthly focal point for the divine judgment in order to demonstrate and prove the true attitude of those being judged. Without Moses' involvement in the ten plagues on Egypt, Pharaoh would have lacked an earthly object against which to vent his spleen. But by having such an object (i.e., Moses), we see the true nature of unbelief, and in the process of Pharaoh's opposition to God manifested in his opposition to Moses, God is glorified quite against Pharaoh's will (Ex.10:1-2). And had not the three and a half year drought been placed into Elijah's hands, we would not be privy to the details of Ahab's rebelliousness under the influence of his wife Jezebel (1Kng.17:1; cf. 1Kng.18:4). In the former case, we see a man defying God in an extraordinary way (Ex.9:16). In the later case, we see a man attempting to destroy God's agent with all the resources at his command (cf. 1Kng.18:9-14). In both cases, God's ability to overcome even the most powerful and vehement human opposition shines through, and, taken together, we have in the opposition to these two instances a preview of antichrist, whose hostility to God and to His two witnesses will combine the arrogance of Pharaoh with the implacability of Ahab. Antichrist will actively try to destroy Moses and Elijah, despite the folly of this undertaking, and will eventually succeed (but not until the time destined by God for their return to heaven).

Inasmuch as these two witnesses are God's witnesses, will be carrying our Lord's message, and will be specially empowered by Him, the world will be left in no doubt about their status as God's own agents, and we should therefore understand this agency to extend to some visible administration of the trumpet judgments as well. In antichrist's direct opposition to them, therefore, we will see set in the clearest relief the essence of human rejection of God's will on the one hand, and of complete acceptance of that will on the other. By making the two witnesses the visible focal point for evil opposition, God will demonstrate the extent, the vehemence, and the implacability of that ingrained evil to a degree that would be impossible without the provision of just such a tangible, earthly target as Moses and Elijah will provide.

In addition to their connection to the trumpet judgments which will produce worldwide effects and reactions, the two witnesses are also said here to administer other similar

judgments, plagues of a comparable nature though with lesser and more localized effects. These are said to be called down "as often as *they wish*". The Greek phraseology is very similar to the preceding condition of their use of miraculous force "if anyone *should wish* to harm them". In neither case is the "wishing" or "willing" arbitrary. Just as Moses and Elijah will only use deadly force against those who attempt to harm them directly (and thus intend to hamper or end their service to God prematurely), so we may be sure that their use of localized plagues will also serve a definite purpose. Specifically, just as the fire which will proceed from their mouths will be protective in nature, so we should conclude that the limited judgments mentioned here will also be protective, specifically, in defense of the ministries of their associates, the 144,000. In addition to the personal protections which we have already noted in regard to these 72,000 pairs of special witnesses, there will apparently be numerous occasions upon which various localities, governments, and peoples will oppose their work. It will be Moses' and Elijah's task, among their other duties, to administer God's judgment upon every group that stands in the way of the completion of the 144,000's unique ministry.

There is also an important symbolic meaning to take away from the two examples of localized plagues mentioned here, namely "blood" and "drought". Both of these miraculous judgments, each being characteristic of the respective ministries of the two men as we have seen, are also connected to water, a literal substance which is necessary for physical life, and a symbol for the Word of God which is absolutely essential for spiritual life (Is.55:1; Jer.2:13; 17:13; Jn.3:5; 4:10-13; Eph.5:26; Rev.22:17; cf. Ps.36:8-9; Is.8:6-8; 1Cor.10:4; Tit.3:5; 1Pet.3:21). The judgment of drought symbolizes a taking away of the truth from those who have no desire for it, while the judgment of blood symbolizes the truth meant for blessing but willfully rejected now transformed into a means of cursing judicially imposed. Just as Ahab's attitude represented the general rejection by his countrymen of God's "water of truth" subsequently punished by the withholding of literal water, and just as Pharaoh's attitude represented the general disdain by the gentile world at large for God's "water of truth" subsequently punished by the transformation of literal water into undrinkable blood, so in the times of these two witnesses the world in general will continue to disregard and reject God's truth, and will be subsequently punished through the very water which represents it (cf. Rev.16:5-6).

Revelation 11:7-14:

And when they have completed their testimony, the beast who is going to come up out of the Abyss at that time will make war upon them and will defeat them and will kill them. And their bodies will [lie] in the square of the great city which in spiritual terms is called "Sodom" and "Egypt", where our Lord was crucified. And for three and a half days, people from [every] tribe and race and language and nation will gaze upon their bodies, and they will not allow their bodies to be placed in a tomb. And the inhabitants of the earth will rejoice over them and be glad and send gifts to one another, on the [false] grounds that these two prophets had tortured the inhabitants of the earth (i.e., this is how the unbelieving world will see it). And after the three and a half days, a living spirit from God entered into them, and they stood up on their feet. And a great fear fell upon those who

were watching them [arise]. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" And they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them [do so]. And at that hour a great earthquake occurred, and the tenth part of the city collapsed, and the [number of] persons killed in the earthquake was seven thousand. And the rest [of the population] became afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe has passed. Behold! The third woe is coming quickly.

No harm will be allowed to come to the two witnesses, Moses and Elijah, until such time as their mission has been entirely completed. For three and a half years, their enemies, seen and unseen, have been unable to interfere with their efforts to evangelize Israel and restore the true worship of God in Jesus Christ. Now that their work is done, God will grant them one final honor, and a double one at that. Not only will they die as martyrs for Jesus Christ, but they will also be revived an unprecedented second time and again taken up into heaven in a miraculous way.

The beast out of the Abyss: The beast mentioned here is, indeed, none other than antichrist.³⁰² The name "beast" brings to mind both the outrageous bestiality of his conduct and previous prophetic references to him (e.g., Dan.7:3-27; cf. Rev.13:1-3; 17:1-14). As the place of the dead, the mention of the Abyss here has a twofold meaning.³⁰³ First, it refers to the resuscitation of the Roman empire in a new form (for that is essentially what the beast's kingdom will be; Dan.7:7; 9:26; Rev.17:8-11). Second, it also refers to the origin of antichrist, the ruler of that kingdom (for the sea is often symbolic of the evil he represents and the evil one by whom he is spawned).³⁰⁴

The war against Moses and Elijah: The Greek phraseology here, specifically the use of the words "war" (*polemos*) and "conquer" (*nikao*), strongly suggest that the beast's elimination of Moses and Elijah will be far from an easy or instantaneous matter. It will be, as the context intimates, a genuine battle. The God-given ability of the two witnesses to unleash blasts of fire from their mouths proved an effective deterrent during the three and a half years of their ministry, and we may expect that, just as Elijah's prayers were answered with the result that several large detachments of soldiers were similarly destroyed, so here as well a large number of antichrist's henchmen will meet their doom. We are not told the precise means used by antichrist to overcome the two prophets, and it is possible that part of antichrist's approach will be to "fight fire with fire", making maximum use of the satanic power given to him and his key lieutenant, the false prophet (who likewise has a similar ability to bring fire down from the sky: Rev.13:13). However, we may safely say that no means available to antichrist would have been capable of removing Moses and Elijah from the scene had it not been the will of God for their ministry to conclude in this dramatic fashion:

Behold, if anyone does strive with you, it will not be from Me. Whoever strives with you will fall on account of you. I have created the smith, he who blows the coals into fire and sets his tools to the work, and I have created the destroyer to bring ruin. No weapon forged against you shall prosper. And you shall reprove every tongue that rises up to judge you. This is the

heritage of the servants of the Lord, and My vindication on their behalf, says the Lord.
Isaiah 54:15-17

The naming of Jerusalem (without question the city in which our Lord was crucified) as "Sodom" and "Egypt" denotes the sad spiritual state of the majority of the population of Israel at the time of antichrist's warring against Moses and Elijah. As the city notorious for placing earthly sensuality above all spiritual priorities, Sodom signifies the unwillingness of the greater part of the people to respond to God's unprecedented ministry of grace in the persons of the two witnesses and the 144,000 (cf. Is.1:9-10; 3:9; Jer.23:14; 2Pet.2:6-8; Jude 1:7). While Sodom represents a disinterest in divine solutions, the mention of Egypt is a commentary on the people's willingness to choose human solutions instead. Israel had been called *out of Egypt* (Hos.11:1), but it had been a tendency throughout antiquity for both the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel to rely upon Egypt for help and support when they were threatened by attack from the north, rather than to rely upon God (Is.30:1-7; 31:1; Ezek.29:6-7). As the two witnesses depart to the apparent satisfaction of the majority of their fellow countrymen, this doubly damning pair of appellations lets us know that even though many responded to the call to return to God through Jesus Christ, most in Israel will remain hard in spite of witnessing this series of unprecedented and miraculous events (including the double resuscitation of Moses and Elijah).

And [Abraham] said to them, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets (e.g., like Elijah), they will not be convinced if someone rises from the dead".
Luke 16:31

The three and a half days: As we have seen, days frequently represent longer periods of time in biblical symbolism.³⁰⁵ Here the three and a half days during which the bodies of Moses and Elijah will lie lifeless in the center of Jerusalem represent the three and a half years of spiritual desolation and persecution which are about to commence (i.e., the Great Tribulation). The two witnesses will be, in effect, precursors of the martyrs of the Great Persecution which is about to break out upon believers all over the world (with the 144,000 being the first to fall in it). The deaths of the two witnesses will serve to alert those faithful to Jesus Christ of that coming storm of unequalled tribulation and persecution.

For if they do [such] things when the tree is alive (cf. the "two olive trees"), what will happen when it is dead?
Luke 23:31

The reviving of Moses and Elijah, on the other hand, will be a matter of great encouragement, reminding all God's people of His complete power, even over death. For their resuscitation at the end of the three and a half days will symbolize the resurrection of all believers three and a half years from this point at the end of the Great Tribulation.³⁰⁶

But each [will be resurrected] in his own echelon. Christ [is the] first-fruits. Next [will be] those belonging to Christ *at His coming*.
1st Corinthians 15:23

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command, with the archangel's blast on the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we who are alive and remain will be snatched up together with them in clouds **to meet the Lord** in the air, and in this way we shall always be with the Lord.
1st Thessalonians 4:16-17

The deaths of Moses and Elijah will be met with great joy on the part of the majority of the earth's inhabitants. Rather than being grateful to God for His gracious warnings and turning to Him, the unbelieving world will be all too pleased to see these two great men of God destroyed. In this we see the results of the processes of hardening and polarization discussed at length earlier in this installment. The world is now ripe for dominance by antichrist, and in choosing to support him in his "war" against the two witnesses, and by rejoicing in his victory over the servants of the Lord, the world will not only be openly and unreservedly choosing for the beast, but will also be handing him the ultimate opportunity to establish his own alternative religion and thus impose a large measure of religious dominance over the entire globe by its establishment (a development which will in turn cement the political, economic, and social control he will gain at the Tribulation's midpoint with the defeat of the last coalition to oppose him; see part 3B). Thus the ministry of the two witnesses and of their agents the 144,000 will have a dual effect. For this ministry will not only lead to an unprecedented revival among the Jewish people throughout the world. The unbelieving world will actually *blame* Moses and Elijah for these gracious warnings (Rev.11:10), and the identification of the two witnesses with these plagues of ever increasing intensity will thus be the cause of forcing the rest of the population of the earth to abandon all neutrality and to choose once and for all which side they are on. Rather than turning to God, most will direct their anger and rage at His two witnesses, thus hardening their hearts and preparing the ground for the equally unabashed persecution of the remainder of God's people which will follow.

At that time they will surrender you to persecution and will put you to death, and you will be hated by all the gentiles (i.e., unbelievers) on account of My Name.
Matthew 24:9

But a time will come when everyone who kills you will think that he is making an offering in worship to God.
John 16:2

The revival and ascension of Moses and Elijah: We have already discussed the issue of (temporary) resuscitation as opposed to (permanent) resurrection, but it should be pointed out that this *second* revival for each man is also without parallel in scripture, as is this *second* ascent into heaven apart from normal physical death.³⁰⁷ It will be to the great shock of the rejoicing world that the lifeless bodies of the two witnesses are "quickened" by God through the reintroduction of their spirits into their bodies.³⁰⁸ This dramatic, instantaneous, and seemingly impossible return to life (and subsequent ascension) after the

great exertions of antichrist and his forces to eradicate the two witnesses will be a clear sign to the world of the futility of opposing God.

[These types], though always learning, are never able to accept the truth. In the same way that Jannes and Jambres (i.e., types of the beast and his false prophet) opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, for their minds have been corrupted and they have been found wanting concerning the faith. But they will not keep on striding forward forever. Their folly will become obvious to all, just as in the case of those two.
2nd Timothy 3:7-9

On the other hand, the astounding sight of their ascent into heaven at the Lord's audible behest will leave no doubt as to either the heavenly favor in which their ministry was held, or of the power of our God to rescue and redeem all who place their hope in Him, or, finally, of the absolute certainty of His ultimate victory. As Moses and Elijah depart "in the cloud" just as our Lord Jesus Christ departed (Acts 1:9; cf. 2Kng.2:11), so all His saints who see these sights and who read these words can have complete confidence that we too will assemble together with Him "in clouds" on that blessed day of His return on the other side of the gathering storm, no matter how tempestuous and violent it may be (Dan.7:13; Matt.24:30; 26:64; Mk.13:26; 14:62; Lk.21:27; 1Thes.4:13-18; cf. 1Cor.15:51-52; Rev.19:7-8 with 19:14).

Behold! He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the peoples of the earth will grieve on account of Him.
Revelation 1:7

The great earthquake: The local earthquake which takes place in verse thirteen following the departure of the two witnesses in which seven thousand are killed and a tenth of the city of Jerusalem is destroyed must be distinguished from the temblor of verse nineteen which will be felt around the world. The worldwide earthquake (along with the lightning, thunderous voices, and hailstorm) will be a sign that the Great Tribulation has begun (similar to the warnings that preceded the beginning of the first three and a half year period: Rev.8:5). Rather than being a warning, this local earthquake acts as divine punctuation for God's gracious gift of the ministry of reconstruction and revival which has now come to an end. Rather than responding to His favor, the world rejected His grace, and it is no accident that their unashamed opposition to and murder of Moses and Elijah is so reminiscent of the similar rejection and crucifixion of our Lord. His death too was followed by an earthquake (Matt.27:45-54; Mk.15:33-39; Lk.23:44-47), and more than any sign or symbol, His resurrection proves the reality of our God's power and victory over death for all time. No creature can oppose the living God, and none can hope to thwart His will. All opposition to Him is possible only because He chooses to allow it. But God also always makes clear the issue of what His will truly is. Just as the miracles that followed our Lord's death for us all on the cross are an unmistakable divine imprimatur of approval (and of disapproval for those who condemned Him), so the miraculous departure of Moses and Elijah is God's seal upon the validity of their ministry, and the earthquake that follows an

indication of His displeasure with all who opposed them, as well as a terrifying sign of things to come for the enemies of God.

The third woe: The termination of the joint ministry of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000 marks the conclusion of the second woe, because at this point the first six trumpet judgments as well as all the localized plagues administered by the two witnesses in support of the 144,000 have come to an end. The third woe, said here to be "coming soon", begins immediately hereafter when the seventh angel sounds his trumpet (Rev.11:15). For the third woe, the seventh trumpet judgment, and the Great Tribulation all refer to the same period of time, the horrific final three and a half years that precede our Lord's return. That period will be a period of woe, because the earth has never and will never again see darker days (Dan.12:1; Joel 2:2; Matt.24:21; Mk.13:19). That period will be in its entirety a period of warning (symbolized by the seventh trumpet), because its terrifying nature warns of the day of judgment soon to come (Matt.3:10-12; 2Pet.3:10-13). And that period will be a period of unparalleled tribulation, because within it the greatest persecution in the history of the Church of Jesus Christ will take place, when Satan and his fallen angels are cast down to earth (Rev.12:7-9), and through his minion antichrist he vents his wrath on the Body of Christ (see part 4).

That Great Persecution along with the other events of those final three and a half years comes next in the chronological sequence of the Tribulation. But before we turn to the Great Tribulation itself, we must first discuss the central personality used by Satan to drive, direct and guide those events, namely, antichrist.

The Coming Tribulation: A History of the Apocalypse

Part 3B

Antichrist and his Kingdom

by Dr. Robert D. Luginbill

Introduction: In the previous installment, we noted the following combination of divine and satanic trends which characterize the Tribulation's first half:

	Satanic	< >	Divine
Spiritual level:	* The Great Apostasy	< >	* Worldwide Evangelism
Temporal level:	The Rise of Antichrist	< >	* Worldwide Warning Judgments

We have covered three of these four trends (marked with an asterisk above, i.e., the Great Apostasy and the contrasting worldwide evangelism of the 144,000 under the direction of Moses and Elijah, and the series of trumpet judgments which serve to warn the world of the impending coming of Christ). It now remains to treat in detail the central character of the satanic trend opposing and rejecting the gracious warnings of God, namely, antichrist.

Aside from the brief foreshadowing of his rise by the first seal (Rev.6:2), the book of Revelation does not formally introduce "the beast" until chapter 13. At that time, when the dramatic, previously prophesied events of the Tribulation's midpoint finally take place, he will be unequivocally revealed for who he really is, namely, Satan's *anti*-Christ. At that juncture, the reader of Revelation is given a panoramic (and highly symbolic) account of antichrist's tribulational career, retrospectively as well as prospectively (Revelation chapters 13-17). The delay in introducing antichrist until after the other major events of the Tribulation's first half have been discussed allows the reader to better consider "the beast" and his egregious career as a whole, and also serves to focus attention upon his primary role as a replacement Christ who persecutes those who truly follow Christ. Unquestionably, this divinely inspired approach assumes that the reader (or teacher) is well-versed in the numerous passages of scripture which speak of antichrist and so supplement this panoramic view. For without possessing a clear and (scripturally) complete picture of Satan's pseudo-Messiah, the synopsis of the Great Tribulation (Rev.13-17), the subsequent judgments upon Babylon (Rev.17-18), and the specifics of the Second Advent (Rev.19-20) may seem incoherent to some (to the extent that the focus of the devil's anti-God operations during this most cataclysmic of times are for that reason misunderstood). Inasmuch as it is our purpose in this series to amplify these teachings in the manner of a comprehensive "history" of the apocalypse, it is necessary at this point to examine the rise of the beast from his first unveiling, investigating all that scripture has to say about his activities during the Tribulation's first half, before moving on to our treatment of the Great Tribulation proper.

I. Definition, Names Sources, and Prophetic Types of Antichrist

1. Definition: First of all, it needs to be understood that antichrist is not merely a symbol, but a real person. Specifically, he is Satan's substitute Christ who will actually claim to be Christ, rising to power during the first half of the Tribulation, and

dominating the world during its second half, the Great Tribulation. So while we do indeed need to beware of multiple false "Christs" (Matt.24:23-28; Mk.13:21-23; cf. 1Jn.2:18-22; 2Jn.1:7), and while the "spirit of antichrist" is already abroad in the world (i.e., the lawlessness which will characterize antichrist's reign: 1Jn.4:3), scripture is yet quite clear about the fact of the coming of this one particular arch *anti*-Christ (1Jn.2:18; 4:3; cf. Dan.8:11). He it is who will persecute Israel and the Church as never before (Dan.11:31-35), take his seat in the temple of God proclaiming himself to be God (2Thes.2:1-12; cf. Dan.11:36-37), and oppose our returning Lord Jesus Christ at the battle of Armageddon (Rev.19:19-21; cf. Dan.8:25).

The Greek preposition *anti* (αντι), when used in compounds of this sort, often bears two senses, both of which would have occurred to any native Greek speaker of John's day who heard or read the word. First, *anti* means something "opposed to" the thing to which it is prefixed, but, secondly, it can also mean a "substitute for" that thing. And, truly, the beast, Satan's "anointed one" or false "Messiah" (*Christos*, Χριστός, being the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew *Meshiach*, משיח), will be both: a pseudo, substitute Christ who will at the same time directly and violently oppose our Lord and His holy people, Israel and the Church. To this we may compare the devil's most common name, "Satan", which similarly means "adversary", since he is the arch-opponent of both the Father and the Son, and of their representatives on earth, Israel and the Church (cf. Rev.12:10).

As in the case of any forgery, the twin characteristics of opposition and substitution necessarily work hand in hand (e.g., counterfeit currency is an imitation that by its very existence attacks true currency). Therefore one cannot substitute for Christ without also opposing Him, just as one cannot effectively oppose the truth without offering a false substitute for it (cf. Dan.11:36-37; 2Thes.2:4). This explains the many characteristics of antichrist which deliberately mimic those of the true Christ. To believers of the present day, years before the commencement of these events, these deliberate and diabolically engineered similarities of antichrist to Jesus Christ may seem so superficial and so obviously fraudulent that they invite, in addition to disgust, outright ridicule. But we must take it to heart that to the unbelieving world of that time, under the intense pressures of the Tribulation and in the absence of Holy Spirit restraint, those who through faith remain loyal to the genuine but invisible Christ instead of giving obeisance to the spurious but manifest antichrist will be the ones who seem worthy of ridicule and disgust.³⁰⁹ And before we become too self-assured that we personally could never be deceived by Satan's counterfeit "Christ", we would do well to remember the words of our Lord:

And at that time many will fall away and will betray each other and will hate each other, and many false prophets will arise and will deceive many. Now because of the increase of lawlessness [at that time], the love of the many will cool. But he who endures until the end, this [is the one who] will be saved.

Matthew 24:10-13

At that time if someone says to you "*Look* [(as they will tell you then)]! Christ is here!", or "Here [He is]!", do not believe [it]. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will perform great miracles (lit., "signs") and wonders [sufficient] to *deceive even the elect*, if [that were] possible. *Look* [(as I am telling you now)]! I have told you ahead of time.

Matthew 24:23-25

As indicated in the chart at the beginning of this section, the rise of antichrist will coincide with and respond to the worldwide spiritual decline of the "Great Apostasy".³¹⁰ This mass falling away from the true faith will thus work hand in glove with a growing (false) sense of antichrist's legitimacy. We may also safely assume that the numerous points in which the beast will deliberately mimic our Lord will contribute in no small way to the world's growing acceptance of him. This list of such areas of mimicry is long and various, and, while each separate point will be discussed in its proper place below, it will be helpful to mention here some of the more salient instances wherein the devil will proffer his antichrist in direct and deliberate imitation of the true Christ:

- Antichrist's pseudo "virgin birth": Satan's engendering of antichrist, while more abnormal than unique, will be touted as a "second coming" (cf. Gen.3:15; 6:4; 2Thes.2:9-10; Rev.13:1-2).
- His unprecedentedly charismatic personality: (2Thes.2:9-10; Rev.13:3; 13:8)
- His supernatural empowerment: (2Thes.2:9-10; Rev.13:2)
- His messianic title: (2Thes.2:4; Rev.13:16-18; cf. Dan.11:36-37)
- His leadership of a new and powerful religious movement: (2Thes.2:4; Rev.13:16-18; cf. Dan.11:36-37)
- His pseudo signs and "miracles": (2Thes.2:9; Matt.24:24; cf. Ex.7:11; 7:22; Rev.13:13-15)
- His false prophet: the beast too will have a "herald" (Rev.13:11-17; cf. Ex.7:11; 7:22; 2Tim.3:6-9)
- His meteoric political rise: (Dan.8:23-24; 11:21-24)
- His unprecedented military successes: (Dan.8:23-24; 11:25-45)
- His pseudo "resurrection": (compare Rev.13:3 with 13:8; 13:12; 13:14)
- His earthly "session" in the rebuilt temple: (2Thes.2:4; cf. Dan.9:27; 11:31; 11:36-37)

- His pseudo Millennium: (Rev.6:2-8)
- His final crusade against so-called "evil": (Ezek.38-39; Rev.16:12-16; 19:19-21)

Antichrist is thus very clearly "the devil's man", and Satan will go to great lengths to present the beast to the world as an ersatz "Christ". As a result, antichrist will be accepted by the majority of the world's population (those who do not "know their God") as the genuine article. The fact that scripture assigns the beast both a *parousia* (i.e., an "advent": 2Thes.2:9) and an *apokalypsis* (i.e., a "revelation": 2Thes.2:6-8) is a clear indication that we are to take the direct opposition of antichrist to Christ by Satan as both deliberate and complete, analogous to the devil's complete and deliberate opposition to God the Father. In each of these cases, moreover, the diabolical intent is clearly not only to oppose, but to counterfeit, substitute and replace (bringing us back to the core meaning of the word "antichrist").

In short, for those who do not know God (or are not following Him closely enough), antichrist's life and career will seem in many important respects to fit the bill for a "second coming". Although without argument these similarities are indeed superficial, false, and fraught with innumerable, clear contradictions, any one of which would be sufficient to refute his claim to be the Christ, those who want "to believe" in antichrist will do so, and that number will include the great majority of the world's population at that time, including many former believers who have allowed themselves to become swept up in the Great Apostasy (Matt.24:5; Mk.13:6; Lk.21:8).

2. Names for Antichrist: There are, in scripture, a variety of other designations for antichrist, each of which sheds light on his particulars:

a. The Serpent's Seed (Gen.3:14-15; cf. Gen.49:16-18). Antichrist is the devil's "seed" both metaphorically and literally (see section II.1 below).

b. The King of Babylon (Is.14:4-23). Babylon is the spiritual name for Satan's kingdom on earth, so that this title calls attention to antichrist's intimate connection with the devil's grand designs.

c. Gog of the land of Magog, Chief Prince of Meshech and Tubhal (Ezek.38-39). "Gog" is an individual, specifically, antichrist. This prophecy deals with antichrist's mustering of the world's armies at Armageddon to oppose Christ's return.

d. The Little Horn (Dan.7:8-26; 8:9-25; cf. Rev.17). The "horn" a common symbol of power in Old Testament symbolism, is "small" because it refers here to an individual (namely, antichrist) rather than a country or empire.

e. The Stern-faced King, well-versed in Deception (Dan.8:23). Speaks to antichrist's character.

f. The [Roman] Prince who is yet to come (Dan.9:26). Identifies antichrist as the one who will reconstitute the Roman empire in a territorial sense.

g. The Man of Contempt (Dan.11:21). Antichrist will be both "contemptible" in every sense, and "contemptuous" of everything good and decent (the Hebrew participle admits of both senses).

h. The Prince of the Covenant (Dan.11:22) Antichrist is the king who will make the crucial alliance or "covenant" with Israel, only to break it "in the middle of the week" (cf. Dan.9:27).

i. The King of the North (Dan.11:21-45). This name identifies antichrist's power center as essentially European, as well as containing a pseudo-messianic reference (cf. Is.9:1-7).

j. The Man of Lawlessness (2Thes.2:3-12). As we have seen in the previous installment of this series, this is a critical designation, indicating that antichrist's regime will be unlike any which have gone before it in its undermining of basic legality and morality.

k. The Rider on the White Horse (Rev.6:2). This description shows clearly antichrist's deliberate representation of himself as a (pseudo) Messiah, conquering the world.

l. The Beast (Rev.11:7; 13:1-4; 13:12-18; 14:9-11; 15:2; 16:2; 16:10; 16:13; 17:8-17; 19:19-20; 20:4; 20:10; cf. Dan.7:1-11; 7:19-25; Rev.6:8 [Greek]). This last title, the dominant one in the book of Revelation, has a two-fold import, representing both antichrist's beastly personality, character and behavior, and his essential oneness with the coming satanic kingdom he will rule.

3. Prophetic Types: In addition to specific names and designations, scripture also furnishes some more extensive "types" of antichrist, that is, historical individuals whose behavior or other characteristics are closely parallel to those of antichrist and are therefore instructive of that behavior and those characteristics.³¹¹ In each of the cases below, the individual in question was likewise a minion of the devil, and, likewise, the ruler of an anti-God kingdom. Therefore in each of these cases we can see in principle the pattern of actions taken by Satan against God and His people, and the ultimate triumph of our Lord. As the similarities and parallels between antichrist and each of these individuals and their careers are too numerous to recount in full here, the reader is encouraged to revisit the pertinent scriptures which deal with each typical tyrant after mastering the information about antichrist given in the body of this study. General points of comparison between these types and antichrist include:

- being an agent of the devil.
- pursuing a satanic agenda.

- fostering anti-God religion.
- fostering rebellion from God's authority.
- practicing an anti-God type of rulership (violation of basic principles of law and justice).
- overt opposition to divine will.
- stubborn defiance of divine will.
- arrogance beyond normal human limits (hubris).
- persecution of believers individually or collectively (e.g., Israel).
- dramatic destruction by God of the person or of his works.

a. Nimrod (Gen.10:8-12; 11:1-9; cf. Gen.6:4 with 1Chron.1:10): We have covered the career of Nimrod and his leading role in the construction of the tower of Babel previously in the Satanic Rebellion series (and the reader is encouraged to read the detailed discussion given there).³¹² In some respects, Nimrod represents the beginning of a trend for which antichrist furnishes the termination. For Nimrod was the first person to attempt (and the only person besides antichrist to actually achieve) the political unification of the world for nefarious purposes. In each case, that of Nimrod and of antichrist both, the power behind the political movement by which they accomplish international unification is Satan. And in each case, the hidden purpose behind the unification is diabolical in the extreme, namely, the eradication from the earth of faith and of the faithful. Both men place at the center of their political and social reforms a religious core that is exclusive in respect of any genuine worship of God. Nimrod's ziggurat and antichrist's "abomination of desolation" both serve the same essential purpose of forcing universal worship of Satan while at the same time preventing any overt expression of faith in the one true God. Universalization, homogenization, and degradation of national, legal, economic, and social barriers are key planks in the agendas of both men, for these steps serve to remove the divinely provided bulwarks of resistance that have at other times prevented such total assaults on true faith and practice.

Though we know less than we should like about Nimrod, we can say from scripture that he was an extremely effective organizer, and a man of unprecedented charisma (indeed, he is said to have been a "mighty man at capturing men [and turning them] against God": Gen.10:9). To such a degree was this the case that he was able to enlist the entire population of the earth of his day into his satanic enterprise of building both Babylon (the city which comes to symbolize antichrist's kingdom as well), and the tower of Babel (a unifying religious symbol that serves as a powerful metaphor for the beast's anti-Christian religion). That this plan was most definitely anti-God in both design and effect was made clear enough in his appeals as the meaning of the nickname Nimrod clearly

attests (i.e., "let us revolt"; cf. Ps.2:1-3). In a similar way, antichrist will oppose God in an unmistakable and overt way, for he will portray himself as actually being God (2Thes.2:4; cf. Dan.11:36-37).

Although there were doubtless a few individuals in Nimrod's day who did not in fact "bow the knee to Baal", the biblical chronicle of events suggests that they were few and far between. The social and political structures of that time all came around to allegiance with Nimrod and his diabolical vision. So too will it be with antichrist and his political operations during the Tribulation. One important thing to glean from Nimrod's prophetic type, therefore, is that we contemporary Christians should take pains not to underestimate the persuasiveness of antichrist, or the effectiveness of his appeal, or the near totality of his coming successes. For as a prophetic type of antichrist, we must understand that Nimrod's experiences are to be taken as roughly analogous to those of antichrist. This is both a minatory and monitory fact that speaks not only to the magnitude of antichrist's future power, but also to the shocking alacrity with which the world of that time will turn to follow him. Believers, therefore, need to be doubly on guard, and prepare themselves diligently against that day when seemingly the whole world will be swept along after him. For the events and circumstances of those times will be more electric and seductive than we can easily imagine before the fact, and only those who are solidly and resolutely committed to their Lord can have any hope of escaping the tremendous pull that antichrist and his messianic movement will exert (just as in the case of Nimrod when very few managed to do so).

As we pointed out in our earlier study of Nimrod, the building of Babylon (a political-economic undertaking) was the main satanic objective and the tower of Babel (a social-religious icon) the rallying point to enlist support for that objective. Similarly, antichrist will have both a political-economic objective (i.e., world political and economic domination), and make heavy use of a unique socio-religious strategy to advance that objective. Just as Nimrod's appeal was to build the tower so as to preserve "the name" and unity of humanity, so we may expect the satanic religion of antichrist to preach a doctrine of extreme "humanism", and to furnish putative moral grounds for an internationalist, messianic crusade that promises the ideals of social and religious unity (based upon the prior imposition of political and economic homogeneity imposed from above). As with all "purity" movements of this sort, divergence beyond the parameters set by the movement will not be tolerated, and in this we see the true satanic purpose behind all such internationalism: the eradication of "alternative points of view", namely, of true faith and of the truly faithful.

Nimrod's scheme began as a grass-roots mass movement, and we have every reason to believe that such will be antichrist's method as well. In a troubled world, a charismatic leader calling for a new age of religious tolerance, social justice, economic reform, and political enfranchisement will again prove to be a successful formula, both because of the attractiveness of the leader proposing it, and because of the unique, radical, and comprehensive nature of the changes being proposed. To put the matter in twentieth century terms, antichrist will exude charisma and leadership beyond anything seen in the most successful fascist leaders, while his political and religious formulations will

prove exciting and astounding even to skeptical intellectuals. And the dark genius of both his personal appeal and of his doctrines will be that these will yet be inclusive of all but the established elites (whom he desires to replace) and those determined to remain loyal to principles of either natural or biblical divine truth (i.e., believers along with unbelievers who are not deceived by the essential wrongness of his utopian rhetoric – both of which groups antichrist will be intent on destroying). Aimed at circumventing the existing power structures (at least its initial stages) and content to ignore that small element which will maintain its allegiance to the truth, antichrist's movement too will begin as grass-roots mass movement, until, as it gathers momentum, it begins to coopt institutions and organizations en masse (just as Nimrod had done).

For many who will be caught up in the enthusiasm of this movement, the higher purpose of antichrist's socio-religious "crusade" will be the bait which draws them in. But just as Nimrod used the tower of Babel to draw in supporters for his plans of world unification, so also after these victims of antichrist have been hooked the switch will come, and it will then be an easy matter to convince them that political and economic domination must first be achieved before social justice and religious enlightenment can be imposed. In this way, antichrist will, like Nimrod before him, enlist the bulk of the earth's population into his satanic movement.

b. Pharaoh (Exodus chapters 2-14): In many respects, the experience of the children of Israel in escaping from Egypt and Pharaoh forms a close parallel to the future experiences of believers who will pass through the Tribulation, with antichrist in the role of Pharaoh, and the journey out of Egypt into the "promised land" being analogous to all the trials and troubles that will befall believers during those most difficult seven years. We will have occasion to explore this deliberate scriptural analogy from the point of view of the believer in part 7 of the present series. What most concerns us here, however, is the prophetic type of antichrist furnished by the Pharaoh of the Exodus.

First, Pharaoh had no regard or respect for the Lord or the Lord's people (facts obvious from his behavior, and also adumbrated by the observation about his predecessor at Ex.1:8 who "did not know [i.e., take any account of] Joseph"). The lawlessness of that previous Pharaoh (seen most perspicuously in his plan to destroy the Hebrew children: Ex.1:15-22) is a trend that clearly continues with the Pharaoh of the Exodus as can be seen from the "groaning" of the Israelites which reaches God's ears (Ex.2:23-25). Complete lack of concern for law, human or divine, will as we have seen also characterize antichrist, the "man of lawlessness" (2Thes.2:3).³¹³ This total disregard for God and the people of God is made abundantly clear in all of Pharaoh's dealings with Moses and Aaron, and the conflict between arrogant human will and the will of God as mediated by his earthly representatives will be closely paralleled by antichrist's opposition to the two witnesses, Moses and Elijah (compare also Pharaoh's court magicians and their pseudo-miracles with the deceptive signs of antichrist's false prophet: Rev.13:11-17).

One of the most striking parallels between antichrist and his type, Pharaoh, is the similarity they evince in their persecution of God's people. Pharaoh's response to the

insistent divine demand to "let My people go!", was, of course, the famous command to make bricks without straw. This oppressive economic burden placed upon the shoulders of God's children forms a close parallel to the tribulational dictum of antichrist that no one who refuses to take his mark be allowed to buy or sell (Rev.13:16-17). Pharaoh's later attempt to slaughter the Israelites at the Red Sea likewise marks an escalation of his persecution that is analogous to the Great Persecution to come wherein many believers will be martyred for their Lord.³¹⁴ And finally in this vein, God's severe plagues upon Egypt in response to the persecution of His children are clearly paralleled by the final round of tribulational judgments upon the world and upon antichrist and his kingdom in particular, namely, "the seven bowls of God's wrath" (Rev.16:1-21).

In terms of character and personality, Pharaoh likewise forms an instructive type of antichrist. His duplicity in dealing with Moses and Aaron is well-known, and this is a characteristic of the beast's personality as well (cf. Dan.8:23). Even more to the point in respect to his similarity to antichrist is the exceptional hardness of heart he exhibited in the face of a series of awesome demonstrations of divine power at the hands of Moses and Aaron. Pharaoh's stubborn resistance to God was, in fact, only possible because of a special dispensation from God which allowed him to harden his heart beyond normal human limits (Ex.4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1; 10:20; 10:27; 11:10; 14:4; 14:8; 14:17).³¹⁵ God's purpose in granting Pharaoh such extraordinary blindness was to demonstrate His own glory in the face of the most extreme resistance from the most powerful human being on earth at that time (Ex.9:16; cf. Ex.14:4; 14:17; Ps.106:8; Rom.9:17). Antichrist too will boast against God and defy God to an extraordinary degree (Dan.7:8; 7:20; 7:25; 8:25; 11:36-37; 2Thes.2:4; Rev.13:5-6; 16:14; 17:13-14; 19:19), and God will gain all the more glory through His complete victory over the beast at Christ's return. Finally, we also see many similarities in the destruction of Pharaoh and antichrist. Both lead a pursuit against the Israelites in which they are intent upon their annihilation (Ex.15:9 with Dan.11:44). Both are prevented from their objective by a unique darkness that precedes the critical engagement (Ex.14:20 with Zech.14:6-7). In both cases the Israelites are delivered through an extraordinary miracle (Ex.14:21-25 with Zech.14:4-5). And the armies of both Pharaoh and antichrist are subsequently trapped by God and totally destroyed along with their blasphemous commanders (Ex.14:26-31 and Ps.136:15 with Is.29:5-8 and Rev.19:19-21).

c. The King of Assyria (Isaiah chapters 7-39): Assyria was "the Lord's rod" (Is.10:5) with which He executed His terminal judgment upon the Northern Kingdom of Israel and "the waters rising up to the neck" with which He accomplished His severe warning judgment upon the Southern Kingdom of Judah (Is.8:6-8). It is in the Assyrian invasion of Judah that one sees a particularly close correspondence with antichrist's later invasion. Indeed, as we saw in part one of this series, much of the first half of Isaiah is deliberately constructed with reference to the "Day of the Lord paradigm".³¹⁶ That is to say, Isaiah explains and expands his prediction of the Assyrian invasion by comparing it to antichrist's later invasion. Assyria and her king are clear types of the beast, of his kingdom, and of his armed forces, which invade the land of Israel and meet with equally miraculous disasters at the hands of God (Is.37:36-38 with Rev.19:19-21). In the process, both Sennacherib (through his minister Rabshakeh: Is.36:4-10; 2Kng.18:19-25;

2Chron.32:9-16) and the beast (Dan.7:8; 7:20; 7:25; 8:25; 11:36) speak unheard of things against the Lord, and it may well be that the threefold repetition in scripture of the arrogant word's of Sennacherib's representative is meant to emphasize the temerity of such hybristic conduct towards the Lord God. Indeed, this tendency to not only be arrogant in the extreme but to express it verbally in extreme ways was a notable characteristic of Assyria and of her king (cf. Is.10:12-19), and will be a salient feature of antichrist and his regime as well (2Thes.2:4; Rev.13:5-6; 16:14; cf. Dan.11:36-37). Moreover, the statement in Nahum 1:11, "from you [Nineveh-Assyria] one has come forth who conceives evil against the Lord, a counselor of wickedness" is a prophetic one that also deliberately compares the contemporary king of Assyria with the coming antichrist (a use of the so-called "prophetic perfect" tense in the Hebrew text): Assyria's attempt to utterly destroy Judah when the Lord's will was only that she be chastened (Is.10:7) forms a direct parallel to antichrist's future attempts to annihilate the Jewish state and the Jewish people contrary to the expressed will of God (Is.29:1-8; Ezek.38:10-11; Dan.11:44; Zech.14:2; Rev.12:1-17; cf. Nah.1:15). We can also see in the progress of the Assyrian empire similarities with the empire of the beast who likewise will conduct military campaigns against the southern powers (led by Egypt in both cases) and will similarly defeat his opposition in an unexpected and dramatic way. Isaiah chapter nineteen is therefore prophetic both in the near and in the far term, with the prophecy of verse four, that the Lord will hand Egypt over to a "cruel master" and a "fierce king" being both reminiscent of Assyrian rule and similar to the other prophecies about antichrist's regime (cf. esp. Dan.11:25-45). Finally, the encouragement given to the citizens of Judah to persevere until the Lord removes the Assyrian threat is deliberately and perfectly appropriate for the Jewish believers who will be awaiting our Lord's advent (Is.35:3-4; cf. Is.25:9; 2Chron.32:7-8), when the Messiah returns to dispose of antichrist and his armies in a manner similar to the destruction of the hordes of Sennacherib (Is.37:36-38 with Rev.19:19-21; cf. Is.30:27-33).

d. The King of Babylon (Is.14:4-23; cf. Jer.25:9-32): In Isaiah and elsewhere in scripture, Babylon represents both a contemporary power and *the* future diabolical power, the home kingdom of the beast. The king of Babylon, moreover, is frequently acknowledged by interpreters to be a type of Satan, but what is less widely recognized is that this king is also a type of antichrist. This double typology should not be difficult to accept when one recalls the significant similarities between the devil and his seed, antichrist. For Satan and the beast represent the height of opposition to God in their respective species, angelic and human, and both lead rebellions against Him and His universal order, in heaven and on earth respectively. When we add to this the fact that antichrist is literally the devil's own seed (Gen.3:15; see below, section II.1), and will carry out Satan's will on earth, the appropriateness of the two-fold typology here is immediately evident. Antichrist is the "son of Satan" and a deliberate counterfeit of the Son of God. It should not be surprising therefore that there are instances where prophetic typology applies equally to both as it does on occasion for the Son of God and our heavenly Father (see, for example, Is.6:1-13 compared with Jn.12:39-41), the very relationship the devil is seeking to superficially mimic and exploit (2Thes.2:4; Rev.13:3-7; cf. Dan.11:36-37).

e. Antiochus Epiphanes (Dan.8:23-26; 11:21-36): Perhaps the most important and certainly the most detailed typology of antichrist occurs in the book of Daniel where we find the king of the Seleucid empire, Antiochus Epiphanes, used as extensive type for the beast.³¹⁷ While we shall have much to say about these two chapters below, it needs to be stressed here that the prophecies about Antiochus definitely do apply to antichrist as well, so that we should see this typology operating in chapter eight as well as chapter eleven, and that typology beginning in chapter eleven with verse twenty-one, and not withheld until verse thirty six (as is often wrongly supposed).³¹⁸ In many respects, Antiochus is the perfect model for the future antichrist, for his activities track those of the coming beast more closely than any of the other representatives listed above. Antiochus and antichrist both arise from unexpected and lowly beginnings (cf. Dan.11:21 with Rev.13:1). They are both individuals devoid of scruples or conscience (cf. Dan.11:27 with 11:44). Both are successful military commanders (cf. Antiochus' alternate epithet, *nikephoros*, "victorious", with Dan.11:37). Both come to rule kingdoms which dominate Israel from the north (the Syrian kingdom and antichrist's ten-kingdom empire respectively), and the kingdoms of each are associated on the one hand with Babylon (Antiochus' capital of Seleuceia was near Babylon, and antichrist's home country and original power center is called "Babylon": cf. Rev.18), and, on the other, with Rome (Antiochus was educated at Rome and copied much in the Roman social and political system, while antichrist's ten-kingdom empire is, in great measure as we shall see below, a revival of Rome). Both have names which express their implacable opposition to the Lord (the *anti* prefix in Antiochus' name is identical to that of antichrist, with his name as a whole meaning "one who holds out against"). Both are responsible for putting an end to the temple rites in Jerusalem (Dan.8:12-13; 9:26-27; 11:31a; 12:11; cf. 1st Macc.1:20-64; 2nd Macc.5:15 - 6:11), and both replace these rituals with rites which honor themselves (Dan.11:31b; 11:36-37; 2Thes.2:4; Rev.13:12; cf. 1st Macc.1:47), and which are in reality devil-worship (Dan.11:31; 12:11; Matt.24:15; Mk.13:14; Rev.13:4; cf. 1Cor.10:18-21). Both represent themselves as divine (compare Antiochus' epithet "Epiphanes", meaning "appearance", that is a divine manifestation or "epiphany", and coins which depict him as Zeus, with Dan.11:36-37; 2Thes.2:4).³¹⁹ Both oppress the holy people of God to an extraordinary degree (cf. Dan.8:12-13; 8:24; 11:28-35 with Dan.11:44; 12:1; Rev.12), resulting in significant apostasy (cf. Dan.8:12 with 2Thes.2:3) and martyrdom (Dan.11:33-35 with Rev.7:9-17; 12:11; 13:9-10; 14:1-16; 15:2-4). And both kings are highly radical in their methodology, choosing to remake society in every respect after their own images and to fit their own purposes, regardless of the anti-God nature of their reforms (cf. Antiochus' attempted Hellenization of the Jews with antichrist's radical reforms: e.g., Dan.7:25; on this point see section III below). All of this perhaps explains how and why Daniel has so little trouble segueing directly from Antiochus as a type of antichrist to a non-typological, direct prophecy of the beast himself at verse thirty-six of Daniel chapter eleven. The critical thing for the exegesis of this important prophetic chapter, however, is not to omit any of the information it provides about antichrist, including that which comes our way as a result of the Antiochus Epiphanes' typology (i.e., in verses twenty-one through thirty-five).

II. The Origin, Character and Rise of Antichrist

1. The Origin of Antichrist: There are many myths about antichrist, and it is likely, as the end times grow ever nearer and when he finally makes his appearance on the world stage, that these stories and rumors will multiply. Indeed, we know that his deceitful pretensions to being the "Son of God" will be self-advanced, and we may be sure that all reports which augment his personal mystique will be of benefit to him in his rise to world dominance. To be thought of as "super-human" or "miraculously begotten" or even as something "beyond human" is clearly helpful to all leaders of mass political and religious movements, and antichrist's rise will proceed via both of these venues. But though he is an abomination, antichrist is not an alien (there are no "aliens"), nor the first of a new species (there is no "evolution"), nor a resurrected prodigy of the past (only God can resurrect the dead), nor, needless to say, is he in any way divine (though he will claim to be). We can say, however, that antichrist is unique – provided we are allowed to strip that word of all positive connotations.

a. Antichrist's "paternal" origin:

Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And she replied, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate". So the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, you are accursed, more than any beast or wild animal. You shall go on your belly and eat dust all the days of your life. And I shall place hostility between you and the woman, that is, *between your seed and her Seed*. He (i.e., Christ) will attack you head[-on], but you will attack Him from behind" (lit., "His heel").

Genesis 3:13-15

To begin with, we should note that while, on the one hand, the serpent (i.e., the devil) will launch underhanded "attacks" against the woman's Seed who is our Lord, on the other hand it is the *seed* of the serpent rather than the serpent himself who will be hostile to (or "opposed" to = *anti*) the woman's Seed. That is to say, Satan opposed Christ during our Lord's first advent ("attacking His heel"), and Christ will completely defeat the devil at the time of His second advent ("attacking his head"), but the most significant manifestation of the *hostility* referred to here between the serpent and our Lord is said to come in the person of the devil's seed, namely antichrist (through his representation of himself as Christ, his persecution of Israel and of Christ's Church, etc.).³²⁰

The Seed of the woman, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, is a true human being, born in the natural way as all human beings are, but born of a virgin, having been uniquely and divinely conceived (Is.7:14; Matt.1:18; Lk.1:34-35; Jn.1:14; Phil.2:5-8). From any hermeneutic standpoint, therefore, it would be very difficult to justify taking the woman's Seed as literal and biological, and yet at the same time imagine the serpent's seed to be merely metaphorical or symbolic. By any canon of interpretation, if the One is a literal human being, then the other should be as well. This does not, of course, mean that there is an exact equality between the two, and the differences between the Christ and the antichrist could not be more profound or significant. However, the point of

similarity which we are addressing here is also important to understand. Just as our Lord's genuinely human body had an extra-human paternal origin, so in an analogous (though far from identical) way, antichrist's paternity and conception will be of other than human origin. Antichrist is in a literal sense the "seed of the serpent", for he is the offspring of Satan (Gen.3:15-16).³²¹

To understand how this is possible, we need look no farther than the incident of the Nephilim in Genesis chapter six. It will be remembered from our earlier study of that passage that in the time before the great flood, the cohabitation of fallen angels with human women was a relatively common occurrence, so much so that by the time the flood waters came, Noah and his family represented the only true and completely human seed left on the earth.³²²

Now it came to pass that when men began to multiply on the face of the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God (i.e., the fallen angels) noticed the daughters of men, that they were beautiful. So they took wives for themselves from all whom they selected.

Genesis 6:1-2

The Nephilim were on the earth in those days and afterwards as well. For when the sons of God (i.e., the fallen angels) went in to the daughters of men, they bore to them those "mighty-ones" (i.e., the Nephilim) whose names are famous from ancient times.

Genesis 6:4

But Noah had found favor in the Lord's eyes. These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, and perfect in his generations (i.e., of pure human seed). Noah, moreover, made a habit of walking with God. Moreover, Noah was the father of three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth.

Genesis 6:8-10

As a result of their outrageous conduct, the demons involved in this attempt to destroy true humanity were consigned by God to the Abyss (1Pet.3:19-20; 2Pet.2:4-10; Jude 1:5-7). That terrifying prospect seems to have allayed all such behavior since (at least as far as the biblical record is concerned: Lk.8:31; cf. Jude 6; Rev.9:1-11; 9:13-16; 20:1-3; 20:7). In fulfillment of the prophecy of Genesis 3:15, however, Satan will engage in just such an activity in order to spawn the beast, making the antichrist "the seed of the serpent" in a literal sense. As with all anti-god activities, nothing can happen in history without the Lord's approval, and everything that happens ultimately, inevitably and completely works toward the fulfillment of His perfect plan (whether or not mankind chooses to see and accept this fact; cf. Ex.9:16; Prov.16:4; 21:1; Is.25:1; 37:26; 46:8-11; Rom.8:28-30). That this principle is equally true of the devil's fathering of antichrist and of the beast's astounding success in dominating the world is specifically stated by scripture:

And I looked, and behold, [there was] a white horse, and the one sitting on it (i.e., antichrist) had a bow, and a crown was given to him (i.e., *by divine permission*), and he

went out conquering and did conquer.
Revelation 6:2

And there was given to [the beast] (i.e., *by divine permission*) a mouth speaking arrogant things and blasphemies, and it was given to him (i.e., *by divine permission*) to do as he wills for forty-two months (i.e., during the Great Tribulation).
Revelation 13:5

And it was given to him (i.e., *by divine permission*) to make war with the saints and to conquer them, and authority was given to him (i.e., *by divine permission*) over every tribe and people and language and nation.
Revelation 13:7

For *God put it into their hearts* (i.e., the beast's subordinate "kings") *to carry out His purpose* and to be of one accord and to give their kingdoms to the beast *until the words of God shall be fulfilled*.
Revelation 17:17

And then the lawless one (i.e., antichrist) will be revealed, [that same one] whom the Lord Jesus will slay with the breath of His mouth and destroy when He appears at His [glorious] return – [that same lawless one] whose appearance [will come about] through Satan's empowerment [and will be] accompanied by every [sort of] false miracle, both signs and portents, and by every [sort of] unrighteous deception [designed] for those who are perishing, [namely those who will believe these lies] because they did not open themselves up to the love for the truth so as to be saved. And for this [very] reason *God is going to send upon them* an empowerment of error so that they may believe the lie in order that they may be condemned, [even all those] who have not believed the truth but have [instead] approved of unrighteousness.
2nd Thessalonians 2:8-12

Thus the Nephilim provide more than a close parallel to antichrist. They were also sired by demon fathers, and became as a result "mighty men" and "famous" (Gen.6:4), possessing on account of their angelic paternity abilities and powers beyond those of normal human beings. Scripture offers us a number of other indications which suggest that the exceptional nature of antichrist can only be fully explained by his satanic paternity:

- Just as the Spirit's restraining ministry had first to be put in abeyance before the great flood which terminated the Nephilim could begin (i.e., at the end of the 120 years of Gen.6:3), so the revelation of antichrist can only occur after a similar abridgment of the Spirit's ministry of restraint (2Thes.2:6-7), one which releases the great cataclysm (or "flood"; cf. Dan.9:26; 11:22 [Hebrew]) of the Tribulation, at the end of which antichrist too will be submerged by divine judgment – in the lake of fire (Rev.19:20). Thus both the Nephilim and antichrist usher in periods of severe judgment upon the earth which are only made possible by removing the Spirit's restraint, and both the Nephilim and antichrist are removed at the end of

said judgment by exceptional divine measures (Gen.7:23; Rev.19:20). However, that antichrist's very "revelation" requires the previous removal of divine restraint (something not even the case with the Nephilim) is best explained by his exceptionally unnatural origin.

- The arrogance and pretension of antichrist to divine status and world rule are unprecedented and otherwise difficult to explain (e.g., Is.14:9-23; Dan.11:36; 2Thes.2:4; Rev.13:4).
- The charisma and political successes of antichrist are unprecedented and otherwise difficult to explain (Dan.8:24; 11:23-24; 11:36-39; Rev.13:3-4; 17:17).
- The military skills and successes of antichrist are unprecedented and otherwise difficult to explain (Dan.8:24; 11:36-39).
- The blasphemy and opposition to God to such a great degree on the part of antichrist are unprecedented and otherwise difficult to explain (Dan.7:8; 7:11; 7:20; 7:25; 9:27; 11:36; Rev.13:1-6).
- The religious veneration the beast occasions are unprecedented in both scale and type in our collective human experience, and are otherwise difficult to explain (Dan.9:27; 11:36; Rev.13:4-10; 2Thes.2:4).
- The astounding devastation caused by the beast worldwide are unprecedented in both scale and type in our collective human experience, and are otherwise difficult to explain (Is.14:16-17; Rev.6:1-8; 17:15-18).
- The miraculous signs and wonders performed apart from God in support of antichrist are unprecedented and otherwise difficult to explain (2Thes.2:9-10; Rev.13:13-14).
- The apparent resuscitation of antichrist apart from God is unprecedented and otherwise difficult to explain (Rev.13:3; 13:12; 13:14; 17:11).

Thus, independent of the passages which directly suggest satanic paternity (i.e., Gen.3:15 and 2Thes.2:8-10, on which see immediately below), we have these significant additional indications that antichrist is not entirely human, and that this difference is to be connected to his special relationship with the devil.

And then the lawless one (i.e., antichrist) *will be revealed*, [that same one] whom the Lord Jesus will slay with the breath of His mouth and destroy when He appears at His [glorious] return – [that same lawless one] *whose appearance [will come about] through Satan's empowerment* [and will be] accompanied by every [sort of] false miracle, both signs and portents, and by every [sort of] unrighteous deception [designed] for those who are perishing, [namely those who will believe these lies]

because they did not open themselves up to the love for the truth so as to be saved.
2nd Thessalonians 2:8-10

Given the testimony of Genesis 3:15 and the additional indications of abnormal origin just treated, we should therefore understand the passage from 2nd Thessalonians quoted immediately above along the same lines. That is to say, the phrase "whose appearance [will come about] through Satan's empowerment" should be taken to mean that it is antichrist's "arrival" on the earth which is first and foremost "empowered" by the devil. The word translated here as "appearance" (or "coming" in KJV, NASB, and NIV), is the Greek *parousia* (παρουσία). This word, familiar to many Christians as the Greek equivalent to the Latin derived "advent", is also used for our Lord's second "coming" to the earth (Matt.24:3-39; 1Cor.15:23; 2Pet.1:16; 1Jn.2:28). While no one would wish to deny that 2nd Thessalonians 2:9 also refers to the devil's empowerment of the pseudo-miracles which help to solidify antichrist's false claims of divinity during the Tribulation, the close connection of the word *parousia* with the phrase *kat' energeian tou Satanou*, "through Satan's empowerment", strongly suggests that we should understand these words, taken together, initially and perhaps primarily to be an expansion of the Genesis 3:15 prophecy: antichrist's origin or "coming" is satanically empowered (i.e., he is the devil's "seed"). Furthermore, in addition to having a *parousia*, it is significant that antichrist is also said in this same passage to have an "unveiling", that is, a "revelation" or "apocalypse" ("then the lawless one will be revealed"; also in 2Thes.2:3 and 2:6). But while our Lord has two "comings", the first to free mankind from the power of sin, and the second to free mankind from the power of the devil, antichrist's revelation and single *parousia* go hand in hand, for there is no benefit to mankind in either his coming or his revelation, only severe oppression and persecution, and the tribulation and divine judgment it occasions. As one who has staked his future on replacing God,³²³ it would make sense that the devil would wish to have a "pseudo-virgin birth" for his own "pseudo-Messiah" whom he is planning to foist upon the earth. If the devil were to have any literal offspring (or "seed"), it thus stands to reason that antichrist would be it.

In the symbolism used in Revelation for the coming of the beast onto the historical stage, moreover, we also find indications of an unearthly origin. In verse one of chapter thirteen, antichrist is said to rise from the sea, and this symbolism is significant. In biblical typology, the sea is usually representative of evil and God's judgment upon it. God judged the original earth by covering it with a world-encompassing sea (compare Gen.1:1 with 1:2; cf. Is.45:18; 2Pet.3:5-6), destroyed the Nephilim with the world-wide flood (Gen.7:22-23; cf. 1Pet.3:19-20; 2Pet.2:4-6; Jude 1:6-7), and annihilated Pharaoh and his army by bringing the sea back upon them (Ex.14:26-28). In regard to these three examples, inasmuch as the original earth was destroyed through water because of Satan's rebellion (and anti-God genetic experiments reminiscent of antichrist's spawning), and inasmuch as the Nephilim were destroyed through water because of their half-angelic nature and the threat they posed to true humanity, and inasmuch as Pharaoh is, as we have seen, a type of the devil's seed, antichrist (as seen most perspicuously in his attempts to destroy the people of God), it can be no accident that, when Revelation describes the beast's first appearance on the historical stage, it is from *the sea* that he rises. The confluence of symbolism detailed above certainly points to this

"rising from the sea" as a further indication of antichrist's non-human paternity. This impression is strengthened by the fact that the sea is also the allegorical home of satanically symbolic creatures such as Leviathan (Job 3:8, 41:1-34; Ps.74:12-14; Is.27:1), Rahab (Job 9:13, 26:12-13; Ps.87:4; 89:9-10; Is.30:7, 51:9-10), and the Serpent (Amos 9:3; cf. Is.27:1), so that, in addition to connecting antichrist to past improper angelic interferences into the human realm, this rising from the sea also paints a symbolic picture of antichrist coming up from the place of his father, the devil. Finally, as the location of the abyss (a part of Hades), the sea also is the present abode of some of Satan's most notorious incarcerated followers (indeed – the very ones who produced the Nephilim: 1Pet.3:19-20; 2Pet.2:4-6; Jude 1:6-7; cf. Rev.9:1-11), the future temporary prison of Satan (Rev.20:1-3), and is analogous to the ultimate home of the devil and all fallen angels (i.e., it is called the *lake* of fire for a reason: Matt.25:41; Rev.20:10).

In addition to explaining his exceptional nature, antichrist's satanic paternity also accounts for the fact that he is more closely linked to the devil than any other individual in scripture. Revelation 13:1-2, for example, which depicts antichrist being summoned by Satan from the sea, provides a clear symbolic picture of antichrist's origin, rise, and later apparent resuscitation being intimately linked with and entirely dependent upon the power and will of the devil, with the sea representing the demonic realm, Satan's cosmos, and death-Hades respectively (see 2Thes.2:9; Dan.11:36-39; Rev.13:3-4, where the respective connections are made),³²⁴ and the importance of the symbolism of a fire-red, seven-headed, ten horned dragon summoning up a scarlet, seven-headed, ten-horned beast should not be underestimated as a factor in closely connecting these two (Rev.12:3 with Rev.13:1 and 17:3). Secondly, it should be pointed out that the beast gains world rulership by accepting it from the Satan's hands (Rev.13:2), the very offer refused by our Lord during His temptation (Matt.4:8-10; Lk.4:5-8), and, as far as scripture is concerned, only the second time this offer has ever been made by the devil (here again we see the direct opposition between the Seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent). Thirdly, the fact that antichrist will be celebrated and worshiped by the world to a degree unprecedented in human history is also closely tied by scripture to the worship of the devil (Dan.11:36-39; Rev.13:3-4), and not only does the beast have no problem with worshiping Satan, he will attempt to force the entire world to do so as well (through the agency of the false prophet: Rev.13:16-17 compared with Rev.13:12). Fourthly, along with the devil and the false prophet, antichrist receives "special treatment" at the Second Advent, being deposited directly into the lake of fire (Rev.19:20; 20:1-3). These unique associations with Satan are further evidence to support the hypothesis being advanced here that the beast really is "the devil's seed" (Gen.3:15).

Moreover, it is likely that antichrist is even now already alive (based upon our previous calculation for the time of the commencement of the Tribulation).³²⁵ At the point of writing, he would almost have to be. Although he is half-angelic, his body, despite its exceptional capabilities, is still material, just as were those of the Nephilim, all of whom perished during the great flood (cf. Gen.7:23). Given his rapid rise to power, his astounding and energetic military feats, and the fact that he comes swiftly to notoriety, seemingly out of nowhere (cf. Dan.7:8; 8:9-12; 11:21-24; 2Thes.2:5-12; Rev.13:1-4), it

seems more than reasonable to suppose that antichrist will still be fairly young when the Tribulation begins. As was apparently the case of the Nephilim (born to human mothers: Gen.6:4), antichrist will have had a "natural birth". While we have no indication of a particular birth date from scripture, an approximate target date of circa the turn of the millennium has the virtue of being consistent with antichrist's "prodigy" status at the time of his rise (ca. 2026), while at the same time linking his birth to a date which the world will deem significant (i.e., ca. 2000). This later point is of no small moment, since the beast, as we have shown in some detail, will make the claim that he actually is the Messiah. As such, the world will be impressed by a date of birth that is both coincident with the beginning of the new millennium and putatively marks two thousand years since the first advent. The question of when the millennium genuinely began (i.e., 2000 or 2001) is entirely mute in this regard since 1) the most likely date for our Lord's birth is December of 2 B.C., and 2) the significant point for dating the return of the Messiah is His crucifixion and resurrection, not His birth.³²⁶

Finally, it cannot be stressed strongly enough that it is indeed important for Christians to grasp and accept these facts about the abnormal birth of antichrist. For the beast will be so charismatic, so successful in all that he undertakes, and so like unto the Christ (in all the superficial ways which impress the world), that he will indeed be taken to actually *be* the Christ by the majority of the world's inhabitants, including many weak and former believers (Matt.24:23-28; Mk.13:21-23; cf. Dan.11:36-37; 2Thes.2:4; 1Jn.2:22; 2Jn.1:7). This is not as unexpected and bizarre as it may sound to us now, still sufficiently removed from these events so as to be temporarily insulated from them: antichrist will be *so* unusual in so many impressive ways that it will be logical to conclude that he is no ordinary human being – and that will indeed be the case. However, those who fail to understand or accept his diabolical origin will thus run the risk of falsely attributing his unprecedented uniqueness to divinity instead of to the devil.

b. Antichrist's maternal origin: Having discussed the beast's paternal origin above, we can say nothing more about his mother than that she traces her genetic line back to Israel. This fact in and of itself is significant. Although it may perhaps seem surprising to some, the person who will institute the most far reaching persecution of Israel in human history (more so than that of Pharaoh, or of Haman, or even of Hitler) will himself be partially of Jewish stock. For the one thing we can say about the origin of antichrist's human half is that he is born of a mother of Jewish extraction. The carefulness of this language is necessary because, in biblical terms, to be truly "of Israel" requires a person not only to be of the blood of Abraham but also to be of the faith of Abraham (Rom.9:8; cf. Rom.4:16). Israel's most violent and vehement opponent can therefore certainly not fit into this category. It seems banal in the extreme to point out (but at the same time perhaps necessary) that neither the scriptures which teach this principle nor the explanation of it given here can in any logical way be used to support any sort of anti-Semitic agenda. Rather it is antichrist who will be the most extreme anti-Semite in history. He will persecute Israel as never before, attempting to destroy her entirely at the behest of his father the devil. And it is antichrist who will impersonate, attempt to

supplant, and in the final hour oppose with all his might the true King of the Jews at His return, the genuine Messiah, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

To begin with, it is difficult to see how the beast could possibly be classified as an anti-*Christ* (or at least be believable as one) were he lacking such an essential qualification of Messiah-hood as being born of a Jewish mother (for even today this is the essential test of "Jewishness" used by the state of Israel). Regardless of spiritual status, religious affiliation, or national origin, everyone is well aware that the Messiah comes from Israel and, in particular, from the line of Judah (Gen.49:8-12; Mic.5:2; cf. Num.24:17; Matt.2:2b). Any pretender to the Messiah-ship would have to be able to establish such a Jewish origin even to be granted an initial hearing, and we may certainly assume from the great success of the beast and from his description as anti-*Christ* that he will be able to do just that.

Secondly, the close relationship which the beast fosters with Israel during the first half of the Tribulation is also difficult to fathom apart from some sort of natural bond, one that is best explained by his Jewish origin (i.e., he is the "prince of the covenant": Dan.9:27; cf. Num.24:24; Dan.11:22b). The last two verses cited here are often entirely misunderstood, and, as a result, also frequently the victims of poor translation (KJV on Dan.11:22b is the closest to the truth). Taken together (in concert with Dan.9:27) they contain compelling evidence for the antichrist's Jewish antecedents. We will have much to say about these verses below, but suffice it say here that the Hebrew text in both instances contains a prophetic reference to the beast: *ve-gam hu`* in the first passage and *ve-gam naghidh berith* in the second, meaning, respectively, "and this indeed is the one (i.e., antichrist)" and "and this indeed is the prince of the covenant (of Dan.9:27, i.e., antichrist)". Antichrist's special status as the putative "Messiah" will serve him well in all his actions relative to Israel, for he will initially be seen as her "savior".

He (i.e., the little horn, antichrist) even magnified himself against the Prince of the host (i.e., Christ).
Daniel 8:11a

Thirdly, Daniel 11:37-38 twice mentions "the God of his fathers" in reference to antichrist. Since in biblical terms the "fathers" represent exclusively the patriarchs of Israel (e.g., 2Chron.20:33; cf. Rom.9:5: "of whom [i.e., Israel] are the fathers"), this attribution of the true God as the ancestral God of antichrist (spurned by him, of course, since he is said to have "no regard" for this God), must mean that antichrist is of Jewish ancestry (an impression strengthened in Dan.11:39 where we are told that antichrist will instead honor "a foreign [i.e., non-Israelite] god", a remarkable thing only if this ultimate "king of the north" is Jewish).

Finally, there are indications from scripture that antichrist arises from the tribe of Dan, and that we should therefore understand his maternal origin to be Jewish as a result, and specifically from that tribe. First, Dan is the one tribe not mentioned in the list of the twelve tribes from whom the 144,000 Jewish witnesses are called (Rev.7:5-8). This omission is striking. Levi, often excluded in lists of this sort, is included instead, with

Manasseh and Ephraim (called Joseph in v.8 because of the effective primacy of Ephraim: Gen.48:12-20) counted as individual tribes. Beyond all argument, there has to be a reason for the divine omission of one the tribes from this list, and the descent from Dan of the one who will trouble Israel as never before would certainly account for that tribes' lack of representation among the witnesses who will ultimately be martyred by antichrist. The fact that Judah, the tribe of the coming Messiah who will destroy antichrist is (uncommonly) first in this list, strengthens this argument. The other major prophetic passages dealing with Dan likewise confirm this tribe's association with the beast:

Dan [in the person of antichrist] will judge his people *as if he were* [of] one of the tribes of Israel. [But] Dan (i.e., antichrist) will be *a serpent* beside the road, *a viper* beside the path, one who strikes at a horses heels, so that its rider falls [off] backwards. I wait [in hope] for your deliverance, O Lord!
Genesis 49:16-18

The identification here of Dan as a serpent (always prophetically associated with the devil) needs little elaboration and should not be underestimated, coming as it does in this first, critical prophecy about the future of that tribe. In terms of the translation given above, it should be remarked that the Hebrew particle *ce*, invariably comparative in meaning, should rightfully be translated as is it here, namely, "as if", for this word never bears the meaning "in the capacity of" (although this is the interpretation implied by translating it, as many versions do, with the word "as" alone). This distinction is very important, because the natural Hebrew translation given above clearly distinguishes between Dan and true Israel, whereas the often found incorrect translation implies that there is no question of Dan's legitimacy being raised here, exactly the opposite of what the passage actually states. Now since Dan as a tribe is truly and legitimately one of the twelve, we are right to conclude that this prophecy is focusing in upon *one prominent Danite* in particular, namely, antichrist. Just as Dan is left off of the list of tribes who supply the 144,000, so in this prophecy of the end times the tribe of Dan is (temporarily) considered as if it were illegitimate because of its association with antichrist, an unbeliever if ever there was one and so definitely not a part of Abraham's "promised seed" (Rom.4).

The principle of a group standing prophetically for a single prominent individual within the group (and vice versa) is well attested in scripture (most germane here is the fact that the figure of the beast can stand for either antichrist or his empire: cf. Dan.7:17-19; Rev.17:9-17). Further, the reader actually anticipates such a usage in this case inasmuch as this verse is talking about the overall rulership of Israel (something that must ultimately fall into the hands of a single person). In this respect it is also important to note that earlier in chapter forty-nine we find the same usage of a tribe standing for a single prominent individual also in the case of Judah, where "the scepter [of rulership]" clearly refers and is looking forward to the ultimate Good Ruler, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah (Gen.49:8-12). Jacob had begun his prophecy by telling his family that he was about to explain what would happen "at the end of days" (a common phrase referring to the end times and specifically to the Tribulation as we have seen).³²⁷ Thus

we have here in Jacob's prophecy a clear and deliberate juxtaposition between these two diametrically opposed future rulers of Israel, the Lion of *Judah*, our Savior (cf. Gen.49:8), and the serpent's seed, the viper antichrist, coming from the tribe of *Dan*.

To return briefly to the symbolism of the serpent representing Satan (and therefore also antichrist, who mimics his father's methodology), the reference in Genesis 49:16-18 to the viper "striking at the heels" of the horse so as to unseat the hapless rider is more than a little reminiscent of the serpent of Genesis 3:15 who similarly strikes at the heel of the woman's Seed, the Messiah. Indeed, the unusual Hebrew word for viper used here, *shiphiphon* (שפיפון), is so similar in its root to the unusual word used for "attacking" or "striking" in Genesis 3:15, *shuph* (שוף), that we are clearly supposed to draw this connection, making it all the more certain that our present passage is likewise meant to be taken as a prophecy of the false Messiah who will oppose the people of God.³²⁸ Just as Satan opposed Christ, so the devil's antichrist will oppose the true sons of God. Like a snake, antichrist will deceive and stealthily attack Israel and all true believers. The fact that the rider in this prophecy falls off "backwards" seems clearly symbolic of apostasy, and, indeed, we have already seen how those in Israel who refuse to heed the ministries of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000, will be easy prey for antichrist as he leads them astray from the "right road". Importantly here too, the deliverance, or "salvation" for which Jacob emphatically prays on behalf of all of his descendants destined to experience that bitter time to come, most certainly casts the activities of the serpent in the previous verses as something that will require a specific divine deliverance of some magnitude. The Hebrew word used here for deliverance (or "salvation"), *yeshu'a*, ישוע, is the one commonly used for just such extraordinary rescues by the Hand of God (e.g., from Pharaoh and Egypt, types of the beast and his kingdom: cf. Ex.15:2), and is also the word from which the name Jesus is derived (through whom we have our ultimate "deliverance" and salvation). The ultimate deliverance in this context will come when Jesus Himself, the Deliverer, returns to destroy the beast and his kingdom and to save His people from antichrist's hand.

We see this same essential meaning and connection of the tribe of Dan with antichrist in the other major prophecy of the twelve tribes, the blessing of Moses:

And of Dan he said, "Dan is a lion's whelp. He will spring forth out of Bashan".
Deuteronomy 33:22

Bashan was a region north of Israel across the Jordan, and its scriptural connotations are hardly positive. It was the home of the Rephaim (Deut.3:11; cf. Gen.14:5), a race of super-tall men who call to mind the Nephilim (and antichrist is essentially one of this latter type through his satanic paternity as we have seen). The "bulls of Bashan" symbolize the assaults of the devil against our Lord Jesus Christ (Ps.22:12), and the "cows of Bashan" typify the materialistic apostasy of the women of the northern kingdom during the reign of Jereboam (Amos 4:1), both of which images relate directly to a satanic and anti-spiritual connection. Bashan is also associated with Tyre (Ezek.27:6), with the sea (Ps.68:22), and with the slaughter of the armies of antichrist at Armageddon (Ezek.39:17-20), associations which remind us respectively of antichrist's

home country (Tyre-Babylon), his satanic origins (the Abyss), and his ultimate end (at the hands of Messiah at the Second Advent). Thus from the composite negative picture of Bashan given by scripture, from the start of this prophecy the reader expects a likewise negative development on account of Dan's "springing forth" from that locale. Such is indeed the case, for, like Bashan, eschatological Babylon is north of Israel (cf. Is.2:13), and it is from the north that antichrist will "spring forth" against Israel when he abrogates his treaty with her in the middle of the Tribulation (Dan.9:27). The portrayal here of Dan "pouncing" with the hostile intent of a young lion from a place north of Israel towards some sort of "prey" is, in the absence of any other stated object, best taken to mean that Israel herself is the target. And, again, since the tribe of Dan never individually attacked the rest of the nation of Israel, and since the verb here is in a future construction, we are left to conclude that this "blessing" upon Dan by Moses is along the lines of the "blessing" which Isaac pronounced upon Esau, that is, a historically accurate prophecy about future progeny which is in its particulars no particular blessing (Gen.27:37-40), but rather, in this case, a further prophecy of antichrist's future assault upon his own kindred (reinforcing Jacob's earlier prophecy of Gen.49:16-18).

Finally, the Hebrew phrasing used here of Dan, "lion's whelp", is identical to that used of Judah in Genesis 49:9. In that earlier prophetic passage about Judah, the lion's whelp is, as we have pointed out already, a clear symbol of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah (cf. Rev.5:5). The characterization of Dan in Deuteronomy 33:22 as a lion, one found nowhere else in scripture, is hardly accidental. Given that this lion has a hostile intent towards his own kith and kin, we are right to see in this symbolism not only a prophecy of antichrist which ascribes his (maternal) origins to the tribe of Dan, but also another clear indication of the deliberate mimicry of the Messiah which will constitute a large part of antichrist's modus operandi (i.e., the beast "has a mouth like a lion", meaning, among other things, that he will claim to be the Messiah: Rev.13:2).³²⁹

The association of Dan with antichrist in these two critically important prophecies about the futures of the twelve tribes (from Jacob and Moses respectively) is in keeping with numerous other negative references to Dan in scripture, many of which have prophetic implications:

The coming of the Babylonian invasion from the north is a prophetic type of the invasion of antichrist, the king of eschatological Babylon, who likewise will come from the north against Israel. And this invasion is associated with Dan several times in the book of Jeremiah:

A lion (i.e., Nebuchadnezzar as a type of antichrist; see section I.3.d above) has come forth from his lair, and has set out to destroy the nations (cf. Jer.25:32-38; esp. v.38). He has set out from his place to devastate your (i.e., Israel's) land. He will lay waste to your cities until they have no inhabitants. For a voice is proclaiming *from Dan*, and announcing trouble from mount Ephraim. Make it known to the nations. Behold, proclaim it against Jerusalem. Blockaders are coming from a land far away, and they

will lift their voices against the cities of Judah.
Jeremiah 4:7 and 4:15-16

In chapter eight, Jeremiah's picture of Nebuchadnezzar's attack is highly reminiscent of Ezekiel's description of Gog's (i.e., antichrist's) future invasion of Israel, as his mounted hordes swarm across the land (cf. Ezek.29:12-16; 30:23-26), and the connection of Dan to the snake again surfaces in that context:³³⁰

From Dan is heard the snorting of his horses; the whole earth shakes from the neighing of his mighty steeds (cf. Ezek.38:4). For they have come and are devouring the land and its fullness, the cities along with their inhabitants. For behold, I am going to send them upon you [as] *serpents*, [and as] *vipers*, which cannot be charmed. And they will bite you, says the Lord.
Jeremiah 8:16-17

Dan is associated more closely with idolatry and apostasy than any other tribe (Judg.18:30-31; 1Kng.12:28-30; Amos 8:14; cf. Lev.24:11: the half-Israelite Danite of a Jewish mother who blasphemes the Lord). While the other tribes occupied their allotted territories within the land, the tribe of Dan (at least in part) abandoned their assigned habitation, moving instead to the far north, and becoming more deeply ensnared in anti-God practices as a result (Judg.18). In the marching order of Israel, Dan was the lead tribe of the group of three who encamped "on the north", the place most closely associated with Satan and antichrist (cf. Is.14:13 and Dan.11), and was positioned directly opposite the lead tribe of the eastern group, Judah (thus scripture places in direct geographic opposition the tribe of the Messiah and the tribe of antichrist: Num.2:3; 2:25). And along with the tribe of his brother, Naphtali, Dan belongs to the group of tribes who utter the curses of Mt. Ebal instead of the blessings from Mt. Gerizim (Deut.27:13).

Dan's gemstone (on the high priest's breastplate: Ex.28:20) is the chrysolite (i.e., "gold stone"; cf. SS.5:14; Ezek.10:9), or, in Hebrew, the *tarshish*, a name that calls to mind the ships of Tarshish and their commercialism (cf. Judg.5:17), both of which have a decidedly Phoenician connection (1Kng.10:22; 2Chron.9:21; Is.60:9; Jer.10:9; Ezek.38:13; cf. Ezek.28 where the king of Phoenician Tyre is symbolically both Satan and antichrist). Thus in its essential symbolism within the group of the twelve, Dan's gemstone has a decidedly worldly and materialistic association (contrast this to the red sardius of the tribe of Judah which calls to mind the symbolic blood of sacrifice that would be poured out by our Savior for the sins of the world). Dan was the first of Jacob's sons from a non-wife, whose mother Bilhah was Rachel's maidservant (Gen.30:3-4), and it was Bilhah with whom Reuben slept, occasioning the loss of his birthright (Gen.35:22; cf. 1Chron.5:1). The first person to suffer capital punishment under the Law of Moses – for blaspheming God – was a Danite (Lev.24:11).

Finally, there are indications from scripture that Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed our Lord, was of the tribe of Dan. Along with Dan, Judas is also "one of the twelve", and like Dan, Judas is ultimately left off the list of the twelve (being replaced in his case by

the apostle Paul). The most likely etymology for Judas' surname, Iscariot, is "man of Karioth". Now there was in Judah a town by the name Kiriath-Jearim. The book of Joshua also identifies this place as "Kiriath-Baal", "city of Baal", the pagan god of the Canaanites (Josh.15:60). According to Judges 18:12, the Danites who migrated north camped just to the west of Kiriath-Jearim, and "this is why the place west of Kiriath-Jearim is called Machaneh-Dan to this day". Based on what is known of the Danite allotment (Josh.19:40-46), it is generally concluded that this camp would thus have been within Danite territory, with Kiriath-Jearim, officially a town belonging to Judah, marking the triple boundary between Judah on the east, Dan on the west, and Benjamin on the north. Thus Judges 18:12 not only draws a close connection between Dan and the town of Judas, but also indicates that, in reality, there were *two* localities of note here, Kiriath-Jearim proper, in Judean territory, and Machaneh-Dan ("Dan's Camp"), directly across the border in Danite territory. Given that it was rather common among the generation of the Babylonian captivity to tie their genealogies to the Israelite place-names of their ancestry (cf. Neh.7), the existence of "two Kiraths" is significant in the case of Judas, for the Hebrew plural of Kirath is, indeed, Kiriath. That is to say, the suffix "-cariot" of the full surname "Is-cariot" (Hebrew *ish-karioth*) will then mean "man of the [*two*] Kiriath", and most likely refer to Judas' ancestral home as within the original territory of Dan (otherwise only the main settlement in Judah would need to be mentioned; cf. Neh.7:26-29: "the men of . . . Kiriath-Jearim"). In any case, we see in Judas a parallel to the tribe of Dan during the Tribulation, where the apostasy of one of the select group of twelve (disciples and tribes of Israel respectively) results in the temporary omission of that twelfth place (later replaced respectively by Paul and by Dan restored), a parallel which Judas' Danite connection makes all the more powerful.

This association of Dan with Judas, the betrayer of our Lord, and with antichrist, the one who will falsely represent himself as our Lord, does not invalidate the faith and faithfulness of those from the tribe of Dan who followed our Lord in the past, who are doing so presently, or who will do so in the future. God honors all those who honor Him (1Sam.2:30), and the promises of covenant made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (whose son Dan is), stand firm forever through the power, the faithfulness, and the integrity of God (Rom.11:28-29). And we know from the description of the millennial Jerusalem (Ezek.48:32), and of the distribution of the land of Israel under Messiah's reign (Ezek.48:2), that Dan will be fully restored to all the rights of a tribe of Israel, despite his past associations and omission from the list of the 144,000.

None of this is to be taken to mean that it will be known to the world that antichrist is from Dan. The genealogical realities of most of Israel's tribal associations are today known only to God, and we are specifically told in scripture to beware of getting sidetracked by "endless genealogies" (1Tim.1:4; cf. Tit.3:9). Moreover, to the extent that antichrist promotes his (maternal) Jewish heritage, it is likely that, as a false Messiah, he would claim to be descended from Judah, and it is more than likely that such a claim would be believed by the unregenerate world (compare the wrong impression Christ's unbelieving contemporaries had of His genealogy because of their false assumption that Galilee was His place of birth: Jn.7:42). In the Danite pattern of apostasy and idolatry, and in Judas' pattern of falsity and betrayal, antichrist will use his Jewish origins and

Messianic claims to gain favor with the nation of Israel (cf. Dan.9:27), but, in the end, will be the greatest betrayer of Israel and the greatest persecutor of Israel that the world will ever see. Thus there is no rational brief for antisemitism to be found here on the basis of antichrist's maternal Jewish roots, for he is the one who will attempt to destroy Israel, even as he mimics and opposes Israel's true righteous ruler, the Messiah.

c. Antichrist's national origin: Any attempt to identify antichrist's country of origin and citizenship (as opposed to his genetic ancestry discussed above) must of necessity first identify prophetic Babylon, for it is Babylon that is his home, and the power-base from which he ascends to world dominion:

1) Babylon is the home country of antichrist: Rather than referring to the historical Babylon of antiquity, "Babylon" in the New Testament is the symbolic name given by scripture to the country of antichrist (e.g., Rev.17:5: "mystery Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the world"; cf. 1Pet.5:13: "she who is elect together with you [i.e., the local church] in Babylon [i.e., Rome], greets you"). By all accounts, Babylon will be an extremely powerful, indeed, the most powerful country in the world, analogous in her dominance to Rome in her heyday. Babylon is the nation which antichrist uses as a base of power to leapfrog to control of his own new "Roman" confederacy of Europe (of which Babylon is not technically a part), and from there to control of the entire world (following the second defeat of the southern alliance, his main opposition during the first half of the Tribulation: Dan.11:25-30 in the Hebrew). It is true that prior to the return of our Lord, antichrist will destroy Babylon (Rev.17:16-19:3), but that the beast is from Babylon and rises to world dominance primarily through her influence and power is not changed by the fact that she is later destroyed at his hand and at his command. Indeed, this is precisely what Isaiah prophesied:³³¹

(3) And it will come to pass on the day (i.e., during the Millennium) when the Lord gives you rest from your pain, and from your turmoil, and from the hard labor which was levied upon you, (4) that you will take up this taunt concerning the king of Babylon (i.e., antichrist), and you will say, "How the oppressor (i.e., antichrist) has come to an end! How the golden [city] (i.e., Babylon) has ceased to be! (5) The Lord has shattered the staff of evil-doers, the rod of those who ruled [over us], (6) which smote the peoples in her arrogance with unrelenting scourging, which ruled the nations in her anger with unrelenting persecution. (7) The whole world is now at rest, at peace. They break forth in song. (8) Even the fir trees rejoice over you, the cedars of Lebanon: 'Since you have been laid low, no one comes up to cut us down'. (9) Sheol below is astir because of you, at the prospect of your arrival. It rouses for you the spirits of the dead, all the [former] princes of the earth. It makes all the [former] kings of the earth rise from their thrones. (10) All of them will answer and say to you, 'Even you too have [now] become weak like us'. (11) All your pride has been brought down to Sheol, [all that] noise of your harps. Below you maggots are spread out like a bed, and worms are your bedcovers. (12) How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, O son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, O you who laid the nations low. (13) For you said in your heart, 'I will ascend heavenward. I will set my throne above the stars of God. And I will take my seat on the mount of assembly on the sides of the north. (14) I will ascend above the heights

of the clouds. I will be like the Most High God'. (15) But indeed you will be brought down to Sheol, to the sides of the pit. (16) Those who look at you will contemplate you; they will consider you: 'Is this the man who confounded the earth, who shook [the foundations of] the nations? (17) He made the world like a desert, and trampled its cities underfoot. He did not let its prisoners go home.' (18) All the kings of the earth, all of them, lie in dignity, each in his own tomb. (19) But you have been cast out of your grave like an abominable branch (i.e., in contrast to *the Branch*), clothed with your slain [victims], those pierced by the sword, those who go down to the stones of the pit, like a corpse trampled underfoot. (20) You will not share with them in your burial. *For you have destroyed your [own] land. You have killed your [own] people.* The seed of evil doers will not be called to remembrance again forevermore."

Isaiah 14:3-20

The introduction to this "taunt" clearly identifies "the king of Babylon" as the subject (v.4), and the future day of restoration as the time for its appropriate use (v.3). Further, the description of the ruler of Babylon as contained within these verses cannot find their complete fulfillment in any such historical ruler.³³² The king portrayed here was ruler of a "golden city" which oppressed Israel (v.4), and which ruled harshly over all the nations of the earth (vv.5-8). This king's aspirations and (dark) deeds were so exceptional (i.e., he "laid all the nations low") that all the prior rulers of the earth are anxious for his entrance into Sheol below (vv.9-11). He is described as falling from the greatest of heights, from heaven itself, as if he were "the morning star" (v.12a), and we have already seen how that the true "Morning Star" is our Lord Jesus Christ, so that anyone else assuming such a title is by definition a fraud. The ruler in these verses aspired to the highest heights, to a rule beyond any prior earthly rule, to be like God Most High (vv.13-14), to lay claim, in a word, to all Messianic honor, privilege and power. But, in the end, he is the one who is laid low, proving beyond all doubt that he was not the One to come after all (v.15). This ruler "confounded the earth", shook the nations to their very foundations, made the world like a desert, trampled its cities underfoot, but now has himself been humbled. Rather than bring liberation to the captives of the world (as the true Messiah will), he kept them in captivity. And as a result of all his horrendous deeds, unlike the true Branch (cf. Is.4:2; 11:1; 53:2; Jer.23:5; 33:15; Zech.3:8; 6:12), this ruler is cast out like a branch that is a an abomination (cf. Matt.24:15; Mk.13:14; Dan.11:31; 12:11; Rev.13:14-15).

Clearly, these verses have a primary application to antichrist, the false Messiah, and most germane to our discussion here is the highlighted portion of the last verse quoted. For this passage identifies this individual, antichrist, as "king of Babylon" (v.4), and reproaches him with one of his most outlandish deeds, namely, the destruction of his own country and of his own people (v.20; cf. Hab.2:8-12). Therefore, as we have stated above, the fact that antichrist does destroy Babylon prior to Armageddon (Rev.17:16-19:3) not only does not disqualify him as king of mystery Babylon, but rather, in accord with Isaiah 14:3-20, positively identifies Babylon as his native land (he is "king of Babylon"; he has destroyed his own people and his own country).

We also find other prophetic passages which are in line with this identification of antichrist and Babylon. In Ezekiel chapter 28, antichrist is also represented as the "king of Tyre" (v.12), an alternative representation of mystery Babylon stressing her commercial dominance as exemplified by that premier Phoenician city state (note, for example, the closeness in language between the lament for Tyre in Ezekiel and the lament for Babylon in Revelation 18, and compare Isaiah 23). Like Babylon, Tyre is also pillaged and destroyed by fire (Zech.9:3-4).

Throughout the book of Jeremiah in particular, we find the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, serving as an antitype for the beast (see in particular Jer.25:8-9; Jer.50-51 and especially 51:34; cf. also Ezek.29:17-20.). As the king of Sheshach, a cryptogram for mystery Babylon, antichrist drinks last of all from the cup of the Lord's wrath (a reference to Armageddon: Jer.25:26; cf. Rev.14:19). Perhaps most significantly, in Jeremiah 51:1 we find the Lord stirring up a destroyer against "Babylon and the people of Lebh-Qamay". "Lebh-Qamay" is also a cryptogram for Babylon (specifically, for the people of the neo-Babylonian empire who were known to Jeremiah as the Chaldeans; cf. Jer.50:1 [not NIV]).³³³ Now this cryptogram, when read as Hebrew, yields the meaning, "the people of *those who rise up against Me*", but the Masoretic pointing of this otherwise unknown phrase need only be changed in regard to one vowel point in order to read it as "Lebh-Qamiy", "the people of *him who rises up against Me*". That is to say, no emendation of the original Hebrew text per se is required to make this verse refer specifically to antichrist, only a minor alteration of the eighth century A.D. interpretation of the Masorete scholars who pointed the text. In this context of divine judgment upon Babylon, the first rendering ("people of those who rise up against Me") makes little discernible sense, whereas the shift to the singular to identify the ruler of Babylon is something paralleled in all of the passages we have seen where Babylon's fate is predicted (i.e., she is always mentioned in concert with her ruler, although he is never said to be destroyed along with her; cf. Jer.51:12). Identification of the king of Babylon as the one who preeminently rises up against the Lord is certainly consistent with the "I wills" of Isaiah 14 quoted above, and with everything else we know about antichrist's unprecedentedly blasphemous conduct (e.g., Dan.7:8; 7:20; 7:25; 8:25; 11:36-37; 2Thes.2:4; Rev.13:5-6; 16:14; 17:13-14; 19:19 and see section II.2 immediately below). Taken together with the other passages given here, the association of antichrist with Babylon, and specifically, as her king, indicates clearly that mystery Babylon is his country of national origin.

Finally, as we have pointed out above, antichrist is also synonymous with Gog, the future invader of Israel treated in Ezekiel chapters 38-39. This Gog is said to be "of the land of Magog," a place which, while it is indeed a nation in its own right (a people of the far north from Israel's geographical perspective: Gen.10:2; 1Chron.1:5), is, in this prophetic context, a synonym for mystery Babylon. This identification of mystery Babylon with Magog is clear not only from the unique eschatological details given Ezekiel chapters 38-39 (necessarily future in their application as is clear even to the casual reader), but also from the commanding role that Magog and her ruler Gog are given in that context. That is to say, Gog is "chief prince" of the two other major nations whose role in the invasion is paramount, namely, Meshech and Tubhal (and Magog is

not even mentioned when Gog's rulership of these two primary nations is repeated in Ezek.39:1). Many other significant nations are included in this confederacy in a subordinate way (i.e., Persia, Put, Cush, Gomer, Beth-Togarmah: Ezek.38:5-6; and, to a lesser extent, Sheba, Dedan, and Tarshish: Ezek.38:13), while still other unnamed nations participate as well (Ezek.38:6b). Thus Gog's home nation, Magog, represents a sort of "super-nation" from which Gog rules and directs this coalition of worldwide scope (a situation perfectly analogous to antichrist and mystery Babylon).³³⁴ Given all this, the fact that the word "Magog" is also potentially a cryptogram for Babylon is doubtless both significant and deliberate (for this is a phenomenon well attested for use specifically with mystery Babylon in the book of Jeremiah as we have just seen above).³³⁵ The name "Gog" then will be a back-formation from Magog (which can bear the meaning "place of Gog"),³³⁶ whose main function is to identify this future ruler (antichrist) intimately with Magog, mystery Babylon.

2) Babylon is a definite, geographical place: As the home country of antichrist, Babylon is a finite geographical location. For although the name "Babylon" as used in this prophetic context is, as we have seen, symbolic (i.e., mystery Babylon is the name of the future empire which will be in many ways analogous to the Roman empire of John's day), it is, nevertheless, a genuine place. For example, when Peter uses "Babylon" to refer symbolically to the Rome of his day, he is nevertheless referring to a distinct location (1Pet.5:13). While it may seem overly pedantic to stress to this point, it is nonetheless important to do so because of the fact that so many contemporary interpretations of Revelation see Babylon as a mere "system" (of religion or economics or etc.), and make a point of denying her a specific geographical locale. Scripture, however, tells us a different story:

a) In Revelation 17:18, Babylon, the harlot, the one who "rules over the kings of the earth" is described as "the great city". The Greek word for city here is *polis* (πόλις), a term that, if anything, generally conveys something more than a single urban area (Athens, for example, was a *polis*, a city-state which encompassed the entire peninsula of Attica, far beyond the confines of the city of Athens proper, and containing other towns and cities).

b) Babylon is capable of being (and in fact is) physically destroyed, in a way that only a definite, tangible entity can be destroyed (Is.13:1-22; 14:20-23; 21:1-10; 46-47; 48:14; Jer.50-51; Hab.1-2; Zech.2:7-9; Rev.16:19; 17:16-17; 18:1-24; 19:1-3; cf. Is.23:1-18; Ezek.26-28).

c) Believers are commanded to "flee Babylon", something that is only possible (and only necessary) if Babylon is a specific, geographic location (Is.48:20; Jer.50:8; 51:6-9; 51:45; 51:50; Zech.2:6-7; Rev.18:4; cf. Is.13:14; 52:11-12; Jer.50:16).

d) Theories of interpretation which draw a distinction between the Babylon of Revelation chapters 16-17 and a supposedly distinct one in chapter 18 have no reasonable basis. The thematic consonance of Babylon described in both places is clear. For example, 1) the dress in which Babylon appears at Revelation 17:4 is essentially

duplicated at Revelation 18:16; 2) the maddening wine of adultery dispensed by Babylon from which the nations drink at Revelation 17:2 is mentioned again at Revelation 18:3; and, 3) the harlot analogy of Babylon figures large in both sections as well (compare Rev.17:1-6; 17:15-16 with Rev.18:3; 18:9; 19:2; cf. Rev.14:8). In fact, all the descriptions of mystery Babylon are remarkably consistent throughout scripture, so that when we place either section of Revelation along side the broader picture, we find a seamless uniformity (this is true even when she is described under her alternative name of Tyre: cf. esp. Is.23; Jer.50-51; Ezek.26-28).

Finally, inasmuch as chapter divisions in the New Testament are a relatively modern invention (16th century – courtesy of Henri Estienne, a.k.a. "Stephanus"), we should be extremely wary about placing any interpretive weight on the progression of chapters (i.e., from 17 to 18). The fact that the details of Revelation chapter 18 follow directly upon those of chapters 16 and 17 with no break indicated in scripture beyond the extra-biblical chapter divisions makes it clear, *prima facie*, that this discussion of Babylon is entirely of a piece with what has preceded. Simply put, there is not a shred of either textual or literary evidence to suggest drawing any sort of distinction between these two sections of Revelation so as to produce "two Babylons".

e) Lastly, there is no true indication anywhere in scripture that Babylon is *not* a place. If she were an economic or religious system, as is sometimes claimed, it would be difficult indeed for the beast to destroy her in the near instantaneous manner described in Revelation 16-19 (et alibi) – if, indeed, such a thing would really be possible at all.

3) Babylon is distinct from and to be distinguished from the "Ten-Kingdom Empire": Another common misconception in the contemporary interpretation of Revelation is the mistaken idea that mystery Babylon and the empire of antichrist are essentially one and the same thing. Such, however, is not the case. Once one accepts the fact that Babylon is a real place (the home and original power-base of antichrist), the critical passages which describe the destruction of Babylon make it clear that the empire of antichrist is still intact after this event (indeed, antichrist's subordinate kings play a large part in Babylon's demise):

Now as for the ten horns which you saw and the beast, these will come to hate the harlot [Babylon] and will render her desolate and naked, and they will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire.
Revelation 17:16

Thus antichrist and his empire are alive and well when Babylon is destroyed prior to the Second Advent, and are only destroyed themselves at the Second Advent, following Babylon's fall (cf. Dan.2:34-35; 2:44). Clearly, then, Babylon is an entity apart from the ten-kingdom empire of antichrist. As we shall see below, this distinction between Babylon, antichrist's home country, and the ten-kingdom empire over which he later gains control helps us to understand how scripture can refer to this unusual greater

kingdom of the beast as "a divided kingdom" (Dan.2:40-43), and as "different from all other kingdoms" (Dan.7:23).

4) Since Babylon is distinct from the Ten-Kingdom Empire, she is most likely not located in Europe et al.: In Revelation chapter seventeen, the prostitute Babylon is portrayed as riding upon the beast (the empire of the beast: cf. Dan.7:2-27), an allegory which shows, among other things, both the independence of Babylon and the empire one from another, and the fact of their close relationship. The empire over which the beast gains control during the first half of the Tribulation (using Babylon as his base of power – she rides the beast) is made up of ten major kingdoms (i.e., the "ten horns" of Dan.7:7-8; 7:19-20; 7:24; Rev.12:3; 13:1-3; 17:3; 17:7; 17:12; 17:16). Although the exact identity of these kingdoms is never expressly given in the Bible, two key passages of scripture, Daniel 9:24-27 and Revelation 17:8-11, make it clear that these nations are, in general terms, loosely synonymous with the area ruled by the Roman empire of John's day (and for this reason the empire of the ten horns is sometimes referred to in the interpretation of Revelation as "the revived Roman empire"):

(24) Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to complete the rebellion and consummate sins (i.e., to bring apostasy to the full), to atone for iniquity and bring in everlasting righteousness (i.e., the saving work of Christ), and to seal up vision and prophecy and anoint the holy of holies (i.e., the coming of the Kingdom). (25) So know and understand that from the issuing of a decree to desist [from rebuilding Jerusalem] (in ca. 485 B.C.: Ezra 4:6-23), and for the rebuilding of Jerusalem (forty-two years later in ca. 443 B.C.: cf. Ezra 7:11-28; Neh. chap.1-6) until Messiah the prince there will be seven weeks (i.e., between the decree and the rebuilding) and sixty-two weeks (i.e., between the rebuilding and the birth of Christ in ca. 2 B.C.).³³⁷ [Jerusalem] will be repopulated and rebuilt with streets (i.e., residential reconstruction) and fortifications (i.e., military reconstruction) [and will remain so] even during difficult times (e.g., the occupation of Antiochus Epiphanes). (26) And after the sixty two weeks, Messiah will be cut off and have nothing (cf. Is.53:8), and *the people of the prince who is coming* (i.e., antichrist) will destroy both the city and the holy place. And his end will come with a flood (i.e., the "flooding away" of his armies at Armageddon; cf. the same Hebrew word, *sheteph*, שֶׁטַף, in Dan.11:22; Nah.1:8), and until that end there will be wars – [appalling] devastation has been decreed. (27) Then he (i.e., antichrist) will confirm an agreement (or "covenant"; Hebrew, בְּרִית, *beriyth*) with the powerful [in Israel] during [that] one [remaining] week (i.e., the 70th week, the Tribulation), but in the middle of the week (i.e., just prior to the Tribulation's mid-point) he will put a halt to sacrifice and offering (i.e., eliminating Moses and Elijah and interrupting the temple rites). And on account of the extreme [nature] of [his] abominations, he [will] be causing desolations (i.e., desertion and estrangement from God), even until the end when what has been determined will be poured out upon the one characterized by [this] desolation (i.e., the beast as archetype and cause of the alienation and rebellion from God which he fosters).

Daniel 9:24-27

In addition to the prominence of this "prince" during the final week (the Tribulation) and his interruption of the temple rites, both of which are clear indications that this is antichrist (cf. Dan.11:21-45; 2Thes.2:3-12), the identification here of both him and Messiah as "princes" (the use of the identical Hebrew word, *naghidh*, נגיד, suggests a true Prince and an "anti-prince"), and the phrasing of his agreement with Israel as a "covenant" (the same Hebrew word, *berith*, ברית, suggesting here an "anti-covenant" opposed to the true covenant) are also clear indications that this person is indeed none other than antichrist. For we have already considered antichrist's deliberate (false) claims of Messiah-ship, and in his treating with Israel it is more than conceivable that he will portray his formal arrangements with her in a similar, Messianic way, suggesting that it is a scriptural fulfillment of the "new day" for Israel (cf., Is.55:3; 61:8; Jer.31:31-33; Ezek.16:59-63; 20:37; 34:25; 37:26; Hos.2:14-20; Mal.3:1). Daniel 11:22 actually combines both of these ideas with its labeling of antichrist as "the prince of the covenant" (*neghidh berith*), removing any doubt about the identity of the individual in question here.

The critical portion of these verses for our specific purpose here is the identification of antichrist as the eschatological prince of the people who were to destroy Jerusalem. Since it was the Romans who destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D., the connection of antichrist with Rome is therefore beyond question. Furthermore, since nearly two thousand years will separate that destruction from the appearance of antichrist on the stage of history, the "Roman empire" of which he will be prince must be, in some important sense, a restoration of the earlier empire (thus in part explaining the amazing recovery of the beast from its "fatal wound" as this applies in part to the ten kingdom empire, namely, as a revival of Rome: Rev.13:3; 13:12; 13:14; cf. Rev.17:8-10). Inasmuch as the Roman people, the Latin language, and the imperial system of Rome are not likely candidates for any sort of restoration, it seems fairly certain that this revival of empire must be meant in the territorial sense, so that the ten kingdom empire will be a revived Rome primarily in the sense of occupying territory roughly contiguous with that of the historical Roman empire (this is why the ten kings are said to arise out of the fourth beast in Dan.7:23-24). Apropos of our point here is the necessary conclusion that Babylon cannot, therefore, be situated within the same territory as that of revived Rome (since, as we have established, she is fundamentally distinct from the ten-kingdom empire), and thus this consideration eliminates a European, Mediterranean, or Near Eastern location for her, inasmuch as Rome dominated all of these areas.

(8) The beast, which you saw, was (i.e., "existed"), and is not (i.e., came "not to exist"), and is going to rise from the Abyss (i.e., the revival of Rome on the one hand and apparent resuscitation of antichrist on the other), and is going to its destruction. And the inhabitants of the earth, [those] whose names have not remained written in the book of life [where they were written] from the beginning of the world, will be in awe when they see the beast, because he was (i.e., "existed"), and is not (i.e., came "not to exist"), and will again be present on the scene (i.e., seem to return to life in the case of antichrist, and be reestablished in respect to the empire). (9) This calls for a mind having wisdom: the seven heads [of the beast (cf. v.3 and 13:1)] are seven mountains

whereon the woman sits. They are also seven kings. (10) The [first] five [of these kings] have fallen. The [next (i.e., the sixth)] is now [alive]. The last (i.e., antichrist) has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain for a short time (i.e., the Tribulation). (11) And [as to] the beast which was and is not, this is the eighth [king] and he is [also] one of the seven, and he is going to [his] destruction.

Revelation 17:8-11

While the seventh king "who has not yet come" is antichrist, the preceding six kings are Roman emperors. For the sixth king "*now* is alive", while five have died. Nero was the Roman "king" or emperor alive when John wrote Revelation, and he was preceded by the five prior Julio-Claudian rulers, Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius. Inasmuch as the Julio-Claudian line of succession came to an end with Nero (and has long since disappeared into the dust of history), antichrist can only be said to be "the seventh king" in the sense of being, in effect, the next ruler of restored Rome, gaining control of her territories after his rise to power in his own country, Babylon. The second part of this proposition, namely, that while antichrist rules new Rome he is not properly "of" new Rome, is made clear by the text of verse eleven which states that he is "the eighth [king]" at the same time that he is "of the seven" previously mentioned kings.³³⁸ The only way that this can be true is if antichrist is both a king in the line of the Caesars (i.e., "the seventh king", showing his control of revived Rome), and at the same time a king in his own right outside of any Roman empire (i.e., "the eighth king", king of Babylon). While "eighth" here is employed to mean essentially "outside of the seven", it also has significance in respect to the seven heads in their capacity as seven kingdoms, for we know from Daniel 7:7-24 that of the ten horns of Rev.13:1, 17:3 and 17:16, three are kingdoms gained by outright conquest, making the seven heads and seven remaining horns to which they correspond the basis of antichrist's power in Europe. Since each of these horn-head kingdoms has a king allied to antichrist, he is also "the eighth" in the sense of being the supreme king who rules over all the rest. This passage thus shows that Babylon is not part of the territory of historical Rome, for antichrist and his realm (Babylon) are clearly marked out by these verses as being separate from revived Rome.

5) Characteristics of Babylon: We have already established that Babylon is a real place, an actual nation distinct from the ten-kingdom empire of revived Rome, and that she is, therefore, not a part of the territory ruled by the Roman empire of John's day. A listing of the characteristics of mystery Babylon as described in scripture will now allow us to form a strong impression of which present-day nation is the most likely future candidate to match the description of antichrist's home country. For while it is true that much can happen historically between the time of writing and that future day, that day is nevertheless rapidly approaching, and the current disposition of world powers is at least not likely to become unrecognizable within the next two decades or so.

a) Symbolism: Considering the large number of symbolic references to Babylon throughout scripture, the choice of this name for the seat of antichrist's power during the Tribulation is hardly surprising. Historical Babylon was, of course, the original anti-God city "east of Eden", the home of the tower of Babel and of the first major assault on human freedom after the great flood in the form of a satanic attempt by Nimrod (a type

of antichrist, as we have seen) to establish a one-world government (the very thing which antichrist will achieve).³³⁹ Babylon was also the capital of the first major empire to be established after the separation of the nations which followed, and its founder, Nebuchadnezzar (also a type of antichrist in his capacity as the preeminent king of Babylon, as we have seen) is the "head of gold" in Daniel's prophecy of the great statue which predicts the rise of Rome and of revived Rome, the ten-kingdom empire of antichrist (Dan.2:36-45).³⁴⁰ Furthermore, historical Babylon was responsible for destroying the first temple and for the seventy year period of exile from the land, while eschatological, "mystery Babylon" will be antichrist's original source of strength through which he will persecute Israel and the Church (cf. Rev.16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2). Finally, Peter's reference to the church at Rome as "she who is in Babylon" reflects this notion of an overarching center of power in control of the empire that is in some sense separate from it, a picture which is consistent with the future Babylon which will hold sway over the revived empire, "riding the beast" (compare 1Pet.5:13 with Rev.17:1; 17:3; 17:7; 17:9; 17:15; 17:18). The reader is asked to recall the pertinent discussions above and in part 1 of this series in regard to Tyre (as the chief city of Phoenicia) and Nineveh (as the capital of Assyria); these two cities likewise are used to draw parallels to that future "mystery" kingdom which we are exclusively terming "Babylon", the former in her capacity as the supreme commercial power, and the latter in her capacity as the supreme military power.³⁴¹ Antichrist, after all, is portrayed as "the king of Tyre" in Ezekiel chapter 28 (see section II.1.c.1 above).

b) Excessive Wealth: According to Old Testament prophecy, Babylon will be "the golden city" (Is.14:4: KJV and Hebrew), "abounding in treasures" (Jer.51:13), and overly proud as a result of her great wealth (Ezek.28:5). She will dwell in "luxurious palaces" (Is.13:22), and like her sisters in symbolism, Tyre and Nineveh respectively, she will enjoy excessive wealth (Zech.9:3), an endless supply of silver and gold (Nah.2:9). In the end, her riches will not be able to ransom her life (Is.47:11), all her great wealth will be plundered and destroyed (Jer.51:58). This picture agrees perfectly both with the description of Babylon the harlot in Revelation 17:4, who is dressed purple and scarlet, and glitters with gold, precious stones, and pearls (cf. Rev.18:16), as well as with the description of the destruction of that nation in chapter 18, where the merchants of the earth who "grew rich from the abundance of her excesses" (Rev.18:3) will catalog her excessive purchases and possessions (cf. Rev.18:11-16), and lament the loss of "such great wealth" (Rev.18:17).

c) Unequaled Commerce: Apart from the fact of her great wealth and luxury, Babylon will also be a trading nation, known for her commercial activities. In an entirely prophetic context, Zechariah 5:11 tells us that "wickedness" is to be taken to the land of Shinar (i.e., Babylonia). This passage refers primarily to the centralizing of satanic evangelism in mystery Babylon (treated below), but the fact that wickedness is carried in a "measuring basket" gives a clear coincidence of hyper-commercialism and evil.³⁴² Nahum 3:16 mentions the Assyrian merchants who like locusts strip the land bare and fly off. But it is Tyre, the commercial titan of antiquity, who best represents the future mystery Babylon in this respect. Tyre is said to be the "marketplace of the nations" in Isaiah 23:3, and it is this unequaled commerce that has gained her great wealth for her

(Ezek.28:4-5). Her merchants are "princes" and her traders "renowned on the earth" (Is.23:8), and this last reference is applied directly to mystery Babylon at Revelation 18:23. Tyre's selling of Jews as slaves foreshadow's antichrist's persecutions inasmuch as this sin is judged on the day of the Lord (Joel 3:4-8; Amos 1:9-10). The evil nature of mystery Babylon's commercial activities also calls to mind the trend of the third seal (Rev.6:5-6, discussed in part 2B of this series), antichrist's hyper-control of economic activity to the detriment of all but his chosen few, a trend which reaches its apex of evil in the mark of the beast, without which no will be able to buy or sell (Rev.13:16-18; cf. Nineveh "full of plunder": Nah.3:1). This artificial and persecutory system will contribute to the great influx of ill-gotten wealth which Babylon will garner during the Tribulation. Therefore it is not surprising that her trading activities are characterized as prostitution (Is.23:15-18; cf. Ezek.26-28; Am.1:9-10; Zech.9:2-4). Finally, even casual readers of Revelation chapter 18 are left in little doubt about the extensiveness of Babylon's wealth and trade, especially of her voracious appetite for imports of the finest quality (cf. esp. Rev.18:11-20).

d) Preeminent Power: Mystery Babylon is often referred to in Revelation as "Babylon *the great*" (Rev.14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2; 18:10; 18:21), a title which goes back to the "head of gold", the first great empire, Nebuchadnezzar's historical Babylon (Dan.4:30). As such, this title suggests that the future Babylon will stand head and shoulders above all other powers on the earth, and it is consistent with other descriptions of that coming power. Babylon will be

- the "destroying mountain which destroys the entire earth" (Jer.51:25).
- possessed of an invincible army (Hab.1:8-11; cf. Assyria: Nah.2:3-4; and Tyre: Ezek.27:10-11).
- the "most glorious of kingdoms" and "the glory of the Babylonians' pride" (Is.13:19).
- the "queen of kingdoms (Is.47:5)".
- the "bestower of crowns" (Is.23:8).
- the blasphemous "I am" of the nations (Is.47:8).
- a "ruthless and impetuous people who sweep over the whole earth seizing dwellings not their own" (Hab.1:6; cf. Assyria: Nah.2:11-12).
- "feared and dreaded" a people who are "a law unto themselves" and who "promote their own honor" (Hab.1:7), "guilty men whose strength is their god" (Hab.1:11).
- the "hammer of the whole earth" (Jer.50:23).

- the "rod and staff which smites the nations" (Is.14:5-6).
- the "war club that smashes nations" at God's behest (Jer.51:20-21; cf. Rev.17:17).
- the "boast of the whole earth" (Jer.51:41).
- one who attracts a wide variety of immigrant peoples (Is.13:14).

From the above compilation of passages, mystery Babylon's political supremacy, military dominance, and aggressive imperialism are plain to see (cf. Nineveh: Nah.3:2-3; 3:19). No other nation on earth will be the like of her during that future time. It will not be a question of any true "balance of power" when antichrist begins his run toward world conquest first at the helm of Babylon, then quickly transferring his flag to the ten-kingdom revived Roman empire of which he gains control through her dominance. One particular aspect of Babylon's military might is important to consider separately, because it clearly marks her out as a future eschatological power. Although historical Babylon was, for all intents and purposes, a landlocked empire that relied almost exclusively on her army, mystery Babylon of the Tribulation is described as a maritime nation (Is.21:1; Jer.51:13; cf. Rev.18), and will be a naval power of unprecedented strength. For it will be via the projection of her military power through this means that antichrist will finally vanquish the southern alliance, removing thereby the last major impediment to his world dominance (Dan.11:30; 11:40; cf. Num.24:24; and cf. the analogy of Tyre-Babylon: Is.23:4; Zech.9:2-4). It stands to reason that the aggressive, rapacious, imperialistic commerce with which Babylon is credited will require an unmatched navy to safeguard, foster, and enforce.

e) Unprecedented Evil: More so than any other nation in world history, mystery Babylon will indulge herself in luxuries characterized by wickedness. Even those pleasures she takes which are ordinarily acceptable or at least not sinful in and of themselves will become so by reason of their extraordinary excess and their ill-gotten origin. Antichrist's evil system of economic exploitation has been covered in part in our treatment of the "black horse", the third seal of Revelation chapter six (see part 2B of this series, section IV.3), and will be treated later in greater detail (see section II.3 below; cf. Dan.11:24; 11:39). Part and parcel of this exploitative system will be the idolatry and sorcery which will characterize antichrist's political movement (for that movement will be an inextricable blend of politics, economics, and religion), a feature of his rule that, while it will begin in Babylon, will reach its culmination when he takes his seat in the temple of God proclaiming himself to be God and forcing the whole world to worship him (Dan.8:11; 2Thes.2:4; Rev.13:11-18; cf. Dan.11:31; 12:11; Matt.24:15; Mk.13:14). The inherent evil of mystery Babylon is another prominent theme in scripture, especially as it relates to her luxuriating at the expense of others. She is a wanton creature, lounging in her security (Is.47:8), from whom proceeds a noisy voice of revelry (Jer.51:55; cf. Is.14:11), trusting in her evil and oblivious to God (Is.47:10), dissolute and pampered with luxuries (Is.47:1), arrogant (Jer.50:32), greedy (Hab.2:5), guilty of extortion, theft, and unjust gain (Hab.2:6-9). Like Nineveh, she is "a city of lies" (Nah.3:1).

Spiritually, mystery Babylon is "a desert by the sea" (Is.21:1), and a "land of idols" (Jer.50:38; cf. Nah.3:4). And as we know, greed and covetousness are prominent forms of idolatry (Col.3:5; cf. Gal.5:17-21; Eph.5:5). Instead of putting the one true God first in her thinking, Babylon "worships" money, pleasure, fame, power, possessions, all the objects of greed. The blossoming of this foundation of idolatrous thinking into the idolatrous religion of antichrist in the Tribulation's second half will be an entirely natural progression. The inhabitants of this land will be "guilty men whose own strength is their god" (Hab.1:11), who sacrifice to the "net" whereby they exploit others so as to live in the lap of luxury (Hab.1:16-17). One significant aspect of Babylon's blasphemous material idolatry is the prevalence within her of sorcery, witchcraft and the like (Is.47:9-15; Nah.3:4; Rev.18:23; cf. Is.13:17). This should be taken to mean not only what we consider occult in the usual sense, but also Babylon's reliance upon the technological "magic" that so impresses us today. Technology, it is true, is entirely material, and neither good nor bad in the abstract, but Babylon will rely upon it instead of upon God, upon the power of mankind's "secret wisdom" manipulating the material realm instead of upon God's complete control over everything material from the spiritual realm. Just as the "wise men and magicians of Babylon" were always the king's counselors (cf. the court magicians of Pharaoh: Ex.7:11-13; 2Tim.3:1-9), so magic and technology will form a similar witches brew in the future mystery Babylon, aided by a good measure of satanic power. In addition to being the world's commercial and military juggernaut, Babylon will also surpass the nations in her technological prowess, and will glory in it.

f) Irresistible Cultural Influence: Not only will mystery Babylon be irremediably evil in her own right, but she will also contribute the spread of evil world-wide as no nation or empire has ever done before. The nations are said to "stream to her", so influential is she (Jer.51:44). This is a key part of the meaning of Revelation 17:1 where we are told that she "sits on many waters", which waters are later interpreted for us at Revelation 17:15 to mean "peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages". In other words, mystery Babylon's cultural influence will affect every stratum of society around the world to an unprecedented degree. This is the "golden cup" from which she makes the whole world drink with the result that the nations "go mad" (Jer.51:7; cf. Rev.17:2), the same cup that is filled with "abominable things and the filth of her adulteries" (Rev.17:4). But the key theme in regard to mystery Babylon's role as purveyor of every form of evil worldwide is that of prostitution, for she is "the great prostitute" (Rev.17:1; 17:5; 17:15-16; 19:2; cf. Is.23:15-17; Nah.3:4), and "the mother of prostitutes" (Rev.17:5), "with whom the kings of the earth have committed adultery" (Rev.17:2a; 18:3; 18:9), so that all the unbelieving inhabitants of the earth become "drunk with the wine of her adulteries" (Rev.17:2b; cf. Hab.2:15-16).

This a very straightforward analogy (not to mention a graphic one), and it does much to characterize mystery Babylon's behavior for us. Like the adulteress of Proverbs, the path to her house leads to destruction (Prov. chap. 5, 7). Therefore it is not at all surprising that everything about her gives the appearance of beauty and attractiveness, otherwise she would be much less successful in reeling in her marks. But her beauty is only apparent (cf. Matt.23:27-28), heightened on the one hand by her excessive and suggestive presentation, and facilitated on the other by the "maddening wine" she gives

her victims to drink. In the analogy, both on the leadership level (the "kings of the earth": Rev.17:2a), and on the cultural level (the "inhabitants of the earth": Rev.17:2b), mystery Babylon will be purveying a very attractive message (in the form of antichrist's new movement; see section II.3 below). This message will seem intoxicating but will, in reality, be extremely deadly (the "maddening wine" of her adulteries). It will be exciting but not truly wholesome in any way (the "sex" of prostitution without any legitimate relationship). It will be attractive in the extreme on the outside – but on the inside will be filled with the bones of the dead. It will be, therefore, a sort of bewitching sorcery, both metaphorically and literally (Nah.3:4; cf. 2Thes.2:9-12; Rev.13:11-17). In short, mystery Babylon will be the illicit peddler of antichrist's influence, giving him the essential help he needs to expand his control around the world. Babylon's reward in the short term will be the untold riches discussed above, the luxurious trappings of the prostitute described in Revelation chapter 17. But in the end, she and all she has will be destroyed at antichrist's own hand, when God puts it into the hearts of the beast and his ten kings to do so (Rev.17:17).

6) Probable Identification of the Future "Mystery Babylon": The first thing to note here is that mystery Babylon does not yet exist per se. That is to say, until the Tribulation begins, and the restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit in regard to lawlessness ceases to impede the plans of antichrist, even that nation which is destined to become Babylon is not yet Babylon in fact. This is no small point. For the end of divine restraint and horrendous consequences for the world which follow (many of which we have already examined in this series) will cause many changes, both to nations and to individuals. During the Great Apostasy there will a shocking number of believers who will fall away. Before they actually do apostatize, they deserve every consideration from us. For no matter how sure we are of the spiritual danger gathering around any specific individual now, much can happen before that time of trouble to come. Just so in mystery Babylon's case, no matter how clear it may be to us which present day country will, in all likelihood, play that role in the future, we must be careful to distinguish present trends from future realities, and must remember that nothing is impossible for God. It is with this caveat in mind that the following identification of the probable future mystery Babylon is offered here.

Revived Rome is centered in Europe, the biblical north, and does battle with the southern alliance headed by Egypt during the Tribulation's first half (see below), while the "kings of the east" are not directly involved in the military activity of the Tribulation until Armageddon (Rev.16:12). Thus three of the four biblical quadrants of the earth are accounted for in the prophetic history of that time and are thus excluded prima facie as locations for Babylon.³⁴³ Only the western quadrant remains (a.k.a. the "islands" or "coast-lands"). Once one has restricted the search to the western hemisphere, assuming our time-table for the likely onset of the Tribulation to be correct, it takes no great leap of interpretation to identify what is today the United States as the nation which will play the role of mystery Babylon once the seventh seal is opened.³⁴⁴

It should be stressed at the outset of this discussion that there are many features of mystery Babylon which are not yet, and indeed cannot yet be true of the United States

(or of any other nation past or present, for that matter): mystery Babylon is *yet future*, so that even its present ancestor (the United States, if the analysis here be correct) cannot now be held responsible for her future actions, even in those cases where some of the trends discussed above may already be apparent. To use a loose historical analogy, Weimar Germany of the 1920's and early 1930's was in most respects a very different "animal" from the Germany of the Nazis which supplanted it (despite some disturbing trends already visible before the fall of that former republic). The change of regime and the imposition of a intrinsically evil totalitarian system made all the terrible difference.

It is true that many of the features of Babylon catalogued above are not yet true of this country, and that whatever nation turns out to be mystery Babylon will develop these features in full *only* after the present Holy Spirit restraint on lawlessness is removed (i.e., the "house" for "wickedness" must first be prepared: cf. Zech.5:5-11).³⁴⁵ It would, nevertheless, be folly on the part of all Christians who truly love this country (or at the least very dangerous wishful thinking) to assume that it is ipso facto an impossibility for the United States ever to *become* the future mystery Babylon, either because of the presence of perceived positive spiritual features at the present time, or because of the absence in full of some of the negative characteristics listed above. Few things will be as important for antichrist as coopting otherwise well-intentioned individuals into his all-encompassing political movement, and this will not be the first time that a general failure to appreciate the dangers inherent in seductive mass-movements has left people of all stripes vulnerable. This phenomenon is sufficiently familiar to students of 20th century history, and the examples of Communism and Naziism did not have the benefit of the unrestricted range of satanic power that will be available to antichrist during the Tribulation. Given the unprecedented number of Christians who will fall away from the Lord during the Great Apostasy of the Tribulation's first half (studied in the preceding part 3A of this series), it stands to reason that just such a spirit of denial will be instrumental in subverting the hearts of many believers in this country. As students of the Word of God, therefore, it is incumbent upon us to follow the truths of scripture wherever they lead, even when (and perhaps especially when) they lead us to conclusions that for whatever reason we may find uncomfortable. We hope and pray that this particular cup will pass from us, but we have to be willing to face the facts of scripture whatever the cost. If it ever does come to a choice between God and country, there can be absolutely no question where the only path to salvation lies.

Mystery Babylon the great is said to be "the mother of prostitutes and of the earth's abominations". This is an important and revealing description for making a positive identification, for this combination of phrases tells us that Babylon is the source or origin of much of what is offensive to the Lord in the religious, economic, political, and social arenas (to name but a few areas). Antichrist's system of world rule, as we shall see below, will inject pure evil into all the various categories cited above (e.g., Babylon will be the launching pad for his universalist religion, his economic controls, his military conquests, and his evil social engineering). What will begin to be readily apparent from the point of his rise to power onward can be said to be present today only in some very limited respects. Despite the obvious influence of its various denominations, the United States is not presently foisting a single system of religion upon the rest of the world, but

antichrist's Babylon will; despite its dominance as the world's greatest economy, the United States is not presently imposing a self-serving economic system, but antichrist's Babylon will; despite its political muscle as the only true superpower, the United States is not presently subordinating the rest of the world's nations into an imperial system of control, but antichrist's Babylon will; and the United States is certainly not reshuffling world society for the benefit of a privileged few, but that is precisely what antichrist will do for sake of greater personal control. Even in the area of cultural influence, while it may be said that the degeneration of morality pervading nearly everything of a cultural nature emanating from the United States is consistent with the depraved nature of mystery Babylon, there are still countervailing forces at work, whereas in antichrist's Babylon, every voice which opposes his policies and standards will be eventually silenced (apart from divine intervention). What is important in this comparison and tentative identification are not the present realities or even present trends so much as the negative *potential* for the future. Only the harshest and most strident critics of this nation would suggest that the United States is irrefutably visible in all the characteristics of Babylon listed above. But as things currently stand in geopolitical terms, this country is the only nation with the power and the potential to be Babylon. At the moment, the United States is merely a "loaded gun", so to speak, but with antichrist's ascension to power it will become an unequaled weapon which has fallen into the wrong hands, comparable to the totalitarian regimes of the early to mid-twentieth century, but more powerful by an order of magnitude, and without any serious rival (a situation that will grow even worse for the world after antichrist has gained control of the ten-king empire, revived Rome).

Nor will past meritorious services disqualify mystery Babylon-to-be from future iniquity. Historical Babylon too was used of God to strike down evil nations, but was later destroyed for her destruction of Israel (Jer.51:24; cf. Rev.17:6; 18:24; 19:2). Nor does past spirituality or eras of spiritual revival equate to immunity from future iniquity. Assyria repented at the preaching of Jonah, but later generations became hardened (Matt.12:41; cf. Is.10:7-19).³⁴⁶ Nor will the fact that mystery Babylon will only be responding to the dictates of antichrist relieve her of responsibility. Though she "rides the beast" (Rev.17:1-3), Babylon is held fully responsible for the persecutions which emanate from her (and would be impossible without her: Rev.16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2).

As believers we are called upon to be discerning of the time (Lk.12:56). In the case of identifying mystery Babylon, this will involve watching for the development of the trends discussed above. Key to this development is the issue of moral character. Zechariah 5:5-11 indicates both that mystery Babylon will be the point from which the unrestrained lawlessness of the Tribulation will originally emanate, and also that there is a preparation phase which predates the dropping off in Babylon of the basket containing this concentrated and unprecedented "wickedness". For of all things presently in play (before the removal of Holy Spirit restraint) it is the degeneration of morality in the population at large which will give antichrist his biggest opening:

The wicked strut about on every side, when vileness is exalted among the sons of men.
Psalm 12:8 NASB

Indeed, it is this moral, social, and "cultural" arena where we see the groundwork for the development of mystery Babylon being most assiduously laid by the evil one and his minions, human and angelic. In the recent attacks this nation has suffered, few dared express the opinion that our collective degeneracy might have anything to do with those events, and those who did were instantly reprov'd and quickly silenced (cf. Is.22:5-14).

Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so? Does a lion roar in the thicket when he has no prey? Does he growl in his den when he has caught nothing? Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground where no snare has been set? Does a trap spring up from the earth when there is nothing to catch? When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? *When disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it?*
Amos 3:3-6 NIV

Such moral assurance in an increasingly immoral milieu cannot help but remind students of scripture of the attitude in Judah before the Babylonian invasion where only soothing voices were allowed to be heard and those who truly spoke for the Lord were persecuted:

The visions of your prophets were false and worthless; they did not expose your sin to ward off your captivity. The oracles they gave you were false and misleading.
Lamentations 2:14 NIV

No matter how much we love our country, nations are made up of people, and people change. The pressures of the Tribulation will be so intense (as we saw above in our treatment of the Great Apostasy), that by the Tribulation's mid-point there will be few if any inhabitants of this country remaining who will not be either faithful believers or active servants of Satan. Under such circumstances, the only nation state that will not be entirely in the devil's control will be that of Israel (and even there the picture will be complex as we shall see below). Therefore it is well for the reader to distinguish between the situation prior to the Tribulation's beginning and that after it commences, for the shift in character in all nations and among almost all people (the elect excluded) will be dramatic and unprecedented following the removal of the Holy Spirit's restraint on lawlessness and the massive intensification of the devil's activities on earth, preeminently manifest in the rise of antichrist (along with his political, economic, social and religious system).

Finally in this regard, since it would seem that there is insufficient time remaining for the growth of an alternative power center to match the necessary characteristics of mystery Babylon in the way that the United States does (barring some major catastrophe of unprecedented proportions), it is not out of place to ask the question, "then why not leave?". Scripture does give many indications that there will indeed be a right time to "flee Babylon", but that will come late in the Tribulation's second half (and we shall cover this point in detail in part 5 of this series). While there is a right time to

flee, there is also a wrong time. Given that antichrist will, by Tribulation's end, control virtually the entire face of the earth to one degree or another, the obvious first reply to the question above is "flee to where?". Although time and space do not permit a full exposition of this topic here, suffice it to say for the moment that there are some indications in scripture that mystery Babylon will be like the eye of a storm from which the persecutions of the Great Tribulation emanate, and will thus provide a measure of sanctuary until the time of her own destruction prior to the Second Advent. If this be the case, then believers of that coming time who place the Bible first in all their applications will be faced with staying on in the face of what may be a rather large exodus, then departing at the very time when the crisis appears to have finally passed (i.e., the proper time to depart will be counterintuitive as well when judged by human sight alone: cf. 1Thes.5:2-3).

2. The Character of Antichrist: Having established antichrist's paternal, maternal, and national origin, we shall now look into what scripture has to say about him as an individual. By way of introduction, it will be helpful to offer here a translation and explication of Daniel 8:23-25, a prophecy in Hebrew poetic form devoted to antichrist, which contains some of the key features of the beast's personality:

(23) And at the end of their kingdom (i.e., during the Tribulation), when rebels are being confirmed [in their apostasy], there will arise a stern-faced king (i.e., antichrist), well-versed in deception. (24) And he will become exceptionally powerful – but not through his own power. And he will be astoundingly successful in his corrupting [activities]. And he will even undertake to corrupt the mighty men (i.e., believers) and [a part of] the holy people (i.e., Israel). (25) And on account of his cunning, [his] conspiracy will prosper under his direction. And he will [greatly] magnify himself in his own thinking, and by his seductive ways he will corrupt many. He will even take his stand against the Prince of princes, and will be shattered apart from human agency.

Daniel 8:23-25

- "at the end of their kingdom": In addition to the content here, which prima facie describes antichrist, there are numerous indications in the context that these verses are meant primarily as a prophecy about the beast. After receiving a heavenly command to explain this prophecy to Daniel, Gabriel, at Daniel 8:17, proclaims that this vision relates to "the time of the end" (a clear reference to the Tribulation: cf. Dan.12:4 where the same Hebrew phrase is used). This point is repeated with even more emphasis two verses later at Daniel 8:19 where Gabriel attributes the vision to "the latter [time] of [God's] wrath" (i.e., the Tribulation; cf. Rev.15:1). and says "for [this will all happen] at the appointed time of the end" (i.e., the Tribulation). Finally, at the conclusion of this angelic visit, Daniel is told to "seal up the vision, because it [pertains] to many days hence (i.e., the distant future)": Dan.8:26b.
- "when rebels are confirmed [in their apostasy]": As explained in the previous installment of this series, this is a reference to the Great Apostasy, an event which will reach its peak during the first half of the Tribulation.

- "there will arise a stern-faced king": This refers to the revelation at the start of the Great Tribulation of antichrist (for whom, as we have seen above, Antiochus Epiphanes, the more contemporary type in the broad context here, is the antitype). The Hebrew phrase *'az panim*, "stern-faced", refers to the unequalled brazenness and audacity of antichrist (cf. Deut.28:50; Prov.7:13; 21:29). He will proclaim his astounding lies with no shame or conscience and with total commitment and persuasiveness. The beast will easily justify the monumental evils he commits, and without blushing.
- "well-versed in deception": The beast will be a consummate actor and a practiced conspirator. The Hebrew phrase *mebiyn chidoth*, literally "understanding riddles", captures at once his satanically empowered evil intelligence and the exceptionally deceptive uses to which he will apply it (cf. Dan.11:27).
- "he will become exceptionally powerful – but not through his own power": Not only is antichrist sired by the devil; he will be empowered in all his undertakings by the evil one (cf. 2Thes.2:9-10).
- "he will be astoundingly successful in his corrupting [activities]": The beast's success in deceiving and enlisting both unbelievers and apostate believers to his cause will proceed apace throughout the Tribulation's first half, breaking into a world-wide flood as antichrist is fully "revealed" at the start of the three and a half year "Great Tribulation" (cf. Rev.13:1-8).
- "he will even undertake to corrupt the mighty men and [a part of] the holy people": This is a specific reference to and overview of the Great Apostasy. The "mighty men" are our Lord's "heroes", that is, anyone who is (or was) fighting and winning the good fight of faith until overcome by antichrist (1Tim.6:12; cf. the ultimate rewarding of believers called "mighty men" in Is.53:12). "Holy people" refers specifically here to those among Israel who likewise are swept away in the Great Apostasy.
- "on account of his cunning, [his] conspiracy will prosper under his direction": Here we see the beast's animal-like craftiness facilitating the treachery he sponsors in order to come to power (cf. Dan.11:23 where *mirmah* has the same meaning of "conspiracy").
- "he will [greatly] magnify himself in his own thinking": The arrogance of antichrist will outstrip the bounds of normal human restraint (cf. 2Thes.2:4).
- "by his seductive ways he will corrupt many": The beast's politico-religious movement in particular will offer potential followers a seductively easy road to all their dreams and aspirations (undermining whatever conscience and mores they possess).
- "He will even take his stand against the Prince of princes, and will be shattered apart from human agency": In his arrogance, antichrist will even think himself capable of opposing Christ (at Armageddon), but, just as the beast is only able to accomplish what he does through the power of the devil, so in the end he will be destroyed by the power of God.

a. The Symbolism of the Beast:

And the beast which I saw resembled a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth was like that of lions.

Revelation 13:2a

This passage is not only "modeled" after Daniel's picture of the four beasts (as some interpreters would have it) – it is a further and more explicit description of the fourth beast who is "different from the others" (Dan.7:7; 7:19; 7:23-24). In Daniel's vision, the first beast resembles a lion, the second a bear, and the third a leopard. The beast described in Revelation chapter 13 quoted above possess attributes of all three of these beasts, and this is in no way contradictory to Daniel's vision where the particulars of the terrifying fourth beast's overall appearance are never given. Daniel's fourth beast and the beast of Revelation are thus one and the same, with no inconsistencies between the two or their symbolism. Most of the particulars given in Revelation chapter 13 (and elaborated upon in chapter 17) can be left for treatment when those passages are covered later in this series. It is only necessary here to consider those aspects of the symbolism which relate to the beast's character. While he has feet like a bear and a mouth like the mouths of lions, antichrist *himself* most resembles a leopard (and this is even more clear in the Greek where the comparative *homoion* indicates a closer resemblance than that used to compare his feet and mouth to those of the bear and lions respectively: cf. Rev.1:13). The leopard in Daniel chapter 7 stands for Alexander and his empire, and so while antichrist and his kingdom will have the lion-like "bite" of Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian empire, and the bear-like tearing power of Cyrus and his Persian empire, it is to Alexander and his empire that the beast and his kingdom will exhibit the strongest resemblance.

The leopard in Daniel 7:6 is said to have four wings', making this leopard especially swift (cf. Hab.1:8). Rapidity will characterize all of antichrist's activities (and the activities of his kingdom and politico-religious movement). The very speed of his rise and of his conquests will impress the world and intimidate his foes. Other personality traits of the beast to be gleaned from his resemblance to a leopard according to the biblical picture of that animal are cunning (cf. Jer.5:6; Hos.13:7), ferocity (cf. Is.11:6), and a solitary nature (cf. S.S. 4:8). In general terms, we may say that this comparison paints antichrist as a terrifying, decisive, dangerous, violent, treacherous, wily individual, restless in a cat-like way in his desire to further his evil schemes (cf. Hab.2:5). These are characteristics which remind students of history not only of Alexander, but also of other commanders who lusted for world domination like Caesar, Napoleon and Hitler, but it needs to be stressed here that antichrist will exhibit these characteristics and abilities to a uniquely exceptional degree (even by comparison with that egregious company). One final characteristic of the leopard that should not be overlooked here is its exceptional, hypnotic beauty (cf. Jer.13:23). The beast will balance all of the intimidating aspects of his character with his dazzling outward appearance (not only physical beauty, but also magnetic personality, charisma and presence), factors which will play no little part in antichrist's seduction of the majority of the world's inhabitants.

b. Characteristics of antichrist: Besides what can be gleaned from the symbolism just explored, there are numerous scriptures which directly describe antichrist's character and so reinforce and expand the picture given above. Several key passages will serve to illustrate the salient points:

Behold, he (i.e., antichrist) is swollen up [in arrogance]. What he desires in his heart is not right (but the righteous [person] will be preserved by his faith). If you think that wine deceives, [how much more will he!] [He is a] presumptuous man, and never at rest. He has enlarged his appetite [as wide] as the grave, and like death he is never satisfied.
Habakkuk 2:4-5

Among the characteristics of the beast evident here are his extreme arrogance (cf. Is.14:11-14; Dan.7:8; 7:11; 7:20; 7:25; 2Thes.2:4), the restlessness and unrestrained nature of his greed for personal advancement, acquisition, conquest and exploitation (cf. Is.14:8; Hab.2:17; Rev.6:7-8a; 11:18), and his exceptional deceitfulness (Dan.8:23-25; 11:21; 11:23; 11:27; Hab.2:2-20). Habakkuk, it is true, is initially focused on the historical Babylonians (cf. 1:5-11), but the prophetic use to which Babylon is put in foreshadowing the mystery Babylon to come, the contextual signal at the beginning of chapter two that we have now moved to a prophecy about the end times (Hab.2:3a: "For [this] vision [will take place at its] appointed time; it aspires to the *end* [i.e., the end times]"), and the fact that in Habakkuk 2:4 the "they" referring to the historical Babylonians shifts abruptly to "he", all point decisively to the application of these verses to antichrist (quite apart from the content of Hab.2:4-19).

I was considering these [ten] horns when, behold, another horn, a little one, came up among them. And three of the previous horns were rooted up from before it. And, behold, this horn had eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking presumptuous things (i.e., against God).
Daniel 7:8

As suggested here, an arrogant boastfulness directed blasphemously against God Himself is one of the more prominent features of antichrist's behavior (Rev.13:5-6; cf. Dan.7:11; 7:20; 7:25; Rev.13:1; 17:3). This excessive arrogance and boastfulness will certainly be in tune with the spirit of those times (cf. 1Tim.4:1-2; 2Tim.3:1-9; 2Pet.2:1-22; 3:3-7; Jude 1:3-16), but in antichrist's case the degree and horrendous nature of his blasphemies will be unprecedented, as this behavior will be part and parcel of the beasts' blasphemous assuming to himself of the mantle of divinity (Dan.11:36; 2Thes.2:4).

And there will arise in his place a [man of] contempt upon whom they will not bestow the honor of the kingship [in a normal fashion]; rather, he will come [to power] through seductive [methods], and will take control of his kingdom by means of duplicity.
Daniel 11:21

The Hebrew *niphal* participle, as in the case of *bazah* (בזה) above (translated "[man of] contempt"), may sometimes have a sense approaching that of a gerundive (explaining KJV's "vile person", NASB's "despicable person", and NIV's "contemptible person" as

translations for *nibhzeh*). But the *niphal* can also sometimes have a middle sense, meaning in this case not that antichrist will be despised or the object of contempt (sadly, the opposite will be true in the main), or even that from the divine point of view he will be worthy of nothing but despite and contempt (which is certainly true), but rather that the attitude of contempt for everything truly worthy of respect will be one of his most conspicuous characteristics.³⁴⁷ This designation is undoubtedly part of a deliberate contrasting of antichrist to the Christ, who is Himself described in Isaiah 53:3 by means of the exact same participle form as "despised" (the true passive sense being the one preferred in that context). While our Lord offered Himself up to a life of despite for our sakes, antichrist will actively and vehemently despise every aspect of God's mercy, caring only for himself. In the following verse, Daniel 11:22, antichrist is also called "the prince of the covenant", a reference which identifies him as the one who will make the tribulational treaty with Israel (Dan.9:25-27). Our Lord Jesus Christ is Himself the true "covenant" of life through whom Israel and all believing humanity have gained eternal life (Is.42:6; 49:8; cf. Matt.26:28; Lk.22:20; Heb.7:22; 8:6; 9:15; 12:24; 13:20). The beast, on the other hand, although he will present himself as the savior of Israel through this "covenant" will not only have contempt for God's true "holy covenant" (Dan.11:28; 11:30; 11:32), but will even show despite for this worldly instrument of his own making, abrogating it "in the middle of the week" (Dan.9:27). Inasmuch as antichrist will thus be one who "despises the covenant" (his own and God's), it is worthwhile to mention that in the Hebrew numbering system this phrase, "*nibzeh beriyth*" (ברית נבזה), which is itself a very close paronomasia upon Daniel 11:22's "*naghidh beriyth*", i.e., "the prince of the covenant" (נגיד ברית), adds up to 666.³⁴⁸

c. Gleanings from the Policies of antichrist: The second half of the last passage quoted, Daniel 11:21b, does much to reveal the essence of the antichrist's political methodology, and in that methodology we see something of his true character. The beast's every action will be characterized by treachery and seductiveness. That is to say, nothing he says can be counted upon to be true; nothing he promises will be reliable in any way; and everything he does and says and promises will be tailored for maximum enticement, uncovering, affirming and confirming the secret desires of those with whom he treats. Ultimately, like his father the devil (cf. Jn.8:44), antichrist will have no true regard for anyone or anything except himself (although he will possess the ability to "sell" his lies more effectively than anyone else in prior world history). The self-centered core that lies below the beast's treacherous and seductive nature can be seen from his destruction of mystery Babylon, without whose aid he never would have been able to come to power in the first place (Is.14:20), in his technique of hostage taking and population resettlement on a grand scale, despite the mass suffering these war crimes will cause (cf. Is.14:17), and in his cruel economic and social policies (discussed under the first four seal trends in part 2B of this series), policies which ultimately will benefit only himself and his most trusted few (Dan.11:39), but which will cause widespread deprivation, misery, and death.

In fact, the alteration in laws, customs, economic, religious and social structures which antichrist will initiate will be so outrageous and so hubristic – beyond anything yet seen in human history (Dan.11:24; 11:37) – that antichrist is characterized in scripture as the

"man of lawlessness" (2Thes.2:3; 2:8; 2:9; cf. 2Thes.2:7). This characteristic of the beast to have complete contempt for any sort of tradition or morality or value-structure, no matter how valid, is also evident from his classification by scripture as the "man of contempt" (covered immediately above: Dan.11:21), and from the prophecies that he will attempt to "change the times and laws", that is, barriers set up both by divine law and human tradition (appropriate to the "times") designed to forestall behavior which exceeds accepted and conventional norms (Dan.7:25; cf. Est.1:13; Dan.2:21). The beast will ride roughshod over cultural and national norms, ripping up the internal social fabric of countries and societies worldwide, in an internationalist leveling of standards written and unwritten into a system which he will attempt to impose for his own benefit without the slightest concern for the suffering, injustice, and confusion this will cause (Dan.11:36).

d. The Charisma of antichrist and his Empowerment by Satan: We have already discussed antichrist's empowerment by the devil in our discussion of his satanic paternity. The key passages on this point (Dan.8:24; Dan.11:39; 2Thess.2:3-10; Rev.13:1-18) show unequivocally that antichrist will owe the "success in everything he undertakes" (Dan.8:12; cf. Dan.11:36) directly to the power, support, and supernatural intervention of the devil:

And he (antichrist) will become exceptionally powerful – but not through his own power.
Daniel 8:24

He (antichrist) will treat with [conspiratorial] gatherings in the [preeminent] powers (i.e., nations of military and monetary strength; cf. Ezek.31:11; Jn.12:31; 2Cor.4:4) with the help of [his] foreign god (i.e., the devil) whom he will greatly honor, and he will put these [individuals] in charge of the majority [populations], and will also distribute territories [to them] as a reward.

Daniel 11:39

. . . [antichrist] whose appearance [will come about] through Satan's empowerment [and will be] accompanied by every [sort of] false miracle, both signs and portents, and by every [sort of] unrighteous deception [designed] for those who are perishing.
2nd Thessalonians 2:9-10a

And the dragon (i.e., Satan) gave to him (i.e., antichrist) his power and his throne and great authority.
Revelation 13:2b (cf. Rev.13:4; 13:14-15)

The public favor that antichrist will enjoy will come in part from his seductive methods, in part from the rewards he bestows on his most dedicated followers (Dan.11:39), and in part from his deeds which will impress the unbelieving world (especially his apparent resuscitation: cf. Rev.13:3-4). But there is no question that antichrist will also be a "larger than life" figure of exceptional charisma (Dan.7:20b; Rev.17:8; cf. 2Thes.2:10).

And one of the [beast's] heads [looked] as [if] it had been fatally smitten yet its mortal wound had been healed. And the entire earth *was in awe* of the beast. And they worshiped the dragon because *he had given his authority* to the beast. And *they worshiped the beast*, saying, "Who is like the beast? And who is able to make war with him?"

Revelation 13:3-4

The beast will exhibit a degree of personal magnetism not seen on earth since before the flood when "the sons of God" cohabited with human women to produce the Nephilim (Gen.6:1-4; 2Pet.2:4-5; Jude 1:6-7).³⁴⁹ It is entirely understandable, moreover, that antichrist's attractiveness will rival and even excel that of his Nephilim predecessors, inasmuch as he will be not be the progeny of just any rank and file demon, but the son of the original "covering cherub", Lucifer, who, before his fall into darkness, was the most glorious angel of light (Ezek.28:12-17; cf. Is.14:12; 2Cor.11:14).

Furthermore, rather than being a surprise, the abilities, magnetism, and successes of antichrist will seem to those who are weak in or totally ignorant of scripture to be solid credentials backing up his claim to be the true Messiah (in addition to the false signs and miracles performed by him and on his behalf: cf. Matt.24:24; 2Thes.2:9; Rev.13:14-15; 16:14; 19:20). Nor will the fact of his severe treatment of all who oppose him do anything but increase the world's admiration for him (compare the esteem that many cruel dictators of the past have won in the eyes of their followers, and the phenomenon that people tend to admire those who govern harshly: cf. 2Cor.11:20). So although the divine assessment of antichrist is scathingly condemnatory, that does not at all mean that he will be viewed in this negative way by the world, at least at first (or even at last in the eyes of his staunchest supporters). For, if it were possible, "even the elect" would be deceived by him, so powerful will be his charm and so effective his deceptions (Matt.24:24). Just as the evil kings of Israel's northern kingdom are painted clearly in scripture for what they were in God's righteous estimation, yet they did most likely enjoy support from the population (as is evidenced by the ten tribes' complicity in their idolatrous ways), so also is it likely to be in the case of antichrist. But despite the accolades he will win from the world, believers need to keep our Lord's opinion in mind at all times: antichrist is "one . . .who plans evil against the Lord and counsels destruction (*beliya'al*)" (Nah.1:11).

3. The Rise of Antichrist: Inasmuch as Daniel chapter eleven is our most detailed source for the military and political events of the Tribulation's first half and covers those events in a roughly chronological sequence, we will rely upon it heavily for the remainder of this study.³⁵⁰ Chapter eleven details, among other things, the specifics of antichrist's rise to power within his native land, his subsequent seizure of the revived Roman empire, his conquest of the southern alliance, his oppression of Israel, and many of his methods of control. It should therefore be pointed out here that both the main purpose of that chapter and the bulk of its content are focused upon antichrist.

It is often overlooked among exegetes of this critical chapter that Daniel chapter ten, the "set-up" for and introduction to chapter eleven, directs the reader's attention regarding the application of that prophetic chapter directly to the end times from the very start:

In the third year of Cyrus, king of Persia, a prophecy (i.e., chapter eleven) was unveiled to Daniel who had the name "Belteshazzar". And the prophecy was true, and [it concerned] "[*the*] *Great Conflict*" (or "War"; i.e., the Tribulation itself; cf. Matt.24:7; Rev.12:7; 19:11-21). And he understood this prophecy, for its interpretation came to him in a vision.

Daniel 10:1

"For I have come to give you insight into what will happen to your people *at the end of days*. For [this] vision [pertains to] those days of the [distant] future."

Daniel 10:14

Taking these passages in reverse order, as we saw above in our treatment of Jacob's prophecy in Genesis chapter 49, "end of days" in the second passage above is a prophetic expression which invariably refers to the end times (just as the angel's statement in the final sentence above shows for this context as well). That is to say, what we have here is a reference not just to the future, but to the *eschatological* future (i.e., to the final phase of human history which begins with the Tribulation: Is.2:2; Jer.30:24; 48:47; 49:39; Ezek.38:16; Hosea 3:5; Micah 4:1; cf. Dan.8:19 "end of wrath", and Ezek.38.8 "end of years").³⁵¹

The phrase "the Great Conflict" (or "War") in the first passage quoted above (Hebrew: *tsabh`a ghadhol*, צבא גדול) does not, of course, refer to either World War, but to the Tribulation itself, the greatest period of military conflict in world history (both human and angelic), when the two greatest coalitions of all time will do battle during the Tribulation as the great "nation-kingdom" of antichrist's dual-empire (Babylon ruling over revived Rome) clashes with the "nation" and "kingdom" of the massive southern alliance (Matt.24:7), during the course of which Satan and his angels will be cast to earth after their "war" with Michael and his angels (Rev.12:7), and at the end of which antichrist and his armies will be annihilated by our returning Lord Jesus Christ (Rev.19:11-21). So while the first half of chapter eleven does deal with Alexander's conquests and the subsequent campaigns of the Seleucid kings (vv.2-20), all relatively near-term events from Daniel's perspective when compared to the still future Tribulation, it is clear that the main thrust and purpose of the prophecy is to explain the even now yet to come reign of antichrist. The purpose of this long prologue is primarily to bring the time-line down to Antiochus Epiphanes, the most egregious of these Seleucid kings and, as we have seen above, the most important representative type of antichrist. Many interpreters, failing to appreciate the typology in play here, have argued for the postponement of this chapter's application to antichrist until verse thirty-six.³⁵² But even these commentators generally acknowledge that by verse thirty-six antichrist is indeed already being described, and that the same "king" is clearly in view in both sections of the chapter. Limiting verses twenty-one through thirty-five to Antiochus Epiphanes and failing to see their dual application to antichrist as well is an

unnecessary and unfortunate mistake. Quite apart from the content of verses twenty-one to thirty-five which point definitively to antichrist in his own right (he is, after all, the "prince of the covenant"; cf. the discussion of Daniel 11:21 in section II.2.b above), the flow of the narrative clearly binds these two putatively "independent" sections into one contiguous whole. It will thus be helpful at this point to give in outline form a synopsis of the second half of Daniel chapter 11 before we proceed:

- verse 21: Synopsis of the beast's career part 1: His rise to power and his methodology in seizing control of mystery Babylon.
- verse 22: Synopsis of the beast's career part 2: Mobilization for and destruction at Armageddon. Identification of antichrist as the prophesied "prince of the covenant".
- verse 23: Return to the chronological order by reprising antichrist's methods in gaining control of mystery Babylon.³⁵³
- verse 24: Seizure of the seven kingdoms (revived Rome); consolidation of power and preparations for attacking the southern alliance.
- verses 25-28: The first campaign against the three kingdoms (the southern alliance).
- verses 29-30a: The second campaign against the south.
- verses 30b-35: The attempted assassination of antichrist, his putative resuscitation, and his resultant persecution of Israel.
- verses 36-39: The reign of antichrist during the Great Tribulation.
- verses 40-43: Reprise of antichrist's victory over the southern alliance during the Tribulation's first half giving a more detailed account of the second campaign.³⁵⁴
- verse 44: The departure of antichrist from Israel to secure his kingdom following the fifth bowl judgment.
- verse 45: The defeat of antichrist at Armageddon.

We have already covered the phrase "man of contempt", as well as the typology which connects the beast to one of his most important historical types, Antiochus Epiphanes, the putative subject of Daniel 11:21-35. What primarily concerns us in this first section of our study (Dan.11:21-23) is antichrist's initial rise to power in his home country:

(21) And there will arise in his place a [man of] contempt upon whom they will not bestow the honor of the kingship (i.e., he will not come to power in a legal, conventional way). Rather, he will come [to power] through seductive [methods], and will take control of his kingdom (i.e., mystery Babylon) by means of duplicity. (22) Now it is from him that the flood waters (i.e., armies: Dan.9:26; 11:40; cf. Is.8:7-8; 28:15-22; Nah.1:8; Rev.12:15) will pour forth and be shattered (i.e., at Armageddon), for he is even "the prince of the covenant" (i.e., the author of the pseudo-Messianic peace treaty with Israel: Dan.9:27). (23) After men have leagued themselves to him, he will set his conspiracy in motion and will grow [in power] and become [very] strong, even though his faction is small.

Daniel 11:21-23

Although the beast will first come to rule mystery Babylon (the nation, in the typology here, that parallels Antiochus' kingdom), the way in which he comes to power will be at odds with the normal manner of succession. Given the Byzantine machinations and conspiracies that governed successions in the kingdoms of the Diadochi generally, this is quite a statement. Moreover, these verses spell out that antichrist's seizure of power will be

1) "through seductive methods" (Hebrew *beshalvah*, בשלוה, a phrase which focuses on antichrist's methods and specifically his ability to put all potential opponents at ease and off-guard with the unexpectedness of his actions; cf. *basheliy* in 2Sam.3:27),

2) "by means of duplicity" (Hebrew *bachalaqlaqoth*, בהלקלקות, a phrase which brings out the slipperiness and deceptiveness of all of antichrist's pronouncements, and especially his flattery of every audience and segment of society, designed to disarm one and all for his own evil purposes; cf. Dan.11:34), and

3) by setting in motion "a conspiracy" (Hebrew *mirmah*, מרמה, a word which emphasizes the treachery involved in his coup, undertaken in concert with a band of followers who have "leagued themselves to him", cf. 2Kng.9:23).

These statements make it clear that the beast's accession to power will come via some sort of coup d'état, or, at the very least, in a manner far outside the norm for his native country of mystery Babylon.³⁵⁵ For believers who are carefully observing the signs of the times, the non-traditional, conspiratorial, and illegal manner in which the beast initially gains power will be a clear indication that he is, in fact, the antichrist.

Evident in the passage above is a seizure of power not unlike many such which have occurred in the past, the Bolshevik and Nazi seizures of power providing two particularly instructive parallels. A small group of dedicated and highly organized conspirators clustered around a charismatic leader prepared to use any and all means of deception and propaganda in order to seize power at an opportune moment is a scenario particularly familiar to students of twentieth century history.

a. The Leader: In the descriptions of antichrist treated above we should note that many of the details we are given portray the beast as he truly is rather than as he will appear to the world. This dichotomy will be especially pronounced during the period of antichrist's rise to power, before he abandons all restraint at the outset of the Great Tribulation (i.e., it is "then" that antichrist will "do [exactly] as he pleases": Dan.11:36). What this means is that although the beast will in fact be "stern of face" and "well-versed in deception" (to use the description given in Dan.8:23 as an example), this is not at all the way he will appear to the world. The negative realities of his character and evil nature of his purpose will be hidden under a guise of "sweetness and light" to a degree not yet witnessed, and it will take a high level of spiritual discernment in company with a solid depth of biblical knowledge to see through his facade. One aspect of the beast's public persona which should not be underestimated in the process of his introduction to the world and rise to prominence is his messianic claim. He is, after all, the anti-*Christ*

(cf. Dan.8:11). Jesus was quite young (barely 30) when He began His public ministry, and in keeping with his pattern of "breaking the traditional mold" on the one hand and of imitating Christ on the other, we may expect antichrist to be, if anything, even younger. A millennial birthday, while void of any true significance, would certainly be an asset in the devil's offering of his substitute Messiah as a true prodigy (and such a birth date would also conform well to the 2026 projection for the Tribulation's commencement).³⁵⁶

So we may posit in the early days of the Tribulation (or perhaps even before it begins) the appearance of an extremely charismatic young man who at least hints at being Jesus Christ (and later proclaims it). We may well imagine that through an outwardly simple and ascetic lifestyle, a show of celibacy, and even an appearance that approximates what the world expects when they imagine "what Jesus would look like" the beast will easily draw many into his charade. The working of satanically empowered "miracles" will contribute greatly to this process of deception (2Thes.2:9-12). Apart from the fact that our Lord has told us in no uncertain terms *not* to look for Him to return in this way which approximates His first advent (for about His second advent there will be absolutely no doubt: Matt.24:23-31; Mk.13:21-26; cf. Lk.21:8-9), hidden within all of the beast's words there will be indications clear enough to those who know their God that he is not truly the Messiah. For everything antichrist says will be directed towards impressing the masses and gaining a personal following, that is to say, towards currying favor rather than teaching the truth (and this will be true no matter how fine sounding and deep the platitudes he spouts may be).

Thus antichrist will be the ultimate "wolf in sheep's clothing" (Matt.7:15; cf. Rev.13:11ff.), effectively presenting himself as gentle and mild on the outside, but being in truth a ravenous son of Satan on the inside. Just as the devil, the quondam "light bearer", threw away that prestigious position now occupied by the true Morning Star (compare Is.14:12 with 2Pet.1:19; Rev.2:28; 22:16), and yet still represents himself as a "messenger of light" (2Cor.11:14-15), so also we may expect antichrist to burst upon the scene as a bright and shining light in the eyes of the unbelieving world, though in reality all within is deep darkness. We may also expect his approach to be syncretic as he makes himself all things to all people in order to ensnare as many as possible: to those looking for a religious solution, he will seem the true Messiah; to those looking for a political answer to the world's problems, the Great Leader; and to those enchanted with the scientific and supernatural, it is not beyond the pale of speculation to assume that antichrist may well allow himself to be understood as some genetically engineered superman, or an extra-terrestrial sent from afar to heal all the wounds of this troubled world. So astounding and impressive will he and the impression he creates be, that even in the initial stages of his rise to prominence there will doubtless be many who will exclaim, "this is the One, this is the Christ!".

Two other points can be made about the initial rise of the beast as a "great leader" based upon 1st John 2:18-22. In that passage we find John using the analogy of antichrist to warn his readers about the dangers of all false teachers and counterfeit "Christian" leaders. These men are said in verse 19 to have "gone out from us", indicating that those

most dangerous to the Church of that day were unbelievers and apostates who had built up some credentials as "Christian leaders" before overtly breaking with the faith. We may draw from this the corollary conclusion that the beast himself will very possibly begin his career as an erstwhile "minister" of the church visible. Secondly, John's observation in verse 18 that there are "many antichrists" has a particular significance for the early days of the Tribulation. The removal of Holy Spirit restraint (discussed in part 2B) will allow these lesser "antichrists" to gain more prominence and larger followings than is presently the case. Far from creating competition problems for the actual beast, these other false Messiahs will serve to provide cover for antichrist in the early days of his rise. We may expect these pseudo-antichrists to be much more obviously false and to be operating much more transparently out of selfish motivation, so that not only will these more obvious frauds seem more credible candidates for the role of "antichrist" (thus offering a measure of protection for the real antichrist from any such scrutiny or identification), but they will also make it seem very unlikely that the beast could possibly be the genuine antichrist when his activities are compared to their own much more clearly evil and satanic behavior.

Finally, while we perhaps do not know all we would like to know about the early rise of antichrist, everything we do know suggests that his appearance, manner, presentation, and personal charisma will be persuasive in the extreme. Since his motivations are entirely evil and his moral character non-existent, it is more than likely the case that he will very effectively espouse political positions and social causes with which many of us will be highly sympathetic (though he will have no intention of actually following through on any of his promises or of ever being held accountable for his lies). It will thus be more important than ever before for believers of the tribulational period to stay aloof from politics of every sort. The events prophesied will take place regardless of our actions. Our duty is to the Lord, and our primary responsibility in regard to the political situation of the Tribulation will be to avoid becoming ensnared by the beast's movement, a task that will prove far more difficult than we may now imagine, and one that may be next to impossible for all those who mistakenly choose to fight antichrist with political rather than spiritual weapons. Nothing could be more dangerous to our spiritual welfare than to suppose that believing in antichrist or following him will be difficult things for believers to do, or that attempting to oppose him militarily will be either possible or godly. On the contrary, under the enormous pressures of that time it will be all too easy to be swept into antichrist's powerful vortex. The difficult thing will be to persevere in our commitment to Jesus Christ despite everything we see with our eyes, leaving the politics to Him and concentrating on the spiritual realities that are truly important.

b. The Movement: As we have suggested earlier, though the opposite is certainly possible, there are some indications that the Tribulation may perhaps be preceded by a period of considerable peace and prosperity, a situation which will rapidly and radically change as soon as the seventh seal is opened. In our discussion of the second seal trend and its symbol, the rider on the red horse (see part 2B), we also saw that the Tribulation will be a time of unprecedented civil discord, civil strife, and social upheaval, with the breakdown of law and order progressing at an alarming rate worldwide. This contrast,

along with the trend towards acceleration of crime, revolution, and general societal disintegration, will make the world in general very receptive to a leader and a movement that promise decisive action and deliverance from these new and mounting terrors. For Babylon, the world's commercial capital, worldwide instability will add an additional dimension of concern as business interests overseas are threatened by revolutions and dictatorships (cf. in particular the rise of the southern alliance discussed below), at the same time that the exceptional economic well-being of her citizens is being seriously degraded.

The advent of an individual who approximates Christ in his mannerisms and gives promise of miraculous abilities would attract attention under any circumstances. In the crisis occasioned by the onset of the Tribulation, we can expect antichrist to receive an all the more enthusiastic hearing. To rise to political power, however, will require the building of a movement, and such organizations must of necessity possess at least the semblance of a platform. Since he will have no intention of implementing any of the promises he may make (and no expectation of ever being called to account for this failure), any resemblance between his actual policies and his pre-ascension to power pronouncements will be purely coincidental. Remembering that antichrist's initial base of power will be religious, it is probable that his movement will also be more religious than political in appearance (albeit, in reality, with definite political ambitions). Thus we can expect the beast's policy manifestoes to be even more general than those to which citizens of contemporary democracies are now accustomed. As "the great religious leader", and, at least to his inner circle, "the true Messiah", those who throw in their lot with him will be expected to "trust him" to solve every problem *after* he is in power. With few specific policy proposals to attack, antichrist will cleverly and deceitfully craft an agenda designed to alienate as few as possible, and at the same time allow the majority to project their wildest dreams into his poetically ambiguous words. As a master of deception (Dan.8:23-25; 11:21; 11:27; 2Thes.2:9-12; cf. Rev.19:20), it is likely that the beast will fashion a public relations strategy which seeks to appeal to and to coopt the extremes of both right and left, while embracing the middle as well:

- in terms of social policy, promising to repress growing instability and crime, yet adopting a live and let live attitude towards all other behavior (no matter how degenerate).
- in terms of economic policy, promising to end the growing crisis, while at the same time relieving debt and creating economic equality (without regard to property rights).
- in terms of foreign policy, promising security at home through actively improving the world abroad (a top-down, one-world approach, self-righteously justified).

That is to say, antichrist's movement will embrace contradictory policy directions which seem at one and the same time puritanical and libertine (in social policy), capitalistic and communistic (in economic policy), and isolationist and interventionist (in foreign policy). In truth, of course, he will "do as he pleases" as soon as his worldwide power-

base is secure. In addition to the pressure of crisis, the lack of specifics in the beast's program will do much to allay legitimate fears. Since his movement will be first and foremost a "religious" one which has turned to political solutions "for the good of all", this withholding of specifics will seem the more reasonable, and be more readily tolerated than would be the case for a more traditional party. Adherents will be expected to put their faith in this exceptionally "good and gifted" man, trusting him to bring divine power and supernatural solutions to bear on the urgent problems of the day, trusting him to somehow bring in a new millennium of peace, prosperity, security and harmony around the globe, one, that is of such blessing in every regard that every segment of society will benefit – everyone will win, and no one will lose. The attractiveness of this vision, the pressing nature of the emergency, the removal of Holy Spirit restraint, and the seemingly exceptional (though in reality egregious) nature of antichrist will all be factors which contribute to the success and popularity of his movement.

An important point to understand in the context of antichrist's religious-political movement is the role its rise will play in the Great Apostasy (and, conversely, the role that the Great Apostasy will play in it): the defection of many lukewarm Christians around the world from allegiance to the true Messiah will be intimately connected with their conversion into followers of the pseudo-Messiah, antichrist. In the previous installment of this series, we saw that the unique conditions of the Tribulation, namely, the removal of Holy Spirit restraint, the concomitant outbreak of the mystery of lawlessness, the dearth of solid Bible teaching, and the plentifulness of persuasive false teaching will all contribute to the rise of antichrist's religious movement.³⁵⁷ After all, before the lies of the beast can be effective, truth must first be rejected, and it is this rejection of the truth of the Word of God that is at the core of the apostasy that will be so closely interwoven with antichrist's success:

To whom can I speak and give warning? Who will listen to me? Their ears are closed so they cannot hear. The word of the Lord is offensive to them; they find no pleasure in it. Jeremiah 6:10 NIV

This religious movement, the base from which antichrist's political offensive will be launched, will be an ecumenical one that gradually coopts and subsumes most if not all of what today might be called "organized Christianity", culminating at the Tribulation's mid-point when the beast and his false prophet will throw off all semblance of deceit, unveiling the movement for what it truly is, the outright worship of Satan and his anointed antichrist (2Thes.2:4; Rev.13:1-18; cf. Dan.11:36-39). When antichrist is thus finally "revealed", it will be far too late for those who have already accepted him as the true Messiah. In terms of the building up of his movement, however, we may expect this acceptance, allegiance, and "faith" to be more of a process than an overnight conversion, one which gathers strength and momentum with every political and military success (just as the Great Apostasy will only reach its peak under the pressures of the Great Persecution: Matt.24:8-28).

In policy terms, the vague, pseudo-religious promises of antichrist will provide much of interest to nominal and lukewarm Christians on both ends of the political spectrum. For those on the left, the beast's preaching of "economic justice", a "live and let live" morality, and a pro-active internationalism for "the good of all mankind" will have much to recommend it. For those of the right, his promise of "millennial" economic prosperity and limitless opportunity, his pledge to end crime and social upheaval, and his commitment to a forceful elimination of external threats under the guise of the "conquering Messiah" will prove hard to resist. In short, a golden age under the reign of this great messianic leader will seem a "deal too good to pass up" for all concerned. Christian skeptics who understand that all of these dreamy prospects are essentially secular and material rather than spiritual will find themselves increasingly on the outside.

The three-fold combination of the most effective satanic propaganda, the most intense pressure, and the least spiritually prepared Christian population in history will greatly contribute to antichrist's success and to the process of apostasy. It is therefore understandable that Babylon, the place of the greatest Christian community (in terms of numbers, influence, and, historically, in terms of effectiveness), will also be the place of greatest apostasy. Indeed, as the home country of antichrist, Babylon will be the place where the Great Apostasy originates, and the nation which will see the most numerous and most dramatic defections from Jesus Christ. Given its influence in the Christian world, there could really be no better place for the devil and for his antichrist from which to launch the last great assault on faith.

One thing of which we may be sure in regard to the beast's politico-religious movement is that, while it may be purposely vague in specifics (beyond the need to "just trust" the new "Messiah"), it will certainly not be lacking in excitement or in entertainment. To the world of that time, desperate for solutions, eager for distractions, and open to seduction, the promises, the thrill, the confidence, the electricity of a mass movement more appealing and led by an individual more charismatic than anything previously seen will be difficult to resist (and few will try). This seemingly righteous yet self-righteous movement will give direction and provide justification to all sorts of evils and hidden desires, even as it grants absolution for them through the safety which is often to be found in numbers and in popular causes. The promises of antichrist's movement will prove a heady wine that will easily inebriate many of the inhabitants of Babylon, dissolving their fears and stimulating their lusts (as wine is wont to do), and thereby providing a substantial base for the beast from which to launch his coup d'état and gain control of Babylon (cf. Hab.2:4-5).

c. The Party: Daniel 8:9 tells us that antichrist will "start small" and yet quickly become the most powerful of the tribulational leaders (i.e., he will come virtually "out of nowhere" and become more prominent than any of the "ten horns"; cf. Dan.7:20). Therefore we may safely posit the rapid development in the early days of the Tribulation of a mass movement coalescing around this previously unknown charismatic leader, and propelling him into power almost overnight. However, it is important to distinguish between antichrist's overall following on the one hand (i.e., all those who, while they do

become involved in his mass movement, yet possess widely divergent degrees of commitment to and understanding of his true aims), and his committed followers on the other (deemed here his "party"). Daniel 11:23b states that the beast's rise to power will be accomplished by means of only a small group (*me'ath goy*). We should not take this to be a reference to the numbers who flock to his banner at that time, but rather to the small cabal who are truly privy to his intentions:

After men have leagued themselves to him (i.e., antichrist's inner circle), he will set his conspiracy in motion and will grow [in power] and become [very] strong, even though his faction (i.e., his "party") is small.

Daniel 11:23

Because of the rapidity of his rise, seizing power in Babylon, gaining control of revived Rome, and defeating the only other major power-block in the world, the southern alliance – all within the Tribulation's first three and one half years – it is virtually certain that antichrist will begin to collect a sizeable mass following right from the Tribulation's inception. We can expect his actual "party", however, to be quite small in comparison to the wave of supporters who sweep him into control of Babylon. It is also likely, as indicated in the quote above (and paralleled by totalitarian movements of the past), that within this "party" itself there will be an inner core consisting of antichrist's most trusted confidants (i.e., those who initially "league" themselves to him even before his meteoric tribulational rise begins). Within this inner circle of leadership (containing the likes of the false prophet of Revelation chapter 13), it is probable that there will be no illusions about the beast's true nature and intentions, and that this cadre will most likely be engaged in organization and planning with antichrist even before the Tribulation commences. For the beast will no doubt be in the process of collecting and forming a group of "disciples" long before the Tribulation begins and his true nature is revealed. It stands to reason that this inner following would be privy to his true origin and plans, and be in full complicity thereto, as opposed to those who are later "amazed" and join the mass rush to his band wagon which will ensue in no small measure as a result of the "signs and miracles" he will later perform (cf. 2Thes.2:7-9).

The supernatural element of antichrist's appeal and the "evidence" it seems to provide (to unbelievers) that he "is the Messiah" also supports what we have suggested before about the beast's movement, namely that it will initially be a religious movement behaving like a political one. For this reason we may likewise expect many members of the original "party" that is built upon his inner cadre of supporters to be religious figures and adherents for whom the line between religion and politics has been blurred through the acceptance of the person of the pseudo-Messiah, antichrist. The promise of tangible rewards when once the beast "comes into his kingdom" (Dan.11:24; 11:39; cf. Dan.11:28) will also have a powerful effect in motivating his followers at every level, and it should not be lost on believers that all the benefits and blessings promised by this ecumenical movement of the false Messiah will be material in nature, focused entirely on this world, and bereft of any true spiritual dimension whatsoever. The most important thing for Christians to remember when considering these matters before the time is that this exciting new personality will not be the true "embodiment and fulfillment of

Christianity" as he will claim to be, and not even the fact that institutional Christianity will flock to him can make him so. He will not, in fact, be the true Messiah at all, but only a very cleverly constructed counterfeit, and of that we have been warned ahead of time by our Lord Himself, the one and only Christ:

"At that time if anyone says to you 'Look! Here is the Christ!' or 'There He is!', don't believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will perform great miracles and wonders [sufficient] to deceive even the elect, if [that were] possible. Look, I have told you [this] ahead of time."

Matthew 24:23-25

d. The Crusade: The religious focus of the beast's movement mentioned above will serve to make his rise to power more like a crusade than a political campaign. This will be true both in terms of internal and external policies. We have already suggested that antichrist's social, economic, and foreign policy platform will make attractive and seductive promises of progress (which, of course, he has no intention of keeping once in power). But we may expect an even larger part of his and his party's appeal to lie in threats he promises to remove. While no one can foresee the precise condition of the world at that future time, the fact is that, after antichrist's rise to power in Babylon and his subsequent gaining of control of revived Rome, the remaining portion of the Tribulation's first half will be consumed by his two massive military campaigns against the world's only significant remaining power block, the southern alliance (Dan.11:25-30; 11:40-43). It takes no great leap to surmise that the growth of antichrist's influence both in Babylon and in revived Rome will be at least in part because of the perception that he is the only potential leader capable of and willing to confront the growing threat to the west from this quarter of the world.

Perhaps the one thing that might be capable of propelling a strong-man into power in this country and in Europe would be the development of a unified anti-western Islamic world under the control of a messianic figure bent on world conquest. Such a development would be all the more terrifying and compelling if it were to manifest itself in escalating terrorism in addition to more traditional aggression. Daniel chapter 11 and the other passages which touch upon this issue do not give us many specifics about this "king of the south", but the need for two considerable campaigns to subdue him, and the indications that his alliance encompasses the bulk of the biblical "south" (i.e., a large kingdom with a center of gravity in the Middle East, Africa, and probably parts of Central Asia) are enough to suggest that his power will be extensive. It is also worth speculating that this individual may well be seen by his followers to be the coming Islamic "Messiah", the Mahdi. In such a political environment, with the west besieged by a unified Islamic alliance bent upon conquest, it is easy to see how the nominally Christian world might take this foreign leader to be "the antichrist". And once the leader of the southern alliance is accepted as "antichrist", the claim of the real antichrist to be the Messiah will seem to ring all that much more true to those who trust their eyes more than the Word of God. Whatever the particulars of the political events of those days, from the prophecies about the southern alliance we may safely posit a gathering threat

from abroad manifesting itself internally in Babylon in any manner of terrifying ways. Nor should we underestimate the intensity of the pressures of those days as lawlessness reigns in the absence of Holy Spirit restraint.³⁵⁸ Thus it would be strange indeed if antichrist were not to make maximum use of such a threat to build his following. Seen in this way, antichrist's rise takes on the aura of a crusade which must first unify Babylon and the west before waging war against the Islamic "antichrist" in behalf of "Christendom". Casting himself in the role of the conquering Messiah, the putative defender of Israel (see section IV below), and the deliverer of the "Christian" west, will do much to establish antichrist's bona fides in the eyes of marginal and nominal Christians everywhere. For those who truly know their God, however, it will be understood that, for antichrist, world domination is only a means to an end: he does the devil's will, and it is on the top of Satan's agenda to remove from the earth all who believe and all who are of Jewish ancestry – *especially* believing Jews. This is the main point of his true platform and it will be the reason and impetus for Armageddon (see part 5).

e. The Seizure of Power: Scripture does not specify any particular "triggering event" that leads to antichrist's ascension to power. Just as the devil originally seized temporary control of the world through what amounts to a "coup", then, after God's reconstruction of earth, again regained a measure of rulership over this planet through his temptation of our first parents,³⁵⁹ so the beast will likewise make use of conspiratorial methods in his initial seizure of power:

(23) And at the end of their kingdom (i.e., during the Tribulation), when rebels are being confirmed [in their apostasy], there will arise a stern-faced king (i.e., antichrist), well-versed in deception. (24) And he will become exceptionally powerful – but not through his own power. And he will be astoundingly successful in his corrupting [activities]. And he will even undertake to corrupt the mighty men (i.e., believers) and [a part of] the holy people (i.e., Israel). (25) And on account of his cunning, [his] conspiracy will prosper under his direction. And he will [greatly] magnify himself in his own thinking, and by his seductive ways he will corrupt many. He will even take his stand against the Prince of princes, and will be shattered apart from human agency.

Daniel 8:23-25

And there will arise in his place a [man of] contempt upon whom they will not bestow the honor of the kingship (i.e., he will not come to power in a legal, conventional way). Rather, he will come [to power] through seductive [methods], and will take control of his kingdom (i.e., mystery Babylon) by means of duplicity.

Daniel 11:21

It is not impossible that this seizure of power will follow hard on the heels of some particular event that affords a prime opportunity for action, but this will not necessarily be the case. Once his forces are adequate and public opinion sufficiently primed it is likely that antichrist will waste no further time in grabbing the reins of power in Babylon, and everything we have learned about him suggests that he will do so at the earliest possible moment. The one theme that the scriptures above press home

emphatically is the deceptiveness of his actual assumption of power. Therefore, whatever the specific means he will use, and whatever the specific opportunity he will employ, we can be sure that his actions will be deceitful, illegal, and arrogant in the extreme, characteristics that should assure even those only superficially conversant with the scriptures that the one with whom they have to do is certainly not the true Messiah. However, the terrible and terrifying times, the horrendous threats to security both foreign and domestic, the explosion of the "mystery of lawlessness" and unprecedented "empowerment of error" (phenomena studied in the previous installment of this series; 2Thes.2:3-12; cf. Dan.8:23), and the absence of the palliating influence of the Spirit's restraining ministry will all contribute to the receptiveness of many members of that future generation in Babylon both to the idea of antichrist as the Messiah and to their acceptance of his coup d'état as their one hope of deliverance. Finally it is fair to ask why, with all these factors in his favor, antichrist will have to resort to such means instead of assuming power in a more traditional way. The answer to this question, aside from the fact that he will have no concern whatsoever about even the appearance of legitimacy, is the astounding rapidity (and complete lack of patience) with which he will implement all his plans, and it is precisely this rapidity which will necessitate a coup, both from the standpoint of his unwillingness to wait, and on account of the suspicion and resistance that the very "leopard-like" swiftness of his rise to prominence in Babylon will generate among all those who have not yet been fully convinced (cf. Rev.13:2).

III. The Kingdom of the Beast

Following his seizure of power in Babylon, antichrist will move swiftly to gain control over the seven major nations of the European part of the former Roman empire. Together, Babylon and this subordinate empire of revived Rome will compose the kingdom of the beast in its initial and essential form (i.e., before its expansion through antichrist's conquest of the other major power-block in the world of that time, the "southern alliance" composing the further three kingdoms):

And through [the same] seductive [methods] he will enter the strongest provinces (i.e., the seven nations) of the empire (i.e., Revived Rome), and will do what neither his fathers nor their fathers have done. He will distribute plunder, spoils and riches to his [followers] and will afterwards plot against the [remaining] powers (i.e., the three sub-coalitions of the southern alliance), but [will wait] for an opportune time.

Daniel 11:24

We find the same essential picture in Ezekiel, where antichrist's kingdom is similarly portrayed as a single country ruling a subordinate empire composed of multiple parts:

"Son of man, set your face against Gog of the land of Magog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubhal, and prophesy against him."
Ezekiel 38:2

Gog, as was pointed out in section II above, is a prophetic name for antichrist, while Magog refers to his home country, Babylon, a "super-nation" which holds sway over a larger, composite empire (a.k.a., "revived Rome"). In the passage directly above, the revived Roman empire is designated by the two Japhetic nations "Meshech and Tubhal". The use of Meshech and Tubhal to describe revived Rome (especially its seven European kingdoms) is particularly appropriate, since these two tribes are often associated with one another not only in scripture but also in ancient secular history (cf. Gen.10:2; 1Chron.1:5; Is.66:19; Ezek.27:13; 32:26; 39:1).³⁶⁰ In an identical way to the description above, the European part of revived Rome will also be composed of multiple, territorially contiguous states which while often associated in general terms, are yet each unique and distinct.

This central characteristic of Babylon's subordinate empire, that is, being both unified in one sense and yet at the same time clearly composed of disparate parts, is also emphasized in Daniels vision of the great statue. In that vision, however, not only are there distinct parts (i.e., "feet" and "toes"), but even within the composition of its essential material we see a further schism:

(39) And after you (Nebuchadnezzar) another kingdom will arise inferior to you, then a third kingdom after that, one of bronze which will rule the whole earth. (40) Then there will be a fourth kingdom (i.e., revived Rome), strong as iron inasmuch as iron crushes and shatters everything. And like iron which smashes [everything], [this fourth kingdom] will crush and smash all of these other [kingdoms]. (41) And in that you saw that its feet and toes were part potter's clay and part iron, it will be a divided kingdom; but in that you saw iron joined to common clay, it will possess some of the strength of iron. (42) And as to the toes of its feet [being] part iron and part clay, the first (lit., "end") part of the kingdom (i.e., the seven kingdoms) will be strong, but [the other] part of it (i.e., the three kingdoms) will be brittle. (43) And in that you saw iron joined to common clay, there will be an attempt to join these [ten sub-kingdoms] together in the seed of man (i.e., through a mixing of their populations), but they will not bond one to another, just as iron cannot be joined to clay.

Daniel 2:39-43

In this passage too we see the beast's kingdom overall represented as bipartite, for there are two legs of "iron" upon which it stands (i.e., Babylon and revived Rome). And as was the case with "Meshech and Tubhal" in Ezekiel 38:2 above, we also see here a second bifurcation that is itself composed of multiple parts: there are two "feet", representing the dual nature of the revived Roman empire over which Babylon rules. Moreover, in Daniel's careful and repetitive representation of the feet and toes as "partly iron and partly clay" these two elements are being represented as visibly distinguishable and distinct rather than intermingled. That is to say, they are seen as fused one to another rather than confused altogether, layered rather than rendered homogeneous. Therefore

we may understand that some of the toes are made of iron, and some of clay, with the clay and iron radiating up into the feet in separate and discernible strata (like Zebra stripes), and with the iron toes representing the seven nations of European Rome, while the clay toes represent the three nations of the southern alliance, the former group being "strong", and the latter "brittle".

1. The Ten Horns of the Beast: The ten toes in Daniel's vision of the great statue, consisting partly of iron and partly of clay, present a clear parallel to the ten horns of the fearsome beast seen in Daniel chapter seven and Revelation chapters thirteen and seventeen. Both are symbolic of the ten nations of the revived Roman empire when seen in its final, united form (after the collapse of the three southern nations).

After this, I was watching in the vision of the night and, behold, a fourth beast (i.e., Rome/revived Rome), terrible and fearsome and exceedingly powerful. And it had huge iron teeth. It devoured [all the others], crushing [them] to bits and trampling under foot whatever was left. Now this beast was different from those which preceded it, and *it had ten horns*.

Daniel 7:7

This twofold nature of new Rome seen in Ezekiel's reference to "Meshech *and* Tubhal" and in Daniel's implicit differentiation between the toes of iron and clay is also to be found in the other descriptions of the ten horns of the beast.

Then I wished to know the details about the fourth beast (i.e., Rome/revived Rome) which was different from all the others. It had iron teeth which were exceedingly terrible, and claws made of bronze. It devoured [all the others], crushing [them] to bits and trampling under foot whatever was left. And [I also desired to know the details] about *the ten horns* on its head, and the other one (i.e., antichrist) which came up later, and before which *three of the former ones* fell (i.e., the southern alliance)

Daniel 7:19-20a

And as to *the ten horns*, from that kingdom (i.e., Rome, the fourth beast) *ten kings* will arise, and another one (i.e., antichrist) will arise after them. And he will be different from the former ones, and he will cast down *three kingdoms*.

Daniel 7:24

The passage immediately above also makes clear the bipartite nature of revived Rome (i.e., the ten kingdoms which "*will arise*" later and will come "*from that kingdom*" of historical Rome). For the ten horns are divided into the explicitly named block of *three*, overtly conquered by antichrist, and a further block which we are meant to understand as composed of the other *seven*. While Daniel 7:24 establishes that the three non-European members of the ten kingdom block that constitutes antichrist's empire are going to be subdued by military force, it is left to the book of Revelation to explicate the precise nature of the relationship to antichrist of the remaining seven kingdoms of revived Rome.

And another sign appeared in the sky. And behold, a great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven crowns.

Revelation 12:3

Here we see the dragon, representing Satan, bearing very close resemblance to the beast, his antichrist. This resemblance is deliberate and is an indication of the degree to which antichrist and his father the devil are in accord. The fact that it is only in this passage that we see seven heads with crowns (everywhere else it is the horns which are crowned) shows that the key stepping stone for the establishment of Satan's kingdom on earth will in fact be the central seven kingdoms of revived Rome under the command of antichrist and Babylon.

And I saw a beast rising from the sea, with ten horns and seven heads. And on the horns were ten crowns. And on its heads was a blasphemous name.

Revelation 13:1

This verse shows us both the initial and final constitution of revived Rome at one glance: the ten horns represent the rulers of the two separate parts of revived Rome combined, while the seven heads represent the seven kingdoms of revived Rome's largely European part.³⁶¹ This passage also demonstrates the critical role played by the seven, for they characterize the beast and his kingdom to such a degree that his "blasphemous name" is actually inscribed directly upon them (a clear parallel to the inscription of the number of the beast upon the foreheads of all of his followers during the Tribulation's second half: Rev.13:16-17; 14:9; cf. Rev.20:4). The best and earliest manuscripts of the New Testament have the Greek word for "name" in the singular, not the plural, and we understand from this description that antichrist's blasphemous title is thus written on the seven heads in a distributive manner, with one letter of that title inscribed upon each of those seven heads. This of course begs the question of just what that name or title might be.

On this point the description of the name as one of "blasphemy" is key, and the ultimate blasphemy has always been the false claim of divinity (cf. Jn.10:33). As our previous discussions have made clear, the central point of antichrist's blasphemy is his claim to be the true Christ, and it is in this respect that his anti-God discourse may be said to be the most blasphemous (hence his scriptural designation, *anti*-Christ; cf. Is.37:23; Dan.7:25; 11:36; 2Thes.2:1-12; Rev.13:1-18). This usurpation by antichrist of the title "Messiah" is, in fact, a three-fold blasphemy directed against all three members of the Trinity: 1) his claim to be Christ is false, and a blasphemous attempt to replace the true Messiah (Matt.24:5; 1Jn.2:22); 2) but his claim also arrogantly usurps the right of the Father (who alone can anoint the true Messiah), while blasphemously denying the Father's many demonstrations of His Son as the true Christ (Matt.3:17; 17:5; cf. Ps.2:6-12; 110:1-7; Is.42:1-4; Col.1:19; Heb.1:1-14); 3) and, further, his claim is the height of the "blasphemy against the Spirit" about which our Lord warned (compare Mk.3:30 with Matt.12:31-32; Mk.3:23-29; Lk.12:10), for by asserting himself as the true Messiah, by definition antichrist blasphemes against the Spirit's witness to Him who really is the Christ, "the anointed One" (thus essentially calling the Spirit a liar). Therefore, since

antichrist's claim to be Christ is the ultimate blasphemy, the title "Christ" is thus a not unlikely candidate for the name inscribed on the seven heads. This possibility is made the more likely by the fact that in the Greek script (the language of the book of Revelation), the name "Christ" has the requisite seven letters (i.e., Χ ρ ι σ τ ο ς), allowing us to posit one letter per head, the most likely meaning of the phrase "on its heads was a blasphemous name". It is very important to note here that the title written on the seven heads of the beast in Revelation 13:1 is simply "Christ", not *the* Christ (i.e., there is no definite article, and that is always very significant in Greek). Scripture therefore carefully and deliberately distinguishes between *the* One who is truly anointed by God and antichrist, who blasphemously and falsely claims this anointing. By accepting this name of blasphemy, the seven heads/kingdoms and their kings are thus shown to be in full complicity with the beast's claim to be Christ, and thus also with his assumption of power on that basis (see below).

This calls for a mind having wisdom: the seven heads [of the beast] are seven mountains whereon the woman sits. They are also seven kings.

Revelation 17:9

This verse is emphatic in accentuating the importance of the role of these seven mainly European nations in the beast's revived Roman empire. For here we see the seven heads described as "seven mountains whereon the woman (i.e., Babylon) sits". This can only be meant to represent Babylon's domination of and reliance upon these "mountains". The Greek word here, *oros* (ὄ ρ ο ς), does mean mountain, not "hill", so that to take these mountains as the "seven hills of Rome" cannot be supported by the context. To the contrary, in scripture, mountains can be used metaphorically to refer to powerful nations (e.g., Jer.51:25; Dan.2:35), and that is the meaning here. In addition to Babylon's reliance upon and domination of the seven nations in this passage, the use of the word "mountain" suggests that the power of these seven will be not be insignificant.

Our consideration of the passages above should suffice to show that the distinction made by scripture between the 10 horns and 7 heads (or, for that matter, the 7 horns as distinct from the 3 horns within the group of 10) does not represent any discrepancy in symbolism, but is instead designed to differentiate between that part of revived Rome first assimilated by antichrist and Babylon, and the later conquest of the remaining three kingdoms (which constitute the "southern alliance" as we are terming it). Indeed, in the vision of the woman riding the beast throughout Revelation chapter 17, we find all three elements of antichrist's kingdom closely intertwined, with Babylon (represented by the great whore), the seven core kingdoms (represented by the seven heads), and the ten kingdoms of revived Rome fully re-united (represented by the ten horns) all occurring at once.

Having thus established the underlying meaning of this symbolism of the 10 horns and the 7 heads, it is appropriate that we turn now to a brief consideration of the possible geographical constitution of revived Rome. First of all it should be pointed out that the Roman empire of John's day, while centered in Europe, stretched far beyond the boundaries of Europe proper. Rome at the end of Nero's reign comprised the entire

Mediterranean litoral, extending from Britain to Armenia, and from southern Germany to the Sahara. Nor, excepting Italy, were the European provinces proper either the most populous or the most prosperous. Egypt, for example, was one of the most important provinces, being the breadbasket of the empire, Asia minor contained the wealthiest city-states, and North Africa was a much more verdant and agriculturally productive area before the systematic devastations which accompanied the Islamic conquest. Furthermore, apart from the close correspondence of Italy with the earlier Italia, the current political map of the Mediterranean world bears in many instances little resemblance to that of Nero's day. For while Hispania-Spain and Gaul-France are each close regional equivalents, the territory of present day France and Spain was in both cases split up into multiple provinces under ancient Rome. The fact is that, other than identifying the beast's empire with the earlier Roman empire, scripture gives no precise identification of the ten kingdom's that comprise it. However, we can make some basic deductions from the conquest of the king of the south and his kingdom by antichrist as described in Daniel chapter 11 (i.e., the three horns of the southern alliance that "fall before the little horn": Dan.7:19-24). Inasmuch as the conflict between antichrist's realm and the three kingdoms of the southern alliance will center around the land of Israel (Dan.11:25-30; 11:40-44), we can hardly understand these three "horns" in any other way than as areas of the Roman empire in the vicinity of Palestine. We will have much more to say about the southern alliance and this conflict in sections IV through VI below, but suffice it to say here that, given the close proximity of these events to our own day, it is therefore more than likely that those three nations will be or will at least be centered upon the present Muslim power-blocks of that region. At the time of the writing of the book of Revelation, Egypt was the most important province in the empire strategically speaking (through its combination of central geography and grain-producing capacity), Asia Minor (Turkey) was the wealthiest province, and Syria was the place of the greatest concentration of Roman legions (due to the proximity and hostility of the Parthian empire). In the author's view, therefore, these are, in the general terms fleshed out below, the most likely candidates for the three "horns", since they match up reasonably well both with the Roman pattern and with the current geopolitical situation:

1. Egypt (representing a coalition including Muslim Africa and the Arabian peninsula)
2. Turkey (representing a coalition including Muslim Central Asia and the Caucasus)
3. Syria (representing a coalition including Iraq, Iran and Pakistan)

No one can be sure of the particulars, but scripture is very precise about the correspondence of these three kingdoms with the Rome of John's day, and about the fact that there will be three dominant kings ruling them. Therefore while it is not the author's intention to leave the impression that the groupings above are to be taken as definitive, nonetheless, the positing of three sub-coalitions within the Muslim world which bear some relationship to the provinces of John's day does seem to be the best solution to the interpretation of the three horns (even if the precise nature of these

groupings as suggested above out should turn out to be somewhat different in the event).

If we thus accept the proposition that Africa and the Mideast are to be removed from the pool of nations/provinces from which the remaining original members of antichrist's empire may be identified, we are left with a probable roster for the seven as follows:

1. Britain (including/representing all of the British Isles)
2. France (including/representing the Benelux nations)
3. Germany (including/representing the rest of Central Europe)
4. Greece (including/representing the Balkans, Eastern Europe, and Russia)
5. Spain (including/representing the Iberian peninsula)
6. Italy
7. Israel

As in the case of the three sub-groupings of the southern alliance, this list is meant to be taken as an approximation of the actual coalitions which will manifest themselves at that future time. Scripture, however, does clearly indicate a group of seven kings and their respective kingdoms which will dominate the geography of historical and revived Rome, and in its depiction of the events of the Tribulation's first half and later (in Daniel chapter 11 in particular), there is absolutely no indication given of any neutral parties (indeed, when we move into the Great Tribulation, we find the entire world under the sway of antichrist to one degree or another: cf. Rev.13:3b). Therefore while it is very probable according to present geopolitical realities that the "kingdom of Greece" would be dominated by Russia (and that its "king" would most likely originate in that country), it is still the case that those present (and near-term future) realities must tie in to the historical arrangement of the Roman empire and its provinces to some significant degree. So whatever the actual alignment of the nations of Europe on that near-future day, the essential point is that there will be seven power-blocks (lead by seven extraordinary rulers) which will be constituted from and comprise in near or complete totality present day Europe – or more precisely put, six, because Israel, a non-European state (as it is almost unnecessary to point out), will be one of those seven. In John's day, Palestine was, of course, a Roman protectorate, and in both Daniel and Revelation, the two main sources of scriptural information about these events, Israel plays a central role. Furthermore, the positing of Israel as the northern kingdom's "wedge" against the southern alliance and as an "irritant" to that alliance has much to recommend it both in terms of scriptural interpretation and present realities on the ground. Indeed, at time of writing, by projecting the present course of events it is not difficult to envision a

situation in the near future where the west and the Muslim world find themselves embroiled in a fatal duel, with Israel at the center of the conflict.

To review and at the same time cast our glance forward all the way to the end of his reign, we can summarize the progression of antichrist's career as follows:

1. Babylon seized.
2. Revived Rome seized (the 7 kingdoms).
3. The Southern alliance conquered (the 3 kingdoms), in two campaigns.
4. The world subdued (brought under antichrist's influence to a greater or lesser degree).
5. Armageddon (the world's armed forces collected in Israel to oppose Christ's return).

2. The Seizure of Revived Rome: For such a significant event, it may seem surprising that, apart from Daniel 11:24, scripture seems to have very little to say about antichrist's parlaying of his seizure of Babylon into control over the seven nations of the revived Roman empire. Revelation, for example, in its mention of the ten horns and seven heads in association with the beast and Babylon in chapter 17, effectively portrays these events as already accomplished after the fact. The combination of this general lack of scriptural elaboration, the incredibly short time frame within which these events must take place (i.e., antichrist is ready to launch his first campaign against the south within 18 months of the Tribulation's inception as we shall see), and the details which are provided in Daniel 11:24 (treated below), all lead to the same conclusion: antichrist's seizure of the seven kingdoms will be an extraordinary rapid and amazingly easy affair. In fact, it will hardly be a seizure at all. For the seven kings of revived Rome will be antichrist's allies from the very start.

And the ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they will receive authority as kings for one hour (i.e., time period, specifically, the Tribulation) *along with the beast*. These will have *one purpose* and [are going to] *give their power and their authority to the beast*.

Revelation 17:12-13

This passage clearly demonstrates the close connection of the beast both to the wider group of ten mentioned here and to the more elite group of seven included within the ten. In these verses we are told that all ten kings will hand over to antichrist the power and authority they possess over their respective nations. This is critical for our understanding of the revived empire and of antichrist's seizure of control over it, for what it suggests is that the beast's efforts to gain control of revived Rome far from being

hindered by the rulers of her most important nations will instead be aided by them, and significantly so:

1) They are all said to "receive authority as kings for one hour (i.e., the Tribulation) *along with the beast*." Scripture thus ties their accession to power directly to that of antichrist, and in the phrase "*receive authority*" indicates that, like antichrist, rather than being independent agents they are operating under the aegis of a larger scheme (i.e., Satan's plan for world conquest).

2) This impression is strengthened by the fact that they are all said to have the same "purpose" (Greek *gnome*, γνώμη), and it is precisely this common purpose which motivates them to hand over their power and authority to the beast.

3) Finally, the fact that they are going to hand their power and authority over to antichrist entails an unheard of degree of coordination, cooperation, and subordination of personal and national interest – certainly beyond anything paralleled in world history to this point. This detail strongly suggests that these ten kings are either also Nephilim (half-angelic creatures not recorded in the Bible since Genesis chapter six), or at least close and ardent followers of the devil whose purpose it will be from the very beginning of their political careers to aid and abet antichrist's ascension to rule over revived Rome. In that it is said of the ten kings that they will "receive authority as kings . . . *along with the beast*", we have in this statement the further implication that their rise to power in their individual countries will bear many similarities to the rise of antichrist in Babylon, making it clear that they are indeed part of the devil's plan from the start (cf. their later unity of feeling and cooperation in regard to Babylon: Rev.17:16).

By any interpretation the thrust of all the "head-horn" passages covered here and in the previous section is, especially when taken together, to tie antichrist, his kingdom, and his subordinate rulers very closely together. Far from being accidental, therefore, the cooperation of the ten kingdoms themselves in antichrist's seizure of power over them as "revived Rome" is also an integral part of the satanic grand design for gaining world power. It is therefore in this sense that we should understand the details given in the critical verse below which alone describes antichrist's seizure of revived Rome from his base of power, Babylon.

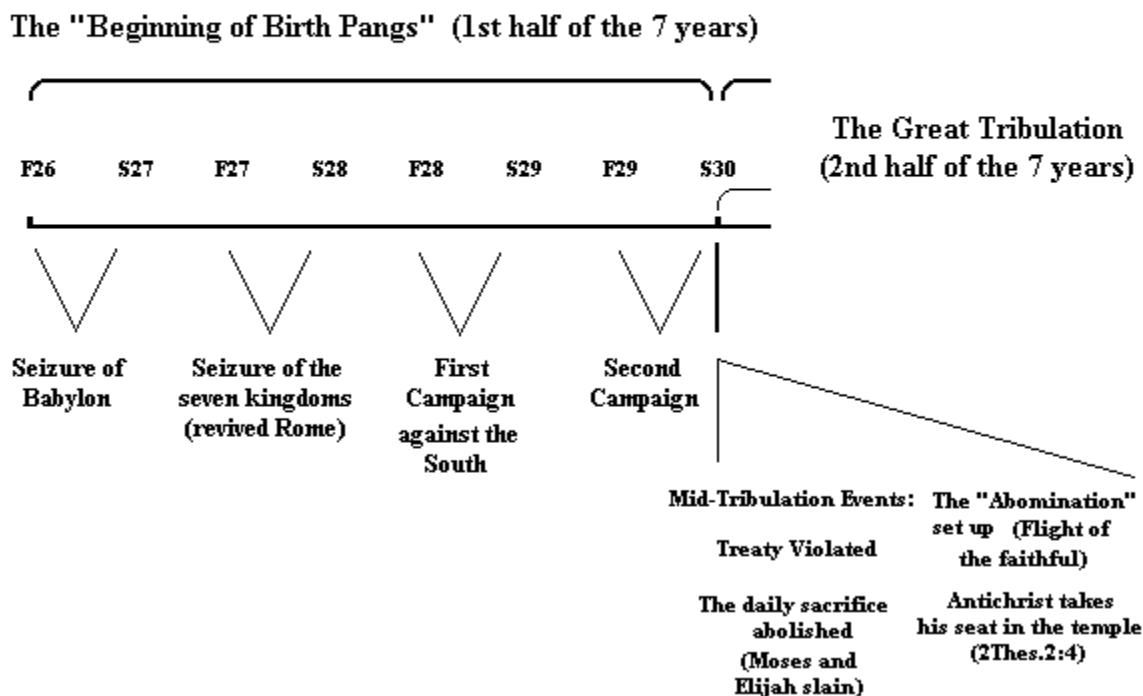
And through [the same] seductive [methods] he will enter the strongest provinces (i.e., the seven nations) of the empire (i.e., revived Rome), and will do what neither his fathers nor their fathers have done. He will distribute plunder, spoils and riches to his [followers] and will afterwards plot against the [remaining] powers (i.e., the three sub-coalitions of the southern alliance), but [will wait] for an opportune time.

Daniel 11:24

The phrase in the translation above, "the strongest provinces of the empire", refers to the seven nations ("provinces") of revived Rome which constitute the strong or "iron" part of the revived empire as opposed to the three remaining "kingdoms of clay" (cf. Dan.2:39-43).³⁶² Not only does the Hebrew here not give any definite indication that

antichrist's entrance into these provinces is at all opposed, the description of the means by which he enters, "through [the same] seductive [methods]", strongly suggests that his taking of possession of these seven nations will be along the lines of his seizure of power in Babylon. In fact, the Hebrew phraseology employed here in Daniel 11:24 is effectively identical to that used of antichrist's coup d'état described in Daniel 11:21 (i.e., the *qal* of *bo`*, בּוּא, plus the prepositional phrase *beshalvah*, בשלוה, are used in both instances to mean "gain control through seductive methods"). Rather than a complicated series of military maneuvers, therefore, it is apparent that antichrist's takeover of Europe and Israel will be accomplished through largely political means. The picture provided by Daniel 11:24 also agrees with what we know of the timing of tribulational events. A complicated series of military campaigns designed to "conquer" all of Europe and Israel would almost certainly take a considerable amount of time to prepare and complete, and such a prolonged period of warfare within Europe is not consistent with what scripture has to say about the Tribulation's first half, specifically the two campaigns against the south which follow the beast's seizure of the seven kingdoms (cf. esp. Dan.11:25-30 and 11:40-43):

Events of the Tribulation's First Half



The chart above will suffice to give the reader a rough idea of the sequence of events

during the Tribulation's first half, and the approximate timing and longevity of its major events (dictated by the constraints of its 42 month duration) which concern us here. The beast's initial seizure of Babylon and preparation for the subsequent securing of the first seven nations of revived Rome would seem to require at a very minimum at least six months a piece to complete. Given that fully two major campaigns by antichrist's newly won empire of the north against the southern alliance are also prophesied to occur during the first half of the Tribulation (and that such campaigns have historically taken place during the winter months with most of the preceding summer months needed to organize and prepare), we are left with a scant six month period for antichrist's capture and consolidation of the seven kingdoms. These time constraints alone, therefore, argue for this seizure to be more along the lines of another coup d'état, and this time a multi-faceted one at that.

We have already discussed the scenario by which antichrist will use deceptive means to gain power in his native Babylon. To accomplish a similar feat in seven other different nations simultaneously will unquestionably require an extraordinary degree of cooperation, one which is unprecedented, as observed above, in the previous annals of human history. Apart from cooperation at the top, it is highly questionable whether such a feat would be possible (even were we to assume a large fifth column of sympathetic supporters in each of these seven nations and their corresponding spheres of influence). Indeed, the only scenario which seems *prima facie* feasible is the one which Daniel 11:24 suggests, the same scenario which the absence of detail in Revelation also points to, assuming as it does antichrist's control over revived Rome from the beginning, namely, that the seven kings are in the beast's camp from the very start. This agrees with the information we have already gleaned earlier in the book of Daniel:

And as to the ten horns, from that kingdom (i.e., Rome, the fourth beast) ten kings will arise, and another one (i.e., antichrist) *will arise after them*. And he will be different from the former ones, and *he will cast down three kingdoms*.

Daniel 7:24

In emphasizing the military defeat of three kingdoms, this verse necessarily suggests no such overt military conquest in the case of the preceding seven. But the passage above also provides an important detail which helps to explain antichrist's relationship to the seven, for it states that he "will arise after them". What this means is that the rise of these seven extraordinary dictators to power in their own countries (and their subsequent establishment of hegemonies over their weaker neighboring nations) will *predate* antichrist's takeover of Babylon. In other words, the seven nations of revived Rome will effectively be waiting for the beast to pluck like a series of ripe apples as soon as he has secured his own political position.

Even the projecting of the development of antichrist's religious-political movement backward several years prior to the Tribulation (so as to be able to posit the development of a number of mirror movements in the seven nations and the subsequent seizure of power by their leaders) fails to fully explain how or perhaps more to the point why these seven kings are standing ready to hand over their power and authority to the

beast. The fact that this flies in the face of all prior known historical behavior cannot be overemphasized. Therefore it must be the case that these seven kings have more in common with the beast than may meet the eye, and that their involvement with the devil and his minions is far closer and far more explicit than anything we have seen in the past, even in the case of the world's most evil tyrants and dictators. Not even an active embracing of Satanism is sufficient to fully explain this somewhat self-sacrificing acquiescence to the will of the devil's son. Therefore the best explanation for this extraordinary chain of events is that, like antichrist, they too are Nephilim, not offspring of the devil himself as is antichrist, but engendered nevertheless by some of his most trusted lieutenants. Only in this way can we explain on the one hand the coincidence of seven discrete meteoric rises to power on the part of seven distinct individuals within the territory of historical Rome, and on the other hand their unanimous willingness to cede their exceptional power to another, absent overwhelming duress. It can only be that these seven share in company with the beast a wickedly unique origin and an innate commitment to carrying out the will and plans of the evil one. This interpretation helps to explain the close connection found in scripture between the beast and these seven; for example, 1) in Revelation 13:2 the beast is said to have a mouth "as of lions", the plural being a reference to the seven kings who are clearly similar to him; 2) the seven kings are described at Revelation 13:3 as seven identical heads, though one head has a fatal wound, a picture which for our purposes here also shows the similarities between antichrist and these kings who is both "an eighth and one of the seven" (i.e., depending upon whether he is being viewed as a discrete emperor or the personification of revived Rome: Rev.17:11); 3) the fact that, as we saw above, the "name of blasphemy" which identifies the beast as a pseudo-Christ is inscribed collectively on the seven heads (Rev.13:1); 4) the identification of antichrist as a horn among these horns (Dan.7:24) who starts out smaller (Dan.7:8) and becomes larger than the others (Dan.7:20); and, finally 5) the fact that all seven heads and all ten horns are an intrinsic part of the same beast in all of the instances in Daniel and Revelation where this figure is used. Therefore whatever the visible coordination between these leaders (and between the beast and these seven as a group), and whatever visible similarities in the political, social, and religious phenomena they represent and exploit, the truth will be that there is a deeper, more sinister reason for their unprecedented cooperation, and that all of the areas of apparently coincident self-interest on the surface will in reality be driven by a darker unanimity of purpose. It is for this reason above all that the seizure of the seven kingdoms will resemble a victory parade rather than a military campaign (in terms of recent history, Nazi Germany's *Anschluss* of Austria may provide a rough parallel).

Even such exceptional (or, from the divine point of view, egregious) leaders will still require some sort of external or internal crisis to provide sufficient motivation for these present day democracies to give themselves over to dictatorial rule. The most likely grounds for such a dramatic sea-change in the collective body politic of Europe and beyond is the continued rise and consolidation of power in the Muslim world of groups and leaders with anti-western Jihadist agendas. The description given in Daniel chapter 11, moreover, is clearly one of a unified northern block (antichrist's Babylon-led revived Rome) waging two massive and eventually decisive campaigns against a similarly unified (Muslim) south. Now the three horns which collectively represent this southern

alliance will later be a willing part of antichrist's unified Rome (Rev.17:12-17). Therefore the most likely explanation for both this initially anti-beast opposition on the part of the three southern horns in contrast to their later unanimous approval of antichrist is to be found in their accession to power through the aid of the "king of the south" who leads this alliance and for whom their support is in reality duplicitous (cf. Dan.11:25-30; and see the discussion in parts V and VI below).

Postulating a charismatic figure who rises to prominence in the Mideast in the days before the Tribulation is the most likely interpretation of the events which scripture describes. It accounts for the development of a threat serious enough to motivate the west to serious political change on the one hand, while also explaining the rise of the three kings in a manner wherein they are initially hostile to the beast (at least to all appearances), yet later willingly subject to him (after the defeat of their first patron). At the time of writing the emergence of such a single charismatic leader who manages to gain control of the entire Muslim world is a nightmare scenario. The appearance of such a "Mahdi", a Muslim "Messiah", and the rallying of that world around him is perhaps the one event which might explain a dramatic political realignment in Europe and Israel in such a short space of time, and the subsequent and even more rapid rise of antichrist both in Babylon and to the rulership of revived Rome. In the face of exponentially growing terrorism, the emergence of an overt military threat posed by the unification of this part of the world in hostility towards the west (even bent upon its conquest), and the collapse of economies dependent upon the Mideast's oil, it is easy to see how the appearance of a set of leaders (and, subsequently, one leader in particular) would be welcomed as the only hope of survival, even at the price of the loss of freedom. The fact that Israel will be the primary focal point of the initial southern attack will provide a further incentive on the part of many in the west, and especially in the United States, to support this development of military dictatorships both at home and abroad. Perhaps the most ironic and potentially dangerous thing about this scenario is that according to the propaganda machine of the beast and his seven kings the coming conflict through which they will rise to power will likely be billed as a war in defense of Christendom and Israel against the pseudo-Christ "Mahdi", whereas those who support this effort will be casting in their lot with the real antichrist about whom scripture leaves no doubt that the destruction of all believers and of all Jews is in reality one of his chief objectives.

IV. Antichrist's Alliance with Israel

In the long history of the nation of Israel, there have been many times when, instead of relying upon the Lord who formed her and delivered her from the smelting furnace of Egypt to be His own special people and nation, she has instead chosen to rely upon the power of countervailing empires. From the human point of view, a relatively small nation poised in-between opposing and competing empires as Israel has been for much of her history would seem to be well served by allying herself to one party or the other, or at least by seeking help from one side when threatened by the other. But Israel is God's special possession, the "apple of His eye" (Zech.2:8), and it has ever been His will

for her to rely, rather than upon the deceptiveness of human strength and good will, upon His own power and mercy, . . .

. . . not on Egypt instead (cf. Is.20:5-6; 30:1-7):

Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, [who] rely upon horses and put their faith in chariots because they are numerous and in cavalry because it is strong, but who have not looked to the Holy One of Israel, and have not sought the Lord.

Isaiah 31:1

. . . not Assyria instead (cf. Ezek.23:5-8):

You shall not say "an alliance (i.e., with Assyria)" [as the solution] for everything [for] which this people may say "an alliance (i.e., with Assyria)" [as the solution] (cf. Is.30:1). And you shall not fear that which makes them afraid nor tremble at it (i.e., the threat of the northern kingdom allied with Syria). It is the Lord of Hosts whom you shall sanctify, and He is the One who shall be your fear, and He is the One at whom you shall tremble.

Isaiah 8:12-13

. . . not on Babylon instead (cf. Ezek.23:14-21):

What will you say when [the Lord] puts in charge over you as commanders those very ones whom you courted (i.e., the Babylonians)?

Jeremiah 13:21a

In contrast to the revival led by Moses and Elijah and administered by the 144,000, the state of Israel itself will remain in secular hands until our Lord returns. And this same tendency to seek security apart from the Lord will be the proximate cause of many of her tribulational difficulties as she first allies herself to the beast (as one of the seven kingdoms), then at the Tribulation's end conspires against him in company with tribulational Babylon (see part 5 of this series). Outside of those who are today believers, and that much larger future number who shall embrace the cross of Jesus Christ during the exceptional Jewish evangelism which will then occur, the state of Israel is and will be during the Tribulation an exceptionally secular and materialistic state (cf. Is.2:7-8; Amos 8:11), making it a natural ally of Babylon, even if it has and will have its issues with the other coalitions of revived Rome. And it is Babylon that will count, especially at the inception of the Tribulation in its capacity as antichrist's initial base of power. Facing an intensified threat from the growth of the southern alliance (whose rallying cry her destruction will be), it is not difficult to see how Israel in particular will look to Babylon and to antichrist for deliverance, especially considering the special relationship between the two countries which exists even today.

A part of the above trend as well as a result of it will be the emergence of a Jewish ruler whose power and influence will be on a par with the other exceptional "kings" of Europe who will gain sovereignty during the early days of the Tribulation. Not to be confused

with antichrist's false prophet who will only come to the fore during the Tribulation's second half (Rev.13:11-18), this Jewish premier is instead one of the seven kings, and also described as the "foolish" (or "godless") and "worthless" (or "wicked") shepherd in Zechariah chapter eleven, a prophecy that sheds much light upon the details of this period from the point of view of events in Israel:

(4) Thus says the Lord my God: "Pasture the flock of the slaughter. (5) Those who buy them will slaughter them and will not be held to account and those who pasture them will not take pity on them. (6) For I will no longer take pity on the inhabitants of the land," says the Lord. "For, behold, I am going to hand over [all] mankind each into the hand of his neighbor and each into the hand of his king, for they will crush the earth and I will not deliver out of their hands." (7) So I pastured the flock of slaughter, that is, those of the flock to be afflicted, and I took for myself two staffs. I called the one "Delight" and the other "Bindings", and [thus] I pastured the flock. (8) After I humbled the three shepherds in the first month, my heart had become grieved with [the flock], and they had come to detest me. (9) So I said, "I will not pasture you [any longer]. Let those destined to die, die, and let those destined to be humbled, be humbled, and let the remainder eat each one the flesh of his companion". (10) Then I took my staff [named] "Delight", and I broke it so as to break the covenant which I had made with all the peoples. (11) And it was broken on that [very] day, and thus those to be afflicted who were watching me knew that this was the word of the Lord. (12) Then I said to them, "If it seems good in your eyes, give me my wages, but if not, then do not". And they weighed out my wages to me, thirty [pieces] of silver. (13) And the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter[']s field], [this] magnificent price at which I have been valued by them." So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord to the potter[']s field]. (14) Then I broke my second staff [named] "Bindings" so as to break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel. (15) Then the Lord said to me, "Take up for yourself now the equipment of a godless shepherd. (16) For, behold, I am going to raise up a shepherd in the land who will not look after the humbled, nor seek the [lost] young, nor heal the sick, nor provide for the healthy, but will eat the flesh of the fat and tear off their hooves." (17) Woe to the wicked shepherd who abandons the flock. A sword upon his arm and upon his right eye! And may his arm shrivel and his right eye go blind!
Zechariah 11:4-17

In this prophecy, Zechariah, under divine command, acts out an allegory whose prime application is to the rejection of the gospel message about Jesus Christ as it is proclaimed to Israel during the Tribulation through the ministry of Moses and Elijah. The prime opposition to the truth in this passage is the 7th king, the Israeli leader whose kingdom constitutes the last of the seven horns (rather than antichrist, whom the "king" and "shepherd" in this context are often taken to be):

- verses 1-3: The theme of the powerful about to be humbled as a result of the process described clearly marks this allegory as applicable primarily to the events leading up to Christ's return (namely, the Tribulation; cf. Is.2:11ff; 5:15; Is.13:11; Ezek.21:26).

- verses 4-6: These verses serve to apply the prophetic information in this chapter to the Great Tribulation in Israel and beyond. The "flock of slaughter" refers to those destined for tribulation. The "buyers" are antichrist and his invading army at Armageddon, who will completely ravage the land of Israel during that campaign (cf. Ezek.38-39). The "sellers" are the 7th king, the Israeli leader, and his cronies. They are not "held to account" for this activity, meaning that they will not have to pay for their horrendous behavior – until they are destroyed at Armageddon. Because of the rejection of the gospel by the majority population of Israel at this time, in spite of the ministries of Moses and Elijah and of the 144,000, the period of mercy will end at the Tribulation's mid-point, and the Great Tribulation will ensue, during which time the Lord will "not take pity any longer" upon the land of Israel as she undergoes the most troubled time in her storied history (cf. Jer.30:7). And not only will Israel suffer – the same pattern of intense tribulation will obtain for "all mankind".
- verses 7-8: After the summary overview discussed above, these verses take us back to the period prior to the commencement of the second half of the seven years. The flock "*to be afflicted*" are those who will suffer tribulation on account of their rejection of the gospel. In his divinely directed actions here, Zechariah is acting as a type (i.e., symbolic representative) of Christ, the Good Shepherd, who in taking for Himself two staffs, Moses and Elijah, is offering Himself and His kingdom soon to come to the inhabitants of Israel. The allegory thus condenses the First and Second Advents as is often the case in Old Testament prophecy, for the Age of the Church is, in prophetic terms, an interlude between the cross and the Messiah's millennial reign. The names of the two staffs, "Delight" and "Bindings" refer respectively to the joy and love all God's people should have for Him and the relationship He makes available through Jesus Christ (seen in His establishment through Moses of the Old Covenant which foreshadows the New Covenant), and the restoration or "binding up" of what has been broken in His reestablishment of Israel as His covenant nation through which the Messiah will rule the world (whose proclamation is the province of Elijah, as we have seen). The ministry of Moses and Elijah will "thus" (verse seven) be the means by which these truths are brought home to Israel (though most will not accept them until the point of Christ's return). The humbling of "the three shepherds" refers to the defeat of the southern alliance by antichrist at the Tribulation's mid-point. Following the removal of this external threat (the number one factor, as we are suggesting, in Israel's decision and desire to join with antichrist and his alliance), antichrist will make war on Moses and Elijah, and the majority of Israel will openly choose for the former, that is, they will come to "detest" the Lord and His representatives, causing Him to be "grieved" with them and thus bringing the period of mercy to an end. This will happen at the inception of the Great Tribulation (i.e., its "first month" [n.b., not "*one* month"; cf. Gen.1:5, "day *one*" = "the *first* day"]). Ironically for Israel, this same removal of the threat of the Mahdi's invasion will also remove all restraint from antichrist and his policies, and will thus begin the implementation of his and his father the devil's plan to destroy Israel.

- verses 9-14: In these verses we are given the details of this transition from warning and mercy to judgment and tribulation. Having rejected God's truth, God's grace, and God's Son, He will "no longer pasture" these sheep, and they will instead have to endure the harsh treatment of the one they have chosen in His stead, antichrist and his local representative, the 7th king. The breaking of the "covenant" thus refers to the termination of the prior period of mercy to which God's chosen people were entitled, taking as its first symbol the death of the one who had mediated it, namely Moses (i.e., the staff named "Delight"). Just as we have seen that the trumpet judgments of the Tribulation's first half function as warnings and the bowl judgments of the Great Tribulation as primarily punitive, so here we also see divine mercy towards Israel in the period before the commencement of the second half of the seven years transitioning now to harsh tribulation. And with the blanket of protection removed from Israel, it is no wonder that the same tribulation and punishment is visited upon "all the peoples". Nor is there any delay, for the Great Tribulation will commence "on that very day" that Moses is removed as a witness to Israel and to the world (compare Rev.11:13-14 with 11:15-19). In his role here as a symbolic representative of our Lord Jesus Christ, Zechariah is told to portray this rejection of the two witnesses for what it truly is, a rejection of the Lord Himself. The prophecy of the thirty pieces of silver, the "severance pay" for the Messiah and His ministry on the one hand and for Moses and Elijah on the other shows unequivocally the low regard that unbelievers in Israel had and will have for the One who died for them as well as for the tremendous sacrifices of His servants on their behalf. This was fulfilled during our Lord's First Advent, and is here applied to Moses (and Elijah) prior to the Second Advent. In both cases this severance pay is given not to the Lord Himself but to His betrayer, to Judas during the First Advent (in a very literal fashion) and the to the 7th king (who aids in the war against the two witnesses) prior to the Second Advent.³⁶³ The breaking of the "brotherhood" mentioned here refers historically to the split between believing "Judah" and unbelieving "Israel". At the time of writing, the northern kingdom was a distant memory so that Israel stands symbolically for the unbelievers who reject the message of Moses and Elijah, while "Judah" refers to those who respond to the gospel message and flee into the desert during the middle of the Tribulation prior to the commencement of the Great Persecution, after responding to the "binding" ministry of restoration mediated by Elijah (and Moses) which divides Israel into those who respond and those who do not (cf. Rev.12:1-17).
- verses 15-17: The worthless (or, better, the "godless") shepherd is, in fact, the 7th king, the ruler of Israel during the tribulational period who is part of antichrist's coalition from the beginning. His self-interested modus operandi is clear to see in these verses as he exploits the people and fails to protect them in their hour of need (cf. Ezek.34; Jer.23:1-4; Zech.10:2-3; Jn.10:1-18). His coming condemnation is thus unavoidable.

The 7th king who will rule and abuse Israel during the Tribulation as an associate of antichrist is also mentioned in Ezekiel chapter twenty-one:

And as for you, O defiled [and] wicked prince of Israel, whose day will come at the evil end time (i.e., the Tribulation), this is what the Lord God says, "Take off his [royal] turban and remove his crown. This will not stand (i.e., he and his regime will be deposed). Exalt the humble, but humble the exalted. I will make [his land] a ruin, a ruin, a ruin. But this too shall not happen until the One to whom judgment belongs shall come (i.e., the Messiah), for [to this] have I appointed Him" (cf. Jn.5:22; Acts 10:42; 1Pet.4:5).

Ezekiel 21:25-27

The pattern of the rise, reign, and fall of the 7th king is unquestionably very similar to that of the other six (and most probably to that of the remaining three as well). This shepherd appears to the sheep who support him in his ascension like the champion of their dreams, and quickly rises to supreme and unchallenged power in his own country in no small degree because of an imminent external threat. Once in control, however, he has little regard for his charges, exploiting them mercilessly for his own ends (and no doubt for the benefit of his inner circle as well). As in the case of this particular king who will support antichrist right to the end, even through the Armageddon campaign whose object is to destroy all Israel (i.e., the 7th king's own country), we can expect that for the other subordinate kings as well the wishes of their patron antichrist will easily outweigh the true interests of their respective peoples.

In addition to specific information about the king of Israel during the Tribulation, scripture also gives us specific information about the compact or alliance made between antichrist and Israel during that time.

Then he (i.e., antichrist) will confirm *an agreement* (or "covenant"; Hebrew, ברית, *beriyth*) with the powerful [in Israel] during [that] one [remaining] week (i.e., the 70th week, the Tribulation), but in the middle of the week (i.e., just prior to the Tribulation's mid-point) he will put a halt to sacrifice and offering (i.e., eliminating Moses and Elijah and interrupting the temple rites). And on account of the extreme [nature] of [his] abominations, he [will] be causing desolations (i.e., desertion and estrangement from God), even until the end when what has been determined will be poured out upon the one characterized by [this] desolation (i.e., the beast as archetype and cause of the alienation and rebellion from God which he fosters).

Daniel 9:27

The beast, it will be remembered, is "the prince" of this "covenant" (Dan.11:22), and although this "covenant" should not be confused with the "holy covenant" also mentioned by Daniel (Dan.11:28; 11:30; 11:32), it is clear that, as part of his policy of representing himself as the Messiah to Israel and to the world, antichrist will indeed portray this agreement as the fulfillment of the "New Covenant" of Jeremiah 31:31-33. In this way, and despite the refutation that will without doubt proceed from Moses and Elijah, the beast will be effective in coopting those in Israel (and around the world) who

are impressed by the ministry of the two witnesses yet still unwilling to give themselves to Christ (cf. Jn.5:43). In reality, of course, this will be no more than the clever "packaging" of the treaty with Israel in a pseudo-Messianic wrapping (attempting through his political and media domination to take credit for the reestablishment of the temple and temple rites). Thus this treaty will be the political focal point for the myth which antichrist will foster about himself as the "conquering Messiah", out to protect Israel (and Christianity) from the Mahdi's southern alliance (a propaganda ploy that will figure large in promoting apostasy and the advance of the beast's ecumenical religious union). On the basis of the model which Daniel 9:27 provides, we may therefore further deduce from this verse that antichrist will gain control over all of the seven nations of his original empire by means of this same process of formal confederation. But while these treaties may spell out the independence of the subordinate states, in actuality they will only be a means for disarming opposition. As in the case of Israel, which this scripture explicitly details, we may expect that also in regard to the other six initial member states (or, more precisely, coalitions) any rights or freedoms originally given de jure will also be de facto annulled (as in the case of Israel) as the beast and his lieutenants consolidate Satan's worldwide empire. That this (and therefore these) covenants are said to be made "with the powerful" (Hebrew, רבים, *rabiym*), is also most instructive, indicating that all of the coalitions which ally with antichrist's Babylon will first come to be ruled by powerful oligarchies, presided over by the "kings" with their special relationship to the beast.

It should also be noted here that neither this treaty nor any of the treaties are subject to a time limit (see the corrected translation of Dan.9:27 above). Yet the beast's relation to Israel is special in certain regards. After all, as the pseudo-Messiah, Israel is the natural and ultimate focal point of his earthly rule. Both the fact that only one of the beast's heads has a mortal wound and that all of the horns have to be on one of the heads (cf. Dan.7:8; 7:20) indicate a closer, "special" relationship with one of the seven county-coalitions (Rev.13:1-3; 17:1-11), and that country is surely Israel, the place where antichrist will take up residence during the Great Tribulation (Dan.11:45; 2Thes.2:4).

V. The First Campaign against the South

[After his conquest of revived Rome, antichrist] will distribute plunder, spoils and riches to his [followers] and will afterwards plot against the [three remaining] powers (i.e., the three sub-coalitions of the southern alliance), but [will wait] for an opportune time.
Daniel 11:24b

While the precise time-line for antichrist's consolidation of power in the seven kingdoms of revived Rome is not given, the time constraints of the Tribulation's first half allow us to make an informed judgment about the likely timing of the beast's first campaign against the southern alliance (see figure #1 above). Allowing roughly one year for his rise to and consolidation of power in Babylon and a further year for his securing of revived Rome brings us to the fall of 2028. Any military campaign in the Mideast on the

scale and of the scope of this massive invasion would be well advised to have concluded major combat operations before the heat and storms of mid-summer begin. A six month time-frame beginning at this point and ending roughly in the summer of 2029 is thus the most likely scenario for the marshaling of forces, transit to theater, combat operations, consolidation of gains, and return of the military assets necessary for this first campaign – not an implausibly short length of time when we recall that all of the beast's operations will be characterized by just such exceptional rapidity (cf. the winged leopard of Rev.13:2). This time-line also has the virtue of allowing a comparable and parallel time period for the second campaign the following year (i.e., commencing fall of 2029), whose termination point (i.e., summer of 2030) would then coincide perfectly with the commencement of the Great Tribulation, exactly as scripture predicts (cf. especially Dan.11:29-31).

And from one of the [four horns] came forth another horn, a small one (i.e., antichrist), but it grew great towards the south and towards the east and towards the Beautiful Land (i.e., Israel).

Daniel 8:9

Daniel 8:9 has as its immediate application the prophesied rise of Antiochus Epiphanes, ruler of the Seleucid kingdom whose epicenter of power was Syria. As we have seen, however, much of Old Testament prophecy has a dual application to both nearer and farther term events, with the Tribulation and its events being the primary paradigm of application (so as to provide a point of comparison for near term tribulation as well as to provide details about that ultimate Tribulation).³⁶⁴ We have also seen above that Antiochus Epiphanes is a particularly important representative type of antichrist, invading Israel, proclaiming himself to be divine (hence the cognomen "Epiphanes"), and profaning the temple in a manner that foreshadows antichrist's future conduct. We may therefore read in the verse above both the general pattern of the beast's military expansion and the motivations which underlie it. Since antichrist already dominates the north (and arose in the west, Babylon), only the south, east, and Israel are outside of his complete control at this point (for while he has the secular ruler of Israel in his camp, the ministry of Moses and Elijah will still be in place and be flourishing at this point). The expansion towards the south mentioned here refers to the conquest of the southern alliance in the two campaigns of Daniel chapter 11, while the eastward expansion is a reference to the progressive occupation and domination of the one other remaining quadrant of the world not as yet under the beast's direct rule. By the time of Armageddon, we see the east also under antichrist's command (Rev.16:12-14; cf. the temporary disruption of that control occasioned by the bowl judgments: Dan.11:44). The final place on earth to succumb to the beast's direct authority will be the land of Israel, and we can see in the pattern of Daniel 8:9 not only a strategy for world domination, but also the primary purpose behind it, replacement of the worship of the One true God with the worship of the devil and his son antichrist, and the concomitant destruction of God's holy people, Israel.

The southern alliance will therefore represent the last major military impediment to antichrist's domination of the world. The combination of economic, political, and

military power projected by Babylon, revived Rome, and the growing coalition of the world's nations falling like dominos at the feet of the beast will remove all other major resistance by the Tribulation's mid-point. The two campaigns against the south, through their scale, rapidity, and success will in particular no doubt also produce a bandwagon effect for joining with rather than opposing the beast until the whole unbelieving world shouts with one accord "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" (Rev.13:4).

(3) And when He sat down on the Mount of Olives, His disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us when these things will be, and what the sign is of your return and of the end of the age?" (4) And Jesus answered and said, "See to it that no one deceives you. (5) For many will come in My Name, saying, 'I am the Christ', and they will deceive many people. (6) And you are going to hear about [actual] wars and impending wars. Make sure you do not become [overly] alarmed [by such things]. For [these things] must happen, but this is not yet the end [of the Tribulation]. (7) For [before that end] *a nation will rise against a nation* (i.e., in general terms, the Japhetic pan-nation against the Semitic pan-nation), *even a kingdom against a kingdom* (i.e., Babylon and revived Rome versus the southern alliance; cf. Dan.11:25-30; 11:40), and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. (8) But all these things are [merely] the beginning of the birth pangs (i.e., the first half of the Tribulation).
Matthew 24:3-8

We can see in our Lord's words above the significance of the conflict between north and south that will dominate the secular political events of the Tribulation's first half (made parallel here to the "famines and earthquakes" which, as we have seen, are shorthand for the divine warning "trumpet judgments" which will also characterize this period). The "wars and impending wars" that will occupy the secular world's attention at this time are significant enough to rate special mention by our Lord, and so we may glean from this combination of remarks that the scale of the warfare between the beast's coalition and the Mahdi's alliance, the two most significant "nations" and "kingdoms" on earth, will be enormous.

Then he (i.e., the king of the north, antichrist) will rouse up his power and desire against the king of the south with *a great force*, but the king of the south will mobilize for war with *an equally great force* which will also be *very powerful*.
Daniel 11:25a

Rarely in the history of warfare have two coalitions mobilized such exceptional and comparably powerful armies for a particular confrontation. Although August of 1914 may provide a rough parallel, in terms of the numbers deployed, the distances involved, the firepower available, the ideological fervor motivating the conflict, and the overall scale involved here (i.e., with roughly two entire quadrants of the world engaged in this titanic struggle), this campaign is likely only to be eclipsed by the ones which follow (i.e., the second campaign of Dan.11:29-30; 11:40-43, and the Armageddon campaign).

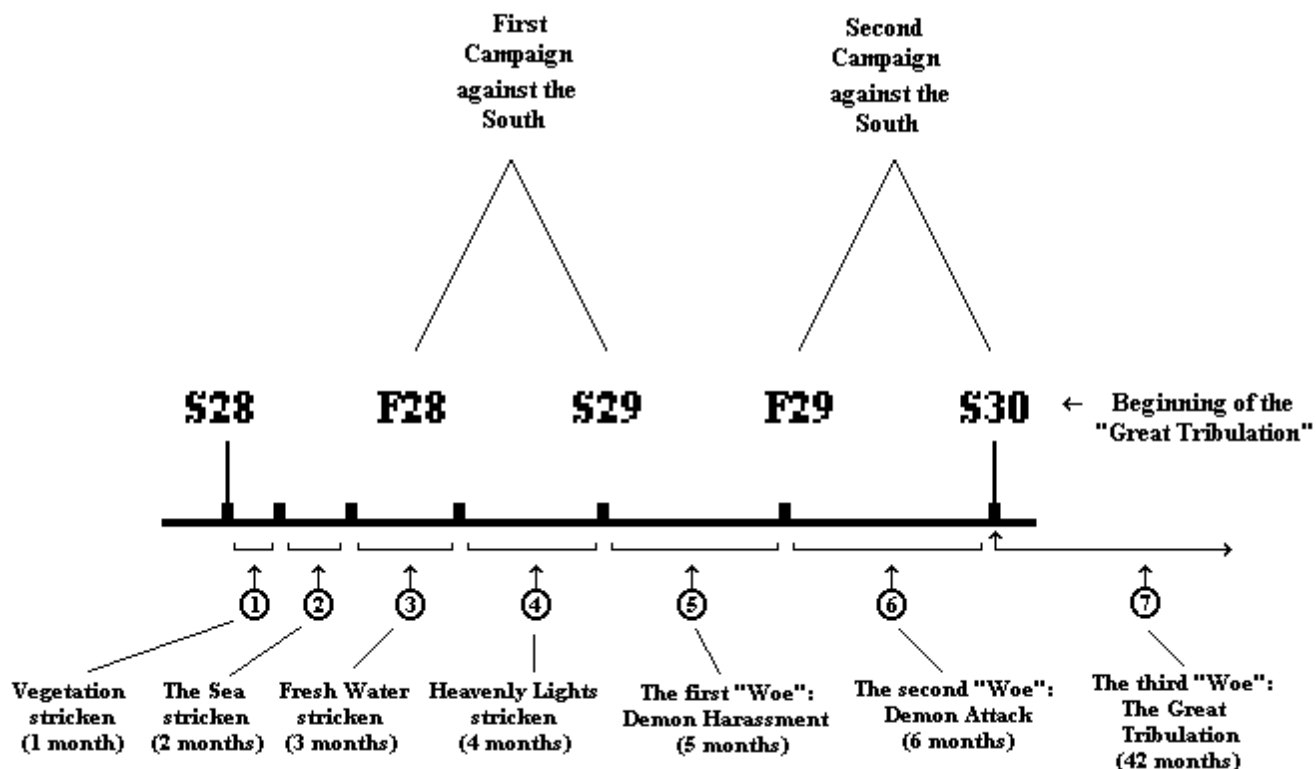
In addition to all of the other issues involved in these campaign, both coalitions will also have to contend with the trumpet judgments which, as we have seen, will be taking place during this entire later period of the Tribulation's first half. On the political front, it is at least conceivable that, for the consumption of the unbelieving world, antichrist in his capacity of pseudo-Messiah will "spin" these trumpet judgments as divine displeasure for the world's failure to support Israel (though he himself, of course, has in mind her eventual destruction), thus adding emotional impetus and added justification to his "crusade". The people who know their God will not be fooled by this false interpretation, and we can be sure that the truth will be made clear by Moses and Elijah along with the 144,000 – for all who are willing to receive the truth. On the operational front, the events of the trumpet judgments will clearly cause complications for daily life in general, and all the more so for military operations. The chart below which compares the probable time-line for these two campaigns with these judgments of divine warning indicates a coincidence of trumpet judgments three and four with the first campaign, and of trumpet judgment six with the second:

The Trumpet Judgments and the Two Campaigns against the South

Daniel 11:24-44 and Revelation 8:6 - 9:19

— The Tribulation —

(1st Half)



As the juxtaposition of events in the chart above makes clear, the initial phase of the first campaign will be conducted in the aftermath of the smiting of the world's fresh water by the "Wormwood" asteroid (while the world is still suffering under its effects), then, at roughly the campaign's mid-point, the world's heavenly lights will be stricken (with these effects lasting throughout the rest of the campaign). Just as king Ahab went to great lengths to preserve his military assets during a comparable water shortage occasioned by divine judgment, and no doubt did so at the expense of his suffering population (1Kng.18:2-6), so we may expect that whatever difficulties the population of the earth experiences from the third trumpet judgment (which we are told will result in many fatalities: Rev.8:11), both antichrist and the leader of the southern alliance will ensure that their vast armies are not seriously inconvenienced, no matter how much more difficult this may make things for their subject populations. Aside from the

logistical problems of transporting additional fresh water over vast distances into terrain that is inhospitable under the best of circumstances, it is probable that the third trumpet will not otherwise seriously affect the course of this campaign (and, indeed, there is no indication from Daniel chapter 11 that it does). The fourth trumpet judgment, the significant diminution of light which will occur during the four month period that coincides with the middle and the end of this campaign, may actually have an enabling effect, for it will virtually ensure that the heat which might otherwise prove an impediment to the unprecedented marches this expedition will entail on both sides will be significantly less than would otherwise be the case. In any event, we may conclude from the scriptural testimony about the fact of this campaign and its successful conclusion on the part of the beast that at the very worst the negative effects of these two judgments will likely affect both sides equally, and will not, in any case, prevent its successful conclusion by the forces of Babylon and revived Rome.

One of the main differences between the two campaigns which antichrist will launch against the triple coalition of the south will be that while the second campaign will be characterized by the decisive intervention of an overwhelmingly superior navy (cf. the Hebrew of Num.24:23-24; Dan.11:30; 11:40; covered below), this first expedition will apparently consist, as intimated above, entirely of a ground invasion. Several reasons may be adduced for this. First, much of what still remains semi-independent in the world will still be in the process of being consolidated under antichrist's control at this time. The concentration of the southern hemisphere's population and power on the litoral of the world's great oceans will require a significant application of naval power to secure, and it is likely that the combined navies and amphibious forces of Babylon and revived Rome will be too preoccupied in this task to have much of an impact in this first campaign. Secondly, it is also likely, given the essential geography of revived Rome versus the southern alliance, that antichrist will need two campaigns to complete the task, and that this first, primarily ground operation, will have as its strategic objective an initial degradation of the south's armed forces and the seizure of key terrain for the establishment of bases and staging of resources that will ultimately be necessary to deliver a knock-out blow in the follow-on campaign. Additionally, the conduct of the first campaign as an entirely overland operation proceeding from north to south will also serve to create an opportunity for strategic surprise by making the massive naval operations of the second campaign a less anticipated development.

Nevertheless, he (i.e., the king of the south) will not be able to stand [against the king of the north], for they (i.e., the three subordinate southern kings) shall devise plots against [the king of the south]. (26) For those who eat his choice food (i.e., his inner circle) will break him, and [this is why] his force will flood away, and many will fall slain. (27) And though these two kings (i.e., antichrist and the Mahdi) set their hearts on evil and speak lies at the same table (i.e., a peace conference), it will not prosper, for there will yet be an end to the period [of the Great Tribulation].

Daniel 11:25b-27

All tactical considerations aside, the verses above clearly indicate that the primary reason for the failure of the south and the victory of the north in this first confrontation

will be the treachery against the southern leader or Mahdi on the part of antichrist's agents (i.e., the three subordinate kings of the south who are themselves part of the ten horns). All this suggests that the south's forces will actually be significantly stronger than antichrist's numerically inferior (if perhaps somewhat technologically superior) army, and that, had the battle taken place on a level playing field, the result would have been much different. We are not told the specifics of how this inner circle of the three kings will undermine the Mahdi's hopes in this first encounter, but it is not difficult to guess. Through a combination of bad advice (i.e., encouraging the decisive action too far north, thus making the logistical situation easier for the beast and more difficult for the south), undermining morale, spreading false rumors, keeping the beast informed of all the Mahdi's movements and plans, and deliberately failing to carry out necessary operations with appropriate vigor, these three will be in a position to bestow upon the beast a decisive advantage.

It should be noted at this point that as a result of his strategic pull-back and the peace treaty with the south, there will therefore probably be no large scale movement of the beast's troops into the state of Israel at this time (that development will apparently await the conclusion of the second campaign when antichrist will shift his world headquarters to Jerusalem; cf. Dan.11:41). As the relatively vulnerable *casus belli*, we may theorize that Israel's primary role during this first campaign will merely be to defend herself, and possibly also to act as a blocking force against the direct intervention by the forces of the alliances' southernmost kingdom (i.e., Egypt and its coalition partners). This does not mean, however, that the beast will not take advantage of this opportunity to begin to apply the screws to Israel while he still has significant forces in the vicinity. The political state of affairs within the state of Israel at this time is likely to be extraordinarily tense. On the one hand, the secular Jewish majority will have placed a very strong leader in power (one of the "ten kings" in fact). On the other hand, however, the ministry of Moses and Elijah and the worldwide evangelism of the 144,000 directed by them will be reaching its zenith at this point, producing a sizeable minority of believers.

The defeat of the southern alliance will be a turn of events which will leave even many of the most ardent supporters of the "worthless shepherd" (i.e., the Israeli premier) somewhat less enthusiastic about the beast and his empire, while at the same time antichrist will also feel less constrained in regard to his dealings with Israel. For with the south "set up" for defeat, the entire world will be only one step away from falling completely into his hands, and the need for a great cause, that is, the "crusade" to protect Israel, will soon be obsolete. At this point, then, the beast will feel secure enough to take preliminary steps towards Israel which will leave objective observers in little doubt about his ultimate designs for that state and for the Jewish people. For while he had based his worldwide political campaign upon the need to protect Israel, in reality it had always been his father Satan's plan to destroy her.

Now as he (i.e., antichrist) returns to his own land with great booty, his heart will be set against the holy covenant, so that he will take action [against it] and [then] return to his

own land.
Daniel 11:28

The words "holy covenant" used here refer both to the administration of God's grace and truth to the Jewish people through the restoration ministry of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000, and to the heart and hand response of those in Israel who accept the message (cf. Dan.11:30; 11:32).³⁶⁵ All of antichrist's long-distance efforts to hinder the ministry itself will prove unsuccessful at this time (as the Lord will provide the two witnesses with ample ability to ward off any direct threats: Rev.11:5-6; cf. 2Kng.1:9-15). But this verse does represent the beginning of the persecution that will break forth with a vengeance after the conclusion of the second campaign. We can only imagine what sort of intimidating measures the beast and the worthless shepherd will impose upon true believers at this time (though they will likely include activities of the sort intimated by Dan.8:10; 8:23-25; 11:32-35), but one can safely assume that particular pressure will be brought to bear upon all those who have not openly accepted the message of salvation. Such a strategy has the advantage of creating a widening rift between "the people who know their God" and those who, while they may have a varying degree of emotional attachment to the restored ritual of the temple, will be unwilling to abandon their worldly security for a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ. Still, the reduction in personal freedoms and alteration/restriction of traditional rituals which the actions of antichrist referred to here in Daniel 11:28 will no doubt entail (especially coming at a time when the threat from the south has now been reduced) will not be well received by many in Israel and will have repercussions as we shall see below.

VI. The Second Campaign against the South

For the better part of this study we have been following Daniel chapter 11 as our chronological guide to the secular events of the Tribulation's first half, and it will be helpful to repeat at this point the summary of the pertinent part of that chapter given in section II.3 above:

- verse 21: Synopsis of the beast's career part 1: His rise to power and his methodology in seizing control of mystery Babylon.
- verse 22: Synopsis of the beast's career part 2: Mobilization for and destruction at Armageddon. Identification of antichrist as the prophesied "prince of the covenant".
- verse 23: Return to the chronological order by reprising antichrist's methods in gaining control of mystery Babylon.
- verse 24: Seizure of the seven kingdoms (revived Rome); consolidation of power and preparations for attacking the southern alliance.
- verses 25-28: The first campaign against the three kingdoms (the southern alliance).
- verses 29-30a: The second campaign against the south.

- verses 30b-35: The attempted assassination of antichrist, his putative resuscitation, and his resultant persecution of Israel.
- verses 36-39: The reign of antichrist during the Great Tribulation.
- verses 40-43: Reprise of antichrist's victory over the southern alliance during the Tribulation's first half giving a more detailed account of the second campaign.
- verse 44: The departure of antichrist from Israel to secure his kingdom following the fifth bowl judgment.
- verse 45: The defeat of antichrist at Armageddon.

It is particularly critical for our study to note at this point the fact that the second campaign is both described in its chronological order in verses 29-30a, *and* later reintroduced for explanation in greater detail in verses 40-43. This is not an uncommon biblical technique (see the discussion in section II.3 above) and it is employed here for two reasons: the brief description in the first half of Daniel 11:29-30 allows the narrative which follows to focus first in an undistracted way upon the most important developments at the Tribulation's mid-point (i.e., the termination of the ministry of the two witnesses, the setting up of the "abomination of desolation", and the commencement of the Great Persecution, the defining event of the Great Tribulation), while at the same time allowing for a later reintroduction of the second campaign in greater detail. For the specific geographical details given in Daniel 11:40-43, while potentially distracting in the first instance, are necessary in this latter context to explain the situation that results from the conquest of the south, in particular, the exploitation that follows the victory and the exclusion of Edom, Moab, and part of Ammon from the vast territorial conquests of the beast (as havens for the believers who will flee Israel when the abomination of desolation is set up; cf. Matt.24:15-20; Rev.12:13-17).

(29) During this period he will return and attack the south [again], but the circumstances of this [second] campaign will not be like those of the first one. (30a) For *ships of Kittim* (i.e., the western "Babylon") will attack *with* him [so that he will be victorious].

Daniel 11:29-30a

Now at the time of the end, the king of the south (i.e., the Mahdi) will make a thrust at him (i.e., the beast), with the result that the king of the north will come against him like a whirlwind with chariots, and with cavalry, and *with many ships*.

Daniel 11:40a

The reference to the naval forces of antichrist in both of these passages is noteworthy. In the first passage above, "Kittim", literally the people of the island of Cyprus, is most often used in scripture as a generic term to refer to all of "the islands", that is, the nations of the world's western quadrant (Is.23:1; 23:12; Jer.2:10; Ezek.27:6; i.e., as representative of all of the western sons of Japheth from whom "the islands of the gentiles divided", Gen.10:4-5). What this means is that these "ships of Kittim" are the ships of Babylon and its western allies. What we have here, therefore, is a reference to the beast's own navy rather than to some extraneous force opposing him (as is often

erroneously supposed).³⁶⁶ Once this point is understood, it is clear to see that in Daniel 11:30 these ships *are* the reason why "circumstances are different" in this second campaign, for it is just this naval superiority which proves to be the decisive element in the beast's victory, attacking "*with him*". The second passage above is in complete agreement with this interpretation. For here we see that antichrist's navy is not only the ultimate element named in the threefold list of his combat arms (stressing its importance), but is also the only one marked out as exceptional in terms of its quantity (i.e., his ships are "*many*", even in comparison to his certainly numerous "chariots and cavalry"). Together, these two scriptures confirm that the second campaign will be won by antichrist through the decisive use of seapower, and the precise manner in which he will employ that power has also been given to us in prophecy, specifically in the last oracle of Balaam son of Besor:

Then [Balaam] pronounced his oracle, and said, "Alas! Who can survive once God unleashes it (i.e., the Great Tribulation)? For ships will come from the direction of Kittim, and they will afflict Ashur, and they will afflict Eber. For this is even the one (i.e., antichrist) . . . until he perishes."

Numbers 24:23-24

It is not unexpected that Balaam, who sought to curse Israel, should be given this prophecy about the persecution emanating from the all-time nemesis of Israel, antichrist. However the context of Balaam's last oracles (Num.24:14-24) have the stated purpose of conveying information about "the days to come" (Num.24:14). In addition to this statement and to the other eschatological elements in these prophecies (cf. the irrefutably Messianic "star" and "scepter" of Num.24:17), the phraseology of the Hebrew words used in verse twenty-three above to identify the "mystery man" who will be responsible for the future "affliction of Eber" (*ve-gam hu'i*: "*for this is even the one*") is reminiscent of that used in the key passage in Daniel which likewise identifies antichrist (i.e., Dan.11:22b: *ve-gam naghidh berith*: "*for he is even the prince of the covenant*", cf. Dan.9:27). Together, these facts make the connection between these "ships of Kittim" and the "ships of Kittim" in Daniel chapter 11 virtually certain. Balaam's prophecy also provides us with the crucial information which details the precise place of this invasion, namely, through present-day Lebanon-Syria and Israel. For Ashur, of course, is the original ancestor of Assyria just as Eber is of Israel (cf. respectively Gen.10:22 and Gen.11:10-31), making it clear that the entire eastern coastline of the Mediterranean will be the focus of this unprecedented invasion.

The purpose for the massive amphibious assault suggested by these scriptures is plain enough when one considers the actions of the king of the south described in Daniel 11:40a above. In that verse, the king of the south is said to "make a thrust" against the king of the north in what would have to be a south to north direction, a maneuver which would entail the large-scale movement of most if not all of his forces toward the upper reaches of his realm, close to his border with antichrist's kingdom. We may surmise that this has been antichrist's expectation and plan from the very start, even from before the opening of the first campaign. By this time the Mahdi has no doubt mobilized an even larger army, confident of victory based upon the previous campaign and the improved

ratio of forces that must now be even more heavily in his favor (when only those forces deployed on the ground are considered). After the king of the south thrusts to the north, Daniel 11:40 characterizes the beast's response as swift and furious (furious as a whirlwind, according to the Hebrew text), and we are again reminded of the leopard-like swiftness which characterizes all of antichrist's operations (Rev.13:2). Once the forces of the south have advanced into his trap, the beast will spring it by launching the largest amphibious invasion in history with the objective of cutting off his enemies from the rear, thus surrounding and then annihilating them. In this way, the last major independent military force outside of antichrist's direct control will be eliminated with a single blow.

Since this seaborne invasion will be directed at Syria-Lebanon-Israel, the general location of the final battle of this campaign is thus most likely somewhere in northern Iraq-Syria and southern Turkey-Iran. This too is consistent with what we find elsewhere in scripture. As we have seen above, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, is a scriptural type of antichrist, the prophetic king of Babylon. Within the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel (esp. Is.19-20; Jer.46; and Ezek.29-32), we also see the conflict between the historical Nebuchadnezzar and Egypt's Pharaoh functioning as a prophetic analogy to the end times with its conflict between Babylon's antichrist and the Mahdi of the southern alliance (whose political center of gravity is also Egypt; cf. Dan.11:42).³⁶⁷ Therefore we can say that the conduct of antichrist's campaigns against the Mahdi and his southern alliance will be similar in general terms to the scriptural representations found in these prophecies.

Egypt will rise up like the Nile, and her waters (i.e., the forces of the southern alliance) will surge forth like the [Nile's] streams. And she will say, "I will rise up. I will inundate the world. I will destroy [its] cities and their inhabitants".
Jeremiah 46:8

Jeremiah places the decisive battle which will ensue as a result of the king of the south's "thrust" and the king of the north's "whirlwind" response (cf. Dan.11:40) in the northern reaches of southern alliance territory "by the river Euphrates", making the most likely focal point of the decisive engagement, as mentioned immediately above, somewhere in the vicinity of present-day Syria, Iraq, and northern Turkey (cf. Jer.46:2; 46:10):

"Muster [your troops] with buckler and shield, and advance to the battle. Harness your horses and order your cavalry to mount up. Assemble with your helmets. Polish your spears. Put on your armor. But why do I see them [all] terrified and falling back to the rear? [It is because] their picked troops have been smashed and are in headlong flight. They do not even look back, for there is terror all around [them]". The Lord declares, "Let the swift not flee [to safety] nor the strong escape. *In the north, by the river Euphrates*, they shall stumble and fall".
Jeremiah 46:3-6

Following this massive defeat, little will be left for the forces of the beast other than to exploit this victory:

(40b) And [the beast] will invade the lands [of the southern alliance], and inundate [them] and sweep through [them], (41) and he will advance into the Beautiful land (i.e., Israel). Now many lands will fall before him, but these will escape from his control: Edom, and Moab, and the first [part of the territory] of the sons of Ammon (i.e., the southern half of historical Ammon contiguous to Edom and Moab). (42) And [antichrist] will extend his control over the lands (of the southern alliance), so that even the land of Egypt will not escape. (43) Thus he will take control of all the repositories of gold and silver, even over all of Egypt's treasures, with Libya (i.e., representing North Africa) and Cush (i.e., Sudan-Ethiopia) following her [in submission].
Daniel 11:40b-43

Egypt is emphasized here because it is the main pillar upon which the southern alliance will be based. We may understand Libya to represent the entirety of North Africa, whereas Cush stands for East Africa. The northern, eastern, and southeastern reaches of the south's three kingdoms, while not mentioned by name, fall into the category of the "many lands" of verse forty-one, so that here we see the fulfillment of the prophecy of the fall of the "three horns". We should also recall in this respect that the three kings of these sub-kingdoms who were so instrumental in the beast's victory during the first campaign will certainly be exceptionally useful to him in his consolidation of power over their respective realms. Furthermore, the "bandwagon effect" of the astonishing defeat of this impressive army will not be lost on the rest of the world. It will serve to deflate the hopes of any and all who are even remotely considering opposition on the basis of secular means, especially when one considers the exponential increase in power that antichrist will experience after capturing "Egypt's treasures", namely, all the natural resources of all of the southern alliance territories. The aftermath of defeat for Egypt and by extension of all of the nations of the triple coalition that threw in with her under the Mahdi's leadership is voluminously covered in scripture, and the combination of passages which treat this subject paint a picture of abject defeat, a situation which will no doubt be all the more difficult to bear since the hopes of the south will have been thrown down from such a lofty height (see esp. Ezek.30; cf. Is.19-20; Jer.46; Ezek.29-32):

"Son of man, prophesy and say, 'Thus says the Lord, "Wail! Woe for the day! For a day [of judgment] is close, [yes], the day of the Lord is close. It will be a day of clouds and time [of judgment] for the nations. For a sword will come against Egypt, and writhing will come upon Cush. When the slain fall in Egypt, they will take away her treasures and her foundations will be trampled. Cush, and Put, and Lydia, and all Arabia, Lybia and all the peoples in league with the land [of Egypt] (i.e., all the allies of the king of the south) will fall by the sword."
Ezekiel 30:2-5 (cf. Ezek.20:45-48)

Egypt's complete undoing at the hands of the beast will, in the end, be a benefit. For it will cause the Egyptians along with many people of the lands of the south to see the

impotence of their modern day "Pharaoh", the Mahdi (cf. Jer.46:17; Ezek.32:2-15), and bring them instead to cry to the Lord for help, a prayer to be answered both at and after the return of our glorious Lord (Is.19:4-25). Ultimately, the south's defeat in this second, decisive campaign will again be largely attributable to the treason of the three horns and the massive infighting that will ensue within her own ranks in the wake of the beast's springing of his trap (cf. Dan.11:26):

For I will spur on Egyptians against Egyptians, and they will fight one against his brother and another against his friend, a city against a city and a kingdom against a kingdom (i.e., the splintering of the triple coalition). And Egypt's spirit will be emptied from the midst of her, for I will confound her plans, although they consult their idols and mediums and oracles and familiar spirits. And I will hand Egypt over into the hand of a cruel master (i.e., antichrist), even a stern king (cf. Dan.8:23) [who] will rule over them, says the Lord God of hosts."

Isaiah 19:2-4

As was the case during the first campaign, so here too we may expect some complication of military maneuvers on account of the trumpet judgments, specifically for this second campaign the sixth judgment or "second woe" (see figure #2 above).³⁶⁸ The havoc wreaked upon the world by the bands of marauding demons is sure to affect this campaign at least to some degree, but, as was the case in the first campaign, we may expect that the worst case analysis for the army of the beast would be an equal share of disruption, and it is fair to ask whether his forces would not be largely exempted from such an assault (for otherwise one would have, in effect, a case of "Satan casting out Satan"; cf. Matt.12:26). In any case, the result of the second campaign will be an overwhelming victory on the part of antichrist, and the removal of the last major impediment to his worldwide rule (Ezek.31:16-18):

And the entire earth was in awe of the beast. And they worshiped the dragon because he had given his authority to the beast. And they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? And who is able to make war with him?"

Revelation 13:3b-4

VII. The Apparent Assassination and Resuscitation of Antichrist

Then he will be stricken [as if dead], but will revive. Therefore he will be enraged at the holy covenant, so that on his return [to Israel from the far south] he will take action [against it] (i.e., eliminating Moses and Elijah and ending the sacrifices).

Daniel 11:30b

Immediately upon the heels of his dramatic victory over the south, the beast will be the object of an attempted assassination plot, the event that gives him the "fatal wound" that is nonetheless miraculously "healed" (Rev.13:3). The key word in the half verse above is the Hebrew verb form *nich'ah* (נִכְאַח). While there exists a variety of opinions among

lexicographers and commentators about this difficult form, what we have here is most likely the *niphal* (i.e., passive) perfect of the verb *cha'ah* (כָּאָה), meaning to strike, smite or scourge (hence the translation, "he will be stricken").³⁶⁹ Time and space do not here permit a detailed explication of כָּאָה. It must suffice to remark that in his Hebrew lexicon, Gesenius likewise derived this form from כָּאָה, and that he and other commentators (notably O. Zöckler and T. Lewis in the Lange series) also find the *niphal* of this verb at Job 30:8 in the form נִכְאָיִם (i.e., "driven/scourged from the land"; Gesenius understands the *dagesh forte* as euphonic). Translations which take this verb as being used here in a strictly emotional sense (i.e., understanding it to mean that antichrist will be "disheartened" but not physically injured) do so without any firm evidence. The two passages often adduced as parallels, namely, Psalm 109:16 and Ezekiel 13:22, both contain the delimiting word "heart" which specifies the place affected or "stricken", and thus move the application of the blow from the physical to the emotional realm. No similar delimiting word is to be found in Daniel 11:30. Therefore, given that the meaning of the near identical root כָּאָה likewise means literally to strike or smite, and given the well-known Hebrew phenomenon of related roots often bearing identical meanings, the preponderance of evidence points in the direction of antichrist being stricken in a quite literal sense, as opposed to suffering a mere psychological setback.³⁷⁰

The wounding and seemingly miraculous recovery of antichrist described in Daniel 11:30 is thus the Old Testament parallel for the similar information given in Revelation chapters 13 and 17. While we will continue our method of covering these verses seriatim in their proper places (in accordance with the generally chronological progression of the book of Revelation that we have noted before), it will be of use to consider the four pertinent passages of scripture here:

And one of its (i.e., the beast's) heads [looked] as if it had been *stricken unto death*, and [yet] its *mortal wound had been healed*.
Revelation 13:3a

And he (i.e., the beast's false prophet) [will] act with all the authority of the first beast [while] in his presence, and he will make the world and all its inhabitants worship the first beast, *whose mortal wound was healed*.
Revelation 13:12

And he (i.e., the beast's false prophet) [will] deceive those who dwell upon the earth on account of the miracles (lit., "signs") which have been given to him to perform in the presence of the beast, even commanding the inhabitants of the earth to make an image of the beast, [that is] of him *who received the [deadly] stroke of the sword and [yet] came [back] to life*.
Revelation 13:14

The beast, which you saw, *was* (i.e., "existed"), *and is not* (i.e., came "not to exist"), *and is going to rise from the Abyss* (i.e., the revival of Rome on the one hand and apparent resuscitation of antichrist on the other), and is going to its destruction. And the inhabitants of the earth, [those] whose names have not remained written in the book of

life [where they were written] from the beginning of the world, will be in awe when they see the beast, *because he was* (i.e., "existed"), *and is not* (i.e., came "not to exist"), *and will again be present on the scene* (i.e., seem to return to life in the case of antichrist, and be reestablished in respect to the empire).

Revelation 17:8

Whatever one makes of these passages, we can say with authority that antichrist is most certainly not being "resurrected" here – only our risen Lord currently possesses an eternal body, and no one else will do so until the resurrection of His Church at His return (at which point the beast will be deposited in the lake of fire: Rev.19:20). The question of "resuscitation" is a more difficult one. On the one hand, it is impossible that the devil would be able to engineer even the temporary return to life of his son, that is, a true "resuscitation", without divine permission for something so entirely unprecedented (i.e., the revival to life from death of an arch-enemy of God and his people), and of such consent we have no specific indication from scripture.³⁷¹ On the other hand, the four passages from Revelation quoted above do suggest at the very least a physical revival which will be extraordinary in the extreme, with the final passage, Revelation 17:8, presenting the most difficult case to explain away. For even though that passage has its primary application to revived Rome, applying to the beast by extension (as opposed to Revelation 13 where this relationship of primary and secondary application is reversed), what is true of one should also be true of the other, and the words "was (i.e., "existed"), and is not (i.e., came "not to exist"), and will again be present on the scene" are most emphatic, and hard to take in any other way than as a literal return from the dead (that is, the definite departure and return of the spirit).

Whether this assassination attempt results in antichrist's actual death or, alternatively, a near-death experience so dramatic and traumatic that it will be nearly indistinguishable from actual death and resuscitation, it is clear from the reaction of the general public to the beast's recovery from this "mortal wound" that the genuineness of his death and the miraculous nature of his return to life will be *taken* as true and factual by the unbelieving world (cf., the amazement and resultant worship of the world: Rev.13:3b-4). It is also relatively easy to see how trauma unquestionably fatal in the case of any other normal human being might not necessarily be so for the beast – for he will not be fully human after all. The angelic paternity of antichrist will doubtless give him the physical resiliency to endure wounds to which any mere man would certainly succumb. We know from our previous study of the *nephilim* that prodigious physical attributes are the norm for such creatures, and it is probable that their ability to tolerate conditions which would kill normal human beings is at least part of the reason why God caused the great flood to cover the earth to such a depth and for so long a time.³⁷² So it is certainly possible that while to the world antichrist may appear to have received an unavoidably fatal injury and may seem to have been "stricken unto death", this wound, mortal in every other case, may only be near-fatal in his case.

From the following context of the passages in both Daniel and Revelation, there is no evidence that the beast will suffer any chronic after-effects of this wounding (beyond the permanent scar visible upon his head left by the blow from the sword which strikes

him). Quite to the contrary, rather than a setback this incident will actually be a boon to the beast, for it will do much to further the idea that he really is "the true Christ", having thus "risen from the dead" in such a seemingly irrefutable way. It is therefore no accident that it will be directly in the wake of this incident that antichrist's new religion will be transformed into outright devil worship and swiftly come to dominate the world (cf. Rev.13:3-17). Unbelievers all over the earth will take this "resurrection" to be genuine and to be legitimate proof of the beast's status as the Messiah. However, believers who know their God and continue to hold firm to the testimony of Jesus will remember our Lord's warning to beware of all such false signs, no matter how persuasive, waiting instead on their own resurrection at the return of our truly resurrected Lord:

At that time if someone says to you "Look [(as they will tell you then)]! Christ is here!", or "Here [He is]!", do not believe [it]. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will perform great miracles (lit., "signs") and wonders [sufficient] to deceive even the elect, if [that were] possible. Look [(as I am telling you now)]! I have told you ahead of time. So if they say to you all, "Look, He is in the desert!", do not go out [there]. [Or] "Look, He is in the inner-rooms (i.e., in hiding in the city)", do not believe [it]. For as lightning [though it] comes forth from the east is visible all the way to the west, this is just how the return of the Son of Man (i.e., the Second Advent) will be. For wherever the body is (i.e., the Lord), there the eagles will gather (i.e., believers rising in resurrection).
Matthew 24:23-28

Beyond the details from Daniel and Revelation provided above, we can say a few things further about this critical event. Having conquered the king of the south, the beast will be at the height of his power, with no possible combination of the remaining independent powers on earth capable of resisting the combined power of Babylon, revived Rome, and the now occupied and cooperating territories of the southern kingdom. At this point, with the world, for all practical purposes, lying prostrate at his feet, antichrist's plan, soon to be successfully carried out, will be to move his headquarters to Jerusalem, intending to rule the world from there as if he were God (cf. 2Thes.2:4). It should be observed in regard to his treatment of the Jews, moreover, that, in addition to the measures "against the covenant" already taken at the conclusion of the first campaign (Dan.11:28), the land of Israel will be very roughly handled during the second campaign, with the invading amphibious forces treating her and her population as anything but allies (i.e., "they will afflict Eber": Num.24:24; cf. Is.33:1-8, especially v.8, and Lam.1:2, 10, 19, 21). The beast's horrendous plans to completely annul his agreement with the state of Israel and to thoroughly abrogate the revival of temple rite will doubtless not be totally secret, even before the fact (at least not to his inner circle, a group which we may expect will contain representatives from Israel, one of the seven original kingdoms of revived Rome). It is more than likely, therefore, that the agents of this assassination attempt will be Jewish. This would seem to be the best explanation for the close connection given in Daniel 11:30 between the "striking down" of antichrist and the fury released immediately thereafter *against* the legitimately revived worship of God in Jerusalem and those who are involved therein:

(30b) Then he will be stricken [as if dead], but will revive. Therefore he will be enraged at the holy covenant, so that on his return [to Israel from the far south] he will take action [against it] (i.e., eliminating Moses and Elijah and ending the sacrifices).

Daniel 11:30b

It should not escape our attention here that this "rage" and retaliation are an indication of antichrist's core antisemitism, for it will be technically misplaced. Those who are truly following Jesus Christ in response to the ministry of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000 will be focused upon divine solutions, and will certainly not be misled into thinking that any act of violence of this sort, no matter how apparently justifiable, will in any way ward off the Great Tribulation to come. At this time in Israel, there will essentially be three major factions into which the body-politic is split: 1) dedicated followers of antichrist; 2) dedicated followers of our Lord; 3) patriots (or "zealots"), most of whom were ardent supporters of the beast when he appeared to be the only worldly hope of help against the Mahdi and his hordes. As the Tribulation progresses, we can expect more and more of the first group to migrate into the third group (cf. Zech.12:3-8 with Zech.12:10). Those who truly know their God, however, will flee into the wilderness in accordance with the commands of our Lord just as soon as antichrist sets up the "abomination of desolation" as a putative part of his reaction to this assault on his person (though his plan all along has been to take this action). In addition to supporting his argument to be the true "Messiah", therefore, this assassination attempt will also supply the beast with a certain measure of justification for the harsh treatment of Israel to follow, and specifically for his war against Moses and Elijah and the subsequent termination of the revived temple worship (an action that will in itself enjoy a measure of worldwide popularity because of their direction of the trumpet judgments: Rev.11:7-13). For antichrist will opportunistically, though falsely, lay this deed at their feet. Finally, it is likely that the assassination attempt will take place while antichrist is involved in directing the plundering of Egypt, the heartland of the Mahdi's power (cf. Ezek.30:9 with Dan.11:30a), for he is said to "return" to Israel after the event in order to vent his anger "against the covenant".

VIII. The "Abomination of Desolation" and the "Session" of Antichrist

Upon his return to Israel following his defeat of the south and his subsequent recovery from the attempt on his life, antichrist will act swiftly to annul the treaty made with Israel (cf. Is.33:7-8). Using the assault upon his person as an excuse and the true believers who follow the ministry of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000 as scapegoats, the beast will commence his "war" against the two prophets with the intention of bringing a halt to the newly revived worship of the one true God, and replacing it with the overt worship of the devil and of himself (Rev.11:7-13).

Then he (i.e., antichrist) will confirm an agreement (or "covenant"; Hebrew, ברית, *beriyth*) with the powerful [in Israel] during [that] one [remaining] week (i.e., the 70th week, the Tribulation), but in the middle of the week (i.e., just prior to the Tribulation's

mid-point) *he will put a halt to sacrifice and offering* (i.e., eliminating Moses and Elijah and interrupting the temple rites).

Daniel 9:27a

Then he will be stricken [as if dead], but will revive. Therefore *he will be enraged at the holy covenant*, so that on his return [to Israel from the far south] *he will take action [against it]* (i.e., eliminating Moses and Elijah and ending the sacrifices). And *he will give his support to those who abandon the holy covenant*.

Daniel 11:30b-c

As we saw in the previous installment of this series in our treatment of the ministry of Moses and Elijah, antichrist's assault upon these two prophets will only be successful because God allows it to be so. In the end, even the beast's murder of the two witnesses will be shown to be merely a part of the permissive will of God, as both are revived to life a full three and one half days after their murder, then taken up into heaven right before the eyes of their enemies and the unbelieving world. But the departure of Moses and Elijah marks the end of the nervous truce between those in Israel who are ardent followers of the beast and those who had heretofore supported him out of misplaced patriotism. Now that the two prophets with their miraculous powers have been removed, antichrist will waste no time in putting an end to all semblance of the worship of God on the temple mount (as the verses above indicate). Worse to tell, he will now implement his plan for replacing the worship of God with the worship of himself as God in conjunction with the worship of his father the devil. The first irrefutable sign of this will be the setting up in front of the temple of an abominable idol known in scripture as "the abomination of desolation".

1. The Abomination of Desolation: The placement of this idol by antichrist is well-documented in scripture, being referred to both by Daniel and by our Lord as one of the critical events whereby the beast may be known (Matt.24:15-18; Mk.13:14-16):

For it is from him (i.e., the coming evil one) that the military forces will issue forth which will pollute the sanctuary (i.e., ending the ministry of Moses and Elijah), remove the daily sacrifice, *and set up the abomination of desolation*.

Daniel 11:31

Daniel's combining of the pollution of the sanctuary and halting of the offerings to God with the setting up of this idol indicates that the place of its erection will indeed be within the temple court:

"But when you see *the abomination of desolation standing where it should not* – let the reader understand – then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."

Mark 13:14

Matthew goes further and overtly connects this idol with the "abomination" mentioned in Daniel (i.e., Dan.11:31 and 12:11), so as to leave no doubt about the identification of these prophecies: from Daniel's words, to our Lord's words, to the description of the idol

in Revelation chapter 13, all of these passages are clearly referring to one and the same thing, the idol of antichrist which is set up in the temple court at the Tribulation's mid-point:

"So when you see the abomination of desolation (which is spoken of through Daniel the prophet) standing in a holy place – let the reader understand – then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."

Matthew 24:15-16

It should be noted that in the Greek text of Matthew 24:15 there is no definite article preceding the words "holy place", so that translations which render this phrase "*the* holy place" are technically incorrect. This is important because, in translation, the words "*the* holy place" generally refer to the outermost of the temple's two spaces which contained the table of the bread of presence, the golden altar of incense, and the golden lampstand or *menorah* (in the LXX: Ex.26:33; 28:29; Lev.16:2; etc.; cf. Heb.9:1-5; in Greek in all these cases, moreover, the word "place" is left out). The omission of the article thus serves as an emphatic sign that the words "holy place" most definitely do not refer to the temple, but rather to the inner court or "priest's court" (as in Dan.8:11; Rev.11:2; cf. Acts 6:13; 21:28). The idol will be visible to all inhabitants of Jerusalem, for it will not be necessary to enter into the temple proper to view it. In fact, during the 42 months of antichrist's reign in Jerusalem, the world will make pilgrimage to the temple mount to do obeisance before the statue of the beast, thronging into the outer court from where the idol, no doubt of substantial size, will be visible from its place in the inner court before the temple (cf. Ezek.8:3-5):

And [the beast's false prophet] [will] perform great miracles (lit., "signs"), even making fire come down from heaven to the earth in front of everyone. And he [will] deceive those who dwell upon the earth on account of the miracles (lit., "signs") which have been given to him to perform in the presence of the beast, even commanding the inhabitants of the earth to make *an image of the beast*, [that is] of him who received the [deadly] stroke of the sword and [yet] came [back] to life. And it was given to him to provide *a spirit for the image of the beast so that the image might speak*, and [it was also given to him] to bring it about that as many as refused to worship the image of the beast might be put to death.

Revelation 13:13-15

As is clear from this description, this idol will be most impressive to the unbelievers who view it and come to worship it. In our age of skepticism and worldliness, that is saying quite a lot. We may therefore expect this idol to be both mammoth in its proportions, incredibly and persuasively life-like in its functioning, and awe-inspiring in its verbal pronouncements. It will strike fear and reverence into the hardened hearts of the unbelievers who come to Jerusalem to worship the beast, confirming their confidence in him and strengthening their support of him. The impression made by this idol in conjunction with the miracles performed by the false prophet and the prior apparent "resurrection" of the beast in conjunction with his military conquest of the world will be

more than enough for all those who have rejected the one true God to convince them of the divinity of the devil's son.

Our name for this idol, "the abomination of desolation" comes directly from the conventional translation of our Lord's words in Greek at Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:14 (*to bdelugma tes eremoseos*; τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως), which is in turn a direct rendering of the Hebrew of Daniel 11:31 (*hashiqutz meshomem*; השקוץ משומם). This translation, while understandable, is a bit misleading, for even in the Greek translation of the original Hebrew phrase, "desolation" is a verbal noun which ought rather to mean something like "*process of desolating*", a fact even more difficult to ignore in the case of the corresponding participles of Daniel 11:31 and 12:11. Since these words are all really calling attention to the *action* produced by the "abominable thing" (i.e., the idol), we would have been better served had this phrase been traditionally translated "the abomination *which causes* desolation". In applying the exact same terminology to antichrist himself, Daniel 9:27 spells out the precise significance of these words in respect to this capacity of the "abomination" idol to produce "desolation" in a spiritual sense, namely, an appalling isolation and separation from God resulting from horrendous idolatry and in turn resulting in devastation in both spiritual and material terms.³⁷³

And on account of the extreme [nature] of [his] (i.e., antichrist's) *abominations*, he [will] be causing *desolations* (i.e., desertion and estrangement from God), even until the end when what has been determined will be poured out upon the one characterized by [this] desolation (i.e., the beast as archetype and cause of the alienation and rebellion from God which he fosters).

Daniel 9:27b

Unfortunately, the setting up of idols even in the very presence of the Lord God is not unprecedented in Israel's history (2Kng.23:6; cf. Ezek.8:3-5). What makes this particular "abomination" distinctive is that, rather than being a mere symptom of apostasy, this particular idol will be instrumental in producing a spiritual "desolation" within Israel whence it will spread to the entire world (cf. Dan.8:13, where the apostasy or "rebellion" is said to be instrumental in the "desolation"). For it is the obeisance paid to this idol which will be central to the new religion of beast-and-Satan worship which antichrist will establish at the Tribulation's mid-point, and it is the acquiescence and willing participation in this worship which will both energize the Great Persecution that follows and at the same time doom the world in general and Israel in particular to the "desolating horrors" of the Great Tribulation itself, the final intense period of judgment that precedes our Lord's return.

"And when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that her *desolation* is near."

Luke 21:20

In Luke's account of our Lord's words above, a second sign (i.e., the mustering of the beast's armies in Israel following the defeat of the south) is given as a warning for

believers to flee Jerusalem in addition to the sign of the "abomination". The Greek word used here, *eremoseos* (ἐρημώσεως), is precisely the same word for "desolation" as the one used for the idol in Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:14. Thus in the case of Luke we are also given to see the *resulting* "desolation" which proceeds from the establishment of the system of worldwide idolatry in the very center of Jerusalem focused on the worship of antichrist and the idol which represents him, "the abomination [which causes] desolation".

2. The Session of Antichrist in the Temple of God: The elimination of Moses and Elijah and subsequent desecration of the sanctuary through the establishment of the talking idol are preliminary steps to the purpose most dear to antichrist's cold, half-human heart, namely, taking his seat in God's temple and thereby blasphemously proclaiming to the world that he is the true God and the true Messiah (cf. Dan.8:11-14).

For [the Second Advent cannot come] unless the [Great] Apostasy has first occurred and the man of lawlessness, [antichrist,] has [first] been revealed, that "son of destruction" (cf. Jn.17:12 of Judas), the one who will oppose and exalt himself against every so-called god and object of worship to such a degree that *he will [even] take his seat in the temple of God and represent himself as being God.*

2nd Thessalonians 2:3-4

The scope and duration of this false "session" are also discussed by Daniel:

(10) And [the little horn] (i.e., antichrist as a type and representative of the devil) magnified himself against the host of heaven (i.e., the family of God, men and angels both), and he cast down to the earth some of the host (i.e., antichrist seducing believers into apostasy) and some of the stars (i.e., Satan having seduced angels into rebellion) and he trampled them underfoot (i.e., their rebellion or apostasy in association with him leading to their subsequent destruction; cf. Dan.7:7; 7:19; Rev.11:2). (11) He even magnified himself against the Prince of the host (i.e., Christ). The daily sacrifice was abolished by him, and the holy place (i.e., the inner court) was desecrated. (12) And along with the daily sacrifice, the host (i.e., believers) fell into his power on account of [the] rebellion (i.e., the Great Apostasy). And he threw truth to the ground, and was successful in whatever he did. (13) And I heard one of the holy ones who was speaking, and he said to the other holy one who was speaking, "How long will this vision of the daily sacrifice and of the rebellion which produces desolation and of the handing over of the holy [place] (i.e., the inner court) and of the trampling down of the host be?" (14) And he replied to me, "Until 2,300 evenings and mornings have passed. Then the holy [place] will be purified."

Daniel 8:10-14

The beast will thus occupy the temple of God for the better part of the Great Tribulation, removing from Jerusalem only when the events which precede the Second Advent necessitate it (Dan.11:44-45; see part 5 of this series). Indeed, this prolonged "session" of antichrist is a deliberate attempt to mimic the present heavenly and coming earthly true session of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also take up residence in the temple

during His thousand year millennial reign. Believers who know their God will not be fooled by the false parallels engineered by the beast (i.e., of a false Messiah ensconced in a false New Jerusalem ruling a false "kingdom come"). Just as the ark did not come to rest until Solomon, the "son of David", built a new and glorious home for it (i.e., the first temple), so the our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the ark is a type (1Chron.17:1-6), will be the one to "build up" the third temple in a manner and to a degree which will allow of no misinterpretation as to the true divine glory of its Builder and Inhabitant (cf. Zech.6:12-15). On the other hand, just as his father the devil profaned the original mountain of God (Ezek.28:18), so antichrist will profane and pollute the sanctuary until the 42 months of the Great Tribulation run their course and the glorious day of our Lord's return draws nigh.

3. The Revelation of Antichrist: With the termination of the warning ministries of the Tribulation's first half (directed by Moses and Elijah and carried out by the 144,000), the setting up of the abomination of desolation, and the session of antichrist in the very temple of God, blasphemously proclaiming himself to be God, not even the most skeptical nor the most ignorant will be able to doubt the identification of this individual as the beast prophesied in scripture. With these events, antichrist will have been fully "revealed" (2Thes.2:3-8), and the "number of his name" associated with the ensuing worship of him and his father the devil central to his new religion (Rev.13:16-18; covered in the next installment of this series) will be the final and incontrovertible proof that he is not the Son of God but rather the son of Satan. From this point forward, antichrist will be, for all practical purposes, the ruler of the world (Rev.13:3-10), and from his new headquarters on Jerusalem's temple mount he will seek to solidify that rule through the institution of a worldwide religion whose basic tenet will be that all must "join or die". All those whose names are not written in the book of life will acquiesce to this demand (Rev.13:8), but for those who are determined to remain faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ, come what may, there will then begin a time of persecution unprecedented since the beginning of the world, there will begin the Great Tribulation.

This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Look! Disaster is spreading from nation to nation; a mighty storm is rising from the ends of the earth."
Jeremiah 25:32 NIV

The Coming Tribulation: A History of the Apocalypse

Part 4

The Great Tribulation: Revelation 11:15 - 15:8

by Dr. Robert D. Luginbill

Introduction: Having examined the career of antichrist up until the mid-point of the seven year tribulational period, we return to the book of Revelation and resume our verse by verse treatment of the history of the apocalypse. The establishment of the beast as the effective ruler of this world under the guidance and support of his father the devil and his session in God's temple in Jerusalem representing himself as God (2Thes.2:4) marks the end of the Tribulation's first phase. With this "revelation" of antichrist, we are brought to the threshold of the most terrible time in world history, the Great Tribulation.

And it shall be a *time of distress* such as has never occurred since people first existed on the earth until that time.
Daniel 12:1b

For at that time there will be a *Great Tribulation* such as has never occurred from the beginning of the world until now, and [such as] will never again occur thereafter.
Matthew 24:21 (cf. Mk.13:19)

The Great Tribulation will unquestionably be a devastating experience for all the inhabitants of the earth, but it will fall especially hard upon believers in Jesus Christ. For the principal and truly eponymous event of that period, that is, the intense tribulation that will characterize those three and a half years, will be the unprecedented persecution of the Church and the martyrdom that accompanies that persecution. Key to the solidification of his world kingdom will be the beast's pseudo-religion. As was the case to a somewhat lesser degree in historical Rome, adherence to the cult worship of the ruler will be the litmus test of loyalty to the state. But while Roman emperors made use of this admittedly evil device primarily for pragmatic reasons relating to the solidification of their power, antichrist and his father the devil will also be intent upon eradicating faith from the earth through the elimination of the faithful. This has always been a central design of Satan's plans, for if all to whom the promises of God have been made could be removed (either through death or apostasy), then God's promises would have to fail. If there is no one left for Christ to return to, then the devil wins. Such, at any rate, runs Satan's twisted thinking. With the whole world under antichrist's control, the forcible conversion of all of the inhabitants of the earth to the beast's devil worshiping religion becomes not only theoretically possible, but is also the perfect satanic final solution: all who refuse to convert will be put to death so that, either way, faith will perish from the earth. And such would be our fate, except for the mercy, the goodness, and the power of our God, who is coming to rescue us through the return of His Son our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

And they will say on that day, "Behold! This is our God! We waited in hope for Him to deliver us. This is our Lord. We waited in hope for Him. Let us rejoice and be glad in

His deliverance!
Isaiah 25:9

Strengthen the hands that are weak. Bolster the knees that are giving way. Say to those with anxious hearts, “Be strong! Don't be afraid! Behold! Your God will come, as an Avenger. [Your] God will come, as a Rewarder. He will come, and He will deliver you.
Isaiah 35:3-4

We must ever look forward to that ultimate deliverance. But we must also remember that the Great Tribulation is aptly named, and that just as many fell through apostasy during the Tribulation's first half, many will fall in martyrdom during those final three and a half years. We must remember, learn well the lessons the Bible has – not without good reason – stored up for us in advance, and make every effort to prepare spiritually for whatever may betide.

I. The Seventh Trumpet (the Third Woe): Revelation 11:15-19

(15) Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven saying, “The world Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ has [now] come, and He will rule forever and ever. Amen”. (16) And the twenty-four elders were sitting in front of the throne, and they fell on their faces and worshiped God, (17) saying, “We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and the One who was, even because you have taken up your great power and begun to reign! (18) Although the nations thronged together in their wrath, your wrath has come, even the time for the dead to be judged, for giving to your servants the prophets and to the holy ones, even to those who fear your Name both great and small, the reward [that is due them], and for destroying those who are destroying the earth!”. (19) And the temple of God which is in heaven above opened, and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple. And there occurred flashes of lightning and thunderous voices and an earthquake, and large hail [fell].
Revelation 11:15-19

1. The Seventh Trumpet (Revelation 11:15a): With the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the Great Tribulation begins. Seven is the number of perfection and completion (cf. Ps.12:6; 119:164; Prov.6:16; 9:1),³⁷⁴ and as we saw in part 3A of this series, while the first six trumpets announce and commence warning judgments of ascending intensity and longevity during the Tribulation's first half, the seventh trumpet opens the longest and most intensive warning judgment of all, namely, the Great Tribulation itself. For the Great Tribulation is the ultimate admonition to prepare to meet with God, for He is coming at the end of that final three and a half years in the Person of the conquering Messiah who will mete out vengeance to His adversaries even as He brings deliverance

to His people (cf. 2Thes.1:3-12). That is why all of the other events and proclamations in this paragraph, Revelation 11:15-19, directly connect the sounding of the seventh trumpet and the Great Tribulation's commencement to that glorious future day. For the Tribulation as a whole is, as we have seen, the opening twilight of the Great Day of the Lord whose dawn will come in blazing glory with the Second Advent of the Morning Star, the Messiah, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the true Light of the World (Num.24:17; Matt.2:2-10; 2Pet.1:19; Rev.2:28; 22:16; cf. Jn.1:4-9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:5; 12:36; 12:46).³⁷⁵

2. The Proclamation of the Kingdom (Revelation 11:15b): The traditional translation of this verse “the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ”, common to all the major versions (with which the author is familiar) and popularized by Handel's “Messiah” is, while possible, very unlikely from both a linguistic and a theological perspective. Linguistically, the traditional translation depends upon taking the genitive phrase “of our Lord and of His Christ” as the predicate of the sentence, and, while this is not impossible, it is somewhat rare and certainly uncharacteristic of John's writing. But in its particular word order, directly *after* the first genitive phrase, “of this world”, deriving such a meaning would be suspect for most later Greek prose and altogether incongruous with John's style. On the other hand, the translation given above, “The world Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ has [now] come”, is entirely in keeping with John's Hebraic compilation of genitives. The above translation is to be preferred on theological grounds as well (although it may seem at first glance as if there is no great difference of meanings between the two translations). For while the imminent arrival of the Kingdom of heaven in the person of the Messiah is a central theme of Revelation, that Kingdom's arrival cannot correctly be understood as in any way an equivalent to the current *kosmos* of evil. Satan's rule over planet earth has never been absolute or uncontested, and to equate the two kingdoms in any way (as the traditional translation of necessity does) is a mistake. Simply put, there is no sense in which the devil's kingdom of evil could ever “become” the Kingdom of the Messiah. Satan's kingdom is on the point of being entirely *replaced* by the Messiah's coming millennial Kingdom, not “morphed” into it in any way or in any sense.³⁷⁶ When the Kingdom of heaven does arrive with the second advent of our Lord in glory, Satan's kingdom will come to an end. It will not “become” anything except extinct. What we have here is not a transfer of power but a complete replacement of the old with the new heralded here through this proclamation of the imminent arrival “in the flesh” of the Kingdom (now spiritually operational) at the revelation of its King, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whose rule will endure forever and ever (exactly the same point made in very similar language at Rev.12:10ff.).³⁷⁷

3. The Worship of the Angelic Elders (Revelation 11:16-18): The seventh trumpet is the Great Tribulation, the final twilight of the devil's rule soon to be dissolved by the brilliant light of the Day-Star's dawning as our Lord returns and takes up His millennial rule in Jerusalem. Each of the sections of Revelation chapter 11:15-19 speak to this same central point, even as each adds additional details. The proclamation of verse 15b puts

into words the underlying meaning of the 7th trumpet, namely, the imminent judgment upon the world, its evil, and present evil ruler with the victorious return of the rightful King. At the end of this final 42 month period, Christ will return to portion out judgment upon the nations who have thronged together to oppose Him, and will wreak vengeance upon all those who have persecuted His Church and oppressed His people Israel. In the synoptic picture presented in the hymn of the 24 elders, therefore, we find the establishment of the Kingdom whose imminent advent on the far side of the Great Tribulation the 7th trumpet announces (“you have taken up your great power and begun to reign”), the destruction of the nations at Armageddon at the second advent (“the nations thronged together in their wrath, [but] your wrath has come”; cf. Ps.2:1-2), and the culmination of all of history in the last judgment (“the time for the dead to be judged”), with the rewarding of the resurrected Church in the newly established millennial Kingdom receiving additional emphasis as an encouragement for all who will endure the dark days of the Great Tribulation immediately preceding that time (“for giving to your servants the reward [that is due them]”). Finally, the vengeance about to fall upon all involved in committing, aiding, or abetting the Great Persecution comes in for special mention. Christ's impending return will result in the literal destruction of “those who are destroying the earth”, a phrase with primarily moral and spiritual implications, referring in particular to all who have been responsible for the martyrdom of those who remain faithful to Jesus (rather than referring exclusively to any physical or environmental damage to planet earth proper; cf. in Rev.19:2, the whore Babylon “who was destroying the earth by her excessive prostitution”, that is, destroying it in a moral and spiritual sense; cf. Is.14:18; Hab.2:17; Rev.6:7-8). This includes Babylon, the beast, the devil, his angels, the nations and those from the nations who participated in Satan's evil plan to eradicate the faithful and the seed of Israel from the earth. So we see that just as they did prior to the opening of the book with its seven seals representing the beginning of the Tribulation proper (Rev.5:8-10; albeit in this earlier instance they do so in company with the four living creatures), here too the twenty-four elders are performing a special hymn of worship to memorialize the importance of the 7th trumpet, the event which marks the beginning of the Great Tribulation even as it heralds the imminent arrival of the Kingdom and its King who will vindicate His own on the dawning of the Great Day of the Lord.

4. The Appearance of the Ark (Revelation 11:19a): As we have had occasion to see several times in the past, the earthly ark of the covenant along with its “mercy seat”, constructed under the supervision of Moses, together symbolize God's throne which takes the form of a battle chariot (Ezek.1:4-28; 10:9-22; cf. Ps.132:7).³⁷⁸ The earthly ark no longer exists (cf. Jer.3:16), but the appearance of a heavenly ark here is highly significant. As the temple opens, the rolling out of this war chariot of God symbolizes the imminence of the Messiah's return to do battle on behalf of His people, meting out retribution upon all the enemies of God. For, as we have seen before, the ark is itself a picture of Jesus Christ (with the acacia wood covered in gold representing His true humanity and resplendent deity respectively), so that what we have here is a powerful symbol of the conquering Messiah poised to return to earth at the head of His heavenly hosts for the vindication of His saints and for the destruction of His foes. Therefore the

message behind the appearance of the ark is substantially the same as that of the sounding of the 7th trumpet, of the heavenly proclamation of verse 15b, and of the hymn of the twenty-four elders. For all of these events and symbols focus our attention upon the coming judgments of Armageddon as our Lord returns in glory to vanquish His enemies and in victory to establish His millennial Kingdom on earth.

The fourfold emphasis upon this same essential point unquestionably means that we are to take special note: the beginning of the Great Tribulation (announced by this final trumpet blast), for all the horrific suffering those three and a half years will entail, is in truth merely a prelude to the end of the devil's control of planet earth and to the beginning of the reign of the Son of God following His glorious and decisive victory at the second advent. This is an extremely important point to digest, especially for all those to whom it may fall to endure those dark days. For the message is clear: the darkest period of human history and the period of greatest Satanic persecution is, from God's perspective, merely a brief overture that serves to usher in the end of the reign of evil and darkness upon the earth and the beginning of the reign of truth and light in the person of the Son of Man, the true Morning Star, our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

5. The Heavenly Signs (Revelation 11:19b): With the sounding of the 7th trumpet and the beginning of the Tribulation's final phase, the "Great Tribulation", there will occur a series of signs of unmistakably divine origin which serve to punctuate the significance of the opening of this final phase of Satan's rule on earth and its impending replacement by the millennial Kingdom of the Messiah. These signs are almost identical to those which heralded the beginning of the Tribulation proper (as we saw in our treatment of Revelation 8:5) as well as to those which will signal the imminence of Christ's return on the eve of the battle of Armageddon (Rev.16:18). But while each of these three sets of heavenly signs includes thunder and lightning and a worldwide earthquake, there is an intensification factor as the end approaches. Here, on the threshold of the Great Tribulation proper, we see the addition of a worldwide hailstorm of powerful effect (Rev.11:19). Prior to Armageddon, the earthquake which occurs as part of the seventh bowl judgment will be of previously unprecedented magnitude, while the hail will become even more massive in its size and devastating in its effects (Rev.16:18-21). The thunder, lightning, earthquake and hail which here signal the arrival of the Great Tribulation will serve notice worldwide to everyone on earth – both for those who care to take warning and for the majority of humanity remaining under the sway of the beast who do not – that the terrible time of testing has now arrived.

6. The Character of the Great Tribulation: It should be safe to assume that anyone reading this series will understand both from its prior installments and from their own previous Bible study that the second half of the final seven years before our Lord's return, the "Great Tribulation" as our Lord Himself calls it, will be a period of suffering and disaster unprecedented in all of prior human history (Matthew 24:21; Mk.13:19; cf.

Dan.12:1).

The vastly increased level of worldwide trouble and tribulation that serves to qualify this period as the “Great Tribulation” is perspicuous from a comparison of the competing trends which we have previously studied from the Tribulation's first half with those of the Great Tribulation (to be covered in our study below):

Tribulational Trends

(a comparative chart)

The First Three and a Half Years

	Satanic	< >	Divine
Spiritual level:	The Great Apostasy	< >	Worldwide Evangelism
Temporal level:	The Rise of Antichrist	< >	Worldwide Warning Judgments

The Great Tribulation

	Satanic	< >	Divine
Spiritual level:	The Great Persecution	< >	Worldwide Witness of the Martyrs
Temporal level:	The Rule of Antichrist	< >	Worldwide Judgments of Wrath

The primary differences between the Tribulation's first and second halves from a thematic point of view should become readily evident by comparing the two charts above. From the earthly perspective, while the first three and a half years – terrible as they will be – will be consumed by the prologue to the devil's plans, the final phase of the Tribulation, the “Great Tribulation”, will see the fulfillment of the earthly rule of his antichrist, and the logical extension of his ultimate purpose, namely, his brazen attempt to destroy faith and the faithful from off of the earth. From the divine side of things as well the Great Tribulation will be an intensified phase inasmuch as judgments of wrath must of necessity be more severe than judgments of warning. And while it will be painful for true believers in Jesus Christ to experience the severe ostracism of their former fellow believers who fall into antichrist's trap during the Great Apostasy, the persecution and martyrdom of the Great Persecution during the Tribulation's final phase will be, beyond all argument, even more difficult to bear and endure.

The second thing to notice about the trends of the Great Tribulation is that all four revolve around the one, central theme of those final years, namely, the Great

Persecution of the Church. Satan's primary purpose in installing antichrist and promoting his worldwide rule is precisely the elimination of the remnant of faith on earth, for thereby he vainly hopes to frustrate God's promises to believing humanity and so prove Him a liar (thus "winning" the conflict which now dominates human and angelic affairs, the rebellion which occasioned the creation of mankind in the first place). The massive martyrdom which this persecution will produce and the subsequent divine wrath that it will bring down upon the unbelieving world are likewise results of this one central plank in the devil's planning as carried out by his antichrist, that is, the unleashing of a monstrous and worldwide persecution of believers designed to eradicate from the earth all who stay loyal to Jesus Christ come what may. It is important for believers to note, however, that although this will be a period of extreme testing, it cannot begin until God Himself gives the signal (i.e., the 7th trumpet), and, as it is with everything else that has ever happened in human history, even this most terrible of times is designed to accomplish the will of God (cf. Is.45:4; 46:11 Ezek.38:4). We believers, all who may be called upon to endure those dark days, must never forget that even such trials as the Great Tribulation serve to demonstrate God's grace to us in testing, just as they offer us an opportunity to demonstrate our faith in Him and our unshakeable love for His Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And the greatest opportunity to do so will come during the persecution and martyrdom of the Great Persecution where faith and truth will find themselves more directly opposed by satanic forces than ever before in human history.

But these [believers] have defeated [the devil] through the blood of the Lamb and the Word of their testimony. For they did not love their lives, [even] to the point of death.
Revelation 12:11

During the Great Tribulation, the essence of evil will be laid completely bare with all the artifice of the first three and a half years stripped away in the intensity of the crucible of the Great Persecution. But, especially if we find ourselves involved in these events, we must not lose sight of the fact that this final fury of the devil will remain entirely subject to the power and grace of God, as He works His will in judgment, replacement, and restoration, culminating in the return of our King Jesus Christ. Marana Tha! O our Lord, return [we pray]! (1Cor.16:22).

II. The Woman and the Dragon: Revelation 12:1-6

(1) And a great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon [was] beneath her feet. And on her head was a crown of twelve stars. (2) And she was pregnant, and she cried out in the pain and pangs of childbirth. (3) And another sign appeared in the sky. And behold, a great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven crowns. (4) And its tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon took his stand in front of the

woman who was about to give birth, so that when she did give birth he might devour her child. (5) And she gave birth to a male child who is going to shepherd the nations with an iron rod. And the child was snatched up to God and to His throne. (6) And the woman fled into the desert, where she has a place prepared there by God, so that they might take care of her for 1260 days.

Revelation 12:1-6

The Woman in the passage above symbolizes Israel, and these verses trace her history in synoptic form in a breathtakingly beautiful way from the patriarchs to the earliest days of the Great Tribulation, the period now under study. As the origin of both the written and the living Word of God, the Woman is clothed with the sun, the symbol of day and of light, while the moon, which rules the night and the darkness (the time and the realm of evil and evil one: Lk.22:53; 1Thes.5:4-10), lies in submission at her feet. The twelve stars in the crown on her head symbolize the twelve sons of Israel and the eponymous tribes which spring from them (Gen.37:9; cf. Gen.15:5; 22:17; 26:4). But by far Israel's most significant and glorious offspring is the Messiah Himself, our Savior Jesus Christ, whose human lineage is traced through Abraham, Isaac and Joseph (Rom.9:5; cf. Rom.9:7). Jesus is the Seed of the woman (Gen.3:15), the true Seed of Abraham (Gal.3:16), and the Son of David destined to rule all the nations with an iron scepter (Ps.2; Rom.1:3; cf. Is.4:2; 11:1; 53:2; Jer.23:5; 33:15; Zech.3:8; 6:12). Thus the Messiah, the true Christ, is *the* Son of the Woman Israel, and all of the pangs, the pains, and the purpose of this archetypal Woman's history are focused upon, concentrated upon, and culminate in the birth of the archetypal Son, Jesus Christ the Son of God, the Son of Man, the One through whom alone salvation comes (Gen.3:16; Mic.5:3-5; cf. 1Tim.2:15).

Directly opposed to the impending birth of the Messiah, the God-Man Jesus Christ, we next see another sign in the sky representing the chief fallen angel, Satan, depicted here symbolically as a great red dragon (Greek *drakon*, δράκων). The term "dragon" in the original Greek refers to a serpent (cf. Gen.3:1-15), albeit one of exceptional size, and the addition of the adjectives "great" and "red" bring home the monstrous nature of the sight.³⁷⁹ This particular dragon, moreover, has seven heads and ten crowns, and thus symbolically reflects the devil's world rule which the Messiah is destined to replace, with the seven heads and ten crowns specifically representing the revived empire of Rome which will be Satan's (and antichrist's) final stepping stone to the long sought after goal of total world domination which will finally be achieved during the Great Tribulation just heralded by the 7th trumpet (cf. Rev.13:1; 17:3-9).³⁸⁰ As in the case of the Woman, the description given here of the dragon's actions is synoptic of the devil's history, beginning with Satan's original rebellion and his seduction of a third of the angels, the stars of heaven (and anticipating the one third of believers who will fall away from God to follow the beast during the Great Apostasy),³⁸¹ moving then immediately to his most direct opposition to God in his attempt to destroy the Messiah who embodies the plan of God in every way (cf. Matt.2:1-15; 4:1-11; Lk.22:3; Jn.13:27). Following the failure of his attempt to thwart the plan of God by destroying the Messiah and after our Lord's subsequent ascension to heaven (where He waits at the Father's right hand until His

enemies are made a footstool for His feet at His glorious return at the end of this final period of Great Tribulation: Ps.110:1; Eph.1:20-23; Heb.10:12-13; cf. 1Cor.15:25), the dragon will concentrate his efforts on attempting to destroy the Woman and all of her spiritual offspring “who obey God's commandments and hold fast to the testimony of Jesus” (Rev.12:17).

What we have here in synoptic form, therefore, are the key developments in God's plan for victory over Satan and his rebellion set against the backdrop of the devil's efforts to oppose and frustrate that plan. By taking us from Satan's prehistoric seduction of the fallen angels to his opposition to the first advent of the Messiah to the devil's final attempt to destroy all who remain faithful to Him, we have been brought by these verses full circle to the point where the Great Tribulation and the Great Persecution which it embodies begin. These verses thus serve as a prologue and an introduction to the events of the Great Tribulation (i.e., everything that happens after the mid-point of the seven years has been reached following the sounding of the 7th trumpet which announces the final phase of God's pre-millennial plan), and especially to the event which in spiritual terms dominates those final years, the Great Persecution.

III. War in Heaven: Revelation 12:7-12

7) And war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought with the dragon and the dragon and his angels fought [back], (8) but they did not prevail against him, and they could no longer find any place [of refuge] in heaven. (9) And [so] the great dragon, the ancient serpent, the one called Devil and Satan, was thrown down; even he who deceives the entire world was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (10) And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying,

“Now our God's deliverance and might and kingdom have come, even the power of His Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, the one who accuses them day and night in front of our God, has been thrown down. (11) But these [believers] have defeated [the devil] through the blood of the Lamb and the Word of their testimony. For they did not love their lives, [even] to the point of death. (12) Because of this, rejoice, O heavens and those residing in them! [But] woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you, having [great] anger, because he knows that he has [only] a short time [remaining]”

Revelation 12:7-12

Antichrist, the visible prime-mover of earthly events during the Tribulation, is not even mentioned in the verses above, nor anywhere else in chapter twelve. Instead, it is the dragon, Satan, who is clearly seen as the opponent of the plan and people of God historically and specifically during the Great Tribulation. Just as the allegory of the woman and the dragon served to concentrate our attention on the true albeit invisible

nature of the conflict that dominates all human events, so here we are given to see at the very outset of the Great Tribulation that angelic events are at the heart of everything which will transpire during those horrific three and a half years. For Satan's ejection from heaven along with his followers will be a crucial turning point in the history of his rebellion against God. From that point forward, the dynamics of the conflict will change so radically and fundamentally that no other period in human history will be comparable. That is in no small part why, from the divine point of view, the Great Tribulation is largely inseparable from "the Day of the Lord" which brings it to a close at our Lord's return. For once Satan has devoted all of his resources to this final furious assault upon the people of God, God's wrath, God's judgment, and God's deliverance cannot be long delayed.

War in heaven: The fight described here between Michael and Satan and their respective forces, resulting in the expulsion from heaven of Satan and his angels, is the first event of the Great Tribulation proper.³⁸² The way in which the outbreak of the "war" is described in this verse indicates that "Michael and his angels" are the initiators of this attack, and we may be certain that they commence these hostilities on divine authority. It may seem strange to some that up until this point in human history God has allowed the devil to present himself in the heavenly assembly and to continue to bring accusations against the elect (1Kng.22:19-22; 2:1; Job 1:6-19; 2:1-7; 15:8; 38:7; Ps.29:1ff.; 89:5-7; Jer.23:18 & 22; Zech.3:1; 1Pet.5:8; Rev.12:10). Clearly, God has always had the power to cast the devil out of heaven, whether by immediate means or, as here, through the agency of his elect angels. But everything which has yet transpired in heaven and on earth has all been according to the ineluctable plan of God "whose judgments are unsearchable and whose ways are beyond finding out" (Rom.11:33). God's plan to repair the breach in the moral fabric of the universe rent by creature rebellion has always involved the allowance of true creature free will on the one hand together with an irrefutable demonstration of the justness and rightness of God and His perfectly holy, good and loving character on the other. In all of the time and opportunity given to Satan and in all of the devil's assaults upon the righteous throughout time, God's will has ever triumphed, and all of the evil done by creatures, human and angelic alike, has only served to demonstrate the quality of the faith of those who have chosen for God together with the faithfulness and mercy of the One in whom they have put their faith. The process of judgment, restoration and replacement has been proceeding apace throughout human history,³⁸³ but with the sounding of the 7th trumpet, the final warning which marks the true "beginning of the end" (cf. Rev.12:10), we enter a new phase of God's plan, the second phase to be precise, wherein God will judge the devil's kingdom on earth, restore the earth to an environment of blessing (i.e., the Millennium), and replace the present de facto ruler of this world with His own Anointed One, the true Messiah, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.³⁸⁴

Thus the period of Great Tribulation which starts immediately following the sounding of the 7th trumpet and at the same time as Satan's expulsion from heaven is in essence theologically indistinguishable from the Day of the Lord which follows hard upon its heels. For this is the beginning of the *judgment* that is answered by *restoration* and

replacement through Christ's millennial kingdom and reign. In the casting down of Satan and his angels we see the process of judgment beginning, immediately after the concluding sign of warning, the 7th trumpet, has been given.³⁸⁵ All of the trends of the Great Tribulation which follow are either part of the process of judgment (i.e., the seven bowl judgments of wrath and the remaining sequence of seven major judgments on Babylon, at Armageddon, and etc.) or provocations thereto (i.e., the blasphemous rule of antichrist and the Great Persecution), and are essentially inextricable from the blessed restoration and replacement that is to follow immediately when the powerful and cleansing wind of judgment has swept away all that is fetid and foul and ushered in the crisp and bright new day of righteousness in the Messiah's kingdom of a thousand years.

The last three and a half years of Satan's reign thus constitute the final darkness before the dawn when the Morning Star rises and bathes the earth in the glorious light of His presence and His truth. What we have here in verses seven through twelve is the first step in this process of judgment, restoration and replacement in the exclusion of Satan and his fallen angels from heaven and their consignment to the earth for this last, terrible period of human testing and suffering.

It is surely in no small part the devil's restriction to planet earth for the remainder of the time allotted to him that makes the Great Tribulation so horrific, a time like no other in the history of the human race (Dan.12:1; Matt.24:21-22). No longer will Satan split his time between heaven and earth, accusing our brothers and sisters before the Lord even as his minions assault us on earth. From this point forward, all of the devil's efforts will be focused upon the earth – if only because this is where he and his will have been confined until the Great Day of the Lord sweeps them away. So while a number of factors contribute to the “greatness” of the Great Tribulation such as the removal of Holy Spirit restraint and the subsequent unleashing of lawlessness, and such as the one world rule of antichrist and the subsequent breakdown of all human restraint, the confinement of Satan and his minions to the earth is, nevertheless, not the least of the reasons why the Great Tribulation will be so consummately horrific.³⁸⁶

But] woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you, having [great] anger, because he knows that he has [only] a short time [remaining]!”
Revelation 12:12

Michael's victory and the devil's expulsion is nonetheless cause for great rejoicing as well (Rev.12:12a), for it marks a tangible beginning of the end of the reign of evil and the devil's reign of terror, made possible through the victory of Jesus Christ on the cross and now entering into the phase of final glorious fulfillment.

[For by means of the cross, God] has stripped [demon] rulers and authorities [of their power] and subjected them to public humiliation, having triumphed over them in

[Christ].

Colossians 2:15 (cf. Rom.16:20; Heb.2:14; 1Jn.3:8b)

Satan's casting out of heaven is a first visible step in the eventual exclusion of all evil from the coming eternal kingdom wherein righteousness dwells, and one which is well documented elsewhere in prophetic scripture at that:

(12) *How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, O son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, O you who laid the nations low. (13) For you said in your heart, 'I will ascend heavenward. I will set my throne above the stars of God. And I will take my seat on the mount of assembly on the sides of the north. (14) I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the Most High God'. (15) But indeed you will be brought down to Sheol, to the sides of the pit.*

Isaiah 14:12-15

In all your ways you were perfect from the day of your creation until unrighteousness was found in you. In your extensive conspiring, you were filled with wickedness, and you sinned. So I cast you from the mountain of God as one profaned, and I blotted out [your memory] from among the stones of fire, O covering cherub. Your heart became haughty because of your beauty, [and so] you destroyed your wisdom on account of your splendor. *So I cast you to the earth, and I made a spectacle of you before kings.*

Ezekiel 28:15-17

The seventy returned and said with joy, "Lord, even the demons obey us in your Name!" And Jesus said to them, "*I was watching Satan fall from heaven like a star*".

Luke 10:17-18

Michael: A brief aside is perhaps necessary at this point concerning Michael and his angels and the battle fought with Satan and his angels. While scripture does have much to say about the angelic realm, it says less than we may perhaps desire to know and yet everything we need to know.³⁸⁷ Lacking physically material bodies such as we possess, angels apparently cannot be wounded or killed (though they may be incarcerated). So the exact nature and detail of the combat that will transpire when the 7th trumpet sounds is beyond our ability to know. We are given only the result, that is, the total defeat of the devil and his forces and their complete exclusion from the heavenly realm. We have posited before that the ultimate tally of saved humanity will eventually equal twice that of the fallen angels (the first half constituting the Church, and the second the echelon of millennial believers).³⁸⁸ Therefore such massive numbers and the completeness of the victory and defeat certainly indicate that the struggle will be a monumental one, especially given the extraordinary power of angelic kind. Furthermore, the significance of the expulsion of the fallen angels from heaven, an "estate" which they have held since before the re-creation of the heavens and the earth and the creation of mankind, is immense. This event will be real, and the mere

fact that we are unable to see it and can barely imagine its specifics in no way diminishes that significance. For the world of angels, the change will be profound for both victors and vanquished, and will also of course not be without serious consequence for the earth and for humanity.

One thing that we can surmise about this decisive battle between elect and fallen angels is that, while the numbers involved will be immense, not all of angelic kind will participate. Michael, by rank an archangel, is one of a college of seven such “general officers”.³⁸⁹ Positing an equal share of the total elect “host” under the command of each officer would leave Michael in charge of a force less than one third the size of Satan's entire command (i.e., one seventh of two thirds versus a full third for the devil). Although a large number of demons will certainly be involved in earthly activities, the same will be true at least to some degree of Michael's forces as well (cf. Dan.12:1). What all this means is that instead of the elect angels fighting an easy battle with overwhelming numbers on their side, Michael's victory will require extraordinary strategy and tactics, and exceptional courage and bravery. Even though this victory has been prophesied for nearly two millennia here at Revelation 12:7-9, the brazenness of the attack with such inferior numbers and the astounding nature of the defeat still seems to come as a surprise to the devil and his cohorts, and this humiliation will be no small contributing factor to the “wrath” Satan will subsequently vent upon the world in the short time remaining to him (Rev.12:12b). Although we are not privy to the details, a clear principle does emerge from Michael's most impressive victory. Armed with this prophecy, Michael and his forces are even now using the time allotted to prepare for the unequal fight to come, and will as a direct result of this diligence be astoundingly successful in conquering a complacent foe who has clearly drawn false confidence from superior numbers. Finally in this regard it is very likely that Michael's forces are the elite of the elect warrior angels (we may think of them as the “Marines” or the “Rangers” among angelic kind). For as we have seen previously, the number of the elect angelic clans totals six, not seven.³⁹⁰ It certainly fits the context and everything else we may discern about angelic organization, therefore, to posit that while each clan possesses an archangel (in addition to four elders; see the previous note), Michael holds a special command composed of elite warriors who have distinguished themselves in the fight against the rebellion thus far by their martial valor, courage, integrity, and zeal for the Lord (compare David's cadre of heroes marked out for special mention: 2Sam.23:8-39; 1Chron.11:10-37; cf. 1Sam.22:1-2). It certainly behooves us as loyal followers of Jesus Christ to remember that in the spiritual conflict in which we are engaged what we do for the Lord is not only of critical importance – it certainly does not go unnoticed now, nor will it be unrecognized on that great day to come. Let us therefore continue to encourage one another with the truth that, like David's mighty men and like Michael's elite, we too have a great opportunity to likewise write out names on the Lord's scroll of valor for exceptional conduct in the spiritual conflict in which we are engaged. And let us remember as well that, although the darkest of times may lie ahead, the battlefield of the Great Persecution will also offer those who fight upon it unprecedented opportunities for glorifying Jesus Christ and winning in the bargain an undying crown of glory (1Pet.5:4; cf. Rev.12:11).

The victorious proclamation: This heavenly proclamation to the effect that God's "deliverance and might and kingdom" have now arrived on the scene establishes what we have said above, namely, that in divine terms the return and victory of the Messiah are at this point so close and so sure as to be all but a present reality. From God's point of view, attempting to distinguish between the rescue of believers from the devil's final offensive, the demonstration of divine power at Christ's return which accomplishes this deliverance, and the blessed Kingdom of the Messiah established thereafter is both fruitless and pointless. Satan's launching of the Great Persecution, beginning with Israel and then expanding to the Church at large, guarantees the judgment and deliverance which follows and cannot rightly be separated from them. All of these aspects of victory spelled out in the proclamation of verse ten come from God, and all three are summed up in one breath in the following phrase, "even the power of His Christ". For Jesus will accomplish the deliverance and set up the kingdom as the true Messiah operating in the delegated power (Greek ἐξουσία, *exousia*) of God the Father Almighty. We who now contemplate the inception of the Great Tribulation and all those who will experience it have a right, indeed a need, to see the horrendous events to come in this same heavenly light. For the very assaults of the devil, taking his campaign to exterminate faith and the faithful from the earth to never before seen levels of intensity, are thereby guaranteeing the protection and personal deliverance of the people of God by God's own Son through His omnipotent power into a blessed new day and a glorious new kingdom ruled in perfect righteousness by our very own Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. So although we are tempted to fear the prospect and groan under the weight of the actual experience, it is incumbent upon us to remember that God's power is not to be compared to that of a mere creature, no matter how great the power of devil and his forces and no matter how terrible and onerous the persecution he will launch at that time.

The accuser thrown down: The Greek conjunction *hoti* ("because", "for") here significantly links the victorious proclamation of the first half of verse eleven with the casting down of the "accuser" in the second half of the verse. That is to say, the imminent coming of the kingdom is *signaled* by the casting out of Satan – that is Jesus' point in Lk.10:17-18, coming right after the mission of the 72 witnesses (just as the actual casting out occurs following the ministry of the 144,000). As terrible as the consequences of the devil's confinement to earth will be for its inhabitants, it is an unmistakable sign that the wonders of the kingdom are not far off. Further, we also see here an important change of dynamics in the ground rules under which the devil has heretofore been allowed to prosecute his rebellion against God. Up until this future time, Satan's slandering of believers before the throne of God has been tolerated, and has apparently been a very regular occurrence (cf. Job 1-2).³⁹¹ After all, it is not for nothing that scripture calls him *diabolos* (Greek διάβολος, "slanderer" or "accuser"; cf. Hebrew Satan, שָׂטָן, "adversary [who accuses]").³⁹² By virtue of his confinement to the earth, however, the devil will no longer be able to bring slanderous accusations against believers before God (cf. Jude 1:9), and this constitutes a highly significant turning point. Now the entire course of the rebellion Satan undertook against God so long ago

has entered an entirely new (and final) phase. God's tolerance of Satan's attempts to challenge human free will by attempting to influence His treatment of errant believers is at an end, and we may extrapolate from this the end of such tolerance in general terms as well. Since his intrusion into the garden of Eden, the devil has been testing and twisting the hearts of mankind. In His unfathomable wisdom, God has allowed Satan to observe us, to try us, and to accuse us – yet not to destroy us – all within the parameters of His all-wise and comprehensive plan. The end of the devil's accusatory audience with God on the one hand and the removal of much restraint from his attempt to destroy faith from the earth on the other vividly give evidence of the coming termination of all such operations at the end of these final three and a half years of the Great Tribulation. The heavenly truce which has obtained since God's judgment upon the universe in the wake of Satan's coup d'état is now at an end. Hostilities have moved into their final phase with the devil and his followers soon to be removed altogether from any part in the affairs of mankind upon Christ's return, but determined in their attempt to eradicate believing mankind from the earth in the meantime. It will be helpful to recall at this point that the plan of God can be viewed as working in three distinct phases (see part 4 of Satanic Rebellion). This three phase process, consisting of Judgment, Restoration and Replacement, phases I, II, and III respectively, is, essentially, God's plan for total victory over Satan and his rebellion as described in strategic terms:

Phase I: Constitution: Lays the foundation for the eternal victory (the “much” phase).

- Judgment I: The Genesis Gap judgment: judgment is passed upon Satan and his angels while the devil's original headquarters, the pre-historic earth, is devastated and the original universe plunged into darkness.
- Restoration I: Earth is restored to a habitable environment (the Seven Days of Re-creation).
- Replacement I: The creation of the first Adam begins the human race (the source of eventual replacement for Satan and his angels). The gift of the Last Adam, Jesus Christ, provides the grace necessary for the salvation of the human race after the fall through the Messiah's work on the cross. The Church is called out for replacement.

Phase II: Completion: Realizes eternal objectives with victory in time (the “more” phase).

- Judgment II: the Tribulation (the Day of the Lord): God's judgment upon the devil's kingdom and upon his earthly subjects. Satan and his angels are expelled from heaven and later imprisoned.
- Restoration II: the Millennium: earth is restored to an environment of blessing.

- Replacement II: Christ the King replaces Satan as the de facto ruler of the earth. The Church is resurrected in replacement of the devil's angels, one for one.

Phase III: Consummation: Crowns the victory with surpassing eternal blessing (the “most” phase).

- Judgment III: The Final Judgments: Satan and his angels are removed to the lake of fire along with unbelieving humanity (the Great White Throne judgment).
- Restoration III: The New Heavens, New Earth and New Jerusalem provide an unparalleled and eternal environment of perfect blessing.
- Replacement III: The Advent of the Father: along with Christ, He will rule forever from earth. The Church is complemented by the double portion of millennial believers.

Thus with the commencement of the Great Tribulation we are likewise witnessing the commencement of Phase II of the plan of God, the great “Day of the Lord”, which begins with the tribulational process of judgment upon Satan and his angels, along with the beast and his human followers. In the casting down of the devil we see the beginning of this process of judgment which will terminate in the series of seven judgments associated with the second advent of the Messiah (see part 6 of this series).

This also has implications for the completion of the second echelon of the resurrection, the initial replacement for the devil's fallen angels, namely, the Church. The end of standard-type satanic testing tolerated and used by God (replaced during the Great Tribulation by direct satanic opposition of the most severe sort) demonstrates that the Church, the company of believers from Adam to the second advent, has now been completed (and so testing of the standard sort has now fulfilled its purpose). The missionary efforts of the 144,000 under the sponsorship of Moses and Elijah will also terminate with the onset of the Great Tribulation so that those final three and a half years will not be a time for evangelism and adding to the numbers of the true Church, but of endurance and refining, as many of those who had formerly professed faith slip away into apostasy, while many others who remain faithful until the end are martyred for Jesus Christ.

There is no little irony in the fact that, while the devil in his own grand strategy has been driving towards the Tribulation and the installment of antichrist as ruler of the world as the capstone of his own plan, his complete and penultimate defeat (foreshadowed none too subtly in his expulsion from heaven) is nevertheless in a very real sense a result of the reaction that this violation of all divine ground rules inevitably provokes. Fathering antichrist, establishing for him a one-world rule, and attempting to eliminate Israel and all believers from the earth are clearly courses of action that God has never and will never allow to stand. The Great Tribulation, whose inception is thus

marked by Satan's expulsion from heaven, marks in turn the start of the second phase of the plan of God wherein the perfect world rule of the perfect King will replace and be directly juxtaposed to the most horrendous rule of the most anti-God ruler in history, and the unparalleled horror of the latter compared with unparalleled blessing of the former will only serve to glorify God and His victory in Jesus Christ all the more.

The martyrs vindicated: In verse eleven we find the heavenly voice continuing this beautiful hymn which foreshadows the Great Tribulation's major trends. Beginning with the ultimate victory of God in the coming of His Messianic Kingdom (verse 10a), and punctuating the victory with a chorus of exaltation over the casting down of the adversary (verse 10b), the hymn now turns its attention to the faithful on earth who will be tested by the devil's redoubled efforts in the fires of the Great Persecution. We are told that these courageous believers who have refused to fall in behind antichrist, and who have not wilted under the many tribulational pressures so as to fall away in the Great Apostasy, have defeated the devil (Greek *nikao*, νικάω). That is, they have "won the victory" over him (the central idea in the Greek root *nik-*; cf. Nike) "through the blood of the Lamb" (that is, they have been justified by faith so that the devil's accusations have fallen on deaf ears before the throne of divine justice). This victory is, then, the victory of faith, maintaining one's belief in and faithfulness to Jesus Christ in spite of all pressures and challenges to the contrary (cf. Rom.8:37; 12:21; 1Cor.15:57; 1Jn.2:13-14):

For everyone who has been born from God overcomes (*nikao*) the [devil's] world. And this is the victory that has overcome the [devil's] world: *our faith* [in Jesus Christ]! For who is the one who overcomes (*nikao*) the [devil's] world except the one who *believes* that Jesus is the Son of God.

1st John 5:4-5

In the passage above we see clearly the victory of faith defined not only by our continued belief in and allegiance to our Lord, Jesus Christ, but also by our continued faithful defiance of the present lord of this corrupt world. The tribulational believers in the context we are studying, Revelation 12:11, are likewise said to gain their victory over "him", that is, the accuser, Satan, now thrown down to the earth. During the Tribulation and especially during its final three and a half years this reality of faith locked in a deadly struggle with the devil and his dark forces will become all the more visible in practice just as it now is in principle:

You are of God, children, and you have overcome (*nikao*) them (i.e., the precursors of *antichrist*; cf. vv.1-3). For greater is He who is in you (i.e., the Spirit) than he who is in the world (i.e., Satan represented by his antichrist-like false prophets now, and, ultimately, by antichrist himself).

1st John 4:4

The theme of victorious faith seen in our context of Revelation 12:11 is more overtly prevalent in the Book of Revelation than any other place in scripture, and with good reason. For there will never be a crucible of testing the likes of which believers will have to endure during the Great Tribulation and its concomitant Great Persecution (Dan.12:1; Matt.24:21; Mk.13:19). The life of faith is a serious and difficult *fight* under the best of circumstances, and the reality and importance of our “faith struggle” will be all the more so as never before during the Great Tribulation. Victory during the time of greatest satanic opposition will constitute the greatest victory of all.

To the one who wins the victory, I will give to him [the right] to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God.

Revelation 2:7

The one who wins the victory shall not be hurt by the second death.

Revelation 2:11

To the one who wins the victory, I will give to him the hidden manna, and I will give to him a white stone, and on it will be written a new name which no one knows except the one who receives it.

Revelation 2:17

And to the one who wins the victory and gives heed to My works until the end, I will give to him authority over the nations.

Revelation 2:26

And I saw a sea of glass, glass [yet] mixed with fire, and those who were winning the victory out from [under] (i.e., suffering martyrdom rather than submit to) the beast and his image and out from [under] the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass with lyres of the Lord God.

Revelation 15:2

The one who wins the victory shall be heir to these things (i.e., the glories of the New Jerusalem), and I will be His God, and He shall be my son.

Revelation 21:7

The tribulational believers in our context are said to be victorious over “him”, the accuser, by means of persistent faith manifest in faithfulness, specifically, “through [their faith in] the blood of the Lamb and [through] the Word of their testimony

[faithfully preserved]”. The means of victory as described here in Revelation 12:11 are thus twofold, representing respectively the object of faith, the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and the production of faith, their work of witness in the world, requiring in many cases during this most trying of times the sacrifice of their lives on the altar of truth as martyrs of the Lamb. For the final words of this hymn of victory, “they did not love their lives, [even] to the point of death”, adumbrate the main challenge to faith during this time, namely, the Great Persecution, and make it abundantly clear that faith-victory during the Great Tribulation will absolutely require valuing one's relationship with Jesus Christ much more dearly than one's physical life. For many believers during those final three and a half years will be called upon to render the ultimate witness for our Lord, the loss of their lives through martyrdom, and all who live through that period will also have to live with the threat of being martyred at any time for what they believe (not to mention having to endure the daily abuses of the Great Persecution; see section VII below).

Joy and woe: The final section of this hymn which encapsulates the Great Tribulation as a whole is concerned with the extreme contrast between the new reality in heaven as a result of Satan's having been cast down and the new reality on earth. In the presence of God, all is joy and rejoicing as no longer will the adversary trouble the assembly of the righteous by his vile presence and slanderous accusations, and the fact that the devil has now been consigned to earth is a harbinger of the coming of the Kingdom of the Messiah. At this juncture, all in the heavenly realms will know that the time is short indeed, and will be looking forward in blessed anticipation of that glorious time which is shortly to arrive.

On earth, however, the situation is reversed. Satan too knows that his time is short now, and there is no longer any reason to husband any resource or respect any rule. In his wrath, the devil (along with all of his subordinates, likewise confined to earth along with him) will now spare no expense and forgo no effort in his attempt to make Israel and the faithful in Jesus Christ “pay” for his expulsion. So while heaven is aglow with the prospect of the second advent, earth will groan under the satanic assault of those days as never before in her history. The Great Tribulation will affect all who live upon the earth, but will fall heaviest upon the seed of Israel, whether saved or unsaved, and upon all who have chosen for Jesus Christ and are determined to stay faithful to Him no matter the cost.

IV. The Dragon's Persecution of Believing Israel: Revelation 12:13-17

(13) And when the dragon saw that he had been cast down to the earth, he gave chase to the woman who had born the male [child]. (14) And to the woman were given two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly into the desert to a place [prepared] for her where she is [going to be] sustained there away from the presence of the serpent for a time and times and half a time. (15) And the serpent spewed [forth] from his mouth after the woman water like a river in order to sweep her away. (16) And the earth helped the

woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon had spewed [forth] from his mouth. (17) And the dragon was enraged at the woman, and he went away to make war with the rest of her seed, [even] those who are keeping the commandments of God and maintaining their testimony to Jesus.
Revelation 12:13-17

Beginning in verse thirteen we find the first earthly event of the Great Tribulation proper. Satan's first assault upon the people of God, foreshadowed in the final stanzas of the heavenly hymn previously studied above (Rev.12:11-12), is an all-out attack against the largest concentration of Jewish believers on earth, specifically all who had responded to the ministry of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000, and who now reside within the state of Israel. As we have mentioned before, while scripture does not say so explicitly, yet it is more than probable that the new remnant of faith present in Israel and described as the object of the devil's wrath in chapter twelve has neither arisen primarily from among the citizens of Israel proper nor does it constitute a majority of them (Rom.9:27; cf. Is.10:21-22), but must instead have assembled there from elsewhere in the world in response to the ministering of the 144,000 (just as they themselves were drawn to Jerusalem through the ministry of Moses and Elijah as we have seen in part 3A of this series).

Moreover, the verses above also indicate that this trend in migration of believers of Jewish ancestry to the present day Jewish state will be a uniquely Jewish phenomenon. Gentile believers in nations outside of Babylon will face persecution in their own countries following God's frustration of Satan's plan to eliminate this new Jewish remnant (cf. Rev.12:17, which marks the inception of the Great Persecution). From what we know about present day realities, it seems extraordinarily unlikely, given the apparent magnitude of the wave of Jewish immigration to Israel which will result during the Tribulation's first half, that the state of Israel, which has never been particularly welcoming of non-Jewish immigration (especially when the intended newcomers have been evangelical Christians), will allow any significant number of gentile believers who might desire to come and study at the feet of Moses and Elijah to do so. We who are gentiles should not lament this fact overly much. Each of us has his own gifts, his own mission field, and a particular effectiveness of ministry ordained, intended and empowered by God (1Cor.12:4-6). That we are to remain behind in our places, ministering and witnessing to our own countrymen, is clearly what God has in mind for us, even though (and especially since) in very many cases this will result in intensive persecution and even martyrdom.

Babylon constitutes a special case. As we have also mentioned before, there are indications from scripture that as the beast's original power-base, Babylon, will be somewhat of a safe-haven during this period of intense persecution, although the safety involved must be understood in relative terms (cf. Rev.18:8). For there will indeed be a call for all believers to "flee Babylon" in the days before her destruction (and we shall have more to say about this in part 5 of this series), a fact that in and of itself suggests a

large number of believers are still residing within her borders and effectively surviving if not thriving up until that point.

Before beginning our detailed exegesis of this section of Revelation, it will be helpful to recap the series of events which will transpire just prior to the flight of the Jewish believers into the desert described here in chapter twelve. Prior to the blowing of the 7th trumpet and the commencement of the Great Tribulation proper we have seen . . .

- Antichrist's complete and total victory in his second campaign against the south (Dan.11:29-30a; 11:40-43).
- The collapse of all remaining organized resistance to antichrist, his armed forces, and his empire worldwide (Rev.13:3-4).
- The plundering of the riches of Egypt, antichrist's final objective at the end of the second campaign (Dan.11:43; cf. Ezek.29-32).
- The failed assassination attempt against antichrist (Dan.11:30b).
- Antichrist's subsequent return to Israel with a substantial contingent of his armed forces (Dan.11:30c; Lk.21:20-24).
- The breaking of the treaty with Israel by antichrist, and his war on Moses and Elijah (Dan.9:27; 11:30c-31a; Rev.11:1-13).
- The erecting of "the abomination which causes [spiritual] desolation", and antichrist's session in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God (Dan.11:31b; 12:11; Matt.24:15-16; Mk.13:14; 2Thes.2:4).
- The expansion as compulsory of his new worldwide religion whose object of worship is himself and his father the devil (Rev.13; see section VI.1 below, "The Anti-Christian Religion and its Worldwide Expansion").

The dragon's reaction to his expulsion from heaven: It is at this point that the 7th trumpet sounds and Satan, along with all his angelic forces there residing, are cast out of heaven and confined to the earth for the duration of the Tribulation. Thus the dramatic steps listed above designed to finally implement his grand scheme for frustrating the plan of God by eliminating faith from the earth and establishing in its stead a visible and physical worldwide kingdom whose inhabitants universally worship him and his antichrist meets with an immediate and equally dramatic consequence: the termination of his access to heaven and the presence of God, which access Satan had continued to enjoy up until this point.³⁹³ In all this we see clearly the plan of God in action and the devil's schemes in reaction. Just as Satan is on the point of carrying through his fondest desires, he is cast to the earth, no doubt in part because of the actions he has taken to bring those plans close to fruition (the spawning of antichrist, the establishment of a

one-world rule, the setting up of the abomination of desolation in the temple court, and his session in the temple of God being the primary apparent violations of the ground rules under which he and his compatriots have heretofore been allowed to operate). And although the effects of the devil's intensified depredations on the earth create the greatest wave of apostasy in history and will soon result in the greatest outbreak of persecution of believers, in short order it will be revealed how even these most distressful events have only served to bring about the fulfillment of what God has had in mind all along. This will take place when the Messiah returns at the apex of the Tribulation's final battle to lay all of God's enemies low, to rescue the remnant of believers, to deliver the nation of Israel, and to establish His kingdom of light and justice, with Satan and his followers removed not only from heaven but from the earth as well for duration of Christ's millennial rule.

Finally in this regard, although the dragon, Satan, is viewed here as the actor in the persecution of the woman which follows immediately upon the heels of his expulsion from heaven, the earthly agent for this persecution is not the devil but his antichrist. The consonance of action between the devil and his son can be seen in the similarity with which scripture describes the two. Comparing these verses with the immediately following opening verses of chapter 13, we see that both the dragon and the beast are “red”, both have “seven heads” and both have “ten horns”. We will discuss the various aspects of this symbolism in section V.1 below, but suffice it to say here that the complete agreement and seamlessness in planning and execution between the devil and antichrist respectively is effectively brought out by this deliberate similarity in symbolism.

The frustration felt by the devil at being expelled from heaven even as he is on the cusp of finally accomplishing his long planned designs on earth brings immediate retaliation in his driving out of the woman. The woman, as noted above, represents true Israel, and in our context here it is very important to understand that she represents *believing* Israel as opposed to the majority of the population of the nation Israel at that future time (and this believing remnant will most definitely be a minority: Rom.9:27; cf. Is.10:21-22; Joel 2:32; Rom.10:13). These are the converts of 144,000 witnesses and the ministry of Moses and Elijah. They are Jewish believers in Jesus Christ who have assembled from the nations in response to the unique evangelism of the Tribulation's first half (covered in parts 2B and 3A of this series). In that these believers, “the woman, Israel”, are said to be driven out by the dragon, it should be noted that the devil's purpose is definitely not merely to evict them from the land of Israel. Were he able to do so, antichrist at the behest of his father the devil would have destroyed these Jewish believers at this point. Only the divine intervention mentioned in the following verses preserves them from that fate, a fate of martyrdom which will indeed befall many of their brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ around the world.

The wings of the eagle: In keeping with the symbolism of the allegory, the woman's deliverance is likewise expressed in metaphorical terms with the “eagle's wings” representing miraculous divine provision for escape.³⁹⁴ The Lord's miraculous deliverance of Israel from Pharaoh, which event is typical of this deliverance (with

antichrist functioning as an anti-type of Pharaoh), provides an identical use of this metaphor (Deut.32:11; cf. Is.40:31):

You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.
Exodus 19:4

Just as the Lord miraculously delivered Israel from Pharaoh in the past, sustaining her in the desert and bringing her safely into the land of promise, so now the Lord will deliver believing Israel from the hand of antichrist, sustaining her in the desert through the Great Tribulation until our Messiah returns and establishes the millennial Kingdom in the land of promise. The wings of the eagle vividly convey the idea of soaring majestically over the trouble on earth below, and of swiftly departing from the danger at hand. When the time comes, the Lord will bring about the woman's deliverance in a manner so dramatic and miraculous that this passage in Revelation thus deliberately compares it to the dramatic and miraculous Exodus of the sons of Israel out of Egypt and out of the hands of Pharaoh.

1. Warning Signs: Deliverance will require unhesitating obedience. Scripture gives sufficient indications of the imminent arrival of this attempted persecution and leaves in no doubt the absolute necessity for swift and immediate flight just as soon as the conditions prophesied below by our Lord have been met. The first such sign is a great earthquake which, as we have seen, will occur immediately following the departure of Moses and Elijah to heaven (Rev.11:13). The upheaval following such an intense disaster will no doubt cause the initial departure of the believers to go unnoticed. The second sign, mentioned by our Lord Himself, will be equally unmistakable, namely, the erecting of the so-called "abomination of desolation", the statue of antichrist set up in the temple court:

(15) So when you see the abomination of desolation (which is spoken of through Daniel the prophet) standing in a holy place – let the reader understand – (16) then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. (17) Let the one on top of his roof not go [back] down to pick up his things out of his house, (18) and let the one in the field not turn back to pick up his cloak. (19) And woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing in those days. (20) And [so] pray that your flight may not take place during a storm or on a Sabbath. (21) For at that time there will be a great tribulation such as has never occurred from the beginning of the world until now, and [such as] will never again occur thereafter.

Matthew 24:15-21 (cf. Lk.17:31-32)

(14) But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it should not – let the reader understand – then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, (15) and let the one on top of his roof not go [back] down, neither let him enter [back] into his house to pick up anything out of it, (16) and let the one in the field not turn back to pick up his cloak. (17) And woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing in those days. (18) And [so] pray that it might not take place during a storm. (19) For those days will see a tribulation the like of which has never occurred from the beginning of God's creation of the world until now, and never will occur again.

Mark 13:14-19

Once the abominable idol of antichrist becomes visible in the temple court, believers remaining inside the city must flee without delay. At that point, the necessity for departing immediately and with deliberate speed will be so urgent that even the briefest delay – only to retrieve one's coat or a few essential items – may result in being caught in the beast's net. Further, this emergency departure will be a “one day only” affair, for those involved are told to pray that that day of flight might not be one of inclement weather (which would hinder their movement) nor a Sabbath (where their movements would be obvious). For all who have remained in the city up until this point, strict obedience to our Lord's command to depart without any further hesitation will be absolutely essential in order to avoid being swept up in the persecution the dragon and his antichrist intend. Only swift response will ensure that those believers who have stayed on in Jerusalem will be able to escape safely into the desert now.

This absolute last chance for deliverance from the impending persecution is delivered from the perspective of those believing Jews who are still resident in Jerusalem at that time. Once antichrist has conquered the southern alliance, returned to Jerusalem, killed Moses and Elijah, and put a stop to the temple rites, he will erect the idolatrous statue of himself in the temple court, the so-called “abomination of desolation” (i.e., “the abomination which causes [spiritual as well as material] desolation”; see part 3B, section VIII.1), and this will be the signal for believers in Jerusalem of their *final* opportunity to leave the city safely. For the dragon's pursuit of the departing Jewish believers will follow immediately, and any who choose to remain or otherwise neglect our Lord's command to make haste will find themselves trapped.

Which of you will listen to this or pay close attention in time to come?

Isaiah 42:23 NIV

In addition to the passages in Matthew and Mark which address this issue from the point of view of believers in Jerusalem, in the gospel of Luke our Lord also gives an earlier warning sign, addressing it to believers residing outside of Jerusalem:

(20) And when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that her desolation is near. (21) Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and those who are in the middle of [Jerusalem] depart from her, and those who are in the countryside not enter into her. (22) For these are days of retribution in order that everything which has been written may be fulfilled. (23) Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing in those days! For there will be great distress on earth and [great] wrath against this people. (24) And they will fall by the mouth of the sword and will be taken captive into all the nations, and Jerusalem will be trodden [down] by the gentiles until the times of the gentiles have been fulfilled.

Luke 21:20-24

The armies mentioned above are the forces of antichrist returning from plundering Egypt at the conclusion of the beast's victorious second campaign against the south. It will be recalled that during this second campaign for the first time significant contingents of antichrist's armies will swarm through Israel in conjunction with his surprise naval assault to the rear of the Mahdi's armies. This event is prophesied to be an unpleasant experience for Israel as she will be treated roughly at that time, a sure indication of things to come (Num.24:23-24). However it will not be until after the defeat of the king of the south that antichrist's forces will return to the land of Israel and "ring" Jerusalem. For during the prosecution of the second campaign their movements will be focused upon defeating the Mahdi's armies. It will only be after his defeat that antichrist will redeploy his forces northward with the express intention of removing Moses and Elijah to enthrone himself in the temple, a development which will require no small "war" in and of itself as we have previously seen (Rev.11:7; cf. Part 3A in loc., section V, "The War against Moses and Elijah"). Thus between our Lord's words in Luke on the one hand and in Matthew and Mark on the other we are given both the inception and the terminus of the period of warning for believers to flee Israel proper for safety and refuge in the mountains and desert, with antichrist's initial encircling of Jerusalem marking the beginning of the period of flight and his erecting of the idolatrous image of himself in the temple court marking its end. Before this time Moses and Elijah will still be ministering so that such flight will be premature, but by the end of this time those still remaining in Jerusalem and Israel will have missed their opportunity for a retreat under divine protection to the safe haven where this remnant of Jewish believers will ride out the remainder of the Tribulation, protected from the wrath of the dragon and the beast and from the Great Persecution they will subsequently launch.

The reason for the necessity of paying careful heed to our Lord's commands in this respect is made clear enough in the verses above. We have shown previously in this series how that the Tribulation, and especially the Great Tribulation, is characterized by divine judgment (see the synoptic chart in section I.6 above). In the second half of the Tribulation, and especially in its latter days, these judgments will take the form of exceptional divine wrath poured out upon the unbelieving world (the "retribution" referred to in Lk.21:22 above). And while believers can expect protection from the direct effects of these judgments, it is nonetheless obviously true that life in the protected haven to which these fleeing believers are about to be led will be far less

onerous during those dark days than life in Israel, the very focal point of the penultimate and ultimate divine judgments of wrath, the battle of Armageddon and the second advent (Rev.16:12-21; cf. Rev.6:12-17; 19:11-21). Secondly, and even more pertinent to this point, is the fact that the Tribulation's second half will be, as we shall shortly see in detail below, characterized by its defining event, the Great Persecution (i.e., the “great wrath against this people” mentioned in Luke 21:23 above), and those believers in Israel who at this time for whatever reason fail to flee according to our Lord's command will, to one degree or another, be caught up in the suffering produced through the attempt on the part of the dragon and the beast to eradicate faith and the faithful from the earth.

(30) For ships of Kittim (i.e., the western “Babylon”) will attack with him (i.e., antichrist) [so that he will be victorious]. Then he will be stricken [as if dead], but will revive. And he will be enraged at the holy covenant, so that on his return [to Israel from the far south] he will take action [against it] (i.e., ending the sacrifices, setting up the abomination, taking his seat in the temple). And he will give his support to those who abandon the holy covenant. (31) For it is from him that the military forces will issue forth which will pollute the sanctuary (i.e., ending the ministry of Moses and Elijah), remove the daily sacrifice, and set up the abomination of desolation. (32) And with enticements he will seduce [people] to violate the [holy] covenant, but the people who know their God will continue to hold fast to it. (33) And those among the people who have insight will teach the people who will be persecuted by sword (i.e., martyrdom), and flame (i.e., torture leading to martyrdom), and captivity (i.e., imprisonment), and plundering (i.e., confiscation of property), for some time. (34) And when they are persecuted, they will receive a little help, yet many will ally themselves to them under false pretenses. (35) For even from among [the ranks of] those who have insight, some will be persecuted, in order to refine, purify, and cleanse them until the final end. For [it is] yet to come at its appointed time.

Daniel 11:30-35

This pressure and persecution upon believers residing in Israel, whether those who failed to flee at the proper time or those who became believers as a result of the beast's depredations as indicated and implied in the verses above, will continue throughout the time of gentile control, that is, the 42 months of the Great Tribulation which terminate with our Lord's return and victorious eradication of the forces of antichrist at the battle of Armageddon (compare Lk.21:24 with Rev.11:2).³⁹⁵

2. Divine Protection for the Flight: Once Jewish believers within Israel do heed the warnings to escape, all indications both from this passage, Revelation chapter 12, and from elsewhere in scripture suggest abundant divine provision for that flight. In the first place, after the beast's conquest of Moses and Elijah, we may safely assume that the devil and his son will make their first order of business the capture and destruction of genuine Christian leaders worldwide, beginning with those in the territory of

Israel. Inasmuch as the general persecution of the Church follows antichrist's attempt to exterminate believing Jews residing in the land, and that it is only after the dragon is "enraged" by the frustration of his attempt in this regard that he turns his attention to "the rest of [the woman's] seed" (Rev.12:17), Christian leadership is the next logical target. And beyond question the most significant leaders in the world at that time next in rank behind Moses and Elijah will be the 144,000. Now while their teams of two are distributed throughout the world, we may posit a disproportionately large number in the land of Israel for reasons discussed previously (see part 2B of this series, section V, "The Sealing of the 144,000"). We know from Revelation 14:1-5 (in the context of all of chapter 14 whose subject is the Great Persecution and the antithetical fates of those who love and those who oppose the Lord) that the 144,000 constitute the first wave of martyrs. In this respect then, the 144,000 will serve to "cover" the escape of the rank and file believers in Israel at that time, refusing to hide or cower or run, and offering up a testimony to their persecutors as penetrating as that of Stephen prior to his martyrdom in Acts chapter 7 (cf. Matt.10:17-20; Lk.21:12-15).

Secondly, since, as we have already seen above, the parallel to the Exodus here in Revelation chapter 12 is being drawn by the Holy Spirit in such a deliberate and obvious way, we are right to conclude that the provision for these Jewish believers of this "second Exodus" out of the hands of this "second Pharaoh" will be equally miraculous and equally sufficient. It will be remembered that on that first occasion God provided absolutely everything the people needed, from strong and competent leadership, to specific divine guidance, to tangible material support, to powerful divine protection. For it will be recalled that the command to depart from Egypt on that first occasion came so abruptly that the people did not even have time to leaven their bread (the origin for the memorial of the unleavened bread at Passover: Deut.16:3; cf. Ex.12:11; 12:33-34), yet they suffered no ill-effects on account of their rapid departure. Now too we must understand that our Lord's command not to return home even for one's outer garment will not present any serious hardship. For those who obey with due speed and diligence, every material need will be met and provided for. Just as the Lord provided Moses and Aaron to lead the people and a pillar of cloud and fire to guide them by day and night, so we may be confident that these exiles will not lack for whatever leadership and guidance they need to bring them to their safe haven out of the clutches of the beast (cf. Ps.77:20). And just as the shoes of those participating in that first Exodus did not wear out nor did their feet swell (Deut.8:4; Neh.9:21), we may be confident that whatever stretching of material means and strengthening of personal health may be necessary for a safe escape will be faithfully and miraculously provided by our Lord as a part of the "wings of the eagle" carrying these refugees out of harm's way. As those early refugees "plundered Egypt" through the divine favor our Lord poured out for them among their enemies (Ex.12:36; cf. Ex.3:21-23; 11:2-3), so we may expect a like measure of favor for these future believers to find grace in the eyes of all they encounter on their flight to safety (Is.21:13-15; cf. Is.48:20-21).

Thirdly, it is very clear both from our passage and from the obvious threat posed by the victorious armies of antichrist against an unarmed civilian column that these refugees would stand no chance whatsoever without a very large measure of supernatural

protection. Revelation 12:16 describes the earth as giving aid to the woman by swallowing up the forces of antichrist sent in pursuit of the retreating remnant, and in this we see a clear parallel to the sea which “helped” retreating Israel during the first Exodus by covering over Pharaoh and his hordes. Obviously, in both cases the Lord is the One who is working supernatural deliverance for the children of Israel. In the latter case to come, moreover, we actually have an indication of direct angelic support as well against the unseen forces of Satan ranged against these believers in their flight, for the role played by Michael and his victorious angels in this safe retreat is specifically referenced in the book of Daniel:

At that time, Michael the great prince (i.e., archangel) will take his stand [in your defense], [even] he who stands [in defense] over the sons of your people. For [that time] (i.e., the Great Tribulation) shall be a time of distress such as has never occurred since people first existed [on the earth] until that time. But during that time your people will escape, [that is,] everyone who[se name] is found written in the book [of life] (i.e., present and future believers).

Daniel 12:1

Since the context here is the commencement of the Great Tribulation, we can see from the correlation of these events that Michael's ejection of Satan from heaven is followed up by his immediate protection of Israel (something that is thus clearly taking place behind the scenes in Revelation 12:13ff.). Following the defeat of the devil's army, Michael and his forces are thus instrumental in preventing Satan from effectively spilling out his wrath upon these Jewish believers as they make their way into the desert and safety.

3. The Place of Refuge: In Revelation 12:6, we were told that the woman would find refuge “in the desert” and that there was a place “prepared by God” for her there. This point is reiterated in greater detail at Revelation 12:14 where we find that provision has been made for her in her desert sanctuary sufficient to endure the entire time of the Great Tribulation. This will be a fulfillment in part of several Old Testament prophecies.³⁹⁶

Thus says the Lord: “Those from among the people who are survivors from the sword will find favor in the desert [prior to] My coming to give Israel rest (i.e., at the Second Advent).”

Jeremiah 31:2

Therefore, behold, I am going to woo her (i.e., Israel). For I shall bring her into the

desert and speak to her heart.
Hosea 2:14 (cf. the Exodus comparison in v.15)

Our Lord's command given in the synoptic gospels to flee “to the mountains” (Matt.24:15; Mk.13:14; Lk.21:21), rather than being contradictory, actually offers us some additional information about the progress of the flight. In rough terms, the historical land of Israel is split from north to south by the Jordan valley rift (the ‘*arabah*’ as it is often called in scripture). To the east of this wide valley one finds what is essentially an unbroken range of mountains running all the way from Lebanon in the north to the gulf of Aqaba in the south as the land rises out of the rift to the central plateau beyond. Even in our Lord's day and before, this area and the plateau beyond was predominately “desert” in both senses in which we employ the word, namely, arid, inhospitable land which is at the same time largely unpopulated. Thus “mountains” and “desert” are not mutually exclusive terms, but we can glean from our Lord's words when set against the context of Revelation 12 and the related passages we are considering here that the mountains on the far side of the Jordan valley are to be the first objective of these fleeing believers.³⁹⁷ Once the initial safety of this remote area is gained, we can safely assume that by various means, human, angelic, and divine, the refugees will be gathered together and, under divinely provided leadership, provision and protection, taken further into the desert sanctuary where they will pass the darkest days of the Tribulation in complete security.

(40b) And [the beast] will invade the lands [of the southern alliance], and inundate [them] and sweep through [them], (41) and he will advance into the Beautiful land (i.e., Israel). Now many lands will fall before him, but these will escape from his control: Edom, and Moab, and the first [part of the territory] of the sons of Ammon (i.e., the southern half of historical Ammon contiguous to Edom and Moab).
Daniel 11:40b-41

This passage in Daniel shows that the northern limit of the flight will be roughly parallel with Jerusalem (i.e., the northern part of biblical Ammon will not be safe). This means that the corridor from Jerusalem to Jericho will be the northernmost escape route, with many refugees undoubtedly opting for more southerly routes, either traversing the Dead Sea or taking to the highways heading south of Dead Sea through the Negev towards biblical Moab and Edom. Once the remnant has made its way thus far, the “wings of the eagle”, all the unspecified divine provision necessary for their journey, will continue to carry them southeastward into the desert to the specific place “prepared” for them by God (Rev.12:6; 12:14).

(13) An oracle concerning Arabia: You caravans of the Dedanites, who camp in the thickets of Arabia, (14) bring water for the thirsty; you who live in Tema, bring food for the fugitives. (15) They flee from the sword, from the drawn sword, from the bent bow,

and from the heat of battle.
Isaiah 21:13-15 NIV

Dedan and Tema are settlements located several hundred miles farther out into the Arabian desert. Along with Dumah to the north (Is.21:11-12; cf. Is.42:11), they constitute the extreme eastern boundary of Edom (see Ezek.25:13). We can thus posit as a general area for the place of refuge a parallelogram of at least some 20-30 thousand square miles in area, extending on lines running roughly from the mountains opposite Jericho in the north and from the central Negev in the south southeastward into the Arabian desert for a distance of between 200 and 400 miles (and possibly farther). This is the approximate location of the biblical Kedar (Is.42:11; cf. Is.21:13-17).

4. Divine Provision in the Desert: Just as during the Exodus the Lord provided manna from the sky and water from the solid rock, so He will miraculously provide for all the needs of these tribulational refugees.

(18) “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. (19) See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. (20) The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, (21) the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.

Isaiah 43:18-21 NIV

The context of comparison for the verses in Isaiah above is the Exodus (cf. Is. 43:16-17), but instead of 40 years in the desert, these believers will endure only three and a half before being resurrected at the glorious return of their Lord and ours. For while that earlier generation tested the Lord “ten times” until He lost all patience with them (Num.14:22-23), these believers will truly be “the salt of the earth”, departing from trouble at His Word, and abiding in the place prepared for them by Him in complete safety and perfect divine provision through the Tribulation's darkest phase, kept safe “away from the presence of the serpent” (i.e., the devil; Rev.12:14), and so kept safe from the beast and all his forces until the time of trouble finally comes to an end (cf. Is.40:3-4; compare also Elijah's years in hiding and our Lord's infancy in Egypt).

Get out, My people. Go into your rooms and close your doors behind you. Hide yourselves for a little while until My indignation has run its course. For behold, the Lord is about to come forth from His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity. And the earth will reveal the blood shed upon it, and conceal its slain no

longer (i.e., the persecution of believers will be punished).
Isaiah 26:20-21 [cf. 2Pet.3:10b]

The earth's drinking up of the water: The symbolism used here for the destruction of the armies of antichrist assigned the task of hunting down the Jewish fugitives is both clear and, to a certain degree, paralleled elsewhere in scripture. At Daniel 9:26, for example, we also find this image of armies dispersing like the waters of a flood, albeit in that context the reference is to Armageddon (and cf. the same Hebrew word, *sheteph*, שֶׁטֵף, used in this same way also at Dan.11:26; cf. Dan.11:22; 11:40; Nah.1:8; Is.8:7-8; 28:15-22). In both instances, the flood waters are impressive and impetuous, but each time they dissipate into nothingness without having accomplished the task for which they are sent forth. A number of other biblical parallels suggest themselves, such as the earth swallowing up Korah and his rebellious adherents (Num.16:30), and “the stars fighting against” the forces of Sisera, a reference to divine intervention in the form of torrential rains which impeded the chariot force of the Canaanites (Judg.5:20-21). But again, the closest parallel is provided by the Exodus. In the retreat of the children of Israel into Sinai, the armies of Pharaoh were, of course, drowned by the Red Sea. Here, in our present context, the armies of antichrist will be “swallowed up” by the earth, but just as miraculously removed as a threat to the retreating children of Israel. Beyond the fact that “the earth helped the woman”, we are not told of the precise manner in which these forces will meet their demise, but we can say that the context clearly indicates their complete destruction at the hands of the Lord. Under such circumstances, it is easy enough to see why Satan and the beast leave off pursuit at this point. In need of consolidation of their newly won worldwide empire, the loss of such a large contingent of picked troops fresh from the victory over Egypt and not easily replaced will certainly be one which they will not be eager to repeat immediately. It will not be until the battle of Armageddon that the devil and his antichrist duplicate this folly, and then on the grandest scale of all, mustering their entire strength to do battle with the returning Messiah (Ps.2).

The dragon's war on the rest of the woman's seed: This prophecy in Revelation 12:17 marks the beginning of the “Great Persecution”, the defining feature of the Great Tribulation which we shall study in detail in section VII below. Enraged and frustrated in his attempt to destroy “the woman”, that is, the believing remnant of the people of Israel, the dragon, that is Satan, will transfer his attentions to “the rest of her seed”, specifically, “[even] those who are keeping the commandments of God and maintaining their testimony to Jesus”. These are clearly all other believers in Jesus Christ throughout the world, for they both follow God's will for their sanctification (i.e., keeping His commandments), and also His will for their production (i.e., testifying to Jesus Christ), the twin hallmarks of those who have faith in and are faithful to our Lord. The devil's efforts in this regard are described in Revelation 12:17 as “making war” against believers in Jesus Christ, and there is no better short description of what the Great Persecution shall entail for those of us who may find ourselves the object of the devil's wrath in those difficult days. Viewed in traditional terms, this “war” will be

entirely one-sided, for we believers will most certainly *not* be authorized to use active measures to oppose the beast in his attempt at his father's behest to destroy us. Our weapons will be faith and perseverance, and our objective the gaining of maximum glory for our Lord through our faithful endurance of all that comes our way, even to the point of death. This is an important principle to grasp, for we shall have to deal with extremes on both sides of this issue – calls to resist as well as calls to compromise – and we cannot afford to give in to either false approach. We must take comfort that whether through death and martyrdom or the timely return of our Lord, “all who are written in the book of life will be delivered” (Dan.12:1).

V. The Beast out of the Sea: Revelation 12:18 - 13:3

(18) And [the dragon] stood at the shore of the sea. (1) And I saw a beast rising from the sea, with ten horns and seven heads. And on the horns were ten crowns. And on its heads was a blasphemous name. (2) And the beast which I saw resembled a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth was like that of lions. And the dragon gave to him his power and his throne and great authority. (3) And one of the [beast's] heads [looked] as [if] it had been fatally smitten, yet its mortal wound had been healed. And the entire earth was in awe of the beast.

Revelation 12:18 -13:3

We have previously treated the verses above in respect to their application to the early career and character of the beast in our examination of antichrist in part 3B of this series. What concerns us here first is the wider biblical symbolism of this passage, coming as it does in the chronological sequence here at the outset of the Great Tribulation, and, second, the implications this passage has for antichrist's consolidation of power following his defeat of the southern alliance and his subsequent enthronement in the temple at Jerusalem.

1. The Biblical Symbolism of the Beast out of the Sea

The allegory of the woman Israel and her opponent, Satan the dragon, comes to a conclusion here with the summoning by the dragon of the beast from the sea. This event marks the shifting of the allegory, a device designed to compress the prior tribulational events for us in a symbolic way, back to a more strictly chronological treatment of the remaining three and a half years. For in the verses above we see for the first time in the text of Revelation the beast being introduced as an actor in the Tribulation's events. Immediately after this symbolic “summoning” by the devil, antichrist's actions form the focus of all the evil that unfolds upon the earth (in stark contrast to the heavenly actions and judgments which oppose him and will ultimately

destroy him and his followers). Simply put, these verses serve to shift our attention now to the beast and to his worldwide rule whose conduct will be characterized by the most significant of all tribulational horrors, the Great Persecution, that event which singlehandedly marks out the Great Tribulation as “great” (in the sense of being horrible beyond expectation or prior human experience). For in the allegory, it is precisely *because* of his rage and frustration over his inability to destroy the woman that the dragon seeks to make war with the rest of her seed (Rev.12:17). It is therefore crystal clear that the dragon in his summoning of the beast has this objective of persecuting believers foremost in mind (a conclusion that is reaffirmed by the “war” soon undertaken against the saints at Revelation 13:7-10). Satan's number one purpose in establishing the one-world rule of antichrist is thus to eliminate faith and the faithful from the face of the earth. Finally, it says much about the blinding effects of arrogance that Satan, who was originally the highest ranking and perhaps most intelligent of God's creatures, should, after some 6,000 years of experiencing God's ability to frustrate such plans, still entertain the vain hope of destroying all of believing mankind.

The Beast Rising from the Sea: The fact that the beast is summoned up from the sea by the dragon (representing Satan) shows conclusively that the allegory of chapter twelve continues here, and that what we have in this passage is a symbolic as opposed to a literal description. Whatever one may personally feel about the oceans of the world, it is undeniable that in terms of biblical symbolism the picture we receive from scripture of the sea, which is generally equated with death and the netherworld, is anything but positive (Gen.1:2; cf. Job 26:5-6; Is.27:1; 51:9-10; Dan.7:2-3; Lk.8:31; 2Pet.2:4; Jude 6; Rev.9:1-11; 17:8; 20:1-3; 21:1).³⁹⁸ For in the symbolism of the Bible, the sea, the Abyss, death, *Sheol* and Hades are essentially synonymous (cf. Rev.17:8, where the beast comes out of the Abyss). This rising of the beast from the sea is therefore meant to convey a rising up from death, and, more specifically, from a place symbolic of evil. This is true in a twofold sense, applying equally both to the revived Roman empire of the beast and to antichrist, the personal beast himself, each of which have in their own separate ways been given a new lease on life, if only for a very short while and if only for the perpetuation of the most horrendous evil and devastation.

Daniel said: “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea.”

Daniel 7:2-3 NIV

The final beast of the four described by Daniel in the verses immediately above is, of course, Rome (Dan.7:7), and not only historical Rome, but also revived Rome under the rule of the “little horn”, namely, antichrist (Dan.7:8). Thus the image of the dragon summoning the beast serves to identify Satan as the one responsible for the rule of antichrist, both in terms of the establishment of a one-world empire of evil and in the empowerment of its emperor (cf. Rev.13:2b). Inasmuch as heaven is the place of God

and the earth is the place where the conflict between God and the devil which explains so much of human history is being fought out, the figure of the sea (or Abyss) as the devil's and antichrist's symbolic realm is all the more perspicuous. And even this symbolic realm will be put under the Messiah's feet when He returns (cf. the angel coming down from heaven prefiguring the 2nd Advent who places one foot on the sea as well as one on the earth: Rev.10:1-3). As the symbolic realm of Satan and the place of every sort of diabolical monster (Job 3:8; 9:13; 26:12-13; 41:1-34; Ps.74:12-14; 87:4; 89:9-10; Is.27:1; 51:9-10; Amos 9:3), it should come as no surprise then that from the sea will arise the most terrifying satanic beast in all of human history, antichrist.

The specific description of the beast in these verses, Revelation 13:1-3, has been sufficiently covered in our prior treatment of antichrist in the preceding installment of this series (part 3B: "Antichrist"). It must suffice here to recall the interpretation of the details given there in regard to this passage:

- The sea: The sea suggests the beast's evil origin and represents resuscitation from death of both the empire and its emperor.
- The seven heads: The seven heads primarily represent the seven rulers of revived Rome allied with antichrist from the beginning of his rise. In Revelation 17:9-11 we discover that they also have a secondary symbolic meaning, for they also represent the original six emperors of Rome with antichrist being the seventh emperor of revived Rome. In terms of the primary application of the seven heads, antichrist is "the eighth" (Rev.17:11a; i.e., he too is a "head", but a "head" in his own right and the primary "head" at that); in terms of the secondary application of the seven heads, antichrist is "one of the seven" (Rev.17:11b; i.e., he is the next dominant emperor to arise after Nero, the sixth and last of the Julio-Claudians falls from power in 69 A.D.).
- The ten horns with crowns: The ten crowned horns represent the ten kingdoms and their kings, three of whom support antichrist surreptitiously, and only become part of his kingdom of revived Rome after the defeat of the southern alliance in the middle of the Tribulation.
- The (single) blasphemous name on the seven heads: As we saw in part 3B, the "name of blasphemy" is the seven letter Greek word Χριστός (i.e., "Christ") written distributively on the seven heads, blasphemously and falsely asserting antichrist's status as Messiah. Its presence on the seven heads shows their full complicity in accepting and propagating the beast's false claim to be "the Christ".
- The resemblance to a leopard: Inasmuch as the leopard is winged in Daniel 7:6, speed as well as treachery and ferocity are indicated. After his victory over the south, the beast will consolidate his one-world rule with exceptional rapidity and merciless force in those few instances where resistance is met. The four wings (in Daniel) likely represent the four quadrants of Alexander's empire so that here, by extension, they can be seen to apply to the four quarters of the world and antichrist's swift ascension to worldwide

domination.

- The feet like those of a bear: The bear in Daniel 7:5 refers to the Persian empire which possessed bear-like tearing power based upon its massive mobilization potential, so that the reference to the bear's feet here represents the immensity of the military power which the beast's empire will be able to deploy.
- The mouth like that of lions: The winged lion in Daniel 7:4 refers to the lion-like “bite” of Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian empire, so that the reference here to the mouth of lions (plural) is an apt description of the formidable offensive capability available to the beast in the consolidation of his worldwide rule.
- The apparently fatal wound seemingly miraculously healed: This mortal wound on one of the beast's heads refers to the apparent revival of Rome as well as to the apparent return to life of antichrist. The fact that new Rome will in many important ways be different from historical Rome and that antichrist will only appear to return to life will not reduce the wonder of the world at these ostensible “miracles”. The fact that the wound is found on one head only serves both to personalize the trauma to antichrist, as well as to show that at this point in the Tribulation the beast will be identified primarily with a single member of the original seven kingdoms of his revived Roman empire, namely, Israel, where his headquarters will be henceforth as he takes his seat in the temple, proclaiming himself to be God. Finally, in terms of the beast himself, the fact that the wound is “on the head” clearly foreshadows God's ultimate judgment upon him (Gen.3:15), indicating for all who remember and believe the Genesis 3:15 prophecy that this is not the Christ but antichrist.

2. The Kingdom of the Beast: Revelation 13:2b-3

Revelation 13:2 tells us that during the Great Tribulation, the devil will lend antichrist his “power, throne, and great authority” over the nations now under Satan's limited control as a result of Adam's fall (Lk.4:5-7; cf. Matt.4:9). At His return, the true Messiah, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, will rule the world for a thousand years in a Kingdom of blessedness, justice, and prosperity, a kingdom that will, in effect, never come to an end, since at the conclusion of the Millennium He will “hand up the Kingdom” to the Father as the New Jerusalem descends from heaven and the eternal state begins (1Cor.15:24-28; Rev.21:1ff.). By way of the sharpest possible contrast, the world rule of the beast will be characterized by the most severe accursedness, injustice, and privation in human history, and in very short order will be abruptly terminated by the return of the true Messiah. Thus antichrist accepts the offer which the devil made to Christ and which our Lord emphatically rejected (Matt.4:10; Lk.4:8), with the result being the clearest possible demonstration of the difference between a world ruled by the true Christ and one under the control of the false Messiah, the anti-Christ.

It is an open question whether the beast, ever of one mind with his father the devil as far as we can tell, will at this point also be possessed by him. Scripture does not say for certain, but it is clear enough that Satan, now expelled from heaven and consigned to the earth, does at this point empower the beast and his kingdom as never before, even going so far as to “give to him his power and his throne and great authority” (Rev.13:2b), with the picture given by scripture going forward emphasizing the complete unanimity of purpose between the devil and his antichrist (cf. Rev.16:13-14). Furthermore, the “summoning” of the beast out of the sea by the dragon seems to indicate a large degree of control.³⁹⁹ In any case, the unbelieving world will certainly see no great distinction between the two, worshiping antichrist as the Messiah and the devil as God (2Thes.2:4; Rev.13:4; 13:11-17; cf. Dan.11:38-39). The amazement and awe in which the beast will be held by the world at large will in no small measure account for the rapidity with which he will consolidate his rulership over the world following his astounding defeat of the southern alliance. Whatever charisma and success antichrist had before is now exponentially expanded as all resistance melts away. For in the eyes of unbelievers everywhere, resistance to this “divine” individual will seem folly, making antichrist's occupation of the remaining kingdoms of the world child's play.

And he (i.e., the “little horn”, antichrist) threw truth to the ground, and *was successful in whatever he did*.

Daniel 8:12b

And he (i.e., antichrist) will become exceptionally powerful – but not through his own power. And *he will be astoundingly successful* in his corrupting [activities].

Daniel 8:24a

For [during that period] the king [antichrist] *will consult only his own desire*, and will exalt and magnify himself above every god, and against the God of gods he will speak astonishing things. *He will have success* until the [time of] indignation is complete, for [all this] has been firmly decreed to take place.

Daniel 11:36

And the entire earth was in awe of the beast. And they worshiped the dragon because he had given his authority to the beast. And they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast? And *who is able to make war with him?*”.

Revelation 13:3b-4

Scripture does not go into detail about the precise course of antichrist's domination of the rest of the world following his defeat of the southern alliance, but, as the verses above make clear, this domination will be complete. To the extent that there is any further serious resistance to the establishment of his worldwide kingdom, we can expect

a ruthless implementation of the same sort of techniques employed in his initial rise to power in Babylon and in gaining control over revived Rome. As we have seen, much of what Daniel chapters 8 and 11 have to say about this subject document antichrist's deceptiveness and intrigue, and it takes no great leap of interpretation to see in the descriptions given therein a continuation of the asymmetric warfare which stood the beast in good stead in the past (i.e., a thorough integration of terrorism, infiltration, fifth-column-ism, technological sabotage, cunning double-dealing, surprise, unscrupulous methods, violation of agreements and expectations, violations of all conventions of warfare, striking at the head – neutralizing command structures, national and military, etc.). Importantly, we should keep in mind that *now* antichrist will be able to deploy a conventional military establishment whose superiority vis-à-vis whatever remains of other military forces around the world will be overwhelming to an unprecedented degree in the history of the world. Furthermore, we may expect the international movement that had formed the basis of the beast's success in his ascension to power over the seven kingdoms to have been active throughout the period, and to have greatly multiplied around the world as a result of the inevitable bandwagon effect that will surely follow his complete victory over the south. And, after all, as a result of his supposed “resurrection”, the whole (unbelieving) world will worship him (Rev.13:12; 13:16; 16:9; 16:11; cf. Rev.14:8; 17:18), so that even the “kings of east” will obey the command to assemble for Armageddon (Rev.16:12-14). Thus during the Great Tribulation the kingdom of the devil's messiah, the beast, will form a near-perfect antithesis to the true Messiah's coming Kingdom by which it is destined soon to be conquered and replaced in fulfillment of the plan of God (cf. Rom.9:17).

(9) I kept looking until thrones were set down and the Ancient of Days (i.e., the Father) took His seat. His attire was white as snow, as was the hair of His head, [white] like the purest wool. His throne was aflame with fire, and its wheels were a blazing fire. (10) A river of fire was flowing, and it poured forth from before Him. Thousands upon thousands were ministering to Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him. The court was seated and the books were opened. (11) Meanwhile, I kept looking on account of the sound of the arrogant words which the horn (i.e., antichrist) was speaking. I kept looking until he was killed and his body destroyed and given over to the burning fire. (12) As for the remaining beasts, their dominions were taken away, but an extension of life was given to them for an appointed time and season. (13) I kept looking during my vision of that night, and behold – with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming up, and He approached the Ancient of Days (i.e., the Father) and they brought Him before Him. (14) And to Him was given dominion and honor and a kingdom, so that all nations and peoples and tongues should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away, and His kingdom one which will not be destroyed.

Daniel 7:9-14

Until that blessed day, life on earth during the Great Tribulation will be monstrous. For believers, the Great Persecution, the subject of section VII below, will be the primary

reason that the final three and a half years will be so utterly terrible. However, the entire world population will, to one degree or another, be forced to deal with the implementation of antichrist's diabolical policies designed to consolidate his rule and impose his will on all human kind.

In part 2B of this series, we saw how the first six seals of Revelation chapter six indicate and predict the unique trends of the Tribulation, with the first four originating in and dominating its first half, and with seals five and six referring to the second three and a half year period, the Great Tribulation (with the opening of the seventh seal representing the beginning of the Tribulation overall). While as we have noted above the Lord's worldwide judgments of wrath and divine displeasure cannot be underestimated in explaining the horrific nature of these final three and a half years (cf. Is.24), antichrist's world rule constitutes the satanic trend that parallels this divine trend of judgment, accounting for a great deal of the intensified tribulation of those days. In addition to his establishment of an extremely oppressive and mandatory worldwide religion of devil worship and his institution of the Great Persecution, the characteristics of the beast's worldwide rule can be expected to parallel and intensify the four seal-trends we saw at work during the Tribulation's first half:

The Tribulation's First Half (four major trends):

1. White horse: Antichrist's Conquests: the trend of warfare and aggression.
2. Red horse: Civil Discord: the trend of lawlessness and political destabilization.
3. Black horse: Economic Constraint: the trend of economic dislocation and famine.
4. Pale-green horse: Accelerated Mortality: the trend of plague and rampant death.

The Great Tribulation (two major events):

5. Martyrs: the Great Persecution (of believers by antichrist and his religion).
6. Judgments: the Second Advent (with its preliminary and concomitant judgments).

While scripture gives us no indication that the underlying dynamics behind the first four seal-trends will change in any significant way during the Great Tribulation, the fact that antichrist's empire will control the entire world to one degree or another at this time does mean that these trends will most likely manifest themselves in a somewhat altered

way after the beast's consolidation of power. With the establishment of the beast's worldwide kingdom, we can expect 1) the trend of conquest to give way to one of ruthless exploitation and consolidation; 2) the trend of civil discord to give way to one of forcible conformity; 3) the trend of economic restraint likewise to become a matter of policy and fiat as much as one of circumstance; 4) the trend to accelerated mortality to be less random and more a direct result of all of antichrist's repressive policies. What scripture there is that applies to this aspect of the Great Tribulation agrees with this assessment:

1. Political Exploitation and Consolidation (seal #1):

(39) And after you (Nebuchadnezzar) another kingdom will arise inferior to you, then a third kingdom after that, one of bronze which will rule the whole earth. (40) Then there will be a fourth kingdom (i.e., revived Rome), strong as iron inasmuch as iron crushes and shatters everything. And like iron which smashes [everything], [this fourth kingdom] will crush and smash all of these other [kingdoms]. (41) And in that you saw that its feet and toes were part potter's clay and part iron, it will be a divided kingdom; but in that you saw iron joined to common clay, it will possess some of the strength of iron. (42) And as to the toes of its feet [being] part iron and part clay, the first (lit., "end") part of the kingdom (i.e., the seven kingdoms) will be strong, but [the other] part of it (i.e., the three kingdoms) will be brittle. (43) And in that you saw iron joined to common clay, there will be an attempt to join these [ten sub-kingdoms] together in the seed of man (i.e., through a mixing of their populations), but they will not bond one to another, just as iron cannot be joined to clay.

Daniel 2:39-43

Although this passage deals primarily with revived Rome, it also suggests that the method of unification attempted within the ten kingdoms will likewise be attempted worldwide to a greater or lesser degree (no doubt with equally questionable results). The reason for the failure is that the devil and his antichrist, in spite of all the power they dispose of at this time, will nonetheless be incapable of altering the human language patterns and our inherent disposition to nationalism instilled by God Himself at the division of the nations at Babel (Gen.11:1-9). Nevertheless, we should not underestimate the pain and suffering that this attempt on the part of the devil and the beast to create a new, politically homogenized one-world "Babel" will cause. Furthermore, just as the rider on the white horse "went out conquering and *did* conquer" (Rev.6:2 in the Greek), so we may expect that antichrist will enjoy some measure of success in his initial efforts, even if he is ultimately unsuccessful in the main.

2. Social Homogenization (seal #2):

And he (antichrist) will speak words against the Most High, and he will persecute the saints of the Most High God. And he will plot to change times and law. And they (i.e., believers, “the saints”) will be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time (i.e., for the duration of the Great Tribulation).

Daniel 7:25

The second major tribulational trend, exemplified by the red horse, is “to take away [social] peace” from the earth through the creation of civil discord. Just as the first seal-trend sees a transformation from exterior conquest to interior enforcement and domination, so this second trend will also undergo a like transformation, with antichrist's efforts now switching from the incitement of differences for the sake of creating political opportunities to an enforced homogenization of the realms under his control. As we can see from the juxtaposition of the elements in Daniel 7:25 above, a large portion of antichrist's “changing of times and laws” will involve the forcible imposition of his satanic religion upon the world resulting in the persecution of believers. But the beast's essential goal of completely eradicating the ingrained law of God at work in the human heart will not succeed despite all his draconian methods and policies imposed from above. God's basic ground rules limiting the devil's activities in human history have as an essential part of their purpose the preservation of each individual's ability to choose for or against God in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, the extent to which the availability of the gospel of truth and the faithful following of Jesus through that truth will be attacked by the devil and the beast in the course of the Great Persecution will come closer to eradicating this essential principle than ever before in human history. Isaiah describes this development by prophesying that mankind will at this time “break the everlasting covenant” (Is.24:5), a reference to the effective removal to a significant and unprecedented degree of any ability to hear or receive the truth of the gospel or grow in the Word (cf. 2Pet.2:21).

The only previous worldwide precedent is the situation which obtained when Nimrod organized a similarly exclusive universal religion during the building of the tower of Babel (Gen.11:1-9).⁴⁰⁰ As in that historical parallel, so in the case of antichrist's religion and the Great Persecution it sponsors and spawns, God will not allow such things to continue forever or even to reach a point where faith is entirely wiped off the earth. This one fact alone should encourage the faithful who anticipate or experience these things. For an end will come to such evil, an end which the faithful will see with their own eyes if only they remain faithful to the end (Joel 2:30-32). It is also a certainty, given the perfect and gracious character of our God, that in no case will any individual who truly desires it be deprived of salvation or spiritual growth despite the severe restrictions upon believers actual and potential in those days – for nothing is impossible for our God (Gen.18:14; Job 42:2; Jer.32:17; Matt.19:26; Lk.1:37; 18:27).

The descriptions throughout Revelation of the bulk of humanity at that future time indicate as we have pointed out before that mankind during those fateful days will be more hardened and more negative to the truth of the Word than ever before in human history, meaning that Satan's progress will be as much a result as an original cause of the evil and apostasy that will obtain during the Great Tribulation. In part for this reason the changing of times and laws will go well beyond the religious persecution with which this characteristic of the last days is linked in Daniel 7:25 above. The phrase “times and law” refers to the alteration by antichrist of customary practices and legal statutes respectively.⁴⁰¹ In his attempt to homogenize humanity, the beast will make every effort to neutralize both specifically statutory and more general norms of customary behavior (e.g., morality et al.). His purpose will be to cause every human being to break with the traditions of the past insofar as that can be achieved (in the same manner that cults strive to sever all of their victims' prior associations the better to control them and command their loyalty).⁴⁰² As in the French revolution, we may expect some of these changes to be only mildly wrenching and awkward in their implementation – like the decimal system which is workable in some arenas for all its many faults (e.g., many things are more normally and naturally divisible by two or three or twelve, while “feet” and “pounds” are very needful and workable divisions for which the metric system has no suitable replacements). Other attempts are likely to be both more onerous and more unworkable (cf. the abolition of Sunday as a day of rest during the French revolution which soon resulted in draft animals dropping dead all over France). But unlike earlier examples, during the Great Tribulation the population of the earth will enjoy no respite from any of antichrist's oppressive decrees until the return of Jesus Christ.

We may also anticipate in this respect, given antichrist's adeptness at co-opting others (Dan.11:24; 11:39), that the biblical parallel we saw in the last installment of this series between the beast and the Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanes will apply to some extent to antichrist's methodology in this area as well. Antiochus Epiphanes, in addition to the proscriptive elements of his regime, also did much to make the inhabitants of his realm feel part of one nation despite their disparate ethnic backgrounds. He did so by aggressively spreading Greek culture and institutions throughout his kingdom, as well as by being very generous with his favors towards those who enthusiastically and wholeheartedly adopted this policy of cultural homogenization. Antiochus' liberal use of Greek theaters and performance art, Greek military training institutions (specifically the *ephebate*), Greek coinage and economic standards, and Greek athletics (establishing gymnasiums and palaestras throughout his realm) gave his supporters (likewise organized into Hellenic senates and assemblies) both the tangible means of expressing their devotion to this policy as well as an incentive to do so. At the same time, these new institutions became veritable litmus tests for all those who were reluctant to give up or compromise their traditions in favor of the Greek way (a conflict most clearly seen in Israel prior to and during Antiochus' persecution and the Maccabean revolt). History provides other examples of ruling elites co-opting useful members of indigenous, conquered societies by demanding allegiance to a common cultural norm (e.g., the Roman empire, the Goths, the British empire, and, in their own especially twisted ways, the Nazis and Communists), but it is likely that the degree of allegiance and the

intrusiveness of the changes demanded by antichrist's party will be beyond anything yet witnessed.

In all this, the pattern set in the beast's assimilation of the seven kingdom empire of revived Rome will provide the model. We cannot say for certain, but it is possible and perhaps probable that the essential core of “culture” at the heart of this program of homogenization will be that of Babylon (and we can already see the spread of American culture in many of its more dubious aspects around the world today). If so, we may possibly see in the prophesied “purification” of human language that will be a part of the millennial blessings of the kingdom of the Messiah a divine reversal of antichrist's attempt to impose a single “tongue” upon all the inhabitants of the earth as well (Zeph.3:9).⁴⁰³

Finally, the attempt on antichrist's part to make the union of peoples within the seven kingdoms as close as possible is certainly apparent in Daniel's prophecy of the great statue (Dan.2:39-43). In that passage we see beyond any question an attempt to accelerate the process of homogenization through intermarriage (compare the efforts of Alexander the Great in this regard), and it certainly stands to reason that this pattern will be applied to the entire world during the Great Tribulation. Coupled with his efforts in regard to social institutions, this attempt to join the entire world together “in the seed of man” (Dan.2:43) will be designed to accelerate the breaking down of cultural and social as well as of ethnic and nationalistic distinctions and political establishments, the better to further Satan's ultimate plan of eliminating any opportunity or place for faith by making the practice of following God stand out in stark relief against an otherwise undifferentiated and homogenous backdrop of satanic allegiance.

3. Economic Exploitation (seal #3):

And through [the same] seductive [methods] he will enter the strongest provinces (i.e., the seven nations) of the empire (i.e., Revived Rome), and will do what neither his fathers nor their fathers have done. He will distribute plunder, spoils and riches to his [followers] and will afterwards plot against the [remaining] powers (i.e., the three sub-coalitions of the southern alliance), but [will wait] for an opportune time.

Daniel 11:24

He (antichrist) will treat with [conspiratorial] gatherings in the [preeminent] powers (i.e., nations of military and monetary strength) with the help of [his] foreign god (i.e., the devil) whom he will greatly honor, and he will put these [individuals] in charge of the majority [populations], and will also distribute territories [to them] as a reward.

Daniel 11:39

In company with the description of third horseman in Revelation 6:5-6 (covered in part 2B of this series) and the description of the mark of the beast and its economic

consequences in Revelation 13:11-8 (see section VI below), these verses give us a taste of how antichrist will administer his realm worldwide in terms of economics. From all these passages (and indeed from what we know about the beast generally), it seems clear that the economic system that will obtain during the Great Tribulation will be merely one of gross exploitation, designed only to supply the military needs of antichrist's kingdom, to enrich his supporters, and to reduce everyone else to such a state of subsistence survival that the means of revolt will not lie readily to hand. The privileged Babylon will constitute an exception to this rule (Hab.1:11; 1:16-17; 2:6ff; Rev.17:1-6; 18:1-34), but this very fact will play no small role in the growing jealousy that will eventually contribute to her destruction (Rev.17:15-18).

4. Ruthless and Lawless Disregard for Life (seal #4):

Those who look at you will contemplate you; they will consider you: ‘Is this the man who confounded the earth, who shook [the foundations of] the nations? He made the world like a desert, and trampled its cities underfoot. He did not let its prisoners go home.

Isaiah 14:16-17

Just as the beast's political, social, and economic policies during the Tribulation's final three and a half years as outlined in the sections immediately above will continue the patterns prophesied in the first three seal-trends (Rev.6), so we can see in the fourth seal-trend the continuing and accelerating ruthlessness and contempt with which antichrist will treat human life generally during the Great Tribulation. In the verses above, Isaiah 14:16-17, we can glean from the beast's “shaking of the earth” so that its “kingdoms trembled” the terror inspired by his methods. His making of the world “like a desert” and his “trampling of its cities” clearly reflects the devastation that antichrist will wreak upon the earth in the process of consolidating and administering his realm. Finally, we can also see in the statement that he “did not let its prisoners go home” a policy of widespread mistreatment of those enemies actual and potential not killed outright. This phrase without a doubt encompasses population deportation (cf. Is.23:6), hostage taking on a grand scale (Hab.1:9), and mass incarceration in concentration or prison camps (cf. Ps.79:11; 102:13-20; Is.14:2; 42:7; 49:9; 49:24-25; 51:14; 61:1; Zech.9:11-12; Lk.4:18).

VI. The Beast's Prophet and the Worldwide Anti-Christian Religion: Revelation 13:4-18

1. The Anti-Christian Religion and its Worldwide Expansion: Revelation

13:4-10

(4) And they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast. And they [also] worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast? And who is able to make war with him?” (5) And a mouth was given to [the beast] to speak presumptuous things and blasphemies [against God]. And it was [also] given to him to do what he wished for forty-two months. (6) And he opened his mouth for [the purpose of] blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His Name and His dwelling and those who dwell in heaven (i.e., the family of God). (7) And it was given to [the beast] to make war on the holy ones (e.g., believers) and to conquer them (i.e., the Great Persecution). And authority was given to him over every tribe and people and language and race. (8) And all the inhabitants of the earth will worship [the beast], [that is, all] whose names are not [still] written in the book of life [where they were written] from the beginning of the world, [even the book] which belongs to the Lamb who was slain. (9) “If anyone has an ear, let him hear. (10) If anyone is [destined] for captivity [to captivity he will go]. If it is necessary for anyone to be put to death by the sword, by the sword he must be put to death. Herein lies the perseverance and the faithfulness of the holy ones.”

Revelation 13:4-10

They Worshiped the Dragon: The amazement the world will manifest at the beast's pseudo-resurrection (Rev.13:3) along with his military successes (being now the effective ruler of the world as a result) spills forth at this point not only in the worship of antichrist himself, but also in the worship of his father, the dragon (i.e., the devil). It is to some extent a moot point whether or not these worshipers who will constitute the vast majority of the world's population really understand that it is Satan and his antichrist they are worshipping and not the one true God and His true Messiah. For the beast will certainly represent himself as the latter so that there will also be no doubt about the representation in this worldwide religion of Satan as “true God” (cf. Ezek.31:11; Jn.12:31; 2Cor.4:4). Clearly, however, the world *ought* to know, inasmuch as antichrist's reign in Jerusalem from the temple of God itself will be pursuant to his prior eviction of the two servants of God, Moses and Elijah, who, it will be recalled, mediated the trumpet judgments of warning (Rev.11:1-13; cf. Zech.4:14).

At the very least, therefore, it will be impossible for the world which now so enthusiastically worships not only antichrist but his father the devil as well not to know that whoever this new “god” may be, his right to be called such and to be worshiped as such is not uncontested. In other words, the “war in heaven” has now come to earth, and the world at this time will quickly and definitively be divided into two camps: those who accept the divinity of antichrist and his empowering “god”, and those who reject them, choosing instead to remain faithful to Him who is the one and only true God and His Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As the Great Tribulation progresses, this essential opposition between the two camps will become even more pronounced, eventually manifesting itself in a mass persecution which begins with believing Israel (as we have already seen in chapter 12) then rapidly expands to include all believers

worldwide after true Israel has been miraculously delivered (Rev.12:17). Thus the “war in heaven” will continue on earth, reaching its climax as the beast and his father the devil summon all of their forces to fight against the Lord at the battle of Armageddon. But the fundamental point that we should come away with here is precisely that scripture is presenting the issue *as* a battle, a fight to the finish to decide once and for all “who is really God and who is His true Christ?” As believers in the truth, we may find this question somewhat nonsensical, and so in truth it is. However, that has not stopped Satan since before the creation of mankind from attempting to do everything in his power so that he might not only be viewed as God but also might assume that role in fact as well. For as impossible as this is, it should not be overlooked that such a complete reversal of reality is exactly what the devil has been lusting for since the beginning, namely, to replace God not only in his own thinking but also in actual practice, to shut Him out of the universe and to assume His role of rulership and authority. With the events of the mid-Tribulation now accomplished, the devil will proclaim these wild desires of his as the inevitable truth to come in the person of his own pseudo-Messiah, and will set in motion a process of attempting to complete and confirm this new regime in preparation for the final showdown with our God and His Christ at Armageddon. What this means for believers, of course, is the beginning of the most difficult time in the history of the world, the Great Tribulation, characterized and indeed defined in our cases by the Great Persecution.

The most effective, most dramatic, and most abhorrent means that the dragon and his antichrist will employ to consolidate their kingdom will be the establishment of a mandatory, worldwide religion designed to replace all genuine worship of the one true God with the worship of the beast and his father the devil instead. As Revelation 13:4 demonstrates, the population of the world at large, awed by recent events, will easily and readily put aside whatever scruples and reservations they may have had before and will enthusiastically embrace the worship of Satan and antichrist. Their reasoning and motivation is simple enough and is made crystal clear in our context: the dragon will be considered a legitimate object of worship “because he gave his authority to the beast”, and antichrist in turn will be regarded as such 1) because of his extraordinary person (exemplified in particular by his pseudo resurrection: “Who is like the beast?”), and 2) because of his extraordinary deeds (exemplified in particular by his conquest of the world, including his “defeat” of the two witnesses: “And who is able to make war with him?”).

Thus the world's new-found reverence for the devil and their acceptance of him as “God” is a result of their prior conviction that antichrist is God's divine representative on earth. While this may perhaps seem a somewhat unbelievable development to followers of the true Christ as we sit comfortable at home today, we would do well to remember the words of our Lord:

(10) And at that time many will fall away and will betray each other and will hate each other, (11) and many false prophets will arise and will deceive many. (12) Now because of the increase of lawlessness [at that time], the love of the many will cool. (13) But he

who endures until the end, this [is the one who] will be saved.
Matthew 24:10-13

At that time if someone says to you "Look [(as they will tell you then)]! Christ is here!", or "Here [He is]!", do not believe [it]. For false christs and false prophets will arise and will perform great miracles (lit., "signs") and wonders [sufficient] to deceive even the elect, if [that were] possible. Look [(as I am telling you now)]! I have told you ahead of time.
Matthew 24:23-25

The parallels between the beast and the true Messiah will be both deliberate and numerous. If, as Jesus tells us in the verse above, even the elect will be tempted to interpret the signs and wonders of antichrist as proof of his Messiahship, it is small wonder that those who have rejected the truth of Jesus Christ will be easily ensnared by the satanic lies of the beast and the dragon. For at this point, in addition to the signs and wonders mentioned above, antichrist will have defeated the "unbelieving nations" of the southern alliance in a "holy crusade" to deliver "Christendom and Israel" from Islamic tyranny; he will have defeated the "forces of evil" in the persons of Moses and Elijah who had for many months been "tormenting" the unbelieving population of the world (Rev.11:10); and he will have (to the eyes of the world) even risen from the dead. Following these unprecedented signs, he will take up residence in the temple of God in Jerusalem proclaiming himself to be God (1Thes.2:4), and setting about to begin the millennium of blessing prophesied in scripture as he rules from Jerusalem a united world without war. Not only will it be no wonder that unbelievers, attributing his feats to the supernatural authority of his father (which is indeed true enough), will accept him as divine, but it also follows logically for those viewing the circumstances in such a way that the imposition of a mandatory form of worship upon the entire world will seem reasonable and good in every way. Only those who know their God will be able to resist the incredible pressures to take part in the new phase of antichrist's religion about to be unveiled and proclaimed worldwide. And it is likewise understandable that the satanic propaganda which has been around since pagan days which seeks to paint the true God as "a bad god" and Satan as "the good god" bent on replacing him will find a ready audience in all those whose names are no longer written in the book of life. Therefore one of the chilling ironies of the Great Persecution about to be unleashed against all who are determined to preserve their faith in Jesus even until death is that believers are going to be charged with "devil worship" by the very people who have in fact sold themselves to Satan. Our Lord's words on the subject are important to remember in this regard, for they accused Him, the Son of God Himself, of being in league with the devil (Jn.8:48-59; cf. Mk.3:22-30), and He has assured us of the world's hatred and persecution, because it hated and persecuted Him first (Jn.15:18-25).

Daniel 11:36-39 presents us with a similar picture of antichrist's activities at the commencement of the Tribulation. Inasmuch as Daniel provides additional details, it

will be helpful here to consider that passage together with its implications for the interpretation of Revelation 13:4-10.

(36) For [during the Great Tribulation] the king [antichrist] will consult only his own desire, and will exalt and magnify himself above every god, and against the God of gods he will speak astonishing things. He will have success until the [time of] indignation (i.e., the Great Tribulation) is complete, for [all this] has been firmly decreed to take place. (37) He will have no regard for the God of his fathers (i.e., the Lord), nor those favored by their wives, nor will he have regard for any god [at all], for he will exalt himself above them all. (38) And in His place he will honor a god of powers, even a god whom his fathers did not know will he honor with gold and silver and precious stones and [all sorts of] delightful things. (39) He (antichrist) will treat with [conspiratorial] gatherings in the [preeminent] powers (i.e., nations of military and monetary strength; cf. Ezek.31:11; Jn.12:31; 2Cor.4:4) with the help of [his] foreign god (i.e., the devil) whom he will greatly honor, and he will put these [individuals] in charge of the majority [populations], and will also distribute territories [to them] as a reward.
Daniel 11:36-39

Verse 36: With the melting away of all military and political resistance worldwide, antichrist, “the king”, will have a free hand to carry out his own will (indistinguishable of course from the devil who spawned him), and so “will consult only his own desire”. Notwithstanding his unprecedented self-exaltation and self-magnification, and the temerity with which he will disparage the true King of Kings and Lord of Lords (i.e., he “will exalt and magnify himself above every god, and against the God of gods he will speak astonishing things”), he will yet enjoy “success until the time of indignation is complete”. This will happen not contrary to the will of God but in accordance with it: “for [all this] has been firmly decreed to take place”.

This is not the first time that our Lord has made sanctified use of secular, even evil agents in the cause of divine justice and holy judgment (though it is the most extreme). Egypt in the person of the Pharaoh of the Exodus (Ex. chap. 3-14), Assyria (Is.10:5-6), and historical Babylon (Jer.27:3-8), to name a few of the other most prominent examples, were all employed by God to render discipline upon rebellious Israel (along with other nations as well). As discussed above, the Tribulation, and the Great Tribulation in particular, is preeminently a time of divine judgment (cf. the chart of corresponding main trends given in section I.6 at the beginning of this study). Pharaoh, a type of antichrist as we have seen (in part 3B), is a particularly instructive parallel in the similarly unusual latitude he was allowed in opposing God to what was at that time an unprecedented degree (cf. Acts 12:21), but not without God's permission and only with the purpose of demonstrating God's power and glory (Ex.9:16). The fact that antichrist's extension of his will and rule around the world is here prophesied in the Bible millennia before it actually comes to pass should be sufficient to show for all who believe scripture that the beast and his father Satan could never have brought things to this pass by their own efforts absent the permissive will of God. This, then, should remind us all that everything that will happen during those

terrible days to come will not only be entirely within God's hands, but will be important, even critical, to bringing about the end that He has ordained since before the heavens and the earth were created, namely, His complete refutation of evil in the process of thoroughly destroying the evil one and his works (1Jn.3:8; cf. Heb.2:14).

Verse 37: The phrase often translated “the desire of women” is not a reference to any particular pagan god, but represents the replacement or rather superceding of all other pagan activity by the new religion which worships only Satan and antichrist. In Jewish experience, foreign women were often the ones who led their husbands to idolatry (cf. Num.25:1-3; 1Kng.11:1-13), so that this phrase stands for all pagan influence in contrast to the “God of his fathers”. Not only will antichrist “have no regard for the God of his fathers” (i.e., the Lord), but will also not revere “those [gods and religions] favored by their wives”, and, indeed, will not even have any “regard for any god [at all]”, but will instead “exalt himself above them all”. In place of both the worship of the one true God *and* all other pagan worship (wherein the satanic origins and effects may be presently concealed to one degree or another), antichrist's new religion will put into place the direct worship of the devil (along with the worship of his son, the beast).

Verse 38: The pseudo-deity preferred by antichrist is described here as “a god whom his fathers did not know”, meaning that whatever the pagan unfaithfulness indulged in by the sons of Israel in times past, it was at least not clearly revealed to them that behind each of these pagan deities stood the angels of Satan and, ultimately, the devil himself. With the advent and full unveiling of antichrist and his religion, the subterfuge is over. The beast and with him the vast majority of the world's population will honor Satan with offerings of “gold and silver and precious stones and [all sorts of] delightful things”, making pilgrimage to the new Mecca, Jerusalem, which is, figuratively speaking, “Sodom and Egypt” as long as antichrist holds court in the temple with his animated image on display in the temple court (Rev.11:8; cf. Dan.8:10-14; 11:31; Matt.24:15; Mk.13:14; 1Thes.2:4).

The devil, worshiped by the beast and the unbelieving world, is here described as a “god of powers”. This phrase reveals much about Satan, his kingdom, and his *modus operandi*. In contrast to the description “god of powers”, our God is a God of Power. That is to say, our God, the one true God, is omnipotent in every sense of that word, while the devil's might, significant as it may be relative to minuscule human strength and capacity, is not to be compared to our Lord's in any meaningful way. And while our God describes Himself as a God of love, mercy, and righteousness, Satan, lacking all of these truly impressive qualities, loves to describe himself in terms of his power.

(5) Then [Satan] took [Jesus] up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in moment of time. (6) And the devil said to Him “I will give you *all this power* and all their glory – for it has been surrendered to me and [so] I [can] give it to whomever I

please. (7) So if you will worship me, it (i.e., the power) will all be yours.”
Luke 4:5-7

While our Lord flatly rejected this offer with the words of Deuteronomy 6:13, “you shall worship the Lord your God, and Him alone shall you serve”, antichrist will unhesitatingly embrace it. For, like his father before him, “power” will be the ultimate good, the ultimate goal, the ultimate end.

It is worth considering that concentrating upon this material world and the charms of it, be they expressed in terms of power, or wealth, of fame, or possessions, or various and sundry pleasures, is fundamentally satanic and hostile by nature to true spirituality. For the quest for worldly security and worldly priorities through expediency and materialism is idolatry in its most quintessential form (cf. Eph.5:5; Col.3:5). Naturally (all *too* naturally) as fallible human beings, adopting a perfect standard of divorcing ourselves from such false values without at the same time falling into the equally dangerous trap of asceticism or withdrawal from the world is not an easy task. But it is important to note that every time we look for solutions or solace in the power of things, people, organizations, movements, or nations, we are essentially playing the devil's game and esteeming what he esteems foremost, namely, fleshly solutions in place of spiritual ones. For he is “a god of [material rather than spiritual] powers”. Given that it is important even now to beware of such a mind-set, and given that we ought rather to be taking pains to remember that God is in control regardless of what the eye may see, how much more will that not be true under the incredible pressures, challenges, and testing of the Great Tribulation!

Verse 39: The “preeminent powers” mentioned in this verse are the world's remaining power centers, nations, for the most part, but not exclusive of prominent organizations and individuals. Scripture gives a glimpse here of the methodology used by antichrist to consolidate his power worldwide after his mid-tribulational successes. The beast will essentially “franchise” his rulership around the world especially in far-flung places which have yet to feel the boot of his marching legions. The cost of the privilege of sharing in antichrist's rule in this way will be steep, including not only complete obedience in the carrying out of the will of the one who now “does what he pleases” without any restraint of any kind, but also the responsibility for propagating and enforcing the new mandatory religion of Satan worship (whom the beast will “greatly honor”), and it will only be through the continued, active support of the devil that this worldwide consolidation of power and expansion of the anti-Christian religion will be able to flourish (i.e., “with the aid of [his] foreign god”). But despite all his reliance on the power of human flesh and these “pillars” (literal “mighty fortresses” in the Hebrew), the beast and his armies are destined to be swept away by the terrible swift sword that proceeds from the mouth of the Son of God “on the day when the towers fall” (Rev.19:21; cf. Is.30:25; Jer.50:15; Amos 1:10; Zeph.3:6-15). No matter what our eyes may tell us, our faith assures us that our Lord is in complete control of the process of human history

(cf. Is.37:26-29; 46:11; 48:3).

(8) Let all the earth fear the Lord. Let all the inhabitants of the world tremble before Him. For He spoke and it came into being. (9) He gave the command and it arose [out of nothing]. (10) The Lord shatters the plans of the nations. He frustrates the intentions of [the world's] peoples.

Psalm 33:8-10

They Worshiped the Beast (Revelation 13:4): Returning to our exegesis of Revelation chapter 13, as we have just seen from the parallel verses in Daniel, at that time it will be impossible to separate the worship of the devil and the worship of the beast. When the world of that dark day to come worships the devil, it will be “because he gave his authority to the beast”. That is to say, the tangible “proof” of Satan's perceived “divinity” will be the successes of his pseudo-Messiah, antichrist. And it will be precisely these successes which produce the world's admiration, both his pseudo-resurrection (“who is like the beast?”), and his counterfeit Armageddon in defeating the vast southern alliance (“who is able to make war with him?”). Before the accomplishment of these two primary deceptions (and the domination of the world which followed), it was neither feasible from the standpoint of persuasion nor possible from the standpoint of political power either to reveal fully the nature of the new religion or to make it mandatory worldwide. The constellation of the events at the Tribulation's mid-point are what make possible (in company “with the help of [his] foreign god”) antichrist's transformation of his rule from regional to global. That transition will be both horizontal (i.e., geographic expansion until the entire surface of the globe renders him effective allegiance), and vertical (i.e., an increasing measure of loyalty and control within all political entities as well as all other power-nodes), with a corresponding degree of increased intensity in the demands he will make of those controlled. For immediately after his initial consolidation of power we can expect a greater requirement for allegiance to and participation in his cause and in his religion which will manifest itself most significantly in the Great Persecution about to be unleashed upon all who refuse such allegiance and participation.

A Mouth to Speak Presumptuous Things and Blasphemies (Revelation 13:5a): As we saw in our previous installment of this series, such temerity is a salient characteristic of antichrist (Dan.7:8; 7:20; 7:25; 8:25; 11:36; 2Thes.2:10-11; Rev.16:14; cf. 2Pet.2:10-12; Jude 1:8-10). Here, however, we have the beast taking his assault on the Person of God to unprecedented levels. Such presumption of deity for himself even as he denies it to the true God of the universe will both require and help to facilitate the unbelieving world's complete capitulation to the “empowerment of error” prophesied in 2nd Thessalonians 2:11.⁴⁰⁴

The Forty-Two Months (Revelation 13:5b): At this time, antichrist will be restrained in

only a very minimal way from doing all he pleases. Instead, a free hand will be “given” to him to implement his satanic plans for one world rule, including the destruction of believers and the elimination of any possible avenue for faith and faithfulness. As it says in Daniel 11:36, “he will consult only his own will”. It is this removal of restraint through the permissive will of God that will make the second half of the Tribulation “Great” in every negative aspect that word can bear. As believers who may potentially be called upon to endure those terrible days, we must keep in mind that, indeed, it is only because God allows it that such things can happen, and, if God allows it, He is doing so for good, especially for our good, even if the “good” will be veiled from our sight for a time during those days (Rom.8:28).

Call to remembrance the former things from the beginning of creation (lit., “eternity”). For I am God – no other One exists. [I am] God – and there is nothing like Me. Since the [very] beginning, I have been making known the end. Since [eternity] past, things that have not yet been done. [I am the One who] says, “My purpose shall stand”, and “*I will accomplish all My good pleasure*”.
Isaiah 46:9-10

Blasphemy against the Name, Dwelling, and People of God (Revelation 13:6): This listing of the objects of antichrist's blasphemy indicates that his opposition to God at the behest of his father the devil has now become an overt “crusade”. At this juncture, the beast will begin to attack not only the Person of God (i.e., His holy “Name”), but also “His dwelling and those who dwell in heaven”. The Greek root common to both “dwelling” and “dwell” in this verse is *sken-* (σκην-), and has the literal meaning “tent” (from which we derive our English word “scene”, from the changing of the “tent” or canvas backdrop in Greek dramatic presentations). This usage is significant, because, after all, God is merely “tenting” in the third heaven at present, and “those who tent with Him”, that is, the eternal family of God, are also only there on a temporary basis as well, for the rightful place of God and all who belong to Him is the earth (the ultimate of the seven Edens: Rev.21-22).⁴⁰⁵ These verbal attacks upon elect angels and victorious believers are thus antichrist's way of representing their presence in heaven as somehow illegitimate, while his blasphemy against “the dwelling of God” suggests that he and his father Satan likewise regard the Lord's continued physical presence in “their” universe as offensive. In this horrendous reversal of all that is right and righteous, we see clearly the depths not only of outrage to which the devil and his son are capable of sinking, but the essential madness their unbridled arrogance has produced. At the heart of all lies and slander one finds the erroneous assumption that verbalizing falsehoods can somehow make them realities. Despite the damage that such active disparagement and deceit can do, the idea that God could somehow be affected or diminished through any means (especially mere words) can only be understood to arise from the same self-induced insanity that will produce the Armageddon campaign wherein the devil, the beast, and the false prophet will attempt to overthrow our Lord Himself by physical force (cf. Rev.19:11-21).

War against the Holy Ones (Revelation 13:7a): As was the case in Revelation 12:17, this is of course a reference to the Great Persecution. Scripture describes it as a “war”, not because believers will take up arms against the beast but because despite what we may think or feel under the pressures of that time our suffering will be a part of the larger invisible conflict that has been underway since Satan's rebellion began. We are indeed soldiers in this war, but our weapons are spiritual ones, the “panoply of God” (Eph.5:10-17; cf. Rom.13:12; 2Cor.10:4; 1Thes.5:8). What will transpire on earth, therefore, will only be a reflection of the true realities taking place beyond our ken. We should thus make every effort before the time to fortify ourselves with faith (rather than with material means), that we may avoid the equally devastating mistakes of allowing ourselves to plunge into despair on the one hand (thus forgetting that we are soldiers in our Lord's army and that He is glorified through our persistent faithfulness), or of allowing ourselves to be caught up in human solutions such as opposing antichrist in a material way (thus forgetting that God is our mighty fortress, our strength, our shield, and our sword). For this scripture tells us explicitly that “it was given to [the beast] to make war on the holy ones *and to conquer them*”, so that beyond all argument the Great Persecution will come about through the permissive will of God, and the suffering and martyrdom which results will be unavoidable. Let us not forget that all this will be according to our Lord's good pleasure and for His great glory – and for our ultimate blessing and inheritance in His eternal kingdom, if we but trust Him in that dark hour and stay faithful to Him no matter what the cost or the consequences.

(21) I was watching, and this horn (i.e., antichrist) was *waging war* with the holy ones (i.e., believers). And he was prevailing over them (i.e., “*conquering them*”), (22) until the Ancient of Days came (i.e., our Lord's second advent) and rendered judgment on behalf of the holy ones of the Most High, and the time came when the holy ones *took possession of the Kingdom*.

Daniel 7:21-22

Authority over Every Tribe, People, Language and Race (Revelation 13:7b): In the Greek text, antichrist's “authority over every tribe and people and language and race” follows directly after and is phrased in a parallel way to his conquest of believers. He has power over both because it is “given to him”. The parallelism between the two also shows that antichrist's initiation of the Great Persecution is interconnected with the worldwide authority he will assume. In the prior history of the world, there was always some haven to which persecuted believers could flee with the help of our God, and thus find shelter from the storm. On that terrible day to come, however, no such refuge will exist. For the beast will be given through the permissive will of God an authority over the world which no one since Nimrod has enjoyed. Like Nimrod, antichrist will use his control over the world's population to create an atmosphere of compulsion for the express purpose of opposing God (as in the case of the tower of Babel). The opposite side of this coin of course will be the active oppression of any and all who do not embrace antichrist, his religion, and his anti-God agenda, with the beast's growing control over every aspect

of life on earth facilitating a persecution which will be unlike anything the world has yet witnessed (and that is saying quite a lot: Matt.24:21). The rapidity with which the nations of the world will fall into line will be expedited by antichrist's delegation of the process of consolidation to a highly organized chain of command beginning with his trusted associates, his "party", prominent groups and individuals in the newly subordinated countries, and to specific nation states as well, all chosen for their power, influence, and absolute loyalty to the beast (Dan.11:39). Yet none of this would be possible unless our God permitted it, and we have faith that in His doing so everything is working out for our good and for His glory.

The Book of Life (Revelation 13:8): At this time, the vast majority of the world's population will accept antichrist as the Messiah and his father Satan as God and will worship them as such, that is "[all] whose names are not [still] written in the book of life [where they were written] from the beginning of the world, [even the book] which belongs to the Lamb who was slain". The reader's close attention to the precise translation is solicited at this point since this verse is often mistranslated and even more frequently misunderstood. As sinners at birth, none of us is worthy of eternal life by our own merits and therefore all are equally unworthy of being included in any "book of [eternal] life". Absent divine intervention, we would all instead suffer the just condemnation for the record of sins we and will commit in this world (through our own volition). Blessedly beyond all expression God *has* intervened in the Person of His Son, and through His precious blood has redeemed us, paying the price in the priceless coin of the blood of Christ for all the sins of every single person who has ever lived. As a result, all human beings have their name written in "the book of life" since the beginning of the world, for Christ's sacrifice was ordained and valid from the time of God's original decree (Rom.3:25-26; Eph.1:4; 1Tim.2:6). Only by *rejecting* God and His solution in the Person of Christ and His work is anyone's name "blotted out" of the book, whether this is an active process as in the case of those who reject God in preference for the beast, or a passive one in the case of those who, though never definitively rejecting God, yet refuse to come to Him before their days on earth expire (cf. Dan.12:1; Lk.10:20; Phil.4:3; Rev.3:5; 17:8; 20:12; 20:15):

May the [godless] be blotted out of the Book of Life, and may they not be recorded with the righteous.
Psalm 69:28

"And now, if You will forgive their sin, [fine]. But if not, [then] please blot my name out of Your book which You have written." But the Lord said to Moses, "The one who sins against Me, him will I blot out of My book."
Exodus 32:32-33

As is true even today, the unbelievers at that time will not recognize what was behind the humiliation and suffering of the true Christ in our place or accept its necessity. As a

result, they will easily (and wrongly) accept and exult in the glorification of the anti-Christ”. As it says in 2nd Thessalonians 2:10, “they perish because they refuse to believe”. Such is the “empowerment of error” which will prevail so mightily in the darkened hearts of the followers of the beast at that time.⁴⁰⁶

“If anyone has an ear to hear, let him hear” (Revelation 13:9): We have seen this exhortation before in our study of the seven churches of Revelation chapters two and three. In fact, this same exhortation in nearly identical phrasing occurs in each of Christ's messages to the seven churches (Rev.2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:29; 3:6; 3:13; 3:22), which, as we have seen, represent the seven periods of the Church Age (see Part 2A of this series). This is the only *other* place in Revelation where we find this exhortation, and that is highly significant. The second important thing to understand about this phrase is that it is looking forward here, not backward. In other words, the exhortation addresses the coming persecution of the Church during the Tribulational period and the advice given believers in verse ten regarding the necessity of perseverance. It is to these words in God's own voice that the exhortation points, and, specifically (on the basis of the parallel of the other seven passages where this phrase occurs), to Christ's own words directed to His Church on earth at the Tribulation's mid-point about to enter the Great Persecution. This message will be one of great importance to the believers of that time, and is comparable in its significance to the other exhortations to pay close attention such as the one to Laodicea which is addressed to us today (Rev.3:14-22). Just as our Lord outlined the most important characteristics and failings of the seven periods of the Church, exhorting each to take the appropriate corrective action, so here we find our Savior giving what in His perfect view is the most important advice for those of us destined to experience that final time of testing, and we would indeed do well to “give ear” to His words.

The Perseverance of the Holy Ones (Revelation 13:10): What we have here then is not only a preview of the Great Tribulation to come from the believer's point of view. What we have here are the direct words of Jesus Christ to us, summing up the attitude and the perspective that will be necessary for us to adopt and maintain should our Master call upon us to endure those terrible days ahead. The first thing to notice about this verse is that it presents only two possibilities for the experience of believers during the time of the Great Persecution: martyrdom and imprisonment. That is not to say that there will be no other possible outcome for those of us who face the pressures of that fiery furnace to come, but the fact that our Lord gives us only these *two* eventualities to consider when we contemplate the possibility of our participation in those future events is highly significant. The fact is that martyrdom and imprisonment will be so common that it will be folly to assume that somehow “we” will escape one or the other or both. We may very well do so, but for our spiritual health and spiritual survival the most essential armor we can don in preparation for the crucible of the Great Persecution will be the mind-set of complete obedience and patient submission to the will of God whatever that may be *in full recognition and acceptance of the fact ahead of time* that such obedience and

submission may very well and may even very likely require that we endure imprisonment and or martyrdom at the hands of antichrist. For at no time in human history will it be more important for believers to be properly attuned to the will of God for their lives. And it will be of critical importance for all of us who must run this gauntlet to understand fully and completely that should such be our lot, that lot has been allotted by our Lord Himself, serves His purposes, glorifies Him, and is not a result of our failings, but rather is the ultimate opportunity to demonstrate our love and responsiveness to Him for the sacrifice of sacrifices He made for us.

The comparative experience of Peter and John is illustrative of this. Both men were apostles of the Lamb, both great believers, both authors of significant portions of the Word of God. Without the benefit of scripture, we would be hard-pressed to guess which of the two would be a candidate for martyrdom while the other was to be spared that particular fate for continued ministry. But John 21:18-19 records how our Lord Jesus told Peter ahead of time that it was his destiny likewise to glorify God with a martyr's death. Upon hearing this, Peter immediately asked about John, "Lord, what about this one?" (Jn.21:21). To this Jesus responded, "If I want him to remain until I come [back], what does that have to do with you? You follow Me!" (Jn.21:22). In a similar way, our Lord is telling us here to be accepting of the imprisonment and martyrdom that may be destined to come our way, even if, in the end, we are spared such a fate. For it is true that there will be surviving believers who will "be caught up to meet the Lord in the air" (1Thes.4:17; cf. 1Cor.15:51-52), but it is entirely the Lord's decision whose role it will be to endure until the end, and who will be removed from this life in a death that glorifies Him in a very special way. We cannot know before the fact what our particular destiny will be in this respect, but one thing is certain as this passage makes clear: in order to cope with the tribulation of those days we must arm ourselves ahead of time with the proper attitude of accepting God's will for our Savior's glory, even if that entails imprisonment or martyrdom or both. Revelation 13:10 is itself a quote or paraphrase of Jeremiah 43:11, and it is significant that the Jeremiah passage occurs in the context of divine judgment upon *unbelievers* who had defied God's will and out of fear had fled to Egypt instead of staying in the place of blessing. In our verse the Great Tribulation has temporarily overturned the natural order of things, and we see the righteous receiving what the wicked deserve. Yet we are confident that our God will never abandon or forsake us, and that none of this will transpire apart from the will of God, to the glory of God, and in anticipation of a swift reversal of our fortunes in a most dramatic way at our Lord Jesus' imminent return. But we must wait patiently for that day and guard against fighting antichrist's minions (that must be left to the Lord) or fleeing from them (unless and until our Lord directs us to do so). Herein lies "the perseverance and the faithfulness" of all of us blessed to be included in the number of His "holy ones".

Characteristics of the New Religion: Before moving on, it needs to be stressed at this point that despite the inherent horrors of antichrist's universal religion of Satanism and the terrors it will hold for all who refuse to bow down to it, we should not think that it will be for those reasons a system of worship that most people find oppressive and

abhorrent but are only embracing out of necessity. As suggested in part 3A of this series, the situation will be much to the contrary. As in the case of many cults, beyond the obvious mind-control and group coercion, there is always also an element that appeals to and even legitimizes the secret desires of many if not most of its members. Just as we would be mistaken to imagine the devil as some horrible looking creature when in fact he was made beautiful (Ezek.28:12-13) and even now masquerades as “a messenger of light” (2Cor.11:14), so in the case of the worldwide cult designed to worship him, rather than imaging some repulsive collection of odd and onerous rituals, we would do better to understand this new religion as something that most people will find incredibly appealing (cf. Nah.3:4 and the harlot analogy generally: Rev.17:1-5; 17:15-16; 19:2). Cults often attract new adherents by promising them a welcoming and friendly society, and by offering them a “deeper” spiritual relationship through initiation into “secret doctrines and mysteries” unavailable elsewhere. And if in the process they also appeal to the hidden desires of the new initiate (be they of either an ascetic or licentious nature), then their appeal can seem irresistible. The unique feature of the beast's religion will be, as we have seen, a syncretism of all such elements, allowing virtually every human being to clothe his or her base desires in the mantle of religion, in a friendly and welcoming environment, and with the conviction that the “truth” is thus being sought, and the “true God” thus being served, to the end that “true eternal life” may be earned (such as antichrist seems to exhibit in his feigned rise from the dead).

One of the trends visible in our own day is the increasingly meticulous concern large segments of the population are showing towards their dietary regimes even as they are less and less bothered by sexual indiscretions – as if God were greatly concerned about the former and little about the latter when in fact exactly the opposite is the case. The beast's religion is prophesied to take great advantage of this trend, fulfilling the deep-seated need to “do something” about holiness on the one hand (i.e., practicing a pseudo-holiness of dietary restraint), while having one's true sins and indiscretions excused and even justified on the other (i.e., it is probable that antichrist's religion will, in the manner of pagan cults, include all varieties of sexual practices as “acts of worship”, even as the one divinely authorized venue for sexual activity, marriage, is denigrated).

The Spirit explicitly says that in the end times certain men will rebel from the faith, giving their allegiance [instead] to deceitful spirits and demonic doctrines. With their own consciences seared away and speaking with the hypocrisy of men [who peddle] lies, they will [instruct their victims] to refrain from marriage, and to keep away from certain foods . . .

1st Timothy 4:1-3a

Perspicuous in the verses above is the perverse reversal of God's natural order of things as marriage is discouraged – but not sexual practice of all sorts, both natural and unnatural. Inhabitants of urban 21st century America may well wonder what great change this will represent from contemporary practices. Nevertheless, there will be a decided change for the worse as the incipient trends now visible burst into full flood, are

blessed by the state and the state religion, and become mandatory for all loyal citizens of antichrist's world state. And while believers will have as much trouble accepting this degraded and degrading behavior as they do accepting antichrist, the partisans of antichrist will be disposed by the darkness of their minds to embrace his religious strictures even as they have been drawn to embrace him – a phenomenon which cannot be disentangled from the prior rejection of the truth of God:

I have come in My Father's Name, and you do not accept Me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him.

John 5:43

Of course, this new Satanic religion will not spring out of nowhere. It will be a development, expansion, and consummation of the religious movement developed by the beast in Babylon and elsewhere which was instrumental in his rise to power in the first place. In part 3A of the present study, we saw this religion in its incipient and growth phases.⁴⁰⁷ Here in chapter 13 we now see it in its implementation phase, spreading under the umbrella of the beast's protection both horizontally (i.e., to every corner of the world) and vertically (i.e., becoming an ever more intrusive part of the daily lives of all the inhabitants of the world). The logical extension of the world's acceptance of antichrist as God and the true Messiah as a result of his extraordinary successes and personal “rise from the dead” will be the universal forced conversion of all humanity, marginalizing, then ostracizing, then persecuting, then executing all who refuse to join and participate.

In general terms, the religion of the beast will stress the material and the visible over against invisible spirituality of which, of course, it will be completely bereft. And in all of its worldly manifestations it will attempt to mimic the outward appearance of Christian forms (although this will be more in terms of the “traditional” forms of the church visible as opposed to genuine Christian faith and practice). One thing that will be noticeably missing from antichrist's “church” will be the Bible. For while false religions often have some doctrinal focal point or other, it behooves any organization that is in truth no part of the truth to maintain “flexibility” about the truth. In other words, when an organization or movement is built upon lies, the freedom to continue lying without restraint or fear of contradiction is crucial. For this reason, we may expect that with his “revelation” as the Son of God, antichrist will expect the world to accept his words as fully sufficient and authoritative since they come from “God”. What need will the world then have for an outdated, outmoded written Bible when they now have the purported author to worship in person? It is worth noting in this regard that, in effect, this is where we find much of contemporary Christianity in our present Laodicean age of spiritual lukewarmness. For while many so-called Christian churches and organizations pay lip service to the Bible (and we imagine that the beast and his religion will do so as well), in terms of practice and application the scriptures often take a distant second place to entertainment, self-help, motivational speaking, emotional appeals, pop-psychology, and “worship”. For many groups, therefore, the adoption of the beast's

religion in both name and practice will sadly mean very little change in either outward appearance or inward effect.

1. Its Ultimate Object of Worship: As our context of Revelation 13:4 makes clear, “the dragon and the beast” will be the ultimate objects of worship in this new religion. So while there will be other focuses of worship and veneration as well (e.g., the idolatrous cult statue in the temple court and the false prophet), the world will have no excuse – Satan and his antichrist will replace the Lord God Almighty and His true Christ in the active worship in which the unbelieving world will now orgiastically indulge. The prior apostasy of two thirds of the Church, coupled with the removal of Holy Spirit restraint, and the empowerment of error spoken of in 2nd Thessalonians 2:11, will, as we have seen, contribute mightily to the rapidity and the totality of the world's rush to embrace the devil and the beast:

(10) And [the little horn] (i.e., antichrist) magnified himself against the host of heaven, and he cast down to the earth some of the host (i.e., believers seduced into apostasy) and some of the stars (i.e., angels seduced into rebellion) and he trampled them underfoot (i.e., destruction by association). (11) He even magnified himself against the Prince of the host (i.e., Christ). The daily sacrifice was abolished by him, and the holy place (i.e., the inner court) was desecrated. (12) And along with the daily sacrifice, *the host* (i.e., believers) *fell into his power on account of [the] rebellion* (i.e., the Great Apostasy). And he threw truth to the ground, and was successful in whatever he did. Daniel 8:10-12

2. Its Ultimate Place of Worship: Just as antichrist proclaims himself to be the true Messiah and makes every attempt to support that claim in ways that would, “if possible”, deceive even the elect (Matt.24:24), so Jerusalem and the temple of God are not accidentally chosen as the supreme place of worship. The idea of substitution is clear in everything that the beast and his father Satan will do in this regard, for it has ever been the devil's desire to replace God, so that the installing of his son on the throne of God with himself enshrined as the ultimate object of creature worship is in many respects the fulfillment of a dream which has been millennia in the making. Indeed, Satan will take pains during this entire period to represent this time as the beginning of “the Millennium”. For, after all, the true Millennium begins following the revelation of Jesus Christ, the defeat of His enemies at Armageddon, and His installment in the temple at Jerusalem as the Ruler of the world. To the unbelieving world, antichrist's pseudo-resurrection, conquest of the southern alliance, and usurpation of the temple and Jerusalem for his own use will fit this bill. Needless to say, the ensuing three and half years, the time of greatest tribulation in world history, will hardly seem “millennial”, but the selection of Jerusalem as the supreme place of worship will contribute to the persuasiveness of the beast's claims and to the acceptance by the unbelieving world of his new universal religion. For not since the tower of Babel will the world be thus so completely “united” in a political sense, or have a single unifying religious center and motivation as it will have at that time as antichrist begins his rule

from Jerusalem with the intent of putting all of *his* enemies under his feet – if they refuse to worship him.

3. Its Ultimate Priest: As with all of the other supreme foci of the beast's religion, so in the case of the “clergy” we can expect to see a deliberate usurpation of both true and traditional Christianity in antichrist's system. There is, of course, nothing biblical about Roman Catholicism's “pope”, but the false prophet will indeed be a true “vicar” or substitute for antichrist, serving him in a way that falsely parallels the true Christ but in reality models antichrist and the devil (e.g, the false prophet has “two horns like a lamb”, but “speaks like a dragon”: Rev.13:11). We may expect this to be the case with the other lesser “clergy” as well, especially considering that in all probability antichrist will make use of already existing clergy who are co-opted into his new universal religion, so that any distinction as seen by the world between the beast's church and the “Christian church” will be difficult to draw (since in most cases it will be a question of the same people in the same buildings employing many of the same rituals only now committed to worshiping the beast “as Christ”). In general terms, we can expect antichrist's new clergy to be extremely persuasive (cf. Matt.24:23-24; Col.2:16-23; 2Thes.2:3-12; 1Tim.4:1-8; 2Tim.3:1-13; 2Pet.2:1 - 3:18; Jude 1:4-16).⁴⁰⁸

4. Its Ultimate Sign of Membership: Believers in Jesus Christ have as their sign and as their seal of divine ownership the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (2Cor.1:21-22; Eph.1:13-14; 4:30; cf. Rom.8:9:-17; Rev.7:1-3). Antichrist's substitute for this true yet invisible sign is, once again in keeping with the pattern above, a false, visible sign, the “mark of the beast” (covered in section VI.3 below).

5. Its Ultimate Promise: Given that the beast has been “restored to life”, it is likely that the promise of a similar reward will be given to those who embrace his religion, especially in the context of antichrist's claim to be the true Messiah. It should be noted in this connection, however, that rather than being a universal good promised to all, as in the case of the true resurrection of the righteous, we may instead expect this false promise of resurrection to be qualified, offered only to the few who distinguish themselves in loyalty, and thus used as a goad to spur the “faithful” on to ever greater degeneracy and fanaticism. Moreover, the type of “eternal life” being offered will be along the same lines of materiality we see in every other aspect of the beast's religion, namely, the continuation (or revivification) of the sordid and (apart from God) pointless temporal life that is humanity's lot, rather than any true transformation. That so many around the world will find this offer appealing is almost a cause for pity, especially considering that antichrist will be incapable of making good on this promise in even a single instance.

6. Its Ultimate Sacrifice: It is a common-place in literature to portray those who make a “deal with the devil” as having “sold their souls”. And it is true that the unbelieving world of that future time, by their embracing of the beast's religion, will have likewise embraced their own condemnation, willfully rejecting through the worship of antichrist and his father Satan the grace and mercy in Jesus Christ that God was eager to give them freely (cf. Jonah 2:8). However, the true nature of the “bargain” is this: they have

forsaken eternal life and spiritual riches beyond calculation for the sake of some trifling and, in many cases, totally disgusting short-lived material benefits. In other words, like Esau, the unbelieving world of that time will sell en masse “their birthright for a mess of pottage” (Heb.12:16). To those concerned, the bargain will actually seem reasonable, for it will involve substituting present persecution endured for the sake of intangible advantages (which their hearts blinded by unbelief find incredible) for tangible “benefits” in the here and now (cf. the pattern of Is.57).

7. Its Ultimate Service: As in the case of its ultimate sacrifice, the ultimate service for believers in antichrist and his religion will reflect a sick parallelism to genuine Christianity. After the pattern of our Savior (e.g., Jn.13:1-17), true Christians are committed to service for the sake and the benefit of their fellow believers, seeking their spiritual growth and welfare above all else (Rom.14:19-21). For adherents of the religion of the beast, however, “the ultimate service” will not be edification but destruction, namely, the betrayal of all who refuse to accept antichrist in preference for the true Christ.

2. The False Prophet: Revelation 13:11-15

(11) And I saw another beast (i.e., the false prophet: cf. Rev.16:13; 19:20; 20:10) rising up from the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. (12) And he [will] act with all the authority of the first beast [while] in his presence, and he [will] make the world and all its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. (13) And [the beast's false prophet] [will] perform great miracles (lit., “signs”), even making fire come down from heaven to the earth in front of everyone. (14) And he [will] deceive those who dwell upon the earth on account of the miracles (lit., “signs”) which have been given to him to perform in the presence of the beast, even commanding the inhabitants of the earth to make an image of the beast, [that is] of him who received the [deadly] stroke of the sword and [yet] came [back] to life. (15) And it was given to him to provide a spirit for the image of the beast so that the image might speak, and [it was also given to him] to bring it about that as many as refused to worship the image of the beast might be put to death.
Revelation 13:11-15

The beast rising up from the earth: The first beast's rising from the sea is in part, as we have seen, an indication of his non-human paternity. The fact that this second beast will rise up “from the earth” shows that he will be completely human, albeit an integral part of a sort of unholy false “trinity” along with Satan and antichrist. (cf. Gen.2:7; 3:19b).⁴⁰⁹ But the contrast between these three and the genuine Trinity could not be more pronounced. For while Father, Son and Holy Spirit share a single divine essence, three unique and individual Persons though they are, in the devil's counterfeit version we see an angel (Satan), a human being (the second beast from the earth, that is, the false prophet; cf. Rev.16:13; 19:20; 20:10), and one who is neither of the above, but is instead an abominable combination of the two (antichrist). None of the three, it goes without

saying, are divine, but this does not preclude such a claim, and, indeed, the world will for the most part gladly pay these three divine honors while enthusiastically persecuting those who refuse to do so.

He [will] act with all the authority of the first beast: Another clear contrast between the true Trinity and Satan's pseudo-trinity is that while the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are coequal, there is a clear hierarchy in the counterfeit version. The first beast receives his power and authority from the devil (Rev.13:2; 19:20), just as in our context the second beast receives his power and authority as a clear subordinate of the first beast. In this respect we see another deliberate (though false) parallel between the high priest and the head of state in the original Jewish monarchy. As believers in the only true God, we understand very well that Jesus is both the ultimate King *and* the ultimate High Priest "in the order of Melchizedek", having offered Himself on the cross as the only sacrifice sufficient to cleanse us from our sins (Ps.110:4; Heb.4:14; 5:5-10; 6:19; 7:1-3; 8:1-2). Antichrist, however, will ignore the true Savior's redemptive work and will instead stress the regal aspects of the Messiah who is destined to institute the worldwide "kingdom of heaven". For those who reject Jesus and His work on the cross (i.e., the true functioning of His priesthood) and choose instead to accept antichrist's claim to be the legitimate ruler of the world, it will seem reasonable that there should be a new high priest to conduct the worship of the first beast and his father (the devil).

Two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon: Herein we see yet another difference between the true Trinity and the devil's counterfeit version. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each have very clearly defined and very clearly necessary roles in the plan of God. But in the case of the false prophet, one finds no such clear role. For while the devil falsely assumes the role of God with antichrist as his false Messiah, the second beast bears absolutely no resemblance to the third Person of the true Trinity, the Holy Spirit. And it is no wonder that the false trinity should lack such a presence since it and the false religion it represents, encompasses and propagates is entirely fixated upon the material realm, having no part in anything which is truly spiritual. That is one reason why the false prophet is described as he is here, namely, as outwardly resembling a lamb but speaking like a dragon. For while it is very true that the false prophet will seek to establish and support antichrist's claim of Messiahship (hence the horns of the lamb) and will in so doing actually be furthering Satan's plan (i.e., speaking like a dragon), it is also the case that this person's significance is not only less than the other two members of the pseudo-trinity but is also entirely dependent upon them, a fact which by itself gives the lie to all of the false claims of divinity for this trio (at least for anyone who is still paying the slightest attention to scripture).

He [will] make the world and all its inhabitants worship the first beast: This phrase demonstrates that the second beast, the false prophet, will take the lead in the administering of antichrist's religion, both in terms of its expansion and also in the implementation of the compulsory aspects of it, including the Great Persecution which

mandatory conversion will occasion in the case of all who refuse. The administrative and cultic center of this new religion will not be Rome, as many have surmised, but Jerusalem. For it is in Jerusalem that the beast will take his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God, and it is in the temple court that the statue of the beast, the “abomination which causes [spiritual] desolation” will be erected (Dan.11:31; Matt.24:15; Mk.13:14). Thus the temple and the idol then associated with it will be the new religion's focal point from the middle of the Tribulation onward. And it will be in front of the temple and its idol that the false prophet will perform his miracles, acting with antichrist's authority “in his presence” (Rev.13:12; 13:13). In his implementation of the first beast's false religion, we see the second beast following the pattern of counterfeiting true forms and practices, and, specifically now that the focus of worship has moved to the temple in Jerusalem, of paralleling the Mosaic Law with a series of practices designed to resemble the truth even as they propagate satanic lies:

1. False Pilgrimage: In the law, all males in Israel are commanded to present themselves before the Lord on three occasions every year, i.e., at the Passover, the festival of first fruits, and the feast of Tabernacles (Ex.23:14-17). We may infer from the testimony given in our context to the effect that the false prophet will “deceive those who dwell upon the earth on account of the miracles which have been given to him to perform *in the presence* of the beast” that many individuals, especially those of any sort of prominence, will be expected to make what amounts to a similar “pilgrimage” to Jerusalem during those 42 months in order to worship at the feet of the beast, paying homage to him and to his idol under the watchful eye of the false prophet (compare the behavior of Nebuchadnezzar vis-`-vis the idol of gold which he had erected on the plain of Dura in Babylon: Dan.3:1-12).

2. False Worship: It is likely that the false prophet will represent himself as the high priest of Israel (though scripture does give him this title possibly for the very good reason that he is not so in fact), and that much of the ritual carried on in and around Jerusalem this time, illegitimate though it is, will closely parallel the historical temple rite (i.e., the appointment of divisions of priests, the reconstruction of all the trappings and paraphernalia of the Aaronic priesthood, and the continuation of various rules and regulations; although apparently not sacrifices per se: cf. Dan.9:27). It is the case that this show of historicity will in truth have nothing to do with the original temple worship, or the worship re-instituted by Moses and Elijah, or the millennial temple worship reestablished by the true Messiah. But to those who have been deceived to the point of accepting antichrist as the Christ, restoration of the temple rite at least in some form or other far from being surprising will indeed be expected of this pseudo-Messiah who has now come to Jerusalem to begin his “millennial reign”.

3. False Dietary Regime: Dietary regulations play a significant role in the Mosaic Law for the purpose of “distinguishing between the holy and the profane” (Lev.10:10). That is to say, Israel's separation from the practices of the world in diet were to be representative of their far more important spiritual separation (Rom.4:13). Reversing this relationship, that is, claiming holiness or righteousness on the basis of “keeping the

Law” in any of its aspect is, as any reader of the New Testament is well aware, diametrically opposed to the true purpose of the Law and the true meaning of grace. Yet a key feature of antichrist's religion as administered by his high priest, the false prophet, will be to take traditional legalism a step farther, instituting a system of aggressive vegetarianism that will give its practitioners a feeling of “holiness” and “purity” on the basis of diet (i.e., physical, substituting for spiritual, purity), despite whatever truly sinful behavior in which they may be engaged (1Tim.4:1-5; cf. Col.2:16-23; 2Tim.3:5; Heb.13:9).

4. False Communion: Closely tied to these everyday dietary restraints will be the practice of a false “communion” which will follow closely after the pattern of historical pagan practices (cf. Zech.9:7):

Those who sanctify and purify themselves for the gardens following the lead of the one [characterized] by violence, eating the flesh of swine, and of whatever is an abomination, and of rats will be swept away together (i.e., at the Second Advent), says the Lord.

Isaiah 66:17

The context of this verse (both preceding and following, but see especially Is.66:18-24) shows clearly that while the behavior described is not unprecedented in Israel's past (cf. Is.65:3-5), the disgusting communal meal described above will be the one in vogue during the Tribulation. Therefore the “one with violence”,⁴¹⁰ clearly an individual acting as a sort of priest officiating over the proceedings, is best taken to be the false prophet, antichrist's own “high priest” and the one responsible for directing his false religion. The fact that meat will be eaten in this “communion” whereas vegetarianism will be the rule otherwise is not contradictory, for this eating of abominations will represent a “sacrifice” and for that reason necessarily includes behavior not otherwise sought out or condoned.

5. False Piety: The “sanctified” behavior of antichrist's religion will go beyond diet including in particular a general prohibition against normal marriage (1Tim.4:3). Genuine Christianity does indeed forbid sexual conduct outside of marriage (e.g., 1Thes.4:3-8), but never forbids legitimate marriage (1Cor.7:8-9). Here once again, therefore, we see the beast's religion turning the truth on its head. While preaching and encouraging sexual licentiousness (cf. 2Pet.2:17-22), the false prophet will lead the charge to forbid the only valid forum for sexual behavior. We may expect many such instances of making virtue out of sin and vice versa. One particularly well documented form of counterfeit piety will be the tattooing of the beast's name (or number) on the forehead and/or right hand of his worshipers (covered in section below), wherein we see a clear attempt to mimic legitimate biblical practices past and present (Is.44:5; Rev.3:12; cf. Ex.13:9-16; Is.62:2; 65:15; Rev.2:17), even while violating the express commands of scripture (Lev.19:28; Rev.14:9-11; cf. Rev.16:2; 19:20; 20:4).

6. False Millennial Program: During the Great Tribulation, antichrist will represent himself as the Messiah. Therefore it should not be surprising that his religion will attempt to counterfeit and play off of the prophecies regarding Christ's true Millennial Kingdom. One of the key thematic characteristics of the genuine Millennium will be justice, divinely defined and directly administered by the Lord worldwide for the first time in human history since the garden (cf. Ps.2; 9; 24; 45-48; 50; 68; 72; Is.11; 24-27; 32; 34-35; 49-52; 62-66). Instead of true justice stemming from divine administration of the world (an under-appreciated blessing that is worth far more than many material blessings with which the Millennium will be replete), the beast's religion will offer unprecedented "freedom" from innumerable legal and societal restraints (Dan.7:25; 2Pet.2:17-22; cf. Is.24:5), but this "freedom" will in fact help to produce the most outrageous violations of the most basic human rights as well as of the most important freedom we as a species possess, namely, the right to choose for Jesus Christ and to follow and serve Him in this life without persecution. From the believer's perspective, the beast's false millennium is best understood by its divinely assigned name, "The Great Tribulation". Instead of a time of justice and safety, these final forty-two months will be a time of trampling down of all that is just and right and decent in the name of "freedom". For whatever good one may find in anti-materialistic, new age, vegetarian, libertarian anti-commercialism, in the context of antichrist's pseudo-millennium all such things will be mere fig leaves employed solely for the purpose of covering a campaign of crime, lawlessness, licentiousness, and the judicial murder of all who find themselves in opposition to the beast for whatever reason, and especially those who have determined to stay faithful to Jesus Christ regardless of the consequences. One category of "freedom-blessings" scripture does spell out for this period is a general redistribution of wealth by antichrist on behalf of his supporters (Dan.11:24b; 11:39). Presented no doubt as a "jubilee" along Old Testament lines (Lev.25; 27), this action will instead be motivated out of the beast's desire to firm up his own support rather than any desire to help the poor.

7. False Service: Finally, the "righteous works" required of the adherents of antichrist's religion as led by his high priest, the false prophet, will entail first and foremost participation in the satanic attempt at universal conversion to the beast. In addition to all the other depravities required of those who choose to serve the beast, this final "crusade" will involve the active destruction of the free will opportunities of others to choose for Christ, even to the point of betraying those they ought to love the most (Matt.10:36; Lk.21:16).

Great miracles: More persuasive than any of the lies the false prophet will spout will be the exceptional "miracles" he is permitted to perform in the name of the beast and in the power of the devil. Scripture is very clear here and elsewhere that these signs and wonders will be most impressive, "deceiving those who live upon the earth" (v.14; cf. 2Thes.2:9-10), and even capable of deceiving even the elect, "if that were possible" (Matt.24:24; Mk.13:22). In the production of these miraculous signs once again we see Satan's familiar pattern of aping the wonders of God in order to appear a god in the eyes of world (2Cor.11:14). Moreover, the specific false miracles given to the second beast to

perform are particularly deceptive in that they so directly parallel demonstrations of genuine divine power. For Moses and Elijah, both historically and even more importantly during their recent return to earth to direct the missionary activities of the 144,000, performed similar signs and miracles (Rev.11:5; cf. 1Kng.18:38; 2Kng.1:9-14). Just as Pharaoh's magicians, Jannes and Jambres, were able to produce counterfeit signs and miracles that nevertheless fell short of what God gave Moses to perform (Ex.7:11; 7:22; cf. 2Tim.3:8-9), and just as the devil was able to manipulate the pre-historic creation and yet fell pitifully short of the power of God, so the false prophet's signs and miracles will in fact be pathetically lacking compared to true divine power. However, we must not underestimate the power of their *persuasiveness* upon the unbelieving world. As believers contemplating these events before the fact, we need to realize that these signs and wonders will appear to the human eye as indeed being the “real thing”, so that only through our understanding of the truth of scripture will we be able to resist being impressed to the point of misguided belief as the rest of the world will be. Believers in Jesus, therefore, must take pains to remember at all times (and especially at that time) that what we know to be so from the Bible is always of much greater import than anything our eyes may happen to see – it is by faith in God's truth that we navigate this world, not by how we may feel or by what our we may experience or by what our eyes behold (2Cor.4:18; 5:7). However impressive and persuasive the signs and wonders we may see, the true “test” lies in whether or not those who perform them contradict the truth and seek to lead us astray (Deut.13:2-4).

Commanding the inhabitants of the earth to make an image of the beast: The fact that the world's entire unbelieving population is included here as involved in the construction of the idol, the “abomination which brings [spiritual] desolation”,⁴¹¹ indicates that this statue will be of massive size and probably constructed of extremely valuable materials. Given the close relation between many aspects of this occurrence and Nebuchadnezzar's similar construction of the huge, ninety foot tall golden idol in the plains of Babylon (Dan.3:1ff), we would be justified in assuming that this statue is made of gold as well. We may posit that the false prophet in his role as high priest of the beast's religion will supervise a worldwide campaign of contributions for the construction, for this is most likely what is to be understood from the phrase “commanding the inhabitants of the earth to make an image of the beast” (cf. Ex.35:4 - 36:7). Once the idol is in place, the false prophet will animate it through satanic power (i.e., v.15: “it was given to him to provide a spirit for the image of the beast so that the image might speak”). This ability to animate a statue so large and impressively appointed will play no small role in the deception of the world, and we may anticipate that many who come to Jerusalem unconvinced will be awed into “belief” by this unprecedented sight (cf. Nebuchadnezzar's attempt to impart a similar sense of awe through ornate and extensive musical accompaniment: Dan.3:5; 3:7; 3:10; 3:15).

And [it was also given to him] to bring it about that as many as refused to worship the image of the beast might be put to death: It stands to reason that only those in the presence of the image of the beast can be put to the test as to whether or not they are

willing to worship it. This verse indicates that all whose allegiance to antichrist is suspect will be brought to Jerusalem and made to stand before the colossal idol, with those who refuse to give their obeisance in its presence being put immediately to death. The means of execution is not given, but it would certainly continue the parallel with Nebuchadnezzar's statue if the imminent demise for all who refuse was a horrifying death by fire in a furnace akin to that into which Hananiah, Mishael, and Asariah (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) were thrown upon their similar refusal (cf. Dan.11:33). The terrifying sight of this monstrous, animated colossus, and the prospect of being cast alive into the flames for refusing to worship it, will no doubt prove too much for anyone to bear – except for those who are solidly grounded in their faith in Jesus Christ, and ready to follow Him even unto a fiery death rather than prove unfaithful in this life.

3. The Mark of the Beast: Revelation 13:16-17

(16) And he (i.e., the false prophet) compelled everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to allow [his clergy] to place a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, (17) so that no one would be able to buy or sell except those with the mark, [consisting of] either the name of the [first] beast or the number of his name.

Revelation 13:16-17

We see again in these verses that the false prophet, antichrist's high priest, is responsible for the implementation of the policy regarding the “mark”. Several important points contained in the text above need to be considered before proceeding to the discussion of the “number of the beast” in verse eighteen:

1. The beast's universal religion results in universal compulsion to receive the mark: Whatever civil rights and benefits of citizenship obtain under antichrist's worldwide state, we are right to expect that these will all be closely tied to membership and participation in his universal religion because it is through this religion that his “majesty” will be worshiped and revered. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that at this juncture the false prophet will administer the placement of a visible sign of obeisance upon all of the beast's followers with the objective of “marking” the entire world. Given the dire consequences the reception of this mark will have, we may posit that, in addition to true believers, there will be an indeterminate number of unbelievers who will avoid it as well. We should not, however, underestimate the short-term negative consequences which resisting this mark will entail (see point #3 immediately below).

2. The placing of the mark is most likely carried out by the clergy of the beast's religion: Since antichrist's religion is a purposefully syncretic mixture all other religions distinguished mainly by its universal acknowledgment of the beast as God, we do not have to find in this policy of marking its adherents any fundamental reconstruction or

reorganization of its parts. More than likely, the same priests, pastors, imams, etc. of all religions and cults previously co-opted into antichrist's universal religion will be at the forefront of the process of marking all of the world's "believers" in antichrist, and that this process will be essentially religious rather than civil in nature (though it will have definite civil consequences).

3. The pressure to receive the mark: The mark will accomplish a melding together of church and state such as the world has not seen since the tower of Babel. For while the taking of the mark will have a putative religious purpose and be imprinted in a religious setting, its consequences for every other sphere of life can hardly be underestimated. In addition to the economic hardships of a posture of refusal spelled out here in our context (i.e., essentially banning the unmarked from commerce of any sort), we may expect all such persons to become what amounts to "unpersons", bereft of any rights, legal recourse, or any consideration of any kind whatsoever under the beast's system of governance. The beast's focus upon economic activity as related in verse seventeen is entirely understandable as the most effective stimulus to the progress of this universal conscription of humanity into the official ranks of evil. For while legal matters, voting, various registrations and the like might all be of use in the process of coercing the world to enroll, "buying and selling" are weekly if not daily activities in which all but those engaged in the most independent of agricultural operations must necessarily engage.⁴¹²

As one of the most important functional and practical spheres of daily life, therefore, commerce, and specifically the exclusion of the unmarked from commerce, will be an ideal vehicle for the universal enrollment of mankind into antichrist's religion. For in addition to the necessities of life, commerce is also the entrepot into all of the key aspects of the devil's worldwide system of lust generally:

a. Money: If currency, cash, gold, money and fungible assets of every sort were "important" in the eyes of the world in the past, during the Tribulation, a time of such intense insecurity, we can expect the twin desires for financial security and opportunity based upon a large store of liquid assets to be more intense than ever. Clearly, under the new mandate of the mark, those who have it or seek or otherwise want and need money will feel the pressure to be marked all the more intensely according to the degree of their wants, desires, lusts, and needs for it. For without the mark, not only will they be unable to acquire monetary assets, but they will also be largely unable to make use of what they have previously accumulated.

b. Possessions: As mentioned above, part of the beast's system will entail the redistribution of wealth, real estate in particular. We can well imagine that gaining new lands and holdings will be virtually impossible for those who lack the mark, and that likewise retaining what substantial possessions one may have will also be difficult in the short run and essentially impossible in the long run. Most large, hard assets, moreover, require various types and degrees of maintenance, a process that also requires engaging in commerce on some level. Therefore it will be very difficult for those who are rich in

any sense in which this world defines it to maintain that wealth and those possessions during this period without receiving the mark.

c. Pleasure: Whether large or small, illicit or legitimate, the gratification of non-essential pleasures makes up a large part of the current world economy. Inevitably, in order to gratify most pleasures one must engage in commercial activity. Therefore even those who might for other reasons be willing and able to resist the process of marking – and be stubborn and bold enough to do so – will be sore tested on this count, for they will find themselves largely shut out of this particular aspect of the devil's world system if they do.

d. Fame: Glory, celebrity, reputation, fame of every sort, large and small, is an important area of lust in Satan's world system. For those whose self-image and ultimate desires are bound up in this area, the prospect of becoming an “unperson” and being shut out of all commercial activity and the essential things that often attend that activity will be difficult even to contemplate. However defined or derived, antichrist will have a virtual monopoly on “fame” during the Great Tribulation, so that failure to take the mark will necessarily turn any good reputation to “infamy”, a hard road to take for any one who does not value God's opinion over the opinions of mankind.

e. Power: The ultimate lust in the devil's world system is that of power (on whatever level), the myth of having some sort of control over others by virtue of position or other means. Generally this also has a base in commercial activity on some level (if only indirectly). But in any case, it is virtually certain that, during the Great Tribulation, the powerful will owe continuation in their positions of power to antichrist, making it a near certainty that they will be among the first to receive the mark.

Since everything that human beings lust after and desire apart from God will be put at risk by refusing to accept the mark of the beast, it is a mistaken notion to assume that the taking of the mark will be something easily avoidable by merely refraining from direct “legal” commercial transactions. The end result will thus be that many who would rather not take the mark, even if they would be otherwise willing to go underground or seek to skirt the system not out of any love for God but just on general principles (i.e., the taking on to one's body of a large tattoo not even of one's choosing is bound to rub many people the wrong way, not only Christians), will ultimately do so. For, otherwise, they will find themselves entirely deprived of or at least seriously hindered from seeking and enjoying the things that, for a large part of the secular world, “make life worth living”.

For those who know their God, the loss of the things of this world, culminating for many in the loss of their very lives, will constitute a true blessing, the privilege of persecution and martyrdom for the Lord who died for us (though the world will not realize it as such). But for those who do not believe, the down side of refusing to take the mark will be so horrific without any apparent appreciable benefit that only the most irascibly independent are likely to try. One thing is certain: anyone at this point who “has

anything” as defined by the five areas delimited above will certainly think twice before refusing the mark and losing everything, even though accepting it is a guarantee of divine judgment (Rev.14:9-11; cf. Rev.16:2; 19:20; 20:4). For during the Great Tribulation, at the center of the spider's web of these five main cross-fertilizing and intersecting lusts of Satan's world system will be the beast himself and his religion, Satanism, the worship of the devil in preference to the worship of God. And this is the devil's strategy and objective: to present to God a world inhabited *only* by those who of their own "free will" have taken upon themselves the mark as a proof of their choice of Satan over God.

4. The mark will take the form of a permanent, visible tattoo: The Greek word used here for the “mark” is *charagma* (χάραγμα), meaning something that has been permanently marked, generally through inscription or carving or other permanent imprinting (cf. our derived word “character”). The context and its logic certainly suggest the same, for there would be little purpose to antichrist's requiring an easily removable mark. The whole point is to make the world choose for him in a visible and irremediable way, and requiring a permanent, highly visible tattoo certainly accomplishes this purpose. But the beast's “sealing” of his faithful is so dramatically at odds with our Lord's sealing of us that it bears comment. We are sealed with the Holy Spirit, an act of God on our behalf with positive and invisible spiritual consequences for good in every way (2Cor.1:21-22; Eph.1:13-14; 4:30), while those who choose for antichrist and for Satan are physically sealed for short-term material benefit without any positive spiritual consequences whatsoever. Indeed, receiving the mark is guarantee of condemnation (Rev.14:9-11; cf. 16:2; 19:20; 20:4).⁴¹³

5. The significance of the two places for the mark: Why two places for the mark? The answer most likely has to do with a hierarchy of marking, that is, we may assume that the mark received on the forehead will be considered “better” than merely marking the hand. While it is possible that this distinction will be one of choice with each person deciding where to receive it, the more likely scenario is that only the elite will be “allowed” to receive a mark on the forehead, and this will constitute a badge of honor showing that those who have it are not merely responding to universal coercion but are instead enthusiastic communicants of antichrist's religion. The danger in this two-track system for those under pressure to receive the mark is that they will make the mistake of assuming (in the face of divine warning to the contrary) that only the mark on the forehead is spiritually dangerous (i.e., since the mark on the hand will represent more of an attitude of acquiescence than of enthusiasm). But in fact receiving the mark in either place will be a cause for “drinking of the wrath of God” (Rev.14:9-11).

6. The significance of the two variations of the mark: An additional “choice” is afforded those who respond to the false prophet's demand that the whole world be marked for antichrist, namely of receiving the “number of his name” in place of the name itself. The fact that the number comes second in the sequence in verse seventeen (just as the forehead marking comes second) suggests that this is the “better” choice signifying a deeper commitment to the beast. The fact that verse eighteen is taken up with explaining the significance of the number of the beast confirms this analysis. Inasmuch

as the name or the number can be placed on either the forehead or the hand, we see in this system a hierarchy of four levels of dedication to antichrist as follows:

Highest:	Number on the forehead
Second Highest:	Name on the forehead
Third Highest:	Number on the hand
Lowest:	Name on the hand

As noted above, scripture is quite clear that in God's eyes there will be no distinction between the highest and lowest in this hierarchy, for by taking the mark in any of its four manifestations the individual in question is willfully throwing his lot in with antichrist and his father the devil, and so by definition and of necessity has in the process deliberately turned his back on God the Father and His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. One further monitory note here. Since in every way possible he attempts to counterfeit the true Messiah, it is very possible that the beast's "name" will in some way mimic one of Jesus' names or titles. We cannot know the precise "name" before the fact (on this point and on the Greek system of enumeration generally see section VI.4 immediately following), but it is worth noting that several divine names come very close to the requisite "six hundred and sixty six" when computed via the Greek numbering system wherein letters of the alphabet represent numerals (n.b., the system of Arabic numerals which we use today is a much later development). For example, Messiah in Greek, *Messias* (Μεσσίας), is short by only one letter, an iota, of 666 (a deficit easily made up by any number initials that would equal ten in the Greek system). If this word or any number of other legitimate divine titles variously calculated should turn out to be antichrist's name, there is at least the danger that some believers under coercion may rationalize the taking of the mark as really being a name of the Lord, since it may well be, at least in some form. But scripture is adamant about the fact that the mark, however innocuous it may seem and whatever alternative meaning it may be made to bear, will constitute an act of ultimate unfaithfulness so extreme that any and all who may have been believers before the fact will by that act become believers no more – taking of the mark by any brother or sister will put faith to death (Rev.14:9-11; cf. 16:2; 19:20; 20:4).

4. The Number of the Beast: Revelation 13:18

Here is wisdom: let everyone who is alert [at that time] calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man[’s name]. And his (i.e., the beast's) number is six

hundred and sixty six (i.e., 666 “ways”).
Revelation 13:18

Since in verse seventeen we are told specifically that the alternative form of the mark is “the number of his (i.e., the beast's) name”, the “number of the beast” mentioned here, therefore, has to be the same numerical equivalent of antichrist's name referenced in that previous verse. That is to say, “six hundred and sixty six” is the number which both constitutes a numerical value for the beast's name and which also functions as the alternative (and superior) form of the mark.

Before considering the number of the beast per se, we need to say a few words about his “name” as it will occur in the other versions of the mark along with its numerical value. The “wisdom” given here is not in any way mysterious. If at that time one is merely “alert” or paying attention to what scripture says about this issue, the formula provided will easily dispel all doubt about what is the true “mark of beast” so that believers will have no trouble whatsoever identifying it (and no excuse for failing to avoid it). As part of the New Testament, this book of the Bible is written in Greek, and for that reason it is the Greek system of numerals which must be employed to calculate the “name” for its numerical value (use of Arabic numerals in the west was not widespread until the 15th century). In the Greek system, each letter of the alphabet (and some symbols as well) has a numerical value, with *alpha*, the first letter equaling one, and *omega*, the last letter equaling eight hundred. For example, the Greek transliteration mentioned above for the Hebrew word Messiah (meaning, “anointed one”), is as follows:

Μεσσίας: M = 40 + ε = 5 + σ = 200 + σ = 200 + ι = 10 + α = 1 + ς = 200 > = 656

By adding the Aramaic imperative “come!” (cf. *Marana tha!*, “O our Lord, come!”), we create a phrase equaling the requisite number of six hundred and sixty six (because the letters *theta* and *alpha* equal nine and one respectively so that θα = +10). Before the reader gets too excited about all this, let me point out what should be readily obvious, namely that in such a system the number of possibilities for constructing names that add up to 666 is incalculably large (if not literally infinite). For this reason, the information given us in Revelation 13:18 *cannot possibly* be used to figure out antichrist's name before the fact. For even if one was fortunate enough to hit upon the precise sequence of letters for the actual name, there is absolutely no way to determine before his revelation that said sequence *was* the uniquely correct one. What we are given in Revelation 13:18 is thus not a key to figuring out the identity of antichrist *before* the fact. On the contrary, it is an analytical tool or “litmus test” for evaluating the putative name of the beast to see if he is indeed antichrist *after* we have a name to work from. With a simple transliteration of any name into the Greek system, we can with relative ease examine any name and discover fairly easily whether it might have the numerical value of 666. This was a fairly common sort of cipher in antiquity (often called a “gematria”), and one finds, for example, graffiti recovered from Pompeii where

the names of lovers were concealed in this manner, as well as riddles on funeral monuments in the Greek speaking areas of the Mediterranean which substitute a sum of letters for the name of the deceased and invite the onlooker to solve the puzzle. Without clues, such riddles are impossible to solve, since, as mentioned above, the number of names that can be made to fit into any large sum is, for all practical purposes, endless. The relatively small number “10”, for instance, could be a lone *iota*, an *alpha* plus a *theta*, a *beta* plus an *eta*, etc., etc. And the possibilities grow geometrically the larger the numbers become.

One should also note that once the universal marking begins, decoding the precise mark of the beast as it occurs at that time will be a fairly simple matter despite issues of transliteration. Before the precise form of his name as it is to be used for the mark comes to light, however, this test is unlikely to be the best litmus test for uncovering antichrist. For example, will the mark contain only his last name? Will it include his first name or merely his initials, and which ones? More to the point, will antichrist change his name in some way at the point when he takes his seat in the temple of God in Jerusalem and proclaims himself to be God? The point is that until the exact form of the name as it occurs in this alternative version of the mark becomes generally known, there is little point in making the calculation recommended here. And Bible believing Christians should take careful note that scripture only gives us this information at the point when the actual marking begins, indicating very clearly that any attempt to identify antichrist in this way before the process of universal marking is pointless. In any case, by the middle of the Tribulation it is difficult to comprehend how any genuine believer in Jesus Christ who has the least bit of spiritual discernment could not know that the dictator who has come to control the world and has invaded God's very temple is antichrist. The real danger here is that believers in the early days of the Tribulation will fail to recognize the beast because his name as it occurs *at that time* may not seem to fit the formula given in verse eighteen.

The significance of 666: The first thing to emphasize here is that we do not necessarily have to do with three consecutive numeral “sixes”, that is, some precise variant of 6-6-6. In our system of Arabic numerals, a system that does not greatly antedate the printing press here in the west, it is true that there is no distinction between the number six hundred and sixty six and its representation by three consecutive sixes: 666. In the Greek system, however, this is not at all the case. In Greek, the language of Revelation and therefore the basis for the system that must be employed to understand this issue correctly, six hundred and sixty six would be represented by two letters and a symbol, namely, *chi*, *xi*, and *stigma*. What this means for our purposes here is that much popular theorizing that makes the “sign of the beast” a series of three sixes may be entirely wrong. And while it is certainly possible that three Arabic numeral sixes will indeed constitute the essential mark that stands for the name of antichrist, there is no convincing reason why this should be so. Just as the Arabic numeral representation 666 would appear different in the Greek system (i.e., as $\chi\xi\varsigma$), so it is also fair to point out that the contemporaneous Roman system (i.e., “Roman numerals” wherein 666 = DCLXVI) and Hebrew system (an alphabetic system similar to Greek wherein 666 =

תרטו) certainly have as much claim to be considered as the much later, non-contemporaneous western version of the Arabic system. Moreover there is no way that we can say before the fact that antichrist might not adopt, say, a base two system (stressing technology), or a base twelve system (stressing Babylonian mysticism), or any other system of mathematical, geometrical, or mystical symbolism to represent the integer 666, perhaps even one of his own devising not yet extant. The point is that discerning Christians *cannot* afford to assume that any mark that does not have three Arabic numeral sixes (i.e., 666) could not possibly be “the mark of the beast”.

The significance of the number itself has also long been a matter of as much speculation as its appearance. Like “pi”, a repeating system of sixes may have some significance for the mythology that antichrist creates around himself and his system of devil worship. As Christians, we would rather choose to note that whether 666 is seen as single integer, a series of sixes, or a repeating decimal, at all points it falls short of perfection (i.e., of the perfect number seven) by “one”, namely, through rejection of the “One” who is the way, the truth and the life, our true Savior Jesus Christ.⁴¹⁴ One thing that is generally not appreciated in such discussions is that, unlike English, Greek numerals are at times declinable, and such is the case in this instance. Specifically, “six hundred and sixty six” in this instance at Revelation 13:18 is feminine,⁴¹⁵ so that what the text here is really saying is “six hundred and sixty six (feminine) _____'s, and it is left to the reader to fill in the blank from the context. This is a not unfamiliar situation in Greek where one often understands the occurrence or repetition of a particular noun which can be easily guessed from the information contained in the ending of an adjective (in contrast to English where adjectives are unchangeable). Of course there is no feminine noun in context, a situation which no doubt explains why various other versions switched the ending to masculine, neuter, or eliminated the problem entirely by using symbolic notation (i.e., the Greek equivalent of 666 mentioned above: χξς). But in fact the case of a feminine adjective with no noun expressed is far from unprecedented in Greek, there being a generally understood short list of common nouns to be supplied in such circumstances. By far the most common noun to supply in such situations is the Greek word for “way”, hodos (ὁδός; cf. “odometer” = “road-measurer”), and that is the noun to be supplied here. Since 666 represents an infinitely repeating cipher, the “six hundred and sixty six ways” may be understood as the all inclusive and virtually infinite number of “paths to salvation” in the beast's religious system. Provided only that one worship antichrist and his father the devil as god, all other religious, traditional, or cultic practices will be pronounced acceptable and deemed effective in “saving” the individual worshiper. But in fact, this cipher leaves out the “one” that would end its pointless repetition and instead produce completion and fulfillment, the “One” who is the one and only true “Way”, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 9:2; 19:9; 19:23; 22:4; 24:14; 24:22; 2Pet.2:2;):

I am the *Way*: the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.
John 14:6

VII. The Great Persecution: Revelation 14:1 - 15:8

1. The Great Persecution is what makes the Tribulation's second half "Great": We have made the point repeatedly in this series that the "distress" and "tribulation" which characterize the final seven years of human history before Christ's return are seen in scripture first and foremost from the standpoint of believers (cf. Dan.12:1; Matt.24:21; 24:29; Mk.13:19; 13:24). It is true that many of the events of that terrible time to come will weigh heavily on the people of God, but believers will be protected to a large extent from much of the worst of it (viz. the judgments of God which are directed toward the reprobate). The Great Persecution is the preeminent exception, for it will be a period of the greatest testing wherein because of widespread martyrdom believers in unprecedented numbers will have to put into practice what we should all understand in principle, namely that our true security consists in our eternal relationship with Jesus Christ rather than in clinging to this temporary physical life (Matt.16:25; Mk.8:35; Lk.17:33; Jn.12:25; Rev.12:11).

The uniting of the globe under the banner of antichrist and the one-world "peace" which results will be the worst thing that has yet happened in human history by virtue of its elimination of any countervailing power to check the machinations of the beast and of his father the devil. This will be particularly true for believers in regard to the Great Persecution, an event which will begin not long after antichrist's consolidation of power. For with the world united in evil, there will be no place to hide, no place to run. Those who in the will of God are destined for martyrdom will be martyred, while those who are destined to survive must endure persecution until the return of our Lord (Rev.13:10).

As is evident from its occurrence in chapters thirteen and fourteen of Revelation, the Great Persecution will begin not long after the beginning of the Tribulation's second half, the Great Tribulation. To recap in brief some of the preceding events, following his total defeat of the southern alliance, antichrist will quickly turn his attention to the establishment of his capital in Jerusalem. The beast will be the target of an assassination attempt at this time, and his remarkable recovery coupled with his victory will do much to swing the great majority of the world's population in his favor. Using this attempt on his life as a pretext, antichrist will make war on Moses and Elijah, killing them and then occupying the temple of God, even proclaiming himself to be God, erecting the "abomination that causes [spiritual] desolation" in the temple court. Those in Israel who have responded to the ministry of the two witnesses and the 144,000 will flee to the wilderness at this time, evading through divine intervention the beast's attempts to catch and destroy them. His frustration in this attempt will result in the commencement of the Great Persecution, a reign of terror directed against all true believers in Jesus Christ, the implementation of which will be part and parcel of the establishment of antichrist's worldwide system of religion:

And the dragon was enraged at the woman (i.e., the escaping Jewish believers), and he went away to make war with the rest of her seed, [even] those who are keeping the commandments of God and maintaining their testimony to Jesus.

Revelation 12:17

The scapegoating of believers in the matter of the assassination attempt will have the dual effect of provoking a violent reaction in Israel and worldwide against all believers on the one hand, and on the other hand will also contribute to an environment of great suspicion wherein unbelievers will be eager to show by their acceptance of the mark that they are without blame in the matter, and even more eager and willing to “smoke out the traitors” by way of this litmus test. Thus will the stage be set from the very early days of antichrist' worldwide reign for the event that more than any other defines and characterizes the coming Tribulation, namely, the Great Persecution.

2. Key Passages: The precise term “Great Persecution” is, as we have said before, one coined for the purposes of this study. But that a persecution of believers the likes of which the world has never seen will take place at this time (and through its terrible nature make the second half of the Tribulation “great”) is evident from the volume and specificity of the major passages which treat this event, especially in (but not limited to) the book of Revelation:

(9) And when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the fifth seal, I saw below the altar the living persons who had been slain because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained. (10) And they cried out with a loud voice, saying “How long, O Master, holy and true, will you [wait and] not render judgment and vindication for our blood upon those who dwell on the earth?” (11) And a white robe was given to each one of them that they might rest yet a little while longer until their brothers who were destined to be killed in the same fashion should also fulfill [their course].

Revelation 6:9-11

Comment: It will be recalled that only two seals, the fifth and sixth, deal with the trends of the last three and a half years (the seventh serving to “open the book” and begin the seven year period itself), with the sixth seal referring to Armageddon and related events. Therefore the fact that this seal serves as the sole agent of characterization for the bulk of the Tribulation's second half demonstrates that the Great Persecution is the decisive event of that period.

(9) After this I looked and, behold, [there was] a huge multitude which no one was able to number from every nation and tribe and people and tongue standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes and with palm branches in their hands. (10) And they were shouting in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God, the One who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!” (11) And all the angels had

taken their stand around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures. And they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, (12) saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might belong to our God forever and ever! Amen!” (13) And one of the elders who was speaking with me replied, “These people dressed in white robes – who are they and where have they come from?” (14) And I said to him, “My lord, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones who are about to come forth from the Great Tribulation. And they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (15) For this reason they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple. And the One who sits upon the throne will pitch His tabernacle over them. (16) They will neither hunger nor thirst again, nor will the sun beat down upon them nor any burning [heat], (17) because the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and will lead them to fountains of living water (lit., “fountains of waters of life”), and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes”.

Revelation 7:9-17

Comment: There are so many who have been martyred that they can not be counted, showing clearly the scope of the Great Persecution. Moreover, the fact that these martyrs come “from every nation and tribe and people and tongue” demonstrates the worldwide nature of the persecution. Finally, this passage definitely fixes the time of the Great Persecution, for as the angel says in verse fourteen, these martyrs are “about to come forth from the Great Tribulation”, that is, the second half of the seven year period.

(7) And war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought with the dragon and the dragon and his angels fought [back], (8) but they did not prevail against him, and they could no longer find any place [of refuge] in heaven. (9) And [so] the great dragon, the ancient serpent, the one called Devil and Satan, was thrown down; even he who deceives the entire world was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (10) And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying,

“Now our God's deliverance and might and kingdom have come, even the power of His Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, the one who accuses them day and night in front of our God, has been thrown down. (11) But these [believers] have defeated [the devil] through the blood of the Lamb and the Word of their testimony. For they did not love their lives, [even] to the point of death. (12) Because of this, rejoice, O heavens and those residing in them! [But] woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you, having [great] anger, because he knows that he has [only] a short time [remaining]!”

Revelation 12:7-12

Comment: In verse eleven the martyrs are described as virtually synonymous with all believers alive at this time, indicating the scope of the Great Persecution. The casting down of Satan at the midpoint of the Tribulation (verse nine) and the proclamation that

his remaining time is short (verse twelve) further serves to fix the time of the Great Persecution as the final three and a half years. Finally, in this synopsis of the Great Tribulation, we see that from the standpoint of believers the Great Persecution is *the* event which dominates this period.

And the dragon was enraged at the woman (i.e., the escaping Jewish believers), and he went away to make war with the rest of her seed, [even] those who are keeping the commandments of God and maintaining their testimony to Jesus.

Revelation 12:17

Comment: Just as the dragon, Satan, attempted to use his newfound mastery of the world's political systems united under his son, the beast, for the destruction of Jewish believers in Israel, so now, at the Tribulation's midpoint, he will turn his attention to the destruction of “the rest of her seed”, namely, gentile and Jewish believers worldwide. This passage likewise fixes the time of the Great Persecution (i.e., it follows the escape of believing Jews immediately after the beast's victory and shift of headquarters to Jerusalem), demonstrates the universal sweep of the persecution (i.e., the target is all the rest of “her seed”, that is, all other believers not removed to the special place of protection), and characterizes its horrible nature (i.e., it will be a “war” whose object is the annihilation of the faithful).

“If anyone is [destined] for captivity [to captivity he will go]. If it is necessary for anyone to be put to death by the sword, by the sword he must be put to death. Herein lies the perseverance and the faithfulness of the holy ones.”

Revelation 13:10

Comment: This caveat from our Lord removes all doubt about either the intensity of the Great Persecution to come or the possibility of avoiding it. Only two outcomes are contemplated, death or prison cell. While other outcomes are not necessarily ruled out, this passage suggests that they will be the exception rather than the rule, and thus encourages us to steel ourselves to these grim realities before the fact.

And it was given to him (i.e., the false prophet) to provide a spirit for the image of the beast so that the image might speak, and [it was also given to him] to bring it about that as many as refused to worship the image of the beast might be put to death.

Revelation 13:15

Comment: Here we see that the Great Persecution is central to the institution of the beast's worldwide religion, for it will be by means of the litmus test of willingness to worship antichrist that true believers will be winnowed out. This passage also makes it clear that the number of those martyred will be significant, for refusal to worship, once a believer has been “processed” to that point, will apparently result in a sentence of death

in every case.

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on so that they may rest from their labors”, says the Spirit. “For their deeds follow with them.”

Revelation 14:13

Comment: This verse, coming immediately after the most stringent of warnings to refrain from the beast's religion in any form (i.e., the third angel's proclamation of Revelation 14:9-12 [on which see section VII.2.c below]), encourages believers to face martyrdom with confidence and a sense of peace, since the end will be rest and reward. The need for such comfort is a sure indication that the Great Persecution will be a horrendous experience which is near universal in its scope and impossible to survive apart from a close walk with the Lord.

(14) And, behold, a white cloud. And sitting on the white cloud was what looked like a man with a golden crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. (15) And another angel came out of His temple, shouting in a loud voice to the one sitting on the cloud, “Send [forth] your sickle and reap, because the hour of the harvest has come, and the harvest [crop] is ripe” (lit., “dry”). (16) And the one sitting on the cloud set his sickle to the earth, and the earth was harvested.

Revelation 14:14-16

Comment: As we shall see below (section VII.3), the reaper represents Jesus Christ, and the believers martyred during the Great Persecution are the harvest. This passage shows that, far from being an accident, the Great Persecution is an integral part of the plan of God designed for the glory of God, reflected in the faithfulness of His witnesses, and the ultimate good of the martyred, who, like a ripe crop, are removed at precisely the right time, being spared the time of final judgments of the Great Tribulation while yet receiving all the rewards that accrue to those genuinely martyred for Jesus Christ. The dramatic and worldwide nature of the Great Persecution is also evident from the above.

(2) And I saw [something] like a sea of glass, [but this time it was] mixed with fire, and those who were [in the process of] winning the victory over the beast and his image and over the number of his name were standing on the sea of glass holding lyres of the Lord God, (3) and they were singing the song of Moses the servant of God, even the song of the Lamb, saying . . . Revelation 15:2-3a

Comment: While this passage is often taken to represent the victorious martyrs who

have come out of the Great Tribulation, the fact that they are seen here actually standing *on* the glass sea, the “viewing port”, so to speak, whereby earthly events are visible from heaven, gives us instead a picture of faithful believers enduring the Great Persecution while still on earth. The glass sea familiar to us from its description in chapter four is now described as being “mixed with fire”,⁴¹⁶ a clear and hardly subtle symbol of the intensity of the trial that the believers of that time will experience (1Pet.1:7; 4:12; cf. Dan.11:33; Heb.11:34). This interpretation explains the fact that the participle describing the endurance of the faithful is in the present tense here, and by rights should be translated “who were [in the process of] winning”, expressing their status as being still in the midst of the fiery trial.⁴¹⁷ The passage above describes all believers who remain faithful as belonging to the same essential category of those “[in the process of] winning the victory” over the beast, indicating that no one who maintains faith in Jesus Christ will be exempt from the fire or the fight (nor, blessedly, from the exaltation of victorious struggle on behalf of the Lord who bought us).

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them (i.e., they sat in judgment), namely the persons who had been executed (lit., “beheaded with an ax”) because of their witness for Jesus and because of the Word of God, [that is] whoever did not worship the beast or his image and did not take the mark on their forehead and on their hand. For they came to life and began to rule with Christ for a thousand years.

Revelation 20:4

Comment: We know from a number of important and specific New Testament passages (1Cor.15:50-55 and 1Thes.4:13-17 in particular) that a significant number of believers do survive the Great Persecution and are resurrected while yet alive at Christ's return. The fact that this verse equates refusal to worship the beast with execution demonstrates unequivocally the widespread martyrdom and intensity of the Great Persecution.

(21) I was watching, and this horn (i.e., antichrist) was waging war with the holy ones (i.e., believers). And he was prevailing over them (i.e., “conquering them”), (22) until the Ancient of Days came (i.e., our Lord's second advent) and rendered judgment on behalf of the holy ones of the Most High, and the time came when the holy ones took possession of the Kingdom.

Daniel 7:21-22

Comment: As in Revelation 12:17, the Great Persecution is here described as a “war”, with antichrist continuing to “conquer” (i.e., execute) believers until our Lord's return. The implication is that no believers will be “neutral”, that is, immune from the effects of the Great Persecution. Further, the casualties (i.e., martyrs) will likely be

horrific since the beast will continue to “prevail” until the second advent.

And he (antichrist) will speak words against the Most High, and he will persecute the saints of the Most High God. And he will plot to change times and law. And they (i.e., believers, “the saints”) will be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time (i.e., for the duration of the Great Tribulation).

Daniel 7:25

Comment: This passage also fixes the period of time during which antichrist will persecute (lit., “wear down”, “consume”) believers as lasting through the entire Great Tribulation (the “time and times and half a time”, or three and a half years). As mentioned in section V.2.2 above, the Great Persecution is here also connected directly to the implementation of the beast's religious and his not unconnected radical social “reforms”, the net effect of which places all believers “into his hand” (i.e., subject to persecution) until our Lord returns.

(10) And [the little horn] magnified himself against the host of heaven (i.e., the family of God, men and angels both), and he cast down to the earth some of the host (i.e., antichrist seducing believers into apostasy) and some of the stars (i.e., Satan having seduced angels into rebellion) and he trampled them underfoot. (11) He even magnified himself against the Prince of the host (i.e., Christ). The daily sacrifice was abolished by him, and the holy place (i.e., the inner court) was desecrated. (12) And along with the daily sacrifice, the host (i.e., believers) fell into his power on account of [the] rebellion (i.e., the Great Apostasy). And he threw truth to the ground, and was successful in whatever he did. (13) And I heard one of the holy ones who was speaking, and he said to the other holy one who was speaking, “How long will this vision of the daily sacrifice and of the rebellion which produces desolation and of the handing over of the holy [place] (i.e., the inner court) and of the trampling down of the host be?” (14) And he replied to me, “Until 2,300 evenings and mornings have passed. Then the holy [place] will be purified.”

Daniel 8:10-14

Comment: This passage (cf. Dan.8:23-35), previously covered in our treatment of the Great Apostasy,⁴¹⁸ deals primarily with the Tribulation's first half when seduction will be the primary means of leading believers away from Jesus Christ. But also clearly foreshadowed in the verses above is the near future time when seduction gives way to compulsion (i.e., in verse 12 “the host fell into his power”, and in verse 14 “the trampling down of the host”) which is only terminated by our Lord's second advent.

(32) And with enticements he will seduce [people] to violate the covenant, but the people who know their God will continue to hold fast to it. (33) And those among the

people who have insight will teach the people who will be persecuted by sword (i.e., martyrdom), and flame (i.e., torture leading to martyrdom), and captivity (i.e., imprisonment), and plundering (i.e., confiscation of property), for some time. (34) And when they are persecuted, they will receive a little help, yet many will ally themselves to them under false pretenses. (35) And even from among [the ranks of] those who have insight, some will be persecuted, in order to refine, purify, and cleanse them until the final end. For [it is] yet to come at its appointed time.
Daniel 11:32-35

Comment: These verses are some of the most explicit in detailing the harrowing time that those who continue to “hold fast” to Jesus Christ will have. Set in the context of antichrist's establishment of the abomination (v.31), and indicating that the ordeal will continue “until the final end”, this passage likewise establishes the time period for the Great Persecution as essentially extending over the entire final 42 months of the Great Tribulation, and likewise apportions the suffering, “sword, and flame, and captivity, and plunder”, to everyone subject to it.

(8) But all these things (of vs. 3-7) are [merely] the beginning of the birth pangs (i.e., the first half of the Tribulation). (9) Then (i.e., the beginning of the Great Tribulation) men will betray you [bringing you] into tribulation (i.e., the Great Persecution), and will put you to death, and you will be hated by all of the nations on account of My Name.
Matthew 24:8-9 (cf. Matt.10:16-33; Mk.13:9-13; Lk.21:12-24)

Comment: Our Lord's words here anchor the previous prophecies of Daniel and later prophecies of Revelation, and demonstrate with certainty the reality of a coming persecution during the second, final phase of the Tribulation of such unprecedented scope and intensity that it can only be described as “great”.

The above are only the major passages which directly describe the Great Persecution in some detail, but they are sufficient to show that this widely underappreciated teaching is both heavily stressed in scripture and of absolute importance to us all “upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1Cor.10:11). Nor are these the only passages where one finds reference to the Great Persecution (cf. also Is.24:16; Jer.31:2; Mic.7:1-7; Jn.16:1-4; 2Thes.1:6-10; cf. Jer.9:4; 12:5-6; 31:2). For example, the attribution of the divine wrath that will come upon the earth at the end of the Tribulation is consistently characterized by scripture as a direct divine response to the “blood of the saints”, that is, divine judgment descending upon antichrist, his kingdom, and his minions as a direct result of the Great Persecution (e.g., Is.26:20-21; 2Pet.3:10b; Rev.16:5-6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2). In conclusion, it may also be mentioned that there have always been persecutions of believers in every age of world history, so that the many biblical passages which deal with this general subject will be, if anything, even more important and applicable during the quintessential persecution to come, the Great Persecution (cf. Jer.45:1-4; Mic.7:1-7;

Matt.13:21; Jn.15:20; 16:33; Acts 14:22; 1Thes.1:6-10; 3:3; 2Tim.3:12; Heb.11:32-40; 1Pet.4:12-19).⁴¹⁹

3. The Precedence of the 144,000: Immediately following the description of the false prophet, of his administration of the Great Persecution, and of the mark and number of the beast in chapter thirteen, chapter fourteen turns directly to the 144,000. The appearance of these unique Jewish witnesses at this point, following the inception of the Great Persecution in the chronological sequence (yet preceding the angelic blessing upon those about to be martyred and the symbolic description of the general course of the Great Persecution in Revelation 14:14-16), is highly significant. We will cover this passage in some detail below, but suffice it to say here that this juxtaposition of passages definitively establishes the martyrdom of the 144,000 as the inaugural event of the Great Persecution. Scripture describes them here as being “purchased *first* from among men for God [the Father] and for the Lamb” (Rev.14:4), an explicit representation of these witnesses as having been delivered from the crucible of tribulation through martyrdom.

We should not let it go unnoticed here that this precedence of the 144,000 in martyrdom is an exceptional honor which in turn teaches us how we should view the prospect of our own potential martyrdom during that most difficult of times to come. Instead of seeing the possibility of literally giving up our lives for Jesus Christ as a terrible tragedy to be endured, we need to learn to see it for what it truly is, namely, a deliverance which is both a great honor and a great blessing, honoring the One we love, while guaranteeing great reward for us through all eternity. This does not mean that we seek martyrdom (the choice is God's, not ours), nor that the experience is likely to be easy or painless, only that if so wills the will of God we need to be ready to accept the eventuality of martyrdom not with sullen resignation but with confidence, faith, and joy that God is accomplishing His will for our lives in a special way that brings special honor to our dear Savior and ultimate benefit to us (if only we comport ourselves honorably in the process – and this we shall do, God helping us).

Demonstrate faithfulness unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.⁴²⁰
Revelation 2:10b

4. The Number of the Martyred:

(9) After this I looked and, behold, [there was] a huge multitude which no one was able to number from every nation and tribe and people and tongue standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes and with palm branches in their hands.

Revelation 7:9

As we have already seen, many of the passages dealing with the Great Persecution present the possibility of martyrdom for those who would remain faithful to Jesus Christ as a near certainty. This passage which describes them as “a huge multitude which no one was able to number from every nation and tribe and people and tongue” removes all doubt about the magnitude of their number, while at the same time emphasizing the worldwide nature of the Great Persecution. The actual number is withheld in Revelation 7:9, a significant fact in and of itself inasmuch as the Book of Revelation does often provide specific numbers, even when they are extremely large (e.g., Rev.9:16). Nor are we given a ratio, another form of specification found on more than one occasion in the book (e.g., Rev.8:7-12). Yet we know, even given the unprecedented magnitude of the number of these martyrs, that even so there will apparently be a sizeable host of believers still alive when our Lord returns at the end of the Great Tribulation (1Cor.15:50-54; cf. Matt.24:36-51; 25:1-13; 1Cor.15:23; 1Thes.5:1-11; 2Thes.1:3-12):

(15) For we tell you this by the Lord's own Word, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord (i.e., the Second Advent which brings the Great Tribulation to a close) will not precede those who have fallen asleep. (16) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command, with the archangel's blast on the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first (in resurrection), (17) then we who are alive and remain will be snatched up together with them *in clouds* to meet the Lord in the air, and in this way we shall always be with the Lord.

1st Thessalonians 4:15-17

It is worth noting in this regard therefore that the fact that those martyred will be an innumerable multitude does not necessarily mean that they will constitute the majority of those still faithful to Jesus Christ when the Great Persecution begins (although that may be the case). Based upon the passages covered above all we can say of a certainty is that virtually all believers will be subject to persecution during that time, and that an extremely large number will be martyred while a sizeable number will be spared in order to be resurrected while still alive at our Lord's return. It is therefore probably best to estimate the ratio at approximately “50/50”. This proportion of the martyred to those who survive until the coming of the Lord is supported indirectly by the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-13. In that parable the light of the lamp represents faith so that the five virgins whose lamps are extinguished before the bridegroom arrives stand for those who fall away in the Great Apostasy. Thus the five wise virgins whose lamps continue to shine represent those who maintain their faith until the end of the Tribulation (in contrast with those who fall away). Since we do know that those who fall away constitute one third of the Church (see part 3A, section II, “The Great Apostasy”), and since in this parable they are complemented by an equal number of believers who survive until the second advent, the only way that the one third proportion can thus be preserved is by positing an equal number who neither fall away nor abide until the end,

namely, the martyrs who will quite possibly be commensurate in number with both of the two groups described in the parable.

5. General Persecution and Imprisonment: The refusal of believers to accept the mark of the beast will, from the very start, bring upon them general persecution including but not limited to social ostracism and economic hardship (Matt.10:17-20; 24:9; Mk.13:9; Lk.21:12-15; Jn.15:20-21; 16:2). As the Great Persecution gathers momentum, moreover, we may expect the faithful to come under ever greater pressures and more intense forms of persecution, not the least of which will be imprisonment (and possibly torture) as a transitional stage preceding eventual martyrdom.

(33) And those among the people who have insight will teach the people who will be persecuted by sword (i.e., martyrdom), and flame (i.e., torture leading to martyrdom), *and captivity* (i.e., imprisonment), and plunder (i.e., confiscation of property), for some time.

Daniel 11:33

In fact so many passages of scripture allude to the widespread incarceration of believers during the Great Persecution either directly or by application that it seems the most prudent course on the basis of Revelation 13:10 for us to assume our imprisonment as a matter of course, even if it should be God's will for some believers to be spared this particular ordeal (Is.14:16-17; 42:7; 49:9; 51:14; 61:1; Dan.11:33; Hab.1:9; Zech.9:11-12; Matt.10:17-20; Mk.13:9; Lk.4:18-19; cf. Ps.79:11; 102:13-20; Is.14:2; Matt.14:3; 18:30; 25:36-44; Acts 5:19; 8:3; 12:4; 16:23; Heb.10:34; 13:3).

But, [what is] even more [grievous] than these things (i.e., the disruptions of the Tribulation's first half),⁴²¹ they will lay hands upon them (i.e., believers during the Great Persecution), betraying them into [the hands of] their [religious] assemblies and prisons, haling them before kings and governors for the sake of my Name.

Luke 21:12

Have no fear of what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you *into prison* to test you, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Revelation 2:10a

6. Betrayal: Notwithstanding the difficulties for believers in sustaining life, and the dangers involved in collective worship that will attend the Great Persecution, it is still questionable whether such a large number as prophesied would or could ever be rounded up for imprisonment and execution without an efficient method for actively hunting them down. But the Bible leaves us in no doubt about the fact that many of the “candidates” for persecution will be secured in a most disheartening way, namely, by betrayal, often by those most near and dear to them (see also Dan.11:34; Mic.7:5-7;

Mk.13:9-13; Lk.21:12; cf. Jer.9:4; 12:5-6; Matt.24:23-26).

(16) And *you will be betrayed* even by parents and siblings and friends. And they will put some of you to death, (17) and you will be hated by everyone because of my Name.
Luke 21:16-17

(10) And at that time many will fall away *and will betray each other* and will hate each other, (11) and many false prophets will arise and will deceive many. (12) Now because of the increase of lawlessness [at that time], the love of the many will cool. (13) But he who endures until the end, this [is the one who] will be saved.
Matthew 24:10-13

(34) Do not think that I have come to hurl peace upon the earth. I have not come to hurl peace upon the earth but a sword [of divisiveness]. (35) For I have come to divide, [so that] 'a man [will be set] against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; (36) [with the result that] a man's enemies will be the members of his own household' (cf. Micah 7:6). (37) Whoever loves his father or mother above Me is not worthy of Me, and whoever loves his son or daughter above Me is not worthy of Me. (38) And whoever does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. (39) Whoever has found his life will lose it, and the one who has lost his life for My sake will find it.
Matthew 10:34-39

In these passages we can also see the close connection between the Great Persecution and the Great Apostasy, as the pressures of persecution serve to intensify the trend of abandoning Christ (see part 3A, section II, "The Great Apostasy"). For those believers determined to stay loyal to Jesus no matter what, the example of Daniel comes to mind, who was thrown into the lions' den precisely because he refused to alter his behavior of prayerful worship to God in spite of the fact that his enemies in the Persian government had managed to make it illegal (Dan.6). Confronted with the suspicious eyes of nearly all our prior acquaintances who are now hostile towards us no matter how close the prior relationship, it will be nigh on impossible to live and worship as true believers in Jesus Christ without exposing ourselves to similar charges of illegality and without inviting similar persecution. But just as God was able to deliver Daniel contrary to all human expectation, we need to be confident of the same potential deliverance (cf. the "help" promised in Dan.11:34), even as we accept the very real possibility outlined throughout this section that it may well be God's will for us to die as witnesses for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (cf. 2Tim.2:11-13). We must be prepared to show the world that we truly do love Him more than our very lives.

But these [believers] have defeated [the devil] because of the blood of Lamb and their word of witness (lit., “martyrdom”). For they did not love their lives, even to the point of death.

Revelation 12:11

7. The Mechanics of Martyrdom: In his famous exchange of letters with the Roman emperor Trajan (no. 96-97), Pliny the younger in his capacity as governor of Bithynia was told that the government should not initiate investigations to determine who might or might not be a member of this new “sect”, Christianity, but that once someone was denounced as a Christian, failure to sacrifice to the emperor must be considered a capital offense. Harsh as this “don't ask, don't tell” policy was, it will appear mild in contrast to the regime of persecution that will obtain during the Great Persecution. For the elimination of faith from the earth has always been an objective near and dear to the devil's heart, and with the entire world now under the thumb of his son antichrist, the process of actively hunting down Christians in order to extirpate Christianity stock and stem will have no equal in world history. The combination of the economic prohibitions directed at those who lack the mark of the beast, the (seemingly certain) prohibitions upon Christian worship et al. (along with the infiltration of true Christian groups: Dan.11:34; cf. Matt.24:23-26; Mk.13:21-23; Lk.21:8), and the pressures placed upon friends and family to betray their kindred who are still faithful to Christ (no doubt out of a persuasive mix of penalties for inaction and rewards for cooperation) will all combine to produce a flood of captive believers into the hands of the beast's politico-religious apparatus. Those who do not immediately acquiesce by renouncing Christ while proclaiming antichrist's divinity will become the grist for the mill of the Great Persecution. Although the scale of the Great Persecution will dwarf anything of the like in the past, in individual terms such has often been the lot of those who truly do choose Jesus over this world (cf. Rev.2:10; 2:13).

Some [of these great believers of the past] were tortured, refusing release, that they might obtain a better resurrection (i.e., worth more to them than their lives; cf. Ps.63:3). Others endured ridicule and beatings, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, sawed in half, killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goat hides. They were deprived, persecuted, abused. They world was not worthy of them. They wandered the deserts and the mountains, making their homes in caves and fissures in the earth. And through their faith, all of them became witnesses [to the world] (lit., “were martyred”) . . .

Hebrews 11:35b-39a

Although individual experiences will no doubt differ somewhat, scripture gives us enough information to establish a basic schematic of the typical stages of the process to be endured by a believer during the Great Persecution once betrayed and arrested upon initial refusal to “repent”. It should be noted that the three stages delineated below

parallel exactly the sort of ordeal to be faced by a person wrongly accused of some heinous crime for which the penalty is death.

a. Imprisonment: We have covered above the Bible's frequent references to the imprisonment of believers during this period. The wide scale incarceration of so many believers at this time on the basis of "religious crimes" would no doubt be impossible without the cooperative efforts of clergy and authorities in a world-state where there is effectively now no separation between "church" and state, and it is further likely that only logistical issues will prevent the immediate imprisoning of the entire believing population of the world. Indeed, it is a blessed encouragement to remember that God's limitation of the devil's logistical reach, great though it will be at this time, will stymie Satan's efforts to achieve his goal of removing faith from the earth (cf. Mk.13:20). But, as noted above, a large percentage of believers will indeed be cast into prison, and, given the emphasis that scripture places upon their release at the hands of the returning Messiah, we can expect that once arrested, most of those who are not executed will not see freedom again until the second advent (cf. Is.14:17; 42:7; 49:9; 51:14; 61:1; Zech.9:11-12; Lk.4:18-19). This prospect will undoubtedly add to the pressure to apostatize on the part of those whose faith is weak. Finally, the atmosphere in which these mass arrests will take place will probably be ugly in the extreme. Just as Nero blamed the Christians for destroying Rome in order to deflect attention from himself, antichrist will in an analogous way blame believers for the assassination attempt on his person, so that we should not underestimate the zeal and vitriol with which the followers of the beast, many of them nominal "Christians", will turn to rounding up these "enemies of the state" who refuse to swear allegiance to antichrist, and, in doing so, will actually feel that they are doing God a favor:

But a time will come when everyone who kills you will think that he is making an offering in worship to God.

John 16:2

b. Quasi-Judicial Scrutiny: Just as our Lord's false arrest, imprisonment and trial was carried out on the basis of pretext alone (cf. Is.53:7-9; Matt.26:55; Mk.14:39; Lk.22:37; 22:52-53; Acts 3:13-15; 8:33; 1Pet.2:22), so those who are called to "walk in His footsteps" (Jn.13:15; 1Cor.11:1; 1Pet.2:21-25; 1Jn.2:6; cf. Matt.11:29; 16:24; Mk.10:38-39; Phil.2:5) and "share in His sufferings" (Rom.8:17; 2Cor.1:5; Phil.1:29; 3:10; Col.1:24; 1Pet.4:13; cf. Gal.6:17) in this special way will be subjected to a severe process of interrogation, pressure, and abuse, along with judicial and quasi-judicial inquisition. Anyone who has been through any sort of trial will understand immediately how a string of illegal and abusive ordeals will bring enormous emotional pressures to bear on those so accused. When we add to this the concomitant physical abuse, scourging, ostracism, humiliation, and plundering of all that we have (Matt.10:17; Mk.13:9; cf. Dan.11:34), it should be obvious that this gauntlet of opposition will constitute an enormous test of faith, and one for which those so tested will be extremely grateful for every bit of prior preparation in the Word and its application. Clearly, what

we may have to endure, no matter how stressful or terrible, will be nothing like what our Lord did endure. Yet we must in any case avoid underestimating either the difficulties of this process so as to lose heart, or the great honor it bestows in God's eyes so as to fail to count it the great joy amid the tears that it can and should be. Many of the greatest believers of all time endured similar extreme tests of their faith (and it is very much worth studying in this regard the examples of Daniel and his friends: Dan.3 & 6; Stephen: Acts 6:8-7:59; Peter: Acts 5:17-42; 12:1-19; and Paul: Acts c.21-28). Further, in that time of testing we will receive divine “help” (Dan.11:34), so that even the words we shall speak will not be ours, but will be graciously given to us through the Holy Spirit with the result that even those among us who are not gifted in public speaking need not worry in the least about this ahead of time:

(17) Beware of [all] men. For they will betray you into [the hands of their] tribunals and will scourge you in their assemblies. (18) And you will be haled before governors and kings for my sake as a witness to them (i.e., the pseudo-Christian leaders) and to the gentiles (i.e., generic unbelievers). (19) But when they betray you, do not worry how you will speak or what you will say. For it will be given to you in that [very] hour what you will say. (20) For you will not be the ones speaking, but your Father's [Holy] Spirit will be the One speaking in you.

Matthew 10:17-20

(9) Take care for yourselves. For they will betray you into [the hands of their] tribunals and you will be beaten in their assemblies. And you will stand before governors and kings for my sake as a witness to them. (10) For the gospel must first (i.e., before “the end”; cf. Matt.24:14) be proclaimed to all the nations. (11) And when they betray and hale you [in before them], do not worry about what you will say, but whatever is given to you in that [very] hour, say that. For you are not the ones speaking but the Holy Spirit.

Mark 13:9-11

(11) And when they bring you into their assemblies and rulers and authorities, do not worry how or what defense you shall make or what you shall say. (12) For the Holy Spirit will instruct you in that very hour [as to] the things which must be said.

Luke 12:11-12

(12) But, [what is] even more [grievous] than these things (i.e., the events of vv.8-11), they will lay hands upon them, betraying them into [the hands of] their [religious] assemblies and prisons, haling them before kings and governors for the sake of my Name. (13) For this will result for you in an act of witnessing [for Me]. (14) So set it [firmly] in you hearts not to prepare ahead of time to make a defense. (15) For I will give you a mouth and wisdom which none of your enemies will be able to oppose or refute.

Luke 21:12-15

c. Trial by Fire: As these martyrs follow in the footsteps of our Lord, if their betrayal by

their friends and loved ones and consequent imprisonment is roughly analogous to His betrayal by Judas and arrest in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt.26:48-49), and if the inquisition they undergo is roughly analogous to His series of trials by Herod, Pilate, and the Jewish religious leaders, then their subsequent trial by fire will be roughly analogous to His condemnation and ordeal in crucifixion (excepting, of course, His death for our sins). Please understand, what our Lord did for us at the cross is not to be compared with any other earthly event. But as we are called to walk in imitation of Him (Jn.13:15; 1Cor.11:1; 1Pet.2:21-25; 1Jn.2:6; cf. Matt.11:29; 16:24; Phil2:5), and to share His sufferings (Rom.8:17; 2Cor.1:5; Phil.1:29; 3:10; Col.1:24; 1Pet.4:13; cf. Gal.6:17), the parallels which scripture points out in general terms between His experience and that of these martyrs does need to be considered. Indeed, our Lord Himself drew a clear parallel between His imminent death for us and the high calling of those who choose to follow Him (i.e., we too are to “pick up our cross” and follow Him: Matt.10:38; 16:24; Mk.8:34; Lk.9:23). So while we would never wish to make an exact comparison between martyrdom and our Lord's unique sacrifice (for only His death could suffice to accomplish our salvation), it is nonetheless true that these martyrs for our Lord by their similar experience will be His unique witnesses, calling attention to His unique sacrifice through the absolute faith they will demonstrate in it and in Him, when they give up their lives rather than denouncing the One who bought them with His life's blood.

And when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the fifth seal, I saw below the altar the living persons who had been slain *because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained.*

Revelation 6:9

In the preceding section, the verses in the gospels which detail the process of the inquisition that these believers will undergo mention first “tribunals” and “assemblies” (Matt.10:17; Mk.13:9; cf. Lk.21:12). The second word is a translation of the Greek *synagoge*, often transliterated as synagogue. This is somewhat misleading in that it suggests a solely Jewish setting whereas in truth what we should understand in terms of the true context being studied here is indeed a religious venue but one which is much more likely to be pseudo-Christian than Jewish. For what is being described in respect to the quasi-judicial examination process of believers incarcerated during the Great Persecution is part and parcel of the pressure placed upon them by antichrist's religious establishment. These believers will be commanded to “repent” of their “misplaced” faith in that “other Messiah” (i.e., our true Lord and Savior Jesus Christ), and to declare instead their acceptance of antichrist as the true Christ by taking the mark of the beast. As in the case of our Lord who was called upon to deny Himself, and who was tried numerous times in the hours before His crucifixion, this process may involve numerous “trials” before various tribunals, but in every case those doing the examination will be adherents of the beast's political and religious apparatus. In particular, as has been suggested above, it is likely that many main line religious organizations completely co-opted at that time by antichrist to serve and worship him will take the lead, at least initially, in the process of pressuring those who still have true

faith to abandon it in order to save their lives. That is what is meant by the “tribunals” (*synedria*), namely, smaller screening bodies of religious officials analogous to Jesus' first trial before Annas and the Sanhedrin (derived from *synedrion*, the singular form of the same word: Jn.18:12-24), whereas “assemblies” (*synagogai*) will refer to more public meetings presided over by larger numbers of religious officials with a larger audience, analogous to our Lord's second trial before Caiaphas (compare Jn.18:24 with Matt.26:57-68; Mk.14:53-65).

In this regard we should recall that the apostle John identified “many antichrists” at work during the Church age (1Jn.2:18-22; cf. 2Jn.1:7), and gave as the means for that identification the fact that “they went out from us”. Applied to our present discussion, this gives us a clear indication that both antichrist and many of his key followers will be erstwhile “Christian leaders” as indeed we have already seen.⁴²² We have already noted here a consistent parallel between our Lord's trial by fire prior to the cross and the experience of the martyrs of the Great Persecution. In this respect we may anticipate present-day equivalents among the beast's co-opted “Christian leaders” which likewise parallel the various religious sects of our Lord's day, groups which in prior years and centuries had no doubt included genuine believers, but which by the time of Jesus' multiple trials had similarly been co-opted into doing the devil's work. For the “scribes” who consistently put tradition over truth, the similarly traditionalist denominations of the Orthodox and Catholic persuasions are the best fit. For the secularist Sadducees, the old line now quite liberal Protestant denominations who have come to prefer “reason” to scripture along with other related groups (e.g., Unitarians and Christian Scientists) are a good match. The legalistic Pharisees who used judgmental applications of the Law to eliminate mercy and faith bring to mind the trends now found in many conservative Protestant denominations such as various Baptists and other spin-off independent denominations (and one may wish to place the Mormons here as well). The other-worldly Essenes are somewhat analogous to the various “charismatic” groups who worship experience over scripture, while we may find in the Zealots a parallel for any of the many fringe groups, left or right, which embrace violence, setting their extreme efforts in place of God and His plan. Apologies ahead of time to any and all who are partial to any of the groups mentioned above, but the reader is asked to remember that we are talking here about future events that will take place only after the removal of the Holy Spirit's restraining influence in the crucible of the Tribulation. This set of parallels is thus not meant to indict any present group (and indulgence is also asked for any which may have been inadvertently left out), but merely to illustrate how the various tendencies of all the major Christian (not to mention pseudo-Christian) organizations could very well result in their being employed in the service of evil once they no longer contain any true believers, that is, the very situation which obtained in our Lord's day and the very one which we are contemplating during the Tribulation after antichrist co-opts the church-visible for his own ends.

Before final approval is given for the execution of those who refuse to repent despite such pressures, the political authorities will also have to weigh in. These are the “governors and kings” mentioned in the pertinent scriptures above (Matt.10:17; Mk.13:9; Lk.21:12), and are analogous to our Lord's trials before Herod and Pilate. Just

as religious officials are co-opted in antichrist's kingdom, so of course will all of the world's political officials be, for the beast's rule will be a worldwide rule (Rev.13:1-9). For those being persecuted, it is very important to understand that being alone and having been subjected to extreme physical and verbal abuse, these trials will constitute an inordinate amount of pressure the degree of which is difficult to grasp before the fact, even by those among us who may have been subjected to a lengthy legal process. It is therefore imperative as we study these things to appreciate ahead of time the importance of prior spiritual preparation to the successful endurance of such trials, even as we gain a better appreciation for the gauntlet our Lord ran for us even before He got to the cross and died for our sins.

Revelation 6:9 quoted above tells us that those put to death in the Great Persecution will be executed “because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained”. We have also seen that the false prophet will be given the authority “to bring it about that as many as refused to worship the image of the beast might be put to death.” (Rev.13:5). Further, the resurrected martyrs seen in Revelation chapter twenty who reign with Christ for a thousand years are said not to have worshiped “the beast or his image and did not take the mark on their forehead and on their hand” (Rev.20:4). The litmus test then for execution and martyrdom will be the two-sided coin of refusing to reject the true Christ on the one hand and of refusing to worship the pseudo-Christ beast and his image in conjunction with the reception of his mark on the other.

This brings up the question of whether or not a person can be said to refuse to worship the image of the beast in any place other than Jerusalem. For clearly the false prophet who forces obeisance and administers capital punishment on all who refuse will be in Jerusalem, as will antichrist and antichrist's abominable image. Given the vast numbers of those put to death for the Lord and their geographical diversity, “a huge multitude which no one was able to number from every nation and tribe and people and tongue” (Rev.7:9), it is likely that, when Jesus tells us in Matthew 24:9 “and [they] will put some of you to death”, He is talking about the local “governors and kings” mentioned above. Therefore just as the mark of the beast is discussed in a manner that seems to connect it with worshiping the statue in person (i.e., Rev.14:9-11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4) and yet it seems improbable that everyone who agrees to take the mark will have to go to Jerusalem to do so, so in this case it seems preferable to understand some sort of satellite process, possibly enhanced through technology, whereby many of the martyrs will be put to death locally.

As to the timing, we can expect persecution to go hand in hand with the ceremonial placing of the mark of the beast, with the coercion, compulsion, and execution of some believers beginning from the start. It stands to reason, however, that the process of denouncing, arresting, examining, and executing those who refuse to acknowledge the beast will have to gather speed and momentum over time. Human limitations being what they are, a period of transition into the new, harsh economic reality that accompanies the mark (Rev.13:7) will thus be unavoidable despite the devil's best efforts, so that not all believers will be identified immediately (indeed, as we have seen,

fully half of those who remain at that time will most likely survive until the coming of the Lord). Nevertheless, we can be sure that the beast will do everything in his power to make that time of transition as short as possible so that we may expect to see a rapid implementation of this policy and subsequent ensnaring of the faithful. Given the desire for speed, sheer logistics would seem to indicate that, while there will be a certain amount of celebrity worship and marking done in Jerusalem itself (and the conspicuous execution of prominent Christians there too, for that matter), this process will take place mainly on the local level. Whether or not the local venues will have smaller replicas of the “abomination that causes [spiritual] desolation” or be fitted out with large viewing screens or some other such substitute, we cannot say for certain. What is certain, however, is that worshiping the beast and his image, in person or remotely, and taking the mark, whether from the second beast himself or one of antichrist's clergy far from Jerusalem, will just as surely guarantee condemnation. Finally, inasmuch as Revelation 13:5 shows that the false prophet will be engaged in personal direction of some of these inquisitions which result in the execution of those who refuse to worship the beast and his image and take his mark, it is therefore also the case that some of the martyrs will indeed be killed in Jerusalem – and perhaps a large number of them at that. For those so “selected”, it will certainly mean the necessity not only of being strong under the initial pressures following imprisonment, but of staying strong in faith for what is likely to be a long and arduous process. Gaining a temporary reprieve on the local level merely for the purpose of being transported to the headquarters of evil for “special treatment” will no doubt be very much like facing a firing-squad twice.

As to the manner of execution, scripture does not provide any basis for dogmatically singling out a preferred method (although see Rev.20:4 where the martyrs are described as having been beheaded). The “sword” in Revelation 13:10 is a common biblical metaphor for capital punishment (cf. Matt.26:52; Rom.13:4). Crucifixion as well as more traditional modern modes of execution are certainly possible (cf. Jn.21:19). However, given that fire is closely connected with antichrist and his false prophet (Rev.13:13), and the close analogy already noted between the refusal by Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to worship the statue of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel chapter 3, it is more than likely that a similar death by fire will be the end result of this “trial by fire” for the tribulational martyrs (cf. the fiery sea” of Rev.15:2). Just as those three great men of God were not intimidated into forsaking Him despite the terror before them and were vindicated in a most miraculous way, so we need to commit ourselves to trust and obey God in spite of the commands of the world's authorities to reject Him, in spite of the confidence of the beast's followers that they are “doing good” in putting us to death (cf. Jn.16:2), and in spite of every terrifying eventuality with which we may be threatened. For while it will not be the fate of the tribulational martyrs to walk out of the fiery furnace the way Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did, it will be their lot to rise first in the ranks of the redeemed (1Thes.4:16b), and to reign with Jesus a thousand years:

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them (i.e., they sat in judgment), namely the persons who had been executed (lit., “beheaded with an

ax”) because of their witness for Jesus and because of the Word of God, [that is] whoever did not worship the beast or his image and did not take the mark on their forehead and on their hand. For they came to life and began to rule with Christ for a thousand years.

Revelation 20:4

8. The Great Persecution in Israel: As we saw in our study of Revelation chapter 12 above, the vast majority of believers within Israel will respond to the divine command to flee into the desert and will thus be shielded from the otherwise universal persecution of the faithful. However, Daniel chapter eleven, a passage already covered above in some detail, does seem to indicate that, along with Moses and Elijah and the 144,000, a certain number of believers will remain in the land (as is also indicated by a number of other passages which suggest continued problems for believers in Israel despite the flight of the faithful: e.g., Jer.30:7; Dan.8:12; 12:7; Zech.10:11).

(30) For ships of Kittim (i.e., the western “Babylon”) will attack with him (i.e., antichrist) [so that he will be victorious]. Then he will be stricken [as if dead], but will revive. And he will be enraged at the holy covenant, so that on his return [to Israel from the far south] he will take action [against it] (i.e., ending the sacrifices, setting up the abomination, taking his seat in the temple). And he will give his support to those who abandon the holy covenant. (31) For it is from him that the military forces will issue forth which will pollute the sanctuary (i.e., ending the ministry of Moses and Elijah), remove the daily sacrifice, and set up the abomination of desolation. (32) And with enticements he will seduce [people] to violate the [holy] covenant, but the people who know their God will continue to hold fast to it. (33) And those among the people who have insight will teach the people who will be persecuted by sword (i.e., martyrdom), and flame (i.e., torture leading to martyrdom), and captivity (i.e., imprisonment), and plundering (i.e., confiscation of property), for some time. (34) And when they are persecuted, they will receive a little help, yet many will ally themselves to them under false pretenses. (35) For even from among [the ranks of] those who have insight, some will be persecuted, in order to refine, purify, and cleanse them until the final end. For [it is] yet to come at its appointed time.

Daniel 11:30-35

Whether it is the case that those described in the above persecution in Israel following the Tribulation's mid-point failed to depart at the proper time, or were led by the Spirit to remain, or became believers after the fact, it is certainly true that what is being described here is applicable to the Church as a whole and to the pattern of the Great Persecution as a whole everywhere else in the world as well (and that is undoubtedly an important connection we are meant to make). One thing is certain: all those who remain in the land during this period, believers and unbelievers both, are in for a very difficult time (e.g., Is.8:14-15).

9. The Role of Babylon: The book of Revelation very emphatically makes Babylon responsible for the Great Persecution, both directly (Rev.17:6; 18:20; 18:24; 19:2; cf. Rev.16:6), and also in terms of the beast's religion of "prostitution and witchcraft" which lies behind it and for which she is the primary source (Rev.17:1-5; 18:3-4; cf. Rev.14:8-9; 16:19). In fact, Babylon the great prostitute is said in Revelation 17:6 to be "drunk with the blood of the holy ones, even from [the blood of] the witnesses for Jesus", providing us with a clear linkage between the Great Persecution and Babylon in her capacity as the original headquarters of antichrist's religious and political base. Babylon, of course, is also the wealthiest state in the world (cf. the descriptions in Rev.17:1-6 and in all of chapter 18), so that the commercial restrictions upon those who lack the mark (whereby so many believers will be identified, incarcerated and martyred) are doubtless to be understood as intimately connected with her role in this regard as well. Since the Great Persecution is thus largely indistinguishable from Babylon in scripture, showing that she will thus be the chief agent of that persecution through the amalgamated world-system of religious, economic and political power she represents, we are further correct to conclude that the new pseudo-Christianity developed by antichrist in Babylon will be instrumental in conducting the Great Persecution itself. Just as our Lord was haled before a series of Jewish religious councils which ought to have worshiped Him, the Messiah of the Jews, so believers during the Great Persecution will find themselves being accused, berated, and condemned by erstwhile fellow "Christians", a fact that will make the burden of martyrdom all that much more difficult to bear.

10. A Brief Christian "Code of Conduct" for the Great Persecution: While the issue of proper conduct for believers during the Tribulation generally is properly the subject of part 7 of this series, it seems appropriate to discuss the topic here in brief. After all, the most difficult testing of the Tribulation will fall upon those caught up in the Great Persecution, especially the martyrs. It is hoped that the following list of guiding principles, though not meant to be exhaustive, will prove to be some help to those facing the trying circumstance of that future time (or indeed similar pressures in the present):

a. Don't hide your light of faith under a bushel (Matt.5:15-16): Be courageous in continuing to carry out the ministries and Christian witness to which Christ has called you (Matt.10:28). Many contemporary Christians seem to believe that once the Tribulation arrives we are to go into "survivalist mode". This seems to me to run counter to everything the Bible has to say. When the apostles were told to stop speaking and teaching in the Name of Jesus, they refused on pain of scourging, imprisonment and death (all three of which fates lay in wait for many of them because of their determination to serve Jesus no matter what the cost; cf. Acts 5:29). Certainly, we are told to be wise as well as innocent in the way we conduct ourselves in the world (Matt.10:16; cf. Rom.16:19; 1Cor.14:20), and no one is suggesting that we volunteer to be executed, that we "dare" the authorities to martyr us, or that we deliberately go out of our way to run afoul of those who are administering the Great Persecution, calling attention to ourselves rather than to Christ (cf. Matt.6:2). This extreme is clearly not what God would have us to do any more than He expects us to run for cover than rather confess our faith in His Son. Daniel and his three friends give us the perfect examples of how we should behave in this regard. Daniel did not immediately go into the presence

of the king and protest the wicked decree forged against him, daring him to make him a martyr for the Lord; but neither did he run and hide as he well might have done for just a day, or even change in any way his normal walk with the Lord, but continued in exactly the same way as he had before the harsh decree was passed. Likewise, Hananiah, Mishael, and Asariah (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) did not make a point of identifying themselves to the king, daring him to throw them into the fiery furnace so that they might be martyrs for the Lord; but neither did they run and hide as they well might have done for just that day, or even change their normal manner of faithful service to the king as a reflection of their duty to God, but were present on the plain of Dura at the king's command. In each case, continuation of faithfulness in normal spiritual and secular behavior led these men to be martyred – but in each case God delivered them in a miraculous way. It is well for us to consider, should it so be that we face such circumstances ourselves, that God is completely capable of delivering us as well, so that if we should be caught in the process of living our lives as God would have us to do and then martyred as a result, it can only be because this is the will of God for us, and it is only through our response to His will that He is glorified through us (Is.43:7; Eph.1:5-14). Everyone will have to make his or her own applications of this principle during that time and it may very well be that some measure of greater circumspection will be appropriate in some things (such as avoiding commercial venues where the lack of the mark will be an issue; cf. Is.26:20; Matt.10:17; Mk.13:9), while more boldness will be appropriate in others (such as visiting those who have been imprisoned for their faith: Matt.25:39; Heb.13:3; cf. Rev.2:10). The point is that, just as we should do today, during the Great Persecution we ought to be consulting our Lord and His Word of truth in prayer and in the power of the Spirit in order to know the right thing to do in trying circumstances, rather than consulting the world and our circumstances in it first and foremost, making God merely an afterthought.

[But in contrast to those who receive the mark of the beast and worship him], the saints have *perseverance*, [even] those who in this way (i.e., by refusing to receive the mark or worship the beast) *keep God's commandments and [retain] their faith in Jesus* (viz., even though it may cost them their lives).

Revelation 14:12

b. Don't fall asleep spiritually (Mk.13:32-37): Stay alert through continued spiritual growth and ministry. As we mentioned above, one of the most disturbing ironies of the Great Tribulation is that true believers in Christ will be persecuted as at no other time in history for being unwilling to accept this pseudo-Messiah. Therefore we should not underestimate the degree to which antichrist and his pseudo-Christianity will resemble the real thing at least on the surface, nor the degree to which the pressures to conform and join-in arising both from putative fellow “Christians” and also especially from friends and family will be persuasive (as they were in the case of Jewish believers in Israel during the first century: cf. Hebrews 10:23-39). For the comforting aspects of “belonging” to the pseudo-church of that day will be even more deadly to faith in truth than it was in the situation described throughout the book of Hebrews or than it is today (where what we are experiencing is in most cases

merely rank superficiality and lukewarmness to the truth of scripture rather than outright worship of the devil). Embracing apostasy out of pressure, even the extreme pressure of persecution, is the one sure way to put faith to death and thereby lose out on all the blessings of eternity so very close at any time, but especially during the waning days of the Tribulation (Heb.11:26; 11:37; cf. Rev.14:9-11).

c. Don't let your light of faith go out (Matt.25:1-13): Keep fighting the good fight of faith in spite of the many difficult challenges to faith that will arise during the Great Persecution. Holding onto faith will require the correct mental perspective informed by scripture regarding the true situation at that time. Even Moses became distraught at Pharaoh's lack of positive response amid the increased pressures on the children of Israel (Ex.5:22-23), but we have the advantage of hindsight so that we know from the Bible what the Lord's plan was all along. We know from scripture how it was that the Lord would work everything out for good in spite of repeated trouble and testing. And we know too, unfortunately, that the people continually failed to trust the Lord in spite of the many extraordinary miracles they witnessed. As believers who may experience the things to come, we need to remember this example (cf. 1Cor.10:1-13). We need to prepare ourselves, not with canned goods in the basement but with Bible truth in the heart, to endure what the Lord has told us about through scripture ahead of time, remembering not to take these terrible times and events personally, but rather to appreciate the inner workings of the overall plan of God upon these final events of history before the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁴²³ The believers of that time who do survive with faith intact will be those who were prepared to stand against their country (cf. Rev.18:4), family (cf. Matt.10:36; Jn.16:1-4), church (cf. Matt.), and economic well-being (Rev.13:17). For as bad as the Great Persecution will be from the very start, we may expect it to grow progressively worse before our Lord returns.

d. Don't value your life over your faith (Matt.16:24-27): Love the Lord with all your heart. Don't put physical things, even those essential for minimal survival, over the truly more important spiritual ones. If it comes to it, it is far better to lose one's life for His sake than to gain the world without Him at the price of forfeiting the eternal life that is in Him (Matt.10:37-39). The Tribulation in general and the Great Persecution in particular will be a refining process (Dan.11:35; cf. Dan.7:18-27), whereby the Lord will not only demonstrate who are truly His but will also glorify Himself through what those who prove faithful in this trial are willing to suffer for His Name. The entirety of human history is "God's threshing floor" (Matt.3:12), used by Him to demonstrate beyond any doubt what we really do choose, and how emphatically we choose it (the basis for rewards on the part of believers). At no time will this be more true than during the Great Persecution. If we really are thinking like God is thinking, instead of becoming disconsolate under the pressures, inconveniences, trials, tribulations, and loss of the Great Persecution, we will see beyond the veil that shrouds this life from the next and realize that the rewards we are earning through patient endurance and joyous acceptance of our Lord's will for us are not to be compared to any of the troubles we are presently suffering, even if they cost us a few short years of our physical lives, lives

which would be completely pointless in any case apart from our faith in and faithfulness to our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who died for us (Rom.8:18; 2Cor.4:17).

e. Don't be afraid (Lk.12:32-34): Let hope and joy rule your heart as you continue to look forward in eager anticipation to the glories of the Kingdom to come rather than focusing upon the miseries of the present. The beast and his father the devil along with all their followers can only kill the body, not the spirit (Matt.10:26-31), and can only do that if the Lord allows – our deaths are always precious in His sight and we can expect that to be doubly true during this unprecedented period of martyrdom (Ps.116:15). Given that as we have seen above the likelihood is for fully one half of those whose faith survives the Great Apostasy to perish in glory as martyrs for our Lord during the Great Persecution, our hope of eternal life and joy in our eternal reward ought always to temper any prospect of earthly survival in light of the very real possibility of martyrdom (cf. Zeph.2:3; Jer.45), ever making it our first priority to demonstrate faithfulness to the One who is ever faithful to us.

Therefore let all those who are suffering according to the will of God entrust their lives (while doing what is good) to a Creator who is faithful.

1st Peter 4:19

Demonstrate faithfulness unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.
Revelation 2:10b

In all of this, then, we need to keep in mind that the Tribulation is an essential part of the Plan of God and could never happen in the first place apart from His specific will (2Thes.2:6-8; Rev.5:1-5). That is true both on the worldwide level and in the case every individual believer, no matter what the Lord has in store for us personally. As we have seen in our comparison of the competing tribulational trends (see the chart in the introduction above), the Tribulation constitutes a key part of God's demonstration of Satan's complete evil and ultimate powerlessness on the one hand, and of His own righteousness and faithfulness on the other (with the Millennium which follows providing the ultimate counterpoint to a world ruled by the devil in contrast to a world ruled by God). The Tribulation thus has an important role to play in the overall Plan of God and in His refutation of Satan. For it will be seen more clearly than ever before during those final seven years that the devil is in no way “for” mankind as he seeks to destroy the world, while at the same time we will observe God's miraculous protection of a holy remnant in the world in spite of otherwise complete satanic control. And not only that, but the Tribulation will also demonstrate that in spite of the greatest pressures of human history, there will indeed be those who continue to remain faithful to the Lord, notwithstanding the incredible enticements of its first half (which is destined to sweep so many away in the Great Apostasy), and the unprecedented pressures of its second half (wherein half of the faithful will be subjected to martyrdom). In short, though we may be forced during those dark days ahead to “make hay without straw” for what

seems a never-ending stretch of time, we should recall that in the analogy of the days preceding the Exodus, Pharaoh, a type of antichrist, was really making the Lord the issue in this persecution (cf. Ex.5:17). Those abused during the Great Persecution will likewise and most assuredly be persecuted *because of Jesus Christ*, and this is at once the greatest compliment to a believer's faith and the greatest opportunity to demonstrate that faithfulness, separating for all the world to see the seed in good soil from that which fell upon the rock.

Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we persevere, we will also reign with Him. If we disown Him, He will also disown us; If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself.

2nd Timothy 2:11-13

1. The Martyrdom of the 144,000: Revelation 14:1-5

(1) And I looked, and behold, the Lamb stood upon Mount Zion, and with Him were the 144,000, having His Name and the Name of His Father written upon their foreheads. (2) And I heard a sound from heaven like a sound of many waters and a sound of thunder, and the sound which I heard was like that of lyre-players playing on their lyres. (3) And they (i.e., the 144,000) are singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders, and no one was able to learn the song except the 144,000 [singing] in unison, they who had been purchased from the earth. (4) These are they who have not fallen into sin with women (i.e., been seduced by them), as shown by the fact that they are virgins. These are they who were purchased first from among men for God [the Father] and for the Lamb. (5) And no lie was found in their mouths, as shown by the fact that they are blameless.

Revelation 14:1-5

The 144,000: The first martyrs of the Great Persecution will be, as seen above, the 144,000. Along with Moses and Elijah, these Jewish evangelists will be the most conspicuous believers in Jesus Christ, and for that reason alone an obvious first target of antichrist's unprecedented pogrom. This precedence in martyrdom is why they are described in verse four as having been "purchased *first* from among men". The worldwide proclamation of the gospel first prophesied in Mark 13:9 is the event we see actually taking place in Revelation 14:6 immediately following our present context. Therefore the experience of inquisition described in Mark 13:10 and following can be understood as having a special applicability to the 144,000. Following the beast's war upon Moses and Elijah, his cessation of the temple rites, and his pursuit of believing Jews into the desert, we may expect the Great Persecution to commence in earnest with the rounding up of the 144,000 worldwide and their subjection to a series of highly publicized "show trials" of the sort described in Mark and in the other gospels as a result

of which these evangelists will be publically and conspicuously put to death (e.g., Matt.10:5-42; 24:4-28; Lk.9:1-27; 10:1-24; 21:12-36).⁴²⁴ It is entirely conceivable that while the main body of martyrs will be too large to entertain such a possibility, that the 144,000 will indeed be transported to Israel and made to stand before the “abomination that causes [spiritual] desolation” on the temple mount in Jerusalem before being formally convicted and executed. It will thus be very important for them to keep the words given by our Lord firmly in mind throughout this ordeal (as well as for those called to follow later in their footsteps in similar or identical circumstances). This will be true in particular in regard to His command to leave their verbal defense to the Holy Spirit (Matt.10:17-20; Mk.13:9-11; Lk.12:11-12; 21:12). For, as suggested above, it is probable, in the absence of Moses and Elijah, now miraculously translated into heaven, that the beast and his false prophet will attempt to blame the 144,000 for all of the troubles that have befallen the world as a result of the trumpet judgments (for we have seen how Moses and Elijah actually administered some of these judgments as well as other judgments similar to them). And we may expect this justification to be extended later to the Great Persecution in general, with all believers being similarly made scapegoats for the judgment that has so far fallen upon the unbelieving world by way of warning (but which cannot be compared to the intensity of the bowl judgments soon to come as just divine retribution for the Great Persecution itself), as well as for the conspiratorial attempt to assassinate the beast. Since the 144,000 and all the martyrs will be slandered and wrongly held accountable in this way, it is all the more understandable why Jesus tells them to let God the Holy Spirit do the talking in defense – God's authority in Jesus Christ is the true issue here (cf. the Lord telling Samuel not to be upset at the people's request for a king since “It is Me they have rejected”: 1Sam.8:7-8).

In the verses translated here, Revelation 14:1-5, we see the 144,000 in their interim, pre-resurrection state, fresh from their martyrdom on the earth. That this is not a preview of the second advent as is sometimes supposed is made clear by the fact that 1) John hears the sound of their singing coming “from heaven” (v.2); 2) they are said to have been redeemed “from the earth” (which shows that they are not presently on it: v.3); and 3) the presence of heavenly objects and persons such as the throne of God, the four living creatures, and the angelic elders (v.3). Therefore the Mount Zion referred to in verse one is the heavenly Mount Zion rather than the earthly one (Heb.12:22-24; cf. Gal.4:14; Rev.3:12; 21:10). Indeed, we have already seen the presence on this heavenly Mount Zion of the temple and the ark of the covenant (Rev.11:19; cf. Rev.14:15-17; 15:5-8; 16:1; 16:17), whose mention is likewise in keeping with the clear counterpoint being given here of the true heavenly realities which contrast so sharply with the earthly desecration of the temple mount by antichrist. We see that same counterpoint, that same contrast, in the description of the 144,000 who, though just martyred under the most trying of circumstances, now stand before the Lamb in unimaginable bliss. Killing them has merely resulted in blessing beyond description.

We may also observe from this passage the principle that special service to the Lord never fails to produce exceptional rewards. This is certainly true of the 144,000 and should be of immense encouragement to everyone caught up in the Great Persecution

(not to mention personal tribulation at any time in history). For we see here three unique privileges bestowed upon these martyrs. First, we see them with Jesus in what can only be described here as close and intimate fellowship. Quoting Isaiah 8:18 (a passage which also mentions Mt. Zion), Hebrews 2:13 unequivocally ascribes to Christ the future assembly of all the “children” given to Him by the Father. This is the common blessed destiny of all who have put their faith in the Son of Man, but here we see the 144,000 enjoying a special preview of that eternal fellowship even before the resurrection and second advent (quite an exceptional honor). Second, the Holy Spirit seal they had received upon their foreheads in chapter seven now is legible as the Name of the Son and of the Father. All who have chosen for Jesus will receive “the Name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem (which is going to come down from heaven from My God), and My new Name” (Rev.3:12), but here we see the 144,000 enjoying this special preview of that eternal demonstration of being God's own unique possession (quite an exceptional comfort). Third, John also hears them singing a special hymn of praise before the throne (i.e., a “new song”).⁴²⁵ While we will all sing the praises of our Lord throughout all eternity (cf. Rev.5:13), here we see the 144,000 performing in unison⁴²⁶ this special song in a way in which no one else is able to duplicate, suggesting, rather than an inability to learn the words (which are recorded here for us even now), that they are all given some special musical talent to render this unique song (quite an exceptional blessing). It should be noted in passing that the 144,000 do not have “harps” or “lyres”. The Greek adverb *hos* merely tells us that their vocal ability to perform this melody is such that it can only be described by John as if they were using instruments.

Finally, some explanation is required of the statements regarding the “virginity” and “blamelessness” of the 144,000. We have already had occasion to show in part 2B of this series how that these men were indeed all virgins, a special sacrifice undertaken in order to carry out their unique ministries (cf. “eunuchs for the Kingdom of God”: Matt.19:13), but, clearly, no human being has ever been sinless, apart from our Lord

[Jesus] said this indicating by what sort of death (i.e., one of martyrdom analogous to our Lord's) [it was that Peter] would *glorify God*. And having said this, He says to him, “Follow me!”
John 21:19

2. The Three Angelic Proclamations: Revelation 14:6-13

Prior to the commencement of the seven punitive “bowl judgments”, God in His great mercy will give the unbelieving world one final chance to turn from its evil, and towards Him and salvation through Jesus Christ instead. This final series of warnings will be heard worldwide through angelic proclamation, a true indication of the gracious and forgiving character of our God (cf. Is.18:3). First, the “eternal gospel” is given with a

warning appended to “fear God” because “the hour of His judgment has come”. Then, a second angel warns of the coming destruction of Babylon, the mightiest and wealthiest of the nations of the world. Lastly, a third angel spells out in great detail the terrors that await those who persist in worshiping the beast instead of the one true God. The stubborn refusal of the vast majority of the world's population in the face of the bowl judgments to come can be seen at Revelation 15:9 and 15:11, as a “hardness of the gentiles” comes to replace the “hardness in part” of Israel (Rom.11:25) in these the waning days of the times of the gentiles (Lk.21:24; cf. Rev.11:2), a reversal of roles to the pre-Church status quo already having been witnessed on the positive side with the reestablishment of Jewish leadership through the ministries of Moses and Elijah, and the 144,000.

a. The Way of Salvation Proclaimed: Revelation 14:6-7

(6) And I saw an angel flying in mid-heaven, [one who] had an eternal message of good news (i.e., “gospel”): “Give the good news to those dwelling on the earth, even to every nation and every tribe and every language and every people (7) [and do so] in a loud voice, [telling them to] ‘Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come, and worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and the fountains of water’”.⁴²⁷
Revelation 14:6-7

Immediately following the martyrdom of the 144,000 who had carried the gospel message to the four corners of the world (albeit primarily to Jews), we now have the final evangelistic effort of the Tribulation, the last chance for the unbelieving world to turn from evil and respond to the truth, one which was prophesied by our Lord Himself as presaging the coming of the end:

And this good news (i.e., “gospel”) of the kingdom shall be proclaimed in all the inhabited world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.
Matthew 24:14 (cf. Mk.13:10)

From this point forward, for those who choose to reject this good news and harden their hearts beyond any possible future repentance there will be only spiritual darkness (Jn.9:4 cf. Is.21:12), until the Light of the world Himself returns. It is important to point that the order to give the good news comes from this angel but that it is not he alone who carries out the command. We must assume that this is a high ranking angel, and, while scripture is not specific, the fact that there are seven angels mentioned in this context (i.e., Rev.14:6; 14:8; 14:9; 14:14 [an angel representing our Lord]; 14:15; 14:17; 14:18), strongly suggests that these are the archangels (a supposition which certainly is in keeping here with the issuing of a command that will take a very large complement of

other angels to fulfill).⁴²⁸ The gospel message recorded here is very similar to the essence of the message given by our Lord during the initial days of His earthly ministry: “Repent, because the kingdom of heaven is near” (Matt.4:17). Then as now and at that future time, the first order of business is to get the attention of the unbelieving world by fixing their gaze upon God (i.e., the need to fear Him and the nearness of the kingdom respectively), and then to respond with a basic change of attitude (“repent” and “worship” respectively). In our Lord's day, He Himself was the one giving the message, so that the issue of Jesus was a personal one. In this passage, we should not fail to note that as the person of the Trinity responsible for physically creating the world (as well as maintaining it: Jn.1:3; 1:10; 1Cor.8:6; Col.1:16; Heb.1:2), Jesus Himself, the Giver of life, is the One “who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and the fountains of water”, necessities for basic human life as even the most calloused unbeliever would have to admit. Hearing loudly and clearly and in their own language the essentials of the good news, words of life which, if followed with a mustard seed size grain of faith will lead to life, the world of that time will have even less excuse than that of today for their failure to repent and turn to Jesus Christ for eternal life (cf. Rom.10:13).

(22) Turn to me and be saved, every[one from the] ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is no other. (23) By Myself I have sworn. From my mouth a righteous word has gone forth which will not be revoked, that every knee will bow to Me, and to Me every tongue will swear. (24) And so they will acknowledge Me: “Only in the Lord are righteousness and might.” Before Him will come all who raged against Him and they will be put to shame.
Isaiah 45:23-24

b. The Coming Judgment on Babylon Proclaimed: Revelation 14:8

And yet a second [angel] followed, saying, “Babylon the Great has fallen! For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the [divine] wrath [to come on account] of her prostitution”.
Revelation 14:8

The fall of Babylon, vividly described in chapters 17-18 of Revelation, will be covered in detail in part 5, the next installment of this series. It is sufficient to mention here that this next warning, also heard worldwide and the second in a series of three, is intended to warn the world of the imminent destruction of Babylon, antichrist's original home country (see part 3B, section II.1.c, “Antichrist's national origin”). While all unbelievers who live in Babylon at this time would be wise to respond to this warning, those who live elsewhere would also be wise to take heed themselves in the face of God's humbling of the mightiest of the nations of the world. For believers who have suffered the most at

Babylon's hands during the Great Persecution (see section VII.9 above), the impending judgment against her is also meant as an encouragement, for they will soon see just recompense weighed out upon her in full measure. For the Lord will soon give Babylon to drink of His wrath (Rev.16:19; 18:3; cf. Rev.14:10; 14:19; 15:1; 15:7; 16:1; 19:15). The asyndeton between the two sentences in this proclamation shows that divine judgment upon Babylon is coming about as a direct result of the corrupting influence (“prostitution”) which she has exercised upon the nations of the world.⁴²⁹ As we have already seen, one of Babylon's chief outrages is her nurturing and sponsoring of antichrist's religion (inherently intertwined with his evil politico-economic system; cf. Jer.50:38-39), along with the Great Persecution which that religion has spawned and is administering (see section VII.9 above). Given the intensity and worldwide nature of this pogrom aimed at all believers, and the fact that the Great Persecution is the dominant theme throughout this entire section of Revelation (i.e., Revelation verses 13:11-18; 14:1-5; 14:9-13; 14:14-16; 15:1-8 are all focused upon that event either directly or indirectly), we can be sure that the divine “wrath” in which the nations of the earth are said to be about to share is forthcoming primarily because of their participation in the persecution of believers sponsored by Babylon. For in very short order the entire world, not just Babylon, will begin to pay a severe price for their treatment of the Body of Christ (cf. Rev.14:10; 14:19; 15:1; 15:7; 16:1; 19:15).

c. The Need for Fortitude in Persecution Proclaimed: Revelation 14:9-13

(9) And yet a third angel followed them, saying in a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives [his] mark upon his forehead or upon his hand, (10) he himself will also drink from the wine of God's wrath which has been mixed undiluted in the cup of His anger. And [that person] will be tormented in fire and sulfur before angels, [and] saints,⁴³⁰ and before the Lamb. (11) And the smoke of their torment will go up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night, those who worship the beast and his image and whoever takes the mark of his name." (12) [But] the saints have perseverance, [even] those who in this way (i.e., by refusing the mark and worship of the beast) keep God's commandments and [retain] their faith in Jesus. (13) And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on so that they may rest from their labors", says the Spirit. "For their deeds follow with them."

Revelation 14:9-13

The third archangel's proclamation (which will likewise be carried around the world by his subordinates) complements the second. While the first proclamation served the purpose of a final positive call to turn to God, the second and third proclamations serve to demonstrate the alternative to repentance, with the second approaching things from the national point of view (i.e., the impending fate of Babylon, the nation whose efforts

have made the Great Persecution possible) and with this third and final proclamation making the issue clear from the individual point of view (i.e., the imminent divine judgment about to fall upon everyone worldwide who has supported the Great Persecution through their participation in the beast's religion). Since everyone in the world will hear these proclamations, no one will be in a position to claim ignorance when at last they stand before the judgment seat of God. It is a sobering thought to consider the state of the unbelieving world at this time, for having witnessed God's powerful warning judgments of the Tribulation's first half, and now having heard with their own ears this series of admonitions about the impending punitive judgments to come, they nonetheless will refuse to turn away from following antichrist and his father the devil. And not even under the pressure of those final, terrible judgments will they deign to repent (Rev.16:9; 16:11). Indeed, instead of throwing themselves on the mercy of God, their reaction will be to curse Him (Rev.16:21). This reaction serves to demonstrate that, far from being arbitrary, the wrath of God upon these implacable rebels is not only entirely justified under the circumstances, but abundantly so, both because they have received numerous, clear divine warnings, and also because their intransigent attitude in the face of that wrath proves beyond any doubt that indeed their participation in the beast's religion makes them just as guilty as those most actively involved in directed the Great Persecution.

Torment in fire and sulfur: Rather than focusing upon the earthly (and for that reason short-lived) consequences of their choice of antichrist over the true Christ, this third archangel's warning places the eternal future of all proponents of the beast in the forefront. The everlasting state of those who reject God and His Son is most assuredly not, as some would wish to maintain, one of oblivion but rather one of eternal punishment. The torment in fire and sulfur described here is a reference to the lake of fire (Matt.25:41; Rev.19:20; 20:10; 20:15; 21:8; cf. Is.66:22-24; Mk.9:48), the final abode of all unbelievers following the last judgment which takes place not at the end of the Tribulation but at the end of the Millennium at the termination of pre-eternal human history (to be discussed in detail in part 6 of this series). These verses are quite explicit in saying that "if anyone worships the beast" (v.9), and "whoever takes the mark" (v.11) will suffer this horrendous, eternal damnation. Scripture thus puts the issue in unmistakable terms. Taking the step of becoming an active participant in antichrist's religion will constitute an irrevocable decision that leads inevitably to the lake of fire. This is not because of any deficiency in the grace or mercy of God, but rather because, with the consequences made so crystal clear through the preceding events of the Tribulation, the ministries of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000, the trumpet judgments, and not least these three universal proclamations, any and all who can, in spite of everything, make themselves turn away from the truth to such a degree that they embrace the worship of the devil and antichrist have, like the Pharaoh of the Exodus, hardened their hearts past the point of no return. Such eternal condemnation is thus self-willed and self-chosen in direct defiance of Christ's sacrifice, God's grace, God's mercy, and God's first, best will for their lives (Ezek.18:23; Matt.18:14; Jn.12:47; 1Tim.2:4; 2Pet.3:9). By their own free will, those who agree to worship the beast and take his mark have their names blotted out of the Lamb's book of life (see Matt.22:1-14

for the two categories where coming to the wedding banquet without proper attire represents the passive rejection of not having received the clean garment of God's righteousness through faith; cf. Dan.12:1; Rev.13:8; 14:9-11; 16:2; 17:8; 19:20; 20:4).

One further point needs to be addressed here. While the description in our context of the fate of those who take the mark of the beast is a preview of their ultimate state, it is also true that those who have worshiped the beast and allowed themselves to be so marked will not be allowed to enter the millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ. Sometimes called "the baptism of fire" (after the phrase used by John the baptist: Matt.3:11; Lk.3:16; cf. Mk.1:8), this post second advent event, to be covered in detail in the next installment of this series, is also often misunderstood. A fiery removal of unbelievers from the earth occurs both at the inception and at the conclusion of "the Day of the Lord" (cf. 2Kng.1:9-15).⁴³¹ What concerns us here, however, is not the final removal of unbelievers to face the last judgment, but the removing from the incipient millennial kingdom of those who have already willfully and irreversibly rejected its King, namely, all those who have taken the mark of the beast still alive following the battle of Armageddon (Rev.19:11-21; cf. Zech.14:12-13; Rev.14:17-20).

(10) For the ax has already been put to the trunk of the trees. Accordingly, every tree which does not produce good fruit is about to be cut down and thrown into fire. (11) Now I am baptizing you with water for the purpose of [your] repentance. But the One coming after me is more powerful than me and I am not worthy to carry His sandals. It is He who is the One who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. (12) His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will sweep clean His threshing floor, and will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Matthew 3:10-12

Comment: The trees that fail to produce good fruit are the unbelievers at the second advent who have the mark of the beast (as well as unbelievers at the end of the millennial kingdom who have failed to respond to the offer of salvation even under the reign of the Messiah). In the ancient world, before it was ground the useful part of a head of grain was separated from its accompanying chaff by repeatedly casting it up into the air so that the wind would catch the chaff and blow it away while the heavier grain came back down onto the central part of the threshing "floor", ideally a smooth, flat rock surface on a hilltop (where the wind could blow across it unimpeded). Once separated, the grain could be gathered, stored, and processed, while the chaff was good for nothing except for burning. The fire with which these beast worshiping unbelievers are to be "baptized" is said to be "unquenchable", so that this passage too looks forward to the lake of fire, the ultimate eternal end of all those who receive the mark.

(6) Since indeed it is just for God to repay with tribulation those who are subjecting you to tribulation, (7) and to give you who are being distressed relief along with us at the revelation of our Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels, (8) wreaking

vengeance in a flame of fire upon those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power.

2nd Thessalonians 1:6-9

Comment: As in Matthew 3:10-12, “that day” is the Day of the Lord (and the prophecy is thus applicable both to its inception and termination). Further, the specific description of the eternal state of these unbelievers is said to be “away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power” (v.9), indicating clearly that while their last judgment will indeed take place in His presence (cf. “*before* angels, [and] saints, and before the Lamb” in Rev.14:10 above), the lake of fire itself will be far removed from the blessed new heavens and new earth which the righteous will inhabit in glory with the Lord forever.

(15) For behold, the Lord will come with fire, and His chariots will be like a whirlwind, to bring down His wrath in anger and His rebuke in flames of fire. (16) For with fire the Lord is going to execute judgment – and with His sword – upon all flesh, and many will be those slain by the Lord. (17) Those who sanctify and purify themselves for the gardens following the lead of the one [characterized] by violence, eating the flesh of swine, and of whatever is an abomination, and of rats will be swept away together (i.e., at the Second Advent), says the Lord.

Isaiah 66:15-17

Comment: Here we see the Lord's glorious second advent return (v.15) and the dual destruction by means of sword (i.e., at the battle of Armageddon: Rev.19:21), and by fire of unbelievers who oppose Him. That the fiery destruction is the baptism of fire directed towards all who have taken the mark can be seen from verse 17 where the description of abominable cult activity refers to those who worship the beast and take part in his religion's foul rites and activities, including the Great Persecution (i.e., “[characterized] by violence”).

And I will place a sign among them, and I will send survivors from among them to the nations, to Tarshish, and Put, and Lud, those who draw the bow, Tubhal, and Yavan, the islands far away who have not heard my Name, and have not seen my Glory. Thus will they proclaim my Glory among the nations.

Isaiah 66:19

Comment: The sending forth to the gentiles of evangelists from the Israelite survivors (i.e., those who are converted to Christ at His second advent: Zech.12:10-14; Rev.1:7; cf. Rom.11:25-27), shows that there will be survivors among the gentiles as well, unbelievers who did not take the mark of the beast nor worship him despite the

pressures of the Great Tribulation (cf. Is.2:2-3).

I will bring you from the nations and gather you from the countries where you have been scattered – with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with outpoured wrath. I will bring you into the desert of the nations and there, face to face, I will execute judgment upon you. As I judged your fathers in the desert in the land of Egypt, so I will judge you, declares the Sovereign Lord. I will take note of you as you pass under my rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. I will purge you of those who revolt and rebel against me. Although I will bring them out of the land where they are living, yet they will not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord. Ezekiel 20:34-38 NIV (cf. Jer.31:2)

Comment: The basis for the distinction between those who enter the land and those who do not after the regathering that follows the second advent is most likely also the presence of the mark of the beast. For those who are excluded as they “pass under the rod” are referred to as “those who revolt and rebel against me”, and there is no greater rebellion against the Lord than accepting the irrevocable mark of Satan worship. Here too, therefore, we see even among Israel those who will be expunged from the Messiah's kingdom during the baptism of fire. Jews, if anything, will have less of an excuse for taking the mark than gentiles, given the strict contrast of this abominable procedure to the specific teachings of the Mosaic Law (e.g., Deut.11:18).

At that time, Michael the great prince (i.e., archangel) will take his stand [in your defense], [even] he who stands [in defense] over the sons of your people. For [that time] (i.e., the Great Tribulation) shall be a time of distress such as has never occurred since people first existed [on the earth] until that time. But during that time your people will escape, [that is,] everyone who[se name] is found written in the book [of life] (i.e., present and future believers).
Daniel 12:1

Comment: As we saw in section VI.1 above, the book of life contains the names of every human being, and these names are blotted out of the book only through active or passive rejection of God's solution to the problem of sin and death, the person and work of our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In this verse we see everyone who has not *actively* rejected Jesus through taking the mark and worshiping the beast admitted into the millennial kingdom, either through resurrection (believers at the time of the second advent), or through exemption from the baptism of fire (through having refused the mark of the beast; Rev.13:8; 17:8b cf. Josh.6:25; Matt.25:37-40). This leads us also to suppose that taking the mark of the beast will be an informed and therefore an adult decision, suggesting that many of those who are spared the baptism of fire will be

children who have not yet been officially enlisted into the beast's religion (cf. Is.2:2-3; 66:17).

The combination of those killed on account of the harsh conditions of the Tribulation, the trumpet and bowl judgments, Armageddon, and the baptism of fire shows the truth of the predictions that the Lord will make mankind “as rare as gold of Ophir” (Is.13:12), and that “unless those days had been shortened, no flesh would have survived” (Mk.13:20). As it is, believers will enter the new millennial kingdom of the Messiah in resurrection, rising to meet our Lord on His return, and those who survive until the coming of the King will not precede those who die as martyrs and witnesses for Him (1Thes.4:15-17). Herein lies the greatest tragic irony of the baptism of fire related in our context: while the unbelieving world had given themselves up to the beast in order to save their lives, they will only have guaranteed themselves a fiery end, while the believers who were willing to lose their lives rather than do so, will have gained eternal life (Matt.10:39; 16:25; Mk.8:35; Lk.9:24; 17:33). The believers did not set their hearts on the lust, and rust, and dust of this world, on the wealth that cannot be taken beyond this world, but have taken their works with them (Rev.14:13), and have gained rewards that are eternal (1Pet.1:3-9; cf. Ps.49). This is the holy perspective upon which the perseverance necessary during those trying days to come must be based (Rev.14:12).

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on so that they may rest from their labors", says the Spirit. "For their deeds follow with them."

Revelation 14:13

3. The Harvest of the Martyrs: Revelation 14:14-16

(14) And, behold, a white cloud. And sitting on the white cloud was what looked like a man with a golden crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. (15) And another angel came out of His temple, shouting in a loud voice to the one sitting on the cloud, “Send [forth] your sickle and reap, because the hour of the harvest has come, and the harvest [crop] is ripe” (lit., “dry”). (16) And the one sitting on the cloud set his sickle to the earth, and the earth was harvested.

Revelation 14:14-16

This is the first of three allegories whose purpose it is to provide graphic previews of what is yet to come, all related in one way or another to the Tribulation's eponymous event, the Great Persecution. In Revelation 14:14-16, we have the harvest of the martyrs, a description of the Great Persecution from the heavenly perspective as it relates to those who give up their lives for Jesus Christ. In Revelation 14:17-20, we have the vintage of the persecutors, a description of the grim end at the battle of Armageddon about to befall those who have supported the beast and enabled this

persecution. Finally, Revelation 15:1-8 gives us a description of the triumph amid suffering of all believers persevering through the Great Persecution (verses 2-4), enclosed by the real-time heavenly preparations for the preliminary divine answer to Satan's and antichrist's horrendous abuse of the saints, namely, the punitive "bowl judgments" which precede and portend the even more emphatic and decisive divine judgments of the second advent and the baptism of fire.

The harvest metaphor, often used in scripture to describe gracious divine selection (e.g., Is.17:5-8; 27:12; Matt.9:37-38; 13:39; Mk.4:26-29; Lk.10:2; Jn.4:35), here depicts as ready for reaping the believers who are being martyred in the Great Persecution. They have fulfilled their purpose for the Lord on earth, and are now being removed by Him at just the proper time, the time of His perfect choosing. Thus we should remember in our concern for these believers and for ourselves as we contemplate this possibility in our own lives that things really are not as the world sees them. Antichrist and his father the devil will delight in the holocaust of believers, but God is working everything out for good, taking home to glory those whom He ordained for this in eternity past in a manner that brings special glory to the One they love, the One who died for them on Calvary. The death of every saint has always been precious to the Lord (Ps.116:15), but that the martyrdom of these tribulational believers constitutes a special case can be seen from the extraordinary symbolism employed here. In the verses above, the archangel who symbolically harvests the martyrs from the earth, is made to represent our Lord Jesus Christ as can be seen from his human rather than angelic appearance, the golden crown upon his head, and the cloud upon which he sits (since this foreshadows Jesus' return: Dan.7:13; Matt.24:30; Mk.13:26; 14:62; 1Thes.4:17; Rev.1:7). The crown here is not the kingly crown or *diadema* (cf. Rev.19:12), but instead the victor's crown or *stephanos*, the same word used for the crown of life promised to believers who are "faithful unto death" in Revelation 2:10, and thus a symbol of the great reward that will fall to the lot of those who die in this way.⁴³² What we have here is thus a blessed and special allegory for all who may face martyrdom during the Great Persecution, designed to demonstrate to us in advance how precious in particular the deaths of these martyrs will be to the Lord Jesus, and how personally and intimately concerned He will be with gathering them in at just the proper time and in just the proper way.

4. The Vintage of the Persecutors: Revelation 14:17-20

(17) Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. (18) And another angel came out from before the altar, [the one] having authority over the fire (i.e., of judgment), and he shouted in a loud voice to the [angel] with the sharp sickle, saying "Send forth your sharp sickle and gather up the clusters of the earth's vineyard, because its bunches [of grapes] are ripe". (19) And the angel cast forth his sickle onto the earth, and he gathered up the vintage of the earth and threw [it] into the great winepress of God's wrath. (20) And the winepress was trodden down outside of the city. And blood from the winepress went forth up to the horses' bridles

for a distance of twelve hundred stadia (i.e., approx. 143 miles).
Revelation 14:17-20

In Revelation 19:15 we similarly see our Lord “trampling down the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty”, making it clear that the passage above is a preview of Armageddon, with the “blood” of the grapes representing the literal blood or death of those who oppose Him, spattered on His robes in the slaughter of that great day (Rev.19:13; cf. Is.63:1-6 with Gen.49:11). While the harvest is a positive metaphor of ingathering, the symbolism of the vintage and the “blood of the grape” is always concerned with divine judgment (e.g., Jer.25:30-31).

Send forth the sickle for the harvest is ripe! Come down into the winepress for it is full and the vats overflow. For great is their wickedness. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of doom! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of doom.
Joel 3:13-14

The city mentioned in Revelation 14:20 above is Jerusalem, the focal point of the battle of Armageddon, and the distance of 143 miles (not 190-200 miles as many versions have it following a lesser manuscript tradition) is the approximate extent of the inhabited portion of the state of Israel from the northern border to the central Negev. This indicates that while Jerusalem will be the gravamen of the campaign, our Lord's destruction of the armies of antichrist will surge like a flood throughout the entire land of Israel. The fact that the first angel of this pair has “authority over the fire” is also an indication of coming judgment and presages the baptism of fire which will remove from the earth those who while they may not have taken part in the invasion of Israel nevertheless have supported antichrist and taken his mark. The altar, as we have seen before, is the altar of incense, and was used previously in Revelation to show that the prayers of the saints during these difficult times are indeed being answered (Rev.8:3-5). We therefore see in this second allegory the encouraging fulfillment of the ultimate deliverance for which all believers on earth during this time have been fervently praying for so long.

5. The Vindication of the Martyrs: Revelation 15:1-8

(1) And I saw another sign in heaven, great and wondrous, seven angels with the seven final plagues, [final], because with them the wrath of God shall have been brought to a full end. (2) And I saw [something] like a sea of glass, [but this time it was] mixed with fire, and those who were [in the process of] winning the victory over the beast and his image and over the number of his name were standing on the sea of glass holding lyres

of the Lord God, (3) and they were singing the song of Moses the servant of God, even the song of the Lamb, saying,

“Great and wondrous are your deeds, O Lord God, the Almighty!

Just and true are your ways, O King of the ages!

(4) Who shall not fear you, Lord, and give glory to your Name?

For You alone are holy.

For all the nations will come and worship before you.

For [these] judgments shall have been made manifest before You”.

(5) And after this I looked and the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. (6) And the seven angels with the seven plagues came out of the temple dressed in linen, shiny and clean, and with golden belts tied around their waists. (7) And [one] of the four living creatures (i.e., a cherub) gave the seven angels [seven] golden bowls, filled up with the wrath of God who lives for ever and ever. Amen. (8) And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter into the temple [again] until the seven plagues of the seven angels had been completed.

Revelation 15:1-8

Here we have a real time depiction of the suffering of believers in the crucible of the Great Tribulation and the divine response in the preparation of the final seven plagues of wrath, judgment, and vindication (of the believers). These last seven plagues, do, as verse one declares, complete the wrath of God since the seventh plague is synonymous with the series of judgments that precede and include Armageddon and the second advent, wherein Satan, antichrist, the false prophet, and all those who have aided and abetted them in their evil deeds are removed from the earth (cf. Rev.16:17ff.). John's description of these events as a vision of a great and wondrous sign shows that, as was the case in the last two passages, what we are dealing with here is allegorical in part. John saw a similar “sign” (i.e., of the dragon) at Revelation 12:1-3, but that sign was “great” in the sense of being terrible, for it portended and portrayed the beginning of the Great Persecution, while this sign is not only truly “great” but also “wondrous”, for it portends and portrays God's mighty deliverance of those being persecuted. The seven angels who administer these final plagues of wrath, judgment, and vindication are the archangels, the same seven angels who were depicted in the previous two allegories of the harvest of believers and the vintage of the wicked (i.e., they are described here as “*the*” seven angels: Rev.15:7). Their rank is indicated in part by the similarity of their dress to that of the Messiah (likewise girt with a golden sash: cf. Rev.1:13). Additionally, they receive their orders directly from one of the cherubim, the highest ranking of the angelic orders.⁴³³ The charge with which they are here entrusted is so dramatic that after they have received their commissions we see the heavenly tabernacle, God's temple in heaven, filled with smoke, a sign that God Himself has now taken over active and decisive control of events, and that nothing will now stay His purpose until His saints are vindicated and rescued, and judgment paid out to His

enemies. No one will be able to enter into His presence until these final plagues are carried out (cf. Ex.40:34–35; 1Kng.8:10-11; Ezek.10:3-5; Is.6:4).

The Song of Moses: The song of Moses is a song of deliverance (Ex.15:1-18), of salvation and vindication from the hands of unbelieving persecutors, from Pharaoh (a type of antichrist as we have seen) and the Egyptians in the historical analogy, and from antichrist and those with his mark in our context. Moses' song celebrated God and His delivering of the children of Israel both from the point of view of His glorious power and goodness in doing so, and also from the point of view of their miraculous deliverance and appreciation for it. Such is the case in the passage above. There is a critical difference, however, which is often misunderstood because of a misreading and mistranslation of the text. As pointed out above (in section VII.2, “Key Passages” dealing with the Great Persecution), this is a portrayal of believers who are still alive on earth and suffering in the crucible of the Great Persecution, for the glassy sea is heaven's “looking glass” into events transpiring on the earth.⁴³⁴ Therefore the depiction of these believers as standing on the sea tells us clearly that they are still on the earth at this point. The fire represents the fiery trial of persecution they are currently enduring and demonstrates their need of immediate deliverance.⁴³⁵ So here we see these heroic believers enduring, persevering, and anticipating the deliverance to come while yet in the midst of the crucible – Moses and the Israelites praised God for deliverance through the sea; these believers are still in the midst of the fiery sea (cf. Daniel's three friends fellowshiping with the Lord while yet in the fiery furnace: Dan.3:25), and praise Him for what He is about to do for them, humbling the nations and delivering them from the grasp of antichrist. For them, this is just as certain as if it had indeed already happened. Here is true proof of faith and faithfulness, when with the eyes of faith we can look beyond the sorrows, the terrors, and the hardships of the here and now into the glorious future, though veiled from our earthly eyes, and glory in our Lord's sure deliverance even before the fact.

These all died [while still walking] in faith, though they had not received the [fulfillment of their] promises. But [while they lived] they did catch sight of [these promises] from a distance and saluted them, [so to speak], thus making it plain [to all the world] that they were [in effect] strangers and sojourners on the earth. For people who express [their faith] in this way make it quite evident that they are eagerly in search of a homeland [other than the world they now pass through]. Indeed, if these [believers'] hearts had yearned for the [land] from which they had departed, they would have had [ample] opportunity to turn back. But they were zealous for a better place, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God. He has, in fact, prepared a city for them.

Hebrews 11:13-16o

That city is the New Jerusalem, and these tribulational believers, singing God's praises in the midst of the most intense persecution in history, surely belong to the number of

those of whom our God is not ashamed. May we be worthy of that number, and prepared to behave with equal courage in the difficult and trying days ahead.

"And there will be signs in the sun and the moon and the stars, and on the earth there will be [great] distress among the nations [who will be greatly] bewildered by the roaring of the sea and [its massive] waves, [and] men will lose heart out of fear and expectation of what is about to come upon the inhabited world. For the luminaries of the heavens will be [powerfully] shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and much glory. *When these things begin to happen, stand up and raise up your heads, because your redemption is near.*" Then He told them a parable. "Look at the fig tree and all its leaves. When they have already come out [like this], you can see for yourselves by examining it that summer is near. So also when you see that all things have come to pass, know that the Kingdom of God is near."

Luke 21:25-31

The Coming Tribulation: A History of the Apocalypse

Part 5

Armageddon and the Second Advent: Revelation 16:1 - 19:21

by Dr. Robert D. Luginbill

Introduction: From the point of view of believers, the overarching event of the Tribulation's second half has been the Great Persecution and the martyrdom it has entailed as our adversary the devil through his son the beast has been attempting to eliminate faith and the faithful from the earth entirely. Had this evil process and the regime of antichrist been allowed to continue uninterrupted for much longer, not only would it have meant an end to the remnant of faith upon the earth, but it is also the case that "no flesh would have survived". It is precisely "for the sake of the elect" that our Lord has "shortened the days" (Mk.13:20). Beginning with the bowl judgments in the Tribulation's final year, God's direct and powerful intervention into human events will complicate Satan and the beast's control of the world, leading inexorably and ineluctably to our Lord Jesus Christ's return in judgment and glory at Armageddon, and granting believers a measure of respite in the process. For those who have survived until this point, the message is clear: "Be strong! Don't be afraid! Behold! Your God will come, as an Avenger. [Your] God will come, as a Rewarder. He will come, and He will deliver you." (Is.35:4b).

(25) "And there will be signs in the sun and the moon and the stars, and on the earth there will be [great] distress among the nations [who will be greatly] bewildered by the roaring of the sea and [its massive] waves, (26)

[and] men will lose heart out of fear and expectation of what is about to come upon the inhabited world. For the luminaries of the heavens will be [powerfully] shaken. (27) And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and much glory. (28) *When these things begin to happen, stand up and raise up your heads, because your redemption is near.* (29) Then He told them a parable. “Look at the fig tree and all its leaves. (30) When they have already come out [like this], you can see for yourselves by examining it that summer is near. (31) So also when you see that all things have come to pass, know that the Kingdom of God is near.”
Luke 21:25-31

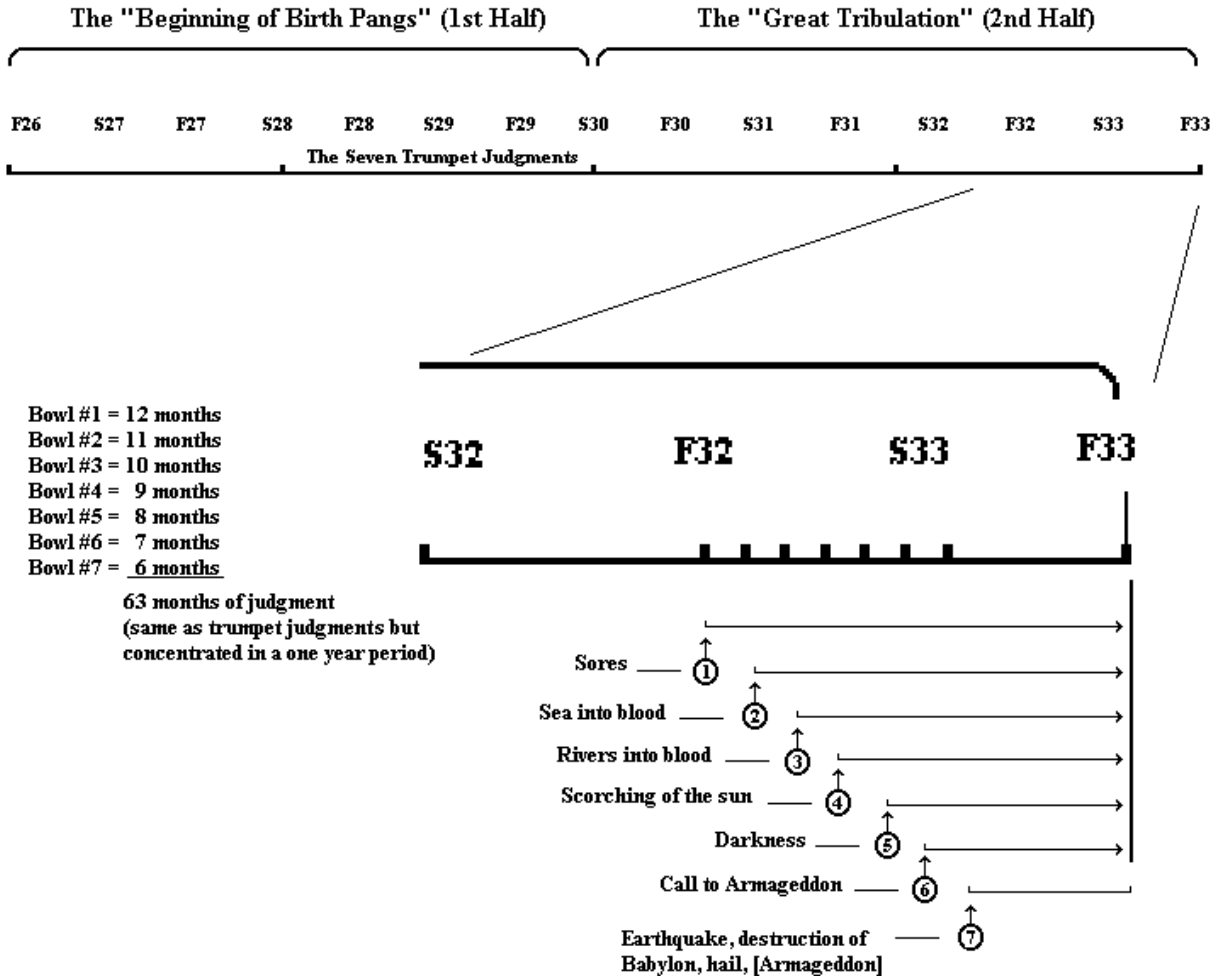
I. The Bowl Judgments: Revelation 16:1-21

As to the precise placement of the bowl judgments in the chronology of the Great Tribulation, scripture provides a number of clues which give us the ability to project a plausible time-line for their occurrence. As is made clear throughout chapter sixteen, the exact terminus for the bowl judgments is Armageddon and the Second Advent (see esp. Rev.16:16-17), since both of these events and the build-up to them are part and parcel of bowls six and seven. Further, the start-point for these seven judgments must occur at some point during the Tribulation's final three and a half years (obviously, in that, along with everything else which follows Revelation 11:15-19 and precedes Christ's return in chapter 19, they are part of the seventh trumpet which represents the Great Tribulation). So although there is clearly a relationship (and many obvious parallels) between the seven judgments of warning and the seven judgments of punishment, at first glance it may seem impossible for the bowls to parallel the trumpets in terms of raw time since the total number of months of warning comprised by the trumpet judgments is 63 (when the 42 months of the seventh trumpet, the Great Tribulation, are included in the count). On the other hand, the termini provided by the start and stop points of the Great Tribulation can provide us with only 42 months at most. In actuality, of course, the linear total has to be far fewer than 42, since a good deal of time must be allowed at the beginning of the Great Tribulation for the Great Persecution (for it is to this offence that the bowls constitute a divine response; cf. Rev.16:5-7). The correct solution lies in positing an *overlap* in the effects of the bowl judgments (i.e., a continuation of the effects of each judgment even as the next in sequence begins, with the effects of all seven continuing until Christ's return). In this way it is possible to telescope these seven in a manner that will both yield a total of 63 total (partially overlapping) months of judgment parallel to the 63 (sequential) months of warning represented by the Trumpet Judgments, while at the same time allowing the Bowl Judgments to fit into the Great Tribulation's second half in a reasonable and workable way.

The Seven Bowl Judgments

Revelation 15:1 - 16:21

— The Tribulation —



The above schema is certainly in keeping with the rising crescendo of punishment designed to be unbearable in contrast to the sequential and (relatively) endurable hardships of the warning judgments. Bowls six and seven, which comprise the entire Armageddon campaign along with all of the other events which precede the Second Advent, form the anchor for this system. Since, as we have already seen, Armageddon and our Lord's return occur in the fall (as symbolized by the Day of Atonement),⁴³⁶ and since the events of bowls six and seven will almost certainly require the bulk of the preceding summer and spring (the summoning and transporting of the beast's armies to Israel from throughout the world being a particularly time-consuming logistical task), the positing of six and seven months for the seventh and six bowl judgments respectively fits the evidence. This schema also has in its favor the fact that the

supplying of a further month for each additional bowl judgment working backward (i.e., totals of 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and, finally, 12 months for each bowl judgment from the seventh to the first respectively) yields the desired total of 63 months reckoned in overlapping total, yet manages to do so in only 12 months of overall, linear chronological time (as can be seen from the diagram above).

This modeling of the likely chronology of the bowl judgments also has in its favor: 1) It allows for the fact that just as the seven trumpets constituted a build up to the Great Tribulation, so the seven bowls constitute a rising crescendo of judgment in anticipation of the return of our Lord and His judgment of the beast, the devil, and all their minions at the battle of Armageddon. 2) It allows for the fact that, inasmuch as these judgments are in no small part the divine response the Great Persecution (chap.14-15 plus 16:5-7; cf. Is.35:4; Rev.19:15), sufficient time must first pass for that persecution to take place before the bowl judgments begin (and, as we have seen, the persecution is allowed to take its course for quite some time). 3) It allows for the bowl judgments to fit into the gap between the Great Persecution and Armageddon (and it is difficult to see how this could extend much past the suggested chronology of the Tribulation's final year). 4) It allows for the time required for all of the armies of the world to gather for Armageddon, the subject of the fifth and sixth bowl judgments, with this assembly taking place during the spring and summer of the final tribulational year, and with Armageddon itself taking place in the fall (i.e., lining up with the Day of Atonement), as well as allowing for sufficient time for the prophesied war between the beast's invading forces and Israel. 5) It allows for sufficient time for the other events which are prophesied to take place in this final year or so, including the plunging of the beast's kingdom into darkness (the event that dislodges him temporarily from Jerusalem), the revolt of Babylon and Israel, the destruction and pillaging of Babylon, and the invasion of Israel preparatory to Armageddon.

For the Lord has a day of vengeance, even *a year of retribution* for Zion's cause.⁴³⁷
Isaiah 34:8 (cf. Is.63:4)

Although the overall length of time for this punitive period of judgment is only 12 months from beginning to end, we are not to draw from this fact the notion that the bowl judgments will for that reason be less intense. Quite the contrary. Such an idea is easily refuted by the nature and effect of this second set of judgments as should be obvious even from a cursory reading of Revelation chapter sixteen. Moreover it is also the case that, in contrast to the trumpet judgments which are sequential and non-overlapping, the effects of each bowl judgment continue from their inception right down to the end of the Tribulation at the battle of Armageddon and the Second Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. This build up of “blow upon unrelenting blow” is characteristic of the pattern of divine punishment where the objects of God's wrath have emphatically and categorically rejected His mercy (cf. Deut.28:16-68; 1Thes.1:10). Thus the manner in which these final seven judgments are administered reflects their punitive nature (in contrast to the monitory nature of the trumpet judgments; see Rev.15:1; 15:8; 16:1).

1. Sores (1-2)

(1) And I heard a loud voice from the [heavenly] temple saying to the seven angels, “Go and pour out upon the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God”. (2) And the first [angel] went out and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and dreadful and terrible sores arose upon the people who had the mark of the beast and upon those who were worshiping his image.

Revelation 16:1-2

Bowls: The Greek *phiale* (φιάλη), equivalent to the Latin *patera* (the diminutive of which is *patella*), is a large, deep saucer (about the size of a medium deep-dish pizza pan). This deep-dish plate was commonly used in antiquity for libations so that it had a general sacrificial use. It was chosen for libations instead of what might seem to us more practical utensils such as true bowls, cups or jars no doubt because of its suitability for dispersing the liquid libation in a way so as to maximize the emission of fragrance, the visibility of the outpouring, and the area moistened. So in our analogy here, the widespread and tangible nature of the judgment produced is the picture we are meant to receive through the use of this particular ceremonial device: the consequences of the bowl judgments will be even more emphatic and wide-ranging than was the case with the trumpet judgments.

The Seven Angels: The number seven suggests that, as in the case of the trumpet judgments, the archangels are once again in charge of administering this series of judgments.⁴³⁸ As with the blowing of the trumpets, the pouring out of the bowls is the command to begin. Upon receiving this command, we may understand that the large number of elect angelic angels under each archangel's command will then be responsible for carrying out the particulars of each judgment. One additional important difference between the trumpet and the bowl judgments is that while in the case of the former each angel received individual, sequential orders to blow his trumpet, here we see *all seven* archangels commanded at the same time to “pour out upon the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God” (a fact which further argues for the overlapping duration of the bowl judgments as explained above).

Sores: Beyond the physical pain involved, afflictions of the skin are particularly psychologically wearing because they are at once difficult to put out of mind and at the same time obvious to others. When given the opportunity to attack Job physically, the devil, a shrewd judge of human nature, chose to smite Job “with painful sores from head to foot” no doubt as much because of the anticipated effect upon his morale as anything else (Job 2:4-8). The sores in question here, recalling the “boils” that afflict the Egyptians during the sixth Exodus plague (Ex.9:8-12), “arise” upon the followers of the beast immediately after the first bowl is poured out, and we can take heart that the scripture here names them as the recipients, thereby indicating that believers will be exempt (as in the case of many of the effects of the trumpet judgments as we have seen; cf. Ex.15:26). The sores themselves are described as “dreadful and terrible”. The Greek words here are generic (*kakos*/κακός and *poneros*/πονηρός respectively), with the former most likely referring to their ugly appearance and the latter to their unpleasant

quality. Suffice it to say that they will serve as a constant reminder to everyone who worships the beast of God's displeasure, right up until point of our Lord's return in glory.

2. Sea Turned to Blood (3)

And the second [angel] poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like the blood of a dead [person], and every living thing in contact with the sea died.

Revelation 16:3

This second bowl judgment also represents a clear intensification over the similar second trumpet judgment wherein only a third of the creatures in the sea perish as a result of a third of the sea being turned into blood (Rev.8:8-9). Human fatalities are also to be understood here as well (cf. Rev.8:9b), since it is not only “everything *in the sea*” which perishes but everything (and everyone) “in contact” with the sea at the instant this judgment comes down. As with the sores which appear on all of the beast's followers so this plague upon the earth's seas is deliberately reminiscent of the plagues upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians in response to his persecution of the Israelites (compare Ex.9:8-12 with Ex.7:14-24). And just as Pharaoh and his armies were destroyed soon after the end of that cycle of judgment, so it will be with antichrist and his hordes when our Lord annihilates them at the battle of Armageddon. But until that time, this judgment of blood and the deprivation of the sea as a source of food will, like the sores of the first bowl judgment, continue to weigh heavily upon the anti-God population of the world until that blessed end comes to pass. Finally it should be noted that in all three instances the blood in question is literal blood, making the reality of the divine source of this judgment impossible to refute – except by hearts that have been hardened past the point of any return to reality or repentance (the universal state of affairs for antichrist and his followers). Therefore here we clearly see God's power and righteousness underscored by this judgment: in spite of undeniable proof of its evil, the world nevertheless stubbornly refuses to repent.

3. Waters Turned to Blood (4-7)

(4) And the third [angel] poured out his bowl onto the rivers and the springs of waters, and it (i.e., all fresh water) become blood. (5) Then I heard the angel of the waters (i.e., the third angel) saying,

Revelation 16:4-7

Just as the previous bowl judgment affected all bodies of salt water on the earth, so this third judgment will affect all bodies of fresh water. Just as the Israelites were protected during the similar cursing of the river Nile (cf. Ex.7:18 and 7:21: “the *Egyptians* will not be/were not able to drink the water”), so we may expect that believers still alive at this time will be provided some respite. For although the method and manner of the relief for those who have not succumbed to the worship of the beast are not specified here, it is very clear from the verses above that the punishment involved here is specifically

directed at antichrist's followers (and verse 5b applies this principle to *all seven* of the bowl judgments). Water, lest we forget, is symbolic of the life-giving truth of the Word of God (Ex.17:5-6; Is.8:6; 55:1; Ps.33:4-5; 36:8-9; 68:26; Jn.3:5; 4:14; 7:37-38; 1Cor.10:4; Eph.5:26; Heb.10:22; Rev.22:17). The appropriateness of this judgment, therefore, whereby the world's fresh water is turned into a symbol of judgment not fit to drink should be very clear. For just as the worshipers of the beast have rejected the sweet water of truth and spilled the blood of those who love it instead, so their access to the fresh water which symbolizes that truth has now been taken away and replaced with undrinkable blood. A word should be said here about the justice of God. Despite what might seem to be terrible and unthinkable judgments falling upon countless people the world around, the third angel is given here to sing a hymn praising God precisely for the *justice* of what He is doing in holding the world to account for its evil in following and worshiping the beast and thus facilitating the massive persecution of the true Church, believers in Jesus Christ. Indeed, in verse six, it is "the inhabitants of the earth" who are charged with spilling the blood the "saints and prophets". Even though the moral ambiguity which reigns in our day would no doubt find great fault in the destruction of all sea-life, the pollution of all fresh water, and the severe smiting of so many people with painful sores, God is completely "justified in rendering these judgments". They are pure, and good, and righteous according to the angel's hymn, and this evaluation is seconded by none other than the Son of Man Himself who died on behalf of all mankind on the altar of the cross (a sacrifice now memorialized by the heavenly altar of incense represented here), our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: "Yes, [O] Lord, God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments."

4. Scorching Heat (8-9)

(8) And the fourth angel poured out his bowl onto the sun. And it was given to it to burn men with [its] fire. (9) And men were burned with a great scorching, and they blasphemed the Name of God, the One who holds the authority over these plagues, but they did not repent [so as] to give Him glory.
Revelation 16:7-8

As with the sores of the first judgment, this plague also affects primarily the skin (a place of visible and intensive suffering as we have pointed out above) of those who worship the beast, and with even greater apparent immediacy and intensity than was the case in the plague of the sores. The type of scorching described in these verses and the fact that it affects the entire unbelieving world argues for the effects of this plague being supernaturally present regardless of precautions men may seek to take. Just as the frogs, flies, gnats and locusts of the Exodus plagues made their way into the innermost places of the houses of the Egyptians (and they were incapable of preventing it), so it seems that these burns will be impossible for the followers of antichrist to avoid altogether (cf. Ex.8:3; 8:17; 8:21; 10:6). On the other hand, here too we anticipate our Lord's divine protection for those who remain faithful to Jesus (1Thes.1:10):

The Lord is the One who guards you. The Lord is your shade, at your right hand. By day the sun will not strike you down, nor will the moon [do so] by night.

Psalm 121:5-6

By the time of this fourth bowl judgment we might expect the cumulative effect and build-up of the cursing – the sores and the oceanic devastation and the undrinkable fresh water and now this scorching heat – to have finally broken the will to resist among the followers of antichrist. For, one would think that all of these events, pressing down with such force and effect at the same time, would leave no doubt as to the insanity of opposing the God who made heaven and earth and who holds our very lives in His hands. But instead of giving in to this truth, instead of crying “uncle!” and acknowledging the obvious fact of His superiority, instead of repenting and giving Him the glory due His Name, those who worship the beast actually have the temerity to blaspheme that holy Name in the face of such inexorable judgments! No stronger evidence can be found in scripture for the blindness brought on by the hardening of the heart through the embrace of evil, except perhaps for the example of Pharaoh.⁴³⁹ And it is in fact Pharaoh that we are meant to recall, who, in his similar blind arrogance, so inexplicably and defiantly continued to oppose the God of heaven in the face of similarly irresistible plagues (Ex.9:16). But just as his implacable resistance only served to further the plan of God – both by demonstrating His power and also by proving beyond all question the solidity, depth and irreversibility of his arrogant disposition – so now this curse directed to God, at once so impotent and so horrific, only serves to show that no amount of mercy or judgment could ever be sufficient to sway the followers of the beast from their evil ways. This incredibly arrogant behavior is in stark contrast to that of a previous world ruler, the “head of gold” himself, Nebuchadnezzar, who when personally confronted with the awe-inspiring power of God, humbled himself in response to the Lord's discipline (Dan.4:28-36):

Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

Daniel 4:37 NIV

5. Darkness (10-11)

(10) And the fifth [angel] poured out his bowl onto the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became darkened, and [the inhabitants] were chewing their tongues because of the suffering [this caused them]. (11) And they blasphemed the God of heaven on account of their sufferings, but they did not repent.

Revelation 16:10-11

Darkness is one of the most significant of all divine judgments (e.g., Ex.10:21-23; 14:20; Is.8:22; Matt.8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk.16:24; 2Pet.2:4; 2:17; Jude 1:6; 1:13), for God is light, and there is no darkness in Him (1Jn.1:5-7; cf. Jn.1:3-9). Response to the light, God's truth, is thus the universal litmus test of true creature character. Therefore, as in His turning off of the universal lights in response to Satan's rebellion (Gen.1:2),⁴⁴⁰ God

has always used this judgment of darkness to show in a very graphic and tangible way not only His power but also the true character of those judged: antichrist and his most ardent core of followers are given the darkness they truly love and have unquestionably merited by their entirely blind and light-less conduct (cf. Gen.19:11; Deut.28:28-29; 2Kng.6:18ff.; Acts 13:11).

And this is the [basis for] judgment: the Light (i.e., Jesus Christ) has come into the world, yet men loved the darkness more than the Light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who commits detestable practices hates the Light and does not come to the Light, lest his deeds be exposed [for what they really are]. But everyone who acts in accordance with the truth comes to the Light so that it becomes obvious that his deeds have been done in God (i.e., in accordance with God's will).

John 3:19-21

As was the case with the darkness occasioned by the fourth trumpet judgment (Rev.8:12), it will be impossible for contemporaries to rationalize away this casting of the beast's kingdom (comprising roughly a fourth part of the earth) into what is being described here as at the very least near total darkness. But again, although the power of God is unquestionably being made manifest in this judgment, and although the pain and suffering this judgment brings ought to provoke a response of humility and repentance,⁴⁴¹ in the completely hardened hearts of the worshipers of antichrist it will provoke instead only impotent blasphemy against the One who made and sustains the very heavens and earth (cf. Jer.6:27-30; Ezek.22:17-19). In this respect too then, this bowl judgment at least foreshadows the supernatural darkness that will occur just prior to the Second Advent, the time when the beast and his followers will finally be destroyed for so enthusiastically serving the darkness rather than the light (Is.13:9-13; 34:4; 60:1-3; Ezek.32:7-10; Joel 2:2, 2:10, 2:31; 3:15; Zeph.1:15-18; Zech.14:6-8; Matt.24:29; Mk.13:24-25; Acts 2:17-21; Rev.6:12-13).⁴⁴²

That the darkness mentioned here affects only “the kingdom of the beast” is extremely significant. It will be remembered that the fourth trumpet judgment, while seemingly less intense in that it reduced the emission of light from the sun, moon and stars by a third whereas here the darkness is described in absolute terms, was nevertheless the first judgment wherein the entire earth was adversely affected. By contrast here we see the darkness, while total in the area directly stricken, only said to affect that one particular area, namely the “throne” and “kingdom” of the beast. By this point in the Tribulation, it is true that antichrist will exercise some degree of control over the entire world, enough, for example, to orchestrate the Great Persecution in all quarters of the globe. But in the precise terminology used here, “throne” and “kingdom”, something less than the entire world is meant. Specifically, Revelation 16:10 has to be referring to the original seven members of the ten nation confederacy (i.e., the European continent) which, following his seizure of Babylon, came to constitute the power base for the beast's worldwide dominion.

(40b) And [the beast] will invade the lands [of the southern alliance], and inundate [them] and sweep through [them], (41) and he will advance into the Beautiful land (i.e.,

Israel). Now many lands will fall before him, but these will escape from his control: Edom, and Moab, and the first [part of the territory] of the sons of Ammon. (42) And [antichrist] will extend his control over the lands (of the southern alliance), so that even the land of Egypt will not escape. (43) Thus [antichrist] will take control of all the repositories of gold and silver, even over all of Egypt's treasures, with Libya (i.e., representing North Africa) and Cush (i.e., Sudan-Ethiopia) following her [in submission]. (44) *But reports [coming] from the east and the north will disturb him,* with the result that he will depart [from Israel] in a great rage to destroy and to exterminate many. (45) Then [upon his return to Israel] he will pitch the tents of his [royal] pavilion between the seas (i.e., the Mediterranean and the Dead seas) near the mountain of the beauty of holiness (i.e., the temple mount in Jerusalem). But [in spite of this (i.e., his hopes for success in the battle of Armageddon)] he will come to his end, and no one will aid him [then].

Daniel 11:40b-45

As we have seen previously, verses 40b-43 above describes the beast's conquest of the southern confederacy and consolidation of his power during the Tribulation's second half. Then, in verse 44, we are given additional critical information about antichrist's subsequent conduct, specifically, his actions at the time of the fifth bowl judgment which we are presently studying. At that time, the beast will quit Jerusalem because of "reports" which will "disturb him". These "reports", furthermore, are said to emanate from "the east and the north". They will provoke him to "a great rage" and motivate him "to destroy and to exterminate many". The following context in verse 45, is a clear reference to the battle of Armageddon where the beast will meet his end at the hands of our victorious returning Lord. This means that antichrist's hasty departure from Jerusalem in verse 44 has to be sandwiched between the two, and in the description given seems to occur during the time period just prior to the Second Advent (as also in Zech.9:8, NASB: "him [i.e., antichrist] who passes by *and returns*"). There is thus much to recommend understanding the cause of these "reports" which so enrage the beast and cause him to abandon his new world headquarters in Jerusalem's temple for a wide-ranging and destructive punitive campaign as being the darkness of the fifth bowl judgment.⁴⁴³ For just as in Daniel 11:40-45 the departure lies between events taking place late in the Great Tribulation and the return of Christ, so in Revelation chapter 16 the fifth bowl judgment occurs just before the commencement of the Armageddon campaign (the sixth bowl judgment), and is likewise positioned late in the Great Tribulation (e.g., it follows the Great Persecution and the previous four bowl judgments). So in the same way that Babylon will be singled out during the seventh bowl judgment, here we see the earth's northern quadrant (essentially synonymous with antichrist's seven nation European confederacy, although for geographical reasons we can omit Israel in this case) being similarly singled out – not destroyed, as Babylon will be, but plunged into darkness. That this blacking out of the entire continent of Europe will be the cause of much political and social disruption should come as no surprise especially given the horrendous nature of antichrist's social and economic policies in particular (that is to say, there will unquestionably be many who will take advantage of this opportunity to rid themselves of his rule).⁴⁴⁴ The mention of the "east" here as also being a source of the disturbing reports is significant as well. The degree of control

enjoyed over the world's eastern hemisphere by antichrist at this time will be, as previously discussed, based upon an overall military, political, and economic dominance, and exercised in that quadrant largely through surrogates (i.e., “the kings of the east”), rather than being underpinned by large-scale military occupation (although the deployment of his substantial naval superiority in this endeavor is not to be ruled out). Therefore, though not suffering the judgment of darkness itself, the global disruption of command and control that this unprecedented event will produce can reasonably be expected to engender at the very least the rumblings of an increased degree of political independence in these eastern regimes. It is certainly in keeping with antichrist's character to react vigorously and ruthlessly to any perceived threats to his power and position, especially when they are so potentially serious as what we are contemplating here. In such circumstances, a campaign of terror designed to put down any hint of rebellion in the north and by example squelch all potential moves towards political independence in the east may be understood in phraseology of verse 44: i.e., antichrist's method in temporarily relinquishing Jerusalem “in a great rage” will be “to destroy and to exterminate many” in order to repair the breaches in his worldwide empire.

In Daniel 11:45 we see antichrist returned to Israel, and taking up positions with ominous intent *against* rather than in Jerusalem. As with verse 44, this description is again in complete harmony with what we find in Revelation chapter 16 where, shortly after the darkening of the north during the fifth bowl judgment, we find that the “kings of the east”, rather than entertaining rebellion, are now full-fledged participants in the anti-God Armageddon campaign (Rev.16:12). This development, and the mustering of the armies of the world to do battle with the soon to return Lord Jesus Christ (detailed in section VII below), is sufficient to show that antichrist's efforts to reestablish his authority in the north and east following the disruption of his control occasioned by the darkness will be entirely effective.

The Jewish Rebellion:

We saw in part 3B of this series in our treatment of antichrist's second campaign against the south, the campaign following which he takes up residence in the temple in Jerusalem, that Israel was said to be subject to “harsh treatment” at this time according to Balaam's prophecy (Num.24:23-24). Much of this “harsh treatment” is almost certainly a proleptic reference to the “rage” with which antichrist will return to Israel from Egypt following the failed attempt upon his person (Dan.11:30). Thus the bulk of the maltreat suffered in Israel at that time will be intimately connected with the beast's war upon Moses and Elijah and the 144,000, the scapegoats chosen by antichrist to atone for the unsuccessful attempt to assassinate him (Rev.11:7-13). We can also expect as a result of these developments, especially in light of the fact that the beast from this point forward takes up residence in Jerusalem, that personal freedom in Israel at this time will be even more limited than is the case in the rest of antichrist's empire. Conservative unbelievers and zealots, who resisted the message of Moses and Elijah but fell short of wholeheartedly embracing antichrist as God, will be extremely resentful of the beast's representation of himself as the Holy One of Israel. Indeed, as

suggested in part 3B, the source of the previous assassination attempt will most likely derive from these circles, and this “breaking of the [pseudo-Messianic] treaty” between himself and Israel during the middle of the Tribulation will be a major grounds for continuing unrest (Dan.9:27). But although political liberties may be nonexistent in Israel during the Great Tribulation, relative to much of the rest of the world she will be experiencing at least some measure of material prosperity thanks in no small part we may assume to the fact that Jerusalem has now become the capital of the world. Thus the resulting pilgrimages to the temple and the embassies connected with the Great Persecution on the one hand, and the likely desire of the beast to make “the place of his feet glorious” (as part of the pseudo-fulfillment of the messianic promises to which he lays claim: Is.60:13) will to some degree enrich Israel in material terms (cf. Ezek.38:7-16 where Israel appears as relatively prosperous before Armageddon), even though she will never know a time of greater spiritual abasement. Nevertheless, scripture does also indicate that even in the case of this relative material prosperity, the bulk of the population will be subject to extreme exploitation and mal-treatment at the hands of the beast's ruling class, notable among them being the “false shepherd”, one of the “ten kings” and Israel's ruler during this period (Zech.14:15-17). We can therefore easily understand how many elements within Jewish society at this time would find the supernatural darkening of antichrist's home kingdom and his departure from Israel with the greater portion of his military forces an ideal opportunity to throw off the beast's yoke once and for all, little understanding or appreciating that this very action will soon set in motion the Armageddon campaign as the beast summons all of the world's military forces to Israel in hopes of destroying her forever in retaliation for her unfaithfulness. This rebellion and the response it provokes thus fulfills the prophecies of wars and desolations destined to continue for her until our Lord returns (Dan.9:26; cf. Lk.21:9).

A word needs to be said here as well about the role in this rebellion of prophetic Babylon (i.e., the U.S., antichrist's original home country). Although it will be recalled that antichrist is Babylon's “king”, scripture also indicates that she will have a regent as well, no doubt managing her government while the beast is occupied overseas (as he will be for the bulk of the Tribulation).⁴⁴⁵ This would be the “regent” of Babylon as opposed to her true “king”, antichrist (contrast Ezek.28:2-10 referring to the former, with Ezek.28:12-19, which applies to the latter). We can well imagine that with the beast and the majority of his imperial guard disappearing into the darkness that enshrouds Europe at this time, it will not only be Israel and the eastern marches of the beast's empire who are entertaining thoughts of independence. Therefore a revolt centered upon antichrist's new capital is likely to bring a receptive response from all such quarters, and none will be more naturally sympathetic toward such a development than Babylon and her regent. For, it will be recalled from part 3B of this series, the emotional tie between Babylon and Israel did much to bring about the two campaigns that led to antichrist's world dominion in the first place. And as to the deputy ruler of Babylon, scripture indicates that in his arrogance he is very likely to see himself as the beast's natural successor, with the present crisis providing an opportunity to move that

succession forward in time beyond anything previously anticipated. But of course this thinking represents a miscalculation in the extreme.

(1) Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, (2) Son of man, say to the *prince*[-regent] of Tyre (i.e., as opposed to the “king” in v.12), “Thus says the Lord. Because your heart is lifted high [with pride], and because you say ‘I am a god [and] I occupy a position like God's in the heart of the seas’, but because you are a man and not a god, though you have indulged your heart [with divine prerogatives] as if it were God's heart . . . (3) behold, you are as wiser than Daniel! No hidden thing is concealed from you! (4) It is by your own wisdom and understanding that you have enriched yourself and piled up gold and silver in your storehouses! (5) It is by your own abundant wisdom, by your own trafficking, that you have multiplied your wealth! But [in fact] your heart has been lifted high [with pride] because of [that very] wealth of yours.’
Ezekiel 28:1-5

We see the regent of antichrist's home country Babylon described above as the “prince-regent of Tyre”, with Tyre being an alternative representation for the same prophetic future state stressing economic as opposed to military power (cf. Ezek.28:12ff. where the *king* of Tyre is a type of both antichrist and Satan). The unfaithfulness demonstrated by the beast's sub-ruler at this time will have much to do with motivating the destruction of Babylon soon hereafter.⁴⁴⁶

(46) And lest your heart grow faint and you become afraid at the report heard against the land (i.e., antichrist's decree against Israel in his call to Armageddon: Rev.16:12-16), in the year this report comes, after it will come another report in the same year; the one [will be] of violence against the land [of Israel], the other of a ruler (i.e., antichrist) *against a ruler* (i.e., the prince of Babylon). (47) For behold, in days to come I will render judgment on the idols of Babylon. Her entire land will be ashamed, and all of her slain will fall in her midst.
Jeremiah 51:46-47

Another representation for this deputy ruler is “Pharaoh” in those cases where Egypt and Pharaoh are being contrasted with Assyria and her king in prophetic contexts. In such situations, Assyria and her king represent revived Rome and her ruler antichrist, while Egypt and Pharaoh represent prophetic Babylon and antichrist's disobedient deputy respectively.⁴⁴⁷ Israel's reliance at this time upon prophetic Babylon, a pagan nation which only recently contributed mightily to her troubles, is eerily parallel to her reliance in the past upon literal Egypt. In both cases not only does such confidence prove to be entirely misplaced, but it also demonstrates the folly of Israel looking *anywhere* for help apart from the Lord who created her.

(1) Woe to [you] rebellious children, says the Lord, [who purpose] to carry out a plan (but it is not from Me) and to make an alliance (but My Spirit has not [led you to it]) in order to heap sin upon sin. (2) [You] who proceed to go down to Egypt (but have not asked My opinion), in order to seek protection from Pharaoh and to find shelter in the shade of Egypt. (3) But Pharaoh's protection will result [only] in shame, and sheltering

in Egypt's shade [only] in reproach. (4) Although [Israel's] officials appear in Zoan, and her ambassadors reach Hanes, (5) everyone [of them] will be put to shame on account of a people who can profit them nothing. (6) This will not result in help and it will not result in profit, but only in shame as well as reproach.

Isaiah 30:1-6

(1) Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, [who] rely upon horses and put their faith in chariots because they are numerous and in cavalry because it is strong, but who have not looked to the Holy One of Israel, and have not sought the Lord. (2) But He (i.e., the Lord) is shrewd too, and [knows how] to bring on disaster, and He does not turn aside His decrees. For He shall arise against [that] group of evildoers, even against the help of those who work iniquity (i.e., in having supported antichrist). (3) For the Egyptians are men and not gods, and their horses are flesh and not spirit. And it will come about that He will smite with His hand so that he who helps will stumble, and he who is being helped will fall, and both of them will come to a dire end.

Isaiah 31:1-3

Moreover, our eyes failed, looking in vain for help; from our towers we watched for a nation that could not save us.

Lamentations 4:17 NIV

(6b) [I shall destroy you in this way, O Pharaoh], because you have been a staff [made only] of reed for the house of Israel. (7) When they took hold of you, you splintered in their hands, and [so] you broke everyone's back [who leaned on you].

Ezekiel 29:6b-7

At this juncture, therefore, though there will be a renewed dialogue between antichrist's home country and insurrectionist forces within Israel for reasons of political expediency on both sides, and though this will serve to greatly encourage the rebel camp within Israel, whatever material support Babylon may give to this rebellion will all be for naught. For Babylon will be destroyed soon thereafter, while the rebellion itself will only furnish motivation and pretext for that destruction, as well as for the Armageddon campaign which follows in its wake.

(13) And I heard one of the holy ones who was speaking, and he said to the other holy one who was speaking, "How long will this vision of the daily sacrifice and of the [spiritual] rebellion (i.e., apostasy) which produces desolation and of the handing over of the holy [place] (i.e., the inner court) and of the trampling down of the host be?" (14) And he replied to me, "Until 2,300 evenings and mornings have passed. *Then the holy [place] will be purified.*"

Daniel 8:13-14

This passage in Daniel allows us to reconstruct the timing of the rebellion with great specificity. It will be recalled from the chart of the bowl judgments above, that the supernatural darkness which strikes the beast's kingdom of revived Rome will occur at the beginning of the eighth month preceding our Lord's return at the end of the Great

Tribulation. That is to say, the fifth bowl judgment occurs 1,020 days into the Great Tribulation and 240 days from its termination.⁴⁴⁸ The information in Daniel's prophecy above further assures us that the beast's pollution of the temple, begun it will be recalled at the Great Tribulation's outset, will last for 1,150 days (i.e., 1,150 evenings plus 1,150 mornings). This means that it will take just over four months (130 days) after the fifth bowl judgment begins for the Jewish rebels to re-occupy the Temple Mount and complete the requisite ritual purification of the holy place (a process which took the priests under Hezekiah half a month to complete: 2Chron.29:17). Thus the beast's departure from Israel, the formation (or coming out into the open) of an armed resistance, the capturing of the Temple Mount, its ritual purification, and antichrist's reaction in mounting the Armageddon campaign will all happen in rapid-fire succession as the pace of events accelerates toward the Tribulation's end. The re-conquest of the Temple mount will certainly not mean the end of armed struggle within the borders of Israel. Part of antichrist's modus operandi of rulership worldwide will be to cement his control through the use of "fortresses" (Dan.11:38-39), strong points manned by his loyalists as a hedge against just such attempts on his regime, and scripture indicates that the same will be true in Israel (Is.2:15; 25:12; 30:25; Zeph.1:16; 3:6; 3:15 [Hebrew only]). Once the rebellion begins, these strong-points will no doubt be occupied not only by the beast's residual garrison, but also by those Jews whose allegiance to antichrist has passed the point of no return (as, for example, the "king" of Israel: Zech.14:15-17). Given the progression of the Armageddon campaign (see section VII below), we can expect a number of these outposts to hold out until antichrist returns for Armageddon, and thus for the struggle to continue right up until our Lord's return (Dan.9:26), for it will be His Second Advent which destroys the beast and delivers Israel rather than this rash attempt at self-deliverance.

(6) Then [one of the two other angels] said to the man (i.e., the angel) clothed in linen who was [suspended] above the waters of the river, "How long [will it be] until the end of [these] astounding things?" (7) And I heard the man (i.e., the angel) clothed in linen who was [suspended] above the waters of the river. He raised his right hand and his left hand to heaven and he swore by Him who lives forever and ever that it would be a period [of time and] two periods [of time] and half [a period of time] (i.e., the three and one half years of the Great Tribulation), and that [just] when the power of the holy people was being completely crushed, [all] these things would come to their completion. Daniel 12:6-7

And after the sixty two weeks, Messiah will be cut off and have nothing (cf. Is.53:8), and the people of the prince who is coming (i.e., antichrist) will destroy both the city and the holy place. And his end will come with a flood (i.e., the "flooding away" of his armies at Armageddon), and *until that end there will be wars* – [appalling] devastation has been decreed. Daniel 9:26

6. Preparation for Armageddon (12-16)

(12) And the sixth [angel] poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water dried up in order that the way of the kings of the orient (lit., “sun's rising”) might be prepared. (13) And I saw [coming] out of the mouth of the false prophet three unclean spirits like [unto] frogs. (14) Now these are spirits of demons which produce “signs”: they will go forth to the kings of the entire earth to gather them together for the war of the great day of God the Almighty. (15) – Behold, He (i.e., our Lord Jesus) is coming like a thief. Happy is he who both stays awake and guards his clothing, in order that he may not walk about naked and [people] see his shame. – (16) And they (i.e., the demons) gathered them (i.e., the kings of the earth and their armies) together to a place called in Hebrew, “Armageddon”.

Revelation 16:12-16

The Kings of the East: It will be remembered that reports coming from both east and north had compelled antichrist to abandon temporarily his new world headquarters in Jerusalem in order to re-secure his base of power. Only the north, the “kingdom of the beast”, had been plunged into supernatural darkness, but the disruptions caused in that quadrant of the world produced rumblings of insurrection in the eastern quarter of the globe as well. Now, scarcely a month later, we see the situation entirely reversed. In characteristically “leopard-like” fashion (Rev.13:2), the beast's fierce and lightning-swift reaction to incipient rebellion in his own kingdom has not only restored complete control to the north, his current location, but has apparently so over-awed the “kings of the east” that they are now more than willing to offer him the use of their own massive if inferior military forces as a sign of their loyalty and obeisance (and no doubt with the intention of warding off a similar punitive strike aimed in their direction).

And the entire earth was in awe of the beast. And they worshiped the dragon because he had given his authority to the beast. And they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast? And who is able to make war with him?”.

Revelation 13:3-4

Thus, the rumblings of rebellion are rapidly and mercilessly squelched by antichrist and die out without so much as a whimper. Instead of their actions being cloaked by a worldwide insurrection to throw off the beast's yoke, the rebels within Israel now find themselves not only bereft of erstwhile allies (Babylon temporarily excepted), but have now become the primary target of the remaining military might of the entire world. For antichrist is now mustering every available battalion from the four corners of the earth. Previously in control of the south, and having regained control of the north, now we see even the forces of the east available to him. As this process begins to unfold, we now find ourselves some six or seven months away from the climax of the Armageddon campaign which culminates with our Lord's return at the Second Advent. Judging from the description of massive troop movements from the east, it appears that the beast, with time now on his side, will opt for a somewhat different strategy to crush Israel. Rather than striking immediately with limited forces, he will choose instead to gather all of the world's military forces in and around Israel for a final massive assault on Jerusalem with the intention of annihilating Israel stock and stem (and we can expect him to use every aspect of his considerable political and social control to bring

this campaign to pass in a spectacular way).⁴⁴⁹ Thus, even as the Jewish rebellion proceeds and consolidates around the newly reclaimed temple, antichrist's juggernaut will be gathering momentum even as it grows ever greater in size, assembling on the borders of Israel from every corner of the globe. Finally, as to Babylon, as suggested in the parallels to Egypt and Pharaoh and the historical disappointments they consistently dealt to Israel whenever she relied on them for support against northern invaders, the west, still under Babylon's nominal leadership, will provide no tangible help (for reasons to be covered in section II below), so that her previous encouragement will only have served to have emboldened secular Israel to take up this hopeless fight, hopeless, that is, without extreme divine intervention, a contingency upon which these rebels never planned.

The Sixth Bowl: The meaning of the drying up of the Euphrates is symbolic (cf. Is.11:15). As a purely geographical barrier, it presents no great obstacle, whether dry or at flood stage, to the passage of a massive modern army. But it did mark the traditional boundary between east and west, one which was rarely crossed in antiquity with any sort of effect. By “drying it up” we are meant to understand that all of the factors which have so far prevented or restrained involvement of “the east” from the seat of conflict in the Middle East have now been removed by divine intervention. It may seem somewhat odd that this sixth bowl judgment seemingly plays into antichrist's hands, removing all restraint on the previous reluctance of the kings of the east to participate in Middle-Eastern conflict. But just as the removal of Holy Spirit restraint worldwide was a necessary measure in order to allow “the book to be opened” and the Tribulation to begin,⁴⁵⁰ so the removal of the barrier to involvement by the kings of the east is a necessary measure to allow of the earthly forces of evil to assemble for the Great Day of Lord, the battle of Armageddon. This, then, is truly a judgment as well, because now the east too, the last quadrant of the world so far not directly involved in the military affairs of the Tribulation, will be drawn into the destruction about to rained down by our returning Lord Jesus Christ.

The Three Unclean Spirits: The first thing to notice from the translation provided above is what is *not* present in verse thirteen, namely, any reference to the dragon or the beast as origins of the three unclean spirits. The occurrence of the words “the dragon and the beast” are a latter addition not present in the best manuscript, and were added no doubt in an effort to match the three spirits with three sources. However, this non-scriptural supplement is, like all such improper additions, misleading. As we have seen, the false prophet is both the herald of the beast, disseminating his propaganda all over the world, as well as the one who performs the “false signs” in his name (Rev.13:11-17; cf. Matt.24:24; 2Thes.2:9-12).⁴⁵¹

And the beast was seized and the false prophet with him (*the one who had performed the signs before him with which he had deceived those who took the sign of the beast and worshiped his image*). The two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns

with sulphur.
Revelation 19:20

We find both of these elements present in the function of the three spirits in verse fourteen. For each of these “three spirits” are actually numerous demons going forth to assemble the world's armies for the final battle of the Tribulation at Jerusalem. The false identification of them with the so-called “un-holy trinity” merely obscures the true reason why these demon forces are split into three groups, namely, to rally the military forces of all three of the world's remaining quadrants to Armageddon (the fate of the fourth, the west represented by Babylon, will be discussed below). It is nonetheless true, of course, that the beast will lead this “crusade” against the chosen people of God and the devil is the ultimate force of will behind this event, and thus will it ever be with every assault upon the people faith until the evil one is once and for all removed from the world.

And when the thousand years were completed, Satan was released from his prison, and he came forth to *deceive the nations* which [reside] in *the four quadrants* (lit., “corners”) of the earth, Gog and Magog (whose number is as the sand of the sea) in order to marshal them together for war.
Revelation 20:7-8

The use of the comparison to frogs at Revelation 16:3, i.e., the statement that these three demon divisions [looked] *like* frogs, is another example (cf. “the woman”, “the beast” and “the dragon”) of John using very descriptive allegorical pictures to represent actual entities. As in all of the other cases where he employs this device, however, John under the Spirit's guidance also leaves us in no doubt whatsoever as to what these similes represent. “Frogs”, notoriously animals to be detested according to the Law of Moses (Lev.11:9-12) and reminiscent of the Egyptian plague (Ex.8:1-14), are an especially effective choice to bring home the repulsive nature of the task these demons are calling the world to undertake: the complete annihilation of the Jewish people.

Like a Thief: Verse fifteen is an interjection addressed to believers which interrupts the call to Armageddon in verse fourteen from the gathering together of the kings of the earth and their armies in verse sixteen. As mentioned above, there is the possibility that antichrist, consumed by this new purpose, namely, the utter destruction of Israel, will leave off for the moment his prosecution of the Great Persecution. Yet the interjection here in verse fifteen, the command to believers to “stay awake”, clearly demonstrates that these will continue to be most difficult times for all who remain alive and maintain their confession of Jesus Christ as Lord. Many believers (as we shall see below) will find themselves at this time within Israel, the very target of the beast's unprecedented and massive military mobilization of the entire world's armed forces. Within the broader and largely unbelieving community of Israel, the “emotional high” based upon the assumption that antichrist's hold on world power is beginning to crack will swiftly give way to panic as innumerable armies from the four corners of the globe begin to make their way toward Jerusalem.

Verse fifteen thus serves to remind believers of the folly and the danger of becoming caught up in either of these short-sighted emotional reactions. The only solution to the problems of this world is Jesus Christ. That has always been the case (Heb.13:8). And it will never be more important to remember this principle than in the waning days of the Great Tribulation. For the Second Advent will occur when no one thinks it possible or likely, when no one is expecting it as still even being a likely possibility, and when many have given up hope of thinking it might yet happen. Just when it is least expected, our Lord will return – like a thief in the night – past the point of when it seems there is any hope of deliverance, and yet extraordinarily out of nowhere with unbelievable power and glory!

Thus we are warned ahead of time and solemnly charged here to remember this truth and to make a point of not judging by what our eyes may see or our emotions may feel, but instead by what we know irrefutably to be true through the Word of God. We are to “stay awake” like the wise virgins of Matthew 25:1-13 (where sleep likewise represents the loss of faith by tribulational believers), not fall asleep in our faith. The consequences of falling asleep are said here to be the loss of our clothing. As in Revelation 3:18, the consequences of spiritual failure are the exposure of this “nakedness”, a very descriptive picture of the loss of everything we have worked so hard for by abandoning our faith. Tragic at any time, it would surely be a horrendous thing to have suffered through so much, only to lose faith in the whirling vortex of events that will characterize the Tribulation's final days. At that time, then, even more than at any other time, it will be crucial for believers to avoid looking to political solutions and fixing their gaze on earthly developments. Instead, then more than ever, we shall need to keep our hearts focused on the Lord and the divine solutions that only He can provide.⁴⁵²

Armageddon: Armageddon is the scene of the last battle of the Tribulation, the place where our Lord will destroy the massive armies of antichrist on the “great day of God the Almighty” just as they are on the point of destroying Israel and all who have recently sought shelter within her borders. Contrary to popular belief, Armageddon has nothing to do with “Megiddo”, an ancient city located in the north of what today is the state of Israel. Armageddon is, rather, a prophetic name for Jerusalem, the place where the unbelieving rebels and the saints recently escaped from Babylon make what appears to be their “last stand”.

The popular (and misinformed) association of Armageddon with Megiddo rests entirely upon the similarity in spelling between these two proper names. This is not an unreasonable place to begin a consideration of what scripture means by the name “Armageddon” (a word that occurs only here in Revelation 16:16), but further investigation will show that, while the perceived etymological connection is illusory, scripture leaves us in no doubt whatsoever about the fact that, just as we ought to have expected, it is at Jerusalem that the final battle of the Tribulation will occur (while, on the other hand, the Bible is entirely silent about Megiddo on this score; cf. Ps.2:1-6; Is.4:3; 22:1-14; 25:6-7; 31:9; 33:3-5; 33:10-22; 40:1-2; 40:9-10; 52:1-8; 60:1-3; 62:11; Joel 3:1-2; Zeph.3:14-17; Rom.11:26):

(1) Woe to you, Ariel, Ariel, the city where David encamped (i.e., Jerusalem)! Add year to year, let your festivals run their course, (2) but I will besiege Ariel so that there will be mourning and lamentation, and she will become to Me like an “Ariel” (lit., “God's [sacrificial] altar”). (3) For I will beleaguer you round about with palisades, and surround you with siege works. (4) You will be brought low and speak from the ground, and from the dust your speech will be humbled. Your voice will come ghost-like from the earth, and your speech will come muttering from the dust. (5) But the multitude of your enemies will become like pulverized powder, even like chaff swept away [on the wind], that multitude of ruthless [enemies]. And it will come to pass in an instant that (6) you will experience visitation from the Lord of Hosts [Himself], with thunder and quaking [of the earth] and a loud voice, with tempest and whirlwind and devouring flames of fire. (7) And the hordes of the nations mustering against Ariel will become like [just] a dream in the visions of the night, even all those who camp against her and her fortress and besiege her. (8) And it will be as when a hungry man dreams he is eating, but when he awakes his appetite remains unfulfilled, or as when a thirsty man dreams he is drinking, but when he awakes his thirst remains. This is how it will be for the multitude of all the nations who are going to marshal themselves against *Mount Zion*.
Isaiah 29:1-8

(9) Break forth [in song] and rejoice altogether, O ruins of *Jerusalem*! For the Lord has had compassion on His people. He has redeemed *Jerusalem*. (10) The Lord has uncovered His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God!
Isaiah 52:9-10

(18) As they have done, so He will repay them, wrath to His adversaries and recompense to His enemies. Even unto the islands (i.e., the remotest lands of the west) He will repay the recompense [due them], (19) so that they will fear the Name of the Lord in the west, and His glory from the rising of the sun (i.e., the east). For although the enemy (i.e., antichrist) will attack like the River (i.e., the great Nile or Euphrates; cf. Dan.11:22; 11:26), the Spirit of the Lord will put him to flight. (20) For the Redeemer will come to *Zion*, even to those in Jacob who turn away from their transgression.
Isaiah 59:18-20

(30) For I will display wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. (31) The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the Day of the Lord, that great and terrible [day]. (32) And it will come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. For on *Mount Zion and in Jerusalem* there will be deliverance as the Lord has said, even among the survivors whom the Lord calls.
Joel 2:30-32

(12) Let the nations be roused [from their places], and let them come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat (i.e., the valley of “the Lord will judge”). For there I will sit in judgment over all the nations on every side. (13) Send forth the sickle for the harvest is ripe! Come down into the winepress for it is full and the vats overflow. For great is their

wickedness. (14) Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of doom! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of doom. (15) The sun and moon will darken, and the stars will gather up their light. (16) Then the Lord will roar from *Zion*, and from *Jerusalem* He will let sound His voice, and the heavens and the earth will quake.

Joel 3:12-16

(15) For the day of the Lord is near against all the nations. Just as you have done, it will be done to you, and your recompense will return on your own head. (16) For just as you have drunk on My holy mountain, so all the nations will drink continually. They will drink and swallow down [the Lord's cup of wrath] and will be as if they never were. (17) But on *Mount Zion* there will be deliverance.

Obadiah 1:15-17a

(2) For behold, I am going to make *Jerusalem* a cup of reeling for all the nations round about. And Judah also and Jerusalem will be besieged. (3) And it will come to pass on that day that I will make *Jerusalem* a burdensome rock for all the nations. Everyone who tries to lift it will surely be injured. For against her (i.e., *Jerusalem*) will be gathered all the nations of the earth.

Zechariah 12:2-3

And it will come to pass on that day that I will make it My purpose to destroy all the nations which are attacking *Jerusalem*.

Zechariah 12:9

And this is the plague with which the Lord will smite all the peoples who marshal themselves against *Jerusalem*: Their flesh will rot even as they stand on their feet, and their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths.

Zechariah 14:12

Thus the precise place where our Lord was crucified and resurrected, and to which He is prophesied to return, is where this final battle of the Tribulation will take place (cf. Acts 1:11):

(1) The Lord said to My Lord, "Sit down at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." (2) From *Zion* the Lord will send forth your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies! (3) Your people will volunteer on the day of your valor[ous victory] (i.e., the armies of Israel). In the holy chambers, from the womb of the dawn, your young [troops] will [come] to you like the dew (i.e., the armies of the newly resurrected). (4) The Lord has sworn and He will not recant, "You are a priest forever in the manner of Melchizedek." (5) The Lord is at your right hand. He will shatter [those] kings on the day of His wrath. (6) He will render judgment on the nations. He will shatter [their] head (cf. Gen.3:15) broadly throughout the land filled with corpses [as a result]. (7) [But as to His troops], they will drink from a brook beside the way. Therefore He will lift up their head.

Psalms 110:1-7

Thus says the Lord: I will return to *Zion* and dwell in the midst of *Jerusalem*. And *Jerusalem* will be called "the City of Truth", and "the Mountain of the Lord, the Mountain of Holiness".

Zechariah 8:3

Rejoice greatly, daughter of *Zion*. Shout [for joy], daughter of *Jerusalem*. Behold, your King will come to you. Righteous and victorious He is; humble and riding on a donkey, even on a colt, a donkey's foal.

Zechariah 9:9

(2) For I shall gather all the nations to *Jerusalem* to fight against her. The city will be captured, its houses will be sacked, and its women will be ravished. (3) Half of the city will be taken away captive, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. Then the Lord will go forth, and He will fight against those nations as when He fights on a day of battle. (4) For His feet will stand on that day on the *Mount of Olives* which lies before *Jerusalem* on the east.

Zechariah 14:2-4a

And I looked, and behold, the Lamb stood upon Mount Zion, and with Him were the 144,000, having His Name and the Name of His Father written upon their foreheads. Revelation 14:1

And the winepress [of the slaughter of Armageddon] was trodden down outside of the city [of Jerusalem]. And blood from the winepress went forth up to the horses' bridles for a distance of twelve hundred stadia.

Revelation 14:20

Given the overwhelming testimony of scripture to the fact that Jerusalem will be the focal point of the final battle of the Tribulation, it is indeed strange that the misunderstanding of the name "Armageddon", a *hapax legomenon* occurring only here at Revelation 16:16, has had such a profound (and negative) influence on the true interpretation of these events. A few words about the true etymology of this word are, therefore, in order here. The first thing to notice is that the similarity between "Megiddo" and "Armageddon" is primarily one of correspondence between the Septuagint's most common transliteration of Megiddo (at e.g., Josh.12:21) and what we find here at Revelation 16:16 (i.e., Μαγεδών versus Ἀρμαγεδών). However, a number of other transliterations of Megiddo are attested in the LXX (i.e., Μεγεδδω, Μαγεδδων, Μαγεδδω, Μαγεδω, Μαγεδωρ, Μα κεδω, Μαγδω, Μαγεδαων, Μαγεδδωδ, Μακ εδδω, Μαγεδει), with this variety of renderings sufficient to show that at least some degree of care should be taken before seizing upon the Megiddo-Armageddon identification. In the preceding list, the first alternate transliteration given, Μεγεδδω, is, for our purposes here, the most interesting. For the Hebrew word for this place (מִגְדּוֹ, Megiddo), is really best reflected by this first rendering Μεγεδδω / *Megeddo*.⁴⁵³ Indeed, our English rendering of this place name, "Megiddo", is in fact a more accurate transliteration of the Hebrew than any of the Septuagint's attempts. Using this information then, it is easy to see the disparities between the two names: *Megiddo* versus *Har-Mageddon*. The pre-

formative “a” in the latter, its medial “e” versus the “i” of the first form, and the addition of the letter “n” at the end are not insignificant differences. Alone, they would invite us to seek a more plausible etymology for “Armageddon”, and this is especially the case since John under the Spirit's influence comments that this is “a place *called in Hebrew, ‘Armageddon’*”. Therefore it is to the Hebrew that we must look for our etymological clues, not to Greek transliterations in the LXX version.

Most interpreters agree that the *Har-* of Armageddon (the “h” sound present in the Greek being commonly if unfortunately left out in the traditional transliteration of this name) is the Hebrew word for “mountain” (and it should be noted in passing that the most common geographical feature that has recommended Megiddo to exegetes has been its extensive plain rather than any “mountain”). This leaves us to explore the second part of this compound place name, *-Mageddon*. First in this respect, it is best to take the *Ma* as a pre-formative *mem* used here in the locative sense, i.e., “Mountain-which-is-a-place of _____”. The use of the letter “m” as a prefix indicating “place of” to whatever root it is attached is a well-attested phenomenon in Semitic languages.⁴⁵⁴ This leaves us to derive *-geddon* from either the “double *ayin*” root *gdd* גדג, or the hollow root *gud* (גוד). The distinction is largely academic here, as both roots have the same essential meaning in BH: “attack, cut, go in troops or throngs”. Given that the most commonly attested substantive from either root, *ghedhudh* (גודוד), generally refers to military formations, the most likely meaning of Armageddon is “Mountain of Troops” or “Mountain of [mustering] Troops”. As such, it is a very clear reference to the assembly from the world over of all the forces of antichrist to Jerusalem. Here they will assemble, at Jerusalem called here prophetically and appropriately “the Mountain of [Assembly of] Troops”,⁴⁵⁵ As such, it is a very clear reference to the assembly from the world over of all the forces of antichrist to Jerusalem. Here they will assemble, at Jerusalem called here prophetically and appropriately “the Mountain of [Assembly of] Troops”, for here all of the beast's worldly armies will be annihilated by our Lord. Indeed, it is for this very purpose that they will be so assembled:

And it will be as when a hungry man dreams he is eating, but when he awakes his appetite remains unfulfilled, or as when a thirsty man dreams he is drinking, but when he awakes his thirst remains. This is how it will be for the multitude of all *the nations who are going to marshal themselves against Mount Zion*.
Isaiah 29:8

(2) For behold, I am going to make Jerusalem a cup of reeling for all the nations round about. And Judah also and Jerusalem will be besieged. (3) And it will come to pass on that day that I will make Jerusalem a burdensome rock for all the nations. Everyone who tries to lift it will surely be injured. *For against her will be gathered all the nations of the earth*.
Zechariah 12:2-3

And this is the plague with which the Lord will smite *all the peoples who marshal themselves against Jerusalem*: Their flesh will rot even as they stand on their feet, and

their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths.
Zechariah 14:12

Understood in this way, we can then see in Micah 5:1-5a the *locus classicus*, for “Armageddon”, that is, the passage which John under the guidance of the Spirit had in mind when coining this prophetic name. In Micah 5:1-5a, we see that this predominantly Second Advent passage also brings in testimony about our Lord's first advent, weaving the two events together in a wonderful, poetic way, a common phenomenon in Hebrew prophecy as we have seen⁴⁵⁶:

(1) But now marshal your [own] troops (<*gdd*, דָּגָל, O city (lit., “daughter”) of troops (<*gedhudh*, גִּדְדוּ) [which are marshaled against you]. For they have laid siege to us. For they have struck on the cheek with a rod the Judge of Israel. (2) But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, too small to be numbered among the clans of Judah, from you I will bring forth the One who is to rule over Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, even from the days of eternity. (3) For He will give them over [to the oppressor] until the time when [Jerusalem] labors [like] a woman in labor. At that time the rest of His brethren will return to the sons of Israel (i.e., prior to the Second Advent; see section II below). (4) For He (i.e., our Lord Jesus at His return) will arise and will be their Shepherd, in the might of the Lord, and in majesty of the Name of the Lord His God. And they (i.e., His flock) will abide, for then He will be great, even to the ends of the earth. (5) For this One will be our Peace.
Micah 5:1-5a

7. Earthquake and Hail (17-21)

(17) And when [the seventh angel] poured out his bowl upon the atmosphere, a loud voice issued forth out of the [heavens coming] from the throne [of God], saying “It is done!” (18) And there occurred thunderous voices and flashes of lightning and a great earthquake such as had not occurred since men came to be upon the earth – of such great magnitude was [this] earthquake. (19) And the great city (i.e., Jerusalem) was split into three parts. And the cities of the gentiles fell. And Babylon the great was remembered before God [so as] to give to her [the] cup of the wine of [God's] angry wrath (Jer.25:19-32; Ob.1:16; Zech.12:2-3; cf. Jer.51:7; 1Thes.1:10; Rev.17:4; 18:6). (20) And every island fled, and mountains could not be found. (21) Then great hail stones the size of a talent (i.e., approx. 80 lb.) were coming down out of heaven upon mankind, and they blasphemed God on account of the plague of hail, because that plague was very severe.

Revelation 16:17-21

“It is done!”: The seventh bowl comprises all of the final events of the Great Tribulation which culminate in our Lord's return and His destruction of the beast and his armies at Armageddon. Some of the items in this description, specifically, the thunderous voices (of God) and the flashes of lightning, the earthquake and the hail, we have seen before (Rev.4:5; 8:5; 11:19). All of the signs mentioned here presage the coming of the Lord. As with their parallel predecessors, these miraculous signs will be perceptible

around the globe and as yet unimaginably awesome to experience (as was the case in their previous occurrences).⁴⁵⁷ Moreover, their intensity will dramatically increase (cf. of the earthquake “such as had not occurred since men came to be upon the earth” and of the hail “the size of a talent”, both of which signs are covered individually below). The increased intensity here indicates that our Lord's coming is now imminent, even as the words “It is done!” are unquestionably meant to show. In fact, history since our Lord's ascension into heaven has been, from the divine perspective, a series of preparatory periods of intensifying warning telescoped into ever smaller windows of time: The Church Age (1000 years), whose last era is Laodicea (144 years), which culminates in the Tribulation (7 years), whose most intense phase is the Great Tribulation (three and a half years), which ends with the seventh bowl judgment (six months), which is itself concluded by the Second Advent proper (a unique, single day, the “Day of the Lord”: cf. Zech.14:1-7). For as with the signs which preceded the Lord's descent to Mount Sinai (Ex.19:16-20), these signs too are indications of the imminence of the awesome and terrifying presence of God Himself, soon to return to the earth in judgment.⁴⁵⁸ With the words “It is done!”, we have God's assurance that the Great Tribulation is now in its final phase.

The Earthquake: Earthquakes are prominent precursors of most of the ever shortening periods of warning that lead up to our Lord's return (Matt.24:7; Mk.13:8; Lk.21:11; cf. Amos 1:2 w/ 1:1; Hag.2:6-7; Heb.12:26-29), and, as this unprecedented temblor indicates, their intensity parallels the intensity of the period covered. For we find exceptional earthquakes characterizing and marking the commencement of . . . 1) the Church Age (lasting 2000 years: Matt.27:51; 27:54; 28:2; Acts 4:31; cf. Acts 2:1-2); [2] possibly the era of Laodicea (lasting 144 years)];⁴⁵⁹ 3) the Tribulation (lasting 7 years: Rev.8:5); 4) the Great Tribulation (lasting 3.5 years: Rev.11:13; 11:19); 5) this earthquake which accompanies the Seventh Bowl Judgment (and governs the period 6 months prior to the Second Advent: Rev.16:18-20); 6) the Second Advent proper (coincidental with the Day of the Lord's official commencement: Is.29:6; Ezek.38:19; Hab.3:6; cf. Zech.14:3-5; Rev.6:12); and finally, 7) the beginning of eternity (Hag.2:6-7; 2:20-21; 2Pet.3:10-13; Rev.6:12-17; 20:11). As is the case with many of the horrendous events destined to occur during the Tribulation, it is difficult to digest and appreciate the magnitude of this particular earthquake and the terror it will inspire when actually experienced (cf. Lk.21:25-31). Scripture clearly indicates that this earthquake will be unparalleled in human history and experience, and of such incomprehensible force that it will bring down “the cities of the gentiles”.

Although Babylon is often described as “the great city” (cf. Rev.14:8; 17:1; 17:5; 18:2; 18:10; 18:16; 18:18-19; 18:21; 19:2), her punishment is related in this context as the third event in the sequence of events which comprise the seventh bowl judgment (following the lightning and the earthquake). That punishment will be unique, and is detailed in Revelation 17:15 - 19:3 (covered in section II below). Jerusalem, antichrist's world capital of late, is the “great city” mentioned here (as she is described at Revelation 11:8 as well, also in the context of a great, local earthquake, #4 above: Rev.11:13). Having previously undergone an earthquake judgment earlier in the first half of the Tribulation (Rev.11:13), and with another major earthquake foretold to accompany the Second

Advent proper (Is.29:6; Ezek.38:19; cf. Zech.14:1-7; Rev.6:12), Jerusalem will at this time be physically split into three parts. It will be recalled that those Jews who responded to the ministry of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000 are at this time enjoying safe haven in the desert (see part 4 of this series, section IV “The Dragon's Persecution of Believing Israel”). This earthquake, among other things therefore, will be another sign to the as yet unbelieving population of Israel of the futility of seeking deliverance apart from God. For we can expect this mammoth quake to seriously disrupt all plans for resistance to the beast as he begins to muster his forces for Armageddon. The earthquake which splits Jerusalem into three parts will have two salutary effects, however: 1) while it will degrade the overall effectiveness of the Israeli armed forces, it will make Jerusalem herself more defensible (cf. the complications to the German offensive at Stalingrad caused by the great mass of industrial ruin and debris); and 2) the dislocation caused by the earthquake will result in opening up the way for an influx of refugees from Babylon (who might otherwise be denied entrance were the civil administration not reeling from this event; see section II.4 below).

Since as explained above the seventh bowl entails a series of divine judgments which begin six months prior to but culminate in the return of our Lord, we may expect little or no time between the last event described here, the plague of hail, and that return. On this point, the preceding words “every island fled, and mountains could not be found” must be applied to the next major earthquake which accompanies that return (i.e., #6 above, and not #5). This second earthquake in context, the “2nd Advent” quake, will be a gigantic one, with these words indicating that few geographical features will remain unaffected by its massive, global shockwaves. The world's islands and coast-lands will be swamped by the tsunami effect of this world-wide event, with its violent vibrations affecting all of the world's mountains as well, bringing many eminences crashing to earth as a result. This fourth event in the seventh bowl judgment is thus the same earthquake referred to in the description of the Second Advent given in the sixth seal (Rev.6:12-17), the same event often mentioned in prophecy as the harbinger of our Lord's return (Is.2:21; 24:18-20; 29:6; Ezek.38:19-20; Joel 3:16; Hag.2:6-7; 2:21; cf. Zech.14:1-7), with the “fleeing” of mountains, islands, earth and sky being a characteristic feature which accompanies the coming of the Lord to execute judgment (Rev.20:11; cf. 2Pet.3:10):

And I saw when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the sixth seal, a great earthquake occurred, and the sun became black like hairy sackcloth, and the moon became entirely like blood [in appearance], and the stars of heaven fell to the earth like a fig tree casting its fruit when shaken by a strong wind, and the heaven retreated like a scroll when it is rolled up, and *every mountain and hill was moved from its place*. And all the kings of the earth and the prominent men and the generals and the wealthy and the powerful and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and the rocks of the mountains. And [thus] they say to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of the One who sits upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, because the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand [before them]?”
Revelation 6:12-17

Hail: Large hailstones falling worldwide, it will be recalled, also accompanied the blowing of the seventh trumpet, the event which heralded the beginning of the Great Tribulation proper, also accompanied by “thunderous voices and flashes of lightning and an earthquake” (Rev.11:19). But just as the earthquake of the seventh bowl judgment is exponentially larger and incomparably more devastating than its predecessor, so this worldwide hailstorm will be without parallel in world history, surpassing both the seventh plague of the Exodus (9:13-35) and the hail rained down by the Lord upon the Canaanite kings at Gibeon (Josh.10:11) – not only in its ferocity, but also by virtue of the fact that it will not be localized as those two judgments were: everyone on earth will feel the fury of this divine judgment (believers excepted to some degree as always: cf. Is.26:20-21; 32:19-20).

Though we can scarcely imagine the terror produced or the damage caused by the raining down of hailstones some eighty pounds in weight, yet the most remarkable thing about this judgment will be the continued implacable hardness of heart on behalf of the worlds' unbelieving population. In spite of the massive earthquake, in spite of this massive hail, in spite of the warning voices, thunder and lightning, there is still not the slightest thought of repentance. Indeed, their only response is to blaspheme God. Surely in all this God has shown Himself to be just in all He has done – and in all He is about to do to this world of unrepentant and irremediable evil.

(5) For the earth has befouled itself at the hands of its inhabitants. For they have transgressed the teachings [of God]; they have altered [His] statute[s]; they have violated the eternal covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants are punished. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are incinerated, and little of mankind remains.

Isaiah 24:5-6

II. Judgment on Babylon: Revelation 17:1 - 19:4

1. Babylon, the Woman who Rides the Beast: Revelation 17:1-14

(1) Then one of the seven angels with the seven bowls spoke with me, saying, “Look! I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters, (2) [the one] with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication even as the inhabitants of the earth have become drunk from the wine of her fornication.” (3) And he took me off in the Spirit to a desert.⁴⁶⁰ And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was covered with blasphemous names,⁴⁶¹ [and which] had seven heads and ten crowns. (4) And the woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and was adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, [and was] holding a golden cup in her hand filled with abominations and [all] the unclean things of her prostitution and [the prostitution] of the earth (Jer.51:7; Rev.18:6; cf. Jer.25:19-32; Ob.1:16; Zech.12:2-3). (5) And on her forehead a name was written: “mystery Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the world”. (6) And I saw that the woman was drunk from the blood of the saints, even from the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw [this], I was greatly amazed. (7) And the angel said to me, “Why are you amazed? I will tell

you the mystery of the woman and the beast who is carrying her, the one who has the seven heads and the ten crowns. (8) The beast, which you saw, was (i.e., “existed”), and is not (i.e., came “not to exist”), and is going to rise from the Abyss (i.e., the revival of Rome on the one hand and apparent resuscitation of antichrist on the other), and is going to its destruction. And the inhabitants of the earth, [those] whose names have not remained written in the book of life [where they were written] from the beginning of the world, will be in awe when they see the beast, because he was (i.e., “existed”), and is not (i.e., came “not to exist”), and will again be present on the scene (i.e., return to life in the case of antichrist, and be reestablished in respect to the empire). (9) This calls for a mind having wisdom: the seven heads [of the beast (cf. v.3 and 13:1)] are seven mountains whereon the woman sits. They are also seven kings. (10) The [first] five [of these kings] have fallen. The [next (i.e., the sixth)] one is now [alive]. The last (i.e., antichrist) has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain for a short time (i.e., the Tribulation). (11) And [as to] the beast which was and is not, this is the eighth [king] and he is [also] one of the seven, and he is going to [his] destruction. (12) And the ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they will receive authority as kings for one hour (i.e., time period, specifically, the Tribulation) along with the beast. (13) These will have one purpose and [are going to] give their power and their authority to the beast. (14) These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, because He is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, and those who are with Him are called, and elect – and [have remained] faithful.”

Revelation 17:1-14

Most of chapter seventeen has already been exegeted and discussed in part 3B of this series in our treatment of antichrist, and the reader is invited to revisit that study. Nevertheless, some attention to these verses is necessary here in order to examine the primary focus of chapter seventeen, the judgment on Babylon. In verse two, the angel who is speaking with John is quite clear about the fact that the purpose of the vision here described is to “show you the judgment of the great prostitute (i.e., Babylon) who sits on many waters”. For this chapter is primarily concerned with Babylon's judgment, while the inclusion of the beast is necessary since Babylon's downfall cannot be explained apart from her involvement with antichrist.

A. The Woman Babylon who Rides the Beast (verses 1-6)

Like the four horsemen of chapter six and the woman and the dragon of chapter twelve, this vision which John is given to see of Babylon and the beast is an allegory, that is, a symbolic representation of events which provides concentrated and memorable content related to the future. Babylon, as we have pointed out (see part 3B), is the home country of the beast, an economic, military, and cultural powerhouse which was the first part of antichrist's kingdom and the springboard both for his military conquests as well as for his worldwide religion. As verse fifteen later tells us, the “waters” upon which the woman sits are “peoples and multitudes and nations and languages”, and this clearly speaks to the potency of Babylon's worldwide power and influence (cf. Jer.51:12-13). But John does not see her “sitting on many waters”. This bit of information comes

in verse one before the angel shows him the vision in verse two. What John sees in this vision is a gaudy prostitute sitting on a scarlet beast with seven heads.⁴⁶²

The woman Babylon's appearance and behavior as described above in terms of prostitution and fornication tell us much about the character of her role in antichrist's plan for world domination and the institution of Satan's pseudo-millennium. In the metaphor here, prostitution and fornication refer in general terms to illegitimate, sinful, and evil as opposed to godly behavior and relationships. Specifically, the metaphor is comparing to prostitution Babylon's embracing of and trafficking for the devil's pseudo-Messiah (antichrist, the beast) and the devil's pseudo-divine kingdom (of which she styles herself the capital). Just as prostitutes use superficial yet attractive wiles to entice their customers, so Babylon will be instrumental in "selling" antichrist's ideology and false religion. Her methods are cultural, economic-technological, and military ones, yielding political, social, and religious results for the beast's conquest and domination of the world. Rather than serving the One who should be her true Husband, our Lord Jesus Christ (to whom the entire world owes its true allegiance), Babylon has developed her unfaithfulness to a high art, and has sold herself to the devil's anointed in the prosecution of his horrible goals. This facilitation of the beast's influence and power on Babylon's part is said here to extend both to the "kings" and also to the "inhabitants" of earth generally, demonstrating that the witches brew of her influence, i.e., the "wine" she has mixed for her victims, has had an enormous effect both strategically (in the larger military-political scheme of things) and tactically (on the level of personal influence through culture, religion, and techno-economic impact). It should be noted here that the sinful and evil aspects of current day U.S. cultural and other influences are quantitatively and qualitatively not to be compared to what Babylon of the Tribulation will do. For the "fornication" of that final eschatological day will be conscious, deliberate, and out of all proportion to anything presently imaginable. Therefore she will be completely without any excuse whatsoever in the face of the divine judgment described in Revelation chapters 17-19. Babylon's outrageous aiding and abetting of antichrist's corruption, seizure and abuse of the world generally constitutes the first divine charge against her. The second charge on the bill of indictment against Babylon is her facilitation of the Great Persecution as the original headquarters of antichrist's world religion. This is the meaning of the description of her in verse six as "drunk from the blood of the saints, even from the blood of the martyrs of Jesus", and the fact that this heady wine has intoxicated her suggests that rather than being a reluctant participant in the Great Persecution, Babylon has taken a sick pleasure in it, for she is "drunk" on this wine.

The "desert", a place of physical desolation where we find the woman mounted on the back of the beast. speaks of the spiritual desolation of the world under the rule of antichrist, in which spiritually desolate Babylon has played a signal role. This symbolism, moreover, has for Babylon a double meaning, for the spiritual desolation she has fostered is about to bring upon her a literal, physical desolation through the judgment which God is about to unleash upon her as a result.

The scarlet color of the beast speaks of the unprecedented slaughter which will characterize antichrist's reign,⁴⁶³ and that is also the point of comparison in the woman Babylon's scarlet dress, for she has aided and abetted antichrist in the slaughter of his opponents generally and in his martyrdom of believers in particular. She is also described as wearing “purple”, the color of royalty, and this is a reference to the fact that Babylon styles herself the “Queen of the World”, the jewel of kingdoms through which the beast has gained world political dominion. It is from this lofty height that she shall fall, with her fall all the more precipitous and destructive as a result.

For you [O Babylon] said, “I will be a queen forever”. But you did not consider these things (i.e., the ramifications of your evil actions) in your heart. You did not call to mind the consequences [of your deeds].
Isaiah 47:7 (cf. Is.47:3)

To the same degree that she glorified herself and indulged in wonton excess, to that same degree give her torment and grief. For she says in her heart, “I am enthroned as a queen, and I am not a widow and I shall not see grief”.
Revelation 18:7

The golden goblet encrusted with gemstones and pearls, yet filled with fornication and abomination, completes the allegory of Babylon. All of these elements speak to the nature of her evil influence upon the world in the service of the beast. She has prostituted herself for antichrist, and this description of the cup and its contents relates entirely to that service on antichrist's behalf. The “wine” of fornication, antichrist's message of political “deliverance” and religious “devotion” is potent,⁴⁶⁴ taking away the wits of the nations and kings of the world who drink it (Jer.51:7; Rev.18:6), and yet it is delivered in a very attractive package (the impressive goblet) at the hand of an alluring agent (though it will bring on the corresponding cup of God's wrath in the end: Jer.25:19-32; Ob.1:16; Zech.12:2-3). Babylon appears to be a beautiful and perfect mate, but she is in reality a shameless prostitute. These symbols indicate in no uncertain terms that the prostitute and her wiles will be difficult to resist – except for those who know and faithfully follow their God.

B. The Beast on whom Babylon Rides (verses 7-14)

Verses 7-14 serve to bring the focus of action back to the beast and his kingdom, reprising the history of his rise and bringing us forward to the threshold of the Great Tribulation's end, a cluster of eschatological events which precede the Second Advent, key among which is the destruction of Babylon. As in the case of Babylon, in this multi-part study we have already had occasion to cover the beast, antichrist, and his kingdom in great detail, including most of these verses in chapter seventeen (see part 3B of this series: “Antichrist and his Kingdom”). The reader is therefore advised that what follows is provided mainly for the purpose of summary and review:

verse 7: The word “mystery” is used here because the vision of the woman riding the beast which John sees is an allegory which must be explained. The woman is Babylon,

the beast is antichrist, and the seven hills and ten heads represent the beast's original European federation and the ten rulers of his post-conquest composite empire respectively. The beast is said to be “carrying” Babylon at this point, because, now that antichrist has conquered the world and faces no more political opposition, Babylon's support is no longer necessary (making her vulnerable to the judgment described below).

verse 8: Rising from the Abyss, the symbolic place of death (and actual present place of deceased unbelievers) represents antichrist's pseudo-resurrection and his European empire's seemingly miraculous reconstitution. Thus, the three-fold description “was, is not, and will come” is descriptive both of antichrist, the personal beast, and the empire of revived Rome, the territorial beast, which constitutes the power-base from which (in addition to his original kingdom of Babylon) antichrist will gain world dominion. The three-fold description as applied to the territorial beast refers to revival in modern form of a pan-European power block which will greatly resemble the Roman empire in size, power, and location. The three-fold description as applied to the personal beast refers to his apparent death and pseudo-resurrection through which he will falsely convince much of the world's unbelieving population that he is the true Messiah. As a result of being deceived, these unbelievers will not come to saving faith in Christ, for although their names were originally written in the book of life “before the foundation of the world”, they are blotted out at the point of actively rejecting Jesus Christ by choosing instead to follow antichrist.⁴⁶⁵ This description allows for the existence of unbelievers who, in spite of all that has presently transpired, do not put their faith in the beast (including many Jewish unbelievers who will yet turn to Christ when they witness His Second Advent return: Zech.12:10-14).

verses 9-11: The seven heads of the beast represent seven “mountains” or power-blocks within the revived Roman empire (cf. Jer.51:25; and see part 3B for probable geographic identification). In terms of the vision John sees of the scarlet beast, they also represent rulers of the historic Roman empire. This device is used to explain antichrist's status. The beast will be “the seventh” in the line of absolute rulers or “Caesars” in that he will likewise come to have complete power and authority over the area ruled by Rome just as the Julio-Claudians, the original ruling house of the Roman empire, possessed.⁴⁶⁶ Five of these emperors were “fallen” or deceased at the time John wrote Revelation, but the sixth, Nero, was still alive. Antichrist is described here as being the next in the sequence (i.e., he will be a ruler just as powerful and absolute over revived Rome as the Julio-Claudians were over historic Rome), but also as being “an eighth”, because in addition to being the new emperor of revived Rome, he will also be king of Babylon, a kingdom and an empire in its own right through the dominance of which antichrist will come to control revived Rome.

verse 12-14: The ten horns are the ten kings of the beast's composite empire of revived Rome, seven of whom will be his regents over the seven “mountains” (his original European power-base plus Israel), three of whom will be his regents over the three power-blocks of the southern alliance which the beast will conquer during the Tribulation's first half (see part 3B). As discussed in our earlier treatment of this issue,

all ten of these sub-rulers are likewise servants of Satan, and will be in league with antichrist from the beginning. The truth of this may be seen in verse thirteen where they are said to “have one purpose and [are going to] give their power and their authority to the beast”. Thus, by the Tribulation's midpoint, the entire globe will be under antichrist's control to one degree or another, opening the way for the Great Persecution which defines its second half and yields the name, “The Great Tribulation”. In verse fourteen, the synoptic view offered by this vision and its allegory now moves swiftly forward through those events of the Tribulation's second half (which John has just written about in detail in the preceding chapters 13-16), and on to the battle of Armageddon and the Second Advent, the closing events of the Tribulation. But although the assembled military might of the entire world of that time will be marshaled against Him, it will be no match at all for the conquering Lamb of God. For He is “Lord of Lords and King of Kings”, true God and true man in One unique Person forever. Having won the victory over death through His own death on our behalf on the cross, He will quickly dispatch the forces of evil arrayed against Him on that future day of His glorious return. Here we are given a particular and blessed piece of encouragement: as believers in Jesus, no matter whether we are taken to be with Him before the Tribulation begins, die as martyrs for our Lord during that fiery trial, or endure until His return, we will in any case accompany Him, resurrected at the point of His return to live forever with Him in glory, partaking with Him of the victory of that great and glorious day. We are described, moreover, as “the called, selected, and faithful”. This gives the progression of our salvation, called to believe, selected to the family of God on the basis of that belief, and maintaining that belief firm until the end, no matter what may come. For it is on the basis of our faith, held fast until the end of life or the resurrection, whichever may come first, that we will experience the “first resurrection” (cf. Rev.20:5), and will rise to meet and then accompany our Lord in His victorious return. These words thus serve as an important reminder to all believers of the critical importance of maintaining our faith firm until the end, even in the face of the most intense tribulation the world will ever know, the Great Tribulation.

2. Hatred of Babylon: Revelation 17:15-18

(15) Then he said to me, “These [waters] which you saw upon which the prostitute sits are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. (16) Now as for the ten horns which you saw and the beast, these will come to hate the harlot [Babylon] and will render her desolate and naked, and they will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire. (17) For God put it into their hearts to carry out His purpose and to be of one accord and to give their kingdoms to the beast until the words of God shall be fulfilled. (18) And the woman whom you saw is the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth.”

Revelation 17:15-18

verse 15: This verse demonstrates the worldwide scope of Babylon's power and influence, a major point in the jealousy she arouses, not least in the beast, whose ego cannot brook the elevation of anyone or anything to any degree of earthly glory that might compete with his own. The fact that without Babylon and her political, economic,

military and, last but far from least, cultural influence he never would have achieved the mastery of the world he now enjoys will matter little to antichrist. As a true son of his father the devil, there is not a scintilla of gratitude to be found in the beast's heart of solid stone, a fact that should give pause to any and all who contemplate serving him or his master Satan, even from a strictly worldly way of evaluating matters.

verse 16-17: This is our first indication in Revelation of the precise manner in which Babylon will meet her demise. In all of the various Old Testament passages which speak of the destruction of Babylon (historical and eschatological), God is the cause, but in all such instances He makes use of earthly means (see section II.3-5 below). The seven European rulers together the three rulers of the southern alliance's main power blocks will all be equally jealous of Babylon's status, power, influence and wealth, no doubt all the more so inasmuch as we have already seen that Babylon will, up to this point, have been largely spared from the worst effects of the Tribulation, including much of the economic dislocation (as evidenced by the description of the prostitute's wealth earlier in this chapter), the ravages of war (since the conflicts will be fought far from her doorstep), and, as the beast's home country and favored realm, from the worst of antichrist's social, religious, economic and political system and "reforms". The beast's own hatred is also unquestionably predicated upon Babylon's recent infidelity to him. For it will be recalled that during the just concluded fifth bowl judgment, Babylon had made use of the dislocation occasioned by the darkness of the seven kingdoms to conspire against him.

The unfaithfulness demonstrated by the beast's sub-ruler in charge of Babylon at this time will have much to do with motivating her destruction. Rather than expressing disapproval in the face of the ruler of Babylon's intrigues with Israel during antichrist's emergency expedition into the darkness of the rebellious north, there is no indication that either the powerful or the general population of Babylon were at all averse to exploring the possibility of alternative leadership. Given that Babylon has up till now been the privileged exception to all of the beast's depredations, it is no wonder that his attitude on returning will be one of "hatred" for Babylon, motivated by his own anger over such ingratitude, and mixing with the "hatred" born of jealousy on the part of the ten kings.

Although antichrist and his ten rulers are the means used, this judgment itself originates directly from the hand of God and is completely in God's plan (for reasons that will be made clear below). But in verse seventeen we are also given a good deal of information about the course and manner of this judgment. First, Babylon will be isolated of allies and support (the beast and the ten kings will "render her desolate"), then stripped of all of her defenses (made "naked"). Once Babylon is completely defenseless, "they will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire", a twofold process wherein Babylon will first be plundered ("eat her flesh"), and then made subject to devastating conflagration (see section II.5 below), with all aspects of this horrendous judgment emanating from antichrist and his subordinates, but originating with God: "for God put it into their hearts to carry out His purpose".⁴⁶⁷

verse 18: As discussed in a previous installment (part 3B, sections II-III), while Babylon represents religious, cultural, and technological power, she is first and foremost a discrete geographical nation, a great “city-state” (Greek *polis*, πόλις) “which has dominion over the kings of the earth”. This dominion, rule, and influence which preceded antichrist's rise to power came primarily as a result of her political, military, and economic power (and it is of these assets and defenses that she will be stripped before being plundered and destroyed). Babylon represents the jewel in Satan's crown. Aside from ancient Rome, no other nation in the history of the world has come close to matching such systematic and tangible power (political, military, and economic), wrapped up in such systematic and intangible influence (religious, cultural, and technological). But whether we focus upon Babylon as a nation projecting power or Babylon as a system projecting influence, we should not forget that, in the end, Babylon is made up of people, and it is the collective depravity of her population on that future, eschatological day which will call down this extreme divine judgment.

Raise the standard on the walls of Babylon! Strengthen the guard, station the watchmen, prepare the reinforcements! But nevertheless what the Lord has planned, that He will do, namely, what He has decreed against *the inhabitants* of Babylon.
Jeremiah 51:12

3. Fallen is Babylon: Revelation 18:1-3

(1) After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven with great power, and the earth was lit up by his glory. (2) And he cried out in a mighty voice, saying, “Babylon the great has fallen! And she has become a dwelling place for demons, and a place of confinement for every [sort of] unclean spirit, and a place of confinement for every unclean and detestable bird. (3) For the nations have drunk from the wine of [God's] wrath [that flows] from her prostitution. And the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her. And the merchants of the earth have grown rich with her from the [economic] power [flowing from] her wanton excess”.

Revelation 18:1-3

verse 1: Like the angel with the little scroll of Revelation chapter ten, this angel too is best seen as a type of Christ.⁴⁶⁸ For just as in the case of the angel of Revelation chapter ten, this angel too is seen “coming down from heaven” (a picture of the Second Advent). This angel too is said to possess “great power” (cf. v.1 with Rev.10:1), and have a “mighty voice” (cf. v.2 with Rev.10:3). And in a manner analogous to the powerful angel of Revelation chapter ten whose hair and face “were like the sun” (Rev.10:1), in the case of this angel it is said that “the earth was lit up by his glory” (v.1). Since the fall of Babylon is, in prophetic terms, intimately connected with the final events of the “Day of the Lord”, comprising part of the final series of judgments which bring the Great Tribulation to an end and usher in the Millennial Kingdom of the Messiah, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the fact that this prophecy about the impending fall of Babylon should be given to another powerful angel whose appearance likewise foreshadows the now imminent return of our Lord,⁴⁶⁹ serves to emphasize the immediacy of that

return: once Babylon has been destroyed, Armageddon and the Second Advent will follow in rapid-fire succession.

verse 2: As in the case of the angel in Revelation chapter ten, the proclamation given here, “Babylon the great has fallen!”, is prophetic – but only just so. The command to “flee Babylon” comes immediately upon the heels of this prediction (Rev.18:4), with the actual destruction following with very little intervening time elapsed (the description of which begins in Rev.18:5).

The symbolic relegation of post-judgment Babylon to a habitation for demons, unclean spirits, and unclean birds, serves to underscore that this judgment is from God and that it represents cursing of the first order.⁴⁷⁰ Just as the original earth, a paradise of light and delight created perfectly and out of nothing from the hand of God in Genesis 1:1, was cursed with the devastating judgment of being made dark in utter waste and desolation becoming “ruined and despoiled” by the time of the situation described in Genesis 1:2 as a result of God's judgment upon Satan's rebellion,⁴⁷¹ and just as Sodom and Gomorrah were totally annihilated with fire and brimstone and remain a curse to this day, so Babylon's judgment will be cataclysmic, with her end serving as a memorial to the folly of serving Satan in place of the one true God (cf. Rev.18:22-23; 19:3).

verse 3: While we have already considered the reasons why the beast and his ten sub-kings should hate Babylon (retaliation and jealousy respectively), here we are given the first of two reasons why Babylon has earned such a devastating judgment from God. This first reason concerns the negative effect she has had upon the world, primarily upon unbelievers, in promoting, supporting, and in fact to a very great degree producing the system of spiritual “prostitution” which will characterize human life throughout the Tribulation and which will hold sway throughout the world of that time. This corrupting influence is described here as having three main venues: 1) other nations generally, 2) the “kings” or ruling hierarchies around the world, and 3) the “merchants”. Herein we are given to see just how all-pervasive Babylon and her corrupt values and practices have been. For in this three-fold breakdown we can see her cultural and religious, political and military, and economic and technological influences at work upon these three respective groups. The spirit of prostitution, of seeking solutions apart from God (and turning instead by definition to Satan, and explicitly so in following the beast), will penetrate deep down into the marrow of every significant power-bloc in the world of that future day. With this level of culpability, having made herself essential to all that antichrist and his father the devil have “accomplished” in the world at large during the Tribulation, it is small wonder that Babylon has incurred such an extraordinary measure of divine wrath.

4. Flee Babylon: Revelation 18:4

And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, “Come out from her, O my people, that you may not receive a share of [the punishment for] her sins, and that you may not

partake of the plagues [which are about to fall upon] her.
Revelation 18:4

Up until this point, as we have had occasion to mention before, Babylon has apparently been spared many of the more draconian aspects of the beast's tribulational rule. The command given here in verse four is a clear indication that she has also been a sort of "safe haven" for believers. We should not, of course, expect that believers dwelling in Babylon and her vicinity have been completely exempt up until now from either the general trials of the Tribulation (e.g., the two series of worldwide divine judgments and the general suffering brought about by antichrist's policies), or from the Great Persecution. However, the fact that the remainder of this chapter in Revelation definitely paints a picture of a Babylon characterized by excessive luxuries certainly indicates that she has fared far better than the rest of the world to this point, with at least her privileged classes knowing very little lack as judged from the description in Revelation 18:4-24. Secondly, our present verse definitely assumes that 1) there are a sizeable number of believers still alive and living in Babylon in spite of the Great Persecution, and that 2) at this point at any rate they have the freedom of action and opportunity necessary to respond to this command to "flee Babylon". For some, it will doubtless be the case that their prior imprisonment or confinement or restriction had been lifted at the point of Babylon's rebellion, when the beast and his imperial guard temporarily disappeared into the supernatural veil of darkness which had fallen upon his kingdom. For others, it may well be that they had been largely spared the intensive trouble endured by their brothers and sisters in Jesus around the world. For all concerned, however, the recent destruction in Jerusalem on account of the worldwide earthquake will make that city seem the last place that anyone should flee *to*, especially in light of that city's recent status as antichrist's world capital. But regardless of prior experience or human reasoning, it will be absolutely critical for believers to respond to this command when it comes, for the safe haven of Babylon is about to become a danger zone. Failure to do so will result in "sharing the plagues which are about to come upon her" (Rev.18:4). Given other previous heavenly commands, signs, and signals during the Tribulation (e.g., Rev.8:5; 10:3-7; 11:15; 11:19), it is best to understand this command to flee Babylon as one which will likewise be audible and, to all believers within Babylon's borders at least, comprehensible. All the more so then will it be absolutely essential for those who have retained their faith in Jesus Christ to respond to this mandate immediately, for there will be no excuse for non-compliance with this exceptionally clear warning (cf. 2Pet.3:1-13).

(28) Likewise just as it happened in the days of Lot, [people] were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, buying and selling, planting [orchards] and building [homes]. (29) But on the day that Lot left Sodom, it rained fire and sulfur from heaven, and [the judgment] destroyed everyone [who had not left]. (30) It will be the same on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. (31) In that day, who[ever] is on [the roof of] the house, even though his possessions are in the house, let him not come down to collect them, and let the one who is in the field likewise not turn back. (32) *Remember Lot's wife!* (33) Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses it (i.e.,

treats it as lost) will preserve it.
Luke 17:28-33

When [people] are saying "Peace!" and "Safety!", at that precise time destruction will fall swiftly upon them, just like labor pains on a pregnant woman (i.e., the tribulational judgments culminating in Armageddon will begin).
1st Thessalonians 5:3

The verses above, while not technically describing this situation, are certainly applicable, with the first passage driving home the lesson that our response at that time must be swift and decisive, with no looking back and no indecision, while the second passage indicates that the need for flight will be completely counter-intuitive. To the secular world, the fifth bowl judgment which plunged the beast's kingdom into darkness, the instability which followed, and antichrist's temporary disappearance into the gloom will seem to mark the end of a long nightmare, but in reality it will begin what is apparently a very short count-down to Babylon's annihilation. Those who draw the false conclusion that their trouble is over once and for all will likely fail to flee in time, even if they recognize their error after antichrist's re-emergence from the darkness prior to Babylon's destruction: this passage in Revelation definitely indicates that the window of opportunity for flight will be a narrow one indeed.

Depart from Babylon! Flee from the Babylonians!
Isaiah 48:20a

(8) "Take flight from the midst of Babylon and from the land of the Babylonians! Depart, and be like the he-goats at the head of the flock! (9) For behold, I am about to stir up and bring up against Babylon an assemblage of great nations from the land of the north. And they will array themselves against her, and from there she will be captured. Their arrows are like those of a skilled warrior who bereaves – they will not return without effect. (10) The Babylonians will be plundered, and those who plunder them will get their fill", says the Lord.
Jeremiah 50:8-10

Cut off the sower from Babylon, and the one who grabs the sickle in time of harvest. Let everyone return to his own people and let everyone flee to his own land from before the sword of the oppressor.
Jeremiah 50:16

(6) Flee from the midst of Babylon, and save your lives, everyone! Don't be annihilated on account of her iniquity! For this is the time of the Lord's vengeance, and of His recompense – He will repay her in full. (7) Babylon is a golden cup in the hand of the Lord which makes the whole earth drunk. The nations have drunk of her wine, [and] therefore the nations have gone mad. (8) Babylon will fall in an instant and be broken. Lament over her! Get balm for her disease! Perhaps she can be healed. (9) We would have healed Babylon, but she could not be healed. Abandon her! And let us get out, everyone to his own land. For the judgment against her has reached up to heaven

and has risen to the clouds.
Jeremiah 51:6-9

(6) “Awake! Awake! And flee from the land of the north (i.e., Babylon), even though I scatter you like the four winds of heaven [were driving you on]!” says the Lord. (7) “Awake! Flee to Zion, you who dwell with the Babylonians!”
Zechariah 2:6-7

The above passages all have a double application, referring first to the historical return of the Jews to Israel following the Babylonian captivity, but also referring to the situation at hand, the escape of believers from eschatological Babylon prior to her destruction. Indeed, many of the details in these and other like passages are incomprehensible without understanding and applying this final fulfillment in the last days. From the above quotations, the answers to several important questions about this escape come to light:

What is meant: In addition to the historical return from Babylon, three other “exoduses” are mentioned in the prophecies about the end times: 1) the rapid flight of believers within Israel to the divinely prepared sanctuary in the desert which takes place as antichrist assumes worldwide control at the Tribulation's mid-point (cf. Rev.12:6; 12:13-16; covered in part 4 of this series, section II, “The Woman and the Dragon”); 2) the measured exodus of Jews from all the nations of the world returning to Israel after the end of Tribulation following the Second Advent (e.g., Is.60:4ff.; 66:20); 3) the rapid flight of believers from within Babylon just before her destruction prior to Armageddon (to which our passage, Revelation 18:4, refers).

Where to flee: As we have seen, the one place other than Babylon at this time not under antichrist's control will be Israel. Scripture indicates that believers who flee Babylon at this time will have but one safe haven and therefore one objective in fleeing, namely, Jerusalem:

Wail, O gate! Howl, O city! Melt away, all you Philistines! A cloud of smoke comes from the north, and there is not a straggler in its ranks. What answer shall be given to the envoys of that nation? “The Lord has established Zion, and in her (i.e., Jerusalem) his afflicted people will find refuge.”
Isaiah 14:31-32 NIV

The voice of the refugees and fugitives from the land of Babylon [resounds], to tell in Zion (i.e., Jerusalem) of the vengeance of the Lord our God, vengeance for His temple (i.e., believers; cf. 1Cor.3:16-17; 6:19; 2Cor.6:16; Eph.2:21; 1Pet.2:4ff.).
Jeremiah 50:28

(9) We would have healed Babylon, but she could not be healed. Abandon her! And let us get out, everyone to his own land. For the judgment against her has reached up to heaven and has risen to the clouds. (10) The Lord has brought forth the vindication [due us] (cf. Rev.19:8b). Come and let us tell in Zion (i.e., Jerusalem) of what the Lord

our God has done [for us].
Jeremiah 51:9-10

(44) For I will visit [judgment] on Bel in Babylon, and I will bring out his mouth what he has swallowed (i.e., believers released from antichrist's religious persecution represented by "Bel"). And the nations will never stream to him again. For the wall (i.e., the military protection) of Babylon has fallen. (45) Come out of her My people! And let everyone [of you] save his own life [by fleeing] from the fierce wrath of the Lord!
Jeremiah 51:44-45

You refugees, flee from the sword! Don't stay put! Remember the Lord from your far away land (i.e., Babylon), and let Jerusalem ascend in your hearts (i.e., set your thoughts on her)!
Jeremiah 51:50

(2) But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, too small to be numbered among the clans of Judah, from you I will bring forth the One who is to rule over Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, even from the days of eternity. (3) For He will give them over [to the oppressor] until the time when [Jerusalem] labors [like] a woman in labor. At that time *the rest of His brethren* will return to the sons of Israel.
Micah 5:2-3

(6) "Awake! Awake! And flee from the land of the north (i.e., Babylon), even though I scatter you like the four winds of heaven [were driving you on]!" says the Lord. (7) "Awake! *Flee to Zion*, you who dwell with the Babylonians!
Zechariah 2:6-7

When to flee: Given that before the bowl judgments begin, antichrist is ruling in Jerusalem as Satan's world regent with the world as a whole to one degree or another directly under his control, the beast's departure into the gloom of the fifth bowl judgment's darkness and the accompanying revolts in Israel and Babylon would seem to be the first opportunity for believers either to leave Babylon or to escape to Zion. As we have seen above, antichrist, to the amazement and confounding of his adversaries, reappears very shortly thereafter and issues his directive to all of his confederate forces throughout the world to assemble at Armageddon. This order given to all of the armies of the world under his command (i.e., with apparently only the meager forces of Israel and Babylon being excepted), constitutes the sixth bowl judgment, an event which occurs a mere month after the beast's disappearance (see figure #1 above). Although we may suppose that the proclamation for Armageddon comes immediately after the beast's reappearance, and that in light of the severe dislocation of this command structure as a result of the preceding events effective implementation of this command and reassertion of his worldwide control will lag to some extent, it can nevertheless be concluded that from this point forward flight will become problematic. Thus the guidance given above about the necessity for *immediate* flight upon the first opening of this narrow window of opportunity should be heeded with all the rigor demanded by our

Lord's warning to flee in haste and not turn back (Matt.24:18; Mk.13:16; Lk.17:28-33; cf. 1Thes.5:3), in spite of the fact that in the (temporary) absence of the beast this will seem completely counter-intuitive to worldly eyes (cf. the pre-judgment description of Babylon as “lounging in security”: Is.47:8). The necessity for rapid flight would also seem to rule out any sort of extensive preparations. Believers who have either been imprisoned or living under great restriction of their personal freedom heretofore will have to trust the Lord to “make a way through the Red Sea”, that is, to provide the necessary transport to Israel. Whether by air or by sea, time will be of the essence, and it is very likely that little in the way of tangible material assets will be capable of being brought along. Like Lot leaving Sodom and the Israelites leaving Egypt, we will have to depart with what we can carry, and do so in great haste (cf. Jer.21:9).

Why flight is necessary at this time but may be ill-advised earlier: The command given here to flee Babylon is clearly given to believers (i.e., “my people”). Thus ipso facto this command to flee shows that there are some of God's people still in Babylon at this time, and, given the prominence of this command in scripture, one would imagine a goodly number of them. We must therefore conclude that at the very least while these facts do not prohibit an early flight from Babylon, it is no sin for a believer to be still residing within Babylon's borders during the second half of the Tribulation. As suggested above, for many if not most believers, an earlier escape may be impossible. For we may expect that during the Great Persecution, even if those dwelling in Babylon proper are spared execution for their refusal to take the mark of the beast and worship antichrist, it is very likely nevertheless that they will be placed under severe restrictions (which may include incarceration in prison or concentration camps, seizure of property, restricted travel and mobility, etc.). Therefore the issue of leaving Babylon before this time may be entirely moot for most of those who choose to follow the Lamb wherever He leads instead of bowing to the beast. There are other reasons too why seeking an earlier departure may be ill-advised, among which may be 1) to continue Christian service and ministry; 2) to continue spiritual preparation for the crisis; 3) to continue witnessing for the Lord; 4) to provide leadership and support for those who are not able or who are unwilling to leave earlier. In sum, we must assume that for many if not most believers in Babylon, the Lord has a purpose for us being here until that final directive to withdraw, and it is not an insignificant consideration that to leave before this command in Revelation 18:4 will be to act in the absence of a clear and definitive divine message (even though we are told here through prophecy that this very one will indeed be forthcoming). Finally, it is well to ask for those who are inclined to remove themselves from Babylon before this crucial last command to do so the critical question: what possible place of refuge might they find? For prior to this moment the entire world has been under antichrist's control, with only Babylon offering any degree of sanctuary for believers (with the exception of course of the divinely provided and completely inaccessible refuge in the wilderness provided for the believing refugees from Israel just prior to the Great Tribulation's commencement; see part 4, section IV, “The Dragon's Persecution of Believing Israel”). Thus it could very well be the case that attempts to anticipate this command may put those who opt for early flight to some self-selected refuge in a far worse situation than if they had patiently awaited the Lord's timing. Only at this point, with

the beast's control temporarily disrupted, will there be a clear opportunity to depart and a definite, divinely prophesied destination to seek: Jerusalem.

How: Just as when haled before the beast's tribunals during the Great Persecution we are instructed to give no thought ahead of time to what we will say (Matt.10:19-20; Mk.13:11; Lk.21:14-15), so it would seem that prior preparation for this exodus will be of little help, if only because the precise particulars of that future situation are unknowable except for the fact that the window of opportunity will be so narrow. This last point suggests that elaborate prior plans will not be able to be implemented and could act as a hindrance, at least to the extent that they cause those who have made them to delay until "everything can be worked out". For is it more than likely that we shall all have to leave much behind in order to obey the Lord's insistent command: houses, property, possessions, assets, money – even loved ones who are for whatever reason reluctant to flee with the required rapidity. Those who delay overmuch are likely to end up like Lot's sons in law; those who look back are likely to end up like Lot's wife. A corollary to this principle is that, since specific prior preparations are likely to be of no use when the time comes, there is little point to making them. Scripture gives no support for adopting a "survivalist mentality", stock-piling food and weapons and withdrawing to some remote location. Indeed, it is more than likely that over the course of the seven years of Tribulation antichrist will have little trouble identifying, locating, and persecuting all who are truly "of Christ". Rather than seeing this as an entirely negative thing, it is also possible to look on the positive side. Since when the time comes the Lord will provide a way for us to follow His directive to flee Babylon, the loss of all of our worldly goods in the Great Persecution which precedes is something we should try not to take to heart: there will be a way out because God ordains it, and, on the other hand, if we have managed to retain and are relying upon our possessions to provide that "out", it is just possible that these may instead form an "anchor" which keeps us from departing in a timely fashion. When we hear the command "flee Babylon!", for most of us it will probably be the case that we have little to gain by staying behind anyway, and that may prove to be a blessing in disguise. As suggested above, the temporary departure of antichrist from Israel and Babylon's sympathizing with Israel's rebellion will provide an opportunity for travel to Jerusalem. Isaiah 43:14 describing the later flight from Babylon of unbelieving fugitives at least suggests that travel by sea at this time will also be the likely means of transport (although Is.21:6 indicates that a variety of transport is possible). We can well imagine that, with Jerusalem's recent status as the beast's world religious and political headquarters, and with all the world making pilgrimages to the temple in order to demonstrate their allegiance to antichrist, a large ferry service will have developed along the lines of the one we see bringing Moslems to Mecca, only in this case even much more extensive and serving all regions of the world, Babylon most especially. With the temporary cessation of all such activities, this same ferry service would seem the likely means to transport believers to Jerusalem. Those just released from prison and or camps may have little or no material resources, but we can have complete confidence in the Lord that He will provide the material means for our departure. Just as the Lord gave the Israelites "favor in the eyes of the Egyptians" and enriched the children of Israel in their hasty departure from Egypt (Ex.12:35-36; cf.

Ex.3:21-22; 11:2-3; Ps.105:37), so we can be absolutely sure that no one who is willing to follow our Lord's command will be left behind for want of boat fare (or anything else).

(33) And those among the people who have insight will teach the people who will be persecuted by sword (i.e., martyrdom), and flame (i.e., torture leading to martyrdom), and captivity (i.e., imprisonment), and plundering (i.e., confiscation of property), for some time. (34) And when they are persecuted, they will receive a little help . . .

Daniel 11:33-34a

The Exodus parallel: As we shall consider in greater detail in part 7 of this series, the experience of the children of Israel during the Exodus furnishes a prophetically important and detailed parallel to the experience of believers undergoing the Tribulation over all. However the actual departure from Egypt provides some critical points of comparison which should be noted at this point:

- The origin and character of the people being delivered: Just as Israelites went down to Egypt, so a godly seed came to America and has been both nourished and expanding ever since. But just as there was a time for God to make a distinction between those who were His and those who were not, and to call forth His people from Egypt, so it will be in Babylon's case.
- Deliverance from oppression by divine agency: Just as Egypt was originally very hospitable to the people of God, so also in the case of Babylon. However, in the last days of Israel's abiding in that land, a harsh ruler oppressed the Israelites mightily. So also in the case of Babylon we may anticipate that the days of Tribulation will weigh heavily upon the people of God, and that believers will face ever increasing oppression in this country. But just as the Israelites were delivered from the hand of Pharaoh by the mighty power of God, so also the bowl judgments of retribution will create a situation whereby God opens the doors of the prison house so that we may safely take our leave of Babylon. Just as darkness preceded immediately the plague of the firstborn and the Exodus, and just as there was light for the Israelites but darkness for the Egyptians, so on that coming day there will be darkness on the kingdom of antichrist but light for believers to escape from Babylon.
- Divine provision: As mentioned above, the Lord did not allow the Israelites to leave Egypt empty handed, but gave them grace in the eyes of the Egyptians so that they "plundered" them (Ex.12:35-36; cf. Ex.3:21-22; 11:2-3; Ps.105:37). So also we may have every confidence that no matter how we may have been oppressed, no matter how long we have been in prison or otherwise confined, no matter how widespread and extensive the confiscation of our belongings has been, we shall nevertheless be provided the means we need to depart Babylon for Jerusalem.
- Rapid departure: God led Abraham out of his country to the land of promise at just the right time (Heb.11:8). God prepared Noah to "flee" the destruction of the world of his day by following His instructions so that he was preserved and not destroyed along with it on the day the flood came (Heb.11:7). And God brought the Israelites out in an equally

swift and decisive manner, having them leave at twilight ready for a hasty march when the time came to depart (Ex.12:11; 12:31; 12:34; Deut.16:6).

- Deliverance through the sea to the promised land: Just as the Israelites who faced the seemingly impossible obstacle of the Red Sea between them and the land of promise were miraculously delivered through the sea by the mighty hand of God, so also we may have every confidence that our Lord will bring us through every trouble, trial and tribulation, safely to the place He has made for us in Jerusalem to await His return (and in the New Jerusalem thereafter where we will rejoice in Him forever).

5. Babylon Destroyed: Revelation 18:5-8

(5) For [Babylon's] sins have been piled up to heaven, and God has called to mind her wicked deeds. (6) Repay her just as she also herself has repaid. And give her a double measure according to her deeds. In her own cup with which she mixed [her evil brew], mix a double batch for her. (7) To the same degree that she glorified herself and indulged in wonton excess, to that same degree give her torment and grief. For she says in her heart, "I am enthroned as a queen, and I am not a widow and I shall not see grief". (8) Because of [all] this [arrogance of hers], her plagues will come in one day: death and mourning and famine. And [then] she will be burned down with fire (the invasion undertaken by the beast and his confederates). For the Lord God who has judged her is mighty.

Revelation 18:5-8

It is an occupational hazard of great material abundance to lose humility and all sense of proportion in terms of our mortality. This is true on an individual as well as a national level:

When you eat and are satisfied and bless the Lord your God on account of the good land which He has given you, take care for yourselves lest you forget the Lord your God so as not to keep His commandments, judgments, and statutes which I am commanding you [to keep] this day. Lest, when you eat and are satisfied and build fine homes and dwell [in them] and your cattle and sheep multiply and your gold and silver increase and everything you have increases, your heart become proud and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery, He who led you through the great and awesome wilderness with its deadly snakes and scorpions, a thirsty place without water, He who brought forth water for you from the flinty rock, He who in [this] desert gave you manna to eat (of which your fathers had no knowledge), in order to afflict you so as to test you that it might go well with you in the future. Lest you say in your heart, "My strength and my own hand have produced this wealth for me". [Rather] that you may remember the Lord your God, that it is He who gives you the strength to produce wealth, [and] that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers as it is this day.

Deuteronomy 8:10-18 (cf. Hos.13:6)

Jeshurun grew fat and kicked - [Yes,] you grew fat and heavy and were sated – so that he abandoned God who made him, and considered foolish the Rock, His Savior.
Deuteronomy 32:15

Two things I ask of you, O Lord; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, “Who is the Lord?” Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.
Proverbs 30:7-9 NIV

But Babylon is seen here to have taken this principle to what may be a historical extreme. In the divine wisdom of God, her punishment will consist in her deprivation of the very things she has treasured and boasted of, things of which she had thought she would never be deprived, and the loss thereof will be like a sword piercing her heart, a “double measure” and “double batch” of destruction that will bereave her of everything upon which she has arrogantly prided herself (cf. Ezek.7).

5 "Sit in silence, go into darkness,
Daughter of the Babylonians;
no more will you be called
queen of kingdoms.

6 I was angry with my people
and desecrated my inheritance;
I gave them into your hand,
and you showed them no mercy.
Even on the aged
you laid a very heavy yoke.

7 You said, 'I will continue forever—
the eternal queen!'
But you did not consider these things
or reflect on what might happen.

8 "Now then, listen, you wanton creature,
lounging in your security
and saying to yourself,
'I am, and there is none besides me.
I will never be a widow
or suffer the loss of children.'

9 Both of these will overtake you
in a moment, on a single day:
loss of children and widowhood.
They will come upon you in full measure,

in spite of your many sorceries
and all your potent spells.

- 10 You have trusted in your wickedness
and have said, 'No one sees me.'
Your wisdom and knowledge mislead you
when you say to yourself,
'I am, and there is none besides me.'
- 11 Disaster will come upon you,
and you will not know how to conjure it away.
A calamity will fall upon you
that you cannot ward off with a ransom;
a catastrophe you cannot foresee
will suddenly come upon you.
- 12 "Keep on, then, with your magic spells
and with your many sorceries,
which you have labored at since childhood.
Perhaps you will succeed,
perhaps you will cause terror.
- 13 All the counsel you have received has only worn you out!
Let your astrologers come forward,
those stargazers who make predictions month by month,
let them save you from what is coming upon you.
- 14 Surely they are like stubble;
the fire will burn them up.
They cannot even save themselves
from the power of the flame.
Here are no coals to warm anyone;
here is no fire to sit by.
- 15 That is all they can do for you—
these you have labored with
and trafficked with since childhood.
Each of them goes on in his error;
there is not one that can save you.

Isaiah 47:5-15 NIV

Babylon Invaded: As we saw above in our translation of Revelation 17:15-18, Babylon is destroyed in accordance with the will of God, but the agents of His judgment are the beast and his sub-kings for "God put it into their hearts to carry out His purpose"

(v.17). It is not uncommon for the Lord to make use of the devil and his minions, whether human or angelic, to accomplish His overarching purpose (cf. Paul's handing over of the offending Corinthian believer "to Satan for the destruction of his flesh", 1Cor.5:4-5).⁴⁷²

The actual destruction of Babylon will be preceded by a military invasion that will occasion much plundering, after which Babylon, or at least all of her significant cities and towns, will be put to the torch by this invasion force. This sequence of events is clearly visible in the near context of Revelation 17:16 where we are told that the beast's henchmen (1) "will render her desolate and naked", (2) "and they will eat her flesh", then (3) "will burn her up with fire" (compare our present context of Revelation 18:8: "her plagues will come in one day: death and mourning and famine. And [then] she will be burned down with fire."). The rendering of Babylon "desolate and naked" in Revelation 17:16 refers to the removal of all of her defenses, the "eating of flesh" to the plundering of Babylon by the beast's invasion force, and the "burning with fire" to the literal physical destruction of Babylon at the conclusion of this campaign.

1) The Disarming of Babylon: It will be remembered that by this time the beast will have been in control of the world for several years, with all its military forces under his command (direct or indirect). At this time, it is very doubtful that Babylon will possess significant forces within her borders. On the one hand, the need for defense against foreign attack will have evaporated (or so it will seem). On the other hand, what use there will be for the military at this time will be in maintenance of the beast's control over his realm. Furthermore, the campaign to reduce the north to full obedience occasioned by the darkness of the fifth bowl judgment is likely to have resulted in the summoning of the remaining major portion of Babylon's military power to his aid (and this would have preceded her rebellion). In short, by this time the vast bulk of whatever military force Babylon does possess in principal will be fully integrated into the beast's one-world army, and geographically located outside of Babylon. Finally, there are indications from scripture that by this time much of Babylon's military will be composed of foreign nationals or "mercenaries" in any case (a trend already incipient today), so that Babylon is unlikely to be able to count on the loyalty of those who are at this time still ostensibly in "her army" (Ezek.27:3b-11).⁴⁷³ Rendering Babylon "desolate and naked" may demand little more than requiring her few remaining troops to place their oath of fealty to the beast ahead of their oath to her, with the result that the few resident forces which choose to remain loyal will be pitifully insufficient to prevent her destruction.⁴⁷⁴

Your guards are like locusts, your officials like swarms of locusts that settle in the walls on a cold day – but when the sun appears they fly away, and no one knows where.
Nahum 3:17

Prepare the nations for battle against her – the kings of the Medes, their governors and all their officials, and all the countries they rule. The land trembles and writhes, for the Lord's purposes against Babylon stand – to lay waste the land of Babylon so that no one will live there. *Babylon's warriors have stopped fighting; they remain in their*

strongholds. Their strength is exhausted; they have become like women. Her dwellings are set on fire; the bars of her gates are broken. One courier follows another and messenger follows messenger to announce to the king of Babylon that his entire city is captured, the river crossings seized, the marshes set on fire, and the soldiers terrified. Jeremiah 51:29-32 NIV

Your wealth, merchandise and wares, your mariners, seamen and shipwrights, your merchants *and all your soldiers*, and everyone else on board will sink into the heart of the sea on the day of your shipwreck. Ezekiel 27:27 NIV

2) The Invasion of Babylon: As the above passages describing the fall of historical Babylon and eschatological Babylon show, the campaign of conquest will not be much of a campaign at all. In practical terms, this assault will amount to little more than a rapid “Blitzkrieg” style occupation of an essentially defenseless country. Based both upon the scriptures which predict it and the scant time remaining before all of antichrist's forces are collected at Armageddon, we can safely say that the small forces still remaining in Babylon are likely to put up only scattered and token resistance in the face of what will be a rapid and largely unexpected onslaught by an overwhelming assemblage of opponents assaulting her from the north (Jer.25:9; 50:3; 50:9; 50:41ff.; cf. Rev.17:16), the east (cf. Ezek.27:26), the desert (Is.21:1-10), the sea (Ezek.27:34), in short, from each and every side (Jer.51:1-2).

“Therefore, behold, I am going to bring foreigners against you, the [most] ruthless of the nations, and they will un-sheath their swords against the allure of your wisdom, and they will defile your glory.” Ezekiel 28:7

“You (i.e., the ruler of Tyre, the beast's rebellious regent) will die the violent death of the uncircumcised *at the hands of foreigners* (i.e., the multi-national invasion force sent by antichrist to finish off Babylon). For I have spoken”, say the Lord God.⁴⁷⁵ Ezekiel 28:10

(4) The sound of a multitude on the mountains, like a great army. The sound of an uproar of the kingdoms, the nations are being gathered. The Lord of hosts is mustering an army for war. (5) *They are coming from a distant land, from the ends of the earth.* The Lord and the instruments of His rage, to despoil the entire land [of Babylon (cf. v.1)]. Isaiah 13:4-5

We cannot underestimate the fury which Babylon's behavior during the Tribulation has aroused worldwide, both externally among the other nations of the world, all of whom to one degree or another have to this point been her imperial possessions, and also internally among a large and most likely majority population of immigrants, slaves, and those reduced to penury and indentured servitude.⁴⁷⁶ Likewise, we cannot underestimate the attractiveness of plundering Babylon at this time given the extreme

contrast between her excessive wealth and the incredible poverty and dearth otherwise throughout the world during the dark days of the Great Tribulation. Thus the motive for the latter internal unrest as well for the invading armies will be two fold, jealousy and revenge on the one hand . . .

There is no alleviation for your disaster. The blow [which has befallen you] is grievous. All who hear of this report about you will clap their hands against you. For against whom has your wickedness not come continually?
Nahum 3:19

Woe to the one (i.e., antichrist's Babylon) who multiplies what is not his (i.e., through theft). How long will he enrich himself through usury?
Habakkuk 2:6

(16) Now as for the ten horns which you saw and the beast, these will come to hate the harlot [Babylon] and will render her desolate and naked, and they will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire. (17) For God put it into their hearts to carry out His purpose and to be of one accord and to give their kingdoms to the beast until the words of God shall be fulfilled.
Revelation 17:16-17

. . . and greed and plunder⁴⁷⁷ on the other:

“For the Babylonians will become plunder, and all her pillagers will have their fill”, says the Lord.
Jeremiah 50:10

For thus says the Lord of hosts, “In later times He [the Father] shall send Me in glory against the nations who have plundered you (for whoever touches you touches the apple of My eye). At that time, behold, I shall wave My hand against them, and they will be plundered by their slaves. In this way you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent Me.
Zechariah 2:8-9

A dire vision [of Babylon's fate] has been shown to me. The traitor betrays, and the despoiler despoils.
Isaiah 21:2 (cf. Is.33:1)

Plunder the silver! Plunder the gold! The supply is endless, the wealth from all its treasures! She is pillaged, plundered, stripped! Hearts melt, knees give way, bodies tremble, every face grows pale.
Nahum 2:9-10 NIV

A sword against her horses and chariots and all the foreigners in her ranks! They will become women. A sword against her treasures! They will be plundered.
Jeremiah 50:37 NIV

Out in the sea she will become a place to spread fishnets, for I have spoken, declares the Sovereign Lord. She will become plunder for the nations, and her settlements on the mainland will be ravaged by the sword. Then they will know that I am the Lord.

Ezekiel 26:5-6 NIV

They will plunder your wealth and loot your merchandise; they will break down your walls and demolish your fine houses and throw your stones, timber and rubble into the sea.

Ezekiel 26:12 NIV

(7) Will not those who pay you [exorbitant] interest rise up suddenly, and those whom you shake down [for payment] awaken? For you will become plunder for them. (8) Since you have looted many nations, all the remaining peoples of the earth will pillage you on account of your shedding of blood and your violence against the earth, against its cities and those who dwell in them. (9) Woe to the one who heaps up unjust gain for the benefit of his own empire (lit., “house”), in order to set his nesting place on high so that he might be rescued from the grasp of disaster. (10) But you have devised only shame for your empire (lit., “house”) by your cutting down of many peoples and have acted in sinful folly against your own life. (11) For [even] the stones in your walls [of your empire/house] will cry out, and the beams from its wooden [framework] will reply [in condemnation of your behavior]. (12) Woe to the one who builds his city[-state] (i.e., empire) on bloodshed.

Habakkuk 2:7-12

3) The Destruction of Babylon: As a political state, historical Babylon was destroyed by the Persian invasion “from the north” ca. 529 B.C., but Babylon the province was never entirely depopulated (cf. Daniel 5:31 - 9:1), and Babylon the city, though in decline ever after, continued as provincial capital of the Persian empire and, later, as Alexander’s eastern capital. In the time of Christ, the city was a shadow of its former self, and in recent times it has indeed become completely depopulated (though it was revived as a tourist attraction under Saddam). These historical facts invite us to pose the question of whether or not the devastating destruction leveled upon eschatological Babylon by antichrist and his forces will indeed be total in our modern, western sense of the word. For without a doubt there are many passages which certainly suggest something like total destruction by any definition (Is.13:5; 13:19; 47:3; Jer.40:12-13; 50:29; 50:39-40; 51:29; 51:13; Ezek.26:17-21; 27:26-36; and compare the similarity of these last two passages with Rev.18-19).

Babylon will be “burned with fire”, left “naked and desolate” with her “flesh eaten”.

(16) Now as for the ten horns which you saw and the beast, these will come to hate the harlot [Babylon] and will render her desolate and naked, and they will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire.

Revelation 17:16-17

(19) And they cast dust upon their heads [in grief] and they cried out, wailing and grieving, saying, “Woe, woe for the great city, [by consorting] with whom all who have ships on the sea became wealthy from her exceptionally expensive [tastes]! [Woe to her] for in a single hour she has been bereft [of it all]”.

Revelation 18:19

(21) And a powerful angel lifted up something resembling a huge stone and cast it into the sea, saying, “Thus in the blink of an eye shall Babylon the great city be thrown down, and never again will there be heard in her (22) the sound of harpists or musicians or flute players or trumpets, and never again will there be found in you any of your skilled technicians, (23) and never again will there be seen in you the light of your lamps, and never again will there be heard in you the [joyous] sound of bridegroom and bride!

Revelation 18:21-23a

(1) After these things I heard something like the sound of a great multitude in heaven, saying, “Hallelujah! Salvation and power belong to our God, (2) for His judgments are true and just. For He has judged the great prostitute who was corrupting the earth with her prostitution, and He has exacted retribution from her hand for the blood of His servants.” (3) And they spoke a second time, “Hallelujah! And her smoke is rising up forever!”

Revelation 19:1-3

Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the glory of the Babylonians' pride, will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah. She will never be inhabited or lived in through all generations; no Arab will pitch his tent there, no shepherd will rest his flocks there. But desert creatures will lie there, jackals will fill her houses; there the owls will dwell, and there the wild goats will leap about. Hyenas will howl in her strongholds, jackals in her luxurious palaces. Her time is at hand, and her days will not be prolonged.

Isaiah 13:19-22 NIV

(3) And it will come to pass on the day when the Lord gives you rest from your pain, and from your turmoil, and from the hard labor which was levied upon you, (4) that you will take up this taunt concerning the king of Babylon (i.e., antichrist), and you will say, “How the oppressor (i.e., antichrist) has come to an end! How the golden [city] (i.e., Babylon) has ceased to be!”

Isaiah 14:3-4

Prepare a place to slaughter his sons for the sins of their forefathers; they are not to rise to inherit the land and cover the earth with their cities. “I will rise up against them,” declares the Lord Almighty. “I will cut off from Babylon her name and survivors, her offspring and descendants,” declares the Lord. “I will turn her into a place for owls and into swampland; I will sweep her with the broom of destruction,” declares the Lord Almighty.

Isaiah 14:21-23 NIV

The ruined city lies desolate; the entrance to every house is barred. In the streets they cry out for wine; all joy turns to gloom, all gaiety is banished from the earth. The city is left in ruins, its gate is battered to pieces.

Isaiah 24:10-12 NIV

Yet the defenced city shall be desolate, and the habitation forsaken, and left like a wilderness: there shall the calf feed, and there shall he lie down, and consume the branches thereof.

Isaiah 27:10 KJV

“Attack the land of Merathaim and those who live in Pekod. Pursue, kill and completely destroy them” declares the Lord. “Do everything I have commanded you.”

Jeremiah 50:21 NIV

Come against her from afar. Break open her granaries; pile her up like heaps of grain. Completely destroy her and leave her no remnant.

Jeremiah 50:26

The land trembles and writhes, for the Lord's purposes against Babylon stand – to lay waste the land of Babylon so that no one will live there.

Jeremiah 51:29 NIV (cf. vv.36-37; and even 25-26)

For the time will surely come when I will punish the idols of Babylon; her whole land will be disgraced and her slain will all lie fallen within her.

Jeremiah 51:47 NIV

Tyre (i.e., as eschatological parallel to Babylon; see notes #38 and #39 above) has built herself a stronghold; she has heaped up silver like dust, and gold like the dirt of the streets. But the Lord will take away her possessions and destroy her power on the sea, and she will be consumed by fire.

Zechariah 9:3-4

Clearly, the coming judgment upon Babylon, whether or not it involves her complete and total depopulation and systematic devastation for all future time, will be horrendous:

Babylon's affliction will produce a dramatic outflow of her non-native population:

Like a hunted gazelle, like sheep without a shepherd, each will return to his own people, each will flee to his native land.

Isaiah 13:14 NIV

Babylon will suddenly fall and be broken. Wail over her! Get balm for her pain; perhaps she can be healed. “We would have healed Babylon, but she cannot be healed; let us leave her and each go to his own land, for her judgment reaches to the skies, it rises as

high as the clouds.”
Jeremiah 51:8 NIV

Babylon's native population will terribly abused and depleted:

Whoever is captured will be thrust through; all who are caught will fall by the sword. Their infants will be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses will be looted and their wives ravished.
Isaiah 13:15-16 NIV

And I will send foreigners to Babylon to winnow her and to empty her land. For they will be against her on every side on the day that evil [comes] upon her.
Jeremiah 51:2 NIV

Babylon will never be rebuilt to her former glory:

For you [O Lord] have turned [Babylon] from a city into a pile of stones, from a fortified town into a ruin, from a city into a citadel for foreigners. It will never be rebuilt forever.
Isaiah 25:2

Sit in silence, go into darkness, Daughter of the Babylonians; no more will you be called queen of kingdoms.
Isaiah 47:5 NIV

In many respects, it is a moot point whether the territory of Babylon, devastated by this invasion and its aftermath, will play host to any significant millennial population.⁴⁷⁸ For on the one hand, in the coming kingdom of our Lord, Babylon's name, fame, power and prestige will be gone forever in any case, with her commercial might completely obliterated. And, on the other hand, no one in their right mind who with the benefit of scripture has discerned the “signs of the times” will forsake the opportunity to flee during this narrow window when the world in general and the population of Babylon in particular wrongly assume that antichrist's reign of terror has come to end.

On balance, the many descriptions of complete devastation seem to leave little that doubt that Babylon will be irreparably destroyed by antichrist's dual assault of massive invasion followed by deliberate incineration. It seems clear that the Lord is making a very deliberate example of Babylon, one whose lesson will continue into the millennial kingdom (and the extensive description given in the rest of chapter eighteen certainly confirms this impression). All other things being equal, therefore, one might suppose that everyone who does not take the opportunity to escape to Jerusalem during the calm before this storm will be caught up in it and destroyed (with the exception of those who somehow manage later to flee successfully: e.g., Is.47:2). There is, however, one piece of information which may challenge this assumption. We have posited in the past that up until this point, Babylon, the original homeland of the beast, has to a large degree been shielded from some of the worst of antichrist's depredations, and may in fact have functioned as a sort of safe haven – not necessarily just for dedicated Christians, but

possibly also for marginal believers and for non-believing Jews as well (especially perhaps in regard to avoiding the mark, something they will no doubt be keen to do in spite of a lack of faith in Christ: cf., Deut.11:18; Jer.30:11). Now one of the first orders of business in Christ's millennial kingdom will be the regathering for evaluation of all remaining Jews from the four corners of the world (cf. Is.11:11-12; 48:20-21; 52:12). It will be recalled that the ministries of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000 resulted in the salvation of a large number of Jewish people around the world though by no means anything like a majority. At this point in time, the believing remnant is enjoying a protected interlude in the desert kept safe by the power of God from all the troubles of the Great Tribulation until Christ's return (Rev.12:13-17; see the previous installment of this series, section IV). Given the large Jewish population in this country, and the very likely possibility that it will increase significantly as Jews around the world seek a place of safety during the worst of the tribulational events, it stands to reason that those Jews living in Babylon at this time will at least escape with their lives so as to be available for the great regathering after our Lord's taking up of His millennial kingship (and that they may perhaps form the largest element of this return).

Writhe in agony, O Daughter of Zion, like a woman in labor, for now you must leave the city to camp in the open field. *You will go to Babylon; there you will be rescued.* There the Lord will redeem you out of the hand of your enemies.

Micah 4:10 NIV

Leave Babylon, flee from the Babylonians! Announce this with shouts of joy and proclaim it. Send it out to the ends of the earth; say, "The Lord has redeemed His servant Jacob." They did not thirst when he led them through *the deserts*; He made water flow for them from the rock; He split the rock and water gushed out.

Isaiah 48:20-21 NIV

I will bring you from the nations and gather you from the countries where you have been scattered—with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with outpoured wrath. I will bring you *into the desert of the nations* and there, face to face, I will execute judgment upon you. As I judged your fathers in the desert of the land of Egypt, so I will judge you, declares the Sovereign Lord.

Ezekiel 20:34-36 NIV

(3) And he took me off in the Spirit to *a desert*. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was covered with blasphemous names, [and which] had seven heads and ten crowns. (4) And the woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and was adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, [and was] holding a golden cup in her hand filled with abominations and [all] the unclean things of her prostitution and [the prostitution] of the earth. (5) And on her forehead a name was written: "mystery *Babylon the great*, the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the world".

Revelation 17:3-5

Such a deliverance from Babylon after the fact would follow the parallel of the Jewish return to the land after the destruction of the historical Babylon. It is thus entirely

possible and consistent with the scriptures quoted above to envision a scenario wherein Babylon will be so thoroughly looted and so deliberately put to the torch that she becomes largely uninhabitable for all time to come, yet without the complete and immediate destruction of all who live within her borders at that time, even though the loss of life may be extreme and the loss of property nearly complete. According to this interpretation, the transfer of population from out of the territory of destroyed Babylon will occur after Christ's return with life in the ruins until that time existing on a bare subsistence level (quite a contrast to Babylon's former unprecedented luxury).

This is what the Lord says – your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: “For your sake I will send to Babylon and bring down as fugitives all the Babylonians, in the ships in which they took pride.”

Isaiah 43:14 NIV

6. The Lament for Babylon: Revelation 18:9-19

(9) And the kings of the earth will cry and mourn over her, even those who committed fornication with her and indulged in wonton excess [with her], when they look upon the smoke of her conflagration, (10) standing at a [safe] distance on account of their fear of her torment, saying, “Woe, woe for the great city, Babylon the mighty! For in one hour the judgment [due] you has come [upon you].” (11) And the merchants of the earth [who did business with] you are crying and grieving over you, because no one buys their cargos any longer, (12) cargos of gold and silver, of precious stones and pearls, of linens and purple [fabrics] and silk and crimson [cloth], and every [sort of product made of] fragrant wood, and every [sort of] product [made of] ivory, and every [sort of] product [made of] exceptionally precious wood and bronze and iron, (13) and [spices of] cinnamon and anise and [various sorts of] incense and myrrh and frankincense and wine and olive oil and fine flour and grain and livestock and sheep, and of horses and chariots and bodies, that is, human beings [enslaved or indentured]. (14) Indeed, the imports your heart lusted for have departed from you. And as to all your sleek and shiny [cultural] exports, [the people of the world] will never find them again. (15) The merchants of [all] these things who grew rich from her (i.e., Babylon) will stand at a distance on account of their fear of her torment, crying and grieving, (16) saying, “Woe, woe for the great city, the one clothed in linen and purple and scarlet, and gilded with gold and precious stones and pearls! (17) [Woe to her,] for in a single hour she has been made bereft of such great wealth!” And every captain and everyone sailing to that place, and sailors, and as many as make their living from the sea stood at a distance, (18) and as they looked at the smoke of her burning they cried out, saying, “What [city was ever] like this great city?” (19) And they cast dust upon their heads [in grief] and they cried out, wailing and grieving, saying, “Woe, woe for the great city, [by consorting] with whom all who have ships on the sea became wealthy from her exceptionally expensive [tastes]! [Woe to her] for in a single hour she has been made bereft [of it all]”.

Revelation 18:9-19

This passage evokes many obvious parallels with Ezekiel's lament over Tyre (chapter 27; cf. also the “woes” of Is.33:1), and depicts the destruction of Babylon as being as

thoroughly complete as that of other previous world empires. However the indictment after the fact here of Babylon's exceptional and unprecedented luxuriation at the expense of others without any concern on her part and in complete rejection and disregard for the Lord's opinion of her wanton behavior is a strikingly severe justification of her total destruction (cf. Zech.5:5-11). There can be no doubt that her supercilious arrogance ascended to record-breaking heights, and that her correspondingly precipitous downfall is not only thoroughly justified but the cause for just as much welcome celebration among the righteous as it is here of lamentation on the part of her accomplices in materialistic excess. As quickly as the forces of antichrist have descended upon Babylon, just as quickly we may expect to see them go, heeding the call to assemble for the battle of Armageddon and leaving a burned out shell in their wake (i.e., Rev.18:10: "one hour" refers to the rapidity of the operation; cf. Jer.51:8). Believers who have now escaped from Babylon in response to the divine warnings that preceded her destruction will have occasion to appreciate the Lord's deliverance of them from that fatally stricken country, no matter how wrenching the departure may have been or how much they may have seemed to have lost in a material way: to have stayed would have meant losing everything, and most probably their lives as well. Jesus tells us that we believers are "the salt of the earth" (Matt.5:13; Mk.9:50; Lk.14:34; cf. Lev.2:13; Num.18:19; Col.4:6), and salt with its preservative properties is a piquant metaphor for the preservative effect of a remnant of genuine, godly believers whose presence God honors wherever they may be found, even if it be in the midst of the Great Prostitute. But now, with all responsive believers having heeded the Lord's command to withdraw from Babylon, the wanton creature has found herself without any shred of protection. And while from the human viewpoint the lack of military defense will seem critical (discussed above), those who know their God will realize that just as the withdrawal of Lot from Sodom paved the way for her destruction, so the removal of the remnant of believers from Babylon will likewise remove the final impediment to her reaping what she has sown (in a similar way that the degradation of the remnant in Israel led to her removal from the land; cf. Lev.26).

The possessive genitive of the second person singular pronoun *sou* (σου) in Revelation 18:11 (in the original of the Sinaiticus manuscript) makes it clear that the merchants in question in Revelation 18:11-13 are not "Babylonian" merchants (who apparently share in the judgment) but traders from other countries around the world. The extensive list of goods in that context are luxury imports, underlining what the Greek words *streniao* (Rev.18:7; 18:9) and *strenios* (18:3) mean in this chapter, namely, Babylon's luxuriating in "wanton excess" even while the rest of the world is going through the stark deprivations of the Tribulation. Babylon is dressed in fine linen (bespeaking her economic dominance and luxury), purple (referring to her [tyrannical] rulership), scarlet (the color both of prostitution and of blood), and is adorned with gilding and precious stones (the results of these three anti-God activities: Rev.18:16). In every respect then, Babylon had become the queen of the nations, but what did this profit her? Though she came close to gaining the entire world, she has now been made bereft of everything she had possessed, plundered, looted, and put to the torch.

Has not the Lord Almighty determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing?
Habakkuk 2:13 NIV

(3) And it will come to pass on the day when the Lord gives you rest from your pain, and from your turmoil, and from the hard labor which was levied upon you, (4) that you will take up this taunt concerning the king of Babylon (i.e., antichrist), and you will say, “How the oppressor (i.e., antichrist) has come to an end! How the golden [city] (i.e., Babylon) has ceased to be!”
Isaiah 14:3-4

7. Heavenly Rejoicing over Babylon: Revelation 18:20 - 19:4

(20) “Rejoice over her, O heaven, even [all] the saints and the apostles and the prophets, because God has exacted from her the retribution due you!” (21) And a powerful angel lifted up something resembling a huge stone and cast it into the sea, saying, “Thus in the blink of an eye shall Babylon the great city be thrown down, and never again will there be heard in her (22) the sound of harpists or musicians or flute players or trumpets, and never again will there be found in you any of your skilled technicians, (23) and never again will there be seen in you the light of your lamps, and never again will there be heard in you the [joyous] sound of bridegroom and bride! For those who did business with you were the great men of the earth, [doing so] because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery. (24) And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all those slain upon the earth.” (1) After these things I heard something like the sound of a great multitude in heaven, saying, “Hallelujah! Salvation and power belong to our God, (2) for His judgments are true and just. For He has judged the great prostitute who was corrupting the earth with her prostitution, and He has exacted retribution from her hand for the blood of His servants.” (3) And they spoke a second time, “Hallelujah! And her smoke is rising up forever!” (4) And the twenty four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits upon the throne, saying, “Amen! Hallelujah!”
Revelation 18:20 - 19:4

The laments for Babylon's destruction coming from the merchants of the world and based upon earthly, materialistic concerns is answered in these verses by heavenly songs of victory which put Babylon's annihilation into its proper, divine perspective: no matter what the world may think, the obliteration of Babylon is a decidedly *good* thing from the only point of view that really counts, God's point of view (for she is inherently evil: see [part 3B, section II.1.c.5.e](#)).

In the process of underlining the permanence of the chilling judgment upon Babylon, we are given here the second divine reason for her destruction. As we saw in verse three of chapter eighteen, the first divine reason concerned the corrupting influence Babylon had exercised upon the world, primarily upon unbelievers, in promoting, supporting, and in fact to a very great degree producing the system of spiritual “prostitution” exploited by antichrist. After reaffirming this first basis for her judgment in Revelation

19:2 (“For He has judged the great prostitute who was corrupting the earth with her prostitution”), the great heavenly multitude whom John hears provide him with the second indictment which has provided grounds for her obliteration: “He has exacted retribution from her hand for the blood of His servants”. Thus, Babylon's pivotal role in antichrist's attempt to expunge all believers in Jesus Christ from the earth during the Great Persecution is the behavior which has sealed her fate. For not only did she support the devil and the beast in their intensified corruption of the world, but she also opposed God in the most hubristic way by making possible the near eradication of believers from the earth. The precise manner of her involvement in this regard, as was suggested in the last installment of this series, are Babylon's commercial, political, military, technological and religious dominance, all of which will have been brought to bear in the effort of Satan and his antichrist to destroy believers worldwide (Rev.17:6; 18:20; 18:24; 19:2; cf. Rev.16:6).⁴⁷⁹

(5) And on her forehead a name was written: “mystery Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the world”. (6) And I saw that the woman was drunk from the blood of the saints, even from the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

Revelation 17:5-6a

The voice of the refugees and fugitives from the land of Babylon [resounds], to tell in Zion (i.e., Jerusalem) of the vengeance of the Lord our God, vengeance for His temple (i.e., believers; cf. 1Cor.3:16-17; 6:19; 2Cor.6:16; Eph.2:21; 1Pet.2:4ff.).

Jeremiah 50:28

[Jeremiah] said to Seraiah, “When you get to Babylon, see that you read all these words aloud. Then say, ‘O Lord, you have said you will destroy this place, so that neither man nor animal will live in it; it will be desolate forever.’ When you finish reading this scroll, tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates. Then say, ‘So will Babylon sink to rise no more because of the disaster I will bring upon her. And her people will fall.’”

Jeremiah 51:61-64a NIV

This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me: “Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them.” So I took the cup from the Lord's hand and made all the nations to whom he sent me drink it: Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, its kings and officials, to make them a ruin and an object of horror and scorn and cursing, as they are today; Pharaoh king of Egypt, his attendants, his officials and all his people, and all the foreign people there; all the kings of Uz; all the kings of the Philistines (those of Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and the people left at Ashdod, Edom, Moab and Ammon; all the kings of Tyre and Sidon; the kings of the coastlands across the sea; Dedan, Tema, Buz and all who are in distant places; all the kings of Arabia and all the kings of the foreign people who live in the desert; all the kings of Zimri, Elam and Media; and all the kings of the north, near and far, one after the other—all the kingdoms on the face of the earth. *And after all of*

them, the king of Sheshach (i.e., Babylon) will drink it too.
Jeremiah 25:15-26 NIV

III. The Beast's Armageddon Crusade

Following the destruction of Babylon, the narrative in Revelation moves swiftly to the Tribulation's end, and the first indication we receive that the battle of Armageddon is about to take place comes later on in chapter nineteen in the description of the Rider on the white horse in verse eleven and following. But we are given no further information in this passage about the activities of the beast in assembling the armies of the world to Israel with the purpose of destroying her and opposing the return of the King. The reason for this rapid conclusion to the narrative of tribulational events is no doubt twofold: 1) from this point forward, the Messiah and His victorious return in company with His newly resurrected Bride, the Church, form the true and proper focus of all that remains to tell next in Revelation, and 2) we are already in possession of the details of antichrist's Armageddon "crusade" which is sufficiently described elsewhere in scripture. Therefore before moving on in Revelation proper (whose next descriptions in 19:5ff. deal exclusively with events on the threshold of the Second Advent, followed immediately by the Second Advent itself), it will be helpful first to pull together here the biblical testimony about the intervening events, that is, the scriptures which deal with antichrist's mustering of all of the armed forces of the world to invade and destroy Israel, and to oppose Jesus Christ upon His return.

With the north back under his control, with all restraint removed for the assembly of the kings of the east, with Babylon now out of the way, and with the forces employed in her destruction now available, the beast's mustering of the armies of the world for the assault upon Israel will begin in earnest. Throughout his rule and visible in his opposition to all truth, antichrist has continually represented the lie as the truth and evil as good. This trend will reach its apex now at the end of the Great Tribulation in the battle of Armageddon, where our returning Lord will be represented by the beast as the usurper who must be opposed at all costs (cf. 2Thes.2:4). We may expect the beast to bill this final "crusade" as being one of so-called "good" against so-called "evil" (Ezek.38-39; Rev.16:12-16; 19:19-21), casting the Jewish people in the role of the last stain which much be erased in order to gain the final victory. Moreover once Israel is destroyed, there will be no one left to deliver. Thus antichrist's gathering of the nations to Jerusalem to exterminate Israel will seem to him and his father the devil the ideal way to put the Lord "on the spot", daring Him to prevent the elimination of the Jewish state and the Jewish race. Since he is the pseudo-Messiah, it had no doubt been a sweet thing for the beast prior to this Jewish rebellion to have his military headquarters at Jerusalem, the prophesied millennial capital. For the past several years, Jerusalem was the capital of death where many were forced to come to worship antichrist on pain of execution; but Jerusalem is also the coming capital of life, where all will desire to come and appear before the true Messiah (Zech.8:23; cf. Is.2:3ff.). That coming wave of visitation will be in response to the divine millennial blessings about to poured out upon the entire earth. At present, however, we see the earth reeling under the bowl

judgments of which Armageddon is the final travail. The unbelieving world led by antichrist is responding to these just judgments from the Lord exactly as Pharaoh had done, by attacking God's people rather than learning from their mistakes. Instead of repentance, the proper response in the face of such clear divine disapproval, the world as a whole is only too happy to join in the madness of the beast's crusade – in an attempt to fight against God Himself.

Now these are spirits of demons which produce “signs”: they will go forth to the kings of the entire earth to gather them together for the war of the great day of God the Almighty.

Revelation 16:14

(1) Why are the nations forming into a mob and the peoples [of the earth] grumbling idly. (2) The kings of the earth are assembling and its princes are gathering together – against the Lord and His Anointed One, [saying] (3) “Let us pull off Their chains, and cast Their cords from us!”

Psalms 2:1-3

The beast's response to the Jewish rebellion will be characteristically swift (cf. Dan.7:6; Rev.13:2), and yet overwhelming in spite of its speed, coming “like a flood” raging over the land of Israel (Is.8:6-8; Dan.9:26; 11:22 [in the Hebrew]).⁴⁸⁰ Feverishly mustering the united armed forces of evil from all the remaining quarters of the earth, antichrist will cause to descend upon the true center of the world an innumerable, polyglot horde with Jerusalem as its objective. But the Lord will help her “at break of day” (Ps.46:5), and, indeed, it has been His plan all along to bring antichrist and all his forces together and cause them to founder on Zion's Rock.

(9) Proclaim this among the nations! Prepare a holy war! Rouse [all] the mighty men! Let all the men of war come near [and] come up [to Jerusalem]. (10) Beat your ploughshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears! Let [even] the feeble man say “I [too] am a mighty man (i.e., fit for service)!” (11) Hurry and come from every direction that you may be assembled there! And Thou, O Lord, Do Thou [likewise] bring down Thy [own] warriors [there to Jerusalem]. (12) Let the nations be roused [from their places], and let them come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat. “For there I will sit in judgment over all the nations on every side.” (13) Send forth the sickle for the harvest is ripe! Come down into the winepress for it is full and the vats overflow. For great is their wickedness. (14) Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of doom! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of doom. (15) The sun and moon will darken, and the stars will gather up their light. (16) Then the Lord will roar from Zion, and from Jerusalem He will let sound His voice, and the heavens and the earth will quake.

Joel 3:9-16

As we saw in our treatment of Revelation 16:12-16 above (i.e., the sixth bowl judgment with its call to Armageddon), this will be a universal proclamation to all the nations on the face of the earth, bringing every able-bodied man to do battle at Jerusalem. Overlooked universally in the translations of this passage is that the Hebrew

verb in the second command of Joel 3:9 means “consecrate” rather than simply “prepare” (from the root *qdsh*, *קדש*). This will indeed be a “holy war”, the final “crusade” of Satan and his antichrist against the coming true Messiah at His own *truly* holy and righteous return. The massive nature of the mobilization can be seen from the description in verse ten above where even the implements of peace are rapidly forged into weapons of war for this final assault on the people of God, a command famously and stunningly reversed in the millennial prophecies of Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3 in a way which serves to demonstrate quite clearly the difference between the pseudo-Messiah and the genuine One about to come. From the passage above we also see that even those who would otherwise be disinclined to enter military service will be zealously enthusiastic to join in this final battle of “total war” between the forces of the devil, seen and unseen, against the camp of God in Jerusalem.

This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me: “Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them.” So I took the cup from the Lord's hand and made all the nations to whom he sent me drink it: Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, its kings and officials, to make them a ruin and an object of horror and scorn and cursing, as they are today; Pharaoh king of Egypt, his attendants, his officials and all his people, and all the foreign people there; all the kings of Uz; all the kings of the Philistines (those of Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and the people left at Ashdod Edom, Moab and Ammon; all the kings of Tyre and Sidon; *the kings of the coastlands across the sea*; Dedan, Tema, Buz and all who are in distant places; all the kings of Arabia and all the kings of the foreign people who live in the desert; all the kings of Zimri, Elam and Media; and *all the kings of the north, near and far*, one after the other – *all the kingdoms on the face of the earth*. And after all of them, the king of Sheshach (i.e., a cryptogram for Babylon) will drink it too. “Then tell them, ‘This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Drink, get drunk and vomit, and fall to rise no more because of the sword I will send among you.’ But if they refuse to take the cup from your hand and drink, tell them, ‘This is what the Lord Almighty says: You must drink it! See, I am beginning to bring disaster on the city that bears my Name, and will you indeed go unpunished? You will not go unpunished, *for I am calling down a sword upon all who live on the earth*, declares the Lord Almighty.’”
Jeremiah 25:15-29 NIV

While the passage from Jeremiah above has its primary application in the lead up to the Babylonian captivity, the highlighted passages show clearly enough that it was meant to have an eschatological application as well, bringing home to Jeremiah's contemporaries the horror of what was about to happen by comparing it to Armageddon (i.e., the “Day of the Lord” paradigm; see part 1 of this series, section IV.1.b). On the other hand, Ezekiel chapters 38-39 are entirely eschatological. Since these two chapters give us the most detailed look at the beast's mustering of the world's armed forces and his subsequent invasion of Israel preceding Armageddon, it is necessary at this point that we make a thorough examination of Ezekiel's description of “Gog of Magog”.

Gog of Magog:

(1) And you, son of man, prophesy against Gog, and say, “Thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold, I am against you, Gog (i.e., antichrist), chief prince of Meshech and Tubhal. (2) And I will fetch you back, and conduct you, and bring you up from the far reaches of the north. For I will make you come to the mountains of Israel. (3) Then I will strike your bow from your left hand, and make your arrows fall from your right hand”.

Ezekiel 39:1-3

In our previous discussions of Ezekiel's description of Gog of Magog (in part 3B of this series: “Antichrist”, section II.1.c.1), we saw that Gog is synonymous with the beast, while Magog means “the place of Gog”. That is to say, in our prophetic context Magog is mystery Babylon (MGG via the use of the Hebrew cryptographic technique of *athbash* stands for LBB = BBL = *Babel*).⁴⁸¹ It is true that the consonants are reversed in the cryptogram (i.e., a direct correspondence would require Babylon's cryptographic name to be “Gogam”). But “Magog” is a historical name (he is one of the sons of Japheth: Gen.10:2), so that the reversal is used no doubt to preserve the identification with mystery Babylon without altering the historical name and so losing that part of the analogy.⁴⁸² For it is precisely by using the historical name “Magog” that the power center of this future invader of Israel is plainly located for the reader in the far north, the historical locale of Japheth's second son.⁴⁸³ Now while eschatological Babylon is, strictly speaking, in the west, historical Babylon is in “the north” in terms of biblical geography, and, until her destruction at the end of the Tribulation, is indistinguishable from the revived Roman empire as part of antichrist's dual base of power. Thus, for Ezekiel's listeners, the association of “Gog”, the future invader of the land, with “Magog”, one of if not the most remote of the northern nations, not only conveys in contemporary terms a perfect picture of what will actually happen, but also allows us with the benefit of later prophetic details to take things a step further and identify “Magog” with prophetic Babylon for the reasons already delineated. Further, if we see in the root of the names “Gog/Magog” a doubling of the Hebrew word for gentile, (*goy*, גוי), then “Magog” will mean something like “archetypical gentile nation”. And with eschatological Babylon being, in ethnic terms, on the one hand more representative of more Japhetic nations than any other single nation, and on the other hand more polyglot in general than any other nation, the use of “Magog” to represent mystery Babylon as the homeland of the beast (he is “*chief prince*” of Magog) and the lynchpin of the dual confederation presided over by Magog (composed of the two parts, Meshech and Tubhal) makes perfect sense. There are, moreover, many indications throughout the context that show of a certainty that Ezekiel is speaking exclusively of far future events in chapters 38-39, and *specifically* of the events of Armageddon:

1) The Lord Himself repeatedly stresses His own role in assembling *all* of His enemies worldwide for this final showdown and their destruction (Ezek.38:3-4; 38:7; 38:16; 39:2), something which never happens before Armageddon (and certainly not in the two previous campaigns between antichrist and the southern alliance).

2) Gog's confederacy indisputably includes both peoples from around the world, and clearly from the south as well as the north working in unison, so that it is clear that this is a worldwide undertaking unlike any preceding campaign in Israel, including the preceding campaigns of the Tribulation.

3) The occasion of burying the bodies of the Lord's enemies afterward Armageddon in chapter 39 (to be covered in part 6 of this series) suggests no further satanic activity thereafter but a time of unprecedented peace and prosperity (esp. Ezek.39:25-39). In all of human history after Eden, only the Millennium fits the situation so described. Additionally, the length of time required for this cleanup (cf. especially the "seven years" of Ezek.39:9) is clearly inconsistent with the immediate arrival of New Jerusalem at the end of the Millennium (following the similarly named Gog-Magog assault on Jerusalem directed against the rule of the Messiah). On this last point, at the end of the post-millennial Gog-Magog rebellion, we are also told that "fire came down from heaven and devoured" this final set of rebels, so that there would be no bodies to bury in that case (Rev.20:9).

4) The statement at Ezekiel 39:26 that "they will forget their shame and all the unfaithfulness they showed toward Me when they lived in safety" must be looking back to the contemporary and tribulational situation, not to the time of the perfect rule of Christ during the Millennium (when there will be no such "shame" or "unfaithfulness"; e.g., Jer.31:33-34). Moreover the following verse, Ezek.39:27 sets the time frame as still future: "when I have brought them back from the nations", namely, the regathering of Israel by divine agency after the 2nd Advent at the conclusion of the battle of Armageddon (as distinguished from the present political situation; cf. Is.60:8ff.; Zech.8:23).

5) The great earthquake mentioned in this context is an event which precedes the 2nd Advent (i.e., around the time of the seventh bowl judgment: compare Ezek.38:19 with Rev.16:18).

6) There is only one human army described here, that of antichrist, showing that this is not one of the earlier campaigns of antichrist against the south or an earlier historical invasion, but the predicted arraying of the nations against the Lord and His Anointed at Armageddon (Ps.2).

7) The way in which the warriors of the beast go mad and kill each other in a frenzy is also consistent with other 2nd Advent-Armageddon passages (compare Ezek.38:21-22 with Zech.14:13).

8) The plague of hail at Ezekiel 38:22 is, as we have seen, also a well-known pre-cursor of the 2nd Advent-Armageddon (cf. Rev.16:21).

9) The Lord uses the destruction of Gog's army to make Himself and His power known to the world (Ezek.38:16; 38:23; 39:6), something that only happens at its most emphatic at the 2nd Advent during the battle of Armageddon (cf. Rev.1:7; 19:11-16).

10) The bodies of the dead providing food for the birds is also a 2nd Advent-Armageddon reference (compare Ezek.39:17ff. with Rev.19:17-18).

11) The fire which is poured out upon Magog (Ezek.39:6) is in part a reference to the same event as the fiery destruction of Babylon in Revelation 17-18 (although with the phrase “even upon those of the coast-lands who live in safety”, we have an expansion of the judgment to more of the west after Armageddon; see part 6 of this series).

12) Ezekiel 39:36 speaks of the regathering of Israel following the invasion as a result of which there will be “no one to make them afraid” any longer, a clear reference to the peace and security of the Messiah's millennial kingdom.

(2) “Son of man, set your face against Gog (i.e., antichrist) of the land of Magog (i.e., Babylon, the home kingdom of the beast) [he who is] chief prince of Meshech and Tubhal (i.e., Revived Rome). Prophecy against him (3a) and say ‘Thus says the Lord God. Behold, I am against you, Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubhal.
Ezekiel 38:2-3a

Just as Ezekiel's reference to historical Magog refers prophetically to the beast's home country, Babylon, so his use of Meshech and Tubhal, also sons of Japheth, is likewise focused on future rather than contemporary events. The pairing here of these two ancient nations reveals to us that in addition to ruling his own “super-nation”, Babylon, antichrist also holds sway over a larger, composite empire (a.k.a., “revived Rome”), one consisting of two essential parts and named here “Meshech and Tubhal”.⁴⁸⁴ Thus, as in the case of Magog, these names are given to Ezekiel by the Spirit in order to express future prophetic realities in geographical terms understandable to his contemporary readers. For our purposes here in examining the beast's Armageddon campaign, we can say that the core of his invasion force will be composed of the same set of armies he used to conquer the south, that is, the armed forces of the west and the north, that is, of (now destroyed) Babylon and her allies and of the revived Rome and her allies respectively. However, since *both* Meshech and Tubhal are mentioned, we can be sure that the second part of antichrist's revived Roman empire, the newly conquered southern alliance (i.e., the three horns out of the ten which fall before the small horn in Daniel 7:8), will also contribute her entire complement of military might (and we have also seen from Rev.16:12 that the east will contribute as well).

(3b) “And I shall bring you back [here again] (i.e., for Armageddon). (4) For I shall put my hooks in your jaw and make you come, [you] and your entire army of horses and horsemen, all of them fully arrayed [in battle gear], a vast multitude, all of them with shields and bucklers and carrying swords. (5) Persia, Cush, and Put will be with them, all with shield and helmet, (6) Gomer, and all her hordes, Beth-Togarmah (i.e., “the house of Torgarmah”) [at] the recesses of the north and all her hordes, a host of [allied]

nations with you [O Gog]. (7) Make thorough preparations, you [O Gog] and all your troops who have gathered together around you, and be on your guard for them."
Ezekiel 38:3b-7

This passage demonstrates that bringing the beast and his hordes to Jerusalem in order to destroy them utterly is unquestionably “of God”, while the image in verse four of our Lord physically impaling Gog and his armies with a hook and dragging them to the slaughter of Armageddon states in the most unequivocal terms the irresistible nature of the divine plan to defeat this final offensive of the devil and the devil's chosen one, and to do so in an unprecedentedly decisive way. For it is the Lord who will “bring you back”. The Hebrew verb here (*shabhabh*, שָׁבַב) indicates quite unmistakably that Gog has been in Israel before (a reference to antichrist's prior residence in Jerusalem). This theme of Gog being led to his destruction by the Lord in the manner of Pharaoh is later emphatically repeated in the above quoted beginning of chapter 39:1-3 as well where the Lord renews His pledge to “bring Gog back” to Israel, adding that He Himself will “conduct you” (i.e., the Lord's facilitation of a rapid and complete arrival of antichrist's forces to Jerusalem),⁴⁸⁵ “bring you up from the far reaches of the north” (“up”, as always because of Jerusalem's relative elevation; “the north” is precisely the region whence antichrist will begin the campaign) and, finally “make you come”. This last phrase shows us once again that in spite of the beast's and the devil's enthusiasm for this evil crusade, the Lord is the One who is leading them on to a complete annihilation that is already firmly determined in the plan of God, precisely as He led Pharaoh into the Red Sea only to dispose of him and his army in an equally complete and miraculous manner.

The following verses describe in vivid terms the sheer size of this expedition which will constitute the largest and most powerful force ever brought to bear against a single objective in world history (v.4 “a vast multitude”, and cf. the muster list later in the chapter). Nor should we assume based upon the excessively large numbers involved that the quality of these troops will be substandard: 1) it will be an entirely mechanized force (v.4 an “entire army of horses and horsemen”); 2) it will be an exceptionally well equipped force (v.4 “all of them fully arrayed [in battle gear]”, “all of them with shields and bucklers and carrying swords”); 3) it will be a force composed of “1A” regulars and veterans, the best each political entity has to offer (v.5 “all with shield and helmet”). And in spite of the swiftness of its mustering and the rapidity of its assembly in the theater of operations, it will not for all that be either disorganized, or unprepared, or operating without proper plans or orders. For the Lord Himself is seen here to give the command and to offer encouragement to the beast and his general staff to put forth their very best effort in this regard as well (v.7 “Make thorough preparations, you [O Gog] and all your troops who have gathered together around you”, and “be on your guard for them”). In short, this will be absolutely the largest, best equipped, best trained and prepared, most professional combat force conducting the most effective operation in world history – and that is precisely the point. Were the defenders reduced to mere human means, they would stand less than no chance before antichrist and his irresistible Blitzkrieg. But it is the Lord whom they will meet at Armageddon, and the

sharp sword that proceeds out of the mouth of the glorious Messiah, the Son of Man, our Savior Jesus Christ (Rev.19:15; cf. Is.1:20; 49:2; Heb.4:12; Rev.1:16; 2:12; 2:16).

As to the nations listed in verses 3-7 above, these can be broken down into three essential groupings: 1) Persia, Cush, and Put; 2) “Gomer, and all her hordes” along with “Beth-Togarmah [at] the recesses of the north and all her hordes”, and 3) “a host of [allied] nations”. As to the first group, these nations are representative of the south and, specifically, of the three regional powers of the southern alliance now subject to the beast (i.e., three of the ten horns that form the revived Roman empire; cf. Dan.7:7; 7:20; Rev.12:3; 13:1; 17:3-16). Persia may be taken to represent Iran and the central Asian power center (Turkey to Kazakstan). Put refers to Libya and represents North Africa. Cush, in biblical terms usually refers to Ethiopia but sometimes also to Mesopotamia (cf. Cush, the father of Nimrod who operated in that region: Gen.10:8), and in our context probably has both meanings, referring to the arc of southern kingdoms from Ethiopia and Sudan across the Red Sea and into Arabia and Iraq. Egypt is notably missing from this description no doubt because as the head of the southern alliance she suffered especially grievously at the hands of antichrist after their defeat (cf. Ezek.30:2-26; 32:11-15).

“For I will spur on Egyptians against Egyptians, and they will fight one against his brother and another against his friend, a city against a city and a kingdom against a kingdom (i.e., the splintering of the triple coalition). And Egypt's spirit will be emptied from the midst of her, for I will confound her plans, although they consult their idols and mediums and oracles and familiar spirits. And I will hand Egypt over into the hand of a cruel master (i.e., antichrist), even a stern king (i.e., antichrist; cf. Dan.8:23) [who] will rule over them, says the Lord God of hosts.”
Isaiah 19:2-4 (cf. Is.19:5-17 compared with Is.19:18-24)

In the second grouping we find only two subdivisions, Gomer and “the house of Togarmah”. That is because these two sons of Japheth represent the twin pillars of the beast's power during the first half of the Tribulation, the west from whence he sprang (and which until only just recently was dominated by the now destroyed Babylon), and the north (that is, the first seven kingdoms of revived Rome), conquered in the early days of the Tribulation. Gomer and Togarmah, often taken to be the Cimmerians dwelling in the *terra incognita* of the northern steps and the somewhat less remote Armenians,⁴⁸⁶ thus represent from the biblical perspective the more and the less exotic quadrants of the world respectively, namely, the (in Ezekiel's time) unknown west and the somewhat less mysterious north. With the addition of the final element in verse six, “a host of [allied] nations with you [O Gog]”, we have a reference to the last of the world's four quadrants, the east, now brought into this final conflict by specific divine facilitation represented by the “drying up” of Euphrates to “prepare the way for the kings of the east” at Revelation 16:12 in the sixth bowl judgment, “Armageddon” (cf. Rev.16:16). In the clearest possible terms his contemporaries could fathom, Ezekiel has thus through his delineation of the muster list of antichrist demonstrated through the

Spirit that this mobilization will be worldwide in its scope and massive in its implementation.

(8) “Many days from now you [and your forces] will be mustered. At the end of the years (i.e., at the end of the 6,000 years of human history just prior to Armageddon) you will come to a land restored from the sword, [to a nation] gathered out of many peoples, [you will come] against the mountains of Israel which had [previously] been [in a state] of continual devastation. (9) When you come up [against the land of Israel] you will come like a cataclysm. You will be like a [storm] cloud and cover the land, you and all your hordes and the many peoples with you.”

Ezekiel 38:8-9

For the many reasons already delineated (i.e., the list of twelve given above), what is being described here is not the end of the Millennium, but rather that political situation as it will obtain on the eve of Armageddon. The passage is very careful *not* to say that the inhabitants of the land have been regathered “by the Lord” (the process of this prophetically necessary pre-Tribulation regathering is already far advanced in our time of course). Further, while the situation in Israel on the brink of the beast's invasion will be one of “restoration from the sword”, nothing more is implied by these words than a breathing space from war and domination by others (and certainly not the much anticipated prosperity of the Millennium). The fact that the world in general and the government of Israel with her ally Babylon had imprudently anticipated antichrist's demise as he disappeared into the darkness of the fifth bowl judgment will merely make the short respite all the more disappointing. For the contrast between the anticipated end to the beast's rule and all the concomitant evils of the Great Tribulation will be jarring as the newfound peace and tranquility dissolves into the cataclysm of this advancing storm.

(10) Thus says the Lord God, “It will come to pass on that day that thoughts will rise in your heart and you will devise an evil plan. (11) For you will say, ‘I shall go up against [that] land of unfortified towns and villages. I shall attack those who are at peace, all living in [false] security, all of them inhabiting [towns and villages] without defenses (lit., “bars and doors”, i.e., city gates).’ (12) [For you shall] take plunder and take spoil and set your hand against [previously] desolate places which are [now] inhabited, and against a people [recently] gathered from the nations and now in the process of acquiring livestock and property and dwelling at the center of the world. (13) Sheba and Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish and all her nobles will say to you, ‘Have you come to take plunder? Have you gathered your troops to carry off silver and gold, to take [their] cattle and property, to take much loot?’”

Ezekiel 38:10-13

In no further need of the Jewish state and eager to punish them for their unfaithfulness, antichrist at the behest of his father the devil has conceived the “evil plan” of annihilating the Jewish race now heavily concentrated in this single location. As at the present time, the indications are that during the Tribulation the Jewish state has continued to rely on the strategy of counter-attack and mobile rather than static

defenses. While generally a superior approach for a highly skilled armed force, against vastly numerically superior and equally skilled opponents attacking simultaneously from every direction, the lack of any significant fixed fortifications will be sorely felt, and, as the scriptures above suggest, will place the Israeli army at a considerable disadvantage. We may expect that, as news of the beast's re-emergence and of his mustering of the world's armies for Armageddon reaches Israel, it will occasion a frantic effort to construct makeshift forts and entrenchments throughout the land, and especially around the capital of Jerusalem. To the rest of the world, however, the imminent demise of the Jewish state will seem certain, so that the international merchant class, represented by the traders of Sheba, Dedan and Tarshish (noted trading nations of Ezekiel's day representing from their relative geography vis-à-vis Israel the mercantile interests of the south, west, and north respectively), will be looking forward to the opportunity of trafficking in what promises to be a wholesale liquidation of all property within the borders of the Jewish state just as soon as antichrist's mission is accomplished. The eagerness visible in the verses above is not doubt accentuated by the fact that the seven years of tribulation have taken their toll on the world and its wealth (not to mention that their best customer, Babylon, has just recently been obliterated), but Israel, as the headquarters of the beast and his religion for the past three years has benefitted economically significantly more than any other nation, though that "benefit" has come at the extremely high cost of having to experience the presence of antichrist and his anti-God rule more directly than any other nation.

(14) "Therefore prophecy, son of man, and say to Gog, 'Thus says the Lord God. On that day when My people are living [in false] security will you not realize it? (15) For you will come from your place, from the far north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding horses, a huge multitude and a vast army. (16) And I will bring you up against my people Israel like a cloud covering the earth. At the end of days (i.e., in the last days, the Tribulation: cf. Is.2:2) it will come to pass that I will bring you against my land so that the nations may know Me (i.e., understand who I am) when I show forth My holiness in their sight by [destroying] you, O Gog'."

Ezekiel 38:14-16

Finally, it should also be pointed out here that the essential strategy of Armageddon has been developed by Satan, and that Israel is really not so much the target as she is the bait, for it is the true of essence of the devil's mad plan to force the issue in one place and at one time in a final confrontation of all the forces he can muster, human and angelic, with the Lord Himself (e.g., Ps.2:1-3; Rev.16:14). But of course the entirety of all creature effort is a laughable pittance in the face of the least expression of divine power. Just as the Lord raised up Pharaoh for the very purpose of displaying His power and proclaiming His Name (Ex.9:16; cf. Rom.9:17), so all the devil's efforts through the mobilization of more human might than has ever been deployed in one place in world history will only serve to "show forth my holiness in their sight by [destroying] you, O Gog" (Ezek.38:16).

The Jewish Resistance:

As the class most resentful of antichrist in his portrayal of himself as “the Holy One of Israel” coupled with his breaking of the pseudo-Messianic treaty (Dan.9:27; cf. part 3B of this series, section IV, “Antichrist's Alliance with Israel”), we may expect that it will have been the religious conservatives and nationalistic zealots who took the lead in rebelling against the beast. While the first object of their attention, Jerusalem, has by now most likely come completely under their control (or nearly so: cf. Rev.11:2), we may also posit as suggested above, that, at the time of the beast's re-emergence from the northern darkness and his call to Armageddon, there will still remain strongholds within the land of Israel whence the loyalists of the secular party and the relatively small contingents of antichrist's armed forces still based in the land of Israel at that time will have fled for safety. The existence of these hostile strong-points throughout Israel in the face of an imminent invasion of incredibly mammoth proportions will pose a major complication for the leaders of the Jewish resistance and will greatly complicate the defense. Indications from scripture are that instead of attempting to defend the entire land of Israel, a very difficult prospect under the best of circumstances and objectively impossible in this situation, the Jewish generals will fall back upon Jerusalem and fortify the capital with every available soldier and all available means (as was typically the case in antiquity, e.g., 586 B.C. versus the Babylonians and 70 A.D. versus the Romans). Thus it is at Jerusalem that the final battle of the Tribulation will be fought, the “Mountain of [the assembly of] Troops” otherwise known as Armageddon. This has been the Lord's plan from the beginning, and it is He who is in truth directing things to this end (Ezek.38:16).

Something to keep in mind as we examine the passages which relate the heroic but seemingly futile Jewish resistance to antichrist's invasion is that these defenders however noble and however courageous share a common characteristic which has brought them to this pass: they all rejected the ministry of Moses and Elijah during the Tribulation's first half. Had they accepted the testimony of these two great prophets and the ministry of the 144,000 martyrs, they would presently find themselves safely ensconced in the wilderness far east of Jerusalem, riding out the storms of the Great Tribulation and this latest catastrophe in the embrace of God's protection, waiting for the return of the King when they, in company with all believers still alive and all who have by then passed on to be with the Lord, would have been resurrected on that glorious day of resurrection at the 2nd Advent of Jesus Christ. Many if not most of these men and women who resist the beast's assault will convert when they see the sign of the Son of Man and witness His return with their own eyes (Matt.24:30; cf. Zech.12:10; Rev.1:7), but their reluctance to put their faith in Jesus before His actual return will mean that they will have to wait for their own time of resurrection as the double portion of Christ's victory prize, the resurrection of the Friends of the Bride who will take on immortality at the end of His millennial kingdom (1Cor.15:24). Nevertheless, there is indeed a distinction to be made on the one hand between these courageous, conservative defenders whose hearts have been vexed in all of antichrist's doings, who come in for scriptural praise in their conduct of the defense, and who apparently *do* convert upon our Lord's return, and on the other hand the secular compromisers who embraced the beast, no doubt accepting his mark. This distinction is also born out in the prophetic passages which describe honorable fighting by the former group while other scriptures

describe the low state of affairs in Israel on the threshold of this invasion. Since the Tribulation is a time of judgment, the Lord is using this invasion also as a final bit of punctuation to demonstrate that compromise with evil whether to a small or great degree (i.e., failure to choose for the good on the one hand and wholehearted choosing of evil on the part of the latter) both invite divine judgment.

(1) Blow a trumpet in Zion, and raise the alarm on my holy mountain. All the inhabitants of the earth are distressed, because *the Day of the Lord* is coming, because it is near at hand. (2) A day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and deep gloom. An army great and mighty is [coming], spreading itself out over your mountains like the dawn. There has never been anything like it since the beginning of time and never will be again in latter times from generation to generation. (3) Fire devours in front of them, and behind them flames are set ablaze. In front of them the land is like the garden of Eden, but behind them is a desolate desert and nothing escapes them. (4) Their appearance is like that of horses, and they race forward just like mounted cavalry. (5) Their clatter on the mountains is like that of chariots, like the sound of fire devouring chaff, like a mighty army arraying itself for battle. (6) Before them the nations writhe in anguish and every face turns pale. (7) They rush on like mighty men. Like men of war they storm the wall. They all keep their ranks and all march straight ahead. (8) They do not crowd each other. Each maintains his file. They throw themselves at the defenses. They do not falter. (9) They charge into the city. They rush the wall. They go up into the houses. They enter into the windows like a thief. (10) The earth trembles before them and the heavens quake. The sun and the moon grow dark and the stars contract their light. (11) Then the Lord will sound forth with His voice before *His* host, for *His* army is [also] very large, for [the forces] who obey *His* word are [also] numerous. For *the Day of the Lord* is great and extremely awesome. Who can endure it?

Joel 2:1-11

Comment: The passage above is a very clear example of the sort of dual application of prophetic scripture we have been discussing since the beginning of this series. Through the use of the “Day of the Lord paradigm”, Joel is very clearly speaking both about the invasion of locusts during his own day (cf. Joel 1:2-4), while at the same time illustrating that invasion through comparison to the beast's invasion for Armageddon. By terming the locust “a nation” in chapter one verse six, Joel has prepared his readers for this more expansive comparison in chapter two wherein the invasion of locusts is deliberately compared to the invasion of the beast's army prior to Armageddon, an event which ends in the “Day of the Lord” proper when Christ returns and destroys the literal armies of antichrist. The comparison is rendered unmistakable when Joel actually describes this “locust” invasion as directly preceding “the Day of the Lord” (framing the passage with that description in both verse one and verse eleven). Through this common prophetic and Holy Spirit inspired device, not only are Joel's contemporaries given a helpful point of comparison for their suffering in judgment, but we too are blessed in being given a precisely parallel representation of the beast's invasion where the speed, shock, and irresistible nature of antichrist's offensive are brought home in a very graphic way. The eschatological significance not only of this and other passages but also of the situation

generally cannot have been lost on the Jewish rebels who are led by religious though non-believing conservatives. It is safe to say that as in the case of other such Jewish rebellions in the past, they are staking their survival on divine intervention, and, specifically, on the return of the Messiah. It is thus more than a little ironic that these religious conservatives will in truth have correctly divined the signs of the times and the prophetic situation, but will have missed the main point of this entire exercise (i.e., the need for faith in Christ), stumbling over the cross of Messiah in order to embrace His crown. But before this campaign is at an end, the futility and pointlessness of all human endeavor apart from accepting the merciful provision of God in the Person of Jesus will be made evident.

(6) “Because this people has rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah and rejoices over Rezin and the son of Remaliah, (7) therefore the Lord is about to bring against them the mighty floodwaters of the River — the king of Assyria with all his pomp. It will overflow all its channels, run over all its banks (8) and sweep on into Judah, swirling over it, passing through it and reaching up to the neck. Its outspread wings will cover the breadth of your land, *O Immanuel!*” (9) Raise the war cry, you nations, and be shattered! Listen, all you distant lands. Prepare for battle, and be shattered! Prepare for battle, and be shattered! (10) Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted; propose your plan, but it will not stand, for *God is with us.*

Isaiah 8:6-10 NIV

Comment: The word “Shiloah” means “[the] One sent” and is reference to the true Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ (Jn.3:16; 3:34; Jn.17:1-5; 17:18; 17:20-22; Rom.8:3; Gal.4:4-6; Heb.3:1; 1Jn.4:9-10; cf. Gen.49:10; Is.8:6; Zech.2:9; 2:11; 4:9; 6:15), and the water is a reference to the truth of the gospel that brings rest and salvation (Jn.3:5; 1Cor.10:4; Rev.7:17; 21:6; 22:1; 22:17). Isaiah's contemporaries, like the religious conservatives of the brink of Armageddon, were relying on human agency rather than the divine help which only comes to those who are seeking God in the correct way – through His Son Jesus Christ. As a result, the “hired razor from beyond the Euphrates” (Is.7:20) would be employed to destroy the idolatrous northern kingdom and chastise the sinful southern kingdom, not entirely annihilating the latter, but, as the passage above says, sweeping through the land like a flood that reaches all the way up to the neck (i.e, stops only just short of utter devastation). It will be recalled that the Lord did indeed deliver the kingdom of Judah on this occasion and in miraculous fashion as the Angel of the Lord (an appearance of Christ in “Christophany”) slew 185,000 Assyrian soldiers encamped before Jerusalem (Is.37:36).⁴⁸⁷ Thus we see many parallels in the previous historic situation to the one presently under discussion wherein Immanuel, “God *with us*” is indeed on the point of returning to rule the world. Just as the northern kingdom was swept away at that time, so on this occasion only Jerusalem and its environs will prove able to provide anything more than token resistance in the face of antichrist's assault, and just as the Lord make a point of delivering Judah in an unanticipated and miraculous way only after she had been thoroughly chastened and only after all human means had utterly failed, so our Lord will return in glory to extirpate the beast's hordes only after the resistance of the rebellion has been broken (cf. Dan.12:7). The Messianic war cry of the rebels, “God is with us!”, that is “*Immanuel*”,

will prove to be true indeed, but not for the reasons they suppose, nor will their deliverance come at a time or in the manner they hope. They will first have to experience the shattering of their might, and then will be revealed the sign of “the Son of Man” emblazoned in the heavens for all to see: the *Cross of Jesus Christ* (Matt.24:30; cf. Zech.12:10; Rev.1:7).

(9) And He said to me, “Go and say to this people, ‘Hear well, but do not comprehend. See well, but do not understand’. (10) Harden the heart of this people, make their ears heavy, and blind their eyes, so that they may not see with their eyes, nor hear with their ears, nor understand with their hearts, nor repent and be healed”. (11) Then I said, “Until when, Lord?” And He replied, “Until their cities are devastated without anyone dwelling [there] and their houses [are empty] without any inhabitants, and their land is devastated with appalling destruction. (12) And [until] the Lord removes the inhabitants far away so that the desolation is great in the midst of the land [of Israel].
Isaiah 6:9-12

Comment: This passage and many others firmly connect the resistance of the inhabitants of the land of Israel to this final scourging judgment at antichrist's hand, so that whether the recipients are secular confederates and servants of the beast or conservative religious Jews who have continued to resist the reality of the true Messiah Jesus Christ, the essential reason for the devastating nature of the beast's invasion will be precisely on account of their rejection of God's will for them (see also especially Is.3:1 - 4:1; 5:8-30; 17:4-14, 33:7-9, 51:17-20; 64:9-12, prophetic descriptions of the dire state of affairs in Israel at this time and the underlying reason for it).⁴⁸⁸

(5) “Announce in Judah and proclaim in Jerusalem and say: ‘Sound the trumpet throughout the land!’ Cry aloud and say: ‘Gather together! *Let us flee to the fortified cities!*’ (6) Raise the signal to go to Zion! Flee for safety without delay! For I am bringing disaster from the north, even terrible destruction.” (7) *A lion* has come out of his lair (i.e., the beast); *a destroyer of nations* has set out (i.e., antichrist). He has left his place to lay waste your land. Your towns will lie in ruins without inhabitant.
Jeremiah 4:5-7 NIV

(11) At that time this people and Jerusalem will be told, “A scorching wind from the barren heights in the desert blows toward my people, but not to winnow or cleanse; (12) a wind too strong for that comes from me. Now I pronounce *my judgments* against them.” (13) Look! He advances like the clouds, his chariots come like a whirlwind, his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us! We are ruined!
Jeremiah 4:11-13 NIV

(15) A voice is announcing from Dan, proclaiming disaster from the hills of Ephraim. (16) “Tell this to the nations, proclaim it to Jerusalem: ‘A besieging army is coming from a distant land, raising a war cry against the cities of Judah. (17) They surround her like men guarding a field, because she has rebelled against me,’” declares

the Lord.
Jeremiah 4:15-17 NIV

(29) At the sound of horsemen and archers every town takes to flight. Some go into the thickets; some climb up among the rocks. All the towns are deserted; no one lives in them.

Jeremiah 4:29 NIV

Comment: These excerpts from Jeremiah chapter four speak about the contemporary situation of Nebuchadnezzar's imminent invasion of Israel during the 6th century B.C., but also have the same prophetic application we have been noticing throughout.⁴⁸⁹ The attribution of the attack to “a lion” and “a destroyer of nations” is a clear reference to the beast, and the message that the judgment about to leveled at his hands has a divine origin is impossible to overlook. The swiftness of the assault and stunning nature of the devastation it will wreak are also very clear from the quotes above and from the rest of Jeremiah chapter four as well. Finally, these passages also illustrate the last ditch strategy of the rebels, namely, retreat to the most inaccessible and highly fortified areas within the land of Israel, and, preeminently, to Jerusalem, the one place most worth fighting for to the end, and the one place where divine deliverance may best be expected.

The rapid narrowing in of the campaign to the network of valleys surrounding Jerusalem and leading down to the coast is especially obvious in Isaiah chapter 22 where the frantic efforts to fortify the capital in the face of the northern invasion are recounted.

(1) An oracle concerning the Valley of Vision: What troubles you now, that you have all gone up on the roofs, (2) O town full of commotion, O city of tumult and revelry? Your slain were not killed by the sword, nor did they die in battle. (3) All your leaders have fled together; they have been captured without using the bow. All you who were caught were taken prisoner together, having fled while the enemy was still far away. (4) Therefore I said, “Turn away from me; let me weep bitterly. Do not try to console me over the destruction of my people.” (5) The Lord, the Lord Almighty, has a day of tumult and trampling and terror in the Valley of Vision, a day of battering down walls and of crying out to the mountains. (6) Elam takes up the quiver, with her charioteers and horses; Kir uncovers the shield. (7) Your choicest valleys are full of chariots, and horsemen are posted at the city gates; (8) the defenses of Judah are stripped away. And you looked in that day to the weapons in the Palace of the Forest; (9) you saw that the City of David had many breaches in its defenses; you stored up water in the Lower Pool. (10) You counted the buildings in Jerusalem and tore down houses to strengthen the wall. (11) You built a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the Old Pool, but you did not look to the One who made it, or have regard for the One who planned it long ago.

Isaiah 22:1-11 NIV

All of the factors discussed above are evident here, the rapidity of the oncoming disaster, the early shift of focus for the defense exclusively to Jerusalem, and the stop-gap

measures taken to ward off the coming assault. And even in the face of the overwhelming force swiftly arrayed in battle line before the city and the irresistible nature of their approach, still we see a stubborn refusal to understand that this judgment is from the Lord and is the result of the rejection of His true Messiah.⁴⁹⁰

The Siege Begins:

But now *marshal your [own] troops* O city of troops [marshaled against you]. For *they have laid siege to us*.

Micah 5:1a

Then [upon his return to Israel] he (i.e., antichrist) will pitch the tents of his [royal] pavilion *between the seas* (i.e., the Mediterranean and the Dead seas) *near the mountain of the beauty of holiness* (i.e., the temple mount in Jerusalem). But [in spite of this (i.e., his hopes for success in the battle of Armageddon)] he will come to his end, and no one will aid him [then].

Daniel 11:45

(1) Woe to you, Ariel, Ariel, the city where David encamped (i.e., Jerusalem)! Add year to year, let your festivals run their course, (2) but *I will besiege Ariel* so that there will be mourning and lamentation, and she will become to Me like an “Ariel” (lit., “God’s [sacrificial] altar”). (3) For *I will beleaguer you* round about with palisades, and *surround you with siege works*. (4) You will be brought low and speak from the ground, and from the dust your speech will be humbled. Your voice will come ghost-like from the earth, and your speech will come muttering from the dust. (5) But the multitude of your enemies will become like pulverized powder, even like chaff sweeping away [on the wind] that multitude of ruthless [enemies]. And it will come to pass in an instant that (6) you will experience visitation from the Lord of Hosts [Himself], with thunder and quaking [of the earth] and a loud voice, with tempest and whirlwind and devouring flames of fire. (7) And the hordes of the nations mustering against Ariel will become like [just] a dream in the visions of the night, even all those who camp against her and her fortress and besiege her. (8) And it will be as when a hungry man dreams he is eating, but when he awakes his appetite remains unfulfilled, or as when a thirsty man dreams he is drinking, but when he awakes his thirst remains. This is how it will be for the multitude of all the nations who are going to marshal themselves against Mount Zion.

Isaiah 29:1-8

These passages, while presaging the beast’s defeat in the soon to ensue battle of Armageddon, show antichrist hemming in the resistance in preparation for a grand assault on Jerusalem. At His return, our Lord will breath courage and might into the defense (Is.28:5-6; Ob.1:18; Mic.4:11-13; 5:5-9; Zech.9:13-16; 10:3-7). At this moment, however, as the dire nature of their predicament sinks in, the defenders have begun to realize the complete hopelessness of their cause absent a miraculous divine

intervention, a situation producing mixed emotions and pleas for help amidst expressions of despair:

The harvest is over, the summer has past (i.e., time-frame nearing the Day of Atonement), but [still] we have not been delivered!
Jeremiah 8:20

(9) Proclaim this among the nations! Prepare a holy war! Rouse [all] the mighty men! Let all the men of war come near [and] come up [to Jerusalem]. (10) Beat your ploughshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears! Let [even] the feeble man say “I [too] am a mighty man (i.e., fit for service)!” (11) Hurry and come from every direction that you may be assembled there! *And Thou, O Lord, Do Thou [likewise] bring down Thy [own] warriors [there to Jerusalem].*
Joel 3:9-11

(1) You have rejected us, O God, and burst forth upon us; you have been angry – now restore us! (2) You have shaken the land and torn it open; mend its fractures, for it is quaking. (3) You have shown your people desperate times; you have given us wine that makes us stagger. (4) But for those who fear you, you have raised a banner to be unfurled against the bow. Selah (5) Save us and help us with your right hand, that those you love may be delivered. (6) God has spoken from his sanctuary: “In triumph I will parcel out Shechem and measure off the Valley of Succoth. (7) Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine; Ephraim is my helmet, Judah my scepter. (8) Moab is my washbasin, upon Edom I toss my sandal; over Philistia I shout in triumph.” (9) Who will bring me to the fortified city? Who will lead me to Edom? (10) Is it not you, O God, you who have rejected us and no longer go out with our armies? (11) Give us aid against the enemy, for the help of man is worthless. (12) With God we will gain the victory, and he will trample down our enemies.
Psalm 60:1-12 NIV

(5) For this One (i.e., the Messiah) will be our peace. When Ashur (i.e., a type of antichrist's world coalition) comes against our land, and when he tramples upon our fortifications, we will appoint seven generals (lit., “shepherds”; cf.) against him, even eight rulers of men (i.e., the seven and the supreme civil commander represented by Shebna in Is.22:20-25). (6) And Ashur will ravage the land with the sword, even [the people of] Nimrod right up to the very entrances [to Jerusalem].
Micah 5:5-6a

For I will assemble all the nations to Jerusalem for war, and the city will be captured, and its houses will be plundered, and its women will be ravished, and half the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city.
Zechariah 14:2

(6) And I asked the man (i.e., angel) clothed in linen [suspended] above the waters of the Euphrates how long [it would be] until the fulfillment of these marvelous things. (7) And I heard the man (i.e., angel) clothed in linen [suspended] above the waters of the

Euphrates; for he lifted his hand and his left hand to heaven and swore by the One who lives forever that it would be a time, times, and a half (i.e., the three and a half years of the Great Tribulation), and that when [they] (i.e., the beast's forces) had finished shattering the power of the holy people, all these things would come to an end.
Daniel 12:6-7

As the last two passages in particular demonstrate, all resistance will prove vain, for it has not been of God. The Lord will allow the “power of the holy people” to be shattered, and Jerusalem to be captured and on the point of going completely into exile – and then He will arise to deliver His people.

IV. Signs of the Second Advent: Revelation 19:5

Then a voice came forth from heaven saying, “Praise our God, all His servants who fear Him, the small and the great [alike]!”.
Revelation 19:5

This voice comes to John directly after the lengthy section dealing with the judgment on Babylon and immediately before the invitation to the “wedding of the Lamb”, that is, the resurrection of the Church which takes place immediately before and contemporaneously with our Lord's return to earth (see section V directly following). Thus, the praise solicited here from all who serve and fear God, whether great in the kingdom to come or saved by the “skin of their teeth”, both looks backward in appreciation of our Lord's destruction of the “hammer of the whole earth” (Jer.50:23) with which the beast smote the nations and through which he persecuted the Church, and at the same time looks forward to the impending resurrection of the Bride of Christ, including those who have been recently martyred and those still alive at the point of our Lord Jesus' return.

But while for believers in heaven above and on earth below there is call for nothing but praise, joy, and confidence in anticipation of the reality of the light of the Son of God about to overwhelm the darkness of the past seven years, for those who have followed the beast, there will be, conversely, a complete reversal of all their expectations, coming right at the point of the defeat of the final resistance in Jerusalem, the last place on earth where any defiance to antichrist's rule still remains (cf. 2Pet.3:1-13).

When [people] are saying "Peace!" and "Safety!", at that precise time destruction will fall swiftly upon them, just like labor pains on a pregnant woman.
1st Thessalonians 5:3

No one, it is true, will know the precise date of that great Day or the precise hour when the 2nd Advent will begin, but the situation as related above is itself a “sign”, a historical record given in advance for the precise purpose of encouraging all who look to the Lord for their deliverance.

“And there will be signs in the sun and the moon and the stars, and on the earth there will be [great] distress among the nations [who will be greatly] bewildered by the roaring of the sea and [its massive] waves, [and] men will lose heart out fear and expectation of what is about to come upon the inhabited world. For the luminaries of the heavens will be [powerfully] shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and much glory. When these things *begin* to happen (i.e., the entire general situation of the end in concert at the very end with the celestial and earthly phenomena related above), stand up and raise up your heads, because your redemption is near.” Then He told them a parable. “*Look at the fig tree and all its leaves*. When they have already come out [like this], you can see for yourselves by examining it that summer is near. So also when you see that all things have come to pass, know that the Kingdom of God is near.”

Luke 21:25-31

Since our Lord Jesus tells us here personally to “hold our heads up” when we see such clear signs of His imminent return occurring (Lk.21:28-31; cf. Matt.24:32-36; Mk.13:28-32; 1Thes.1:10), our attitude on the threshold of that Day should be one of complete faith in the ultimate deliverance that is in Jesus Christ and even joy at the prospect of seeing Him soon face to face at last, no matter if the world around us seems to be both figuratively and literally falling apart.

(1) God is our refuge and strength. [He is] our help in [times of] tribulation, [and] very quick to be found. (2) Therefore we shall not fear when the earth totters, when the mountains quake in the heart of the seas, (3) [when] its waters roar and foam, when the mountains shake on account of its swells.

Psalm 46:1-2

But it is only during the last hours before our Lord's return to earth that the final indisputable signs of His Second Advent will occur, namely, the supernatural darkness of that unique day, along with the cataclysmic heavenly and earthly events which accompany it (cf. Lk.21:25-31).

(6) Howl, for the Day of the Lord is near, all destroying from the Almighty. (7) Therefore will every hand hang slack and every human heart melt, and they will be dismayed. (8) Convulsions and pain will seize them, and they will writhe like a woman about to give birth. They will look at each other in astonishment, their faces ablaze. (9) Behold, the Day of the Lord is coming, a mighty day of anger and intense wrath, to make the earth desolate and remove her sinners from upon her. (10) *For the stars of heaven and the constellations will not flash forth their light. The sun will grow dark on its course and the moon will not pour out its light.* (11) Then will I punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity. I will bring an end to the arrogance of the proud and bring down the haughtiness of the ruthless. (12) I will make men more rare than gold, and mankind than the choice bullion of Ophir. (13) Therefore *I will shake the heavens, and the earth will quake from its place* on account of the anger of the Lord

and on the day of His fierce wrath.
Isaiah 13:6-13

(6) This is what the Lord Almighty says: “In a little while *I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land.* (7) I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,” says the Lord Almighty.

Haggai 2:6-7 NIV (cf. Hag.2:21-22)

This combination of supernatural darkness coupled with celestial and terrestrial upheaval has its parallels in the other two major divine judgments on the world, God's blacking out of the universe in response to Satan's rebellion before the dawn of human history, and the future destruction of the present heavens and earth at the point of their replacement by the new heavens and new earth, the eternal state in which only righteousness will dwell (i.e., “phase one” and “phase three judgment” respectively with the Second Advent judgments which we are studying here constituting the “phase two” judgment of the overall plan of God).⁴⁹¹ We also find a very clear parallel to these occurrences in the events accompanying the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus, the central pivot of the plan of God and focal point of all history, human and angelic alike. At noon on the day our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified, a similar supernatural darkness covered the land (Lk.23:45 actually describes it as an “eclipse of the sun” in the Greek text). Then, three hours later in the middle of the afternoon, our sins propitiated and His work complete, our Savior expelled His human spirit (Matt.27:50; Mk.15:37; Lk.23:46; Jn.19:30). Our Lord's physical death was immediately accompanied by the supernatural splitting of the temple's inner veil which shielded the holy of holies (Matt.27:51; Mk.15:38; Lk.23:45), an event which to be sure symbolizes the opening of the way into heaven for all who believe in Jesus Christ (Heb.6:19; 9:3; 10:20). However, as the inner curtain could not be seen apart from a similar splitting (or knocking down) of the outer veil, an additional part of the symbolism at work here is the representation of the disruption of the heavens and the heavenly luminaries that each phase of divine judgment includes (i.e., the outer veil represents the heavens proper or “second heaven”, while the inner veil represents the way into the very throne room of God, the “third heaven”).⁴⁹² The same parallelism may also be seen in the contemporaneous earthquake (Matt.27:51), followed directly by a resuscitation of departed believers (Matt.27:52-53), an event which symbolizes the restoration to life seen in the six Genesis days most notably in the creation of mankind, the resurrection about to take place at Christ's return, and the creation of the new heavens and new earth with the concomitant final phase of the resurrection, all dependent upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ at the “conjunction of the ages” (Heb.9:26). Finally, just as there is recognition on the part of saved and unsaved alike at the conclusion of each of these groups of signs and events in all three phases (the fallen and elect angels at the point of re-creation: Job 38:7; the mourning of Israel at Christ's return: see section VI below; and the full recognition of all at the point eternity begins: cf. 1Cor.13:12; Rev.20:11-15), we have at time of the crucifixion the centurion's remark: “Truly, this man was the Son of God!” (Mk.15:39; cf. Matt.27:54; Lk.23:47), accompanied by the laments of all (Lk.23:48). Thus in the account of our Lord's death on the cross, we see a series of precise parallels to all three

judgment phases in God's plan, and to the signs immediately preceding His Second Advent in particular, seismic disruption on the earth below, catastrophic turmoil in the heavens above, and all enshrouded in a supernatural darkness (cf. Is.2:10; 2:19-21; 5:30; 24:1-6; Jer.4:23; 25:32; 30:7; Ezek.38:18-19; Hos.10:8; Amos 5:18-20; Mal.3:2; Matt.24:7; Mk.13:8; Lk.21:11; Heb.12:26; 2Pet.3:7-13; cf. Ezek.32:7):

(17) Terror and pit and snare [have come] upon you, you who dwell on the earth! And it shall be that he who flees from the sound of the terror shall fall into the pit, and he who climbs out of the pit will be caught in the snare. (18) For the sluice-gates on high have been opened, and the foundations of the earth quake. (19) The earth is broken in pieces. The earth is split asunder. (20) The earth totters violently. The earth staggers wildly like a drunken man and sways like a shanty. For its transgression weighs heavily upon it. So will it fall, and not rise up again.

Isaiah 24:17-20

You will experience visitation (i.e., the judgment of Armageddon) from the Lord of Hosts [Himself], with thunder and quaking [of the earth] and a loud voice, with tempest and whirlwind and devouring flames of fire.

Isaiah 29:6

(2) The Lord is angry with the nations; His wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them, He will give them over to slaughter. (3) Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will send up a stench; the mountains will be soaked with their blood. (4) *All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree.*

Isaiah 34:2-4 NIV

(1) Blow a trumpet in Zion, and raise the alarm on My holy mountain. All the inhabitants of the earth are distressed, because the Day of the Lord is coming, because it is near at hand. (2) A day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and deep gloom.

Joel 2:1-2a

(30) For I will display wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. (31) The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the Day of the Lord, that great and terrible [day]. (32) And it will come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance as the Lord has said, even among the survivors whom the Lord calls.

Joel 2:30-32

(12) Let the nations be roused [from their places], and let them come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat (i.e., the valley of "the Lord will judge"). For there I will sit in judgment over all the nations on every side. (13) Send forth the sickle for the harvest is ripe! Come down into the winepress for it is full and the vats overflow. For great is their wickedness. (14) Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of doom! For the day of the Lord

is near in the valley of doom. (15) *The sun and moon will darken, and the stars will gather up their light.* (16) Then the Lord will roar from *Zion*, and from *Jerusalem* He will let sound His voice, and the heavens and *the earth will quake.*

Joel 3:12-16

(18) Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord! Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light. (19) It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him. (20) Will not the day of the Lord be darkness, not light – pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?

Amos 5:18-20 NIV

(14) The great Day of the Lord is near, very near and coming quickly. The sound of the Day of the Lord will be one of warriors roaring bitterly. (15) That day will be *a day of blackness, a day of constraint and pressure, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and deep gloom,* (16) a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the high corner-towers. (17) For I shall bring distress upon mankind, and they will walk about like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord. And their blood will be poured out like dust, and their innards like excrement. (18) Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the anger of the Lord. And all the earth will be devoured by the fire of His jealousy. For He will bring all the inhabitants of the earth to a complete, yes, a terrifying end.

Zephaniah 1:14-18

And I saw when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the sixth seal, a great earthquake occurred, and the sun became black like hairy sackcloth, and the moon became entirely like blood [in appearance], and the stars of heaven fell to the earth like a fig tree casting its fruit when shaken by a strong wind, and the heaven retreated like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and hill was moved from its place. And all the kings of the earth and the prominent men and the generals and the wealthy and the powerful and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and the rocks of the mountains. And [thus] they say to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of the One who sits upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, because the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand [before them]?"

Revelation 6:12-17

Thus the last day of the Tribulation which is also the beginning of the Day of the Lord proper, the day of Jesus' return, will be a unique day, a day which begins with darkness, but which ends with light – precisely as in the case of the first Genesis day of re-creation.⁴⁹³ This supernatural darkness which gives way to equally miraculous light is thus not only *the* unmistakable sign of the 2nd Advent, but a powerful metaphor for the return of God's rule on earth in the person of the Messiah, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as the darkness of world now become complete gives way to the light of Him who is the Light of the world, the bright Morning Star (2Pet.1:19; Rev.2:28; 22:16).

The moon will shine like the sun, and the sunlight will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven full days, when the Lord binds up the bruises of his people and heals the wounds he inflicted.

Isaiah 30:26 NIV

For behold, *the darkness* – it will cover the earth, even a deep gloom its peoples. *But the Lord will rise over you, and His glory will appear above you.*

Isaiah 60:2

(6) For it will come to pass that *on that day there will be no light*. [The light of the] heavenly bodies will be withheld (lit., “curdled”). (7) For it will be a unique day, one which is known [only] to the Lord, neither day nor night, and it will come to pass at evening time that *there will be light*.

Zechariah 14:6-7

For in His day, the Son of Man will be just as lightning which, when it flashes, lights up the earth from one horizon to the other.

Luke 17:24

V. The Resurrection of the Lamb's Bride: Revelation 19:6-10

(6) And I heard something like the sound of a great crowd, like the sound of many waters, and like the sound of powerful peals of thunder, saying, “Hallelujah (i.e., “praise the Lord”)! For God our Lord the Almighty has begun His kingly reign! (7) Let us rejoice and be jubilant, and let us give glory to Him, because the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His Bride (lit., “wife”; cf. Rev.21:9) has prepared herself.⁴⁹⁴ (8) And it has been given her to wear a pure, resplendent [gown] of the finest material (now this fine material represents the righteous acts of His holy ones [believers]).” (9) And [the angel] said to me, “Write this down: Happy are those who have been called to the [wedding] supper of the Lamb! These [words] of mine are the true words of God”. (10) And I fell before his feet to worship him. And he said to me, “See that you don't [do that]! I am a fellow servant of you and of your brothers who hold [fast] the testimony about Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony about Jesus is the essence (lit., “spirit”) of [all divine] prophecy”.

Revelation 19:6-10

No doubt because the subject of the Messiah's glorious return and the resurrection of “those who are His at His coming” is so well-known from other scriptures, John is given to describe here only the joy in heaven as Jesus is about to return and be met by His newly resurrected Church.⁴⁹⁵ While we shall take some time here to discuss the resurrection generally including the living transformation of believers still alive on earth at this time, it is important to realize the heavenly perspective given here is really the *right* perspective. From God's point of view, our resurrection is a reality already complete, and Jesus has already taken possession of His kingdom in effect. Who can therefore help at this point but shout “Hallelujah”? For all prophecy of scripture has

anticipated these coming events (e.g., the Psalms of victory which celebrate the Messiah's coronation, esp. Ps.93-100; cf. Ps.68). Nothing now can stop the consummation of Christ's coming victory, of which victory we form a crucial part as the Bride He won at the cross and whom He will formally claim on that blessed day. It behooves us to remember all this when the going gets particularly rough during the Tribulation's darkest days.

(25) “And there will be signs in the sun and the moon and the stars, and on the earth there will be [great] distress among the nations [who will be greatly] bewildered by the roaring of the sea and [its massive] waves, (26) [and] men will lose heart out of fear and expectation of what is about to come upon the inhabited world. For the luminaries of the heavens will be [powerfully] shaken. (27) And then they will see the Son of Man coming in [command of] a cloud [of followers] with power and much glory. (28) When these things begin to happen, stand up and raise up your heads, because *your redemption* (i.e., your “resurrection”; cf. Rom.8:23; 1Thes.1:10) is near.” (29) Then He told them a parable. “Look at the fig tree and all its leaves. (30) When they have already come out [like this], you can see for yourselves by examining it that summer is near. (31) So also when you see that all things have come to pass, know that the Kingdom of God is near.”

Luke 21:25-31

From the earthly perspective, prior to the events which we see covered in the remaining verses of Revelation chapter 19 and treated in section VII below, namely, Christ's Second Advent and the battle of Armageddon where our Lord rapidly dispatches all of His foes, two other important events occur which need to be described here. The first of these is the repentance of many in Israel who now understand upon seeing the Messiah's glorious return that Jesus is the true object of faith (and we shall address this event in the immediately following section VI). The other is the resurrection of the now completed Church, an event which is the earthly counterpart of the joy in heaven over the wedding of the Lamb to His Bride in verses six through nine of Revelation nineteen, and one which accompanies the re-illumination of the supernaturally darkened earth with the brilliance of the Messiah's coming.

(29) Immediately following the tribulation of those days, the sun will grow dark and the moon will not give out its light, and the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (30) And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven. And then all the tribes of the earth will mourn and will see the Son of Man coming in command of the clouds of heaven (i.e., the heavenly hosts) with power and much glory. (31) And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet, and He will gather together His elect from the four winds from one end of the heavens to the other (i.e., this is not to “help” us but to marshal us – we are already flying to meet those just resurrected). (32) Learn this parable from the fig tree. When its branches become supple and its leaves sprout, you recognize that the summer is close. (33) In the very same way when you behold all these things (i.e., the events of Matt.24:1-31), recognize

that [My return] is right at the door.
Matthew 24:29-33 (Mk.13:24-27)

Just as dawn is preceded by the darkest part of the night, so it will be at the end of the present age when our victorious Lord returns and turns our darkness into light (cf. Num.24:17; Is.9:2; 60:1; 60:19; Matt.2:2; 2:9-10; Jn.1:4-5; 8:12; 2Pet.1:19; Rev.2:28; 21:23; 22:16). The wonder of the return of that One truly New Person, our resurrected Lord, will seem all the more wonderful in contrast to the pain of the Tribulation that precedes it. And the brilliance of the glory of His return will seem all the more brilliant in contrast to the darkness of the supernatural night that precedes it. This will be all the more so true for His Bride, the Church, of which we who believe are all a part. For on that glorious day of days, those of us who are still “in the body” will be resurrected while we yet live, and lifted up in our new bodies to join the Lord at His return in company with all who have gone before us.

As Paul tells us in 1st Corinthians, the resurrection takes place in three echelons: 1) our Lord Jesus Christ, 2) the Church, and 3) all who believe after Jesus' return.

(23) But each [will be resurrected] in his own echelon. Christ [is the] first-fruits. Next [will be] those belonging to Christ at His coming (i.e., the 2nd Advent). (24) Then the end, when He will hand the Kingdom over to the Father, after He has brought an end to all rule, all power, and all authority. (25) For He must rule until He has placed all His enemies under His feet – (26) and death is the final enemy to be done away with.
1st Corinthians 15:23-26

The resurrection of Jesus Christ Himself, the Head of the Body, constitutes the initial echelon of the resurrection.⁴⁹⁶ And as the Head, our Lord rules two further, subordinate echelons. The first of these is the Church, that is, all believers who have ever lived from Adam and Eve to the last person to accept Christ before His return when the resurrection of the Bride begins.⁴⁹⁷ This is the resurrection treated in our context in Revelation 19:6-8. The uniting of Christ with His Church in resurrection is the “wedding” that finally binds us together forever with our Husband Jesus Christ in full experiential reality (cf. Matt.9:15; Matt.25:1-13; Mk.2:19; Lk.5:34; Jn.3:29; 2Cor.11:2-3; Eph.1:22-23; 5:22-33; Rev.21:2-4; 21:9ff.; 22:17). Although we are His here and now in a positional way, on that greatest of days we shall be His irreversibly and unconditionally forevermore, “and thus shall we ever be with the Lord” (1Thes.4:17). For only when we are resurrected do we become His Bride in this official and permanent way. As the context of Revelation chapter 19 shows, this wedding of the entire Church to Christ is a preliminary event which immediately precedes our Lord's taking up His rightful rule over the earth on the heels of His victory at Armageddon. The final echelon of the resurrection will occur at the end of the Millennium, just prior to the last judgment, the destruction of the present heavens and earth, and the creation of the new heavens and the new earth. This final group to be resurrected we may term “the Friends of the Bride” in accordance with what the angel tells John in verse nine of our context: “Happy are those who have been called to the wedding of the Lamb” (cf. the “virgin companions” of the Messiah's Bride in Psalm

45:14, a clearly Messianic victory Psalm). Revelation 19:9 expresses the invitation to the great banquet in the kingdom given to all who believe after Christ's return (Matt.8:11; 22:1-14; 25:1-13; Lk.13:29; cf. Is.25:6-9), a group which at the time will largely be composed of repentant and now believing Jews (see section VI immediately below). As explained in an earlier discussion, there is evidence to the effect that at the end of human history, the number of believers in each of the two subordinate echelons of the resurrection, that is, the Church and the Millennial Believers, will be precisely equal, and will in turn collectively be precisely equal to the number of elect angels.⁴⁹⁸ The final fulfillment of both the Church at Jesus' return and the complement of Millennial believers at the end of human history will thus leave the devil and his fallen angels not only effectively replaced, but superabundantly and marvelously so (in a ratio of two to one). It is at this point, the defeat of all hostile human and angelic opposition (cf. Rev.20:7-10) at the end of the present creation, and at the beginning of the new, eternal one, that death itself, the last enemy (cf. Psalm 110:1), will be removed from the scene once and for all, as we and our fellow servants of the Lord live an indescribably blessed eternal life with Jesus ever after and forevermore.

(15) For we tell you this by the Lord's own Word, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord (i.e., the Second Advent which brings the Great Tribulation to a close) will not precede those who have fallen asleep. (16) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command, with the archangel's blast on the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first (in resurrection), (17) then we who are alive and remain will be snatched up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and in this way we shall always be with the Lord.

1st Thessalonians 4:15-17

In the above passage we see the essentials of the resurrection at Christ's return. First, our Lord returns from the third heaven where He is presently seated at the Father's right hand "until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet" (Ps.110:1; cf. Acts 2:35; Heb.1:13; 10:13). Glowing with refulgent light brighter than the sun (as befits the Light of the world; cf. Acts 26:13), He will split the supernatural darkness which has enveloped the world and in the heavens above will be visible to everyone on the earth (Rev.1:7; cf. Matt.24:30). It is in that instant that Jesus will give the command to rise (cf. Jn.11:43), while the archangel at His side blows assembly in response (cf. Matt.24:31). Then all those believers who have to that point passed from life will rise from the places where they were laid to rest, the dust of their former bodies transformed into their eternal forms in the manner of the Son of Man Himself (Phil.3:20-21; 1Jn.3:2), while all believers still alive on earth will follow them in a living resurrection, transformed into their eternal state without ever experiencing physical death, a significant blessing experienced only by those who have had to endure the Tribulation (while unbelievers are "left behind": Matt.24:36-41; Lk.17:34-35). As each group rises in resurrection, either through the uniting of their departed spirits with their new eternal bodies or, in the case of those still alive, through the transformation of their bodies while their spirits still indwell this present flesh, we are conducted to the assembly area above the earth (cf. Matt.24:31), where our Lord and the rest of His heavenly legions of elect angels (i.e., those not involved in the process of mustering the newly resurrected

believers; cf. Mk.13:26) are arrayed in anticipation of initiating the battle of Armageddon once His entire host is complete (Dan.7:13; 1Thes.1:10; 4:13-18; 2Thes.1:7-10; Rev.17:14; cf. Lk.2:13; Matt.16:27; 25:1-13):

For first, Jesus returns and appears with His angelic legions above the earth:

Immediately following the tribulation of those days, the sun will grow dark and the moon will not give out its light, and the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven. And then all the tribes of the earth will mourn and will see the Son of Man coming in command of *the clouds* (i.e., the angelic hosts) of heaven with power and much glory.
Matthew 24:29-30

“But I say to you, from now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and [after that] returning in command of *the clouds* (i.e., the angelic hosts) of heaven.”

Matthew 26:64b (cf. Mk.14:62; Lk.21:17)

Behold! *He is coming with clouds*, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the peoples of the earth will grieve on account of Him.

Revelation 1:7

Then our Lord gives the command for the dead to rise and for those of us who are His and still in our physical bodies to be resurrected while yet alive as well, and so we shall be resurrected in response to the archangel's trumpet blast (Matt.24:31; cf. Ps.50:5):

(50) But I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (i.e., live in eternity with the Lord), nor can corruption inherit incorruption (i.e., we need the resurrection to live forever). (51) Behold, I tell you a mystery: not all of us will fall asleep, but all of us will be changed (52) in [that] moment of time, in the blink of an eye, at the final trumpet blast. For *the trumpet will sound*, and the dead will rise incorruptible, and we too (i.e., believers still alive) will be changed [at that time (i.e., the Lord's Second Advent return)].

1st Corinthians 15:50-52

(16) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command, with the archangel's *blast on the trumpet* of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first (in resurrection), (17) then we who are alive and remain will be snatched up together with them *in clouds* to meet the Lord in the air, and in this way we shall always be with the Lord.

1st Thessalonians 4:16-17

Finally, Christ and all His hosts, elect angels and resurrected believers alike, proceed to the final battle of the Tribulation:

And *His armies* (i.e., elect angels and the Church once the mustering of the resurrection is complete) were following Him in the sky [mounted] on white horses, [and] clad in linen white and pure (cf. Rev.19:8).

Revelation 19:14

This is our future hope (2Cor.4:17-18; Col.1:27; 3:1-4; 1Tim.1:1), the full realization of our adoption as sons and daughters of the Lord (Jn.1:12-13; Rom.8:16-17; Gal.3:21-4:7; Eph.3:15; Heb.12:4-11; 1Jn.3:1-2), the redemption of our physical bodies (Matt.6:12; 18:27-32; 20:28; Lk.1:68; 24:21; Rom.3:24; 1Cor.1:30; 6:20; 7:23; Gal.3:13; 4:4-5; Eph.1:7; Col.1:14; 2:14; 1Tim.2:6; Tit.2:14; Heb.9:12-15; 1Pet.1:18; 2Pet.2:1; Rev.5:9; 14:3-4), that is, their transformation into perfect and eternal “resurrection bodies” in which we shall dwell forevermore in the presence of our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as we enjoy sweet fellowship with Him for all eternity in the New Jerusalem (Rev.2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:26-28; 3:4-5; 3:12-13; 3:21; 20:5; 21:27; 22:3-6; 22:14). While scripture may not tell us everything we should wish to know about the body we shall inhabit forever, we have some very definite information that does tell us two very significant things about them: 1) these eternal “resurrection” bodies will be comparable to the one possessed by our Lord Jesus Christ, and 2) they will be characterized by “glory”, that is, the pure resplendent light that is our God.

For our [true] citizenship has a heavenly existence, and it is from there that we expectantly await our Savior, Lord Jesus Christ, who will *transform* this humble body of ours into one *that matches His glorious body* through His powerful ability to subordinate everything to Himself.

Philippians 3:20-21

Beloved, we are already the children of God, but what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We know that when He is *revealed* [in glory], we will be *like Him*, that we shall see Him exactly like He is.

1st John 3:2

As the Son of Man returns to earth, marshaling His hosts in the skies above, His glory will split the supernatural darkness like a flash of the most intense lighting imaginable and illuminate the dark world below. For He is the Light of the world, literally as well as in every other way (Jn.1:4-9; 3:19; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46; cf. Rev.21:23; 21:11; 22:5). It is unto this radiant Savior of ours that we shall congregate as we rise up from the earth, flocking to Him like eagles gathering in the sky above.⁴⁹⁹

(26) So if they say to you, “Look! [The Messiah] is [out] in the desert!”, don't go out there, or “Look! He is in the inner rooms (i.e., hidden somewhere in town)!”, don't believe [it]. (27) For just as lightning flashes in the west and lights up the sky all the way to the east, so it will be with the Son of Man's return. (28). Wherever there is a body, there the eagles will gather.

Matthew 24:26-28

(30) “It will be just like this (i.e., the examples of vv.22-29) on the day the Son of Man is revealed. (31) On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. (32) Remember Lot's wife! (33) Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. (34) I tell you, on that *night* (i.e., just previous to vv.30-33 which represent the dawning of the Day of the Second Advent) two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. (35) Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left.” (37) “Where, Lord?” they asked. He replied, “Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather.”
Luke 17:30-37 NIV (cf. Matt.24:40-41)

Here am I, and the children the Lord has given me.
Isaiah 8:18a NIV (cf. Heb.2:13)

United now with our Lord Jesus for all time to come (Jn.12:26; 14:1-3; 17:24; 2Cor.5:8; Phil.1:23; 1Thes.4:17), and clothed in our eternal forms, we shall be free from tears and pain and want forever after (Rev.7:17; 21:4; cf. Is.25:8; 35:10; 65:17:19; 1Cor.15:54-58; Heb.2:14; Rev.2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:26-28; 3:4-5; 3:12-13; 3:21; 20:5; 21:27; 22:3-6; 22:14).

“These are the ones who are about to come forth from the Great Tribulation. And they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple. And the One who sits upon the throne will pitch His tabernacle over them. They will neither hunger nor thirst again, nor will the sun beat down upon them nor any burning [heat], because the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and will lead them to fountains of living water (lit., "fountains of waters of life"), and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes”.
Revelation 7:13b-17

This is our blessed future hope, for a critical part of the true good news of Christianity is that we will not cease to exist after death (as atheism claims) or experience some sort of “shadow existence” as many pagan religions claim, but will instead have a tangible *real* body forever in resurrection, and one that is far better than at present we can have any idea:

So now that we have been justified by faith, let us take hold of the peace [we have] with God [the Father] through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have also obtained our access into this grace in which we stand, and let us boast *in the hope of the glory* of God (i.e., in anticipation of our resurrection).
Romans 5:1-2

To all [believers] God desired to make known what wealth there is in this glorious mystery regarding the gentiles, for it is that Christ – your *hope of glory* – is in you.
Colossians 1:27

[W]e who are awaiting *the blessed hope*, namely the *epiphany of the glory* of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (i.e., when we too will be resurrected in glory when He appears).

Titus 2:13

As the passages quoted immediately above make clear, “glory” is the word often used for our blissful eternal state, not as an abstract expression of that blessed future time to come, but on the contrary the word has been deliberately chosen because it expresses vividly our sharing in God's glorious light in a very real and tangible way after our bodies have been transformed in resurrection.

(17) And if we are God's children, then we are also His heirs, even fellow heirs of Christ – that is if we have indeed suffered with Him so that we might also *be glorified together with Him*. (18) For I do not consider these present hardships in any way comparable to *the glory* destined to be *revealed* for us [at the 2nd Advent]. (19) For all creation eagerly awaits *the revelation* of the sons of God. (20) For the created world is now subject to futility – not of its own choosing, but because of Him who subjected it [as a consequence of Adam's sin] – but not without hope. (21) For [at the 2nd Advent] the created world will be liberated from its enslavement to decay at *the glorious liberation* of the sons of God (i.e. our resurrection). (22) For we know that the whole creation has been experiencing intense pain and agony right up until this present time. (23) And not only the created world, but we too who have received the Holy Spirit as a foretaste [of the good things to come] agonize within ourselves as we eagerly await our adoption, that is, the redemption of our body (i.e. resurrection). (24) This is *the hope* with which we were saved.

Romans 8:17-24a

The effulgent glory of divine light is an essential trait of our Lord's divinity (Is.40:5; Jn.12:41) and also of His humanity now that this part of His nature too has been glorified (Matt.24:30; 25:31; Mk.8:38; 9:2-8; 13:26; Lk.9:26; 21:27; cf. Jn.7:39b). Therefore since our confident hope is to share in this same resurrection glory, we can learn much about our own glorification in resurrection from considering the glory which characterizes His resurrected, eternal human form.

For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels *in the glory of His Father*, and then He will repay every man in his own coin.

Matthew 16:27

And [there on the Mount of Transfiguration] He was *transformed* before them, and His face *shone like the sun* and His clothing became *white like light* [itself].

Matthew 17:2

(29) And it came to pass while He was praying that the appearance of His face changed and His clothing [turned] *white, flashing forth* [like lightning]. (30) And, behold, two men were speaking with Him – and they were Moses and Elijah. (31) These [two]

appeared in *glory* . . .
Luke 9:29-31a

And now *glorify* Me, Father, with your own *glory*, [that glory] *which I had in your presence before the world existed.*"
John 17:5

[Jesus Christ], who appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the [Holy] Spirit, was revealed to angels, was preached among the nations, was believed upon in the world, *was taken up in glory.*
1st Timothy 3:16

[Jesus] is *the shining forth of* [the Father's] *glory*, the precise image of His essence, the One who sustains the universe by His mighty Word. When He had accomplished the cleansing of [our] sins, He took His seat (i.e., beyond the veil) at the right hand of the Majesty on high.
Hebrews 1:3

But now we do see Jesus *crowned with glory and honor* on account of the death He suffered, even Him who became "a little lower than the angels" for a brief span so that by the grace of God He might taste death on behalf of us all.
Hebrews 2:9

But to the degree that you are [truly] participating in Christ's sufferings, be joyful about it, so that *at the revelation of His glory*, you may also rejoice with great gladness.
1st Peter 4:13

(12) So I turned around to see [the source of] the voice that was speaking to me, and when I had turned around, I saw seven golden lampstands. (13) And in the middle of the lampstands was what looked like a man, dressed in a long robe with a golden belt tied around His waist. (14) And His head and his hair were as white as wool or as snow, and His eyes were like a fiery flame, (15) and His feet were like white-hot bronze when super-heated in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. (16) And He held seven stars in His right hand, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword. And *His face shone like the sun in its glory.*
Revelation 1:12-16

As part of His Body, the Bride, the Church, glory will characterize our eternal human forms as well. For we shall share the glory, the divine refulgent light of the Son, a characteristic which does much to explain the nature of the eternal life we shall lead with Him forever (1Cor.2:7; 2Cor.3:11; 2Cor.3:18; Eph.5:8-14; 5:27; 1Tim.1:11; 1Pet.5:10). For we shall be children of light (Eph.5:8) in an eternity where, just as there will be no more death, there will never be darkness again as all evil will have been inexorably and eternally expunged from the New Heavens and the New Earth (Rev.21-

22; cf. 1Jn.1:5): light and life, the glory of our eternal bodies and the eternal life we shall evermore enjoy in them are inseparable.

In the holy chambers, from *the womb of the dawn*, your young [troops] will [come] to you *like the dew* (i.e., the armies of the newly resurrected).

Psalms 110:3b

But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your *dew is like the dew of the morning*; the earth will give birth to her dead.

Isaiah 26:19 NIV

(2) For many who sleep in the dust will awake, some to eternal life, but the others to shame and eternal separation [from God]. (3) Then those who have insight will *shine like the shining forth of the dawn*, even those who led the many to righteousness, like stars forever and ever.

Daniel 12:2-3

(6) [God], who will give to each person according to his works, (7) to those who by persevering in the good course are seeking *glory*, honor and immortality, [He will give] *eternal life*.

Romans 2:6-7 (cf. Rom.2:10; 3:23; 15:7)

(29) For those whom He foreknew, He also foreordained *to share the likeness of His Son* (i.e., to have identical resurrection bodies), so that He might be the Firstborn over many brothers [and sisters]. (30) And those whom He foreordained, these He also called [to salvation], and those whom He called, He also made righteous [through faith in Christ], and those whom He made righteous, these *He also glorified* (i.e., our resurrection and eternal life has been set fast in the plan of God since before the world was made).

Romans 8:29-30

(17) For this present light affliction of ours is working out for us *an eternal weight of glory* beyond any possible estimation. (18) [Let us] not [then be] having [any] regard for what can be seen, but [instead] for what cannot be seen. For the things which can be seen are ephemeral. But the things which cannot be seen are eternal.

2nd Corinthians 4:17-18

(1) Therefore since you have been resurrected [positionally] with Christ, strive for the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (2) Think on the things above, and not the things on the earth. (3) For you are already [positionally] dead [to all that], and your [true] life has been hidden away with Christ in God. (4) When Christ – your [true] life – is revealed [at the 2nd Advent], then you too will be *revealed in glory*.
Colossians 3:1-4

For it is precisely for this purpose (i.e., salvation through the sanctification of the Spirit and faith in the truth; v.13) that He called you through our gospel in order that you

might *gain lasting possession of the glory* of our Lord Jesus Christ (i.e., the resurrection).

2nd Thessalonians 2:14 (cf. Eph.1:14; 1Thes.5:9; Heb.10:39; 1Pet.2:9)

For this reason I endure all things for the sake of the elect, in order that they themselves too may lay hold of the salvation that is in Jesus Christ *with eternal glory* (i.e., resurrection).

2nd Timothy 2:10

For it was fitting for [the Father] to make complete through sufferings Him on whose account all things exist and through whom all things exist, namely, the Captain of their salvation, even Him who has *led many sons to glory* (i.e., resurrection), [our Lord Jesus Christ]. For the One who sanctifies and those who are sanctified belong to One [Father], and for this reason [Christ] is not ashamed to call them His brothers, as He says: “I will proclaim Your name to My brothers. In the midst of the assembly I shall praise you.” and elsewhere, “I [too] shall put My confidence in Him (i.e., the Father),” and elsewhere, “Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me”.

Hebrews 2:10-13

May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be praised, who has in His great mercy caused us to be reborn to a hope which lives through Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead, and to an inheritance which will never be destroyed, defiled, or dimmed, but which is being guarded in heaven for us, who are ourselves also being kept safe by God's power and our faith in Him to an ultimate deliverance ready to be unveiled at the end of time. Rejoice in this [salvation to come], even though at present it may for a time be your lot to suffer through various trials so that this validation (lit., “assaying”) of your faith [which results from your successful passing of these tests] may *result in praise, glory and honor* for you at *the revelation of Jesus Christ*. For this [validation process] has a greater benefit [for you] than [is true in the case of] gold, which, while it is also proved by fire, ultimately perishes (e.g., in contrast to the eternal rewards of faith proved genuine through testing).

1st Peter 1:3-7

(1) So I urge the elders among you as a fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, even one who shares [with you] in *the glory which is about to be revealed*, (2) pastor the flock of God under your charge, overseeing them not out of compulsion but willingly in response to God, not eager for shameful material gain, but out of genuine enthusiasm, (3) not lording it over the charges [entrusted to you], but as genuine examples to your flock. (4) And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will carry off in victory the *crown of glory which will never fade*.

1st Peter 5:1-4

As can be seen from the passages above, eternal rewards are an important part of the glorification of the resurrection, and indeed eternal rewards are not given out until the resurrection (cf. Heb.11:39-40), for it is the resurrection body which will be glorified forever in no small part by these rewards (with which they are indelibly associated: cf.

Dan.12:13). As the process of evaluation of the Church known as “the Judgment Seat of Christ” does not take place until Jesus has taken His seat as Ruler of the world in Jerusalem and begun His millennial rule, this glorious event will be covered in part 6 of the present series (cf. Matt.16:27; 19:28; 20:8; Lk.14:14; Rom.14:10-12; 1Cor.3:10-15; 2Cor.5:6-10; Rev.2:7; 2:10-11; 2:17; 3:5; 3:11-12; 2:26-27; 3:21; 11:18; 20:4-6). Nor should it be thought that until that blessed day of resurrection when we see the Lord in His glory and partake of a similar body of eternal glory that we will in any way be disadvantaged. For the interim state our departed brothers and sisters in Christ presently enjoy is greater than our earthly state in ways we can only dimly imagine (though it falls short of the glory we shall enjoy forever in resurrection).

For we know that if our earthly tent-dwelling (i.e., our physical body) be struck, we have an abode [that comes] from God, a dwelling made without human agency, eternal in the heavens (i.e., the resurrection body). For indeed we do groan in this one, desiring to put on our habitation which comes from heaven. And [even] if we do put off this present one, at any rate, we (i.e., our spirits) will not be found naked (i.e., “body-less”; for we will enjoy an interim body in the meantime: cf. Lk.16:19-31; Rev.6:9-10; Rev.7:9-17).
2nd Corinthians 5:1-3

The resurrection body, its nature and its capabilities, consistently described in terms of “glory” as we have seen above, can best be understood from a consideration of the resurrection body of our Lord Jesus Christ (although it is important to keep in mind as we have noted above that in all of His post resurrection, pre-ascension appearances He had not yet been glorified as would soon be the case; compare those appearances with Jn.7:39; and with Acts 9:1-6; 22:6-11; 26:12-18; Rev.1:12-16). Rather than being a diminishment of our current bodily state in any way, the resurrection body will constitute an improvement upon our present state of affairs in every way – and to a degree we cannot properly now appreciate. For all its benefits and glory, the resurrection body is still a *real and genuine body*. In resurrection, Jesus is recognizable as Himself and behaves as Himself with no diminishment of personality in any way (Lk.24:31; Jn.20:16; 20:20; 20:26-28; 21:12). Christ's transformed body is solid and tangible (Matt.28:9; Lk.24:39; Jn.20:17; 20:27), and capable of the entire range of normal human activities (Matt.28:10; 28:18-20; Lk.24:15; 24:43; Jn.21:13-15). And even before His ascension and glorification, the resurrection body of our Lord (the model and the pattern for the one we shall receive: Rom.6:5; Phil.3:20-21; 1Jn.3:2), possessed super-material capabilities without at the same time sacrificing material advantages, being capable of moving negotiating material space at will (cf. Matt.28:1-3; Lk.24:31; 24:36; Jn.20:19; Acts 1:9-10). The most complete description of these specifics is given by the apostle Paul in the book of 1st Corinthians:

(35) Now somebody will no doubt say, “In what manner do the dead rise? And with what sort of body do they come back?” (36) Use a little common sense! When you plant a seed, it doesn't “come back to life” unless the seed itself is first destroyed, does it? (37) And what you put in the ground is not the actual plant which later sprouts, but an “empty shell”, so to speak, of the wheat or of whatever you are planting. (38) God then transforms this seed into a plant in accordance with His creative plan, giving each

specific seed its own unique structure. (39) [As it is with seeds and plants, the same is true of animate bodies.] For in an analogous way, not all bodies are the same. Obviously, the bodies of men are different from the bodies of cattle, the bodies of birds are different from the bodies of fish, (40) and, just as obviously, bodies capable of dwelling in heaven are different from the bodies we occupy here on earth. Moreover the splendor of our heavenly bodies will transcend that of our earthly ones. (41) [Nor should we imagine that all heavenly bodies will possess the same degree of splendor.] After all, the radiance of the sun and of the moon and of stars is different in each case, and even the stars differ amongst themselves in glory. (42) So it is with the resurrection of the dead. The body sown is corruptible, the one raised incorruptible. (43) The body sown is dishonorable, the one raised *glorious*. The body sown is weak, the one raised powerful. (44) The body sown is suited to physical life, the one raised to spiritual life. If there is a physical body (and there patently is), then there is also a spiritual one. (45) For as it has been written that “Adam, the first man, became a physical being, possessing life”, so Christ, the last Adam, became a spiritual being, bestowing life. (46) However it is not the spiritual body, but the physical body which comes first, and the spiritual body follows. (47) The first man was earthly, being taken from the ground. The second Man is heavenly. (48) And as was the earthly man, so also are we of the earth. And as is the heavenly Man, so also shall we be when we too take on heavenly form. (49) For just as we have born the image of the earthly man, so also shall we bear the image of the heavenly Man.

1st Corinthians 15:35-49

As the verses above make clear, the “spiritual” or resurrection body is not in any way less real or tangible or capable than the corruptible body we now inhabit. Far from it. We will still be “who we are” in the eternal home we will receive on that great day of days, only then possessing a body that is completely in tune with the life we shall live with God forevermore, capable of appreciating Him and the blessings of the eternal life He has prepared for us and for all who love the appearance of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is our blessed hope. For this we wait in expectation day by day, looking forward to the return of our Lord, the redemption, the adoption, the glorification of our bodies in resurrection, and the rewards and wonders of eternal life in the New Jerusalem in the presence of our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ forever and ever (Matt.13:30; 25:1-13; Jn.5:29; Acts 24:15; Rom.6:5; 6:9; 8:11; 8:23; 8:29; 1Cor.6:12-14; 1Thes.3:13; 2Thes.2:1).

(1) Rise up! Shine forth! For your Light has arrived, and the glory of the Lord has burst forth upon you. (2) For behold, the darkness – it will cover the earth, even a deep gloom its peoples. But the Lord will rise over you, and His glory will appear above you. (3) Nations will come to His light, and kings to the brilliance of His rising.
Isaiah 60:1-3

“For this is My Father's will, for everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him to have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”
John 6:40

(25) Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me will live, even if he dies. (26) And everyone who lives and believes in Me will surely not die forevermore."

John 11:25-26

The Wedding of the Lamb:

(7) Let us rejoice and be jubilant, and let us give glory to Him, because the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His Bride (lit., "wife"; cf. Rev.21:9) has prepared herself. (8) And it has been given her to wear a pure, resplendent [gown] of the finest material (now this fine material represents the righteous acts of His holy ones [believers])." (9) And [the angel] said to me, "Write this down: Happy are those who have been called to the [wedding] supper of the Lamb! These [words] of mine are the true words of God".

Revelation 19:7-9

These verses look forward by way of ecstatic anticipation to the events which follow the resurrection on the far side of Armageddon. As such, they will be discussed in detail in the next installment of this series, part 6, "Last Things". After our Lord's return to the heavens above the earth, at His command the resurrection of the Church will take place, wherein all who have believed in Jesus Christ since Adam and Eve will rise with living believers raised last of all. This glorious event is called here "the wedding of the Lamb", because it is only by the transformation of our corruptible bodies into eternal, resurrection bodies that we are finally made "one" with Jesus perfectly and experientially forevermore in a perfect, eternal "marriage".⁵⁰⁰ Immediately following the resurrection of the Church, our Lord will destroy antichrist and his hordes at Armageddon, then commence His millennial reign from Jerusalem. The last judgment in the series of seven judgments associated with Christ's return will be the evaluation of the Church, otherwise known as the Judgment Seat of Christ. At this time, we shall all be judged for the purpose of bestowing upon us the eternal rewards earned through our legitimate service to our Lord and His Church while here on earth. This service is called here "righteous acts", and, significantly, the performance of our duty in time (in growing spiritually and helping others to do the same through the gifts and in the ministries God assigns) is said to be the means by which we "prepare ourselves" for our dear Lord Jesus. Everything we have done which is legitimately "righteous", that is, in accord with the perfect divine standard (of properly motivated response to the true will of God) will receive a reward (Matt.10:42; 25:31-46), while everything that fails to meet this standard will be destroyed by fire (1Cor.3:10-15). This will not affect our salvation in any way (for Christ died for all our sins so that they are not an issue for all who have put their trust in Him), but will remove anything done from impure motivations or not in accordance with God's will as spots and blemishes (Eph.5:25-27), so that we may instead walk in white with Him forever (Rev.3:4-5).⁵⁰¹

I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom

adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
Isaiah 61:10 NIV

Once this process of evaluation is complete and we, the Church, have received our eternal rewards (2Cor.5:10; cf. Rom.14:10), our crowns (1Cor.9:25-27; Phil.4:1; 1Thes.2:19; 2Tim.4:8; Jas.1:12; 1Pet.5:4; Rev.2:10; 3:11), and “well done's” from our Lord and Savior (Matt.25:14-30), His victory and our wedding will be celebrated in an inaugural feast of bounty and blessing such as the world has never seen before (Matt.22:2-14; 25:1-13; Lk.13:28-29; 14:16-24).

(6) On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine – the best of meats and the finest of wines. (7) On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; (8) he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken.
Isaiah 25:6-8 NIV

I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.
Matthew 8:11 NIV

The blessing in our context of Revelation 19:9 on those invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb refers to all who believe in Jesus upon seeing His glorious return and the events which follow. This will apparently be a very large group, composed notably of Jewish believers who have now been brought back to the land of Israel in accordance with the many divine promises of restoration (also to be covered in part 6 of this series), and will also contain gentile believers as well (cf. Zech.8:23). Besides the rest of the unbelieving world, two other groups will be notable by their absence from this banquet: 1) recalcitrant Jews who even now refuse to accept Jesus as their Messiah (Ezek.20:37-38; cf. Matt.8:12-13), and 2) those who fell away from the faith during the Great Apostasy (Matt.25:1-13; cf. Lk.13:24-30). Happy indeed will those be who respond to the Messiah when He returns, for they will be invited to celebrate gloriously on that great day of days in company with all who kept the faith in the great times of trial to come and rose to meet the Lord at His return! For these wonderful and blessed events are not vain hopes, but future realities decreed by unswerving will of God; they are “the true words of God”.

The Testimony about Jesus (Rev.19:10):

And I fell before his feet to worship him. And he said to me, “See that you don't [do that]! I am a fellow servant of you and of your brothers who hold [fast] the testimony about Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony about Jesus is the essence (lit., “spirit”) of [all divine] prophecy”.
Revelation 19:10

Overcome by the anticipated marvels of Jesus' return and moved to worship by the assurance that these things “are the true words of God” (v.9), John falls to the ground in praise, but is quickly rebuked by the angel accompanying him. John will succumb to this pressure once more (Rev.22:8-9), on that second occasion in emotional anticipation of the ineffable blessings of eternity and the New Jerusalem and in response to the similar assurance at that time that “these words are trustworthy and true” and to the proclamation that “I am coming soon” (whereupon he will receive a similar rebuke). In that second instance, John is told to “Worship God!” instead, and to take care not to seal up the book he has been given to write. Here, he is also told to “Worship God!”, and further instructed that it is the message of Jesus Christ that is it at the heart of all prophecy and prophetic revelation. That is because Jesus Himself is the Word of Truth. The use here of the conjunction “for” (Greek *gar*, γάρ) explains very specifically in the Greek that the reason for the necessity of worshiping God instead of mistakenly being carried away by angels and wonders the eye may behold is precisely because Jesus is the issue (i.e., in salvation and spiritual growth through faith in Him who is the living Word of God), and because the message of and about Jesus Christ is the point, the purpose, and essence of and behind everything in the Bible and all revelation, special and natural, including the Book of Revelation (which is, in its full and correct title after all, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ). John is not to be found fault with here for being overcome emotionally in this way. Certainly, he well understood that the worshiping of any created thing was wrong, even angels in their glory in the midst of an overwhelming revelation of this sort. The fact that John was not able to help himself was of divine design, in order that we might see this scene (and the one in Revelation chapter 22), and learn an important lesson. No matter how great the wonders we may anticipate, no matter how great the wonders our eyes may behold in the future, and no matter how impressive the false wonders antichrist may display on earth, the real power, the real glory, the real wonder is *the truth* which is in Jesus Christ and His Word, the Bible.

VI. The Repentance of Israel

The process of “mourning” and grieving on the part of all unbelievers on account of their failure to recognize the true Messiah will commence immediately upon His return to the heavens above the earth in blinding light that splits the sky from one horizon to the other, accompanied by the sign of the cross (Matt.24:27-31). And we may be sure that the rising of the Church in resurrection into our glorious resurrection bodies, with the previously departed being raised up bodily from their graves and with living believers then being transformed before the eyes of all, and with all flying up to meet the Lord in the air, will undoubtedly be an unimaginably astounding sight which will leave the world's unbelievers aghast. At this time many will no doubt turn to the Lord – too late to be part of this echelon of the resurrection, but in time to enjoy the blessings of Jesus' millennial reign as His followers. But as impressive as the resurrection of the Church will be, scripture makes it quite clear that for unbelieving Israel, at any rate, it will be the glorious return of the Messiah Himself that will bring about the end of the “hardness in part” which has characterized the Jewish people since our Lord's first advent.

(25) Brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery (and so think more of yourselves than you should): hardness has come over a part of Israel until the time when the fullness of the gentiles has come in [to the family of God] (i.e., when the Church is completed at the 2nd Advent). (26) And it is in this way (i.e., coming to believe upon witnessing the Messiah's return) that all [true] Israel will be saved just as it is written: The Deliverer will come from Zion. He will expel ungodliness from Jacob. (27) And this will be My covenant with them when I take away their sins.
Romans 11:25-27

For He will give them over until the time when she who is about to give birth gives birth (i.e., the mother of Jesus' humanity, Mary: the First Advent), and the rest of His brothers return to the sons of Israel (i.e., Jewish repentance at the Second Advent).
Micah 5:3

This return to the Lord will commence immediately, just as soon as He appears. For He will be visible to the entire world, seen by every earthly eye, prominent at the head of His legions of angels and the now assembled, resurrected Church. Then the reality of their mistake in failing to recognize Jesus as the Christ before this moment of His revelation to the world as the true Messiah and Son of God will cause the entire world "to grieve".

Behold! He is coming with clouds, and *every eye will see Him*, even those who pierced Him, and *all the peoples of the earth will grieve on account of Him*.
Revelation 1:7

This grief will in many cases be part of a godly repentance in turning to the now revealed Lord Jesus Christ, a phenomenon that will be especially pronounced in Israel.⁵⁰²

And I will pour out on the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem *a Spirit of grace and repentance*. For they will look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they will grieve for Him like the grieving for an only son, and they will [weep] bitterly for Him like the bitter [weeping] for a firstborn son.
Zechariah 12:10

(4) For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar and without ephod or household idols. (5) Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the Lord and to His goodness in the last days.
Hosea 3:4-5 NASB

Moreover, there will be no need for anyone to explain that the glorious Messiah visible to all the world in the heaven above is Jesus Christ our Lord, for His sign, the sign of the cross, will also be emblazoned across the sky, leaving no basis to deny that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and the one and only true Messiah.⁵⁰³

(29) Immediately following the tribulation of those days, the sun will grow dark and the moon will not give out its light, and the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (30) And then *the sign of the Son of Man* will appear in heaven. And then all the tribes of the earth will mourn and will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and much glory.

Matthew 24:29-30

Then our Lord will respond to the repentant hearts throughout Israel and particularly in besieged Jerusalem. For He will unleash His violent fury against those who dare to touch “the apple of His eye” (Zech.2:8; cf. Deut.32:10).

(12) “Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. (13) Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. (14) Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave behind a blessing – grain offerings and drink offerings for the Lord your God. (15) Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. (16) Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber. (17) Let the priests, who minister before the Lord, weep between the portico and the altar. Let them say, “Spare your people, Lord. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’” (18) Then the Lord will be jealous for his land and take pity on his people. (19) The Lord will reply to them: “I am sending you grain, new wine and oil, enough to satisfy you fully; never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations. (20) I will drive the northern army far from you, pushing it into a parched and barren land, with its front columns going into the eastern sea and those in the rear into the western sea. And its stench will go up; its smell will rise.” Surely he has done great things.

Joel 2:12-20 NIV

(30) I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. (31) The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. (32) And *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the survivors whom the Lord calls.

Joel 2:30-32 NIV

For the Redeemer will come to Zion, *even to those in Jacob who turn away from their transgression.*

Isaiah 59:20

VII. The Second Advent and Armageddon: Revelation 19:11-21

Introduction:

Judgment day has now arrived, the quintessential “Day of the Lord” otherwise known as Armageddon, the day of deliverance and wrath to which countless scriptures point and respond, the day of the coming of our Lord.⁵⁰⁴ This is the day upon which the people of God fix their hope, upon which they have always fixed their hope.⁵⁰⁵

(7) Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. (8) Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. (9) Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. (10) Who is he, this King of glory? The Lord Almighty – he is the King of glory.

Psalm 24:7-10 NIV

For the Lord has a day of vengeance, even a year of retribution for Zion's cause.
Isaiah 34:8

(12) Oh, the raging of many nations – they rage like the raging of the sea! Oh, the uproar of the peoples – they roar like the roaring of great waters! (13) Although the peoples roar like the roar of surging waters, when he rebukes them they flee far away, driven before the wind like chaff on the hills, like tumbleweed before a gale. (14) In the evening, sudden terror! Before the morning, they are gone! This is the portion of those who loot us, the lot of those who plunder us.

Isaiah 17:12-14 NIV

(9) You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, “Here is your God!” (10) See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.

Isaiah 40:9-10 NIV

The Lord will march out like a mighty man, like a warrior he will stir up his zeal; with a shout he will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies.

Isaiah 42:13 NIV

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you!

Isaiah 64:1 NIV

(23) See, the storm of the Lord will burst out in wrath, a driving wind swirling down on the heads of the wicked. (24) The fierce anger of the Lord will not turn back until he fully accomplishes the purposes of his heart. In days to come you will understand this.

Jeremiah 30:23-24 NIV

Marana tha (Aramaic = "O our Lord, return!")
1st Corinthians 16:22

1. The Coming of the Word of God: Revelation 19:11-16

(11) And I saw the sky above opened up, and, behold, a white horse, and the One seated on it is called "Faithful and True", and in righteousness He renders judgment and makes war.

Revelation 19:11

As He hung on the cross, about to bear the sins of the world in His own body in the darkness about to descend on Golgotha, our Lord's enemies taunted Him with the charge upon which He had putatively been convicted: "You were going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself, if you are the Son of God!" (Matt.27:39-40). Three days later, our Lord did exactly what He had promised, rising from the dead in the restored temple of His new resurrection body, the proof of the acceptability of His sacrifice and His right to judge the world (Ps.110:1; Rom.1:3-4). Likewise the high priests, scribes and elders took up this refrain and taunted Him: "He is the King of Israel! Let Him come down now from the cross and we will believe in Him!" (Matt.27:41-42). In this moment to come our Lord will do exactly that, appearing out of the sign of the cross in refulgent glory, and many will believe in grief and repentance as they look upon the One whom they pierced, realizing at last that He is undeniably the Messiah, the one and only Son of God (Zech.12:10; Rev.1:7).

John is given to see here the very moment of the 2nd Advent, when, with the Church now resurrected and assembled, Jesus returns physically from heaven in all His glory as the King of Kings and Lord of the Lords, the true Messiah who has come to take possession of the kingdom He earned at the cost of His own blood, His death on the cross for the sake of the whole world. As the heavens above split open, the dark world is bathed in the brilliant light emanating from Him who is the true Light of the world, and every human eye shall see Him.

The white horse is an indication of our Lord's kingly station and also of His prowess in battle. As He entered Jerusalem in full anticipation of the cross that was before Him, His way bestrewn with palms, He rode upon a donkey's colt, but also had a horse's colt in train (Matt.21:1-9), betokening both the humility of his first advent and the coming glory of His second (to which the palm branches were truly appropriate as calling to mind to feast of tabernacles, the second advent celebration).⁵⁰⁶

Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion. Shout [for joy], daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, your King will come to you. Righteous and victorious He is; humble and riding on a donkey, even on a colt, a donkey's foal.

Zechariah 9:9

Just as our Lord's entry into Jerusalem before the cross had double meaning, so we see the same in the verse above: How could the Messiah be both humble and victorious? How could He be the conquering deliverer of Israel mounted on a donkey? Having long since gained the victory of victories over sin and death at the cross, our Lord will now fulfill the other side of the Zechariah prophecy for which those who threw the palms before Him yearned. Mounted on a white charger He will return in righteousness and victory, and will indeed be the cause of great joy and rejoicing for those who now repent and turn to Him. He is called here "Faithful and True", for He is the truth and can be completely relied upon as the One who is about to fulfill all the promises of God to Israel. His truth now rips apart the darkness of the terrible times of tribulation, and sends the lie fleeing into the shadows. For He is about to destroy all who have loved and embraced the lie of Satan and his antichrist, and every life He takes will be justly and righteously taken. And from this moment of His return until the end of time at the close of the Millennium, every judgment He makes will be justly and righteously rendered.

(12) And His eyes were a flame of fire, and on His head were many [kingly] crowns, with names written [on them] which no one knows except He Himself.

Revelation 19:12

The fiery eyes, a unique characteristic of our now gloried Lord, one we have encountered before (Rev.1:14; 2:18), bespeak His deity even in His humanity, and call attention to our Lord's complete and perfect knowledge of all things, including, as in this case, of all transgression in need of fiery divine correction (2Chron.16:9; Zech.3:9 with 4:10; Rev.5:6). The reference to these piercing, fiery eyes here makes clear that our Lord is about to wreak a terrible vengeance upon the offending armies encircling Jerusalem (e.g., Is.34:8; 35:4). The names mentioned above (note the plural, *pace* most versions which incorrectly have the singular), are written one to a crown, and demonstrate that Jesus is the King of every kingdom and the Lord of every people that has ever existed, having won that rulership through His victory at the cross (Ps.110:1; cf. Heb.1:3). These titles are known only to Him, for only God understands the true essence of every nation and people, having created them and assigned them their unique times and habitations (Acts 17:26; cf. Gen.11:6; Deut.32:8; Job 12:23; Ps.74:17; Jer.18:7-10), and only Jesus Christ shall rule over them in what remains of time, judging them all when the seven millennial days of human history finally come to an end, both the living and the dead (Acts 10:42). To this we may compare the "new name" that every believer will have (written on the white stone we receive as our token of our membership in the eternal edifice of the Church of Jesus Christ: 1Pet.2:4-8; cf. 1Cor.3:9-15; Eph.2:20-22) which is also known only to the believer in question and to the Lord (Rev.2:17; cf. Is.56:5; 65:15; though we shall all bear the Lord's Name on our persons: Rev.3:12; 22:4). For as is the case collectively with the nations, so also it is true with individual believers that only He really "knows us" well enough to assign us the unique "name" that captures the essence of all we are and all we chose to do (and that essential designation is a memorial confidence between Jesus and each believer). Moreover, it is Jesus Christ alone who

will evaluate the lives of each of us after that great day of His return (Rom.14:10-12; 2Cor.5:10).

(13) And He is dressed in a robe splattered all about with blood, and His Name has [always] been called, “The Word of God”.
Revelation 19:13

The blood mentioned here is a proleptic symbol, anticipating the slaughter to come with which our Lord's white garments will soon be stained.

(1) Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah, with his garments stained crimson? Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength? “It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.” (2) Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress? (3) “I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. (4) For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come. (5) I looked, but there was no one to help, I was appalled that no one gave support; so my own arm worked salvation for me, and my own wrath sustained me. (6) I trampled the nations in my anger; in my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground.”
Isaiah 63:1-6 NIV

In addition to heralding the coming slaughter of the armies of antichrist, the blood of course also recalls the basis for Jesus' authority to render the judgment of Armageddon and take possession of His kingdom, namely, the shedding of His own blood on the cross on behalf of us all, even on behalf of those about to be destroyed. And if instead of willingly following the beast to oppose our Lord's return they had responded to this precious sacrifice on their behalf, they would have risen in glory with us instead of now being about to face the wrath of Him who is “The Word of God”.

(14) And His armies were following Him in the sky [mounted] on white horses, [and] clad in linen white and pure.
Revelation 19:14

As discussed in section V above, here we see the Church in resurrection, described in similar terms to the Lord whom we love and follow, likewise mounted on white horses and clothed in the pristine white garments with which our eternal bodies will ever be clothed. The absence of blood on our vestments indicates what Jesus says at Isaiah 63:3 (quoted above; and see the following verse in our context, Rev. 19:15), that He alone will “trample the winepress” of Armageddon, while we accompany Him and observe our Master's victory.⁵⁰⁷

(15) And a sharp broadsword proceeded from His mouth wherewith to smite the nations, and He Himself will shepherd them with an iron staff, and He Himself will

trample the winepress of the furious wrath of God the Almighty.
Revelation 19:15

As in verse eleven of Revelation nineteen above where it is said of our Lord that “in righteousness He renders judgment and makes war”, here too we have both the rulership of the Messiah emphasized in His coming millennial administration of the world (i.e., “He Himself will shepherd them with an iron staff”) as well as the imminent victory whereby He will take possession of His Kingdom: “a sharp broadsword proceeded from His mouth wherewith to smite the nations” and “He Himself will trample the winepress of the furious wrath of God the Almighty”. The sword mentioned here (Greek *rhomphaia*, ῥομφαία), is the same one John saw proceeding out our Lord's mouth in His first vision of Christ in chapter one (Rev.1:16; cf. Rev.2:12; 2:16). It is not the smaller, more precise two-edged Roman sword familiar from other passages of scripture (i.e., the *machaira*, μάχαιρα), but the large Thracian broadsword. While the former is sometimes employed to illustrate the surgical-like sharpness of the Word of God (Eph.6:17; Heb.4:12), the broadsword here emphasizes the violent and bloody slaughter about to begin (and described in Rev.19:21). Since elsewhere this sword is described as a spirit or the Spirit, we likewise see in this description the twofold mission of the Word of God, bringing life through the truth to those who will receive it, and death to those who arrogantly and willfully refuse it:

And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath (lit., “spirit” or “Spirit”) of His lips He will put the wicked to death.
Isaiah 11:4b

He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver.
Isaiah 49:2 NIV

Although the enemy (i.e., antichrist) will attack like the River (i.e., the great Nile or Euphrates; cf. Dan.11:22; 11:26), the Spirit of the Lord will put him to flight.
Isaiah 59:19

And then the lawless one (i.e., antichrist) will be revealed, [that same one] whom the Lord Jesus will slay with the breath of His mouth and destroy when He appears at His [glorious] return.
2nd Thessalonians 2:8

John is only given to see here in Revelation 19:15 the sword proceeding from our Lord's mouth. The iron staff and the winepress are described as symbols of (near) future events, and represent respectively the millennial administration of the Messiah's kingdom and the judgment of Armageddon. In both of these latter cases, the emphasis is on severity. The staff or “rod” is the guiding and directing implement of the Good Shepherd (Jn.10:11; Heb.13:20-21; 1Pet.2:25; Rev.7:17), and a reference to the badge of rulership identifying our Lord as the rightful Sovereign of the earth.

The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.
Genesis 49:10 NIV

(8) Ask of Me and I shall give [You] the nations as your inheritance, and as Your possession the ends of the earth. (9) You shall shepherd them with a *rod of iron*, and You shall shatter them like a potter's vessel.
Psalm 2:8-9

(26) And to the one who wins the victory and gives heed to My works until the end, I will give to him authority over the nations. (27) And he will shepherd them with *an iron rod* and crush them like vessels of clay, just as I have received [the authority] from My Father.
Revelation 2:26-27

And she (i.e., Israel) gave birth to a male child who is going to shepherd the nations *with an iron staff*. And the child was snatched up to God and to His throne.
Revelation 12:5

The Messiah will brook absolutely no violation of the law or exploitation of the weak throughout His Kingdom. Perfect justice perfectly administered will equally condemn and destroy the wicked in the process of acquitting and vindicating the innocent while Jesus Christ is in control (cf. Prov.17:15).

(1) The Lord said to My Lord, "Sit down at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." (2) From Zion the Lord will send forth *your mighty scepter*. Rule in the midst of your enemies!
Psalm 110:1-2

(8) But of the Son He says, "Your throne, O God, is from eternity to eternity, and the rod of your kingdom is *the rod of uprightness*. (9) You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness. For this reason God your God has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions (Ps.45:6-7)".
Hebrews 1:8-9

The third symbol in verse fifteen, the winepress, is a very vivid picture of the slaughter about to be unleashed upon the armies of antichrist wherein the beast's forces represent the grapes about to be trodden underfoot in conquest by the returning King (Rev.14:14:20; cf. Ps.2:1-2; 110:5-7; Is.11:4; 29:5-8; 34:1-3; 52:10; 59:15-19; 63:1-6; 66:15-16; Joel 3:9-14; Hag.2:21-22; Zech.12:3; 14:1-3). In this image we see the righteousness of the Messiah in making war paralleling His righteousness in administering peace after He has taken His seat on His millennial throne. In the latter instance, it will be a case of meting out swift and severe but completely righteous recompense upon all who do evil *within* His kingdom, while in the vintage of

Armageddon it is going to be a case of righteously annihilating all those who oppose and seek to destroy His incipient kingdom *from without*.

(2) And the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon Him (i.e., the Messiah), the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, (3) and the fear of the Lord will be to Him a sweet fragrance. And He will not judge [merely] by what His eyes see, nor reprove [merely] by what His ears hear. (4) For He will judge the poor with righteousness, and will reprove with justice on behalf of the humble of the earth. And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath (lit., “spirit” or “Spirit”) of His lips He will put the wicked to death.
Isaiah 11:2-4

Thus we see that in both primary functions of any good government, maintaining internal law and order while protecting the realm from external threats, our Lord's administration will function with perfect knowledge and in perfect justice, a fact that should terrify all His enemies whether within or without.

(16) And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written: “King of Kings and Lord of Lords”.
Revelation 19:16

As mentioned in our discussion of verse twelve above, our Lord has many names, as many as there are races and tribes and peoples and nations or ever have been. For He is Sovereign over them all. Therefore this Name is given out as the common Name by which He may be known: “King of Kings and Lord of Lords”. For this title sums up His total rule over all (1Tim.2:16; Rev.17:14; cf. Deut.10:17; Ps.136:2-3; Dan.2:47).

(4) John, to the seven churches which are in Asia [Minor]: Grace to you and peace from the One who is and was and is coming (i.e., the Father), and from the seven spirits (i.e., the Holy Spirit) which are before His throne, (5) and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and *the Ruler of the kings of the earth*.
Revelation 1:4-5

2. The Invitation to the Slaughter: Revelation 19:17-18

(17) And I saw a single angel having taken his stand in front of the sun. And he cried out in a loud voice, saying to all the birds flying in the sky, “Come, gather together for the great banquet of God, (18) that you may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of generals, and the flesh of horses and those who ride upon them, and the flesh of all [these wicked men], free and slave, small and great [alike]”.
Revelation 19:17-18

This “banquet” of cursing for the birds of the air consisting of the corpses of antichrist's followers is in deliberately vivid and somewhat ironic contrast to the great feast of

blessing that will follow Christ's return to celebrate the wedding of the Lamb and His Bride. The actual occurrence of the gorging of the "feast" mentioned in context here is described a bit later in verse 21. It is also described in Ezekiel's account of Armageddon:

(1) And you, son of man, prophesy against Gog, and say, "Thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I am against you, Gog (i.e., antichrist), chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. And I will fetch you back, and conduct you, and bring you up from the far reaches of the north. For I will make you come to the mountains of Israel. (3) Then I will strike your bow from your left hand, and make your arrows fall from your right hand. (4) On the mountains of Israel you shall fall along with all the hordes and nations with you. I will give you as food to the birds of prey, [to] everything on the wing, [and to] the beasts of the field. (5) You shall fall in the open fields, for I have spoken, says the Lord God'".
Ezekiel 39:1-5

(17) And you, son of man, thus says the Lord God, "Call to the birds, everything on the wing, and to every beast of the field. Assemble them together so that they may come. Gather them from everywhere for My sacrifice 'which I am going to sacrifice for all of you [birds and beasts of prey], a great sacrifice upon the mountains of Israel. And you shall eat fat and drink blood, (18) the flesh of warriors you will eat, and the blood of princes you will drink – [as if they were] rams, lambs, and goats, fattened bulls of Bashan, all of them. (19) For you shall eat fat until you are sated, and you shall drink blood until you are drunk from My sacrifice which I shall sacrifice for you. (20) And you will be sated at My table [with] horses and their riders, warriors and all the men of war", says the Lord God.
Ezekiel 39:17-20

In both cases, the slaughter is described as total, with animals perishing as well as men, and with all who accompany the beast destroyed regardless of their status. The reference to "slaves" entails the reality that many of antichrist's soldiers will be conscripts. But this fact will not spare them: they no doubt have taken the mark of the beast, and it is equally certain that they have chosen to accompany him with the intent of destroying the people of God and of opposing Christ Himself rather than face the beast's wrath. This is a similar choice to the one many believers will face during the Great Persecution. In both cases, those who are more afraid of the wrath of the beast will have to face the wrath of the returning King of Kings. The reference to horses is only a mild case of John and Ezekiel being given this account in language that is not completely incompatible with their technological frame of reference. For one thing, there may indeed be many horses and pack animals employed in the mustering of the world's armies for Armageddon (and we cannot say for certain that the events of the Tribulation will not result in serious technological regression). For another, the differences between a war-horse and a mechanical APC (armored personnel carrier) are, from a strictly interpretive standpoint here, not all that dissimilar. That is because a horse prepared for battle is adorned with much accouterment that is inedible (e.g., saddle, bosses, and other protective and decorative gear), though of course its carcass is edible; and on the other hand, while an APC is, strictly speaking, inedible, it will contain much that is (e.g., not only the bodies of its crew which will normally consist of many

more than one “rider”, but also the foodstuffs it carries to supply them). These and all who follow the beast will be “sacrifices” for mere creatures, because they chose to follow and to worship the creature rather than the Creator who is blessed forever (Rom.1:25).

3. Antichrist and his Armies: Revelation 19:19

(19) And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war with the One riding on the [white] horse and with His army.

Revelation 19:19

In that antichrist is described here as leading “the kings of the earth”, we are meant to understand that all the standing armies of the world, now under his power, have been assembled in Israel. Further, our text makes it quite clear that the true, mad purpose of this assembly is “to make war” with Jesus Christ! Therefore the immediate purpose of destroying Israel is merely “bait” to bring our Lord to battle. Oh the insanity that arrogance brings! But in this purpose the beast is not only following the behest of his father the devil – he is mimicking Satan's actions is rebelling against God before human history began. The results will be comparable, and equally dramatic and swift at that.

The place of this assemblage of the armed forces of the entire world will be, as we have explained above under our initial treatment of Armageddon (section I.6), Jerusalem, whose eastern valleys will accommodate the leading elements of antichrist's train, no doubt composed of his most elite warriors. This will be the *schwerpunkt* or center of his operational mass at the point of our Lord's return, with the rest of his troops deployed from north to south and centered around Jerusalem.

(45) Then [upon his return to Israel] he will pitch the tents of his [royal] pavilion between the seas (i.e., the Mediterranean and the Dead seas) near the mountain of the beauty of holiness (i.e., the temple mount in Jerusalem). But [in spite of this (i.e., his hopes for success in the battle of Armageddon)] he will come to his end, and no one will aid him [then].

Daniel 11:40b-45

(1) For behold, in those days and at that time when I restore the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, (2) I will gather all the nations and bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat (i.e., “the Lord will judge”) and will enter into judgment with them there on behalf of My people and My inheritance Israel whom they have scattered among the nations and whose land they apportioned [to others]. (3) They even cast lots for My people and exchanged a boy for a prostitute and sold a girl for the wine they drank.

Joel 3:1-3

“Therefore wait for Me,” says the Lord, “until the day I rise up for plunder; My determination is to gather the nations to My assembly of kingdoms, to pour on them My indignation, all My fierce anger; all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy.”

Zephaniah 3:8

“Be silent before me, you islands! Let the nations renew their strength! Let them come forward and speak; let us meet together at the place of judgment.”

Isaiah 41:1 NIV

4. The Seizure of the Beast and his False Prophet: Revelation 19:20

(20) And the beast was snatched up and the false prophet along with him, the one who had performed the signs in his presence and had thereby deceived those who had received the mark of the beast, even those who were worshiping his image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with sulfur.

Revelation 19:20

This verse certainly demonstrates that there is nothing hesitant or indirect about our Lord and His methods. Even before the great slaughter of Armageddon proper commences, He has antichrist along with his false prophet removed from the head of their armies, thus decapitating the forces arrayed against Jerusalem at the most critical time (a fact that will only intensify the terror of their last moments on earth). Herein we see very clearly the value of walking with the Lord and the terribly folly of making Him an enemy (cf. Jer.30:16), for on that day the judgment He exacts will be swift and severe upon all those who have chosen to oppose Him (cf. Is.10:22-23; Rom.9:28).

The beast, and, for his pivotal role in deceiving the followers of antichrist, the false prophet are immediately “cast alive” into the lake of fire, the final end of all unbelievers and fallen angels (notice that antichrist’s abominations are so extreme and unique in the history of the world that no explanation need be given in the verse above for this immediate seizure and disposition). Not only are these two the first to experience the “second death”,⁵⁰⁸ but they will do so without the formality of the “last judgment”. This final adjudication is completely unnecessary in their case since have proven by their extreme words and actions beyond all doubt or argument to the entire world that they never had the slightest interest in responding to God. Indeed, they have opposed Him and His people to such a unique and unprecedented degree that no additional formal process is required to demonstrate their free will choice of the devil over the Lord. Like the fallen angels, their choice has been confirmed to such an extent that human history (and in the case of the beast and his false prophet, their time and actions in it) constitutes their “trial”.

(32) Every stroke the Lord lays on them with his punishing rod will be to the music of tambourines and harps, as he fights them in battle with the blows of his arm. (33) Topheth (i.e., the lake of fire) has long been prepared (cf. Matt.25:41), it has been made ready for the king (i.e., antichrist). *Its fire pit has been made deep and wide, with an abundance of fire and wood; the breath of the Lord like a stream of burning sulfur,*

sets it ablaze.

Isaiah 30:32-33 NIV

Meanwhile, I kept looking on account of the sound of the arrogant words which the horn (i.e., antichrist) was speaking. I kept looking until he was killed and his body destroyed and *given over to the burning fire.*

Daniel 7:11

And on account of the extreme [nature] of [his] abominations, he [will] be causing desolations (i.e., desertion and estrangement from God), even until the end when what has been determined will be poured out upon the one characterized by [this] desolation (i.e., the beast).

Daniel 9:27b

He will pitch his royal tents between the seas at the beautiful holy mountain. Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him.

Daniel 11:45 NIV

(13) You came out to deliver your people, to save your anointed one. You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness, you stripped him from head to foot. Selah (14) With his own spear you pierced his head when his warriors stormed out to scatter us, gloating as though about to devour the wretched who were in hiding.

Habakkuk 3:13-14

(8) And then the lawless one (i.e., antichrist) will be revealed, [that same one] whom the Lord Jesus will slay with the breath of His mouth and destroy when He appears at His [glorious] return – (9) [that same lawless one] whose appearance [will come about] through Satan's empowerment [and will be] accompanied by every [sort of] false miracle, both signs and portents, (10) and by every [sort of] unrighteous deception [designed] for those who are perishing, [namely those who will believe these lies] because they did not open themselves up to the love for the truth so as to be saved.

2nd Thessalonians 2:8-10

5. The Battle of Armageddon: Revelation 19:21

(21) And the rest [of the beast's forces] were killed by the broadsword which came forth from the mouth of the One riding on the [white] horse. And all of the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

Revelation 19:21

This verse, succinct and to the point, summarizes the essence of what we absolutely need to know about the battle of Armageddon in the context of the book of Revelation: In very short order our Lord will completely destroy the entire collection of antichrist's armies, giving their flesh to the birds of the air summoned to this great

slaughter. One of the reasons that such a pithy summary is possible here is that the final battle preceding the Messiah's reign is so well-documented elsewhere in scripture, being, in fact, the most prolifically referenced end-times event in the Bible. As the multitude of passages throughout scripture which document Armageddon contain much additional information about the precise course of the final hours of the Tribulation, it will be our purpose here to relate the history of these events beginning with Zechariah 14:2-7, a passage which will need to be considered in some detail.

a. Jesus Christ's Return to Earth on the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:2-7).

Verses 2-3:

(2) For I shall gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against her. The city will be captured, its houses will be sacked, and its women will be ravished. (3) Half of the city will be taken away captive, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. Then the Lord will go forth, and He will fight against those nations as when He fights on a day of battle.

Zechariah 14:2-3

At this point in our treatment of the book of Revelation, we have seen all the nations already gathered in Israel by antichrist and his false prophet. According to the situation described in these two verses, the battle for Jerusalem has been going on now for some considerable time, at least long enough to transport the world's armies to the middle east and reduce most if not all of the rebellion's strong-points shielding Jerusalem (Is.22:8). Given the seven months between the call to Armageddon and Christ's return (see figure #1 above), fighting may have been going on at Jerusalem proper for several months now. The situation at the Messiah's imminent return is dire indeed. Rebel resistance is on the point of collapse, the western half of the city has already been consolidated in the hands of antichrist's troops, and those captured have been harshly used, the women raped (v.2), the young sold into slavery (cf. Joel 3:1-8), and those not killed in the process of the attack now captives of the beast. But now that the situation is at its most desperate, Jesus Christ will come to the rescue of His people (cf. Is.49:24-26: the captives *will* be rescued "from the fierce"). It is often the case that our Lord will bring us to the point of complete helplessness before delivering us, precisely to demonstrate His power, mighty to save (cf. 2Cor.12:10).

The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, "It will be for a time, times and half a time. *When the power of the holy people has been finally broken*, all these things will be completed."

Daniel 12:7 NIV

It is precisely at this time of seemingly utter hopelessness that the Lord of hope will return, and, after appearing in the heavens above and gathering His Church to Himself,

will swiftly descend at the front of His heavenly army to deliver the remnant of His holy people.

(4) This is what the Lord says to me: “As a lion growls, a great lion over its prey – and though a whole band of shepherds is called together against it, it is not frightened by their shouts or disturbed by their clamor – so the Lord Almighty will come down to do battle on Mount Zion and on its heights. (5) Like birds hovering overhead, the Lord Almighty will shield Jerusalem; he will shield it and deliver it, he will ‘pass over’ it and will rescue it.”

Isaiah 31:4-5 NIV

Verse 4:

For His feet will stand on that day on the Mount of Olives which lies before Jerusalem on the east. Then the Mount of Olives will be split in its midst [into] a very great valley [leading] east and west. For half of the mountain will recede [out of the way] to the north, and half of it to the south.

Zechariah 14:4

As the verse above states plainly, before commencing the slaughter of His enemies, our Lord will first rescue the remaining inhabitants of Jerusalem. He will physically land on the eastern heights of the city known as the Mount of Olives which looks down on the temple and Mount Zion. The Mount of Olives is really a long hog-back ridge running roughly north to south and blocking access to and egress from Jerusalem to the east (absent a time-consuming ascent and descent of this ridge). Cleaving it asunder in this miraculous way will occasion a significant earthquake, prophesied by Ezekiel:

(18) This is what will happen in that day: When Gog attacks the land of Israel, my hot anger will be aroused, declares the Sovereign Lord. (19) In my zeal and fiery wrath I declare that at that time there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. (20) The fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, every creature that moves along the ground, and all the people on the face of the earth will tremble at my presence. The mountains will be overturned, the cliffs will crumble and every wall will fall to the ground.

Ezekiel 38:18-20 NIV

Our Lord's astounding splitting of this obstacle in two will greatly facilitate the escape of the beleaguered occupants and defenders of Jerusalem, giving them much needed respite as He proceeds to resolve the Tribulation's final battle. Herein we shall see a fulfillment of the promise of faith for those who now believe: “I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him” (Mk.11:23; cf. Matt.21:21; 1Cor.13:2). The moving of the Mount of Olives will be an occasion for great rejoicing, anticipating the victory and deliverance which the Messiah is about provide.

(9) You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" (10) See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and his arm (i.e., Jesus Christ) rules for Him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.

Isaiah 40:9-10 (cf. Nah.1:15) NIV

(7) How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (8) Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the Lord returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. (9) Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. (10) The Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

Isaiah 52:7-10 NIV

Verse 5:

Then you will flee by way of the valley of My [two new] mountains, for the valley between the mountains will reach directly over to [you] (i.e., in Jerusalem).⁵⁰⁹ Thus you will flee like you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah (i.e., swiftly). And then the Lord my God will enter [the battle], and all His holy ones with Him.

Zechariah 14:5 (cf. Lk.17:28-33)

The historical earthquake which took place during the days of Uzziah king of Judah (ca. 792-740 B.C.), was not accompanied by enemy activity, therefore the direction of the flight of Jerusalem's population was no doubt to the west, down-hill and through the valley approaches to the city, rather than west and up-hill over the Mount of Olives. In this case, with the western approaches occupied by the armies of the beast (which by this time undoubtedly have also flanked the city on the north and the south, east is the only viable direction of retreat, so that this "way of escape" (cf. 1Cor.10:13) opened up by our Lord will be as timely, welcome, and necessary as His opening up of the Red Sea to provide a similar escape from the armies of Pharaoh, a type of antichrist (see part 3B, section I.3.b).

Verses 6-7:

(6) For it will come to pass on that day that there will be no light. [The light of the] heavenly bodies will be withheld (lit., "curdled"). (7) For it will be a unique day, one which is known [only] to the Lord, neither day nor night, and it will come to pass at evening time that there will be light.

Zechariah 14:6-7

These verses harkens back by way of explanation to the period before Christ's descent onto the Mount of Olives. Just as the splitting of the mountain to provide deliverance is

reminiscent of the Lord's deliverance of Israel from Pharaoh's forces at the Red Sea, so also this picture of supernatural darkness wherein light is miraculously withheld from the enemies of God is a deliberate repetition of the circumstances that obtained before Israel's escape on that former occasion (Josh.24:7; cf. Ex.14:19-20; Ps.105:39).

(2) For behold, the darkness – it will cover the earth, even a deep gloom its peoples. But the Lord will rise over you, and His glory will appear above you. (3) Nations will come to His light, and kings to the brilliance of His rising.
Isaiah 60:2-3

b. The Terrifying Signs and wonders:

Coincident with our Lord's glorious, resplendent return and His subsequent descent onto on the Mount of Olives, various celestial and terrestrial signs and wonders will further serve to terrify the adversaries of God even as they encourage His people. Heaven and earth will be shaken in a dizzying display of the transcendent power of God, events which are well-documented in the prophetic passages which anticipate the Second Advent.

Therefore I will *shake the heavens*, and the earth will *quake* from its place, on account of the anger of the Lord and on the day of His fierce wrath.
Isaiah 13:13 (cf. Is.24:17-20; Matt.24:29; Mk.13:25; Lk.21:25-26)

(6) You will experience visitation (i.e., the judgment of Armageddon) from the Lord of Hosts [Himself], with *thunder and quaking* [of the earth] and a loud voice, with *tempest and whirlwind and devouring flames of fire*. (7) And the hordes of the nations mustering against Ariel (i.e., "Jerusalem") will become like [just] a dream in the visions of the night, even all those who camp against her and her fortress and besiege her.
Isaiah 29:6-7

(2) The Lord is angry with the nations; His wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them, He will give them over to slaughter. (3) Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will send up a stench; the mountains will be soaked with their blood. (4) *All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree*.
Isaiah 34:2-4 NIV

(30) For I will display *wonders in the heavens and on the earth*, blood and fire and columns of smoke. (31) The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the Day of the Lord, that great and terrible [day].
Joel 2:30-31

(15) The sun and moon will darken, and the stars will gather up their light. (16) Then the Lord will roar from Zion, and from Jerusalem He will let sound His voice, and *the heavens and the earth will quake*.

Joel 3:15-16

This is what the Lord Almighty says: “In a little while *I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land*. (7) I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,” says the Lord Almighty.

Haggai 2:6 NIV (cf. Hag.2:21-22; Heb.12:26)

(12) And I saw when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the sixth seal, a great earthquake occurred, and the sun became black like hairy sackcloth, and the moon became entirely like blood [in appearance], (13) and the stars of heaven fell to the earth like a fig tree casting its fruit when shaken by a strong wind, (14) and the heaven retreated like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and hill was moved from its place. (15) And all the kings of the earth and the prominent men and the generals and the wealthy and the powerful and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and the rocks of the mountains. (16) And [thus] they say to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of the One who sits upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, (17) because the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand [before them]?”

Revelation 6:12-17 (cf. Is.2:19-21; 51:6; 2Pet.3:14)

c. Israel Fights

(1) The Lord said to My Lord, “Sit down at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” (2) From Zion the Lord will send forth your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies! (3) *Your people will volunteer* on the day of your valor[ous victory] (i.e., the armies of Israel). In the holy chambers, from the womb of the dawn, your young [troops] will [come] to you like the dew (i.e., the armies of the newly resurrected). (4) The Lord has sworn and He will not recant, “You are a priest forever in the manner of Melchizedek.” (5) The Lord is at your right hand. He will shatter [those] kings on the day of His wrath. (6) He will render judgment on the nations. He will shatter [their] head (cf. Gen.3:15) broadly throughout the land filled with corpses [as a result]. (7) [*But as to His troops*], they will drink from a brook beside the way. Therefore He will lift up their head (cf. Judg.15).

Psalms 110:1-7

In one of the most well-known Messianic Psalms we see very clearly the close connection between our Lord's return to rule the earth and His support and empowerment of the hard-pressed Israeli forces at the point of His intervention in the battle of Armageddon. Simply put, while Jesus Christ will for the most part destroy the armies antichrist Himself (by means of the swift sword that proceeds from His mouth:

2Thes.2:8; Rev.1:16; 2:12; 2:16; 19:15; 19:21; cf. Is.11:4; 49:2), Jewish soldiers who repent and turn to Him at the point of His return will be allowed to share in the honor of the final battle. They will be the “willing volunteers” of verse three above, “flocking” to the standard of our Lord as He goes forth to annihilate the forces of the beast, refreshed and energized to play their role in the Tribulation's ultimate battle (verse seven above).

(9) Proclaim this among the nations! Prepare a holy war! Rouse [all] the mighty men! Let all the men of war come near [and] come up [to Jerusalem]. (10) Beat your ploughshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears! Let [even] the feeble man say “I [too] am a mighty man (i.e., fit for service)!” (11) Hurry and come from every direction that you may be assembled there! And Thou, O Lord, Do Thou [likewise] *bring down Thy [own] warriors [there to Jerusalem]*. (12) Let the nations be roused [from their places], and let them come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat. For there I will sit in judgment over all the nations on every side. (13) Send forth the sickle for the harvest is ripe! Come down into the winepress for it is full and the vats overflow. For great is their wickedness. (14) Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of doom! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of doom. (15) The sun and moon will darken, and the stars will gather up their light. (16) Then the Lord will roar from Zion, and from Jerusalem He will let sound His voice, and the heavens and the earth will quake.
Joel 3:9-16

The battle will turn against the beast first at Jerusalem, the front line where Jewish defenders have so far held off antichrist's forces from re-taking the temple mount in spite of the fall of the city proper (cf. Zech.9:8 “but I will defend My house against marauding forces” with the following verse, Zech.9:10, Messiah's return). Thus Jerusalem, as we saw during our treatment of Armageddon above, along with her Jewish defenders, will be the anvil upon which the Lord will first begin to hammer out the salvation of the Great Day of the Lord. It will not, however, be the place where our Lord's personal treading down of the wine press of Armageddon begins, but rather the place of His final return to assume His throne in the temple at Jerusalem once His victory is complete (Mal.3:1). For just as Joshua in his campaigns to occupy the promised land upon the Israelites' entry into Canaan began his attack in the south then moved to the north (Josh.10-12: Joshua, as we have seen, is a type of Christ, and his campaign is a type of the 2nd Advent), so our Lord will rescue “Judah” before Jerusalem. That is, the slaughter will commence from the south, as our Lord annihilates antichrist's armies which are at this time spread out in a wide arc before the city stretching over hundreds of miles from north to south (with Jerusalem in the concave center of this arced deployment).⁵¹⁰ That is the essential meaning behind Zechariah 12 wherein the “honor of Jerusalem” is prophesied to be no greater than that of Judah – not because of any relative merit or deficiency, but because the Lord's campaign of Armageddon, while beginning with the splitting of the Mount of Olives and the shielding of Jerusalem, will then proceed to the south, then from south to north, then back southeast to Jerusalem in a triangular or clockwise-shaped route designed to sweep up every last enemy in the net of destruction.

(2) Behold, I am about to make Jerusalem a cup of reeling for all the nations round about. And also for Judah there will be a siege against Jerusalem. (3) And it will come to pass on that day that I will make Jerusalem a burdensome rock for all the peoples. All who try to lift it will certainly be ruptured (lit., “lacerated”). For all the nations of the earth will be gathered against her. (4) On that day, says the Lord, I will strike every horse with confusion and every rider with madness. But toward the house of Judah I will open my eyes. But I will strike with blindness the eyes of every horse of all the peoples [gathered against her]. (5) Then *the generals of Judah* will say in their hearts, “The inhabitants of Jerusalem are a strong support for me through the Lord of Hosts their God!”. (6) On that day *I will make the generals of Judah like a fire pot put to wood and like a fiery torch put to sheaves of grain*. For they will consume on the right hand and on the left all of the peoples round about. Thus Jerusalem will continue to dwell in her place, even in Jerusalem (i.e., she will not be completely deported). (7) But *the Lord will deliver the tents of Judah* first with the result that the honor of the house of David and of Jerusalem's inhabitants will not be greater than that of Judah. (8) On that day, *the Lord will put His shield around the inhabitants of Jerusalem* so that even those on the point of falling will become like David and the house of David will become like gods (or “angels”), [even] like the Angel of the Lord before them. (9) And it will come to pass on that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations who are attacking Jerusalem.

Zechariah 12:2-9

As can be seen from the passage above, the Spirit of the Lord will both empower and protect the Israeli forces in Jerusalem while our Lord Jesus goes about His work of destroying the armies of antichrist. This protection, inspiration and empowerment for battle of the Jewish army on the Day of the Lord is in fact prophesied in many other passages of scripture:

Like birds hovering overhead, the Lord Almighty will shield Jerusalem; he will shield it and deliver it, he will ‘pass over’ it and will rescue it.”

Isaiah 31:4-5 NIV

(5) On that day (of Armageddon), the Lord of Hosts will be [like] a glorious crown, [like] a beautiful diadem to those who survive among His people. (6) [He will be] a Spirit of [inspiring good] judgment to him who sits in judgment (i.e., the leadership, political and military), and a [He will be a Spirit] of [inspiring good] courage to those (i.e., the soldiers) who are turning back the enemy attack (lit., “war”) from the gate.⁵¹¹

Isaiah 28:5-6

(11) For at that time many nations will be gathered against you[, O Zion], who will say, “Let her be profaned! And let our eyes look upon Zion [in her defeat]!” (12) But they do not know the plans of the Lord, nor do they understand His purpose. For He has [deliberately] gathered them [to Zion like] tussocks of grain to His threshing floor. (13) “*Wake up and thresh, daughter of Zion!* For I will make your horn a horn of iron, and I

will make your hooves into hooves of bronze.”

Micah 4:11-13

(13) “Indeed, *I will bend Judah for Myself like a bow* and I will fill [his bowstring] with Ephraim (i.e., south and north = all of Israel together). I will wield your sons [like a weapon] O Zion (i.e., Jerusalem), against your sons, O Greece (lit., “Javan”, a reference to the origin of antichrist's typological parallel, Antiochus), and *I will gird them on like a warrior's sword.*” (14) *For the Lord will appear above them*, and His arrows will shoot forth like lightning. And the Lord God will sound the trumpet, and He will march forth in the whirlwinds of the south (cf. Is.21:1). (15) And *the Lord of Hosts will be a shield around them*, and they will devour (the enemy) and be impervious to [his] sling-stones. And they shall rage [against the enemy] and drink [them down] like wine until they are completely [poured out] like a bowl as [at] the corners of an altar. (16) For the Lord their God will deliver them on that day like the flock of His people.

Zechariah 9:13-16a

(3b) For the Lord of Hosts will give attention to His flock, even the house of Judah, and He will make them like a war-horse in its glory. (4) From [Judah will come] the corner, from [him will come] the peg, from [him will come] the battle-bow – from [him will come] every leader altogether. (5) And *they will become in that battle like mighty warriors trampling down [the enemy like] mire in the streets.* (6) For I will make the house of Judah mighty warriors, and I will save the house of Joseph, and I will restore them because I love them deeply. And they will be as if I had not rejected them [previously]. For I am the Lord their God, and I will answer them. (7) Then the men of Ephraim will be like mighty warriors, and their hearts will be glad as [when gladdened] with wine.

Zechariah 10:3b-7a

(5) For this One (i.e., the Messiah) will be our peace. When Ashur (i.e., a type of antichrist's world coalition) comes against our land, and when he tramples upon our fortifications, we will appoint *seven generals* (lit., “shepherds”; cf.) against him, even *eight rulers* of men (i.e., the seven and the supreme civil commander represented by Shebna in Is.22:20-25). (6) And Ashur will ravage the land with the sword, even [the people of] Nimrod right up to the very entrances [to Jerusalem]. Then He [who is our peace] will deliver [us] from Ashur when he comes against our land and tramples our borders. (7) Then the remnant of Jacob will be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the Lord, like plentiful rains which do not wait for man and which do not tarry for the sons of men (i.e., they will be unstoppable). (8) Then the remnant of Jacob will be among the nations [surrounding Jerusalem], in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among flocks of sheep from whom no one can rescue when it passes by and tramples down and mauls. (9) Your hand will be lifted up against your enemies, and all your enemies will be cut down.

Micah 5:5-9a

In the passage above, the “generals of Judah” are seen to be seven in number with an additional commander in charge of the overall operations. For the brief and unspecified

“day”, wherein the day begins with darkness, “but at evening, there will be light” (Zech.14:6-7), a day not limited to any particular span of time (as Joshua's day of victory at Gibeon was supernaturally extended: Josh.10:12-13), the Jewish army will be unstoppable, inspired and empowered by the Lord Himself, even as their enemies flee in terror from before Jerusalem.

And Judah also will fight in Jerusalem.
Zechariah 14:14

(9) Proclaim this among the nations! Prepare a holy war! Rouse [all] the mighty men! Let all the men of war come near [and] come up [to Jerusalem]. (10) Beat your ploughshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears! Let [even] the feeble man say “I [too] am a mighty man (i.e., fit for service)!” (11) Hurry and come from every direction that you may be assembled there! And Thou, O Lord, Do Thou [likewise] bring down Thy [own] warriors [there to Jerusalem]. (12) Let the nations be roused [from their places], and let them come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat. For there I will sit in judgment over all the nations on every side. (13) Send forth the sickle for the harvest is ripe! Come down into the winepress for it is full and the vats overflow. For great is their wickedness. (14) Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of doom! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of doom. (15) The sun and moon will darken, and the stars will gather up their light. (16) Then the Lord will roar from Zion, and from Jerusalem He will let sound His voice, and the heavens and the earth will quake.
Joel 3:9-16

(9) Raise the war cry, you nations, and be shattered! Listen, all you distant lands. Prepare for battle, and be shattered! Prepare for battle, and be shattered! (10) Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted; propose your plan, but it will not stand, for God is with us (i.e., “*Immanuel*”).
Isaiah 8:9-10

d. The Great Slaughter.

Our Lord Jesus Christ will first return to earth descending upon the Mount of Olives from the east, the direction of the sunrise toward which the temple is oriented (Ex.27:12-13; Ezek.11:23; 41:14; 43:1-4). But in between His splitting of the Mount of Olives and His entrance into the temple at Jerusalem, the nations arrayed against Jerusalem will come to know the full fury of our Lord's wrath and of His zeal for His people.

1) The Vintage:

The slaughter or “vintage” of Armageddon will be carried out by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself by means of the terrible swift sword that proceeds from out His mouth (2Thes.2:8; Rev.1:16; 2:12; 2:16; 19:15; 19:21; cf. Is.11:4; 49:2), for the battle is the Lord's

(1Sam.17:47; 2Chron.20:15). Just as Pharaoh and his Egyptian armies raced after Israel into the dry bed of the Red Sea in order to destroy her only to meet their own destruction at His hands, so the massive military forces of the beast have in truth been led to a similar place of slaughter.

(5) The Lord is at your right hand. He will shatter [those] kings on the day of His wrath. (6) He will render judgment on the nations.⁵¹² He will shatter [their] head (cf. Gen.3:15) broadly throughout the land filled with corpses [as a result].
Psalm 110:5-6

(15) See, the Lord is coming with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. (16) For with fire and with his sword the Lord will execute judgment upon all men, and many will be those slain by the Lord.
Isaiah 66:15-16 NIV

(11) And I saw the sky above opened up, and, behold, a white horse, and the One seated on it is called "Faithful and True", and in righteousness He renders judgment and makes war. (12) And His eyes were a flame of fire, and on His head were many [kingly] crowns, with names written [on them] which no one knows except He Himself. (13) And *He is dressed in a robe splattered all about with blood*, and His Name has [always] been called, "The Word of God". (14) And His armies were following Him in the sky [mounted] on white horses, [and] clad in linen white and pure. (15) And *a sharp broadsword proceeded from His mouth wherewith to smite the nations*, and He Himself will shepherd them with an iron staff, and *He Himself will trample the winepress* of the furious wrath of God the Almighty. (16) And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written: "King of Kings and Lord of Lords". (17) And I saw a single angel having taken his stand in front of the sun. And he cried out in a loud voice, saying to all the birds flying in the sky, "Come, gather together for the great banquet of God, (18) that you may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of generals, and the flesh of horses and those who ride upon them, and the flesh of all [these wicked men], free and slave, small and great [alike]". (19) And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war with the One riding on the [white] horse and with His army. (20) And the beast was snatched up and the false prophet along with him, the one who had performed the signs in his presence and had thereby deceived those who had received the mark of the beast, even those who were worshiping his image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with sulfur. (21) And the rest [of the beast's forces] were *killed by the broadsword which came forth from the mouth of the One riding on the [white] horse*. And all of the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

Revelation 19:11-21

As our context given above again in toto shows, the battle of Armageddon is described as the trampling down of the vintage of grapes in a winepress, a process which cannot help but splatter the one doing the crushing with the "blood of the grape". This extremely vivid image is meant to impress us with the graphic nature of our Lord's slaughter of the

armies of the beast. For the victory of Jesus Christ at Armageddon will prove beyond any doubt the folly of opposing Him. Thus, His millennial reign, built upon a decisive victory carried out by irresistible force, will set the tone for a time of unparalleled prosperity during our Lord's perfect rule wherein no disobedience or rebellion will be tolerated (thereby allowing the righteous to live in peace).

He (i.e., Judah, and thus the Messiah) will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch (cf. Matt.21:1-8); *he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes.*

Genesis 49:11 NIV

(1) Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah, *with his garments stained crimson?* Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength? "It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save." (2) *Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress?* (3) *"I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing.* (4) For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come. (5) I looked, but there was no one to help, I was appalled that no one gave support; so *my own arm* (i.e., the Messiah) worked salvation for me, and my own wrath sustained me. (6) *I trampled the nations* in my anger; in my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground."

Isaiah 63:1-6 NIV

(30) "Now prophesy all these words against them and say to them: "The Lord will roar from on high; he will thunder from his holy dwelling and roar mightily against his land. He will shout like those who *tread the grapes*, shout against all who live on the earth. (31) The tumult will resound to the ends of the earth, for the Lord will bring charges against the nations; he will bring judgment on all mankind and put the wicked to the sword," declares the Lord. (32) This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Look! Disaster is spreading from nation to nation; a mighty storm is rising from the ends of the earth."

Jeremiah 25:30-32 NIV

(12) Let the nations be roused [from their places], and let them come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat (i.e., the valley of "the Lord will judge"). For there I will sit in judgment over all the nations on every side. (13) *Send forth the sickle for the harvest is ripe! Come down into the winepress for it is full and the vats overflow.* For great is their wickedness. (14) Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of doom! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of doom. (15) The sun and moon will darken, and the stars will gather up their light. (16) Then the Lord will roar from Zion, and from Jerusalem He will let sound His voice, and the heavens and the earth will quake.

Joel 3:12-16

(17) Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. (18) And another angel came out from before the altar, [the one] having

authority over the fire (i.e., of judgment), and he shouted in a loud voice to the [angel] with the sharp sickle, saying “Send forth your sharp sickle and *gather up the clusters of the earth's vineyard, because its bunches [of grapes] are ripe*”. (19) And the angel cast forth his sickle onto the earth, and *he gathered up the vintage of the earth and threw [it] into the great winepress of God's wrath*. (20) And *the winepress was trodden down* outside of the city. And *blood from the winepress went forth* up to the horses' bridles for a distance of twelve hundred stadia (i.e., approx. 143 miles).

Revelation 14:17-20

As in the case of the destruction of Pharaoh's army, this slaughter will be complete, leaving no survivors. All who participate on behalf of antichrist and his father the devil are deemed fully culpable for their actions, and will pay with their lives.

(2) The Lord is angry with the nations; His wrath is upon all their armies. He will *totally destroy them*, He will give them over to slaughter. (3) Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will send up a stench; the mountains will be soaked with their blood.

Isaiah 34:2-3 NIV

(21) I will summon a sword against Gog on all my mountains, declares the Sovereign Lord. Every man's sword will be against his brother. (22) I will execute judgment upon him with plague and bloodshed; *I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulfur* on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him. (23) And so I will show my greatness and my holiness, and I will make myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord.

Ezekiel 38:21-23 NIV

2) The Plague and the Madness:

The soldiers of the beast's armies who are not destroyed by the Lord Himself, by His terrible swift sword or the plague of hail and burning sulfur (Ezek.38:21-23; cf. Is.29:6), and all who do not perish at the hands of the reinvigorated Jewish army, will fall by the swords of their very own fellow soldiers (cf. Judg.7:22; 1Sam.14:40; 2Chron.20:23; Is.19:2), or else will rot in place while still standing on their feet, until every last enemy of the Lord has been destroyed. This *combination* of such divinely inflicted madness and this terrifying plague are unique in human history. Such is the folly of opposing the Messiah, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

(12) And this is the plague with which the Lord will smite all the peoples who marshal themselves against Jerusalem: *Their flesh will rot even as they stand on their feet, and their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths*. (13) And it will come to pass on that day that *a great madness* from the Lord will fall upon them, so that everyone will grab hold of the hand of his comrade and will lift up his hand against his comrade (i.e., they will attack each other). (14) And Judah also will fight in Jerusalem. The wealth of all the nations round about will be gathered up, their gold and silver and clothing in abundance. (15) And thus also a plague will befall their horses,

mules, camels, donkeys, and all [the other] animals their camps just like this plague [that befalls the soldiers].
Zechariah 14:12-15

I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and their drivers; horses and their riders will fall, *each by the sword of his brother*.
Haggai 2:22 NIV

On that day, says the Lord, *I will strike every horse with confusion and every rider with madness*. But toward the house of Judah I will open my eyes. But I will strike with blindness the eyes of every horse of all the peoples [gathered against her]
Zechariah 12:4

(24) Can plunder be taken from warriors, or captives rescued from the fierce? (25) But this is what the Lord says: “Yes, captives will be taken from warriors, and plunder retrieved from the fierce; I will contend with those who contend with you, and your children I will save. (26) *I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh; they will be drunk on their own blood, as with wine*. Then all mankind will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.”
Isaiah 49:24-26 NIV

(21) I will summon a sword against Gog on all my mountains, declares the Sovereign Lord. Every man's sword will be against his brother. (22) *I will execute judgment upon him with plague and bloodshed*; I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulfur on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him. (23) And so I will show my greatness and my holiness, and I will make myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord.
Ezekiel 38:21-23 NIV

3) The Winepress of Armageddon

(12) Let the nations be roused [from their places], and let them come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat. For there I will sit in judgment over all the nations on every side. (13) Send forth the sickle for the harvest is ripe! *Come down into the winepress* for it is full and the vats overflow. For great is their wickedness. (14) Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of doom! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of doom.
Joel 3:12-14

The valley of Jehoshaphat, mentioned only here in scripture and meaning “The Lord will judge”, is a poetic designation for the system of ravines and wadis sloping down from Jerusalem generally westward (and branching off to the north and south as well).⁵¹³ As the natural highways of approach, these areas will be filled with antichrist's forces, from his forward combat units to their rearmost logistical tails.

(2) The Lord is angry with the nations; His wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them, He will give them over to slaughter. (3) Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will send up a stench; *the mountains will be soaked with their blood.* Isaiah 34:2-3 NIV

As this passage shows, the slaughter will not be limited to the network of valleys to the west of Jerusalem, but will cover the entire area wherein the forces of antichrist are amassed. Since the ridges separating the valleys are the high ground whereon the defense will no doubt be concentrated, these obviously cannot be ignored in the assault on Jerusalem. We may expect some of the best shock units to be assigned the task of clearing the ridges, working their way towards Jerusalem in this manner. The total area of deployment necessary for assembling the world's armies and organizing an attack on the entire Judean hill country will thus of necessity be quite large indeed. The book of Revelation itself gives some very specific details about the extent of this "winepress" or "killing field", the place of the last stand of the devil's earthly armies under his son the beast.

(17) Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. (18) And another angel came out from before the altar, [the one] having authority over the fire (i.e., of judgment), and he shouted in a loud voice to the [angel] with the sharp sickle, saying "Send forth your sharp sickle and gather up the clusters of the earth's vineyard, because its bunches [of grapes] are ripe". (19) And the angel cast forth his sickle onto the earth, and he gathered up the vintage of the earth and threw [it] into *the great winepress of God's wrath.* (20) And *the winepress was trodden down outside of the city.* And blood from the winepress went forth up to the horses' bridles for a distance of twelve hundred stadia (i.e., approx. 143 miles). Revelation 14:17-20

Centered on Jerusalem, this distance covers from the northern part of contemporary Israel from a point roughly even in latitude with the Sea of Galilee, to a point some twenty miles south of the southern most extremity of the Dead Sea.

(3) God will come from Teman, even the Holy One from Mount Paran. His glory will cover the heavens, and His praise will fill the earth. (4) His splendor will shine forth like the light [itself] (i.e., brighter than the sun). Rays [of light will shoot forth] from His hand, and there His hidden power [will be revealed]. (5) Plague goes before Him, and bolts of lightning follow in His train. (6) He will take His stand, then take the measure of the earth. He will take in the sight, then cut off the nations. Habakkuk 3:3-6

Teman and Mount Paran are located in the Negev (or, alternatively, in biblical Edom) south of the Dead Sea and thus south of Jerusalem,⁵¹⁴ and mark the southern boundary of the beast's major military deployments. In these verses we see our Lord's campaign of annihilation of the armies of antichrist being carried out in complete consonance with the other passages quoted above, only here the direction of the assault is made clear: it will begin with the southern flank of antichrist's armies and finish in the north (exactly

as in the case of Joshua's campaigns to occupy the promised land: Josh.6-12; cf. Ps.68:4-17; Is.40:3-5).

(20) I will drive the northern army far from you, pushing it into a parched and barren land, with its front columns going into the eastern sea and those in the rear into the western sea. And its stench will go up; its smell will rise.” Surely he has done great things.

Joel 2:20 NIV

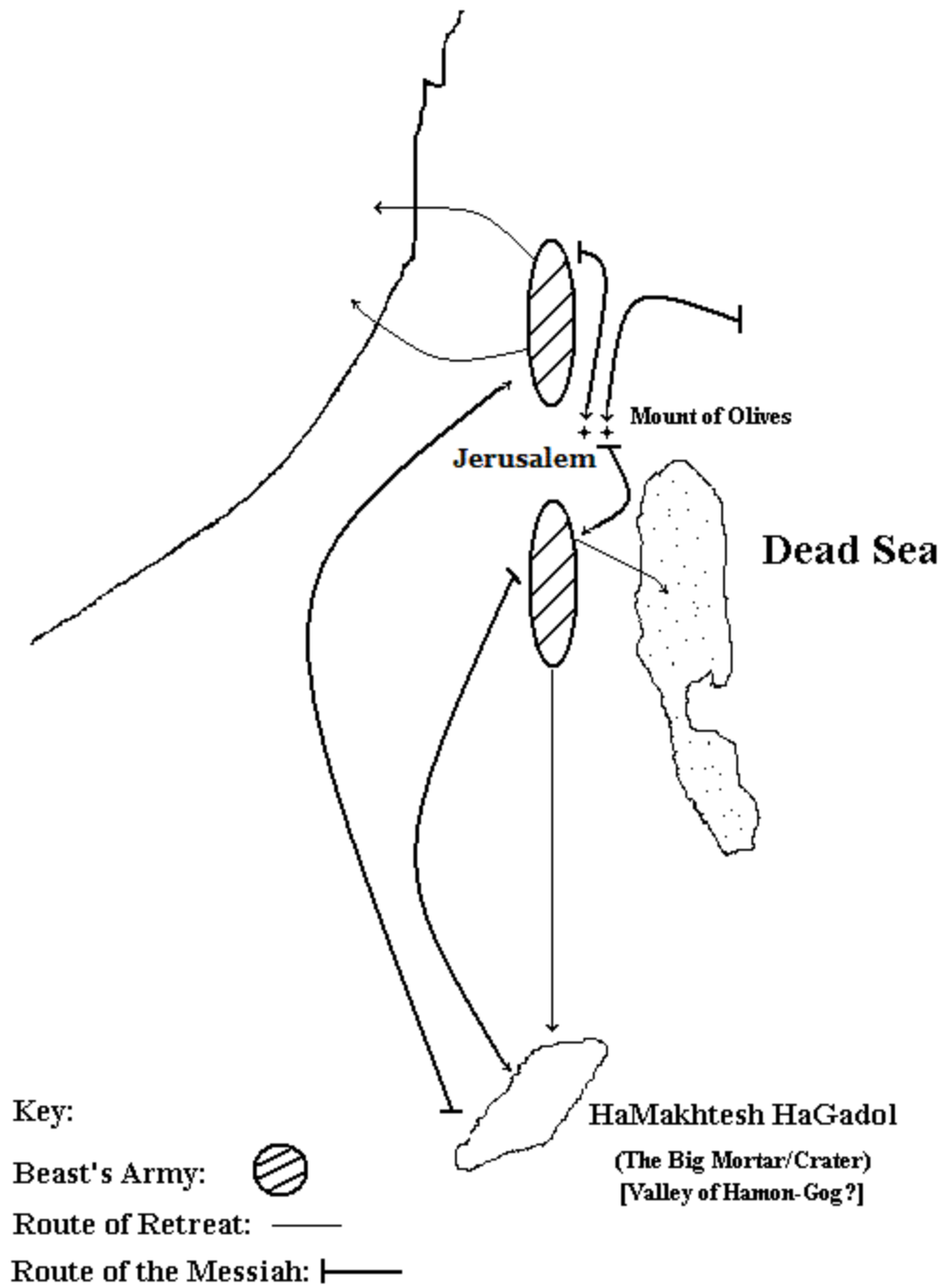
The armies of the beast are described in toto here as “northern” because that is the compass point from which most of them will enter into the land of Israel.⁵¹⁵ Here we see the reaction of the nations to the terrifying sight of our Lord in all His glory cutting a wide swath through the very heart of their army. In their crazed panic, many will flee to the west and northwest and perish in the Mediterranean Sea, while many others will flee to the southeast and perish in the Dead Sea (again, reminiscent of the panic and demise of the Egyptian army; cf. Ex.14:24-25).

(27) See, the Name of the Lord comes from afar, with burning anger and dense clouds of smoke; his lips are full of wrath, and his tongue is a consuming fire. (28) His breath is like a rushing torrent, rising up to the neck. He shakes the nations in the sieve of destruction; he places in the jaws of the peoples a bit that *leads them astray*.

Isaiah 30:27-28 NIV

Still others, fleeing from the advancing terror, will flee into the trackless desert of the Negev directly south of Jerusalem, far from any civilized habitation. Ezekiel 39:11 describes a probable specific concentration of the slaughter of the southern wing, the valley of “Hamon-Gog” (i.e., “Gog's multitude”) which will be given as a burial place generally for the remains of antichrist's soldiers in order to cleanse the land of ritual pollution (Ezek.39:12-16). Connecting the idea of the winepress with this otherwise unknown southern valley, we may perhaps identify it very tentatively as the “Great Crater” (or, more literally, “Great Mortar”) south of present day Dimona, a geographical feature which resembles an ancient wine-press and whose general location, orientation, and physical features certainly fit a scenario which finds a large portion of the southern wing of the beast's army pouring headlong into this inescapable killing field in a manner comparable to their comrades' rushing into the Dead Sea to their deaths. The following chart summarizes the information we are given about the Messiah's campaign, the winepress of Armageddon.

The Winepress of Armageddon



After splitting the Mount of Olives and securing the safe retreat of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, our Lord will “pass over Jerusalem” (Is.31:4-5), breathing courage into its defenders and sowing intense panic in the hearts of its assailants. Then He will begin His campaign of destruction, heading first to the south and the slaughter of the southern winepress, turning then to the north and the remaining wing of the beast's army, all the while driving the terrified survivors fleeing in a deranged panic to their deaths in the eastern and western seas, and ending His flying campaign of slaughter in Jerusalem, where, all His enemies destroyed, He will take His seat in the temple as the true Messiah to rule Israel and the entire world from Jerusalem during His blessed millennial reign. Between the swift sword which will proceed from our Lord's mouth, the inspired counter-attacks of the Jewish army, the plague that will smite down many who will rot while yet standing on their feet, and the uncontrollable madness and panic which will drive the rest into the waters of the Mediterranean and Dead seas westward and eastward, the forces of antichrist will be utterly destroyed – there will be no survivors.

(12) Oh, the raging of many nations – they rage like the raging of the sea! Oh, the uproar of the peoples – they roar like the roaring of great waters! (13) Although the peoples roar like the roar of surging waters, when he rebukes them they flee far away, driven before the wind like chaff on the hills, like tumbleweed before a gale. (14) In the evening, sudden terror! Before the morning, *they are gone!* This is the portion of those who loot us, the lot of those who plunder us.

Isaiah 17:12-14 NIV

In this way too, our Lord will see to it that the land of Israel will be kept from being so entirely polluted by the slaughter of Armageddon that functional life in its aftermath might be impossible. Those enemy soldiers not driven into the seas or deserts or consumed by the plague will be feasted upon by the carrion eating birds of the entire world, summoned to Israel by angelic agency for just this purpose (Ezek.39:1-5; 17-20; Rev.19:17-18). The remainders of the slaughter, the bones of the dead, will be systematically purged from the land, buried in the “valley of Hamon-Gog”, far from the populated areas of the land. Though this army shall have been the largest ever assembled in one place in human history, in short order nothing will remain.⁵¹⁶

(7) And the hordes of the nations mustering against Ariel will become like [just] a dream in the visions of the night, even all those who camp against her and her fortress and besiege her. (8) And it will be as when a hungry man dreams he is eating, but when he awakes his appetite remains unfulfilled, or as when a thirsty man dreams he is drinking, but when he awakes his thirst remains. This is how it will be for the multitude of all the nations who are going to marshal themselves against Mount Zion.

Isaiah 29:7-8

6. The Humbling of the Wicked and the Joy of the Redeemed.

The complete defeat and total annihilation of antichrist along with all his earthly forces, the concomitant defeat of Satan and his legions and their removal from the world (to be covered in the following installment of this series), and our Lord's vindication of all the

words and promises of God evidenced by this awesome victory, followed by His session in the temple of Jerusalem as the true Messiah – all of these things will be a cause of utter terror to the wicked who remain (Rev.6:16-17; cf. Is.2:10-21; Hos.10:8; Mal.3:2; Lk.21:25-27; 23:30), of abject humiliation to the proud who had cast their lot with the beast (Is.2:9-22; 5:15-16; 13:11-12; 23:9; 26:1-5; Zeph.3:11; Mal.4:1; cf. 1Sam.2:1-10; 2Sam.22:28; Lk.1:51-53), but of unrestrained joy and jubilation to the people of God (as attested by the many hymns in scripture which anticipate that great Day of Days: e.g., Ps.9:7-8; 45:1ff; 75:1ff; 76:1-3; 93:1-100:1ff; Is.9:2-7; 12:1ff; 14:1ff; 25:1-27:1ff; 30:27-29; 35:1ff; 52:7-10).

(1) “Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. *All the arrogant and every evildoer* will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the Lord Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them. (2) *But for you who revere my name*, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. (3) Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things,” says the Lord Almighty.

Malachi 4:1-3

The time has now come for the meek to inherit the earth (Matt.5:5; cf. Ps.37:11; Zeph.2:1-3), and our Lord Jesus Christ's astoundingly blessed millennial reign will begin with the unleashing of a torrent of emotion, as the way of the world as it seemingly always has been is turned on its head (cf. 2Pet.3:3-13). Many who were first will be last, and the last first as the promises of retribution upon the wicked who oppose God find their experiential fulfillment at last (Matt.19:30; 20:16; Mk.10:31; Lk.13:30), while those who have now set themselves to seek God in humility and truth experience the relief, the deliverance, and the joy of “God with us” in the Person of the Savior Himself, come to rule the world in righteousness (cf. Is.51:14; 61:1-3).

(14) They raise their voices, they shout for joy; from the west they acclaim the Lord's majesty. (15) Therefore in the east give glory to the Lord; exalt the name of the Lord, the God of Israel, in the islands of the sea. (16) From the ends of the earth we hear singing: “Glory to the Righteous One.”

Isaiah 24:14-16a NIV

Despite the amazing might of the beast and all his depredations, despite the harsh rule of his father the devil over this scarred world for some six thousand years, in the end, the day came when all their fortresses fell (Is.30:25; 31:9; Dan.11:38-39; Zeph.1:16; 3:6; 3:15; cf. Is.2:15; 23:11-14; 25:2; 25:12; Amos 1:10; 6:8; Ob.1:3; Mic.5:11; Zech.9:3), at the hands of the One who died for us that we might live for Him.

(24) The Lord Almighty has sworn, “Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand. (25) I will crush the Assyrian in my land; on my mountains I will trample him down. His yoke will be taken from my people, and his burden removed from their shoulders.” (26) *This is the plan determined for the whole world; this is the hand stretched out over all nations.* (27) For the Lord Almighty has purposed, and who

can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?
Isaiah 14:24-27 NIV (cf. Prov.21:30)

The Coming Tribulation: A History of the Apocalypse

Part 6

Last Things: Revelation 20-22:5

by Dr. Robert D. Luginbill

Introduction: With the dramatic return of our Lord and His signal victory over the beast and his armies at Armageddon, human history now enters its final and most glorious phase. For a thousand years our Lord Jesus Christ will rule the world from His royal capital of Jerusalem, and the earth will see a time unlike anything that has come before. For the Millennium will be a unique period of blessing, one not only of material prosperity, but of complete justice and spiritual blessings beyond imagination. Indeed, this is the very time toward which much of Old Testament prophecy looked. These references are far too numerous to catalog in their entirety, but a few examples will suffice to show how the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, His victory over the devil, His deliverance of Israel, His entrance into Jerusalem with His concomitant coronation and session, and His rule of blessing are ubiquitous themes in the Old Testament, with this anticipated time of future bliss constituting the positive pole of the Day of the Lord paradigm upon which so much of prophecy depends.⁵¹⁷

1. The Victory of Messiah:

(1) Why are the nations forming into a mob and the peoples [of the earth] grumbling idly. (2) The kings of the earth are assembling and its princes are gathering together – against the Lord and His Anointed One, [saying] (3) "Let us pull off Their chains, and cast Their cords from us!" (4) The One enthroned in heaven will laugh. The Lord will mock them. (5) At that time He will speak to them in His anger, and in His wrath He will throw them into confusion. (6) "But as for Me, I have anointed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain." (7) I shall relate the Lord's decree. He said to Me, "You are My Son. Today I have begotten You. (8) Ask of Me and I shall give [You] the nations as your inheritance, and as Your possession the ends of the earth. (9) You shall shepherd them with a rod of iron, and You shall shatter them like a potter's vessel. (10) So now, O kings, learn prudence! Take warning, you judges of the earth! (11) Serve the Lord with reverence and rejoice with trembling! (12) Kiss the Son (i.e., pay homage to Him), lest He become angry [with you] and you perish for your [insolent] behavior. For His anger may blaze up in an instant [if you do not]. Blessed are all those who take refuge in Him." Psalm 2:1-12⁵¹⁸

(1) God is our refuge and strength. [He is] our help in [times of] tribulation, [and] very quick to be found. (2) Therefore we shall not fear when the earth totters, when the mountains quake

in the heart of the seas, (3) [when] its waters roar and foam, when the mountains shake on account of its swells. Selah (i.e., "rest"). (4) There is a river whose streams delight the city of God (Ezek.47:1-12; cf. Is.33:20-21; 41:18), the holy residence of the Most High (i.e., Messiah's capital). (5) God is in her midst. She will not be shaken. God will help her, before morning [comes]. (6) The nations were in an uproar. The kingdoms [of the world] tottered. He gave forth His voice. The earth melted. (7) The Lord of Hosts (i.e., Jesus Christ) is with us! The God of Jacob is our refuge! Selah (i.e., "rest"). (8) Come, see the wonders of the Lord, [even] He who has wrought devastations on the earth, (9) [even] He who makes wars cease to the very end of the earth. He will break [every] bow and shatter [every] spear and burn [all] chariots with fire. (10) "Cease [your agitation] and know that I am God. I shall be exalted over [all] the nations. I shall be exalted over the [entire] earth." (11) The Lord of Hosts (i.e., Jesus Christ) is with us! The God of Jacob is our refuge! Selah (i.e., "rest").

Psalm 46:1-11

(1) God is known in Judah; His name is great in Israel. (2) His tabernacle is in Salem; His dwelling place also is in Zion. (3) There He broke the flaming arrows, the shield and the sword and the weapons of war. Selah. (4) You are resplendent, more majestic than the mountains of prey. (5) The stouthearted were plundered, they sank into sleep; and none of the warriors could use his hands. (6) At Your rebuke, O God of Jacob, both rider and horse were cast into a dead sleep. (7) You, even You, are to be feared; and who may stand in Your presence when once You are angry? (8) You caused judgment to be heard from heaven; the earth feared and was still (9) when God arose to judgment, to save all the humble of the earth. Selah. (10) For the wrath of man shall praise You; With a remnant of wrath You will gird Yourself (i.e., those "left over" Messiah will take to Himself). (11) Make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them; let all who are around Him bring gifts to Him who is to be feared. (12) He will cut off the spirit of princes; He is feared by the kings of the earth.

Psalm 76:1-12 NASB

(1) In that day you will say: "I will praise you, O Lord. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me. (2) Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation." (3) With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. (4) In that day you will say: "Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted. (5) Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world. (6) Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you."

Isaiah 12:1-6 NIV

2. The Deliverance of Messiah:

(8) Bless our God, O peoples, and make the sound of His praises heard. (9) He has preserved our lives, and has not let our feet stumble. (10) Yes, O God, You tested us, and You refined us as [one] refines silver. (11) You brought us into the [prison] fortress. You set tribulation upon us (lit., "on our loins"). (12) You made men ride over our heads. We went through fire and water. But in spite [of all this] You have brought us forth into [a place of] refreshment (i.e.,

deliverance).
Psalm 66:8-12

(1) Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. (2) The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. (3) He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. (4) Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; (5) make music to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing, (6) with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn – shout for joy before the Lord, the King. (7) Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. (8) Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy; (9) let them sing before the Lord, for he comes (lit., "has come") to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity.
Psalm 98 NIV

(9) O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! (10) Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. (11) He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.
Isaiah 40:9-11 KJV

(1) Rise up! Shine forth! For your Light has arrived, and the glory of the Lord has burst forth upon you. (2) For behold, the darkness – it will cover the earth, even a deep gloom its peoples. But the Lord will rise over you, and His glory will appear above you. (3) Nations will come to His light, and kings to the brilliance of His rising.
Isaiah 60:1-3

(1) "Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the Lord Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them. (2) But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. (3) Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things," says the Lord Almighty.
Malachi 4:1-3

3. The Triumphal Entry of Messiah into Jerusalem:

(7) Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. (8) Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. (9) Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. (10) Who is he, this King of glory? The Lord Almighty – he is the King of glory. Selah
Psalm 24:7-10 NIV

Thus says the Lord: I will return to Zion and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And Jerusalem will be called "the City of Truth", and "the Mountain of the Lord, the Mountain of Holiness".
Zechariah 8:3

Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion. Shout [for joy], daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, your King will come to you. Righteous and victorious He is; humble and riding on a donkey, even on a colt, a donkey's foal (cf. Rev.19:11).
Zechariah 9:9

(4) The glory of the Lord entered the temple through the gate facing east. (5) Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. (6) While the man was standing beside me, I heard someone speaking to me from inside the temple. (7) He said: "Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet. This is where I will live among the Israelites forever."
Ezekiel 41:4-7a NIV

4. The Coronation of Messiah:

"But as for Me, I have anointed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain."
Psalm 2:6

(5) God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the Lord amid the sounding of trumpets. (6) Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. (7) For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise. (8) God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne.
Psalm 47:5-8 NIV

(24) Your procession has come into view, O God, the procession of my God and King into the sanctuary. (25) In front are the singers, after them the musicians; with them are the maidens playing tambourines. (26) Praise God in the great congregation; praise the Lord in the assembly of Israel. (27) There is the little tribe of Benjamin, leading them, there the great throng of Judah's princes, and there the princes of Zebulun and of Naphtali.
Psalm 68:24-27 NIV

The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice.
Psalm 97:1 NIV

The Lord reigns. Let the nations tremble. He is enthroned above the cherubim. Let the earth shake.
Psalm 99:1 (cf. Ps.80:1; Is.37:16)

5. The Rule of Messiah:

(1) Shout with joy to God, all the earth! (2) Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious! (3) Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you. (4) All the earth bows down to you; they sing praise to you, they sing praise to your

name." Selah (5) Come and see what God has done, how awesome his works in man's behalf! (6) He turned the sea into dry land, they passed through the waters on foot – come, let us rejoice in him. (7) He rules forever by his power, his eyes watch the nations – let not the rebellious rise up against him. Selah
Psalm 66:1-7 NIV

(10) Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns." The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity. (11) Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; (12) let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; (13) they will sing before the Lord, for he comes (lit, "has come"), he comes (lit, "has come") to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth.
Psalm 96:10-13 NIV

(6) For a child is born to us, and a Son is given to us. Dominion shall rest on his shoulder, and His name will be called "He whose counsel is wondrous", "Mighty God", "the Father of Eternity", "the Prince of Prosperity". (7) To His dominion and its prosperity there will be no limit or end. He will establish it and lay its foundation on David's throne and over his kingdom, in justice and righteousness, now and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.
Isaiah 9:6-7

(17) Your eyes will gaze upon the King in His beauty, and you will see the land expanding out [before you]. (18) Your heart will meditate on [the former] dread: "Where is the [beast's official] who counted? Where is the [beast's official] who weighed? Where is he who administered the fortified posts (lit., "towers")?" (19) [But] you will no longer behold [that] merciless crowd, those people too deep of lip to be understood whose tongues babbled things which could not be understood. (20) Behold Zion, the city of our festivals! Your eyes will see Jerusalem [as] an untroubled habitation, a tent which will not be moved; her stakes will not be pulled up forever, nor will any of her ropes be pulled down. (21) For the Lord our Mighty One will be there. It will be a place of rivers, majestic and wide which no boat will cross with oars, which no mighty ship will sail. (22) For the Lord will be our Judge, the Lord will be our Lawgiver, the Lord will be our King – He is the One who will deliver us!
Isaiah 33:17-22

We will have occasion to examine many other aspects of our Lord's millennial rule likewise prophesied in scripture as they occur in chronological sequence below. But it is also important to note at the outset that the coming of paradise to earth (the sixth and penultimate paradise to be precise⁵¹⁹), will not change sinful human nature. Mankind will be no more satisfied with its lot than before, no more inclined to justice and righteousness, and no more interested in seeking God, despite experiencing on that great day the wonders of the personal rule of Jesus Christ and the blessings which He and His Father will shower upon the earth of that time.

I. The Second Advent Judgments: Revelation 20:1-3

For behold, the Lord is about to come forth from His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity. And the earth will reveal the blood shed upon it, and conceal its slain no longer (i.e., the persecution of believers will be punished).

Isaiah 26:20-21 (cf. 2Pet.3:10b)

For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay every man in his own coin.

Matthew 16:27

(6) . . . since indeed it is just for God to repay with tribulation those who are subjecting you to tribulation, (7) and to give you who are being distressed relief along with us at the revelation of our Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels, (8) wreaking vengeance in a flame of fire upon those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power.

2nd Thessalonians 1:6-9

Earlier in the book (i.e., Rev.10:1-11), John was given to hear the voices of the seven thunders, but then ordered not to write down what he had heard. As explained in part 3A of this series, these seven voices of thunder are predictions of future judgment which respond to the lion-like roar of the angel of chapter eleven who, as we have seen, is portraying Christ's Second Advent return.⁵²⁰ Just as the first half of the Tribulation is begun with seven judgments of warning (the trumpet judgments), and the Second Advent is preceded by seven judgments of punishment (the bowl judgments), so the actual return of Christ is accompanied by these seven "thunder" judgments. These three sets of seven judgments are thus part and parcel of the coming of the Day of the Lord, and, specifically, of the Tribulation which forms the Judgment part of phase II of the Plan of God: Completion.⁵²¹

- Phase II: Completion: Realizes eternal objectives with victory in time (the "more" phase).
- Judgment II: the Tribulation: God's judgment upon the devil's kingdom and upon his earthly subjects. Satan and his angels are expelled from heaven and later imprisoned.
- Restoration II: the Millennium: earth is restored to an environment of blessing.
- Replacement II: Christ the King replaces Satan, the de facto ruler of the earth. The Church is resurrected in replacement.

The seven thunders represent the judgments directly connected to Christ's return at the end of the Tribulation, inappropriate to discuss just prior to the commencement of the Great Tribulation where they are mentioned in chapter eleven (since they would not actually happen until later on), but easily discernible from scripture and necessary to consider here in their place of chronological occurrence.⁵²² As the One to whom all judgment has now been committed (Jn.5:22; 5:27; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom.2:16; 14:10-12; 2Cor.5:10; 2Tim.4:1; 4:8;

Jas.5:9; 1Pet.4:5; Rev.2:5-6; 3:1-3; 3:19-20), it is appropriate that Jesus Christ administers them directly and personally. These seven judgments are as follows:

1. Babylon destroyed (Rev.18).
2. The Armies of Armageddon destroyed (Rev.19:1-21).
3. The Beast and the False Prophet consigned to the lake of fire (Rev.19:20).
4. The Incarceration of Satan and his Demons (Rev.20:1-3).
5. Fire upon Magog and the Coastlands (Ezek.39:6; cf. Rev.20:9).
6. The Regathering and Purging of Israel (Ezek.20:34-38; cf. Rev.21-22).
7. The Judgment of the Church (Rom.2:16; 2Cor.5:10; cf. Rev.2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4-6).

Thunder is a sign of lightning. Just as the echoing of earthly thunder often heralds the approach of an oncoming storm we cannot yet see, so John was not given to see before their chronological occurrence the actual judgments or "bursts of lightning" which the seven thunders presaged. As the storm draws nearer, however, the lightning becomes visible for each in turn. The fiery lightning represents the judgment of God. This is often the case with fire generally (cf. Deut.4:24: "our God is a consuming fire"), and is also often the case with lightning in particular which is variously described as the arrows, spears, and sword of the Lord (2Sam.22:13-15; Ps.18:12-14; 144:5-6; Ezek.21:8-14; 21:28-30; Hab.3:11; Zech.9:14; cf. Ps.29:7; 77:18), and "the fire of God" (2Kng.1:12; Job 1:16 Ps.97:3-4; Ezek.1:4; 1:13-14; Hab.3:4; cf. Rev.4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18). All seven of these divine judgments associated with Christ's return likewise involve fire as the instrument of judgment in one fashion or another.

1. Babylon destroyed: "she will be consumed by fire" (Rev.18:8).
2. The Armies of Armageddon destroyed: "the Lord is coming with fire" (Is.66:15).
3. The Beast and the False Prophet: "they were thrown alive into the lake of fire" (Rev.19:20).
4. The Incarceration of Satan and his Demons (Rev.20:1-3): compare "lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding" (Ps.148:8), with "Who makes his angels spirits; His ministers a flaming fire" (Ps.104:4); in the Abyss, the fallen angels will have nothing to do but to anticipate their own imminent end in the lake of fire.
5. Magog and the Coastlands: "I will send fire" (Ezek.39:6).
6. The Regathering and Purging of Israel: "He will cleanse [them] . . . with a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire" (Is.4:4).

7. The Judgment of the Church: "if anyone's work is burnt up, he will suffer the loss, but he himself will be saved – but in this way as through fire" (1Cor.3:15).

The first of these Second Advent judgments, the destruction of Babylon, occurred just prior to but closely associated with Christ's return; the time frame of judgments two through four is essentially contemporaneous with the Second Advent; judgment five will apparently occur in very short succession thereafter; judgments six and seven will require progressively longer periods of time to complete, and will occur sequentially. Once all of these judgments have been accomplished, the King's millennial reign, His coronation, His victory at Armageddon, and His wedding to His Bride the Church will be officially celebrated, then followed by a thousand years of bliss and blessing unlike anything the earth has seen since the fall of Adam and Eve. As we have seen since the beginning of this series (see in particular part 1), the Tribulation followed by the Millennium is the final "day" of human history, the "eschaton" or end times, the "Day of the Lord" in which all divine judgment will be completed in the Person of Jesus Christ. This process began with the tribulational judgments, will be followed by these seven judgments, and will be concluded at the end of Christ's thousand-year righteous rule by the Last Judgment, after which the present universe will be re-created, cleansed by fire and transformed into the New Heavens and New Earth "where righteousness dwells" (2Pet.3:13). But before that blessed day of eternity, Christ must rule until all enemies are placed under His feet (1Cor.15:25; cf. Ps.110:1; Heb.2:5-9).

"For [God] has appointed a Day (i.e., the final Day of human history culminating in the Last Judgment) in which He is going to judge the world by [the standard] of righteousness through a Man whom He has ordained for this [very purpose], having supplied [us] with the proof [of His identity] by raising Him from the dead."

Acts 17:31

1. Babylon

This judgment has already taken place, occurring at the threshold of the Second Advent but considered eschatologically a part of it (i.e., it is literally "wrapped" into the seventh bowl judgment whose main application is the Second Advent: Rev.16:19 in the context of Rev.16:17-21). We have covered this judgment where it is described in detail, namely, Revelation chapter 18 (section II of part 5 of this series: "Judgment on Babylon").⁵²³

2. The Armies of Armageddon

The Second Advent and our Lord's destruction of the armies of the beast at Armageddon was the subject of the previous installment of this series. Following Babylon's destruction and occurring at the point of Christ's glorious return, this judgment has likewise already taken place at this point in the chronology of Revelation.

3. The Beast and the False Prophet

Uniquely among all of woman born, antichrist and his false prophet will be cast into the Lake of Fire to experience the second death immediately upon Christ's return:

And the beast was snatched up and the false prophet along with him, the one who had performed the signs in his presence and had thereby deceived those who had received the mark of the beast, even those who were worshiping his image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with sulfur.

Revelation 19:20

This judgment as well has already taken place, occurring between the initial point of Christ's return (Rev.19:1-19), and the culmination of the slaughter of Armageddon (Rev.19:21). As was pointed out in the previous installment of this series, these two are deprived of their part in the final trial, "The Last Judgment", because by their extreme words and actions in serving Satan and in attempting to utterly destroy God's people throughout the Tribulation – a trial in and of itself – they stand self-condemned beyond all doubt or argument. As with the fallen angels, no further trial is necessary to illuminate their choice, since that choice has been confirmed to such an unprecedented extent. The Tribulation constitutes their "trial" just as human history in its entirety constitutes the trial of Satan and his angels (Is.30:32-33; Dan.7:11-14; 9:27; 11:45; Hab.3:13-14; 2Thes.2:8; cf. Jer.25:26; Dan.7:26; Hab.2:2-20).

4. The Incarceration of Satan and his Demons

(1) And I saw another angel coming down from heaven with the key to the Abyss and with a great chain in his hand. (2) And he took hold of the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the Slanderer (*diabolos*, i.e., "devil"), even Satan. And he bound him for a thousand years (3) and he cast him into the Abyss, locked it, and set a seal upon it, so that he might not [be able] to deceive the nations [any longer] – until the thousand years (i.e., the Millennium) were completed. After that, he must be released for a short time.

Revelation 20:1-3

Not only is Satan now prevented from appearing before God the Father to slander believers (Rev.12:10). Here we see the fulfillment of the much anticipated removal in toto of the devil from the affairs of this world.

(12) How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, O son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, O you who laid the nations low. (13) For you said in your heart, 'I will ascend heavenward. I will set my throne above the stars of God. And I will take my seat on the mount of assembly on the sides of the north. (14) I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the Most High God'. (15) But indeed you will be brought down to Sheol, to the sides of the pit.

Isaiah 14:12-15

In all your ways you were perfect from the day of your creation until unrighteousness was found in you. In your extensive conspiring, you were filled with wickedness, and you sinned. So

I cast you from the mountain of God as one profaned, and I blotted out [your memory] from among the stones of fire, O covering cherub. Your heart became haughty because of your beauty, [and so] you destroyed your wisdom on account of your splendor. So I cast you to the earth, and I made a spectacle of you before kings.

Ezekiel 28:15-17

The seventy returned and said with joy, "Lord, even the demons obey us in your Name!" And Jesus said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like a star".

Luke 10:17-18

Now the judgment of this world is [imminent]. Now the ruler of this world is about to be cast out [of it].

John 12:31

a. The Other Angel: This angel is not named, but based upon angelic military conduct as described elsewhere in scripture it is probable that he is of archangel rank and it is likely that he is none other than Michael. As the commander of the most elite angelic warriors who have distinguished themselves in the conflict with Satan (comparable to David's "mighty men"), Michael is the most likely choice for this extraordinary mission, possible in direct leadership of his crack unit of angels.⁵²⁴

b. The Key: This is the key to the Abyss proper, not the key to its entry shaft which we saw used in Revelation 9:1 to effect a partial release of some of the demons detained therein for the fifth trumpet judgment. This second key to the Abyss proper (as opposed to its entryway only) includes not only the power to open and close the subterranean dungeon, but also to lock and unlock all the restraints therein (and was previously apparently used by the angel in Rev.9:14 to release for the sixth trumpet judgment the large number of fallen angels enchained in the Abyss proper behind its main entrance door).⁵²⁵

c. Special Security Precautions for Satan: We should note here that the security measures used to sequester the devil for the duration of the Millennium are threefold and are therefore unique. First, he is locked in the Abyss (in common with all other fallen angels removed from circulation from the beginning of human history for various violations of divine ground rules; cf. Mk.5:12). Secondly the devil is placed in chains within the Abyss as a second level of security (as were those fallen angels who severely violated protocol by cohabiting with human women prior to the flood; Gen.6; 2Pet.2:14-10; Jude 1:5-7). Finally and uniquely, the Abyss is specially "sealed", indicating that throughout the Millennium there will be no access to the Abyss whatsoever (and hence no possible chance of the devil exiting until the appointed time through either accident or design). The exceptional level of precautions taken here shows very clearly the importance of a Millennium without the devil.

Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man (i.e., analogous to Satan)? Then he can rob his house (i.e., analogous to the distribution of the plunder upon conquering his kingdom: Ps.68:18;

Is.33:23b; 53:12; 60:11; Lk.11:22; Eph.4:7-8).
Matthew 12:29 NIV

In the absence of any Satanic influence whatsoever, and with the provision of perfect environment by the Messiah Himself (as perfect, that is, as the mortal and therefore still inherently sinful human beings who will populate the world of that time can tolerate), mankind will nevertheless by and large still make use of its God-given free will to reject rather than to accept in faith the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, thus proving both the nature of free will and the reality of it. This is also true for angelic kind, for even though the fallen angels will be put out of operation for a thousand years and given to witness not only their own total defeat but also the coming of the astoundingly marvelous Kingdom and penultimate Eden on the threshold of eternity, no change of heart or regret will be visible in any of them, to the extent that the devil, when he is released at the Millennium's end, will once again do all that is in his power to continue to fight against God.

d. Status of the Other Fallen Angels during the Millennium: As the head of the opposition to God, Satan's imprisonment is naturally emphasized here in Revelation 20:1-3, especially as this event fulfills many long-anticipated prophecies (e.g., Gen.3:15; Lk.10:18; symbolically as a type of Pharaoh and Egypt cf. also Rahab: Job 26:12; Ps.89:10; Is.51:9; and Leviathan: Ps.74:14; Is.27:1). However, the fact that only Satan is specifically said to be imprisoned should not be taken to mean that the fallen angels are exempt; rather, this is an instance of scripture focusing upon the leader of the rebellion and leaving us to understand by implication that his followers share his fate. Just as the devil is mentioned alone as being summarily thrown into the lake of fire at the Millennium's conclusion (Rev.20:10) and yet we know that his demons will suffer an identical end (Matt.25:41), so we should assume here that his fallen angels are likewise expelled from Christ's Kingdom at His return to languish in the Abyss for a thousand years along with their leader, a blessing similarly anticipated in prophecy.

[For by means of the cross, God] has stripped [demon] rulers and authorities [of their power] and subjected them to public humiliation, having triumphed over them in [Christ].
Colossians 2:15

Given the reasons for the devil's removal from circulation during the Millennium discussed above, allowing his untold number of minions to remain at liberty would seem to be inconsistent with everything we know about that blessed time to come. Indeed, there are strong biblical indications that *all* demons are in fact removed to the Abyss at this time, with the devil merely being the last to be deposited therein before it is sealed for the duration of the Millennium.

(21) And it will come about on that day (i.e., the 2nd Advent) that the Lord will visit punishment upon the host of the [heavenly] heights in the [heavenly] heights (i.e., the fallen angels), and upon the kings of the earth upon the earth (i.e., antichrist's elite following). (22) And they will be crowded together, bound in a pit, and imprisoned in a prison. And after many days they will be punished.
Isaiah 24:21-22

The "pit" here is the place to which the human "kings" are committed, and is a synonym for *Sheol* or Hades (Ps.30:3; Is.14:15; 14:19; cf. Ps.28:1; 143:7; Is.38:18; Ezek.26:20; etc.). Specifically it refers to Torments, that part of the underworld where all departed unbelievers reside, awaiting the Last Judgment (Luke 16:19-31). The prison is a reference to another part of *Sheol*-Hades, namely, the Abyss (which in our context is described in precisely these terms with its chains, and with its and locked and sealed entry door).⁵²⁶ It is into the latter that the "host of the heavenly heights", that is, the fallen angels who cast their lot with Satan, will be placed to await their final disposition at the end of history.⁵²⁷

(4) All the *stars of the heavens* will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the *starry host* will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree. (5) *My sword has drunk its fill in the heavens;*
Isaiah 34:4-5a NIV

"Tell them this: 'These gods (i.e., demons worshiped as gods), who did not make the heavens and the earth, will perish from the earth and from under the heavens.'"
Jeremiah 10:11 NIV

All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. [God] does as he pleases with *the powers of heaven* and the peoples of the earth.
Daniel 4:35a NIV

This incarceration of the demons to await their final judgment at the end of human history stands in direct and blessed contrast to the theme of the release of the (human) prisoners at the Messiah's return.

(6) I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, and shall take You by the hand, and guard You, and appoint You a covenant for the nations and a Light for the gentiles, (7) to open the eyes of the blind, to bring forth the prisoner from the dungeon, and those who dwell in darkness from their place of captivity (i.e., physical and spiritual redemption).
Isaiah 42:6-7

(8) This is what the Lord says: "In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances, (9) to say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!'"
Isaiah 49:8-9 NIV

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me [the Messiah], for the Lord has anointed Me. He has sent Me to proclaim victory on behalf of the afflicted, to bind up the wounds of the broken hearted, to announce liberation for the captives and freedom for the prisoners, to announce the year of the Lord's favor [the Millennium], and a day of vengeance for our God [the 2nd Advent], to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who grieve for Zion, to anoint them with joy as with a crown in place of their grief, and to dress them in garments of praise in place

of their faint spirits.
Isaiah 61:1-3a

As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.
Zechariah 9:11 NIV

e. The Participation of the Resurrected Church in this Operation: Believers most assuredly share Christ's authority in administering His millennial government (1Cor.4:8; 2Tim.2:12; Rev.2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4), and when we are also told that we shall "judge angels" at 1st Corinthians 6:3, it seems likely that fallen angels are meant (for what need would the elect angels have for any sort of judicial evaluation, however small?). Further, while Revelation 19:21 places sole responsibility for carrying out the slaughter of Armageddon in our Lord's hands, Zechariah 14:5 states that we shall indeed "enter battle" in company with our Lord:

And then the Lord my God will enter [the battle], and *all His holy ones with Him*.
Zechariah 14:5

At this point in time, that is, the point of the Second Advent, all fallen angels are at liberty (having been released in the course of the trumpet judgments), and yet all have been confined to the earth and its environs (since Satan and the other demons were "thrown down" by Michael and his forces: Rev.12:7). Since, as we have had occasion to see in the past, the number of resurrected believers belonging to the Church, the first part of Christ's double portion, will be precisely equal to the number of fallen angels,⁵²⁸ passages such as this may indicate that the reason we "enter battle" with the Lord will be for each of us individually to dispatch our demonic counterpart back into the Abyss (enjoying at that time the same superiority in our resurrection bodies over angels as that possessed by Christ: Heb.1:4-14).⁵²⁹ If such is the case, this would be a fitting way for our Lord to underscore the replacement of the devil and his angels by the Church, now just newly resurrected and glorified for the first time.⁵³⁰

The Lord came from Sinai⁵³¹, and burst forth like the dawn against them (i.e., all of his foes, human and angelic) from [Mount] Seir. He shone forth from Mount Paran, and advanced with His *holy multitudes*; from His right hand [He cast] fiery judgment against them.
Deuteronomy 33:2

God will not turn back His anger; Beneath Him crouch the helpers of Rahab (i.e., the mythical serpent symbolic both of Egypt and the devil).
Job 9:13 NASB

(5) Let the *holy ones* (i.e., believers) rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds. (6) May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands, (7) to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, (8) to bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron, (9) to carry out the sentence written against them. This is the glory of all his saints. Praise the Lord.
Psalm 149:5-9 (cf. SS 2:15)

"Behold! The Lord has come with His *holy multitudes*, to render judgment against all . . ."
Jude 1:14b - 15a

(2) Or don't you know that the *holy ones* (i.e., believers) will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you really unworthy to judge [these] insignificant matters of dispute?
(3) Don't you know that *we will judge angels*? How much more will that not be the case with earthly matters?
1st Corinthians 6:2-3

For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against [angelic] princes, against [angelic] authorities, against the cosmic powers of this [present] darkness, against evil spirits in the heavenly realms.
Ephesians 6:12

f. Satan's Later Release: While Revelation 20:7-10 clearly tells us that the devil will be released at the end of the Millennium for a short time, there is no indication that his followers will likewise be set free – nor is there any reason for this. The temporary release of Satan and the world's rapid rallying to his banner to oppose the rule of the perfect Ruler will demonstrate once and for all that mankind, even in the most perfect environment possible in this sinful world, will still resent God's authority. The Gog-Magog rebellion will thus prove conclusively that salvation, universally provided by the grace of God in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, is ultimately a matter of choice. Those who perish do so of their own free will out of an essential unwillingness to submit to the Lord, even though the alternative is the forfeiture of eternal life.

5. Fire upon Magog and the Coastlands

Then (i.e., immediately after Armageddon) I will *send fire upon Magog* (i.e., eschatological Babylon) and upon those who dwell securely in the islands (i.e., the remainder of the gentile world; Gen.10:5; cf. Ps.97:1; Is.11:11; 13:22; 24:15; 40:15; 41:1; 41:5; 42:4; 42:10; 42:12; 49:1; 51:5; 59:18; 66:19; Jer.31:10; Ezek.27:35; Zeph.2:11), so that they may know that I am the Lord.
Ezekiel 39:6

The judgment on Babylon which occurred prior to Armageddon, while devastating her territory in a singularly horrific way, did not destroy her entire population. We have already suggested that she will have given sanctuary to a large Jewish population, presently to be repatriated to the land of Israel (cf. Mic.4:10; and see section I.6 immediately below). At the time of our Lord's Second Advent, there will be found within her borders and throughout the gentile world at large a sizeable number of people who have taken the mark of the beast. While refusal to receive the mark exempts those who so refused (Rev.13:8; 17:8b cf. Josh.6:25; Matt.25:37-40), all who have worshiped antichrist and allowed themselves to be so marked will be excluded from our Lord's millennial kingdom, and miraculously so, by being supernaturally incinerated in the wake of His return, similar in fashion to the fate of the soldiers who sought to arrest Elijah (2Kng.1:9-15; cf. Lk.9:52-55), and similar in its selectivity to the destruction of Korah, Dathan and Abiram and their families (Num.16).⁵³²

"But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them – bring them here and kill them in front of me."

Luke 19:27 NIV

The criteria for this destruction are twofold: not only unbelief, but also "reveling in unrighteousness", namely, supporting the beast and his anti-God agenda and so by definition rejecting the Messiah in favor of the counterfeit, the very thing which accepting the mark implies (2Thes.2:12).

(8) And then the lawless one (i.e., antichrist) will be revealed, [that same one] whom the Lord Jesus will slay with the breath of His mouth and destroy when He appears at His [glorious] return – [that same lawless one] (9) whose appearance [will come about] through Satan's empowerment [and will be] accompanied by every [sort of] false miracle, both signs and portents, (10) and by every [sort of] unrighteous deception [designed] for those who are perishing, [namely those who will believe these lies] because they did not open themselves up to the love for the truth so as to be saved. (11) And for this [very] reason God is going to send upon them an empowerment of error so that they may believe the lie, (12) in order that they may be *condemned*, [even all those] who *have not believed the truth* but *have [instead] approved of unrighteousness*.

2nd Thessalonians 2:8-12

Other passages foreshadowing this elimination of such stumbling blocks from Messiah's incipient kingdom include the following:

1. The workers in the field who not taken (Matt.24:36-44).
2. The wicked servant who is thrown out with hypocrites where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt.24:45-51).
3. The sleepy virgins who are shut out of the kingdom (Matt.25:1-13).
4. The lazy servant who is thrown out into darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt.25:14-30).
5. The enemies of the King who did not want Him to rule over them who are killed in His presence at His return (Lk.19:27; quoted above).

The supernatural fire sent upon Magog-Babylon (singled out here because it was the home country of the beast) and also upon the rest of nations outside of Israel is sometimes referred to as "the Baptism of Fire" after the phrase used by John the baptist for the eschatological alternative to accepting Jesus Christ (and receiving instead the Baptism of the Spirit; Matt.3:11; Lk.3:16; cf. Mk.1:8):

(10) For the ax has already been put to the trunk of the trees. Accordingly, every tree which does not produce good fruit is about to be cut down *and thrown into fire*. (11) Now I am baptizing you with water for the purpose of [your] repentance. But the One coming after me is

more powerful than me and I am not worthy to carry His sandals. It is He who is the One who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit *and with fire*. (12) His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will sweep clean His threshing floor, and will gather His wheat into the barn, *but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire*.

Matthew 3:10-12

Just as the baptism of the Holy Spirit, poured out at Pentecost, began the Church Age, so also the baptism of fire will be one of the first acts of the returning King to begin the Millennium. Jesus will make a "clean sweep" of His threshing floor, removing the "chaff" (unbelievers who have already formally declared their hostility to Him through accepting the mark) by subjecting them to a fiery end (described here as "unquenchable" since this execution by fire is followed, after a thousand years in torments, by final disposition in the Lake of Fire; see section VI.2 below). The gathering in of the wheat has a double reference, looking forward as it does to the end as a whole, compromising both the frequently prophesied regathering of Israel into the Messiah's millennial kingdom (see section I.6 immediately below), and the final eschatological gathering up of all believers into the eternal kingdom following history's end (cf. Matt.13:24-30; 13:47-50).

(6) . . . since indeed it is just for God to repay with tribulation those who are subjecting you to tribulation, (7) and to give you who are being distressed relief along with us at the revelation of our Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels, (8) *wreaking vengeance in a flame of fire* upon these [same persecutors] who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power.

2nd Thessalonians 1:6-9 (cf. Is.59:18b)

(1) "Surely the day is coming; it will *burn like a furnace*. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will *set them on fire*," says the Lord Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them. (2) But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. (3) Then you will trample down the wicked; *they will be ashes* under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things," says the Lord Almighty.

Malachi 4:1-3 NIV

The second passage here also conflates the Baptism of Fire at the commencement of the Millennium with the disposition of all unbelievers at the Last Judgment and the entrance of all believers into the eternal kingdom at the Millennium's end.⁵³³ In respect to its Second Advent application, not all unbelievers⁵³⁴ on earth will be subjected to fiery judgment on our Lord's return (if they were, then no one would remain to repopulate the human race, since all believers alive at the Second Advent are resurrected "to meet the Lord in the air"; 1Thes.4:17).⁵³⁵ Those taken away by fire are indeed unbelievers, those who "do not know God" and who "do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus". However, it is only those guilty of "subjecting you to tribulation" who are to be summarily dispatched with a fiery end. This offense seems to be one of which all those who received the mark of the beast are universally guilty. For the persecution of believers during the Great Tribulation was a key characteristic of all those who cast their lot with antichrist, participating in his pseudo-Christian religion, and

acting as his instruments in the Great Persecution (covered in part 4 of this series). Therefore no one who joins the beast and receives his mark will be found to have clean hands in this respect, and none will be allowed to remain and taint the Messiah's incipient Kingdom.

(15) For behold, the Lord will come *with fire*, and His chariots will be like a whirlwind, to bring down His wrath in anger and His rebuke *in flames of fire*. (16) For *with fire the Lord is going to execute judgment* – and with His sword – upon all flesh, and many will be those slain by the Lord. (17) Those who sanctify and purify themselves for the gardens following the lead of the one [characterized] by violence, eating the flesh of swine, and of whatever is an abomination, and of rats *will be swept away together* (i.e., at the Second Advent), says the Lord.

Isaiah 66:15-17

The dual destruction mentioned above, by means of sword (i.e., at the battle of Armageddon: Rev.19:21), *and* by fire, clearly indicates two phases of destruction: 1) Armageddon, where all assembled to do battle with the Lord will be destroyed by "the sharp broadsword which proceeds from His mouth" (Rev.19:15); and 2) the Baptism of Fire directed towards all who have taken the mark. This can be seen from verse 17, where the description of abominable cult activity refers to those who worship the beast and take part in his religion's foul rites and activities (which are by association with antichrist "[characterized] by violence", a reference to the persecution of believers referred to in 2Thes.1:7 quoted above), including the Great Persecution.

Just as the resurrection which immediately precedes the Second Advent is selective and determined on an individual basis (cf. Matt.24:37-39), so the Baptism of Fire which occurs at the commencement of the millennial kingdom will be restricted to a select population; but instead of consisting of those who lived for Jesus Christ and were uniquely resurrected while yet alive, this group will consist of those who chose against Him in the most forceful and willful possible manner. Their removal from the earth to prevent them taking any part in the glories of the Millennium will be likewise unique in the course of human history.

(9) And yet a third angel followed them, saying in a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives a mark upon his forehead or upon his hand, (10) he himself will also drink from the wine of God's wrath which has been mixed undiluted in the cup of His anger. And [that person] will be tortured/tormented in fire and sulfur before the holy angels and before the Lamb. (11) And the smoke of their torture/torment will go up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night, those who worship the beast and his image and whoever takes the mark of his name."

Revelation 14:9-11

As our introductory passage, Ezekiel 39:6, suggests, the Baptism of fire will be extensive and will no doubt consume the great majority of the world's remaining population (for most of those who are not followers of Jesus will have chosen instead to follow the beast: Rev.13:8; 17:8b). It will not, however, be total, and we can expect a very large proportion of those who survive this judgment to be children who had not yet reached the age of accountability and consent at the time of the Second Advent (cf. Is.2:2-3; 60:14; 66:17). The purpose of this judgment will be two-fold and merciful in every way to all inclined to respond to God's mercy.

By cleansing the threshing floor and removing all such stumbling blocks out of Messiah's kingdom (cf. Is.57:14; Zeph.3:11; Matt.13:41), the fire sent "upon Magog and upon those who dwell securely in the islands" has another very specific purpose, and one that works hand in glove with the first: "so that they may know that I am the Lord" (Ezek.39:6).

(2) At the end of days, the mountain of the temple of the Lord will be established as the chief of all mountains, and it will be raised higher than all [other] hills, and all the nations will flow to it. (3) And many peoples will come and they will say, "Come let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us of His ways, and that we may walk in His paths."

Isaiah 2:2-3

6. The Regathering and Purging of Israel

a. The Regathering of Israel: The return of the Jewish people into the land of Israel is at once one of the most blessed and most frequent of all of the promises of Old Testament prophecy. It would be nigh on impossible to produce a completely comprehensive list of the passages, ubiquitous in scripture, wherein the return is expressed literally or figuratively, prophetically and by promise, in the Old Testament or in the New. Directly after Armageddon, our glorious Lord will begin the process of bringing all survivors of Jewish blood back to the Land. Whether hailing from Babylon (Jer.50:4-8; Mic.4:10) or previously imprisoned (Is.51:14; 61:1; Zech.9:11-12; cf. Ps.68:6; 79:10-11; 102:20; 146:7), whether dwelling abroad as a result of the recent diaspora caused by anichrist's depredations (Duet.26:68; Hos.8:10; Joel 3:2-8; Zech.14:2; Lk.21:24:) or in long established communities Jewish communities throughout the world (Jer.3:18; 30:10; Ezek.37:21; Zeph.3:10), all who are of Jewish blood will be repatriated to the place of judgment on the threshold of the Land of Israel in the opening days of the Millennium. There, in the "desert of the nations", they will stand judgment for their right to enter the land.

The return will be prominently announced:

(11) In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the surviving remnant of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the Mediterranean. (12) *He will raise a banner* for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; he will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth.

Isaiah 11:11-12 NIV

(12) In that day the Lord will thresh from the flowing Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt, and you, O Israelites, will be gathered up one by one. (13) And in that day *a great trumpet will sound*. Those who were perishing in Assyria and those who were exiled in Egypt will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.

Isaiah 27:12-13 NIV

(10) They will follow the Lord; *he will roar* like a lion. *When he roars*, his children will come trembling from the west. (11) They will come trembling like birds from Egypt, like doves from

Assyria. "I will settle them in their homes," declares the Lord.
Hosea 11:10-11 NIV

(8) *"I will signal for them and gather them in.* Surely I will redeem them; they will be as numerous as before. (9) Though I scatter them among the peoples, yet in distant lands they will remember me. They and their children will survive, and they will return. (10) I will bring them back from Egypt and gather them from Assyria. I will bring them to Gilead and Lebanon, and there will not be room enough for them. (11) They will pass through the sea of trouble (i.e., the Tribulation); the surging sea will be subdued and all the depths of the Nile will dry up. Assyria's pride will be brought down and Egypt's scepter will pass away. (12) I will strengthen them in the Lord and in his name they will walk," declares the Lord.
Zechariah 10:8-12 NIV

The return will be orderly:

(11) Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing! Come out from it and be pure, you who carry the vessels of the Lord. (12) *But you will not leave in haste or go in flight;* for the Lord will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard.
Isaiah 52:11-12 NIV

The return will be rapid:

(7) "Before she goes into labor, she gives birth; before the pains come upon her, she delivers a son. (8) Who has ever heard of such a thing? Who has ever seen such things? *Can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment?* Yet no sooner is Zion in labor than she gives birth to her children. (9) "Do I bring to the moment of birth and not give delivery?" says the Lord. "Do I close up the womb when I bring to delivery?" says your God.
Isaiah 66:7-9 NIV

The means for the return will be abundantly provided (Is.43:19-21; 48:20-21; 60:4; 62:10):

(15) The Lord will dry up the gulf of the Egyptian sea; with a scorching wind he will sweep his hand over the Euphrates River. He will break it up into seven streams so that anyone can cross over in sandals. (16) There will be a highway for the remnant of his people that is left from Assyria, as there was for Israel when they came up from Egypt.
Isaiah 11:15-16 NIV

(7) The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow. (8) And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness; it will be for those who walk on that Way. The unclean will not journey on it; wicked fools will not go about on it. (9) No lion will be there, nor any ravenous beast; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, (10) and those the Lord has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.
Isaiah 35:7-10 NIV

(9) to say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!' "They will feed beside the roads and find pasture on every barren hill. (10) They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat down on them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water. (11) I will turn all my mountains into roads, and my highways will be raised up. (12) See, they will come from afar – some from the north, some from the west, some from the region of Aswan."

Isaiah 49:9-12 NIV

Surely the islands look to me; in the lead are the ships of Tarshish, bringing your children from afar, with their silver and gold, to the honor of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor.

Isaiah 60:9 NIV

"And they will bring all your brothers, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the Lord – on horses, in chariots and wagons, and on mules and camels," says the Lord. "They will bring them, as the Israelites bring their grain offerings, to the temple of the Lord in ceremonially clean vessels."

Isaiah 66:20 NIV

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself will be the Agent of the return (Ezek.11:17; 20:41-42):

(5) "Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. (6) I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth – (7) everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

Isaiah 43:5-7 NIV

The return will be complete (Dan.12:1b):

Then they will know that I am the Lord their God, for though I sent them into exile among the nations, I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind.

Ezekiel 39:28 NIV

(12) "I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people. (13) One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out. Their king will pass through before them, the Lord at their head."

Micah 2:12-13

The return will be a vindication:

(19) "At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you; I will rescue the lame and gather those who have been scattered. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they were put to shame. (20) At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your

very eyes," says the Lord.
Zephaniah 3:19-20 NIV

b. The Purging of the Jewish People prior to Reentering the Land:

(4) He summons the heavens above, and the earth, that he may judge his people. (5) "Gather to me this consecrated people, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice."
Psalm 50:4-5 NIV (cf. Hos.6:11)

Although the regathering will indeed apply to all surviving Jews, only those who accept the Messiah will be allowed into the land of promise (those who believed *before* Christ's return have, of course, already been resurrected as part of Christ's Bride). This process of purging is the sixth of the seventh judgments, the purifying of the new remnant of Israel following their regathering to the threshold of the land of Israel so that only the righteous may enter to inaugurate the Messiah's millennial kingdom (cf. Is.60:21).

(34) I will *bring you from the nations* and gather you from the countries where you have been scattered—with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with outpoured wrath. (35) I will bring you into *the desert of the nations* and there, face to face, I will execute judgment upon you. (36) As I judged your fathers in the desert of the land of Egypt, so I will judge you, declares the Sovereign Lord. (37) I will take note of you as you pass under my rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. (38) I will purge you of *those who revolt and rebel against me*. Although *I will bring them out of the land where they are living, yet they will not enter the land of Israel*. Then you will know that I am the Lord.
Ezekiel 20:34-38 NIV

Comment: In this passage we see all of the essential features of the process of regathering: 1) All of Jewish stock who did not receive the mark are regathered (v.34); 2) The place of initial regathering is near the Land, but not actually in the Land (v.35); 3) The purpose for this phased arrival into Israel is to render judgment as to who is fit to enter (vv.36-37); 4) Those who "revolt and rebel" even after witnessing the Messiah's miraculous return and their own astounding regathering will be purged from the remnant and will not enter the Land (v.38).

1) The Place of Purging: As explained immediately above, this judgment will take place *near* the Land of Israel but not actually *in* the Land (Ezek.20:38). Ezekiel 20:35 describes the place of judgment as "the desert of the nations" (Hebrew: *midhbar ha'amiym*, מדבר העמים). This is most often taken to mean the places of Jewish diaspora around the world, but that is obviously incorrect since verse thirty-eight very clearly states that all individuals of Jewish stock will "brought out of the land where they are living" yet "will not enter the Land of Israel". The true identification of "the desert of the nations" is Sinai. Israel was delivered from the nations to be her own nation state under God by going through the desert of Sinai and undergoing a process of cleansing and judgment under the leadership of Moses (a type of Christ). Just as Sinai was the place of testing and purging in the first Exodus, so also at this future time the same "desert of [deliverance from] the nations" will be Sinai.⁵³⁶ The strong parallel deliberately drawn in Ezekiel chapter twenty between the situation of this future generation and that of the Exodus generation supports this identification: a prolonged stay in Sinai was the unhappy alternative

for that previous generation who had likewise experienced the miraculous deliverance of God in bringing them forth from the nations. Sinai is on the threshold of the Land of promise. In terms of biblical geography, it is not technically in Egypt, but neither is it "in the Land" (the "brook of Egypt" will be the southwestern boundary of millennial Israel Ezek.47:19; 48:28). We can therefore conclude that the "desert of the nations" is indeed Sinai, given this unique name now because all those of Jewish blood are brought back to this place from all of the nations of the world where they had previously been scattered, not just from Egypt. Sinai will be the place of blessed cleansing for all willing to accept the Messiah, an event soon followed by their repatriation to the Land of Israel.

Therefore I am now going to allure her; *I will lead her into the desert* and speak tenderly to her.

Hosea 2:14 NIV

This is what the Lord says: "The people who survive the sword will find *favor in the desert*; I will come to give rest to Israel."

Jeremiah 31:2 NIV

2) The Time of Purging: As noted above, scripture describes the return to the land as something that will rapidly follow Jesus' return, so we may expect that the entire process of collection, transfer to Sinai, judgment and repatriation to be a very swift affair. In fact, Daniel chapter twelve provides us with a detailed and definitive schedule:

(11) From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. (12) Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days.

Daniel 12:11-12 NIV

The phrase from verse eleven above, "from the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up", refers, as we have seen in part 3B of this series, to the Tribulation's mid-point and antichrist's session in the temple of God, an event that will be accompanied by the abolition of the daily sacrifice and the erection of the cult-idol statue of antichrist which the false prophet will animate (i.e., the "abomination of desolation", or more correctly, "the abomination that causes desolation": Dan.9:27; Rev.13:11-15; cf. 2Thes.2:1-12). Moreover, the "1290 days" must then stretch to a time beyond the end of the Tribulation past the Second Advent. That is because the Great Tribulation itself, the period which begins with the events mentioned here in Daniel 12:11, lasts for three and one half years only, a time frame described in scripture (in terms of lunar years) as either 42 months, or 1260 days, or "a time, times and half a time" (Dan.7:25; 12:7; Rev.11:2; 12:6; 12:14; 13:5). And since this period of time will be further shortened to some degree at least "for the sake of the elect" (Mk.13:20), it is impossible for the 1290 days to be fit in its entirety into this window of the Tribulation's second half. Even calculating on a 365 day year, the maximum yield for the period would 1278 days assuming a leap year, and this figure does not include the unspecified span of curtailment "for the sake of the elect". It seems best, therefore, to understand the differential between the actual return of Christ and the 1290 days as the interval within which all Israel will be regathered into Sinai so that we should complete Daniel's words somewhat as follows: "From the time that the

daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days [until all Israel is regathered]", that is, until the premier prophetic event to which Daniel was looking in anticipation comes to pass.

The place of regathering, for the purpose of judgment and purging, will be the "desert of the nations", and the process of regathering will occupy approximately 30 days (depending upon the variables noted above). There then remains the differential between the 1290 days and the 1335 days, a span of 45 days. This 45 day period will then be the time frame of the actual judgment.

In addition to meshing seamlessly with all of the other information we have about these events, the above interpretation also has two further advantages:

1) It allows for a close parallel to the events of the Exodus. As we have seen, the fact that Israel will be regathered initially into "the desert of the nations", that is, Sinai, and winnowed in a way similar to that experienced by the original Exodus generation, invites this comparison generally. As we have seen since the beginning of this series, days are often representative of years in prophetic contexts (e.g., Ps.90:4; Dan.9:25-27), so that the 45 days naturally suggests the 40 years of wandering and testing in Sinai in addition to the 5 years of entrance under Joshua (cf. Josh.14:10). In its application to this particular prophecy in Daniel, the 40 days will then be the time of our Lord's judging all regathered to Sinai, and the 5 days the period of their restoration to and resettlement in the Land of Promise under Messiah's reign.

2) This also explains Daniel's words "Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days". According to this interpretation, those who "wait for the Lord" (a picture of faith: Ps.27:14; 37:9; Is.40:31; Mic.7:7; Hab.2:3; Zeph.3:8; Rom.8:25; cf. Matt.24:13; Lk.12:36; Rom.11:25-26), and "reach the end" are the Jewish returnees who pass muster in the desert and enter the Land. All who do survive this judgment will most certainly be "blessed", both in comparison to those who do not and in absolute terms as well, for theirs it will be to experience the ineffable blessings of Millennial Israel under Messiah's reign, a boon much anticipated in prophecy from Genesis to Revelation.

(15) When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "*Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.*" (16) Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. (17) At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' (18) "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.' (19) "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' (20) "Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.' (21) "The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.' (22) "Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' (23) "Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will

be full. (24) I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet."
Luke 14:15-24 NIV

(1) Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: (2) "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. (3) He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. (4) "Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.' (5) "But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. (6) The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. (7) The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. (8) "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. (9) Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' (10) So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, *both good and bad*, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. (11) "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. (12) 'Friend,' he asked, '*how did you get in here without wedding clothes?*' The man was speechless. (13) "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (14) "For many are invited, but few are chosen."
Matthew 22:1-14 NIV

As our Lord's parable makes unmistakably clear, while being present at the great banquet in Israel (the wedding banquet "of his *Son*": cf. Matt.22:2) which celebrates the wedding of the Lamb and His Bride will be blessed indeed (Lk.14:15 above), only those who attain to it, that is, only those who are not destroyed first by outright rejection of the invitation (i.e., those who accept the mark of the beast and so are destroyed in the prior "thunder judgment", also known as the "baptism of fire")⁵³⁷, and who are not subsequently found wanting during the judgment in the desert (represented by the man without proper attire in Matt.22:11-14 above), will be allowed to enter the Land and enjoy all of the marvelous blessings to come.

3) The Process of Purging:

(25) Brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery (and so think more of yourselves than you should): hardness has come over a part of Israel until the time when the fullness of the gentiles has come in [to the family of God] (i.e., when the Church is completed at the 2nd Advent). (26) And it is in this way (i.e., coming to believe upon witnessing the Messiah's return) that all [true] Israel will be saved just as it is written: The Deliverer will come from Zion. He will expel ungodliness from Jacob. (27) And this will be My covenant with them when I take away their sins.
Romans 11:25-27

When all Israel is assembled on the border of the Land, as we have already seen in the prior installment of this series, many in her number will already have come to believe in Jesus Christ, having been convicted of the truth of His Messiahship upon witnessing His sign of the cross appearing in the heavens along with His miraculous return.

Behold! He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the peoples of the earth will grieve on account of Him.

Revelation 1:7

And I will pour out on the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem a Spirit of grace and repentance. For they will look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they will grieve for Him like the grieving for an only son, and they will [weep] bitterly for Him like the bitter [weeping] for a firstborn son.

Zechariah 12:10

There are indications, moreover, that the process of repentance will continue right up until the end of this present judgment:

(4) For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar and without ephod or household idols. (5) Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the Lord and to His goodness in the last days.

Hosea 3:4-5 NASB

As the context of Hosea chapter three quoted above makes clear, the Lord is eager for reconciliation with Israel despite her previous reluctance (just as Hosea is commanded to reconcile with his wife despite her indiscretions).

(10) "Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you," declares the Lord. (11) "Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you." Zechariah 2:10-11 NIV

During the Millennium, the change of heart among the offspring of the remnant of Israel will bring a flood of Jews to faith in Christ (comparable to the flood of gentiles that characterizes Church age). Seeing the Messiah face to face (Deut.4:30; Is.17:7-8; Jer.3:22b-25; 23:19-20; Joel 3:17; Zech.12:10-14; Rev.1:7; cf. Is.31:6; 50:20-21; Matt.24:30), Israel will turn to Him in numbers that will proportionally outstrip the greatest gains of the Church age, as God abundantly blesses His chosen people, fulfilling all the promises He has made (Ps.80:18; Is.65:8-10; Jer.31:31-34; Ezek.20:33-38; 37:11-14; Hos.1:10-11; Mal.4:5-6; Matt.23:39; Rom.11:26). However, it is a sad fact that in spite of the nearly two millennia that Israel has spent "in the wilderness (Amos 9:9), in spite of all the pressures of the Tribulation (cf. Is.48:10; Lk.13:6-9), in spite of all of the glories of Second Advent where "all mankind together will see the glory of the Lord" (Is.40:5), and in spite of this process of face to face judgment with our Lord, the hardness of the hearts of many of the original survivors will prove persistent and not susceptible to being cracked (cf. Zech.2:10-11). Scripture is very clear on this point. Not all who are regathered will enter, only the remnant, and that remnant is consistently described as small (Is.6:13; 17:5-7; 65:8-12; Jer.50:20; Joel 2:32; Mic.4:6-7; Rom.9:27-29; cf. Zech.3:8).

Although your people may be like the sand of the sea, O Israel, [only] a remnant of them will return.

Isaiah 10:22

I will choose you—one from a town and two from a clan—and bring you to Zion.

Jeremiah 3:14 NIV

(8) "In the whole land," declares the Lord, "two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. (9) This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.'"

Zechariah 13:8-9 NIV

As is clear from the last passage in particular, in addition to the high casualty rate suffered by the Jewish population of the Tribulation generally, the "one third" who survive will be "refined". That is to say, they will be purified by a purging that distills them into a remnant of believers. This remnant will in turn provide the root stock for the abundant Jewish population of the Millennium, the majority of whom will continue in the footsteps of their forefathers in faith in Jesus Christ, the true Messiah.

The process of purging is clear to see from Ezekiel chapter twenty, the pertinent section of which for this topic is as follows:

(37) I will take note of you as you pass under my rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. (38) I will purge you of those who revolt and rebel against me. Although I will bring them out of the land where they are living, yet they will not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

Ezekiel 20:34-38 NIV

The procedure for this judgment will thus be very similar to what will transpire at the end of the Millennium during the initial stage of the last judgment as described in Matthew 24:31-46, otherwise known as the judgment of the sheep and the goats (covered below in section VI.1). In both cases we have a mixed population that must be separated, and in both cases it is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who will do the separating. However, while the sheep and goats judgment will involve the entire millennial population at the end of history, this judgment will only concern those Jews still alive after the baptism of fire who have been repatriated to the doorstep of the Land of Israel. And while the later judgment will end in a living resurrection, with the believers entering eternity and the unbelievers cast into the lake of fire (Matt.25:41-46), no such resurrection occurs at this time. Those who are shown to truly be believers in Jesus will enter the millennial kingdom of the Messiah in their physical bodies. Those who refuse to accept Jesus will be dispatched to torments (the temporary residence after death of all unbelievers since the beginning of history) to await the last judgment. The criterion or basis of judgment will be the individual's attitude towards the newly returned Messiah. As Ezekiel 20:38 states, Jesus will "purge you of those revolt and rebel against Me". All those who resist

accepting and obeying Jesus Christ through faith, that is, all who persist in unbelief in spite of all that has transpired, will not be allowed to enter the land.

There are thus five discrete categories among those of Jewish blood who survive the Tribulation:

- 1) Those who previously accepted the mark of the beast: these are executed as part of the baptism of fire.
- 2) Those who accept the Messiahship of Jesus Christ upon witnessing His return: these are allowed to enter the land at the conclusion of this judgment.
- 3) Those who refuse to accept the Messiahship of Jesus Christ in spite of the previous miracles and the message given during this judgment: these are executed in the process of this judgment and dispatched into torments to await the last judgment.
- 4) Those who did not accept the Messiahship of Jesus Christ as they saw Him return, but who do repent and accept Jesus as their Savior during the process of this judgment: these are also allowed to enter the land at the conclusion of this judgment.
- 5) Those who have not yet attained to an age or capacity of accountability, and so are not yet responsible for making this critical decision: these are also allowed to enter the land at the conclusion of this judgment.

The purpose of this judgment is therefore not only to assure that the Millennium begins with a pure cadre of Jewish believers in the Land of Promise cleansed of all prone to "revolt or rebel" against the truth or to grumble against the Lord Jesus, their ruling Sovereign (cf. the parallels of Lev.24:10-23 and Acts 5:1-11), but also to give even those who have so far demurred for whatever reason every opportunity to put aside their hard-heartedness and accept the free grace of God for salvation. The fact that some sizeable portion of those so gathered will nevertheless still refuse to accept the truth of the Messiahship of Jesus Christ is at once a startling and horrifying fact, and a testimony to the power of self-willed arrogance to blind the human heart against the truth even when it is so overwhelmingly revealed. For to be brought face to face with the Messiah Himself, to the gospel message from His own lips, to see the consequences of unbelief with one's own eyes, and to persist in arrogant rejection of Him nonetheless, is irrefutable testimony to the fact that, short of taking away our free will entirely, nothing God could ever do would result in all human beings turning to Him in faith. And as we are here for the purpose of exercising our free will in faith to accept Jesus Christ (or reject Him), this He will most certainly not do.

And it will come to pass that *everyone who calls* upon the name of the Lord *will be saved*. For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance as the Lord has said, even among the survivors whom the Lord calls.

Joel 2:32

(11) "For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. (12) As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. (13) I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. (14) I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. (15) I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord. (16) I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, *but the sleek and the strong I will destroy*. I will shepherd the flock with justice. (17) As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: *I will judge between one sheep and another*, and between rams and goats. (18) Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? (19) Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet? (20) Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says to them: See, *I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep*. (21) Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, (22) I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. *I will judge between one sheep and another*. (23) I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. (24) I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the Lord have spoken.

Ezekiel 34:11-24 NIV

As it was during the time of the Exodus when far from the entire complement who left Egypt entered the land of promise (indeed, only Caleb and Joshua of the older generation did enter the land), so it will be during this future judgment. Just as in the Exodus the children who had not yet reached an age of accountability did enter the land after the forty years of refining, so also in a similar way, we may expect a large proportion of those entering and passing this judgment to consist of those too young to be held accountable at present with the result that they are automatically allowed to enter. There will also be opportunity for repentance, the giving of the gospel message from the Lord Himself, the truth about salvation through the washing of the water of the Word of God wherein accepting His Person and His work, the blood of Christ, results in cleansing from all sin, deliverance and salvation for all who are willing to accept the truth (Jn.3:5; Eph.5:26; Tit.3:5; Heb.10:22; 1Pet.3:21; cf. Heb.9:14; Jas.1:18; 1Pet.1:23).

The Lord will wash away the filth of the women of Zion; he will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire.

Isaiah 4:4 NIV

I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me.

Jeremiah 33:8 NIV

In those days, at that time," declares the Lord, "search will be made for Israel's guilt, but there will be none, and for the sins of Judah, but none will be found, for *I will forgive the remnant I spare.*

Jeremiah 50:20 NIV

(18) Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. (19) You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

Micah 7:18-19 NIV

(9) "Then will I purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him shoulder to shoulder. (10) From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, my scattered people, will bring me offerings. (11) On that day you will not be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me, because I will remove from this city those who rejoice in their pride. Never again will you be haughty on my holy hill. (12) *But I will leave within you the meek and humble, who trust in the name of the Lord.* (13) The remnant of Israel will do no wrong; they will speak no lies, nor will deceit be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid."

Zephaniah 3:9-13 NIV

"On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity."

Zechariah 13:1 NIV

(2) But who can endure the day of [the Messiah's] coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. (3) He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, (4) and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years.

Malachi 3:2-4 NIV

But while all who repent of their prior unbelief and accept Jesus and the Messiah and the true Son of God at this time will be cleansed and forgiven, the purging process will discover the dross, and those who would otherwise have been the "sons of the kingdom" will be thrust out into outer darkness.

I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities.

Isaiah 1:25 NIV

(11) "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. (12) But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing

of teeth."

Matthew 8:11-12 NIV

At the completion of this process, God will conduct the remnant, those who have passed the test of faith, into the Land of Promise to experience the glorious blessings of the millennial rule of Jesus Christ.

(8) This is what the Lord says: "As when juice is still found in a cluster of grapes and men say, 'Don't destroy it, there is yet some good in it,' so will I do in behalf of my servants; I will not destroy them all. (9) I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, and from Judah those who will possess my mountains; my chosen people will inherit them, and there will my servants live. (10) Sharon will [again] become a pasture for flocks, and the Valley of Achor a resting place for herds, for my people who seek me."
Isaiah 65:8-10

7. The Judgment of the Church

Also known as "the judgment seat of Christ", this judgment is Christ's evaluation of His Bride, the resurrected Church (i.e., believers from Adam and Eve to the last person to accept Christ before His return). Our Lord will personally evaluate the lives of every human being who has ever lived following their resurrection, whether it is unto life or unto death. This is the first such resurrection judgment: since the Church is first echelon of the resurrection following the resurrection of Jesus Christ, final judgment begins with us.

For [the] time for the [last] judgment to begin with the household of God is [imminent] (cf. 1Pet.4:7). And if begins first with us, what [in the world] will be the result for those who are disobeying the gospel of God (i.e., the "good news" of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ)?
1st Peter 4:17

a. The Time and Place of the Judgment:

For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay every man in his own coin.
Matthew 16:27

Behold, I am coming quickly, and I bring with me my wages with which to repay each according to his work.
Revelation 22:12

The passages above and many others refer the time of our rewarding to our Lord's Second Advent (e.g., Is.40:10; 62:11; Matt.16:27; Lk.14:14; Rev.11:18; 22:12). The judgment of the Church will thus almost certainly take place immediately after the conclusion of the regathering and purging of Israel, following the resettlement of the remnant in the Land of Israel. Rather than a judgment of those still in mortal bodies, however, the final evaluation of the Church will concern believers from Adam and Eve to the Second Advent, all of whom were already resurrected to form part of Christ's Bride at His return. For believers and unbelievers

both, resurrection confirms every person's final eternal state (saved or lost), and is a necessary event *before* receiving final judgment (for reward or for confirmation of condemnation respectively; cf. Dan.12:1-3; Rev.20:11-15).

"But as for you, [Daniel], be on your way until the end. For you will rest, and [then] at the end of days you will *arise* [in resurrection] *to receive your allotted inheritance.*"

Daniel 12:13

Therefore our eternal status will not be at issue in this judgment. Even in cases where production for Jesus during one's lifetime has been virtually nil, while all false efforts will be burned up, those believers with little to show for their lives will yet "be saved", though "so as through fire" (1Cor.3:15). Having survived life with our faith in Jesus Christ still intact, we shall remain part of His Body forever, even if our eternal rewards are at a minimal level.

(10) According to the grace of God given to me like a wise architect I have laid down a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each one take care how he builds upon it.

(11) For no one can lay another foundation except the One that has been laid down: Jesus Christ. (12) And if someone builds upon his foundation with gold, silver, and precious stones, [or] with wood, hay, and stubble, (13) [in either case] his work will be made manifest [as to its true quality], for the Day [of judgment] will make it clear [for what it truly is], because it will be revealed (lit., uncovered) with fire. And the fire will evaluate (lit., "assay") the work of each person as to what its [true] quality is. (14) If anyone's work which he has built [on his foundation of faith in Christ] remains (i.e., is not burnt away by the fiery evaluation), he will receive a reward [for it]. (15) If anyone's work is burnt up, he will suffer the loss [of any potential reward for it], but he himself will be saved – but in this way [just described] as through fire [which evaluated his false works as worthless and burnt them up].

1st Corinthians 3:10-15

Romans 14:10-12 and 2nd Corinthians 5:10 both state that the judgment will take place "before Christ's tribunal". The word "tribunal" (also often translated "judgment seat"), is the Greek word *bema* (βῆμα), and refers to a public podium, dais, or rostrum, used for public speaking or administering justice. The latter accords better with the analogy Paul is drawing in these two passages, comparing the public evaluation of believers' earthly service with the Roman administration of justice (Acts 18:12-17; cf. Matt.27:19; Jn.19:13; Acts 12:21; 25:6-17). Unlike most contemporary settings of jurisprudence where trials are held indoors and generally not made widely available, as in the example of Roman justice (where the trial occurs in some central part of the city or municipality, often in the open air, and always accessible to all), our evaluation before Christ's *bema* or judgment seat will be public, and since all members of the Church will be evaluated, it certainly stands to reason that the entire Body of Christ will attend. This circumstance argues for an outdoor venue (rather than within the holy of holies of the temple whence Christ will reign for a thousand years), and we know from Isaiah that during the Millennium there will be just such a large, open-air area for assembly in Jerusalem near the temple, miraculously protected from the elements:

(5) And the Lord will create over Mount Zion and over all her assemblies a cloud – one of smoke by day, and of a shining flame of fire by night. For there will be a canopy above the glory

[of His presence, covering it] entirely. (6) It will be a shelter from the heat by day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain.

Isaiah 4:5-6

Difficulties of space (the approximate size of the Church is unknown, but if the number of those who truly put their faith in the Lord from Eden onwards reached into the billions, it would not be at all surprising), and of time (obviously, to give each person an individual evaluation would require a tremendous amount of "earth time"), are likely to be met supernaturally. After all, everyone being evaluated will be at that point "eternal", so that both Judge and judged will be capable of standing somewhat outside of normal temporal and spatial constraints as well as within (compare the ability of the resurrection body to defy the limitations of time and space as we presently understand them). Therefore although the question of how long a time this last of the seven judgments, the "judgment of the Church", will take is not set out in scripture, on the basis of its association with the other Second Advent judgments it must surely be relatively short-lived (again, in "earth time"). That would seem to suggest that this will be a case of our Lord doing almost instantaneously (in terms of our present understanding of time) what would otherwise require a very long period to accomplish, if one were to be restricted to the current laws of time and space (which our Lord clearly is not, and, in resurrection, our present earthly restraints will be greatly changed as well).⁵³⁸ In other words, it will both be a short judgment (in calendar terms), and a long and detailed one (in terms of the precise and exacting evaluation of each of us by our Lord Jesus Christ). The fact that we like He at that point will no longer be subject to temporal constraints in the same way as we are now (for we shall have been resurrected at that point) no doubt explains much about the potential to compress this process temporally from the earthly point of view.⁵³⁹

b. The Order of Judgment: While the sequence in which we shall be judged by our Lord is not expressly specified in scripture, there is much to suggest that the order will proceed according to merit. That is to say, the judgment will not be chronological (i.e., starting with Abel, Adam and Eve, etc.), nor reverse chronological (i.e., beginning with the last tribulational cohort to be saved before Christ's appearance), but instead it will progress from the greatest believers to the least, beginning with the likes of king David and the prophets and the apostles, and terminating with all those whose production during this life was at the bare minimum level.

1) Many who are last shall be first: Our Lord's prophecy to the effect that many of those who were exalted in this life will find their positions reversed with those who were not is clearly tied to the principle that self-exaltation in the service of self-interest (i.e., *not* rank or position per se, but self-sought promotion) tends to negate reward, while self-abasement in the service of the kingdom of God (i.e., *not* asceticism practiced perversely for its own sake, but genuine sacrifices made on behalf of serving Christ's Church) tends to produce this reversal of the present order.

"Whoever wishes to be *first* will [have to become] *last* of all and a servant of all."

Mark 9:35

"So whoever *lowers* himself like this child, this person will be *higher* [ranking] in the kingdom of heaven."

Matthew 18:4

"For the one who is [making himself] *smaller* among you all, this person is the *great*[er] [one]."

Luke 9:48

It is in this sense that we should understand Jesus' words about the exchange of places between "the first and the last": the standards of this world are not the ones our Lord will use in determining our eternal rewards; rather, our Lord will execute a true judgment wherein "many" who seem great in this life will be found to have produced little, while "many" who seemed insignificant in this life will be found to have produced much, with each group being rewarded "according to what they have done" (Ps.62:12; Matt.16:27; Rom.2:6; 1Cor.3:8; Rev.2:23; 22:12).

And it is not that *everyone* who seems to be "great" to the world's eyes will not also be so in eternity (e.g., David, Moses, Daniel, the prophets, the apostles, and many others seemed great at the time and genuinely were; these individuals will without question figure high on the list on that day of days); nor is it the case that *everyone* who seems insignificant in the world's estimation will not also be so in eternity (for some who seem not to be producing for the Lord really are not producing for the Lord). Nevertheless, the emphasis our Lord put on this point suggests strongly that we should take to heart the principle that present appearances are likely to be deceiving in "many" cases. For "many" who may seem to us now as likely to be among the first in the kingdom will in fact be shown not to have produced much at all that is significant for the Lord, while "many" whose work and sacrifice is not highly visible at present will be revealed as having produced significant results for Jesus Christ "on the day when God will judge the secret things of men through Jesus Christ according to my gospel" (Rom.2:16). It is for this reason that we should be reluctant to "judge before the time":

(4) The Lord is the One who judges me. (5) Therefore, do not make judgments before the time, until the Lord shall come, who will illuminate the hidden things of darkness, and reveal the intents of every heart, and then the praise of each shall come to him from God.

1st Corinthians 4:4a-5

Seen from this perspective, our Lord's statements about the "many first being last" and "many last being first" likely also indicate that the order of the judgment of Christ's Church will proceed as suggested above, that is, from most the meritorious to the least so.

But *many who are first will be last, and the last first.*

Mark 10:31 NIV

Indeed *there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.*

Luke 13:30 NIV

The context of the first passage above, Mark 10:17-31, is the request made of Jesus by the rich young ruler to know what must be done to inherit eternal life, his disappointment when told to sell his possessions, and Peter's desire to receive confirmation of the reward he and others will receive for following Jesus sacrificially. Against this background, Jesus' words "many who are first will be last, and the last first" are meant to demonstrate that although to the world's eyes the apostles were at that time nothing compared to the rich and powerful Pharisees and Sadducees, at the judgment their places would be reversed (so that Peter and his fellows should keep their eyes focused on their eternal reward rather than on their present humble status). The context for the second passage above, Luke 13:22-30, is Jesus' description of the narrow door of salvation, and the exclusion of many of the prominent religious figures of the day from the great millennial celebration-banquet. Against this background, Jesus' words "there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last" likewise indicate that few of those who are seen to be celebrities in this world will be so in God's eyes in the next, and that on the other hand many who are of no account in the world's thinking will be honored on that future day.

Perhaps the clearest evidence from this set of "first-last-last-first" passages which indicates that a correspondence is to be found between this reversal of roles (i.e., between the only apparently spiritual and with those who are truly meritorious though anonymous workers for Christ) and the order of judgment-reward comes from the parable of the workers in the vineyard.

(30) But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first. (1) "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. (2) He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. (3) "About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. (4) He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' (5) So they went. "He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. (6) About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?' (7) " 'Because no one has hired us,' they answered. "He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.' (8) "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.' (9) "The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. (10) So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. (11) When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. (12) 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.' (13) "But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? (14) Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. (15) Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?' (16) *"So the last will be first, and the first will be last."*

Matthew 19:30 - 20:16 NIV

With the use of the word "so" (Greek *houtos*, οὕτως, "thus / in this way") in verse sixteen above, we see that it is the reversal of the expected *order* that constitutes the fulfillment of the "last/first – first/last" prophecy. Applying this to the Church at large, the denarius represents the award of salvation which all who trust in Christ will possess equally. The workers hired first represent those who seem in the world's eyes according to the world's standards as likely to receive a larger reward, while those hired last appear to be precisely the opposite, namely, those whose reward will be the least. But in fact, the situation is exactly the reverse of worldly impressions. For our purposes here, the critical point of interpretation is the greater honor given to those whose production is often invisible to us here and now being represented *by the order* of evaluation: rather than having to wait at the end of the line, this group is promoted by being given their wages first (while on the contrary those who *appear* to our sight to be worthy of more, are not, and are in fact placed behind the truly more worthy). Thus this parable indicates that those who are truly first in God's eyes will receive their judgment and reward first, while those who may seem more prominent to us but are actually not so in truth will have to wait until later, a situation which also reflects their relatively lesser rewards.

2) The Parable of the Banquet Guests:

(7) When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: (8) "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. (9) If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. (10) But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. (11) For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Luke 14:7-11 NIV

As in the case of the first and the last, many of those who assume that they are deserving of "first place" (and are assumed by others to be so as well), will find themselves demoted to the end of the line when the true Judge begins His process of evaluation. In contrast, those who were at first not deemed worthy by their fellow diners of such honor, nor even deeming themselves so, will be promoted to the first rank. Humbling oneself for Christ, that is, pursuing Jesus' agenda in this life rather than what the world esteems, though such a course of action usually results in little worldly glory, is the only way to achieve anything worthwhile for Him and thus to be exalted by Him on that great day so as to be moved up to the first rank, that is, to be evaluated earlier in the order reflecting greater rewards (in contrast to those who sought honor in this life and accomplished little for Jesus, and will thus be among those evaluated last, an indication of lesser reward).

3) The Parable of the Talents and the Minas: The parable of the talents (Matt.25:14-30), and the parable of the minas (Lk.19:11-27), though not identical in all details do teach the same principles. In both cases, the master or king represents our Lord, while we are represented by his servants. In each telling of this parable, the servants are given money belonging to their lord and commanded to make good use of it until he returns (with his return representing the Second Advent). The money given to (us) represents the means, opportunity, and authority (cf.

Mk.13:34) to act for the Lord in His stead here on earth according to the gifts we have been given (*n.b.*, the English word "talent" actually comes from this parable). Talents and minas are both monetary units used throughout the ancient Mediterranean world from Babylon to Rome. Depending up the specific standard employed, the approximate weight of a talent could range from some 60 to 100 pounds. At current rates for gold, therefore, a single talent might be worth as much as a million and half dollars in contemporary terms (although its buying power in the ancient economy where money was scarcer in relative terms would be significantly greater). A mina (or mna), was commonly one sixtieth of a talent and thus, while still very valuable, was worth considerably less (i.e., comparing the amounts given to servant who received five talents to the group of ten servants who each received a single mina would equate roughly to eight million dollars versus twenty to thirty thousand dollars). The disparate range between these two similar parables indicates a similarly large range in the gifts and opportunities we are given, but the standard of judgment is the same in every case: our Lord expects a return on His investment, and will reward us wonderfully and marvelously in proportion to our efforts (i.e., the one whose mina gained ten more is placed over ten cities; the one whose mina gained five more is placed over five cities), but will do so with a reward that abundantly exceeds our results to an unimaginable degree (i.e., by the standards of the ancient world even more so than today, rulership over a city would be vastly more valuable than a single mina). For our purposes here, we see in both versions that the servants who accomplished the most are judged and rewarded first, and that the judgment continues in a descending order until it reaches the servant who accomplished nothing.

4) Millennial Offices: Finally, since we know that believers will share Christ's millennial rule (Matt.25:19-23; Lk.22:28; 1Cor.6:3; Rom.8:17; 2Tim.2:12; Rev.1:6; 2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4-6; and see below), it stands to reason that those who will hold the highest positions will be rewarded first (as it is customary in the organizing of any hierarchy to begin with the top positions). It is not only logical but consistent with scriptural notions of appropriate honor for the likes of David and the two who will sit at Christ's right and left hands (presumably Moses and Elijah) and the twelve apostles to have the honor of first place in evaluation so as to take their places first in the millennial command structure which our Lord will establish.

c. The Procedure and Criteria of the Judgment: With the incarnation, all judgment was placed into our Lord Jesus Christ's hands (Jn.5:22; cf. Acts 10:42). Jesus is our Judge here and now and will be the One who judges us on that day; and since that is so, any idea we may have of taking judgment into our hands in criticizing our brothers and sisters in Christ is horribly presumptuous (as the passage immediately below states). We are Jesus' Bride, His Church, and He is the One who will personally evaluate "how we did" in living this life for Him (or not).

(10) But you, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you also belittle your brother? For we will all stand before God's tribunal (11) as it is written: "As I live", says the Lord, "every knee will bow to Me, and every tongue will praise God" (Is.45:23). (12) So then *each of us will give an account* concerning himself to God.

Romans 14:10-12

For we must all stand before Christ's tribunal, so that each of us may receive *recompense for what he has accomplished through this body*, whether it be good or worthless.
2nd Corinthians 5:10

It is clear from these and other passages that this will be a thorough and comprehensive judgment: our actions will be individually evaluated, with the eternal rewards we receive depending upon "what we accomplished" with our time, resources and opportunities here in life. Our Lord's judgment of us will thus be quite detailed, covering all of our positive actions, and all of our negative ones as well (1Cor.3:12-15), including even our every word (Matt.12:36-37; cf. Heb.13:17; Jude 1:15). In the context of the passage immediately above, 2nd Corinthians 5:10, we see Paul using this future judgment to motivate our behavior here and now: because this future judgment is the *crowning* event of our lives on earth (though it takes place after resurrection), we should "make it our [primary] ambition to please Him (i.e., our Lord Jesus Christ)" (v.9). For if we were to find ourselves standing before Him this instant, we would certainly realize more fully and deeply than we can presently imagine that all of the troubles and pleasures of this life had meaning only in so far as we overcame them in service to Him (or failed to do so). In fact, the word Paul uses to express what should be our goal or desire or mind-set is the Greek *philotimeomai* (φιλοτιμέομαι), meaning etymologically and essentially "to love honor/office/promotion". This verb is used throughout Greek literature to express the inner drive of highly motivated individuals to compete for the top honors in society, be it in politics, athletics or any other field. Individuals characterized in this way are "ambitious", that is, possessed of a burning desire for success in their respective fields of endeavor. As Paul says elsewhere (1Cor.9:25), non-Christians pour their all into their work, professions or pursuits "to win a *perishable* prize, but we do it to win an *imperishable* one". When we stand before Jesus, we can be sure that it will not only be our words and actions that are evaluated, but also the intentions and motivations of our hearts. If we have loved the world and the things of the world more than our rewards and the One they glorify forever, that will be made abundantly clear.

The Lord is the One who judges me. Therefore, do not make judgments before the time, until the Lord shall come, who will illuminate the hidden things of darkness, and reveal the intents of every heart, and then the praise of each shall come to him from God.
1st Corinthians 4:4-5

Not only should we not judge others, but we should even refrain from judging ourselves "before the time". The reason for this seems obvious: if we are too harsh on ourselves for lack of visible progress in our ministries, we may be unnecessarily discouraging ourselves on account of trivial things that are truly not our fault, with the unfortunate result of possibly backing off on our efforts (but there have always been ministries which, while it is the Lord's desire for them to be done, yet do not yield the same obvious results as those which others may *seem* to be yielding); on the other hand if we are too pleased with ourselves and our work, whether we are justified in our assessment or are grievously miscalculating, in either case we are similarly more likely to back off on our efforts as if we have already "arrived" (although if our Lord has given us a particularly fertile field it is certain that He expects more from us in terms of visible production rather than less). It is our Lord Jesus who has assigned to us the particular field we are to till, be it exceptionally fertile or barren (1Cor.12:5), and it is God the Father who provides

the results (1Cor.12:6; cf. Mk.4:26-28). Therefore, we will avoid both potential pitfalls by keeping our eyes on the finish line ahead and resisting the temptation to look backward.

(13) Brethren, I do not consider that I have already acquired it. This one thing only [do I keep in mind]. Forgetting what lies behind me [on the course] and straining towards the [course] ahead, (14) I continue to drive straight for the tape, towards the prize to which God has called us from the beginning [of our race] in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:13-14

We know the course; we know the rules; we know how to run. Now is *not* the time to survey the course, or look back at how far we have come. Now is the time to run. If we keep on running in the way our Lord would have us do, our reward will take care of itself.

In terms of procedure, as suggested above, our evaluation will take the form of a dialogue between us and the Lord. In the parables of the talents and the minas, the master in each case summons his servants to discover how they have done, and in each case his servants give him a report (cf. Matt.25:19; Lk.19:15); likewise in each case, whether the report is favorable or unfavorable, the master pronounces reward (or punishment) based upon the results. Two obvious differences between the general approach indicated by these parables and the specific procedure of the Judgment Seat of Christ are, first, that our Lord knows very well ahead of time exactly what we have done (so that there is in no sense any "finding out" on His part during these proceedings). Secondly, the last individual in each case, the one who fails utterly to carry out his master's orders and is thrown into hell as a result, represents faithless unbelievers who squander their lives entirely. This group will not be evaluated until the last judgment. Believers whose production is at a bare minimum level will be rewarded last and least (discussed above), and while believers whose efforts have been in truth worthless will suffer loss of anticipated reward (1Cor.3:10-15, discussed below), no one at this judgment will lose their eternal life or full share in Jesus Christ.⁵⁴⁰

The dialogue format of this judgment can also be deduced from our Lord's synoptic description of the parallel evaluation of millennial believers (i.e., the "sheep" of Matthew 25), and the final "last" judgment of all unbelievers which follows it immediately (i.e., the "goats" of Matthew 25). In each case, our Lord begins with an overall evaluation of the person's life based upon their deeds which in turn reflect their status, saved or lost respectively; and in each case the person being evaluated responds with a question which is then answered by our Lord. As this treatment is meant to be seen as synoptic in nature (e.g., the list of deeds or failures is clearly not meant to be seen as identical in every case), all we can glean from this description about the procedure of our own judgment is that there will be a verbal give and take whereby we are given to see the quality of our life's work (or lack thereof). This same essential picture is found at 1st Peter 4:5 where we are told that unbelievers, who we know are judged "according to their deeds" (Rev.20:12-13), will "*render an account* to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead", and also at Hebrews 13:17 where pastor-teachers are said to work hard (lit., depriving themselves of sleep) "as those who will have to render an account" – those sitting under their ministries should obey them and yield to them "so that they may do this (i.e., render an account to the Lord) with joy and not with groaning – for that would be unprofitable for you". In short, what the Bible has to say about the actual procedure of our life-evaluation before

Christ's tribunal is precisely the sort of thing we ought to expect when a Judge with full powers and complete evidence evaluates an individual's record for the purpose of instruction and reward, namely, a dialogue wherein the facts of the case are revealed through a process of questioning and answering, with a final pronouncement from the Judge which, in this case, will determine our eternal rewards for all eternity. The conclusion Paul draws from this sobering thought, appended directly to his discussion of the judgment seat of Christ in 2nd Corinthians 5:10 (quoted above), is telling:

Since then we understand *what it means to fear the Lord* (i.e., in anticipation of this judgment), we are [trying to] persuade everyone (i.e., to run a good race). Our motives in this are clear to God, and I hope that they are also clear in your hearts (lit., "consciences") as well. 2nd Corinthians 5:11

We should all certainly take the above in deadly earnest, and set to ordering our lives according to this future judgment. After all, if we are striving for success in whatever it is we must do in this life (work and profession), whatever we have obligated ourselves to do in this life (marriage and family), and even in whatever it is we choose to do in this life (hobbies and avocations), how is that we are not striving with *at least* equal vigor in what will count not only for the short span of these lives of ours on earth but also for all eternity? The prospect of being publically judged by our Lord Himself in the presence of all our brothers and sisters in the Church should certainly fill us with reverent fear – but not with irrational terror. God is not asking us to do anything we cannot do, no matter how hard living our lives for Jesus may sometimes appear. We run this race one step at a time, one day at a time, one thought, one word, one deed at a time – and they all count. No matter how late in the race it may be, we still have time – "as long as it is still called 'today'" (Heb.3:13) – to make all our remaining opportunities count for Jesus Christ. He will provide us with the means to will and to do (Phil.2:13), if only we are willing to do. We should also take comfort in the fact that God is totally fair, cannot be otherwise, and that therefore our Lord Jesus' judgment of us will be absolutely impartial, totally objective, and based upon absolutely perfect and complete information. Jesus will take every pertinent factor into consideration in a perfect way, and render a judgment which is absolutely just in every respect.

(5) But according to the hardness and unrepentant nature of your heart, you are storing up⁵⁴¹ for yourself wrath in the Day of wrath and revelation of God's just judgment, (6) [God], who will give to each person according to his works. (7) To those who by persevering in the good course are seeking glory, honor and immortality, [He will give] eternal life. (8) But to those who are disobedient to the truth out of selfish ambition, obeying unrighteousness instead, [there will be only] wrath and anger. (9) Tribulation and vexation will be the lot of every single individual who does what is wrong, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek (i.e., gentile). (10) Glory and honor and peace will be the blessing upon everyone who does what is right, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek (i.e., gentile). (11) For *there is no favoritism with God*. (12) As many as sin without the Law will perish without the Law, and as many as sin under the Law will be judged through the Law. (13) For it is not the hearers of the Law who are righteous before God, but it is those who follow (lit., "do") the Law who will be justified. (14) For whenever the gentiles who do not have the Law do by nature the things [written in] the Law, these who have no Law are a Law for themselves. (15) For they demonstrate that the essence of

the Law has been written in their hearts when their conscience testifies against them, and their [mental] deliberations [based on conscience] alternatively either condemn them or acquit them. (16) This [examination will take place] on the day when God *will judge the secret things of men* through Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

Romans 2:5-16

(12) For the Word of God is living and powerful; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even to the point of being able to divide the spirit from its earthly life and the marrow from its bones; [for] it (i.e., the Word when resident in our conscience) acts as a judge of our heart's intentions and emotions. (13) For there is *no created thing [which can remain] invisible* before Him. *Everything is naked and laid bare* to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

Hebrews 4:12-13

So if you are calling upon a Father who renders judgment upon each man's work *in a [completely] impartial way* [and you most certainly are], then [you should make it your practice to] live the remaining time of your [temporary] sojourn here [on earth] *in [Godly] fear*.

1st Peter 1:17

In regard to the standard of judgment which will be employed, it is evident from the passages treated above and indeed from a multiplicity of passages that all will be judged "according to works" (e.g., Matt.16:27; 2Cor.5:10; 1Pet.1:17; Rev.2:23; 20:12-13; 22:12). However, it needs to be understood that "works" (from the Greek *ergon*, ἔργον, cf. English "erg", "ergonomics", "energy"), is a generic term employed in the Bible to encompass the totality of our actions in this life and, by extrapolation, our lack thereof (something which one would hope is obvious from the equally large number of passages where the judgment is described in slightly different terms but with the same overall meaning: e.g., Rom.2:7; 14:10-12; 1Cor.4:4-5; 2Cor.5:10; 2Pet.1:9-11). Suffice it to say that we will be judged not by what we were tempted to do and didn't, nor by what we intended to do and didn't, but by whatever we actually did do in thought, word and deed throughout the entire course of our earthly lives. This will clearly include our motivations and reasons for doing (or not doing) whatever we did (or did not) do, as well as all the attendant circumstances pertaining thereto. Simply put, the Lord will know (and in fact already knows) more about what we did and why we did it than we could ever possibly dream to know ourselves in this life, even if we made such an investigation our prime concern (and what a hopeless, pointless task that would be).

The assumption on the part of many Christians that "works" is a phrase restricted to deeds of charity (or concrete, physical "acts" at all) is thus entirely incorrect. James tells us that "faith without works is dead", but the examples he uses to describe what the "work of faith" looks like are not charitable actions at all, namely, Abraham's trusting of God in the command to sacrifice Isaac, and Rahab's concealing of the spies because she feared God more than threat to her life from her own townsmen (Jas.2:21-25). In a similar way, in chapter eleven of the book of Hebrews where the apostle Paul gives us a veritable catalog of the "great deeds" of believers of the past, there is not a single instance of what we today would consider "charity". What all of the "deeds" in this chapter have in common are a remarkable faith-response to God, trusting

Him in the most difficult of circumstances and doing what He has called us to do regardless of the consequences. It is out of such faith that the "deeds" with which God is truly pleased must come, in the hope that He will reward steadfastness and steadfast service to Him and His Son our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now without faith, it is impossible to please [God]. For whoever wishes to draw nearer to God must believe that He exists, and that He will reward those who earnestly seek Him.
Hebrews 11:6

Ultimately, it is the sum of our faith-choices for God, generating our hope, and manifesting a genuine love for God and His children (which is never without its own tangible fruits), which forms the basis for our reward. These are our true deeds, regardless of the misconceptions of the world or the sad manner in which some organizations may wish to define and limit them.

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
Matthew 5:11-12 NIV

(5) And to this end, along with *your faith* zealously develop morality, and along with morality, knowledge, (6) and along with knowledge, self-control, and along with self-control, perseverance, and along with perseverance, godliness, (7) and along with godliness, love of the brethren, and along with love of the brethren, love. (8) For if these things be in your possession and increasing, they will render you neither unfit nor fruitless in your confession of our Lord Jesus Christ. (9) But whoever does not possess these [virtues] is nearsighted or even blind, having forgotten the cleansing of his previous sins. (10) Strive all that much more then, brothers, to make your calling and election secure. By devoting yourselves to these things [virtue, growth and Christian production] you shall never be tripped up along your way. (11) For it is by such means that *your path into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be smoothly and generously paved.*
2nd Peter 1:5-11

d. The Rewards: On the issue of rewards, the first thing that we should understand is that "reward motivation" in the Christian life is not only legitimate, but *absolutely essential* for a proper and successful running of the Christian race. We run to win, not to lose.

For whoever wishes to draw nearer to God must believe that He exists, and [*must believe*] that *He will reward those who earnestly seek Him.*
Hebrews 11:6b

Reward motivation is a quintessential means of transforming our thinking, leading us to modify our outlook on the world, to change our behavior where appropriate, and to adjust our priorities to the eternal over the temporal.

Do not store up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and corrosion eat them away and where thieves dig through and steal them. But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven,

where neither moth nor corrosion eat them away and where thieves neither dig through nor steal them. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:19-21

Great believers in every generation of the Church from Adam and Eve to the end of the Tribulation have always had (and always will have) the desire to please God *and to be rewarded by Him* (albeit eternally rather than temporally) as the foundation of their thinking, motivating their entire approach to the Christian life, spurring them on in the race.

(24) By faith, Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, (25) and chose instead to suffer maltreatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin, because he considered the reproach [suffered on behalf] of Christ *greater riches than the treasure vaults of Egypt*. (26) For he was *looking to his reward*.

Hebrews 11:24-26

To be rewarded at the highest level requires in turn the highest sort of diligent attention to the truth and to the application of it to one's life. Further, such a manner of life is only possible if one *really believes* that what is done for Jesus Christ in this life is of infinitely greater importance than anything else. Thus it is that there is nothing more important than focusing on the treasures which await those who have performed well in the Christian life (instead of focusing on the transitory treasures of this world which are in truth merely dust) – at least for all those who wish to be richly rewarded in a manner which will be pleasing to our Lord. And indeed there is no better proof of this truth and no better example of the proper way to think about this issue than the example of our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ:

(1) Since then we too [like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and *run with endurance the race set before us*, (2) turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith, who, *for the joy set before Him*, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despite, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:1-2

As the most successful warrior on this battlefield, our Lord has won "the Name above every Name" (Phil.2:9), and has been seated at the right hand of the glory of God to await the day of His installment as King of King and Lord of Lords (Ps.110:1). But as the verses above demonstrate, as part of His reward He has also won for Himself a Bride, His Church. We are "the joy" or special reward with which our Lord motivated Himself to run that most difficult of all races here in the devil's world.

(20) Which [divine power] He (i.e., the Father) exercised in Christ by having raised Him from the dead and having seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly [places] (21) far above every other rulership or authority or power or lordship and [far above] every other name which may be mentioned not only in this age but also in the age to come. (22) And He (i.e., the Father) subordinated all things under [Christ's] feet and gave Him [as] Head over all things in the

Church (23) which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills up all things in all ways.
Ephesians 1:20-23

All things have fallen to Him who has won the victory of victories, and we believers have in turn come "into the joy of our Master" (Matt.25:21-23). Just as our Lord Jesus encouraged Himself with "the joy that was before Him", so we too should never let slip from our mind's eye the joy of being rewarded and commended by Him for a job well done on this earth, for that is precisely what He desires us to do.

(5) You too should have this attitude which Christ Jesus had. (6) Since He already existed in the very form of God, equality with God was [certainly] not something He thought He had to grasp for. (7) Yet in spite of this [co-equal divinity He already possessed], He deprived Himself of His status and took on the form of a slave, [and was] born in the likeness of men. (8) He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even [His] death on [the] cross [for us all]. (9) *Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place* and gave Him the Name that is above every name (10) that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth (11) and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5-11

As Jesus' sacrifice was the most sublime of all time, not only in humbling Himself and becoming a human being, not only in enduring the most difficult life in human history, not only in ministering the perfect ministry whose end was condemnation and crucifixion, but also and most importantly in paying the penalty for all sin by being put to death for them in the darkness on the cross (His spiritual death), so He has reaped the greatest imaginable reward, and our own rewards on that day before His judgment seat will be apportioned out to us from what He has won. Thus, He is our example of the perfect approach, and a large part of that approach, not only legitimate but necessary for success, is a sharp focus on the eternal rewards which will accrue to those who walk like Jesus walked. For everything we do in this life that is truly for Jesus Christ will not fail to have its reward, given to us by the Lord Himself and enduring for all eternity.

"But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for *your work will be rewarded.*"
2nd Chronicles 15:7 NIV

This is what the Lord says: "Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for *your work will be rewarded,*" declares the Lord.
Jeremiah 31:16a NIV

"He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. And if anyone gives *even a cup of cold water* to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly *not lose his reward.*"
Matthew 10:40-42 NIV (cf. Mk.9:41)

Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, *you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.*"

Luke 14:12-14 NIV

(5) You who are slaves, obey your masters according to the flesh with fear and trembling with simplicity of heart just as you [should obey] the Lord, (6) not doing so with "eye-service" (i.e., only when they are watching you) as those who seek to please men, but as servants of Christ, accomplishing God's will from your heart, (7) serving with good will as if to the Lord and not to men, (8) for you know that *whatever good thing each one of you accomplishes, he will receive [a reward] for this from the Lord*, whether he is slave or free.

Ephesians 6:5-8

(23) Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, (24) since you know that *you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward*. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Colossians 3:23-24 NIV

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on so that they may rest from their labors", says the Spirit. *"For their deeds follow with them."*

Revelation 14:13

Every true believer will have at least *something* to show for their time on this earth. For as James assures us, "faith without works is dead"; therefore every true believer with a genuinely living faith will not fail to have accomplished at least some small acts that stem from that faith while here on earth. As mentioned above, we should resist seeing such acts as being restricted to what is currently thought of as "charity". Acting out of faith can take many forms, for as Jesus Himself assures us the fundamental "work" of all Christians is "to believe in the One He has sent" (Jn.6:29). Regardless of the level of production in this life and corresponding level of reward in the next, all true believers in Jesus Christ who exit this world with their faith still intact will receive an eternal inheritance "which will never be destroyed, defiled, or dimmed" (1Pet.1:4), a perfect resurrection body, a place in the New Jerusalem, and eternal access to the Son of God Himself, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. There will be many other extraordinary benefits in which the entire Body of Christ will share, some to which scripture alludes (as in our access to the tree of life: Rev.2:7; 22:2), and others which we cannot even at present imagine:

But as it is written: "What the eye has not seen and the ear has not heard, and [what] has not entered the heart of man, [these are the very] things which God has prepared for those who love Him".

1st Corinthians 2:9

(6) "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, (7) in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus."

Ephesians 2:6-7 NIV

This common set of eternal blessings which will fall to the lot of every believer for all eternity is analogous to the inheritance that all Israelites received upon their entrance into the Land of Promise – or more precisely put, the temporal inheritance is actually an analogy which teaches the enduring eternal one (just as the earthly temple is merely a representation of the true heavenly realities, etc.). Indeed, we find the New Testament replete with this inheritance analogy, indicating just how important it is for us to concentrate our focus on the eternal possessions we shall enjoy rather than on the ephemeral here and now. As members of the Body of Christ, we are God's heirs and we are Christ's heirs, possessors of an inheritance of eternal life in God's eternal Kingdom whose richness exceeds anything we can presently even imagine. Regardless of how little or how much we have done for Him in this life, all believers will receive a full share in Jesus and the kingdom:

(16) For the Spirit Himself testifies to our spirit that we are God's children. (17) And if we are God's children, then *we are also His heirs, even fellow heirs* of Christ – that is if we have indeed suffered with Him so that we might also be glorified together with Him.

Romans 8:16-17

If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and *heirs according to the promise*.
Galatians 3:29 NIV

So that [now] having been justified [in this way] by His grace, we might become *heirs* in regard to the eternal life for which we hope.

Titus 3:7

Just so God, out of a desire to make it abundantly clear to us, *the heirs of His promise* [after the pattern of Abraham's faith], that His will in this matter [of salvation and its resultant blessings] is unchangeable, guaranteed it with an oath (Gen.22:16-17).

Hebrews 6:17

Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to *inherit* the kingdom he promised those who love him?

James 2:5 NIV

(8b) in all wisdom and understanding [God] has made known to us the mystery He has willed (according to His own benevolent purpose which He determined in [Christ]) for administering this [present] fulfillment of the epochs: namely the incorporation of all things in Christ, things in heaven, and things on earth – (11) In whom *we also have an inheritance*, having been ordained according to the design of Him who is working everything out according to the desire of His will, (12) that we who have previously placed our hope in Christ might serve the purpose of generating praise for His glory (in life). (13) In [Christ] you also when you heard the Word of truth, the good news of your salvation, in whom [I say], when you believed, you

were sealed by the Spirit of promise, the Holy [Spirit], (14) who is *a pledge of our inheritance* for redeeming its preservation (i.e., safeguarding our resurrection and reward in every way), to the praise of His glory.

Ephesians 1:8b-14

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, *the riches of his glorious inheritance* in the saints.

Ephesians 1:18 NIV

. . . . giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you *to share in the inheritance* of the saints in the kingdom of light.

Colossians 1:12 NIV

(23) Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, (24) since you know that *you will receive an inheritance* from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Colossians 3:23-24 NIV

And it is for this reason that He is the Mediator of a New Covenant, so that those who have been called *might receive their eternal inheritance* on the basis of the death He suffered to redeem us from the transgressions [committed] under the first Covenant.

Hebrews 9:15

May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be praised, who has in His great mercy caused us to be reborn to a hope which lives through Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead, and *to an inheritance which will never be destroyed, defiled, or dimmed*, but which is being guarded in heaven for us, who are ourselves also being kept safe by God's power and our faith in Him to an ultimate deliverance ready to be unveiled at the end of time.

1st Peter 1:3-5

One important aspect of our coming reward which needs to be considered here is that a good deal of the authority, the gifts and the other tangible rewards we shall receive from the Lord are said to come to as a result of our sharing in the plunder or "spoils" that He won by His victory on the cross (cf. Ps.68:12; 110:1-7; Mic.4:13).

Arise, O God! Judge the earth! For You will assign [us] an inheritance among all the nations.

Psalms 82:8

Then (i.e., at the 2nd Advent) an abundance of spoils will be divided and even the lame will carry off plunder.

Isaiah 33:23b NIV

Therefore I will allot to Him [the plunder] among [His] many [brothers], and He will apportion plunder to the mighty [among them]. Because He lay bare His life unto death, and was dealt with as transgressors [are], so that He bore the sin of the many, and substituted [Himself] for

the transgressors.
Isaiah 53:12

(21) "When a strong man (i.e., Satan by analogy; cf. vv.14-20), fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. (22) But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils.
Luke 11:21-22 NIV (cf. Matt.12:25-29)

(7) And to each of us this grace has been given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. (8) For it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive (i.e., He brought pre-cross believers to heaven). *He gave gifts to men.*" (9) Now [as to] this [phrase] "He ascended", what can it mean except that He had also [previously] descended into the lower reaches of the earth (i.e., Hades, from whence He brought the pre-cross believers to heaven)? (10) The One who descended is also the One who ascended above all the heavens (i.e., into the third heaven, the place of the Father's residence), in order to fulfill all things (i.e., complete the victory won at the cross; cf. Ps.110:1).
Ephesians 4:7-10 (cf. Ps.68:18)

In this last passage, we note that the spiritual gifts that are the unique province of Church Age believers are essentially our "weapons" whereby we may earn the battlefield decorations and earn a share of these "spoils" which will be ours for all eternity. Since the devil and his angels are described as the ones defeated at the cross and made subject to plunder, there is a sense in which all that they now have (i.e., their positions, powers, and territories on earth and within the universe) will fall to our lot on that great future day of distribution.

Reaping *significant* rewards is not, however, automatic. Establishing the sort of track-record in the Christian life commensurate with substantial honors awarded before the judgment seat of Christ requires diligence, consistency, persistence, and perseverance.

"Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants *whose master finds them watching when he comes*. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night.
Luke 12:35-38 NIV

(6) Let him who receives instruction in the Word share in all good things with him who gives instruction. (7) Do not be deceived. God cannot be mocked. For whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. (8) For the one whose sowing is directed to his own [sinful] flesh from that [sinful] flesh will reap corruption, but the one whose sowing is directed toward the Spirit, from that [same] Spirit will reap eternal life. (9) And [so] let us not grow weary of doing the good [work of God], for at [the appointed] time we will reap [our reward], *provided that we do not give up*. (10) So then as long as we have this opportunity, let us keep accomplishing the good

[work of God] towards all [people], and especially to the family of faith.
Galatians 6:6-10

Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he *competes according to the rules*. The *hard-working* farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.
2nd Timothy 2:5-7 NASB

(7) So *be patient*, brothers, until the coming (*parousia*, 2nd Advent) of the Lord. Consider: the [good] farmer waits for the earth [to yield its] precious crop, waiting patiently for it until it receives the late and early rains [which make it grow]. (8) So then, [see to it that] you too exercise [such] patience, [and] steady your hearts, because the return of the Lord has drawn near. (9) Brothers, do not grumble against one another so that you may not be judged [for it]. Behold, the Judge [Jesus Christ] is standing in front of the door (i.e., His return and our final judgment are imminent)!
James 5:7-9

(35) So do not throw away this conviction of yours – it leads to a great reward. (36) You need to keep *persevering* so that you may carry off in victory what has been promised – *after* you have accomplished God's will. (37) For yet a little while, how short, how [short the wait], and He who is coming shall come, nor will He delay. (38) "*Then shall my righteous one live by his faith, but if he shrinks back, My heart takes no pleasure in him* (Hab.2:3-4)." (39) Now we are not possessed of cowardly apostasy which leads to destruction, but we have faith which leads to [eternal] life.
Hebrews 10:35-39

Moreover, this consistent and dedicated work for which we shall be richly rewarded is nothing more, of course, than precisely what we are supposed to be doing in any case.

(7) "Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? (8) Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? (9) Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? (10) So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.' "
Luke 17:10 NIV

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for [the purpose of accomplishing] good works, which [very works] God has prepared ahead of time for us, that we might walk in them (i.e., live our Christian lives in the accomplishment of them).
Ephesians 2:10

The Land of Promise requires a significant journey. To receive our promised inheritance therein (and especially to receive it bountifully) we have to follow the Lord wherever He leads us (cf. Rev.14:4). Despite shortages of water or food, God has and will always provide. Despite opposition from enemies numerous and strong, He always has and always will give us the

victory. The fight we fight, the journey we travel, the struggle with which we have to contend may not be obvious to the world (the purpose behind it and its ultimate reward certainly are not). But the way in which we negotiate the distance between "point A" (wherever we now find ourselves), and "point B" (the moment when our Lord Jesus calls us back to Himself) makes all the difference. Only by continuing to walk, fight, and struggle in a faithful way will we reap the maximum rewards to which we have been called.

(1) For I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, about the fact that our [spiritual] forefathers (i.e., the Exodus generation) were all under the cloud (i.e., protected by the Glory). (2) And all of them were baptized into Moses (i.e., closely identified with him) in both the case of the cloud and of the sea (i.e., received the same protection and deliverance as he did). (3) And all of them ate spiritual food (i.e., divinely provided manna). (4) And all of them drank the same spiritual drink (i.e., divinely provided water). For all of them drank from the spiritual[ly significant] Rock which followed them – for that Rock was Christ. (5) But God was not pleased with most of them and their bones were strewn about in the desert as a result. (6) And in this they have come to serve as examples for us, so that we might not lust for wicked things as they lusted for them. (7) So do not become idolaters as some of them did, as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to play (i.e., feasting followed by indulgence in idolatrous rites)". (8) And let us not commit fornication, as some of them committed fornication, and there fell in a single day 120,000 of them. (9) And let us not put Christ to the test, as some of them tested the Lord and [as a result] were killed by serpents. (10) And let us not complain, as some of them complained, and were killed by the Destroyer. (11) All these things happened to them as an example to us, and were written to warn us – we who live at the culmination of the ages. (12) So let him who thinks he stands firm beware lest he fall. (13) You have not suffered any testing beyond normal human [experience]. And God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your capacity, but, along with the test, He will grant you the way out, so that you can bear up under it.

1st Corinthians 10:1-13

As Paul's assessment of the poor performance of the Exodus generation above indicates, the dangers and pitfalls along the way to Zion are numerous, and the number of believers who overcome them to win significant rewards is small in consequence. Indeed, through its use of athletic and military metaphors wherein significant rewards accrue only to the few, scripture seems to confirm what observation suggests, namely, that those who will receive the highest levels of reward will be relatively few in number, and thus in turn that while all believers will enjoy salvation, eternal life, an equal share of Jesus Christ, a resurrection body, and a place forever in the New Jerusalem, many if not most will have little to show for their life here on earth in terms of additional rewards (cf. Rom.2:7; 1Cor.9:24-27; Gal.6:7-9; Phil.3:11-16; 1Pet.1:9). For in the case of many believers, it will be seen that their time here on earth was largely wasted (from the divine point of view). Instead of living for Jesus, they were distracted by fear and greed, and worked for themselves instead. In the parable of the Sower, these are those who fell among the weeds and the thorns:

"And he who was sown among the thorns, this is the one who hears the Word, but the worries of this life and the deceptiveness of wealth stunt the [productive power of the] Word so that he

becomes unproductive."
Matthew 13:22

(18) "And others were sown among the thorns. These are those who heard the Word, (19) but the worries of life and the deceptiveness of wealth, and the lust for other things grow up [over them like thorns and weeds] and stunt the [productive power of the] Word so that they become unproductive."
Mark 4:18-19

"And as to that [seed] which fell among the thorns, these are they who have heard the Word, but who are stunted by worries and by wealth and by the pleasures of this life with the result that they do not bear a full crop to harvest."
Luke 8:14

Finally in this regard, there is large difference between what God judges to be genuine, legitimate production and what mankind may perceive. As the parable of the Sower makes clear, genuine production is always a result of genuine spiritual growth which precedes it. It is only the "good ground" which receives the Word and accepts it without compromise, responding to it in an acceptable and godly way, which produces a significant crop (Matt.13:23; Mk.4:20; Lk.8:15). It is a very common thing in the Christian life – and has been very common throughout human history – for people to attempt to "work" their way into heaven or into God's good graces. Even a cup of cold water offered in the Lord's Name will not fail to receive its due reward (Matt.10:42; Mk.9:41), but the gift of millions of dollars done out of self-righteousness and self-aggrandizement is of absolutely no avail in entreating God's favor. When unbelievers employ such methods, they are only engaging in self-deception. When believers do the same, attempting to substitute self-works for spiritual growth and true, godly production, their false efforts will be erased at the Judgment Seat of Christ. They themselves will be saved (just as the seeds that fall among the thorns indicate genuine believers who are ineffective for Jesus Christ), but only "though as through fire".

(10) According to the grace of God given to me like a wise architect I have laid down a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each one take care how he builds upon it. (11) For no one can lay another foundation except the One that has been laid down: Jesus Christ. (12) And if someone builds upon his foundation with gold, silver, and precious stones, [or] with wood, hay, and stubble, (13) [in either case] his work will be made manifest [as to its true quality], for the Day [of judgment] will make it clear [for what it truly is], because it will be revealed (lit., uncovered) with fire. And the fire will evaluate (lit., "assay") the work of each person as to what its [true] quality is. (14) If anyone's work which he has built [on his foundation of faith in Christ] remains (i.e., is not burnt away by the fiery evaluation), he will receive a reward [for it]. (15) *If anyone's work is burnt up, he will suffer the loss* [of any potential reward for it], but he himself will be saved – but in this way [just described] as *through fire* [which evaluated his false works as worthless and burnt them up].
1st Corinthians 3:10-15

Watch out for yourselves, lest you lose what you have worked so hard for, but may instead receive a full reward. No one who goes wandering off, that is, anyone who does not keep to the

teachings about Jesus Christ, has [even] a share in God.
2nd John 8-9

I am coming quickly. Hold on to what you have so that no one takes your crown [away].
Revelation 3:11

Level 1 Rewards: All those who truly love Jesus Christ should take to heart the wonderful news that all of their legitimate efforts for Him here on earth will be richly rewarded by Him at His judgment seat. Indeed, above this basic level of salvation without significant production (representing those who were distracted by the "thorns" of life), scripture details three higher levels of reward (represented in the crowns of righteousness, life, and glory respectively, and in the 30, 60, and 100-fold harvest of the parable of the Sower). Before moving on to these higher level rewards, a few additional, general points need to be made here.

1) All believers will receive an inheritance for placing their faith in Jesus Christ and maintaining that faith to the end of their lives. This inheritance will be wonderful beyond expression and beyond our present ability even to understand it. It is doubtlessly true that a moment of eternal bliss experienced by the very last person in line when our Lord hands out eternal rewards will exceed to infinity the longest and most blessed human life here in time on earth. All believers will have eternal life, a full share in Jesus Christ and eternal access to Him and our heavenly Father, a resurrection body which will never age or know pain or grief, access to and a place in the New Jerusalem, and many other exquisitely sublime blessing which at present we cannot even dimly comprehend. That said, it is still the case that even "more" is possible, that we are called to have "more", that this "more" is earned through spiritual growth, progress and ministry here in time, and that this "more" will glorify our Lord Jesus forever, even as our efforts to win it please Him now and will be officially acknowledged by Him during this judgment.

2) There is an important distinction to be drawn between the type of believer being considered here who has very little to show for a life of faith (the thorny-ground type), and on the other hand an unbeliever who never had faith at all (the packed-ground type) or one who lost faith (the rocky-ground type). Faith without any works whatsoever is dead (Jas.2:20), so that all true believers will have some record of legitimate production, however small (Ex.34:20b). This example is not of "dead faith" but rather is one of a faith on "life-support", namely, a marginal believer just barely hanging onto their faith in Jesus, distracted by the worries of the world and its pleasures, never having committed to spiritual growth, and therefore never truly tested nor having accomplished the ministry intended for him. This thorny-ground category of believer *does* exist. In fact all scriptural and experiential indications suggest that it is by far the category containing the largest number of Christians. It is nonetheless the case that, in addition to being the most scantily rewarded category, it is also by far the most *dangerous* category. For that reason, as we can clearly see from the parable of the Sower (the thorny ground) and from the passages quoted above (i.e., 1Cor.3:10-15; 2Jn.1:8-9; Rev.3:11; etc.), biblical descriptions where this category is evident make very little distinction between the almost completely unproductive Christian and the unbeliever. That is because far from taking comfort in the biblical truth that even without significant production in life, eternity will be immeasurably wonderful, such Christians should rather take fright – because their marginal conduct makes

them incredibly vulnerable to falling away from Jesus Christ altogether (not to mention that they are disregarding entirely the desires of their Lord and failing to engage in any meaningful way with the mission to which they have been called and for which they were given specific gifts at salvation and left here in life to utilize).

(45) "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? (46) It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. (47) I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. (48) But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' (49) and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. (50) The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. (51) He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 24:45-51 NIV

As with the parables of the talents (Matt.25:14-30) and the minas (Lk.9:11-27), we see the main distinction emphasized in scripture to be one of the productive believer versus the unbeliever. In the passage above, largely unproductive believers are not even mentioned, while in the parables of talents and minas, they are represented by the theoretical option with which the unbeliever is reproached: putting out the "talent" on interest to let some else do the work (but gaining at least some return, albeit marginal). All evidence suggests very clearly that a marginal Christian life wherein little is accomplished for Jesus Christ falls just short of being a wasted life – though it is inestimably superior to dying in unbelief.

3) Finally (in terms of preliminary matters), there is also an important distinction to be drawn between what the world may see and perceive as "good works" and genuine production for Jesus Christ which receives a reward. We certainly know that this is the case from the very vivid description Paul gives us in 1st Corinthians chapter three where we are told that "wood, hay and stubble" will be burned up, and that the believer under evaluation will "suffer loss" of reward for things he/she no doubt assumed would be richly rewarded. Only doing what Jesus really wants us to do and doing it His way results in reward. Doing what we want to do or what the world praises us for doing or what we wrongly assume is pleasing to God will not be rewarded. From a positive point of view, the three higher levels of rewards treated immediately below lay out in general terms what God's will truly is in this regard: spiritual growth (level 2); spiritual progress (level 3); ministry corresponding to spiritual gifts (level 4). These three higher levels are, moreover, sequential, so that, minor overlaps aside, a truly meaningful fulfillment of the ministry God has planned for a person and gifted him or her for is impossible without prior spiritual maturity and prior testing successfully passed (which are in turn essential components of truly effective ministry). From a negative point of view, there are also important scriptural caveats which make clear the distinction between legitimate production which will be rewarded and illegitimate production which will be burned. Man looks at the surface of things, but God looks on the heart (1Sam.16:7). A cup of cold water given "because [the recipient] is My disciple" (Matt.10:42; Mk.9:41) receives a reward, but not, we conclude, a cup of cold water given at random and from improper motives. God can certainly tell the

difference between proper and improper motivation, even if it is difficult for us to make such distinctions.

(25) I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. (26) Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. (27) And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian."

Luke 4:25-27 TNIV

Correct motivations always flow from humility, from obedience to God and to His truth, and from a desire for His glory, not our own.

"The one who speaks for himself seeks his own glory. But the One who seeks the glory of Him who sent Him, this is the One who is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him."

John 7:18

The Pharisees did all that they did not out of a desire to glorify God but instead to glorify themselves.

"All their works they do [only] to be observed by men [in so doing]".

Matthew 23:5a

Anything done with such motives brings no reward from God, *even if it would have done so* when accomplished with correct motivation.

"(1) Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' in front of others, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. (2) So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full."

Matthew 6:1-2 TNIV

"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full."

Matthew 6:5 TNIV

"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full."

Matthew 6:16 TNIV

While we tend to think of monetary gifts given to charity as the prime means and measure of "good works", in fact, not only are gifts given for the wrong reasons worthless to God (a prime means and measure of the works to be burnt up before Christ's judgment seat), but we are also very wrong to imagine that the amount counts with God. For He has need of nothing (cf.,

Ps.50:8-15; Acts 17:25), and evaluates our giving on the basis of our true motives and our true means.

(41) Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. (42) But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. (43) Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. (44) They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."

Mark 12:41-44 TNIV

As with virtually everything else in the Christian life, legitimate production is a function of spiritual growth, and depends upon a proper attitude of the heart exercised in faith, for it is for faith that we have been called, and it is faith in Jesus Christ that is the fundamental "work" upon which all others depend.

Jesus answered, "This is the work of God, that you believe in the One He has sent."

John 6:29

Higher Rewards: Certain basic rewards will be the province of all believers, no matter how minimal their efforts for Jesus Christ during this life. All will take part in the resurrection, with the perfect, eternal, unimaginably wonderful resurrection body furnishing the essential "platform" for the enjoyment of a blissful eternity wherein there will be no pain or trouble or anything negative at all, only an inexpressibly delightful existence in which we shall revel for all eternity (e.g., Rev.7:17; 21:4; 21:9-27; 22:1-5). Merely being resurrected into eternal life will entail blessings and benefits beyond our present ken, the entire fulfillment of that for which we were made, and the hope for which we presently yearn.

(17) And if we are God's children, then we are also His heirs, even fellow heirs of Christ – that is if we have indeed suffered with Him so that we might also be glorified together with Him.

(18) *For I do not consider these present hardships in any way comparable to the glory destined to be revealed for us* [at the 2nd Advent]. (19) For all creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God. (20) For the created world is now subject to futility – not of its own choosing, but because of Him who subjected it [as a consequence of Adam's sin] – but not without hope. (21) For [at the 2nd Advent] the created world will be liberated from its enslavement to decay at the glorious liberation of the sons of God (i.e. our resurrection). (22) For we know that the whole creation has been experiencing intense pain and agony right up until this present time. (23) And not only the created world, but we too who have received the Holy Spirit as a foretaste [of the good things to come] agonize within ourselves as we eagerly await our adoption, that is, the redemption of our body (i.e. resurrection). (24) This is the hope with which we were saved.

Romans 8:17-24a

All these wonders await the believer in Jesus Christ, regardless of spiritual effort in this life, and all who come through this life with their faith intact will experience the divine seal of approval at this judgment as our Lord Jesus acknowledges our name "in the presence of My

Father and in the presence of the holy angels" (Rev.3:5). That name, our name, will be from that day forth a "new name" (Rev.2:17; 3:12; Is.65:15; cf. Is.62:2b), and our re-naming at the time of this judgment will be a very significant event. For our new name will reflect the spiritual course of our lives here on earth. Just as all God-given names in the Bible are incredibly important and are always expressive of essential spiritual realities, so we may be sure that our eternal name will encapsulate the effort we put forward for Jesus Christ and His Church, whether prodigious or pathetic. This fact alone ought to fill us with a single-minded determination to do all we can in our Lord's service to ensure that this new name will be a cause of rejoicing rather than regret, a name which glorifies Him forevermore through the accomplishment of the works prepared ahead of time for us to do by grace in the power of His Holy Spirit (Eph.2:8-10). For not everyone who stands before His judgment seat will receive a "Well done!" from Jesus Christ on that great day along with the additional rewards which accompany our Lord's positive endorsement, but only those who attain through their legitimate efforts to the higher levels of reward which exceed the basic blessing that will be the province of all believers.

"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"
Matthew 25:21 NIV

"'Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'"
Luke 19:17 NIV

The most common biblical symbol of exceptional service for Jesus Christ meriting these higher level rewards is the (athletic) crown or *stephanos* (Greek στέφανος; in contrast to the regal crown, the *diadema*, διάδημα). The *stephanos* "crown" has a long and colorful history in the Greek and Roman world, but there is a common thread which connects its multifarious uses. Whether awarded for military, athletic, artistic or political exploits (and all such instances are widely attested), the *stephanos* crown is invariably given as a reward for meritorious service or exceptional conduct of some sort. As such, it is often closely connected in scripture with our hope for rewards which extend beyond the resurrection body:

So then my beloved brothers whom I deeply desire, my joy and my crown [of victory], stand fast in the Lord, beloved, in this way [in which I have written you]!
Philippians 4:1

(19) For who is our hope and our joy, or the crown [of victory about which we] boast? Is it not in fact even [all of] you? [For you are our crown of victory] before our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming. (20) For you are our glory and our joy.
1st Thessalonians 2:19-20

I am coming quickly. Hold on to what you have that no one takes your crown [away].
Revelation 3:11

Indeed, the essential idea which lies behind the crown of competitive-like effort in striving for achievement is ubiquitous in scripture. However, we are competing against the "world, the flesh, and the devil", not against our fellow Christians. We believers strive to win, without that hoped for victory necessitating any measure of loss whatsoever by our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ (indeed, we win our honors by *helping* them do the same). We can all win top rewards (or fail to do so), for it would most certainly be within the power of God to provide the same level of ultimate blessing and reward to every single believer (and indeed to every single human being, were it the case that all chose to believe). The fact that the majority of believers will not attain to the highest honors in eternity has nothing to do with God's provision but everything to do with the choices made by each and every individual each and every day. For this reason every one of us ought to take pains to see the life we have been given for what it really is: not only a time of responsibility to do as God requires, but also as a time of immense *opportunity* to win the rewards our Lord Jesus very much desires us to win.

Once we have been saved, once we have committed ourselves and our lives to Jesus Christ, the purpose for our continued existence here on earth really has nothing at all to do with the priorities upon which the secular world focuses (essential as some of them may be), but instead has everything to do with carrying out our Lord's command to follow Him. It is through our determined and consistent efforts to seek our Lord Jesus (spiritual growth and application), and serve our Lord Jesus (spiritual progress and ministry) that rewards are won. And while as described above we will all be heir to blessings the least of which put the best of what the current world can offer in the shade to an infinite degree, nevertheless it is also true that there are indeed higher levels of reward which will fall to the lot of those who made following Jesus and serving Him their top priority – not merely biding their time here on earth with an occasional "nod to God", but by taking up on a daily basis the challenge of making the most of our opportunities in time to excel for our Lord – in hope of reward for so doing. Thus, whenever we see individuals rewarded and honored in this life for their exceptional earthly achievements, be they of a military, political, artistic, athletic or other professional nature, we should make it our practice to reflect that we are involved in a similar quest, with the signal exception that we are seeking rewards and honors which are eternal rather than evanescent and temporal (cf. Gal.2:2; 5:7; Phil.2:16).

Don't you know that all the runners in the stadium run the race, but that only one receives the prize? Run in such a way so as to achieve what you are after. And again, everyone involved in competition exercises self-control in all respects. Those athletes go through such things so that they may receive a perishable crown of victory, *but we do it to receive an imperishable one*. So as I run this race of ours, I'm heading straight for the finish line; and as I box this bout of ours, I'm making every punch count. I'm "pummeling my body", one might say, bringing myself under strict control so that, after having preached [the gospel] to others, I might not myself be disqualified [from receiving the prize we all seek].

1st Corinthians 9:24-27

(12) [It is] not that I have already gotten [what I am striving for], nor that I have already completed [my course]. Rather, I am continuing to pursue [the prize] in hopes of fully acquiring it – [this prize for whose acquisition] I was myself acquired by Christ Jesus. (13) Brethren, I do not consider that I have already acquired it. This one thing only [do I keep in

mind]. Forgetting what lies behind me [on the course] and straining towards the [course] ahead, (14) *I continue to drive straight for the tape*, towards the prize to which God has called us from the beginning [of our race] in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:12-14

(3) Endure hardship with me like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. (4) No one on military campaign becomes involved in the affairs of normal life. [He avoids such things] that he may please the one who enlisted him. (5) Likewise if anyone engages in athletic competition, *he does not win a crown if he fails to compete according to the rules.*

2nd Timothy 2:3-5

(1) Since then we too [like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and *run with endurance the race set before us*, (2) turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despite, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:1-2

(12) Therefore (going back to the race analogy of v.1), pick up those hands hanging slack at your side, put some strength back into your weak knees, (13) and *make straight tracks for your feet*, so that, [even though you fell down,] what you sprained might not be twisted completely out of joint, but might instead work its way back to health.

Hebrews 12:12-13

All of the passages above make absolutely clear that there is no time to lose in this race of ours, and no effort which should be spared in putting our all into this competition in which we are engaged. For not only is this our duty, but there are also great rewards in so doing.

The higher level rewards occur in three distinct categories, and these are represented by the three levels of production yielded by the "good ground" in the parable of the Sower described as "thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold" (Matt.13:8; Matt.13:23; Mk.4:8; 4:20; cf. Lk.8:8), by the "gold, silver, and precious stones" of 1st Corinthians 3:12 (albeit here in descending order), and by the victory crowns of "righteousness", "life", and "glory" which likewise correspond to this three tiered system. To use a modern analogy, everyone whose earthly production entitles them to enter one of these three higher-level classes of reward will be "officer grade", set apart from the enlisted rank and file; but the three levels will be discernible even within this class (as between company, field, and general grade officers in our contemporary military establishment). To carry this analogy a step farther, it is also true that even within the highest class, there are a very small number of top-ranking individuals (such as the joint chiefs), and that will undoubtedly be the case in eternity as well. We can certainly expect the two witnesses, Moses and Elijah, the twelve apostles, and the famous prophets and believers of the Bible to constitute a unique and special subset of the highest class.

If the desire to glorify Jesus through the awards we win, the desire to be praised by Him at this final judgment (and the reluctance to have our efforts shown to have come to naught instead)

were not enough to motivate us to make our spiritual growth, production and ministry the absolute top priority of our lives, then the details of the rewards given by scripture, limited though they may be, should be sufficient to spur us on to greater efforts. The rewards that lie ahead for those who are committed to striving for them in a godly and acceptable way are absolutely disproportionate to any suffering or sacrifice or effort in this life. The parables of the talents considered above makes this abundantly clear: the servants who produce a (relatively) small amount of return proportionate to what they have been given are rewarded with the rulership of cities, that is, rewards exponentially more valuable than anything they had possessed or achieved in the king's absence. And if that is true in an earthly analogy, just imagine applying this same principle to eternal rewards in a new universe wherein there is no scarcity but only superabundance beyond our dreams!

(17) For this present light affliction of ours is working out for us *an eternal weight of glory beyond any possible estimation*. (18) [Let us] not [then be] having [any] regard for what can be seen, but [instead] for what cannot be seen. For the things which can be seen are ephemeral. But the things which cannot be seen are eternal.

2nd Corinthians 4:17-18

We may expect all such achievement which rates the three higher levels of reward to be violently opposed by the evil one. Indeed, to a certain degree such opposition is an essential part of the effort-reward principle. The higher level rewards represent recognition for effective engagement in the struggle which is the true Christian way of life, and military decorations (another frequent use of the *stephanos*-crown in antiquity) are an equally valid parallel to be employed here. Whether we think of these three higher levels of reward as "bronze, silver, and gold medals" or as "silver stars, navy crosses, and congressional medals of honor", in both analogies a higher degree of difficulty and accomplishment is clearly associated with each, and in terms of eternal rewards, that opposition comes increasingly and more aggressively at every stage from the satanic forces arrayed against us. Just as our Lord was opposed, so those who bear His Name and determinedly advance in His service will likewise be opposed. Indeed, it is our Lord and the example of His life which sets the pattern and the principle: just as the most effective and self-sacrificing life and ministry produces the most for God even as it garners the most opposition from the devil, so also it is right that it reap the highest rewards as well:

(5) You too should have this attitude which Christ Jesus had. (6) Since He already existed in the very form of God, equality with God was [certainly] not something He thought He had to grasp for. (7) Yet in spite of this [co-equal divinity He already possessed], He deprived Himself of His status and took on the form of a slave, [and was] born in the likeness of men. (8) He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even [His] death on [the] cross [for us all]. (9) *Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place* and gave Him the Name that is above every name (10) that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth (11) and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5-11

(5) For it is not to angels that He subordinated the world to come (which is our present topic), (6) but someone testifies at some point saying, "*What is Man that you are mindful of him, or*

the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels, you crowned him with glory and honor. (7) You made him sovereign over all the works of your hands, (8) you put everything under his feet" (Ps.8:4-6). For in subordinating the world to Him, He left nothing that was not subordinate to Him. However, we do not now yet see the world in subordination to Him. (9) But we do now see Jesus crowned with glory and honor on account of the death He suffered, even He who became "a little lower than the angels" for a brief span so that by the grace of God He might taste death on behalf of us all.
Hebrews 2:5-9

In general terms, believers achieve the second level of rewards by means of spiritual growth and the attainment of spiritual maturity, persevering in the learning, believing and applying of divine truth to their lives, thus demonstrating consistent *faith* which transcends visible realities. The third level is achieved by passing serious and significant testing beyond the normal, everyday sort, thus demonstrating surpassing *hope* in eternal realities over temporal opposition. Believers attain the highest or fourth level of rewards through effective and consistent ministry in spite of all opposition to the point of fulfilling the ultimate purpose for their lives and spiritual gifts, thereby demonstrating a *love* for their Savior which exceeds all other personal concerns. Finally, although it is certainly true that in any life, there will be some overlap in these functions, nevertheless, these reward levels are very much progressive in nature: consummate ministry (level 4) is impossible without the prior preparation of serious testing and refining (level 3); and the ability to pass such tests is impossible without prior spiritual growth and the attainment of true spiritual maturity (level 2).

Level 2 Rewards: The Crown of Righteousness – The "Faith" Level of Spiritual Maturity

The crown of righteousness, represented by the 30-fold production in the parable of the Sower and by the "precious stones" of 1st Corinthians 3:12, is the "faith level" of high reward. It is achieved by the attainment of spiritual maturity, the completion of spiritual growth that comes to the believer who consistently learns the Word of God, *believes* the truth he/she has learned, and consistently applies Gods' truth to his/her life. What this means can be seen at least in part from the negative examples provided by the parable of the Sower and the judgment as described by Paul in 1st Corinthians 3. In the case of the latter, many believers, and notably many of those who have not attained higher-level rewards, must stand by and watch while everything done in life is burned up before Christ's judgment seat – the individual believer is saved, "yet as though by fire", and with "loss [*of reward*]" (1Cor.3:15). The fire which "assays" the work of each of us will not damage the genuine "rewards" we have achieved (even in the case of those who, while not attaining to a crown, will yet have some legitimate production to show for their time in this world), but the "wood, hay and stubble", representing the false works, missteps, and wasted opportunities of this life, will be obliterated by divine fire which tests and evaluates its true quality. Those whose effort in this life is found to be at least on the level of "precious stones" will thus of necessity have taken some advantage of the opportunities given, will have pursued sanctification to a sufficient degree to be rewarded in a significant way, having walked in faith consistently enough to produce spiritual growth and achieve spiritual maturity.

Scripture very clearly does draw a very visible line in the sand between those who are spiritually mature and those who are not (1Cor.2:6 (cf. 1Cor.3:1); Col.1:28; Phil.3:15; Col.4:12; Heb.5:14; 6:1; Jas.1:4).

Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking *be mature*.

1st Corinthians 14:20 NASB

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, *you who are spiritual*, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

Galatians 6:1 NASB

We do, however, speak a message of wisdom *among the mature*, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.

1st Corinthians 2:6 NIV

These specifics are fleshed out in more detail in the parable of the Sower where spiritual maturity is described by its results. The good ground, even that which yields only this first higher-reward level of "30-fold", will of necessity have avoided the pitfalls of the previously considered type of ground, the ground plagued by thorns (cf. Matt.13:1-9; Mk.4:1-9; Lk.8.4-8):

"And he who was sown among the thorns, this is the one who hears the Word, but the worries of this life and the deceptiveness of wealth *stunt* the [productive power of the] Word so that he *becomes unproductive*."

Matthew 13:22

(18) "And others were sown among the thorns. These are those who heard the Word, (19) but the worries of life and the deceptiveness of wealth, and the lust for other things grow up [over them like thorns and weeds] and *stunt* the [productive power of the] Word so that they *become unproductive*."

Mark 4:18-19

"And as to that [seed] which fell among the thorns, these are they who have heard the Word, but who *are stunted* by worries and by wealth and by the pleasures of this life with the result that they *do not bear a full crop to harvest*."

Luke 8:14

Therefore in order to achieve spiritual maturity, worry, desire for wealth, and the placing of the pleasures of this life in front of God's will must all be overcome. This does not suggest that a flawless Christian walk must be perfected before achieving any true results for the Lord, but it does indicate that a believer who allows the worries of life, wealth or pleasure to dominate his or her outlook and modus vivendi will of necessity not be capable of producing a "level two" crop for Jesus Christ. For if we are too worried and concerned about the necessities of life, we have not yet built up our *faith* to the point necessary for trusting the Lord to take care of our problems as a mature believer should (cf. Matt.6:25-34; Lk.12:22-34). And if we are still looking first and foremost to the riches of this world for our satisfaction and security then we

have yet to develop a mature Christian *hope* which sets its heart on the rewards of eternity instead (cf. Matt.6:19-23; Lk.12:33-34). And as long as we are primarily focused upon our own pleasures rather than seeking to please the Lord, it is very clear that we have not yet progressed in our Christian *love* to the point of spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity, defined above as having grown to the point where in the basic Christian virtues we have effectively turned our backs on the world and towards the Lord instead is the entry point to the field of battle whereon the higher level rewards may be won.

Don't be a lover of this world, nor of what is in this world. If anyone is a lover of this world, a [genuine] love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world and its lust are passing away, but whoever does God's will is [going] to stay [alive with God] forever.

1st John 2:15-17

As seen in this and in many other verses, sanctification, the turning away from sin and carnality generally is an important part of the spiritual growth equation: a good defense is essential for any military operation or competitive contest. But as in both of these secular analogies, defense cannot win on its own. Even more important in attaining spiritual maturity is our spiritual offense, and that process is all about God's truth: taking pains to seek it out, listen to it respectfully, take it into our hearts by believing it, and then applying it to our lives – actually acting and behaving out of faith, hope and love in a truly godly and correct way, based upon what is actually God's will as known from His truth (rather than merely upon immature assumptions).

(11) Christ Himself appointed some of us apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers (12) in order *to prepare* all of His holy people for their own ministry work, that the *entire body of Christ might thus be built up*, (13) until *we all reach that unifying goal* of believing what is right (i.e., "faith", Greek: πίστις, *pistis*) and of giving our complete allegiance (Greek: ἐπίγνωσις, *epignosis*) to the Son of God, that each of us might be a *perfect person*, that is, that we might attain to that standard of *maturity* whose "attainment" is defined by Christ; (14) that we may *no longer be immature*, swept off-course and carried headlong by every breeze of so-called teaching that emanates from the trickery of men in their readiness to do anything to cunningly work their deceit, (15) but rather that we may, by embracing the truth in love, *grow up in all respects* with Christ, who is the head of the Church, as our model. (16) In this way, the entire body of the Church, fit and joined together by Him through the sinews He powerfully supplies to each and every part, *works out its own growth* for the *building up of itself* in love.

Ephesians 4:11-16

The "goal" mentioned in verse thirteen above is described as consisting of *pistis*, faith (i.e., "believing") and "complete allegiance" (i.e., *epignosis*). The linking of these two words here is key. The latter word is usually translated (insufficiently) as "knowledge"; but while there are a number of Greek words for mere knowledge, the prefix *epi-* on this critically important New Testament technical term shows direction: this is not just something understood – this is something understood and effectively *applied*. *Epignosis* is knowledge which is believed, and

which has been completely internalized by faith (1Cor.13:12; 2Cor.1:13; Eph.4:13; Col.1:9-10; 2:2; 1Tim.2:4; 4:3; 2Tim.2:25; 3:7; Tit.1:1; 2Pet.2:20-21; cf. Rom.1:28; 1:32; 3:20; 10:2; Eph.1:17; Phil.1:9; Col.1:6; 3:10; Philem.1:6; 2Pet.1:2-3; 1:8). *Epignosis* transforms the person who has fully digested it, because this new "information" is not only part of the memory – it has also critically become part of the conscience, forming and reforming the inner-person to see and to act in a completely new and different way. *Epignosis* causes internal change which produces external results. Thus, it is only by believing truth that true spiritual growth takes place. True spiritual growth is an "inside-out" process. We can clean and scrub the outside of the cup ad nauseam (as the Pharisees did), but this will never produce growth. We can adopt the most rigorous code of personal behavior (as the Pharisees did), but this will not bring us closer to God, nor will it prepare us to live for Christ and to serve Christ. Committing facts to memory may help a person pass a secular, written test. Committing divine truth to the heart through faith is the only thing that contributes to a believer's passing of life's spiritual tests which alone harden and develop faith, focus and sharpen hope, and motivate and direct love in response to our Lord Jesus Christ in the cause of His Church.

After all, it is possible to be "ever learning" but "never come to an understanding of the truth", because when the "knowledge" or "understanding" (as it is in this passage, 2nd Timothy 3:7) is only *gnosis*, mere academic appreciation of some abstract principle, there is no inner change, no spiritual growth. Only the incorporation of divine truth into the heart by faith, only God's knowledge *believed*, has the potential of transforming our inner-man and rendering us useful to Jesus Christ so as to produce for Him and His Church. Even attending a Bible study where the truth is taught genuinely, accurately and in great detail (a rarity to be sure in this Laodicean era of the Church) will not in and of itself produce spiritual growth: *truth has to be believed to become usable; truth has to be believed to become epignosis.*

The passage quoted above, Ephesians 4:11-16, also shows very clearly the method by which the Body of Christ is to be built up: the teaching of the Word of God among the entire community of believers by gifted and prepared men for the purpose of spiritual maturity, a blessed situation which in turn empowers the gifts of all, and in a blessed "feed-back loop" results in more growth and more effective service by all. This is the ideal process to which we have been called. Sadly, Christian fellowships today where the teaching of the truth exists beyond even a superficial level are few and far between. But even if such a fellowship is found, God's truth in Jesus Christ *must be believed* to be of any benefit. Only by this essential spiritual mechanism is *epignosis* assimilated, God's truth made usable for the Spirit in the believer's heart, and spiritual growth attained.⁵⁴²

(7) I have fought the good fight. I have completed my course. I have kept the faith. (8) In the future there is reserved for me *the crown of righteousness* which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that [great] day [of judgment] – and not only to me, but to all who have loved His appearance (i.e., who have exercised consistent love for Jesus Christ in anticipation of His return).

2nd Timothy 4:7-8

Righteousness comes by faith to all who believe in Jesus Christ (Rom.1:17; 3:22; 4:3-24; 9:30-31; 10:6; Gal.3:6; 5:5; Phil.3:9; Heb.11:7; Jas.2:23). However, it is not by entry-level faith that

this crown is won, but by "keeping" the faith, defined above as "fighting the good fight" and "completing the course" which God has laid out for us that believers earn this award. We all have God's righteousness in Jesus Christ, but only those who have achieved spiritually maturity actually live in consonance with the righteousness all believers positionally possess. The crown of righteousness is given for the witness of maturity, for achieving a measure of spiritual growth whereby a person actually "lives like a Christian", staying true to the faith and its principles ("I have kept the faith"), looking forward to the rewards of eternity more than earthly ones ("the crown . . . which the Lord will award me on that day"), and loving the Lord more than this world ("[having] loved His appearance"). Faith, hope and love, the three basic virtues of the Christian walk, become fully functional at the point of spiritual maturity (1Cor.13:13).⁵⁴³ In 2nd Timothy 4:7-8 quoted above, Paul in characteristic humility does not lay claim to the next two levels of reward, the crown of life (given for endurance of testing) and the crown of glory (given for completion of ministry) – although if there has ever been a "triple crown winner" in the Church, it is most assuredly the apostle Paul. Instead, as an encouragement and an exhortation to "follow me", he holds out the promise of this first crown, the crown of righteousness, to "all" who have come to the point of a solid, mature faith, a focused and vibrant hope, and a genuine and constant love for Jesus Christ. Most if not all believers have some degree of faith beyond the basic "mustard seed" which brought them into union with Christ. Most if not all believers have some hope of the resurrection and the glories of eternity to the point that these truths form a part of their Christian motivation and encouragement. And most if not all believers love Jesus Christ to the point of doing or having done something for Him, His truth, His Church, in response to His sacrifice on our behalf by which we have been saved. Spiritual maturity, however, is the point where all three of these representative virtues are fully formed, complete, and "ripe". Just as we can watch the development of any fruit or vegetable as it grows, from being just barely discernible, to nearly full-sized yet green, to ripe and ready for picking, so it is in the case of a believer's spiritual growth. There are various degrees of size, quality, color and overall "goodness" in any ripe fruit or vegetable – and indeed in the Christian life God has set no limit or end to the potential for goodness which may be attained – yet what all mature believers have in common is this "ripeness" or discernible, distinct maturity. Immature believers may occasionally (and inconsistently) manifest some or all of the characteristics identified with these basic Christian virtues, but just as there is a clear difference between a green tomato, whatever its size, and a ripe red one, so those who have not yet attained to spiritual maturity are obvious – certainly to God, usually to other believers, and also often to the world at large. In the same way, mature believers are also known "by their [ripe] fruit" to be honorable and faithful followers of Jesus Christ (cf. Matt.7:15-20; Jn.15:1-17). The mature witness of our lives in effectively and consistently living up to the standard of righteousness which we have in Jesus Christ through faith is the essential produce which yields this second level reward, the crown of righteousness.

Level 3 Rewards: The Crown of Life – The "Hope" Level of Spiritual Production

The crown of life, represented by the 60-fold production in the parable of the Sower and by the "silver" of 1st Corinthians 3:12, is the "hope level" of higher reward. It is achieved by those who demonstrate the hope they have in eternal rewards above earthly considerations, mature believers who endure significant testing successfully by preferring eternal life to this life. Winners of the crown of life of necessity have first attained spiritual maturity. This mature

faith and faithfulness is then tested in the crucible of life in order to refine it further and also to demonstrate its true quality to the world of men and angels both. Just as the righteous life consistent with that righteousness by faith we all receive through faith in Jesus Christ is a witness to the world, reflecting the grace and goodness of God, to an even greater degree the perseverance of mature believers under severe pressure and tribulation yields unmistakable proof that such individuals really do esteem God more than anything in this life, and that Jesus' opinion – and the eternal life and rewards He promises – are more real to them and more important to them than anything this world of dust and decay could possibly offer.

(6) In anticipation of this ultimate deliverance, your joy overflows, though at present it may be your lot to suffer for a time through various trials to the end that your faith may be shown to be genuine. (7) But your faith, when proven genuine in the crucible of life, *will result in praise, glory and honor* for you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

1st Peter 1:6-7

Many of the believers being addressed in the passage above had matured spiritually, and were at the time undergoing intensive pressure and testing. Specifically, the recipients of this letter were experiencing social ostracism along with legal and economic sanctions as the new "religion" of Christianity began to spread throughout the Roman world in the mid to late first century, and to incur increasing opposition as it did so. All truly good intentions on the part of Christians will be opposed by the evil one, and the reality of satanic opposition at every step and at every stage of spiritual advance is a scriptural fact. However, it is also very much the case that mature believers come in for – and are allowed to come in for – attacks of greater intensity. As the book of Job makes abundantly clear, such exceptional testing and tribulation really is "a compliment", though it doubtless will seldom seem so at the time. Believers who have not yet attained the solidity and consistency of faith which is defined by spiritual maturity are incapable of bearing up under such concentrated satanic attack – and God never puts upon us more than we are capable of bearing.

You have not suffered any testing beyond normal human [experience]. And God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your capacity, but, along with the test, He will grant you the way out, so that you can bear up under it.

1st Corinthians 10:13

It may indeed often *seem* to us that the load put upon us is impossible to carry, but that is part of such tests. To grow beyond the basic level of maturity, we have to learn to trust God that though things seem unbearable to us, He is faithful and will see us through, and a large part of gaining and retaining that perspective is necessarily based upon the anticipation of future rewards (Heb.11:6).

(24) By faith, Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, (25) and *chose instead to suffer maltreatment* with the people of God rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin, because he *considered the reproach* [suffered on behalf] of Christ *greater riches* than the treasure vaults of Egypt. (26) *For he was looking to his reward.*

Hebrews 11:24-26

For believers who have grown up spiritually, this next level of resistance to our progress is essential if that mature faith is to be refined and made even more resilient. In Peter's analogy (1Pet.1:6-7, previously quoted), we see precisely what God intends. Just as steel is tempered in a crucible, so fiery testing is essential to strengthen faith. In order for our faith to be honed into a focused hope capable of truly and experientially seeing the reward ahead as more valuable than anything in this life and as worth whatever suffering and significant trouble must be endured on this earth, we must successfully pass through trials and tribulation beyond the common sort (cf. Mk.10:30; Acts 14:12; 2Thes.1:3-4; 1Pet.2:19-21; 4:12). Only in this way does one earn the crown of life.

Have no fear of what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Demonstrate faithfulness unto death, *and I will give you the crown of life.*

Revelation 2:10

The mark of a believer who has successfully negotiated the hurdle of this penultimate level of reward is a positive attitude in the midst of suffering. That is to say, the believer who has mastered this third level of spiritual advance not only endures severe testing with faith intact, but can actually be loving, hopeful, and even joyous in the process – an utter impossibility for anyone who has yet to mature spiritually or who has yet to be refined to the point of actually esteeming eternity and its rewards beyond this life. Only such a heavenly perspective is capable of laughing through tears.

Brothers, when you are being beset with all manner of trials, *take pains to be joyful.* For you should keep in mind that this testing of your faith develops perseverance. So let your perseverance develop fully, that you may become fully mature and entitled to a full reward, having been found lacking in no respect.

James 1:2-4

And not only this, but *let us glory in our tribulations*, knowing that tribulation produces patience, and patience produces proven character, and proven character produces hope – and this hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us.

Romans 5:3-5

For I do not consider these present hardships in any way comparable to the glory destined to be revealed for us.

Romans 8:18

Level 4 Rewards: The Crown of Glory – The "Love" Level of Completed Ministry

The crown of glory, represented by the 100-fold production in the parable of the Sower and by the "gold" of 1st Corinthians 3:12, is the "love level" of highest reward. It is achieved by those who demonstrate the love they have for Jesus Christ by successfully, faithfully and consistently completing the ministries He has assigned them for the building up of His Church. Winners of the crown of life must first necessarily have attained spiritual maturity, and then had that

mature faith refined into a constant, eternal hope through serious and significant testing. Having been thus spiritually "blooded", these battle-tested veterans are then prepared for and capable of being used by the Lord for the edification of His Body through the effective employment of their various spiritual gifts in ministries which He Himself assigns (1Cor.12:5; cf. Acts 9:15; Rom.1:1). Having first properly oriented to our place in the world by faith through our attainment of spiritual maturity, and having thereafter had this faith refined into a surpassing "blessed" hope focused on Jesus Christ, a hope which "anchors us" to the heavenly perspective in the face of temporal pressures and tribulations (Tit.2:13; Heb.6:19), we are ready to direct this mature faith and tested hope to our fellow believers in love for Jesus Christ and out of love for Him and His Church. This effective deployment of mature love in hopeful anticipation of reward will always involve the successful completion of a distinct ministry corresponding to the individual believer's particular spiritual gift(s).

An important caveat here is that Jesus is interested in the *actual* building up of His Church, not in wasted or only apparent effort expended in activities of only superficial significance. Only those whose faith is mature and whose hope has been tested are qualified to contend for this highest level of reward, and only ministry which actually does contribute to the salvation of unbelievers and/or the building up and progress of the faith of believers is capable of fulfilling this requirement. Moreover, although the effort involved necessary to win this highest crown will unquestionably be considerable, requiring faithful labor of long-standing duration, we should nonetheless be very reluctant to see such ministries only in traditional terms. It is not only those occupations and activities which are traditionally seen as "full-time ministry" that can qualify a person for the crown of glory. There is no formal "track" for such things, and the individual possibilities for ministering to Christ's Church in a significant way are as numerous and varied as the number of spiritual gifts multiplied by the various circumstances of each of us and of our brothers and sisters in Christ (Rom.12:6-8; 1Cor.12:4-31; Eph.4:7-16).

As each one has received a [particular spiritual] gift, [so let us be] ministering it to each other as good stewards of the *multi-faceted* grace of God.

1st Peter 4:10

Furthermore, it is important to remember that the choice of gift(s) we receive at salvation is the province of the Holy Spirit (1Cor.12:4; 12:11), and that the choice of specific ministry is the province our Lord Jesus Christ (1Cor.12:5). Therefore an essential part of effective ministry is the proper identification of our individual gifts and proper sphere of effort in support of the edification of Christ's Body – and only mature, tested believers are truly capable of allowing themselves to be led into just the right place so as to be used by the Lord in just the right way. Before the judgment seat of Christ, "many who are first will be last", and it will certainly be the case that many who are assumed in this life to be worthy of this highest award simply because of their role in traditional full-time ministry will not receive it, while others who are not even involved in anything that the traditional church visible has proclaimed to be a legitimate ministry will be called up to the "higher place" to the great surprise of all (Lk.14:7-11).

(1) So I urge the elders among you as a fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, even one who shares [with you] in the glory which is about to be revealed, (2) pastor the flock of God under your charge, overseeing them not out of compulsion but willingly in response to God, not

eager for shameful material gain, but out of genuine enthusiasm, (3) not lording it over the charges [entrusted to you], but as genuine examples to your flock. (4) And when the Chief Shepherd appears, *you will carry off in victory the crown of glory which will never fade.* 1st Peter 5:1-4 (cf. Heb.13:17)

The crown of glory is here promised by the apostle Peter to all pastors whose ministry is properly carried out (it is not denied to other believers, merely specifically promised to pastors by way of example). With a few choice contrasts, Peter characterizes the attitude of service we should all adopt. We should minister "not out of necessity, but willingly as God would have it; not looking for gain, but with eagerness, and not as overlords, but as examples to your flock" (v.2-3; cf. 1Cor.9:16). Caring for Christ's flock, the goal of all ministry and essential purpose of all spiritual gifts, was the issue emphasized by our Lord during His last recorded substantive conversation with Peter (Jn.21:15-19), and He repeatedly and emphatically made the point that all true love for Himself must manifest itself in ministry. If we truly do love Jesus Christ, then we will minister to His Body, the Church, according to the ministry we have each been assigned. Such ministry is the proof of our love, and is rewarded with the crown of glory. As Jesus told us in the parable of the faithful servant, service of this type will be richly rewarded at His return (Matt.24:45-51; Lk.12:41-48).

(2) For many who sleep in the dust will awake, some to eternal life, but the others to shame and eternal separation [from God]. (3) Then *those who have insight will shine like the shining forth of the dawn, even those who led the many to righteousness, like stars forever and ever.* Daniel 12:2-3

It is for this reason that love is the greatest of the virtues – not love as unbelievers or the world in general may define it, but love as God defines it, namely, loving Jesus with our whole heart, and reflecting that love in all we do in this life (Matt.7:12; 22:36-39).

But [until that future time of our Lord's return] there now remains faith, hope and love, these three [cardinal virtues] – and the greatest of these is love. 1st Corinthians 13:13

And to this end, along with your faith zealously develop morality, and along with morality, knowledge, and along with knowledge, self-control, and along with self-control, perseverance, and along with perseverance, godliness, and along with godliness, love of the brethren, and along with love of the brethren, love. For if these things be in your possession and increasing, they will render you neither unfit nor fruitless in your confession of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2nd Peter 1:5-8

The ultimate demonstration of such love is to be found in providing for our Lord's Body by fulfilling the ministries to which we have been called through the effective application of our respective spiritual gifts (cf. 2Pet.1:10 Greek).

(15) When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." (16) Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He

answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "*Take care of my sheep.*" (17) The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "*Feed my sheep.*"

John 21:15-17 NIV

In the same way you also, since you are [so] desirous of spiritual gifts, seek that you may abound [in them] for the purpose of *the edification of the Church.*

1st Corinthians 14:12

Let all these things (i.e., the functioning of the various spiritual gifts) be done for the purpose of *edification.*

1st Corinthians 14:26b

As we observed at the beginning of this section, the life of love, service and sacrifice of our dear Lord Jesus, and the glory He has received as a result, demonstrate beyond all question that the greatest rewards follow the greatest legitimate production. He was rejected by this world and made to wear a crown of thorns. But now He has been crowned with many crowns, and bears the Name that is above every Name so that it is to Him that all shall bow (Phil.2:9-10). If we would share in His glory and in His rewards to the full, we need to make it our business to follow Him wherever He leads, even if it be that such boldness means that we must share in His sufferings (Acts 5:41; Rom.8:17; 2Cor.1:5; Phil.1:29; 3:10; Col.1:24; 1Pet.2:21; cf. 2Cor.13:4; 13:9; Gal.6:17).

(28) "You are those who have *stood by me in my trials* (lit., "tests"). (29) And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, (30) so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

Luke 22:28-30 NIV

(12) Beloved, don't be amazed at the fiery ordeal of testing you are now undergoing, as if something out of the ordinary were happening to you. (13) But to the degree that you are [truly] *participating in Christ's sufferings*, be joyful about it, so that at His glorious revelation, you may also rejoice with great gladness.

1st Peter 4:12-13

(24) By faith, Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, (25) and chose instead to suffer maltreatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin, because he *considered the reproach* [suffered on behalf] *of Christ* greater riches than the treasure vaults of Egypt. (26) For he was *looking to his reward.*

Hebrews 11:24-26

(12) Therefore Jesus too, in order that He might sanctify the people through His own blood (i.e., His death on the cross), suffered outside the gate (i.e., separated from fellowship). (13) So then let us go out to Him outside of the camp (i.e., likewise choosing God over the world),

bearing His reproach.
Hebrews 13:12-13

e. The Consequences of the Judgment: Whatever loss of potential reward we may experience at Christ's judgment seat (1Cor.3:12-15), whatever embarrassment we may suffer for failure to live up to our full potential (Heb.13:17), and no matter how we may blush if our Lord Himself finds fault with our efforts here on earth (Rom.14:10-12; 2Cor.5:10-11), we may be sure that eternity for all those resurrected and face to face with our dear Savior in the New Jerusalem will be ecstatically blissful beyond our current comprehension. However, the prospect of eternal rewards instead of loss, of fulfilled rather than failed potential, and of hearing "Well done, good and faithful servant!" from the One we love the most ought to be sufficient motivation for us to grow "above the weeds" and produce a crop in response to His commands – as well as to make every effort day by day to ensure that we do not lose what we have worked so hard for hitherto (Col.2:18; 2Jn.1:8; Rev.3:11). For the rewards we earn during this very short time here on earth will last forever, and will be a source of joy to us and glory to Jesus Christ for all eternity.

As part of the "spoils of victory" which are distributed after the final defeat of the devil by our Lord at the second advent (compare Ps.110:1-7 with Is.53:12; cf. Eph.4:7-8; Lk.11:21), and which we will then be able to use and enjoy in our newly resurrected bodies, these eternal rewards to be received at this final, post-second advent judgment will be operative immediately upon reception for utilization and enjoyment during the Millennium (Rom.8:17; 1Cor.6:3; 2Tim.2:12; Rev.1:6; 2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4-6).

Therefore I will allot the great [of heart] to Him [as His portion of the plunder], and He will apportion plunder to the[se same] mighty [of heart].
Isaiah 53:12a

While Moses and Elijah (the most likely candidates to be seated at Christ's right and left hand; cf. Matt.20:23; Mk.10:40), the twelve apostles (Matt.19:28; Lk.22:28-30), and David (Jer.30:9; Hos.3:5) will have special roles during the thousand years (and this will no doubt be true of other exceptional believers of the Bible as well), all of us who take part in the resurrection will share Christ's millennial rule, having some part in His worldwide administration (with the higher positions of governance unquestionably going to those who receive higher levels of reward).⁵⁴⁴

(26) And to the one who wins the victory and gives heed to My works until the end, I will give to him authority over the nations. (27) And he will shepherd them with an iron rod and crush them like vessels of clay, just as I have received [the authority] from My Father.
Revelation 2:26-27

Given all that is at stake, it would certainly be to our eternal benefit to make maximum use of all that scripture has to say about eternal rewards, and motivate ourselves thereby to serve our Lord consistently and to the best of our ability here on earth, taking maximum advantage of the unique opportunity we have for glorifying Jesus Christ and earning laurels that will never fade in the process.

Don't you know that all the runners in the stadium run the race, but that only one receives the prize? Run in such a way so as to achieve what you are after. And again, everyone involved in competition exercises self-control in all respects. Those athletes go through such things so that they may receive a perishable crown of victory, but we do it to receive an imperishable one. So as I run this race of ours, I'm heading straight for the finish line; and as I box this bout of ours, I'm making every punch count. I'm "pummeling my body", one might say, bringing myself under strict control so that, after having preached [the gospel] to others, I might not myself be disqualified [from receiving the prize we all seek].

1st Corinthians 9:24-27

(12) [It is] not that I have already gotten [what I am striving for], nor that I have already completed [my course]. Rather, I am continuing to pursue [the prize] in hopes of fully acquiring it – [this prize for whose acquisition] I was myself acquired by Christ Jesus. (13) Brethren, I do not consider that I have already acquired it. This one thing only [do I keep in mind]. Forgetting what lies behind me [on the course] and straining towards the [course] ahead, (14) *I continue to drive straight for the tape*, towards the prize to which God has called us from the beginning [of our race] in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:12-14

II. The Wedding Supper of the Lamb

(7) Lift up your heads, O gates, And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in! (8) Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. (9) Lift up your heads, O gates, And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in! (10) Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory.

Psalms 24:7-10 NASB

(1) Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy. (2) How awesome is the Lord Most High, the great King over all the earth! (3) He subdued nations under us, peoples under our feet. (4) He chose our inheritance for us, the pride of Jacob, whom he loved. Selah (5) God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the Lord amid the sounding of trumpets. (6) Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. (7) For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise. (8) God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne. (9) The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham, for the kings of the earth belong to God; he is greatly exalted.

Psalms 47 NIV

(19) [Messiah speaks:] "Open for Me the gates of righteousness (i.e., the eastern gate of Jerusalem and the gate of the temple facing east)! I shall enter by them and praise the Lord. (20) This is the Lord's gate. The righteous will enter by it (i.e., through Christ; cf. Jn.10:1-9). (21) I shall praise You although You humbled Me (i.e., 1st Advent sufferings), for You have brought me deliverance (i.e., the victories of resurrection and Armageddon)." (22) [The chorus of celebrants responds:] "The Stone which the builders rejected has become the Cornerstone! (23) This has come from the Lord, and it is wondrous to our eyes! (24) This is the Day which the Lord has made (i.e., the 2nd Advent)! Let us rejoice and delight ourselves in it! (25) Yes, Lord, deliver us we pray (*hoshi'ah na'* = hosanna!) [from the Tribulation]. Yes, Lord, bless us

with prosperity (i.e., the blessings of the Millennial Kingdom)! (26) Blessed be the One (i.e., the Messiah) who is coming in the Name of the Lord! We greet you all (i.e., the Messiah and His retinue) from the house of the Lord! (27) The Lord is God! And He has caused His Light to shine upon us! Bind up the Sacrifice with ropes to the horns of the altar (i.e., the inaugural memorial sacrifice of the Millennial Kingdom meant to remind of the cross)."

Psalms 118:19-27

The triumphal entry of our Lord Jesus Christ into Jerusalem described in the prophetic, Messianic psalms above has already occurred at this point, as has our Lord's session in the temple in Jerusalem and His completion of the seven thunder judgments, including the judgment and evaluation of the Church, the Bride of Christ. With all these preliminary matters concluded, and before beginning of His day to day millennial reign, the most amazing celebration in the history of the world will take place, the celebratory banquet of our Lord's victory, the wedding supper of the Lamb. This feast is so named because it also serves to commemorate Jesus' winning and receiving His most precious possession, the Church, won at the cross and now placed in His arms forever through resurrection.

(6) And I heard something like the sound of a great crowd, like the sound of many waters, and like the sound of powerful peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah (i.e., "praise the Lord")! For God our Lord the Almighty has begun His kingly reign! (7) Let us rejoice and be jubilant, and let us give glory to Him, because the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His Bride (lit., "wife"; cf. Rev.21:9) has prepared herself. (8) And it has been given her to wear a pure, resplendent [gown] of the finest material (now this fine material represents the righteous acts of His holy ones [believers])." (9) And [the angel] said to me, "Write this down: Happy are those who have been called to the [wedding] supper of the Lamb! These [words] of mine are the true words of God".

Revelation 19:6-9

We have already studied the scriptural image of the Church as Christ's Bride (in part 5 of this series, section V, "The Resurrection of the Lamb's Bride"; cf. Eph.5:22-32). However it is important to note here that the celebration of this wedding is to be found even in Old Testament prophecy. The Song of Solomon (as has been traditionally understood in Calvinistic circles⁵⁴⁵), is an allegory relating to Christ as the Bridegroom and the Church as His Bride (SS 3:7-11; 8:11-12; cf. 1Chron.22:5-19; Solomon is the typological though not the prophetic Son of David), and this analogy of the Messiah and His Betrothed is also found most notably in the Messianic marriage psalm, Psalm 45:

For the director of music. To the tune of "Lilies." Of the Sons of Korah. A maskil.

A wedding song.

1 My heart is stirred by a noble theme
as I recite my verses for the king;
my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer.
2 You are the most excellent of men
and your lips have been anointed with grace,

since God has blessed you forever.
3 Gird your sword upon your side, O mighty one;
clothe yourself with splendor and majesty.
4 In your majesty ride forth victoriously
in behalf of truth, humility and righteousness;
let your right hand display awesome deeds.
5 Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the king's enemies;
let the nations fall beneath your feet.
6 Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever;
a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.
7 You love righteousness and hate wickedness;
therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions
by anointing you with the oil of joy.
8 All your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia;
from palaces adorned with ivory
the music of the strings makes you glad.
9 Daughters of kings are among your honored women;
at your right hand is the royal bride in gold of Ophir.
10 Listen, O daughter, consider and give ear:
Forget your people and your father's house.
11 The king is enthralled by your beauty;
honor him, for he is your lord.
12 The Daughter of Tyre will come with a gift,
men of wealth will seek your favor.
13 All glorious is the princess within her chamber;
her gown is interwoven with gold.
14 In embroidered garments she is led to the king;
her virgin companions follow her
and are brought to you.
15 They are led in with joy and gladness;
they enter the palace of the king.
16 Your sons will take the place of your fathers;
you will make them princes throughout the land.
17 I will perpetuate your memory through all generations;
therefore the nations will praise you for ever and ever.
Psalm 45:1-17 NIV

Notable in the verses above is the presence here too of the "friends of the Bride" (vv.14-15). These "friends" were also seen in Revelation 19:9 as those invited to the great wedding feast ("Happy are those who have been called to the [wedding] supper of the Lamb!"). These individuals will include all who are at this point believers in Jesus Christ, and will no doubt be mainly that large company of Jews who turned to Jesus immediately upon witnessing His return, although gentiles who have done so will certainly not be excluded (cf. Zech.8:23).

People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.

Luke 13:29 NIV (cf. Matt.8:11-12; 22:1-14; 25:1-13; Lk.14:16-24)

As to the location of the banquet, it will indeed take place at Jerusalem.

(6) On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine – the best of meats and the finest of wines. (7) On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; (8) he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. (9) In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."

Isaiah 25:6-9 NIV

The special preparations for assembly will include the supernatural "canopy" which will, among other things, shield the congregation from the elements.⁵⁴⁶

And the Lord will create over Mount Zion and over all her assemblies a cloud – one of smoke by day, and of a shining flame of fire by night. For there will be a canopy above the glory [of His presence, covering it] entirely. It will be a shelter from the heat by day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain.

Isaiah 4:5-6

Exclusion from this feast will be a cause of grief and regret, especially for those who have been removed from the earth by the fifth and sixth thunder judgments (see section I above):

(11) I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. (12) But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Matthew 8:11-12 NIV (cf. Lk.13:28; Rev.3:19-20)

Happy indeed will those be who respond to the Messiah when He returns, for they will be invited to celebrate gloriously on that great day of days in company with all who kept the faith in the great times of trial to come and rose to meet the Lord at His return! For these wonderful and blessed events are not vain hopes, but future realities decreed by the unswerving will of God; they are "the true words of God" (Rev.19:9b).

The length of the feast per se is unknown, but will no doubt continue for many weeks (cf. 2Chron.30:23). In many respects, however, the Millennium itself will be a celebration of the victory and reign of Jesus Christ, 1,000 years of blessing unparalleled since the garden of Eden, and not to be matched until the commencement of the eternal state. For good reason, then, the Prophets and the Psalms in particular are replete with songs of victory, celebration and gratitude which anticipate this wondrous moment, and which will undoubtedly be sung on that

grand occasion with their depth of meaning only then fully appreciated (e.g., Ps.47; 76; 95 - 100; Is.26).

Bless our God, O peoples, and make the sound of His praises heard. He has preserved our lives, and has not let our feet stumble. Yes, O God, You tested us, and You refined us as [one] refines silver. You brought us into the [prison] fortress. You set tribulation upon us (lit., "on our loins"). You made men ride over our heads. We went through fire and water. But in spite [of all this] You have brought us forth into [a place of] refreshment (i.e., deliverance).

Psalms 66:8-12

Let us then make it a personal priority not only to be a part of that wonderful celebration, but to occupy a prime place from which to enjoy it to the full as a result of our life's work for Jesus Christ.

(7) When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: (8) "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. (9) If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. (10) But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. (11) For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Luke 14:7-11 NIV

III. The Millennial Reign of Jesus Christ: Revelation 20:4-6

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them (i.e., they sat in judgment), namely the persons who had been executed (lit., "beheaded with an ax") because of their witness for Jesus and because of the Word of God, [that is] whoever did not worship the beast or his image and did not take the mark on their forehead and on their hand. For they came to life and began to rule with Christ for a thousand years. (5) This is the first resurrection (i.e., that of *all* believers). ⁵⁴⁷ (6) Blessed and holy is the one who has a share in this first resurrection! Over these the second death (i.e., condemnation on unbelievers) has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with Him for the thousand years.
Revelation 20:4-6

With these verses Revelation introduces and "covers" in broad strokes the entire millennial reign of Jesus Christ (the verses which follow move to its termination and the "Gog-Magog" revolt). The brevity of the account is not entirely unexpected. As we have seen from the very beginning of this series, Revelation assumes that we have "done our homework", and that we as readers, or, more particularly, as teachers, will bring to bear the other pertinent passages, doctrines, and information that may be found elsewhere in scripture. As it happens, of course, the blessed reign of the Messiah is a subject very well covered in the Old Testament in particular so that there is indeed much to say. Before we supplement this passage, however, we should not fail to notice the special emphasis these verses place on the role the newly resurrected Church will play in the administration of our Lord's earthly kingdom, in particular,

those believers who were martyred during the Tribulation for the sake of Jesus Christ. As we have already observed in great detail, the entire Church has already been resurrected by this time and will be rewarded in this way, and Revelation 20:4-6 neither says nor means to imply otherwise (especially when the correct translation is figured in; see the preceding footnote). But it is certainly the case that the tribulational martyrs for Jesus come in here for special mention with the unquestionable purpose of providing special encouragement. For those whose lot it will be to negotiate the Tribulation, to be persecuted by the beast and his followers, and to suffer death on Christ's behalf, the prospect of a solid reward which includes reigning with Him is put here as a given. This special guarantee is thus a pledge from God meant to motivate and support this group of believers during the Tribulation's darkest days: no matter how hopeless things may seem, and no matter that the cost of true discipleship during that terrible time will be one's life, God has promised salvation, and beyond salvation, the reward of sharing in Christ's rule for all those who reject antichrist's sovereignty, preferring to be executed for the Name of Jesus rather than to bow down to the beast.

Introduction:

(19) So repent and turn back [to God] for the blotting out of your sins, so that times of revival may come from the Lord, (20) and so that He may send to you the One acknowledged as the Christ [Messiah], [namely] Jesus, (21) who must remain in heaven (lit., "whom heaven must receive") *until the times of the restoration of all things* of which God has spoken through the mouths of His holy prophets from of old.

Acts 3:19-21

The Millennium will be a literal, one thousand year period wherein Jesus Christ will personally rule the restored earth without any interference from the devil or his followers. The Messiah's thousand year reign over the entire earth from Mount Zion will be an inexplicably blessed time, the penultimate Eden whose glories will eclipse those of any other time in human history since the garden of Eden and until the ultimate Eden commences, the eternal state and New Jerusalem (see section VII below).⁵⁴⁸ For the storm of the Tribulation has passed (Jer.25:32), and Jesus Christ Himself will now preside over an unprecedented time of calm, peace and plenty, ruling His kingdom in perfect righteousness and justice under Edenic conditions. For just as God previously restored the earth and heavens from a condition of catastrophic darkness to habitable status in order to create mankind in answer to Satan's rebellion, so during the Millennium the earth will witness a return to much of its earlier glory.⁵⁴⁹ The fact that in the Millennium we shall still be "in time" (and therefore still coexisting with sin, even though Satan and his angels will be imprisoned until the Millennium's end) means that the environment on earth will not be "perfect", but it will provide the most exquisitely wonderful conditions seen since Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden.

Just as the seventh Genesis day was a demonstration that everything God had done in re-creating the earth "was good" (Gen.1:31), so the Millennium will demonstrate that only a world ruled by God (through His anointed Son), can be made "good". The earth of Genesis chapter one is gradually reclaimed from a condition of darkness and devastation (following God's judgment upon Satan's revolt) by systematically ridding it of all factors unfavorable to human life and habitation, both by separation from elements hostile to life, and by replacement and

filling with the elements necessary for life.⁵⁵⁰ In an analogous fashion, the millennial earth under the perfect rule of Jesus Christ will restore "goodness" to the world again, not only by removing from it the most pernicious source of evil (the devil and his angels and the world system of evil they promote: Rev.20:1-3),⁵⁵¹ but also by the provision of all things necessary to bring about blessing and abundance under the perfect reign of Jesus Christ. Only when Satan and his followers have been removed from interference in human life, and only when the world finds itself under the direct reign of the Son of God (Ps.2; Rev.19:6) will the earth be "good" again, and it is important for believers to understand that without these two key factors of the devil's removal and Christ's return, nothing approaching paradise on earth is remotely possible.

The Millennium will see, through the perfect rule of the Son of God, the reclaiming of God's direct control over the earth, and of Man's as well in the person of Jesus Christ, the Last Adam, reclaiming that which was lost by the first Adam. Though sin will not disappear until the present heavens and earth are destroyed by fire and replaced with the new heavens and earth (Is.65:17; 66:22; 2Pet.3:7; 3:10-13; Rev.21:1), the Millennium will be a period that begins and ends with winnowing and purification (i.e., the seven thunder judgments of section I above, and the final judgments of men and angels covered in sections IV-VI below). Like the seventh Genesis day, the Millennium will be a time sanctified (i.e., made holy) by God Himself, who will provide mankind with a world of true justice and righteousness enforced by the Son of God Himself (Ps.2; Rev.19:11; cf. 2Pet.3:13). According to Deuteronomy 5:15, a major purpose of the Sabbath day was for Israel to remember their deliverance from Egypt by God's mighty power. It was to be a day of rest so that even those without other recourse, servants and animals, might have some repose (Deut.5:14). Just so, the Millennium will be a time to remember God's deliverance of the world from the devil's grasp, so vividly and horribly experienced in the Great Tribulation which immediately preceded it (Rev.20:1-3), a time to enjoy the rest and blessing of the Christ's perfect rule, and to celebrate the great deliverance God has wrought from the worst period of human history:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me [the Messiah], for the Lord has anointed Me. He has sent Me to proclaim victory on behalf of the afflicted, to bind up the wounds of the broken hearted, to announce liberation for the captives and freedom for the prisoners, to announce the year of the Lord's favor [the Millennium], and a day of vengeance for our God [the 2nd Advent], to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who grieve for Zion, to anoint them with joy as with a crown in place of their grief, and to dress them in garments of praise in place of their faint spirits.

Isaiah 61:1-3a

1. The Unique Physical Conditions of the Millennium

a. The Millennial Rule of Christ:

1 Endow the king with your justice, O God,
the royal son with your righteousness.

2 He will judge your people in righteousness,
your afflicted ones with justice.
3 The mountains will bring prosperity to the people,
the hills the fruit of righteousness.
4 He will defend the afflicted among the people
and save the children of the needy;
he will crush the oppressor.
5 He will endure as long as the sun,
as long as the moon, through all generations.
6 He will be like rain falling on a mown field,
like showers watering the earth.
7 In his days the righteous will flourish;
prosperity will abound till the moon is no more.
8 He will rule from sea to sea
and from the River to the ends of the earth.
9 The desert tribes will bow before him
and his enemies will lick the dust.
10 The kings of Tarshish and of distant shores
will bring tribute to him;
the kings of Sheba and Seba
will present him gifts.
11 All kings will bow down to him
and all nations will serve him.
12 For he will deliver the needy who cry out,
the afflicted who have no one to help.
13 He will take pity on the weak and the needy
and save the needy from death.
14 He will rescue them from oppression and violence,
for precious is their blood in his sight.
15 Long may he live!
May gold from Sheba be given him.
May people ever pray for him
and bless him all day long.
16 Let grain abound throughout the land;
on the tops of the hills may it sway.
Let its fruit flourish like Lebanon;
let it thrive like the grass of the field.
17 May his name endure forever;
may it continue as long as the sun.
All nations will be blessed through him,
and they will call him blessed.
18 Praise be to the Lord God, the God of Israel,
who alone does marvelous deeds.
19 Praise be to his glorious name forever;
may the whole earth be filled with his glory.
Amen and Amen.

Psalm 72:1-19 NIV

Old Testament prophecy is replete with passages which anticipate the Messiah's coming reign, for He is the fulfillment and focus of all God's promises to Israel (2Sam.7:14; Jer.33:14-17; Lk.1:32-33). In the psalm immediately above, penned by Solomon who, as David's son, is here a type of David's greater Son, the Messiah, we see expressed many of the most salient aspects of Jesus' millennial rule. While that time will be one of blessing in every conceivable way (and all the more so given that it will follow immediately upon the absolute worst of times during antichrist's tribulational rule), certain particular features of His reign and kingdom are continually emphasized in prophecy:

1) The Exceptional Joy and Gladness Occasioned at its Establishment: The day of our Lord's return will be one of delight for the entire world and especially for Israel, but also for everyone else (that is, apart from those who have opposed Him: Is.9:3; 12:3; 12:6; 35:1-10; 42:11; 44:23; 49:13; 55:3-11; 60:1; 61:3-7; 65:18; Jer.31:4-13; 33:9-11; Zeph.3:14-20; Zech.8:19; 10:7).

(7) How comely on the mountains are the feet of the one who gives the good news, the one who proclaims peace, who gives the good news of fair tidings, who proclaims salvation, saying to Zion, "Your God has become King!" (8) The voice of the watchers [is heard]. They lift up their voice. They rejoice together. For [all] will see [Him] face to face when the Lord (i.e., the Messiah) returns to Zion. (9) Break forth [in song] and rejoice altogether, O ruins of Jerusalem! For the Lord has had compassion on His people. He has redeemed Jerusalem. (10) The Lord has uncovered His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God!

Isaiah 52:9-10

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me [the Messiah], for the Lord has anointed Me. He has sent Me to proclaim victory on behalf of the afflicted, to bind up the wounds of the broken hearted, to announce liberation for the captives and freedom for the prisoners, to announce *the year* (i.e., season) *of the Lord's favor* [the Millennium], and a day of vengeance for our God [the 2nd Advent], to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who grieve for Zion, to anoint them with joy as with a crown in place of their grief, and to dress them in garments of praise in place of their faint spirits.

Isaiah 61:1-3a

2) Its Exceptional Justice and Righteousness: The righteous rule of Christ will suppress the effects of the sin nature so pronounced in our own experience (e.g., crime and war; cf. Zech.5), meting out swift and perfect justice upon all malefactors and on behalf all who are unjustly oppressed (Ps.2:9-12; 72:1-2; 72:12-14; Is.1:26-31; 9:6-7; 11:3-5; 16:4-5; 32:1-8; 33:5; 42:1-4; 51:4-7; Jer.23:5-6; 33:15; Ezek.34:16; Zech.9:9).

But the Lord shall be seated as king forever: He sets up His throne for judgment, to judge the world in righteousness, to render justice to its peoples.

Psalm 9:7-8

Justice will dwell in the desert, and righteousness in the cultivated fields.
Isaiah 32:16

No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise.
Isaiah 60:19 NIV

3) Its Exceptional Peace and Prosperity: The Millennium will be a time of true peace and prosperity, of security and plenty such as has not been seen on earth since the garden of Eden (Is.11:6-9; 32:16-20; 65:25; Jer.33:16; Zeph.3:15b; cf. 1Kng.8:56). Indeed, the Millennium is the penultimate Eden.⁵⁵²

For He will judge between the nations, and chasten many peoples. Then they will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will no longer raise the sword against nation, and they will not study war any longer.
Isaiah 2:4 (cf. Mic.4:3-4)

(6) For a child is born to us, and a Son is given to us. Dominion shall rest on his shoulder, and His name will be called "He whose counsel is wondrous", "Mighty God", "the Father of Eternity", "the Prince of Prosperity". (7) To His dominion and its prosperity there will be no limit or end. He will establish it and lay its foundation on David's throne and over his kingdom, in justice and righteousness, now and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.
Isaiah 9:6-7

(4) Then He (i.e., the Messiah) will arise and will shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the Name of the Lord His God. And they will dwell [in peace], for then He will be great to the ends of the earth. (5) And He will be their peace.
Micah 5:4-5a

He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.
Zechariah 9:10 NIV

4) The Most Profound Blessing of All: The Presence and Personal Rule of Jesus Christ (see also Ps.2; 45; 48; 72; Is.2:1-5; Ezek.48:35; Dan.7:14; Zech.14; Lk.1:32; Rev.19:11-20:6):

The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed; for the Lord Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders, gloriously.
Isaiah 24:23 NIV

In those days and at that time, I will make a Branch of righteousness sprout forth for David, and He will accomplish justice and righteousness on the earth.
Jeremiah 33:15

(13) I kept looking during my vision of that night, and behold – with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming up, and He approached the Ancient of Days (i.e., the Father) and they brought Him before Him. (14) And to Him was given dominion and honor and a kingdom, so that all nations and peoples and tongues should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away, and His kingdom one which will not be destroyed.
Daniel 7:13-14

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, too small to be numbered among the clans of Judah, from you I will bring forth the One who is to rule over Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, even from the days of eternity.
Micah 5:2

Thus says the Lord: I will return to Zion and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And Jerusalem will be called "the City of Truth", and "the Mountain of the Lord, the Mountain of Holiness".
Zechariah 8:3

As discussed previously, the 2nd Advent followed by Christ's millennial reign is the capstone of phase two of God's plan for replacing the devil and restoring the world to complete harmony and perfection.⁵⁵³ In phase one, God created a new order of creatures, mankind, as the ultimate source for completely replacing Satan and his angels. The original man, Adam, and his spouse were capable of sin, and their eventual exercising of this capability plunged them (immediately) and their progeny (at birth) into a natural state of sin. Contrary to the devil's design and expectation, however, God provided the means for redeeming Adam and Eve along with any and all of their progeny who would desire redemption through the gracious gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, the Last Adam, and in every generation before and since believers have been enlisting into the roles of His Church. Christ's assumption of true humanity and His sacrifice on the cross opened the way for the next stage of replacement, the resurrection of believing humanity, with the way already having been led by the "Prince-Ruler of our salvation" (Heb.2:10):

When He had accomplished the cleansing of [our] sins, He took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high.
Hebrews 1:3b

Phase one laid the ground work for replacement, providing a new Ruler (Jesus Christ) to replace the present ruler of the world (Satan), a new kingdom (the Kingdom of Heaven) to replace the present kingdom of darkness (Col.1:13), and new subjects (believers bought with the blood of Christ) to attend the King in place of the devil's angelic followers (Phil.3:20). During phase one, these replacements are essentially such in principle only as they await the fulfillment of the two further phases: Christ has been glorified, but has not yet returned to commence His reign; the Kingdom is here in principle (in the persons of believers and the Spirit of Christ: Lk.17:21), but is not yet functioning in practice (cf. Matt.11:12); and the Church is coming rapidly to completion, but has not yet been resurrected. During phase two, Christ our King will return (the Second Advent), and will lay claim to His Kingdom (Rev.11:15), while His Church (His Body of believers called out during the first six days of human history) will be resurrected to share in His millennial rule (1Cor.15:23). As the rightful King, the Messiah, our

Lord Jesus Christ replaces the devil as the ruler of this world from the time of the 2nd Advent, and will rule until the end of time when eternity commences at the Millennium's end.

a) His Kingship is founded upon His victory on the cross:

- Through the cross, He has overcome and will terminate the devil's *kosmos* (Jn.16:33).
- Through the cross, the Father has in principle already triumphed over the devil's forces and stripped them of their power (Col.2:14-15).
- Through the cross, He has in principle already put an end to the one having the power of death (i.e., the devil: Heb.2:14; cf. 2Tim.1:10).
- Through the cross, therefore, He has the right to bring on the final epoch of Satan's direct rule (i.e., the Tribulation), thus opening the door for His direct millennial rule (Rev.5:5).
- Through the cross, He has led condemned mankind to the victory of eternal life (Matt.12:20; cf. Col.2:12-14; Heb.2:10).
- Through the cross, therefore, we share in His victory over death (1Cor.15:54-57).

b) His Kingship is confirmed by proclamation, resurrection, ascension, and session:

Proclamation of His victory to the demons previously imprisoned in Hades (i.e., in the Abyss: 1Pet.3:19; cf. Rom.10:5-7; Col.2:15; Eph.4:8-10) confirmed the success of His mission and the imminency of His reign. It was also an indication of the coming superiority of His followers over the angels (1Cor.6:3; Heb.2:5).⁵⁵⁴

Resurrection confirmed the prophecies of His coming reign (Ps.16:10; Acts 2:24-31; 13:30-38), confirmed His status as heir of the Kingdom (Acts 5:30-31; 10:40-43; 17:31; Rom.1:4; 1Pet.1:21), and confirmed the effectiveness of His sacrifice (1Cor.15:13-19; 15:21; Phil.3:10; 1Pet.1:3; 3:21), which forms the basis for His followers to share in that resurrection (Rom.6:5; 8:11; 8:34-35; 10:9; 1Cor.6:14; 2Cor.4:14; 5:15; Col.2:12).

Ascension confirmed the acceptability of the sacrifice of our High Priest (Heb.4:14; 6:19-20; 7:26; 9:11-12), while His entrance into the true Holy of Holies opened the door for believers to enter into the presence of God (Heb.10:19), with believers who had died prior to the cross led to heaven by Him in triumph at the time of His ascension (Ps.68:18; Eph.4:8; cf. Ps.68:24-27; 146:7b; Is.14:17b; 42:7; 49:9; 61:1; Jn.14:2-3; 14:6; 17:24; Col.2:15; 1Pet.3:18-22; Rev.1:18).

Session validated His status as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Acts 2:32-36; 5:30-31; Eph.1:20-23; 1Pet.3:22), made His ultimate rule only a matter of time (Ps.110; Acts 3:21; Heb.1:13; cf. 1Cor.1:7-8; 1Thes.1:10; Tit.2:13; Jas.5:8), and so became the basis for the reward of believers (Ps.68:18; Is.40:10; 62:11; Eph.4:8; cf. 1Thes.2:19; Heb.12:2; 1Pet.1:7; Rev.22:12).

c) His Kingship is consummated at the 2nd Advent:

- With the commencement of His reign, human rule over the earth lost by the first Adam will be restored in the person of the Last Adam (Ps.8; Rom.5:12-21; 1Cor.15:45; Heb.2:7-9).

- With the commencement of His reign, the final stage of reducing all God's enemies to complete submission will begin (1Cor.15:24-26; cf. Phil.2:10).
- With the commencement of His reign, there will also begin the final process of reconciling "all things" and restoring completeness and harmony to God's universe (Col.1:20; cf. Eph.1:10).
- With the commencement of His reign, earth will forevermore enjoy the perfect rule and presence of the perfect Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ (Rev.11:15; cf. Ps.2; 45; 48; 72; Is.2:1-5; Ezek.48:35b; Dan.7:14; Zech.14; Lk.1:32-33; 2Thes.1:6-10; Rev.19:11-20:6).

b. The Millennial Administration: The Millennium will present a unique situation in administrative terms in that it will be the first (and only) era of human history where earth will contain not only a (rapidly expanding) population of sinful mortals, but also a host of resurrected believers (the Church) who lived their previous earthly lives at various times during the preceding six thousand years; and both groups will be subject to a perfect, all-powerful and all-knowing Ruler. The precise extent to which the static number of resurrected believers will interact with the rapidly growing millennial population is not spelled out in scripture, but, as we saw in the previous section, it is clear that a part of our reward will be to share in Christ's millennial administration (cf. Is.32:2; Dan.7:22; 7:27; Matt.19:28-29; 25:21; Rom.8:17; Rev.1:4-6; 20:4-6; cf. Rev.22:5).

"Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'"

Luke 19:17 NIV

(28) "You are those who have stood by me in my trials (lit., "tests"). (29) And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, (30) so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

Luke 22:28-30 NIV

(2) Or don't you know that the holy ones (i.e., believers) will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you really unworthy to judge [these] insignificant matters of dispute? (3) Don't you know that we will judge angels? How much more will that not be the case with earthly matters?

1st Corinthians 6:2-3

(11) Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with Him, we will also live with Him; (12) If we persevere, *we will also reign with Him*. If we disown Him, He will also disown us; (13) If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself.

2nd Timothy 2:11-13

(26) And to the one who wins the victory and gives heed to My works until the end, I will give to him authority over the nations. (27) And he will shepherd them with an iron rod and crush them like vessels of clay, just as I have received [the authority] from My Father.

Revelation 2:26-27

The one who wins the victory, I will grant him to sit with Me on my throne just as I also have won the victory and have taken my seat with My Father on His throne.

Revelation 3:21

(9) And they sang a new song, saying, "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain and have purchased with your blood for our God [men] from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, (10) and have made them into a kingdom and priests to our God, *and they will rule upon the earth!*"

Revelation 5:9-10

These passages all establish the fact of resurrected believers forming the cadre of our Lord's millennial administration. It will not be angels who enforce law and order, ruling and administering justice during Jesus' millennial reign, but His Church, resurrected and rewarded, with the positions we hold during that thousand year period appropriate to the rank we have earned during our present lives on this earth. It can also be gleaned from the passages above that our enforcement of the law, our execution of justice, and our general administration exercised over the areas and territories entrusted to us will be perfect – just as we have been made perfect to serve perfectly our perfect Lord.

(1) See, a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice. (2) Each man (i.e., resurrected member of Jesus' administration) will be like a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm, like streams of water in the desert and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land.

Isaiah 32:1-2 NIV (cf. Is.32:8)

As resurrected believers, incapable of experiencing physical or emotional pain or fatigue, our administrative duties during the Millennium will be a "labor of love", "delightful work" such as Adam was given in the garden of Eden, only much more satisfying and devoid of trouble to the degree that our eternal state will infinitely surpass his pre-fall state. Once abused and discarded, once outcasts and sojourners on the earth (cf. Heb.11:36-38), we shall at that glorious time have "attained the promise" of resurrection and reward (cf. Heb.11:39-40). No longer subject to the world and the caprices of its present evil ruler (cf. Is.33:18-19), we shall rule the world with the Righteous One as His viceroys for a thousand years.

In your thoughts you will ponder the former terror:

"Where is that chief officer?

Where is the one who took the revenue?

Where is the officer in charge of the towers?"

You will see those arrogant people no more,

those people of an obscure speech,

with their strange, incomprehensible tongue.

Isaiah 33:18-19 NIV

As seen from these verses, the blessings of Christ's administration will stand in stark contrast to the rule of the evil one (most egregiously demonstrated by the reign of the beast) not only for us, but also for the millennial population which survives the Tribulation, and most especially

for those of Israel whose future reaction is related directly above. Indeed, the government of Israel will be the most blessed and most unique in this regard. For Jerusalem will be the new capital of the world, now ruled by the Messiah Himself, personally residing there. Israel proper will be ceremonially ruled by David himself in resurrection in the capacity of her king (in fulfillment of the biblical promises: Jer.30:9; 33:15-17; Ezek.34:23-24; 37:24-25; Hos.3:5), with the routine administrative duties born by "the prince", a non-resurrected member of the Davidic line endowed with special privileges (Ezek.45-46).⁵⁵⁵ The prince himself will likewise have under-shepherds to aid him in his tasks chosen from the non-resurrected population.

(3) "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. (4) I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the Lord.
Jeremiah 23:3-6 NIV

Herein we most likely see the pattern – perfect oversight but with a mortal interface – which is no doubt duplicated around the world. Resurrected believers, as we have seen, will participate in Christ's administration, but probably in a sort of super-executive capacity (in the fashion of David), as well as in a judicial capacity (Matt.19:28; Lk.22:30; 1Cor.6:2; Rev.3:21; 20:4-6), leaving the hands-on, day to day administration to our non-resurrected counterparts. Given the role angels currently play as messengers and intermediaries in God's plan (and specifically in regard to serving the Son of God: Jn.1:51), it would be strange if they too were not involved in the Messianic millennial rule, though no doubt continuing to serve Jesus Christ behind the scenes even more so than the Church. Finally, perfect, resurrected members of the Church will make the best possible selections when it comes to choosing their mortal counterparts in every administrative venue around the world, so that even within the most fragile branch of the government, human beings with sin natures, here too we may expect the highest possible standard to be achieved (as the "code of conduct" in the Psalm below indicates):

2b I will walk in my house
with blameless heart.
3 I will set before my eyes
no vile thing.
The deeds of faithless men I hate;
they will not cling to me.
4 Men of perverse heart shall be far from me;
I will have nothing to do with evil.
5 Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret,
him will I put to silence;
whoever has haughty eyes and a proud heart,
him will I not endure.
6 My eyes will be on the faithful in the land,
that they may dwell with me;
he whose walk is blameless
will minister to me.
7 No one who practices deceit

will dwell in my house;
no one who speaks falsely
will stand in my presence.
8 Every morning I will put to silence
all the wicked in the land;
I will cut off every evildoer
from the city of the Lord.
Psalm 101:2b-8 NIV

Finally, from some of the few details scripture gives about the millennial world government we can also extrapolate the essential administrative principle of the Messiah's rule, namely, that of a perfect central standard, accommodating local needs.

1) Language: The official language of Christ's government will be Hebrew. Not only does this make a certain amount of logical sense, for He will be ruling from Jerusalem with the Jewish nation as His unique possession, but there is scriptural evidence for this probability as well. The Lord states at Zephaniah 3:9 that, after unleashing His fury on the nations during the Tribulation (v.8), "I will give to the peoples a pure lip/language (*saphah berurah*), that they all may call upon the name of the Lord and serve Him of one accord". While this purification of the lips does not exclude forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ, the context clearly suggests appropriate ceremonial behavior as well, and it is thus very likely that Hebrew will be the requisite language for the (sometimes mandatory; cf. Zech.14:17) worship at Jerusalem (see section III.2.c below). Isaiah 19:18 further informs us that "five cities of Egypt will be speaking the language of Canaan" (i.e., Hebrew). From this we may deduce that there will be an eagerness in some pockets of exceptional responsiveness to the Lord and His truth to assimilate to the perfect standard as much as possible and in every way. However, the fact that this development is deemed remarkable also shows us that while Hebrew will be the official legal and ceremonial language, no attempt will be made to enforce its use worldwide. In all other instances, the nations will retain their own languages. Rather than stifling free expression, we may expect a flourishing of legitimate conversation, with only evil communication being restrained.

2) Economics: Ezekiel 45:9-14 establishes a perfect system of weights and measures for use within Israel proper during the Millennium, and we may glean from this that there will be perfect economic regulation not only in Israel but throughout the world – not an attempt to control legitimate human-decision making in any local economy, but rather a process of oversight wherein truly unfair and criminal behavior is prevented. As in the case of language, we may extrapolate that it is the principle which is universally enforced, not the specifics. Unique local weights and standards, along with diverse practices, will be allowed to continue with a resulting explosion of free enterprise prosperity bursting forth under the Millennium's blissful conditions – only dishonest behavior will be restrained.

3) Nationalism: We know of course that the Messiah's worldwide rule will restrict all the negative aspects of national competition, for there will be no war between nations during His millennial rule, as Jesus Christ Himself will settle all such serious disputes.

For He will judge between the nations, and chasten many peoples. Then they will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will no longer raise the sword against nation, and they will not study war any longer.

Isaiah 2:4 (cf. Mic.4:3-4)

And yet there will still be unique and discrete individual nations as this passage itself shows, with even some of the most ardent of Israel's enemies restored to their own lands (Jer.12:14-15).

(23) In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. (24) In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. (25) The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance."

Isaiah 19:23-25 NIV

Thus this principle of tempered control most likely sets the pattern for all other aspects of Christ's millennial rule. The nations will still be nations, and Israel will still be Israel. Antichrist had tried (albeit unsuccessfully) to destroy nationalism (Dan.2:41-43). Our Lord's administration will remove the problems inherent in a world full of independent (and sinful) nations, without at the same time eliminating national and cultural distinctions. After all, apart from those who belong to the resurrected Church, the rapidly expanding human population of the millennial earth will still be subject to sin, evil and crime, as the sin nature will still reside in all mortal human beings. It is most enlightening to consider that the Messiah will not attempt to change what cannot be changed without destroying the present heavens and earth altogether, but instead will institute the perfect system of control for an inherently sinful world: not the eradication of choice through stringent, Procrustean homogenization, but the preservation of free will through a system of wise and judicious oversight. In the truly perfect world government to be instituted by our Lord, better regulation will actually result in more genuine freedom. For its object, perfectly attained, will be the restraint of evil (rather than what has often been the case in the devil's world, the suppression of freedom in the service of evil). For these reasons, the Millennium, the time of most complete direct control of a single unified government over the earth, will also be the time of greatest freedom to pursue all legitimate goals and aspirations. This will be so in no small part because of the effectiveness of Messiah's system to restrain crime and evil without at the same time unnecessarily hampering the freedom of action of those not involved in such antisocial pursuits.

c. Physical Blessings of the Millennium: During the Millennium, though human beings will continue to be born mortal and imperfect, yet the righteous rule of Christ (Ps.2:9) will suppress the effects of the sin nature so pronounced in our experience (e.g., crime and war). The marvelous physical blessings of the Millennium will be due in no small part to the fact that the curse God placed upon the ground at Genesis 3:17-19 will finally be removed (to complement the rule of Christ and the resurrection of His Church: Rom.8:18-24; cf. Gen.5:29). For the first time since the fall, this curse which resulted from the disobedience of the First Adam's eating of

the tree of the knowledge of good and evil will be removed – at the return of the Last Adam who paid for its removal through His obedient death on Calvary's tree (Rom.5:12-19):

(18) For I do not consider these present hardships in any way comparable to the glory destined to be revealed for us [at the 2nd Advent]. (19) For all creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God. (20) For the created world is now subject to futility – not of its own choosing, but because of Him who subjected it [as a consequence of Adam's sin] – but not without hope. (21) For [at the 2nd Advent] the created world will be *liberated from its enslavement to decay* at the glorious liberation of the sons of God (i.e. our resurrection). (22) For we know that the whole creation has been experiencing intense pain and agony right up until this present time. (23) And not only the created world, but we too who have received the Holy Spirit as a foretaste [of the good things to come] agonize within ourselves as we eagerly await our adoption, that is, the redemption of our body (i.e. resurrection). (24) This is the hope with which we were saved. Romans 8:18-24a

Once the cursing that came as a result of Adam's fall has been reversed, the result will be a veritable heaven on earth, an environment as perfect as possible (given the limitation that it will contain imperfect human beings still subject to sin), a world overflowing with blessing in its sights and sounds, its prosperity, and in the physical and spiritual wholeness, flowing forth from Jerusalem where the Righteous One Himself will rule. This will be the prophesied "year (i.e., season) of the Lord's favor" (Is.61:2); this will be the long-anticipated "time of restoration" (Acts 3:21).

(10) Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns." The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity. (11) Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; (12) let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; (13) they will sing before the Lord, for he comes (lit, "*has come*"), he comes (lit, "*has come*") to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth. Psalm 96:10-13 NIV

The Lord will have compassion on Zion, and compassion on all her ruins, and He will make her desert *like Eden*, and her wilderness *like the garden of the Lord*. Isaiah 51:3

As this last verse indicates (and as we have intimated above), during the Millennium with the removal of the Genesis curse on the earth, the entire world will be a paradise. In the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, the earth will truly be "Eden restored" to all its prior glories, save for the continued imperfection of the rapidly-expanding, non-resurrected human population. However, the sinful nature of un-resurrected mankind will not prevent the Millennium from being truly Edenic with Satan bound for a thousand years, with all demons likewise removed from the world, and with the Holy Spirit's ministry of restraint not only reestablished (after being removed during the Tribulation: 2Thes.2:6-12)⁵⁵⁶, but now more expansive than ever before (since He will be "poured out" in a dramatic and unprecedented way not seen since the early days of the Church; cf. Is.44:3; Joel 2:28). When we add to these significant changes the perfect rule of the perfect Ruler administered by His Church, the blessedness of earthly

conditions during Christ's coming kingdom are certainly understandable in spite of the flawed nature of its subjects.

In his (i.e., the Messiah's) days the righteous will flourish; *prosperity* will abound till the moon is no more.

Psalm 72:7 NIV

1) Eden-like conditions as seen from the millennial Jerusalem: Jerusalem, the tribulational "rock of stumbling" upon which the Lord Jesus Christ caused the armies of the beast to founder, though subjected to terrible damage during the battle of Armageddon, will rapidly and miraculously rise from the ashes to become the capital city of the Messiah.

(1) Great is the Lord, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain. (2) It is beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth. Like the utmost heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion, the city of the Great King. (3) God is in her citadels; he has shown himself to be her fortress. (4) When the kings joined forces, when they advanced together, (5) they saw her and were astounded; they fled in terror. (6) Trembling seized them there, pain like that of a woman in labor. (7) You destroyed them like ships of Tarshish shattered by an east wind. (8) As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord Almighty, in the city of our God: God makes her secure forever. Selah (9) Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love. (10) Like your name, O God, your praise reaches to the ends of the earth; your right hand is filled with righteousness. (11) Mount Zion rejoices, the villages of Judah are glad because of your judgments. (12) Walk about Zion, go around her, count her towers, (13) consider well her ramparts, view her citadels, that you may tell of them to the next generation. (14) For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.

Psalm 48 NIV

As mentioned above, there are seven "Edens" in the history of God's creation.⁵⁵⁷

1. The Original Earth (before Satan's fall)
2. The Third Heaven (before the creation of mankind)
3. The Garden of Eden (before the fall of Adam and Eve)
4. The Subterranean Paradise (a.k.a., "Abraham's Bosom" – visited by Christ: 1Pet.3:19-20)
5. The Third Heaven (now the abode of departed believers following Jesus' victory at the cross and subsequent ascension)
6. The Millennial Jerusalem (our present focus)
7. The New Jerusalem (in the eternal state of the new heavens and new earth)

Every biblical paradise shares certain unique features that mark it out as a place of extreme blessing, first and foremost of which is the physical presence of God Himself for the purpose of

fellowship (rather than judgment). Just as in the garden of Eden, our first parents Adam and Eve enjoyed sweet fellowship with our Lord when He habitually visited them "in the cool of the day" (Gen.3:8), so the millennial Jerusalem will be blessed with the permanent presence of our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and all of the millennial blessings which mankind will enjoy on that great day will be a result of and will flow from His presence (as is always the case since all blessing originates with God: Jas.1:17).

(2) The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow. (3) You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. (4) No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah (i.e., "I delight in her"), and your land Beulah (i.e., "married"); for the Lord will take delight in you, and your land will be married. (5) As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you. (6) I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest, (7) and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.

Isaiah 62:2-7 NIV (cf. Jer.3:14)

Though devastated by the events of the Tribulation, the beast's Armageddon campaign in particular, Jerusalem will be swiftly rebuilt in a supernatural way by the Lord Himself, to become the most impressive place on earth (cf. Is.11:10; 44:24-28; 51:3; 52:1-2; Mic.4:8), now to rest ever safe and secure under His protecting wings (cf. Jer.31:38-40; Is.54:14-15).

(1) He has set his foundation on the holy mountain; (2) the Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. (3) Glorious things are said of you, O city of God: Selah (4) "I will record Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me—Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush— and will say, 'This one was born in Zion.' " (5) Indeed, of Zion it will be said, "This one and that one were born in her, and the Most High himself will establish her." (6) The Lord will write in the register of the peoples: "This one was born in Zion." Selah (7) As they make music they will sing, "All my fountains are in you."

Psalms 87 NIV

And the Lord will create over Mount Zion and over all her assemblies a cloud – one of smoke by day, and of a shining flame of fire by night. For there will be a canopy above the glory [of His presence, covering it] entirely. It will be a shelter from the heat by day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain.

Isaiah 4:5-6

But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.

Isaiah 65:18 NIV

In addition to the ultimate blessing, the actual presence of God Himself in the Person of the Messiah, the Son of God, millennial Jerusalem will share other features in common with the most well-known Eden (and with all of the other biblical paradises as well):

a) An Exalted Location: Millennial Jerusalem will be a city of greatly expanded dimensions (Ezek.48:30-35), and will literally be raised up in elevation to an exceedingly great height (cf. Ps.68:15-16; Ezek.17:22):

At the end of days, the mountain of the temple of the Lord will be established as the chief of all mountains, and it will be *raised higher* than all [other] hills, and all the nations will flow to it. Isaiah 2:2 (cf. Micah 4:1)

In visions of God he took me to the land of Israel and set me on *a very high mountain*, on whose south side were some buildings that looked like a city.
Ezekiel 40:2 NIV

(10) The whole land, from Geba to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem, will become like the Arabah. But Jerusalem will be *raised up* and remain in its place, from the Benjamin Gate to the site of the First Gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the royal winepresses.
(11) It will be inhabited; never again will it be destroyed. Jerusalem will be secure.
Zechariah 14:10-11 NIV

b) The Living Waters and the Tree of Life:

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells.
Psalm 46:4 NIV

Proceeding forth from the millennial temple in Jerusalem will be a stream of "living water", a supernatural source of refreshment akin to the streams that watered the garden of Eden. The stream will grow in breadth and depth as it runs eastward and descends to the plain of the Arabah (while another branch flows west to the Mediterranean: Zech.14:8), finally emptying into the Dead Sea. Along the banks of this stream, "trees of life" will spring up, comparable to the tree of life of Genesis 2:9, and to the "tree(s) of life" in the final New Jerusalem (Rev.22:2). These trees will share the same purpose as the one which preceded and those which will follow, namely, to impart spiritual as well as physical blessing (cf. Is.41:19; 55:12-13; Ezek.34:27; 36:8; 47:7; Rev.22:2):

And on the bank of the river gorge on both sides will spring up every sort of food-producing tree. Their foliage will not wither, nor their produce fail, but every month they will yield a new crop, for they will be irrigated by the waters flowing from the sanctuary; their produce will serve as food and their foliage as medicine.
Ezekiel 47:12

The river on whose banks the trees described above will flourish will share important qualities with the rivers of Genesis chapter two and with the "river of the water of life" of Revelation chapter twenty-two:

1) It originates from a central source: Just as water flowed out of the garden of Eden, so the millennial river of living water will rise from a fountainhead at the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem (Ezek.47:1-12; Joel 3:18; Zech.14:8), a very similar situation to that of "the river of the water of life" which we find in the New Jerusalem (Rev.22:1-2).

2) It produces a miraculously fertile effect: The river is associated with agricultural fecundity and abundant fisheries in Ezekiel 47:1-12, while Joel 3:18 connects the fountain with the blossoming of the land in general (cf. a similar, symbolic reference in Is.66:12: "I will extend peace to her like a river and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream").

3) It has a life-giving influence: The river is one of "living water" in Zechariah 14:8, a title which, in light of Revelation 22:17, suggests the spiritual blessings it will confer (see also Jer.2:13; Is.55:1).

Just as the Messiah's Kingdom is likened to a life-giving tree (Matt.13:31-32; Mk.4:30-32; Lk.13:18-19; cf. Dan.4:10-27; Ezek.17:3-24; 31:1-18), so we find in the millennial kingdom literal trees of life flourishing on the banks of the river of living water for the first time since our original parents rejected the first tree of life for the tree of knowing good and evil. It is well to remember that none of these blessing could be possible but for the fact that our Lord Jesus bore all the cursing which was rightfully ours on that "other tree", for it is thus that we are eternally healed:

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, in order that we might die to sins and live to righteousness. By His wound you are healed.
1st Peter 2:24

c) Unique Prosperity: The wondrous nature of millennial Jerusalem will be so exceptional to such an extraordinary degree that it surpasses our present ability to adequately imagine:

(11) "O afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted, I will build you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with sapphires. (12) I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones.
Isaiah 54:11-12 NIV

Your gates will be open always, day and night they will not be closed, so that the wealth of the nations may be brought to you, and their kings led before you.
Isaiah 60:11

(15) "Although you have been forsaken and hated, with no one traveling through, I will make you the everlasting pride and the joy of all generations. (16) You will drink the milk of nations and be nursed at royal breasts. Then you will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, your

Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob. (17) Instead of bronze I will bring you gold, and silver in place of iron. Instead of wood I will bring you bronze, and iron in place of stones. I will make peace your governor and righteousness your ruler. (18) No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise. (19) The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. (20) Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end.
Isaiah 60:15-20 NIV

You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
Isaiah 62:3

I am about to extend prosperity to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing torrent.
Isaiah 66:12

Then this city will bring me renown, joy, praise and honor before all nations on earth that hear of all the good things I do for it; and they will be in awe and will tremble at the abundant prosperity and peace I provide for it.
Jeremiah 33:9 NIV

(26) I will bless them and *the places surrounding my hill*. I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing. (27) The trees of the field will yield their fruit and the ground will yield its crops; the people will be secure in their land.
Ezekiel 34:26-27 NIV

2) Eden-like conditions as seen from the millennial Israel: The paradise-like conditions of the millennial Jerusalem will be duplicated to a great degree within boundaries of the entire expanded millennial state of Israel as well (and apparently to an only marginally lesser degree to the earth as a whole). The Millennium under the perfect rule of Jesus Christ will be a time of agricultural bounty without scarcity, of flourishing environmental conditions without the hardships and disasters of previous eras, and of general prosperity and blessing beyond anything now remotely imagined – and it will begin with Israel:

(29b) "I will call for the grain and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you. (30) I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the field, so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of famine. (31) Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices. (32) I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign Lord. Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, O house of Israel!" (33) This is what the Sovereign Lord says: "On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt. (34) The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it. (35) They will say, "This land that was laid waste has become *like the garden of Eden*; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited." (36) Then the nations around you that remain will know that I the Lord have

rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I the Lord have spoken, and I will do it."

Ezekiel 36:29b-36 NIV

(21) "In that day I will respond," declares the Lord— "I will respond to the skies, and they will respond to the earth; (22) and the earth will respond to the grain, the new wine and oil, and they will respond to Jezreel. (23) I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one'. 'I will say to those called 'Not my people', 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God.'"

Hosea 2:21-23 NIV

(16) The Lord their God will deliver them on that day (for His people are to Him as a precious flock, like jewels in a crown set prominently in His land). (17) For how fair and beautiful they will be. Grain will make the young men flourish and new wine the young women.

Zechariah 9:16-17

It will, in short, be a time of the veritable rebirth of Eden, with Israel being preeminent in the experiencing of all these blessings (Jer.31:2), as evidenced by

a) an end to the ferocity of wild animals (contrast to Ezek.14:21):

(6) The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. (7) And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. (8) And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. (9) They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

Isaiah 11:6-9 KJV

I will make a covenant of peace with them and rid the land of wild beasts so that they may live in the desert and sleep in the forests in safety.

Ezekiel 34:25 NIV (cf. v.28)

In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground.

Hosea 2:18a NIV

b) miraculously improved physical and agricultural conditions:

The mountains will bring forth prosperity for the people, and the hills righteousness.

Psalm 72:3

Let grain abound throughout the land; on the tops of the hills may it sway. Let its fruit flourish like Lebanon; let it thrive like the grass of the field.

Psalms 72:16 NIV

(23) He will also send you rain for the seed you sow in the ground, and the food that comes from the land will be rich and plentiful. In that day your cattle will graze in broad meadows.

(24) The oxen and donkeys that work the soil will eat fodder and mash, spread out with fork and shovel. (25) In the day of great slaughter, when the towers fall, streams of water will flow on every high mountain and every lofty hill. (26) The moon will shine like the sun, and the sunlight will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven full days (viz., a hyperbole literally fulfilled in the eternal state), when the Lord binds up the bruises of his people and heals the wounds he inflicted.

Isaiah 30:23-26 NIV

(1) The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, (2) it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the Lord, the splendor of our God.

Isaiah 35:1-2 NIV

(18) I will make rivers spring forth on the barren heights, and fountains in the valleys. I will fill the desert with pools of water, and the arid places with springs of water. (19) I will set cedar trees in the desert, acacias, myrtles and olive trees. I will place cypress, elm and box trees together in the Arabah, (20) so that [all] may see and know and take it [to heart] and understand together that the hand of the Lord has done this, and that the Holy One of Israel has created it.

Isaiah 41:18-20

For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground.

Isaiah 44:3a NIV

The Lord will have compassion on Zion, and compassion on all her ruins, and He will make her desert like Eden, and her wilderness like the garden of the Lord.

Isaiah 51:3

The mountains and hills will let out a cheer and the trees will clap their hands. Instead of thorns, cypress will grow, and instead of thistles, myrtles.

Isaiah 55:12-13a

Sharon will become a pasture for flocks, and the Valley of Achor a resting place for herds, for my people who seek me.

Isaiah 65:10 NIV

(12) They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord—the grain, the new wine and the oil, the young of the flocks and herds. They will be like a well-watered garden, and they will sorrow no more. (13) Then maidens will dance and be

glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow. (14) I will satisfy the priests with abundance, and my people will be filled with my bounty," declares the Lord.

Jeremiah 31:12-14 NIV

I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing.

Ezekiel 34:26b NIV

I will provide for them a land renowned for its crops, and they will no longer be victims of famine in the land or bear the scorn of the nations.

Ezekiel 34:29 NIV (cf. Ezek.34:27)

And it will come to pass on that day that the mountains will drip with sweet wine, and the hills run with milk. And all the watercourses of Judah will run with water.

Joel 3:18

Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when the one who ploughs will catch up with the reaper, and the one who treads the grapes will catch up with the sower. The mountains will drip with sweet wine and the hills will be liquid [goodness].

Amos 9:13

For there will be prosperity for what is sown: the vine will yield its fruit, and the land will bring forth its produce, and the sky will give forth the [necessary] moisture.

Zechariah 8:12

c) general peace and prosperity (cf. Ps.68:6; Is.9:4; Jer.31:22):

Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety.

Hosea 2:18b NIV

(14) In righteousness you will be established: Tyranny will be far from you; you will have nothing to fear. Terror will be far removed; it will not come near you. (15) If anyone does attack you, it will not be my doing; whoever attacks you will surrender to you.

Isaiah 54:14-15 NIV

Then will all your people be righteous and they will possess the land forever. They are the shoot I have planted, the work of my hands, for the display of my splendor.

Isaiah 60:21 NIV

(3b) They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor. (4) They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. (5) Aliens will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. (6) And you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast. (7) Instead of their shame my people will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace they will rejoice in their inheritance; and so they will inherit a double

portion in their land, and everlasting joy will be theirs.
Isaiah 61:3b-7

(38) "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when this city will be rebuilt for me from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. (39) The measuring line will stretch from there straight to the hill of Gareb and then turn to Goah. (40) The whole valley where dead bodies and ashes are thrown, and all the terraces out to the Kidron Valley on the east as far as the corner of the Horse Gate, will be holy to the Lord. The city will never again be uprooted or demolished."
Jeremiah 31:38-40 NIV

d) the expansion of the territory of Israel: During the Millennium, the territory of Israel will finally be expanded to the boundaries she was always meant to have, and her land will be newly allotted to ensure a bountiful inheritance to all of Abraham's offspring. Her Kingdom now united under Messiah's rule (Is.11:12-13; Jer.3:18; Ezek.37:15ff.; Hos.1:11), she will possess the full grant of land God originally made to Abraham (Ezek.45:7-8; 47:13-48:29; Zech.9:10). In those days, Israel will be exalted to the premier position among the nations for the first time since Abraham received the promises (Gen.12:2-3; 15:5-21; 17:4-19; 22:17-18).

(1) For the Lord will cherish Jacob, and will again choose Israel, and place them in their own land. Foreigners will join with them and will attach themselves to the house of Jacob. (2) Nations will take them and bring them to their [rightful] place. Then the house of Israel will receive them by lot in the land of the Lord [for use] as servants and maidservants. For they will they will take their captors captive, and rule over those who oppressed them.
Isaiah 14:1-2

e) the special enrichment of Israel: In an era of intensive blessing, Israel will be doubly blessed (Is.61:7; Joel 2:25; Zech.9:12), and will be a blessing herself to whole world (Zech.8:20-23; cf. Gen.12:3). One of the distinct blessings prophesied to fall to Israel's lot during the Millennium is that she will be bountifully enriched in a variety of ways. In addition to the facts of the presence of the Messiah Himself, her status as the new world capital, and the special blessings upon her agriculture and environment examined above, she will also benefit from "plundering" the nations, both through reaping the benefits that will come from recycling the vast treasures of antichrist's recently annihilated armies (Ezek.39:7-16; Zech.14:1; cf. Ps.68:12-13; Is.9:3-5)⁵⁵⁸, and also from direct tribute from all of the other nations, the "double portion" of spoils which will come to her as the Messiah's special possession (Is.23:17-18; cf. Ex.3:22; 12:26; Deut.6:10; Rev.21:24).

(29) Because of your temple at Jerusalem kings will bring you gifts. (30) Rebuke the beast among the reeds, the herd of bulls among the calves of the nations. Humbled, may it bring bars of silver.
Psalm 68:29-30a NIV (cf. Ps.72:15)

(5) Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. (6) Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the Lord. (7) All Kedar's flocks will be

gathered to you, the rams of Nebaioth will serve you; they will be accepted as offerings on my altar, and I will adorn my glorious temple.

Isaiah 60:5-7 NIV

Your gates will be open always, day and night they will not be closed, so that the wealth of the nations may be brought to you, and their kings led before you.

Isaiah 60:11

You will drink the milk of nations and be nursed at royal breasts. Then you will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

Isaiah 60:16 NIV

(5) Aliens will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. (6) And you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast. (7) Instead of their shame my people will receive a *double portion*, and instead of disgrace they will rejoice in their inheritance; and so they will inherit a *double portion* in their land, and everlasting joy will be theirs.

Isaiah 61:5-7 NIV

I am about to extend prosperity to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing torrent.

Isaiah 66:12

The wealth of all the nations round about will be gathered up, their gold and silver and clothing in abundance.

Zechariah 14:14

3) Eden-like conditions as seen from expanded longevity, health and happiness: The improvements in the physical health, longevity and general well-being of human beings during the Millennium will likewise be extraordinary, and we may take scripture's focus on Israel in these respects as a result more of its concern with the fulfillment of the promises to the Jewish people than as any indication that the rest of the millennial world will be left out. We may well expect these effects to be most pronounced in Jerusalem proper and in Israel in general, but the whole testimony of scripture taken together seems to suggest that disease, poverty, and even death to some great degree will be removed as serious concerns worldwide under the blessing of the Messiah's glorious world rule.

In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see.

Isaiah 29:18 NIV

(5) Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. (6) Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.

Isaiah 35:5-6a NIV (cf. Is.32:3-4)

No one living in Zion will say, "I am ill"; and the sins of those who dwell there will be forgiven.
Isaiah 33:24 NIV

The passage immediately above is informative regarding one of the more controversial aspects of the Millennium, namely the question of whether or not human life spans will expand to their remarkable pre-flood lengths – or even beyond. To put it more directly, will anyone die during the Millennium?

(22) No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands. (23) They will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the Lord, they and their descendants *with them*.
Isaiah 65:22-23 NIV

This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with cane in hand because of his age."
Zechariah 8:4 NIV

(19) I will rejoice over Jerusalem and be filled with joy for My people. The sound of weeping and the cry of distress will no longer be heard in her. (20) No longer will there be there any infant that perishes in his youth, nor any old man who fails to live out his days in full. For a man will be accounted but a youth should he die at a hundred, even the sinner a hundred years old who suffers this curse.⁵⁵⁹
Isaiah 65:19-20

This last passage in particular is sometimes taken to mean that no will die of natural causes during the Millennium, but verse twenty contains an important caveat: "even *the sinner* a hundred years old who suffers this curse (i.e., will even so be accounted to have died early)". Given that near millennium-long life spans were indeed commonly achieved before the great flood (cf. Gen.5), and outside of the garden of Eden at that, it is certainly not impossible that with the restoration of Eden-like conditions on earth we should expect even greater physical resilience and health under the perfect conditions of the reign of Jesus Christ (the Genesis curse on the earth being finally removed as well). However, Isaiah 65:20 quoted above does state that death will occasionally occur nonetheless, and indicates that the key factor in bringing it on will be "sin". After all, even in pre-flood days, people did die, and it is well to consider that the exceptionally long lives recorded in Genesis chapter five apply to believers of exceptional spirituality. In Isaiah 33:24 also quoted above, we are told that illness will be absent in Zion, for "the *sins* of those who dwell there will be forgiven". Thus we may conclude that spirituality versus carnality will be a determining factor in this regard. For as Isaiah 65:19 says, it is "the sinner" who dies at a hundred who will be thought so accursed.

"On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity."
Zechariah 13:1 NIV

As the verse above suggests, the life-giving waters which emanate from the temple in Jerusalem (Ezek.47:1-11; Joel 3:18; Zech.14:8), giving rise to medicinal trees which spring up along its banks (Ezek.47:12), would seem to have not only healing properties but also the power of spiritual cleansing from the physical side-effects of sin. We may thus indeed expect believers who are walking with the Lord to live exceptionally long lives, with even the possibility of reaching through the entire Millennium not to be discounted. On the other hand, we may expect those who are, in addition to being unbelievers, spiritually reprobate ("sinners") to have their life-spans curtailed as a result; even so, as Isaiah 65:19-20 suggests, their lives will be long by contemporary standards. Between the two extremes, that is, between essential righteousness and inveterate immorality, there will no doubt be many points along the scale (with a variety of life-spans resulting). We may also expect a number of deaths as punishment for criminal activity to occur during the Millennium under the Messiah's perfect administration of justice wherein there will be a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to crime. There are some passages which may point to the possibility of deaths from natural causes, as in the case of Ezekiel 46:16-18 where regulations are given to the prince concerning the assignment of inheritances (which could, however, be alternatively explained; see section III.1.b above). We should also recall that at least the original millennial "seed-stock" will come from human beings who have lived a portion (and in some cases a great portion) of their lives under far less than ideal conditions (most recently the seven year Tribulation). It seems best to conclude, therefore, that people probably will still die during the Millennium (in spite of greatly increased health and longevity). After all, even in the case of uncommonly responsive believers, everyone not yet resurrected will still have a sin nature.

Finally, there is also the question of the disposition of believers who may die during the Millennium, whether from natural causes, or from crime or accidents. Even if these are unusual occurrences, or possibly even especially so, it seems out of place for these individuals to be thenceforth excluded from the millennial kingdom, and we find no indication in scripture that they will then find themselves in the third heaven for the duration of the Millennium, a place which though by far not unpleasant will now otherwise be empty of other saved human beings. It seems better to suppose that in such cases either 1) such individuals will be resuscitated immediately (as in cases of murder, et al.), or 2) given an interim body so as to enjoy our Lord's presence – precisely as is the case today with all departed believers – with the main difference in the millennial regime being that they will enjoy that presence here on earth rather than in the third heaven as our departed brethren are currently doing.

4) Eden-like conditions as seen from expanding population: In addition to the vast destruction of Armageddon, and along with the purging out of Jews who though regathered still refuse to accept Jesus as Messiah (the sixth thunder-judgment), the fifth thunder-judgment will also punish with destruction all unbelievers who took the mark of the beast (and that most likely constitutes the majority of tribulational survivors). Taken in conjunction with the enormous loss of life for many other reasons during the Tribulation, therefore, it is virtually certain that the Millennium will begin with a very small population relative to the current seven or so billion human beings who inhabit planet earth, a population which could very well be pushing some ten billion at the time of the Tribulation's commencement. But even if this figure be reduced to one percent (and we are told that mankind will become "rare as gold of Ophir" as a result of the tribulational judgments: Is.13:12; cf. Is.24:6; Zeph.1:2-3; Mic.7:13), the remaining

100 million survivors under the conditions of millennial blessing and enjoying expanded human life-spans would be certain to rebound to the previous level in very short order (and to surpass it significantly by the Millennium's end). That is no doubt true even if the figure of 100 million survivors turns out to be far too high. This would also seem to be borne out by the rapid expansions of both the pre-flood human population (which began with only two, after all), and of the population after the flood (from a seed stock of eight), both under sub-millennial conditions. Starting with what must be at the very least some millions more than this (judging from the facts that "we who remain" in 1Thes.4 is a sizable enough category to deserve mention, and that the regathering of Jews from around the world at this time is one of the most prominently emphasized scriptural prophecies), even this small "seed stock" will no doubt prove more than sufficient to surpass current population levels in very little time (so that by the time of the final event of the Millennium's end those who will oppose the Lord will be as numerous as "the sand of the seashore": Rev.20:8). The place where this expansion of population will be most pronounced is within the land of Israel (Is.9:3; Jer.33:10-13; Ezek.36:13-15):

(19) "Though you were ruined and made desolate and your land laid waste, now you will be too small for your people, and those who devoured you will be far away. (20) The children born during your bereavement will yet say in your hearing, 'This place is too small for us; give us more space to live in.'"
Isaiah 49:19-20 NIV

(1) Rejoice, O barren woman who has never born a child! Break forth with rejoicing and shout for joy, O woman who has never given birth! For the children of the desolate woman will be more than those of the married woman, says the Lord. (2) Enlarge the place for your tent. Let your tent curtains stretch wide and don't hold back. Lengthen your ropes and strengthen your stakes. (3) For you will burst forth on the right and on the left. Your offspring will possess the nations, and the deserted cities will be inhabited.
Isaiah 54:2-3

The least of you will become a thousand, the smallest a mighty nation. I am the Lord; in its time, I will do this swiftly.
Isaiah 60:22 NIV

I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pastures where they will be fruitful and increase in number.
Jeremiah 23:3 NIV

(18) "This is what the Lord says: I will restore the fortunes of Jacob's tents and have compassion on his dwellings; the city will be rebuilt on her ruins, and the palace will stand in its proper place. (19) From them will come songs of thanksgiving and the sound of rejoicing. I will add to their numbers, and they will not be decreased; I will bring them honor, and they will not be disdained."
Jeremiah 30:18-19 NIV

(8) " 'But you, O mountains of Israel, will produce branches and fruit for my people Israel, for they will soon come home. (9) I am concerned for you and will look on you with favor; you will be plowed and sown, (10) and *I will multiply the number of people upon you*, even the whole house of Israel. The towns will be inhabited and the ruins rebuilt. (11) I will increase the number of men and animals upon you, and they will be fruitful and become numerous. I will settle people on you as in the past and will make you prosper more than before. Then you will know that I am the Lord. (12) I will cause people, my people Israel, to walk upon you. They will possess you, and you will be their inheritance; you will never again deprive them of their children.

Ezekiel 36:8-12 NIV

(37) "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Once again I will yield to the plea of the house of Israel and do this for them: I will make their people *as numerous as sheep*, (38) *as numerous as the flocks* for offerings at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts. So will the ruined cities be filled with flocks of people. Then they will know that I am the Lord."

Ezekiel 36:37-38 NIV

d. Spiritual Blessings of the Millennium: During the prior period of the Tribulation, Satan had attempted a most vigorous suppression of the knowledge of God (Lk.18:8; cf. Amos 8:11), through his instigation of the greatest apostasy in world history (Dan.8:12-13; 11:33-35; Matt.24:4-5; 24:24-25; 2Thes.2:3; 1Tim.4:1), the greatest persecution in world history (Matt.24:9-12; Rev.6:9-11; 7:13-14), and his most direct control over the earth in world history (through his minion, antichrist: Rev.13). By way of the most stark possible contrast, during the Millennium, when God reigns directly in the Person of Jesus Christ, the knowledge of God will be more bountifully available than ever before in the history of the world (Is.12:3; 19:21; 54:13a; Jer.31:34; 32:38-40; Ezek.11:19-20; 36:25-27; Hab.2:14; Heb.8:10-11):

"Come let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us of His ways, and that we may walk in His paths."

Isaiah 2:3

For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord just as the waters cover the sea.

Isaiah 11:9b

Those who are wayward in spirit will gain understanding; those who complain will accept instruction.

Isaiah 29:24 NIV

(3) Then the eyes of those who see will no longer be closed, and the ears of those who hear will listen. (4) The mind of the rash will know and understand, and the stammering tongue will be fluent and clear.

Isaiah 32:3-4 NIV

(5) The Lord is exalted, for he dwells on high; he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness.

(6) He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and

knowledge; the fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure.
Isaiah 33:5-6 NIV

All your sons will be taught by the Lord, and great will be your children's peace.
Isaiah 54:13 NIV

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.
Habakkuk 2:14 NIV

33 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. (34) No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."
Jeremiah 31:33-34 NIV

1) The Presence of the Messiah, the True Object of Worship: When our Lord reigns in person in Jerusalem, there will no longer be any reasonable doubt about who He is, the glorious Son of God and the Messiah, worthy of worship as God in His own right and for what He did for us in dying for our sins in His humanity:

(1) Rise up! Shine forth! For your Light has arrived, and the glory of the Lord has burst forth upon you. (2) For behold, the darkness – it will cover the earth, even a deep gloom its peoples. But the Lord will rise over you, and His glory will appear above you. (3) Nations will come to His light, and kings to the brilliance of His rising.
Isaiah 60:1-3

"And the name of the city from that time on will be: The Lord is There ."
Ezekiel 48:35b NIV

And the Lord will be king over all the earth. On that day the Lord will be the only One and His Name the only Name.
Zechariah 14:9

And while Jesus will be the clear focus of all true worship, false religion will no longer be tolerated in His kingdom (cf. Is.1:27-29; 46:1; 65:16; Jer.16:19; Ezek.34:25).

(17) Therefore say, "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries among which you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. (18) When they come there, they will remove all its detestable things and all its abominations from it. (19) And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh."
Ezekiel 11:17-19 NIV

(2) "On that day, I will banish the names of the idols from the land, and they will be remembered no more," declares the Lord Almighty. "I will remove both the prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land. (3) And if anyone still prophesies, his father and mother, to whom he was born, will say to him, 'You must die, because you have told lies in the Lord's name.' When he prophesies, his own parents will stab him. (4) "On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his prophetic vision. He will not put on a prophet's garment of hair in order to deceive. (5) He will say, 'I am not a prophet. I am a farmer; the land has been my livelihood since my youth.' (6) If someone asks him, 'What are these wounds on your body' he will answer, 'The wounds I was given at the house of my friends.'

Zechariah 13:2-6 NIV

And in that day, the Lord will provide an abundance of worthy teachers who will provide true teaching for salvation and spiritual growth.

Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.

Jeremiah 3:15

2) The Pouring out of the Spirit: Ever since the day of the Church's first Pentecost, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, critical to spiritual growth, progression and service in *all* eras of human history, has been more vividly and dynamically felt. That is because while the Spirit has always been "with" believers, Christ's ascension has made possible the gift of the Spirit whereby believers are baptized with the Spirit so as to have Him on the "inside" (a benefit which even before the close of the apostolic period came to be experienced by *all* who believe in Jesus: Rom.8:9; cf. Jn.14:17; 1Thes.4:8; 2Tim.1:14; Heb.6:4). The Millennium will constitute a third phase in the Spirit's ministry wherein Jewish believers, at least (cf. Ezek.37:9), will not only be indwelt by Him, but dramatically empowered in the manner of the first Pentecost and the early, apostolic days of the Church. As is evidenced by their lack of (genuine) occurrence today, the empowerment of those earlier, dramatic "sign" gifts was a temporary phenomenon designed to bridge the gap between the incipient Church and the establishment by the apostles of local churches around the Mediterranean world, governed by the teachings of faith and practice set down in a completed New Testament. During the Millennium, however, this miraculous manifestation of the Spirit will not only be universal among the community of Jewish believers in Jerusalem and Israel, but will also be a permanent feature of the Messiah's Kingdom (rather than a temporary, inaugural phenomenon).

(14) The fortress will be abandoned, the noisy city deserted; citadel and watchtower will become a wasteland forever, the delight of donkeys, a pasture for flocks, (15) till the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the desert becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest.

Isaiah 32:14-15 NIV

I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.

Isaiah 44:3b NIV

(20) "The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins," declares the Lord. (21) "As for me, this is my covenant with them," says the Lord. "My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever," says the Lord.
Isaiah 59:20-21 NIV

(26) I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. (27) And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.
Ezekiel 36:26-27 NIV

"I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord."
Ezekiel 37:14 NIV

"I will not hide My face from them any longer, for I will have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel," declares the Lord God.
Ezekiel 39:29 NASB

"I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication . . ."
Zechariah 12:10a NASB

(28) "It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. (29) Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days."
Joel 2:28-29 NASB

In this last passage we see most perspicuously the dramatic effects of the millennial outpouring of the Spirit, an event foreshadowed by the parallel fulfillment at Pentecost at which time Peter noted the comparison: "This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16). In each case, the wondrously overt manifestations of the Spirit are unique markers of the inauguration of a new era in commemoration of Christ's victory (on the cross and at Armageddon respectively), the difference being that during the Millennium these gifts will endure just as the Messiah continues to abide in Jerusalem (*n.b.*, Joel 2:30-32 shifts the subject *back* to the events *preceding* the Second Advent).

3) The Resumption of Jewish Spiritual Leadership: The above special gift of the Spirit to Israel is a sign of another major millennial trend, namely, the refocusing of God's economy upon the Jewish people. For not only will the number of the Jewish people expand massively and the proportion of Jews within the world's believing community come to dominate as it did in the age of Israel (see section III.1.e below), but we shall also see the leadership of Christ's Church come again into the hands of a predominantly Jewish cadre as in apostolic times. As we have already seen, the first new wave of millennial believers will be Jews, who, when confronted with the reality of the returning Messiah, will turn to God (Jer.31:31-34; Joel 2:30-32;

Zech.12:10; Rom.11:12; Rev.1:7). Secondly, Israel and, in particular, Jerusalem will not only be the political nerve-centers of the Millennium, but also its spiritual focal points and for precisely the same reason: the presence of the One who combines the offices of Great High Priest and King of Kings in His own Person:

(14) "Return, faithless people," declares the Lord, "for I am your husband. I will choose you—one from a town and two from a clan—and bring you to Zion. (15) Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding. (16) In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land," declares the Lord, "men will no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord.' It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made. (17) At that time they will call Jerusalem *The Throne of the Lord*, and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the Lord.

Jeremiah 3:14-17a NIV

A key function of the "shepherds" referenced in verse fifteen above will be spiritual leadership, and we find this theme of the special divine provision of spiritual guidance a prominent one in millennial passages as the gift and office of prophecy are once more empowered for the edification of the people of God:

(19) People of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you. (20) Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. (21) Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it." (22) Then you will desecrate your idols overlaid with silver and your images covered with gold; you will throw them away like a menstrual cloth and say to them, "Away with you!"

Isaiah 30:19-22 NIV

(9) "For I am the Lord your God – since [you dwelt] in the Land of Egypt [I have been so]. (10) I shall again make you dwell in tents as in the days of your festival (i.e., Sukkoth representing the second advent regathering). At that time I will [again] speak to your prophets and will multiply [their] visions. Indeed, through the prophets I will provide you with intelligible teaching."

Hosea 12:9-10

The result of this expanded teaching of the truth, coupled with the special pouring out of the Spirit, will be the ubiquitous presence of the knowledge of God, especially among His people:

For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Isaiah 11:9b

"For" says the Lord, "this is the covenant which I shall make with the house of Israel after these days: I shall put my precepts in their minds and write them upon their hearts, and I shall be their God, and they shall be My people. They shall not teach each one his fellow and each one his brother, saying 'Know the Lord!', because all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of

them. For I shall have mercy upon their unrighteous deeds and shall remember their sins no more."

Jeremiah 31:33-34

The chief venue for the propagation of truth will likewise be Jerusalem and, specifically, the millennial temple.

(26) I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. (27) My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. (28) Then the nations will know that I the Lord make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever.' "

Ezekiel 37:26-28 NIV

Just as the second temple whose construction was originally unimpressive compared to the first temple (Hag.2:3) was later elaborately expanded and impressively ornamented, so the tribulational temple, after ceremonial cleansing and repair, will be marvelously embellished and adorned, so as to take on the full form and beauty recorded in Ezekiel's description (i.e., in Ezekiel chapters 40-47).⁵⁶⁰ The temple is itself a form of palace (i.e., the Hebrew word *heychal* means either "temple" or "palace"), just as the ark in the Holy of Holies is a representation of a throne (and battle chariot)⁵⁶¹. Furthermore, antichrist, it will be remembered, actually "took his seat" in the temple of God precisely so as to "represent himself as being God" (2Thes.2:4). These facts in conjunction with the return of the Shekinah glory to the temple invite us to postulate that our Lord will indeed be enthroned in the Holy of Holies (Ezek.43:1-12), ruling the world and administering from that very place the one true faith – the worship of Himself as the Savior of the world.

He said to me, "Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell among the sons of Israel forever.

Ezekiel 43:7a NASB

(12) And He said to me, "Thus says the Lord of Hosts: Behold a Man – 'Branch' is His name (i.e., the Messiah; cf. Is.4:2; 11:1; 53:2; Zech.3:8). And He will branch out from His place and will build [up] the temple of the Lord. (13) For it is He who will build [up] the temple of the Lord. And He will raise up [its] glory. And He will sit and rule [as King] upon His throne. And He will [also] be Priest upon His [kingly] throne. For there will be a [unity of] consultation between the two [offices]."

Zechariah 6:12-13

The temple rites which will take place during the Millennium will constitute a form worship which while similar to that of the first and second temples will be significantly different in one very important respect: the animal sacrifices and other ceremonies of the past were shadows which represented and looked forward to the coming of our Lord and His death on the cross on our behalf; by way of great contrast, the millennial rites will be *memorials* of what He has already done (e.g., according to Ezek.39:13, the Day of Christ's glorification will be a special "memorial day"). For as Hebrews 10:18 tells us, following the reality of Christ's work in dying

for us on the cross "there is no longer any sacrifice for sin". Therefore these millennial sacrifices will not be the means of any sort of atonement, even ceremonially speaking, but instead they will serve as a kind of group "communion" to teach and remind of what Jesus has done for us all. While Jesus will be ruling in person as the King of Kings, it will still be helpful for people to remember that in the past He was the Suffering Servant who died for all of their sins. For even revering Jesus as the Ruler of the world will not bring salvation; the adherence to the gospel will still require accepting His work on the cross in washing away our sins as well as appreciating Him as the unique God-Man. This memorializing purpose (as opposed to foreshadowing) could never have been achieved while the second temple was standing, because the rituals practiced there even after our Lord's resurrection followed the prescriptions of the Mosaic Law. As such, they continued to "crucify the Son of God afresh" (Heb.6:6) even after He had already suffered and died for our sins, making participation in them a terrible blasphemy (for which the Jerusalem believers are soundly rebuked in the book of Hebrews). With our Lord present in person and actually enthroned *in* the temple, we may be absolutely certain that the meaning of the millennial sacrifices and rituals will be seen for precisely what they are, namely, memorials to His work on the cross, rather than shadows of what is to come. The difference in meaning will also result in significant if somewhat subtle differences in procedure between the Mosaic Law and the function of the millennial temple rite. There will be no ark of the covenant in the millennial temple, no doubt because Jesus has already fulfilled everything it and the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement foreshadowed:

(16) "In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land," declares the Lord, "men will no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord.' It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made."
Jeremiah 3:16

And there will be differences in the millennial regime of animal sacrifice, reflecting the memorial aspect of that future practice in contrast with the forward-looking lessons of the Old Testament. Only one lamb will be offered as a morning sacrifice, representing the "new day" Christ's reign embodies, even as the evening sacrifice is no longer required because all judgment has passed for those who believe (Ezek.46:13-15). Significantly also, the gentiles will now be included in this worship, representing their full inclusion into the family of God (Is.56:3-8; Ezek.45:13-46; cf. Ps.104:6; Is.60:7), the enmity having been dissolved by the cross (Eph.2:15-16). Indeed, the feast of Tabernacles, for example, will be a festival to which all the worlds' peoples will be required to send representatives, and it is further reasonable to suppose that all who consider themselves followers of the Lord will want to assemble before Him in Jerusalem once a year (Is.19:18-20; 66:23-24; cf. "three times a year" in ancient Israel: Ex.23:14-17).

"On that day I shall stand David's fallen booth back up, and repair its holes and everything else which has been trampled down I shall [also] stand up. And I shall rebuild it as in days of old, so that the remnant of mankind and all the gentile [nation]s which are called by My name *may seek Him*, declares the Lord who is going to accomplish this."
Amos 9:11-12 (cf. Acts 15:16-17)

The feast of Tabernacles is significant in this regard because it is the festival which looks forward to the Millennial Kingdom of the Messiah (for the Israelites will dwell "in booths" when they re-enter the land, just as that first generation in the promised land had done). Therefore this feast will be a memorial and a celebration of the Messiah's reign (and of Israel's return to the land – God having fulfilled all of His promises to them in this regard). As far as other nations are concerned, failure to be represented at this festival will constitute a grave offense for suggesting by their absence that, in effect, they are displeased with the King's rule (cf. Lk.19:14; 19:27).

(16) Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. (17) If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, they will have no rain. (18) If the Egyptian people do not go up and take part, they will have no rain. The Lord will bring on them the plague he inflicts on the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. (19) This will be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.
Zechariah 14:16-19 NIV

4) The Evangelizing of the Gentiles and their Response: The Millennium will also see the greatest explosion of evangelism in history (accompanied by a substantial response: Is.19:18-20). Radiating out for its spiritual center, Jerusalem, Jewish evangelists, in the main, will cover the world and bring to fulfillment the prophecy of that great time, "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea":

And I will place a sign among them, and I will send survivors from among them to the nations, to Tarshish, and Put, and Lud, those who draw the bow, Tubhal, and Yavan, the islands far away who have not heard my Name, and have not seen my Glory. Thus will they proclaim my Glory among the nations.
Isaiah 66:19

Nor will this traffic for the sake of the truth be one way only, for many whose hearts are drawn to Jesus Christ will come to Jerusalem to worship at His footstool and to receive instruction in His Word of truth, even going so far as take up permanent residence in Israel so as to be closer to Him and so as to drink more deeply and directly from the waters of truth (cf. Micah 7:11-13; 7:17).

"I will record Rahab (i.e., Egypt) and Babylon among those who acknowledge me—Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush—and will say, "This one was born in Zion."
Psalm 87:4 NIV

"Come let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us of His ways, and that we may walk in His paths."
Isaiah 2:3

The Lord will have compassion on Jacob; once again he will choose Israel and will settle them in their own land. Aliens will join them and unite with the house of Jacob.
Isaiah 14:1 NIV

(14) This is what the Lord says: "As for all my wicked neighbors who seize the inheritance I gave my people Israel, I will uproot them from their lands and I will uproot the house of Judah from among them. (15) But after I uproot them, I will again have compassion and will bring each of them back to his own inheritance and his own country. (16) And if they learn well the ways of my people and swear by my name, saying, 'As surely as the Lord lives'—even as they once taught my people to swear by Baal—then they will be established among my people. (17) But if any nation does not listen, I will completely uproot and destroy it," declares the Lord.
Jeremiah 12:14-17 NIV

(21) "You are to distribute this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel. (22) You are to allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who have settled among you and who have children. You are to consider them as native-born Israelites; along with you they are to be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. (23) In whatever tribe the alien settles, there you are to give him his inheritance," declares the Sovereign Lord.
Ezekiel 47:21-23 NIV

"Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people."
Zechariah 2:11 NIV

(20) This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Many peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come, (21) and the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say, 'Let us go at once to entreat the Lord and seek the Lord Almighty. I myself am going.' (22) And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord Almighty and to entreat him." (23) This is what the Lord Almighty says: "In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.' "
Zechariah 8:20-23 NIV

(20) In that day there will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, "Holy to the Lord", and the cooking pots in the Lord's house will be like the bowls before the altar. (21) Every cooking pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the Lord of hosts; and all who sacrifice will come and take of them and boil in them. And there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts in that day.
Zechariah 14:20-21 NIV

e. Millennial Believers: These gentiles along with the great number of Jews who will turn to the Lord after His glorious return will constitute a complement or filling up of the family of God above and beyond the fulness which is the Church at Christ's return. That is, the millennial believers are given to Christ over and above the number needed to replace the devil and his followers on a strictly one for one basis (for that will by this point already have been accomplished by the resurrection of the Church at the 2nd Advent).⁵⁶²

The post 2nd Advent believers who are "invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb" (the uniting of Christ and His Church and its celebration throughout the memorial time of the Millennium: Rev.19:9), will, along with all of their spiritual off-spring, share and enjoy the world-wide blessing and bounty of Christ's millennial reign. Thus the believers of the Millennium constitute an *additional* blessing for Christ, a "double portion" blessing that is traditionally the right of the first born (Deut.21:15-17; cf. Gen.48:22; 1Sam.1:5; 2Kng.2:9; Job 42:10; Is.61:7; Zech.9:12; 1Tim.5:17). This is most appropriate for the "First Born of all creation" (Col.1:15; cf. Ps.89:27; Col.1:18; Heb.1:6), so that He might truly be "the First Born among many brethren" (Rom.8:29). Given the dramatic and unprecedented repopulation of the earth during the Millennium (treated above; cf. Rev.20:8b), and given that the already resurrected Church constitutes a one for one replacement of the devil's followers (see previous footnote), it is likely that the Millennial echelon of believers, being Christ's double portion, will match the Church precisely in number (a thousand years of perfect environment being more than ample time from the standpoint of population growth).⁵⁶³

IV. The Gog and Magog Rebellion: Revelation 20:7-9

(7) And when the thousand years were completed, Satan was released from his prison, (8) and he came forth to deceive the nations which [reside] in the four quadrants (lit., "corners") of the earth, Gog and Magog (whose number is as the sand of the sea) in order to marshal them together for war. (9) And they went up to the plains of the land [of Israel] and encircled the encampment of the saints and the beloved city [Jerusalem], and fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.

Revelation 20:7-9

The first thing to notice about the last major event in human history before the commencement of eternity is that the Gog and Magog mentioned here bear only a symbolic relationship to the Gog of the land of Magog addressed in Ezekiel 38:2.⁵⁶⁴ The latter reference is to antichrist with the context of Ezekiel chapters 38-39 describing the vast coalition the beast will bring against Jerusalem during the final days of the Tribulation at the battle of Armageddon. This last human rebellion against the Lord Jesus Christ and His millennial rule will share much in common with that earlier attack. Both are instigated by the devil's deceit, both seek to unseat God, and both will draw unprecedentedly large numbers of troops from around the world in order to do battle with Jesus Christ at Jerusalem. For these reasons, John's sanctified use of this well-known appellation, "Gog and Magog", makes perfect sense as a generic phrase to indicate the involvement of the totality of the gentile world in this assault. It seems evident from the verses above that the process of Satan's enlistment of the nations to attack the Great King will be as rapid as it is successful. In spite of perfect government and a thousand years of blissful prosperity more blessed than the world has ever seen, the devil's efforts will meet with a most enthusiastic response on the part of the vast majority of the millennial population. The fact that what appears to be the entirety of the unsaved population of the world at that time will jump at the chance to rid itself of the absolutely fair and just rule of Jesus Christ only goes to show that free will is not a function of environment. The determination to reject God "no matter what" is deep-seated in the heart of unbelief and cannot be coaxed into genuine change no matter how many material blessings are bestowed. This should not really surprise us, because if the forgiveness of our sins at no cost to us through Jesus' death on our behalf and

the offer of eternal life through faith by grace are not enough to satisfy those who reject Him, why should their dissatisfaction with His perfectly fair and abundantly prosperous millennial reign seem at all odd? Arrogance and avarice can never be satisfied. This Satan knows very well, and his new "platform" of freedom from the temporal rule of Jesus Christ whom his audience has already rejected for salvation will cause a wildfire revolt whose appeal will be so intoxicating to all unbelievers that the devil will be able to muster them for the final battle of the world almost effortlessly and even in spite of a lack of support from his legions of imprisoned fallen angels. The description of Jerusalem at this time as "the camp of the saints" also suggests that despite the rebellion's rapid growth, there will be sufficient time for many who have chosen for Jesus Christ to make their way to Jerusalem before the Gog-Magog invasion and assault begin.

(24) Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. (25) But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. (26) But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. (27) The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' (28) And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' (29) But he said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. (30) Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'" (36) Then He left the crowds and went into the house And His disciples came to Him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field." (37) And He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, (38) and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; (39) and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. (40) So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. (41) The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, (42) and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (43) Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father He who has ears, let him hear."

Matthew 13:24-30; 13:36-43 NASB

The parable of the tares describes the pollution of the millennial kingdom during its last days along with the manner of the divine solution: rebelliousness is allowed to come to fruition, which in this case means the actual assault upon Jerusalem, the Messiah's capital city. After the destruction of the attacking force, the remainder of those who set their hearts against Jesus in response to the evil one will be "uprooted" and "burned" (a metaphorical reference to the last judgment and their final end, the lake of fire; see section VI below). In all this we see a very clear parallel to Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. Like our first parents, the millennial population will find themselves living under marvelous circumstances, and yet will still be vulnerable to the offer of something more, not "knowledge", as in the case of Eve, but "freedom" as the devil will deceitfully frame the issue for them (Ps.2:1-3). Thus, the millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ will be the third and final paradise which Satan will corrupt, having first suborned one-third of angelic kind and having thus brought about the

destruction of the original earth,⁵⁶⁵ and having next deceived and corrupted Eve and through her Adam and having thus brought about their expulsion from the garden. Each such action has of course only furthered God's plan, bringing about the creation of mankind in the first instance and initiating the process of human history in the second. At the conclusion of the Gog-Magog rebellion, history will be brought to an end, and the eternal state will commence – following, that is, the final disposition of Satan and his followers (section V), and the final reward of the millennial believers along with the last judgment of all unbelievers (section VI).

As can be seen from the short description in Revelation 20:7-9 (of the complete and instantaneous annihilation of the vast multitudes who will attack Jerusalem in those days), the devil's representations are, as always, mere lies and deceit. For the utter folly of opposing the power of God is something which only blind arrogance can fail to see, and that folly born of arrogance comes through very clearly in the other major passage to treat this revolt, Psalm 2 (cf. Ps.46:6):

(1) Why are the nations forming into a mob and the peoples [of the earth] grumbling idly. (2) The kings of the earth are assembling and its princes are gathering together – against the Lord and His Anointed One, [saying] (3) “Let us pull off Their chains, and cast Their cords from us!” (4) The One enthroned in heaven will laugh. The Lord will mock them. (5) At that time He will speak to them in His anger, and in His wrath He will throw them into confusion. (6) “But as for Me, I have anointed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain.” (7) I shall relate the Lord's decree. He said to Me, “You are My Son. Today I have begotten You. (8) Ask of Me and I shall give [You] the nations as your inheritance, and as Your possession the ends of the earth. (9) You shall shepherd them with a rod of iron, and You shall shatter them like a potter's vessel. (10) So now, O kings, learn prudence! Take warning, you judges of the earth! (11) Serve the Lord with reverence and rejoice with trembling! (12) Kiss the Son (i.e., pay homage to Him), lest He become angry [with you] and you perish for your [insolent] behavior. For His anger may blaze up in an instant [if you do not]. Blessed are all those who take refuge in Him.”
Psalm 2:1-12

Finally, this rebellion and the disaffection and dislocation it will temporarily cause worldwide, conditions to which the millennial population will be otherwise entirely unaccustomed, will also serve to provide a litmus test for the essential spiritual status of all those inhabiting the earth at that time, soon to be brought up at the final judgments which precede eternity.

(31) "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. (32) All the nations will be gathered before him (i.e., after that millennial reign), and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. (33) He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. (34) "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. (35) For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, (36) I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' (37) "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? (38) When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes

and clothe you? (39) When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' (40) "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' (41) "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (42) For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, (43) I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' (44) "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' (45) "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' (46) "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Matthew 25:31-46 NIV

For this time will truly be a time of testing for the entire world, and those not directly involved in the military aspects of the rebellion will still have to face the issue of how to treat believers being persecuted, opposed, or hindered by satanic forces in their journey to Jerusalem. For their actions towards "the least of these" will be a clear indication of their faith or lack thereof.

(12) Oh, the raging of many nations – they rage like the raging sea! Oh, the uproar of the peoples – they roar like the roaring of great waters! (13) Although the peoples roar like the roar of surging waters, when he rebukes them they flee far away, driven before the wind like chaff on the hills, like tumbleweed before a gale. (14) In the evening, sudden terror! Before the morning, they are gone! This is the portion of those who loot us, the lot of those who plunder us.

Isaiah 17:12-14 NIV

V. The Final Disposition of Satan and his Angels: Revelation 20:10

And the devil who was deceiving them (i.e., the millennial rebels, a.k.a. "Gog and Magog") was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet [already are], and they will be tormented day and night for all eternity (lit., "to the ages of the ages").

Revelation 20:10

Satan here meets his final end, joining in the lake of fire the beast and the false prophet who have likewise been deprived of the benefit of any last analysis of their cases or formal pronouncement of sentence.

By your many sins and dishonest trade you have desecrated your sanctuaries. So *I made a fire come out from you*, and it consumed you, and I reduced you to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching.

Ezekiel 28:18 NIV

The devil's instigation of the Gog-Magog rebellion constitutes an extraordinary act of rebellion against the perfect rule of the Messiah similar in its egregious temerity to the instigation of the Armageddon campaign (different only in that the latter was designed to resist His return rather than to overthrow His rule). In the case of the beast and the false prophet, their actions

rendered any further explanation of their condemnation completely unnecessary. Herein we see a certain symmetry in the early consignment to the lake of fire of the most offensive angel (Satan), the most offensive human being (the false prophet), and the most offensive hybrid creature (the nephilim, half-angel, half-human seed of the devil, antichrist), all of whom have merited this extraordinary treatment by their extraordinarily arrogant behavior. But while the beast and the false prophet were denied any further process of adjudication (otherwise known as the last judgment), and subjected to this summary though entirely just judgment instead, Satan has already been judged.

(8) "When He [the Holy Spirit] comes, He will call the world to account regarding sin, and righteousness, and judgment: (9) regarding sin, because they do not believe in Me; (10) regarding righteousness, because I am going to my Father and you are not going to be seeing Me any longer; (11) regarding judgment, *because the ruler of this world has been convicted [already].*"

John 16:8-11

Man was created for the glory of God (Is.43:7; cf. Eph.1:5-14), and a large part of that glory is won in the responsiveness that some (though sadly far from all) human beings show in coming to God through faith so as to be saved by grace on the basis of Jesus' death to sin. This is so because human history as seen from our Lord's perspective rather than from our myopic human viewpoint was always meant to be a means by which God's condemnation of Satan and the fallen angels would be demonstrated as just. For, as we have previously had cause to consider at length (i.e., in the five part Satanic Rebellion series which serves as an introduction to this present series), Satan's case was already adjudicated by the Lord before human history ever even commenced (that is, prior to the reconstruction of the earth during the seven Genesis days and the creation of Adam and Eve).

In your extensive conspiring, you were filled with wickedness, and you sinned. So I cast you from the mountain of God as one profaned, and I blotted out [your memory] from among the stones of fire, O covering cherub.

Ezekiel 28:16

With the successful redemption of mankind at the cross and subsequent belief in the work and Person of Jesus Christ by His Church, God has demonstrated not only the willingness of creatures possessed of free will to repent and return to Him, but much more importantly His ability and willingness to provide the means for their salvation at a cost beyond imagination, the suffering and death of His own dear Son our Lord. This is the victory God has won over the devil in human history, not his physical defeat (which God could have accomplished in the blink of an eye and with no discernible effort), but the demonstration of His love and of His justice, of His ability to be true to the one without compromising the other – by means of the cross of Jesus Christ.

(31) Now is the judgment of this world. Now will the prince of this world be driven out. (32) And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to Myself.

John 12:31-32

[For by means of the cross, God] has stripped [demon] rulers and authorities [of their power] and subjected them to public humiliation, having triumphed over them in [Christ].
Colossians 2:15

Inasmuch as Satan's conviction predates human history, his execution, otherwise known as "the second death" (Rev.20:14; 21:8; cf. Rev.20:6), has long since been prepared for him and his followers in the form of the "lake of fire", an eternal place of punishment which all creatures who have rejected God the Father and His Christ will share forever.

Then He will say to those on His left, "Away from Me, you accursed ones, into the eternal fire [*already*] prepared for the devil and his angels.
Matthew 25:41

Although the book of Revelation does not say so, the passage immediately above, Matthew 25:41, indicates that the other fallen angels will share the devil's fate (Job 4:18; 15:15; cf. Jude 1:13b). But while Satan will not have the benefit of a last, official hearing, and while neither their consignment to the lake of fire nor any final judgment for the fallen angels is described in the book of Revelation, other scriptures indicate that this process of their disposition will be the next eschatological order of business:

Will anyone teach God knowledge, since *He will judge* the high ones (i.e., angels)?
Job 21:22

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but plunged them into Tartarus with its gloomy pits (i.e., the Abyss), preserving them for *the [day of] judgment . . .*
2nd Peter 2:4

And the angels who did not keep to their own realm but deserted their proper habitation He has imprisoned with everlasting chains in the gloom below (i.e., in the Abyss) in anticipation of *the judgment of that great day*.
Jude 1:6

So while for the reasons discussed above, Revelation 20:10 singles out the devil for consignment to the fiery lake at this time, there is no reason to suppose that Satan's followers will be granted any further stay of execution.⁵⁶⁶ Since the last judgment of human beings follows next in the eschatological scheme of things, it seems certain the rest of the fallen angels will follow their leader, the devil, into the lake of fire in short order if not immediately after his relegation to the eternal flames. For the eternal state will be a place "where [only] righteousness dwells" (2Pet.3:13; cf. Dan.9:24), and it is consistently described as being free of every trace of uncleanness (Rev.21:8; 21:27; 22:5; 22:15), a condition that most certainly entails the prior removal of all of the fallen angels. Therefore when we are told that "death and Hades" will be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev.20:14-15), we are certainly meant to understand Satan's legions as being included (inasmuch as Hades, and specifically the Abyss or Tartarus, is the present place of incarceration of a goodly number of demons, and their likely place of

residence during the Millennium; cf. section I.4 above, "The Incarceration of Satan and his Demons") .

The Lake of Fire: Though the Bible uses a variety of terms to describe both the interim and the eternal, self-selected place of condemnation for unbelievers and fallen angels (e.g., "the grave", "Topheth", "Sheol", "Gehenna", "Hades", "torments", etc.), the final "hell" to which all reprobate creatures are condemned is a very real and distinct place, called at Revelation 19:20 "*the lake of fire which burns with sulfur*" (Matt.25:41; Rev.20:10; 20:14-15; cf. Matt.13:42; 13:50). The interim "hell", or "torments", is one of the three sections of Hades below the earth (Lk.16:23; the other two being the now empty paradise where departed believers resided prior to the ascension of Christ, and the Abyss, the place of incarceration for certain of the fallen angels), and it is there that all deceased unbelievers will remain until the time of the last judgment. As we are told at Revelation 19:20, antichrist and his false prophet will be the first to be thrown into the lake of fire (at the conclusion of the battle of Armageddon), with the devil following at the end of the Gog-Magog rebellion some thousand years later (Rev.20:10), and with his fallen angels following him immediately at that time (as discussed above; 2Pet.3:13; Rev.20:14-15; 21:8; 21:27; 22:5; 22:15; cf. Dan.9:24).

Even though it is presently unoccupied, the lake of fire nevertheless already exists. It has "[already been] prepared" – "for the devil *and* his angels" (Matt.25:41; cf. Dan.7:9-11). But while the lake has been prepared for Satan and his followers, we see very clearly in Matthew chapter 25 that unbelieving mankind will share this same fate. For in the judgment of "the sheep and the goats", men and not angels are the ones being judged, and the "goats", human beings who have consciously chosen to reject the Father's gracious offer of salvation in Jesus Christ, are likewise commanded to depart into the lake of fire at the conclusion of this "last judgment" (cf. Rev.20:14-15; 21:8). So while neither the fallen angels nor deceased unbelievers are presently in the lake of fire, it is this lake which will be the place of eternal residence for all who deliberately reject God and His love by refusing Jesus Christ.

John answered them all and said, "I am [symbolically] baptizing you with water. But One who is more powerful than me is coming, [One] whose sandal thong I am not sufficient to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit . . . and *with fire!* His winnowing fork is in His hand, [ready] to cleanse His threshing floor and gather the grain into His barn, but *He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*

Luke 3:16-17

The fire itself, besides being literal, is also a symbol of the judgment under which all human beings find themselves for their sinful conduct (Jn.3:18; 16:5-11; 1Jn.3:14 – and no one has ever been completely without sin save Jesus Christ; cf. Rom.3:9; 3:23; 5:8). We are given to see this intimate connection between divine judgment and the fire which fills the lake of damnation in both Isaiah's and Daniel's accounts of antichrist's final end:

(33) Topheth (i.e., the lake of fire) has long been prepared (cf. Matt.25:41), it has been made ready *for the king* (i.e., antichrist). Its fire pit has been made deep and wide, with an abundance of fire and wood; the breath of the Lord *like a stream of burning sulfur*, sets it

ablaze.

Isaiah 30:32-33 NIV

(9) I kept looking until thrones were set down and the Ancient of Days (i.e., the Father) took His seat. His attire was white as snow, as was the hair of His head, [white] like the purest wool. His throne was aflame with fire, and its wheels were a blazing fire. (10) A *river of fire* was flowing, and it poured forth from before Him. Thousands upon thousands were ministering to Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him. The court was seated and the books were opened. (11) Meanwhile, I kept looking on account of the sound of the arrogant words which the horn (i.e., antichrist) was speaking. I kept looking until he was killed and his body destroyed and *given over to the burning fire*.

Daniel 7:9-11

The lake is thus filled up by a fiery river of divine wrath and judgment (cf. Is.66:15-16; Matt.3:7; Lk.3:7; Jn.3:36; Rom.1:18; 2:5-8; 3:5; 5:9; 9:22; Eph.2:3; 5:6; Col.3:6-8; 1Thes.1:10; 2:16; 5:9; Rev.6:16-17; 11:18; 14:19; 15:7; 16:1; 19:15), a river of fire which "flows" forth from the throne of God (with this portion of the scene in Daniel 7 referring through prophetic conflation to the Father's judgment of Satan and his angels in eternity past; cf. Jn.16:11). In Revelation chapter 14 we find this now fully prepared lake of fire positioned before Christ's Great White Throne at the time of the last judgment of human beings (which at the point of our present context in this study is about to commence immediately):

(9) And yet a third angel followed them, saying in a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives [his] mark upon his forehead or upon his hand, (10) he himself will also drink from the wine of God's *wrath* which has been mixed undiluted in the cup of His anger. And [that person] will be tormented in fire and sulfur *before angels, [and] saints, and before the Lamb*. (11) And the smoke of their torment will go up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night, those who worship the beast and his image and whoever takes the mark of his name."

Revelation 14:9-11

The passage above portrays the act of execution as part of the process of the final judgment of unbelievers. That is the meaning and the force of the phrase in verse ten above, "before the Lamb". Just as the lake was initially filled directly from the Father's throne during the prehistoric judgment of the devil and his followers, so the final judgment for the human race will likewise take place directly in front of the lake of fire (cf. Dan.7:9-11; Matt.25:41). Upon the passing of sentence, those whose names are found to have been blotted out of the book of life for the cause of unbelief will be summarily cast in "before" or "in the presence of" the Lamb and all of us His followers who will attend the proceedings. We therefore should not take the passage above to mean that the place of the lake of fire will be the New Jerusalem where the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ will reside with us forever, for we know from elsewhere in scripture that "hell" will instead be far removed their glorious presence:

(6) Since indeed it is just for God to repay with tribulation those who are subjecting you to tribulation, (7) and to give you who are being distressed relief along with us at the revelation of our Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels, (8) wreaking vengeance in a flame of fire

upon those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction *away from the presence of the Lord* and the glory of His power.

2nd Thessalonians 1:6-9

Through the grace and mercy of God the Father, the horrible fate of those consigned to the lake of fire will not trouble us for a moment in the blissful eternity we shall spend with Him and our dear Savior, Lord Jesus Christ (Is.25:8; 35:10; 65:17-19; Rev.7:17; 21:4; cf. 2Cor.5:17; Heb.12:27). That is so even though there are scriptural indications that the lake of fire and its inhabitants will indeed be visible to us in eternity.

(22) "For just as the new heavens and new earth which I am about to make are going to continue before Me", says the Lord, "so your seed and its name will continue. (23) And it will come to pass that from month to month and from Sabbath to Sabbath all flesh will come to worship before Me", says the Lord. (24) "And they will go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who rebelled against Me, for their worm will not die and their fire will not be quenched and they will be abhorrent to all flesh".

Isaiah 66:22-24

Since it already exists, since it will be visible in the future (standing as an eternal memorial to the folly of rejecting God and His mercy: Rev.14:10), and since it will be no part of the New Jerusalem (or the new heavens and new earth), the lake is in all probability located within the subterranean realm of the present earth. This location has much to recommend it. Firstly, the prehistoric filling of the lake in Daniel chapter seven (quoted above) and the adjudication of Satan's case which accompanied it (Jn.16:11) must have taken place after the devastation and inundation of the original heavens and earth within the Genesis gap (that is, following Satan's rebellion which occurred between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2; see part 2 of the Satanic Rebellion Series: The Genesis Gap). After this supernatural darkening of the original universe, apart from the third heaven (technically a separate place from "the [twin] heavens and the earth", and, as a paradise in its own right, inappropriate for the location of the lake of fire), only the subterranean earth would have remained unaffected by the judgment upon initial creation stemming from the devil's revolt. For this reason, it would seem to have been the only place available for those proceedings, as well as the only place available for the positioning of the lake of fire, whose filling is described at Daniel 7:10. According to this interpretation, the third heaven was made and has always remained perfect; the [twin] heavens and earth are the place where creature free will produces imperfection in what was originally created perfect, thus necessitating the choice between mercy and judgment; and the subterranean earth was made as the place for containing and restraining those who choose the latter over the former. It is more than a little interesting to note that while the devil and his angels were not deposited into the lake of fire at the time sentence was passed upon them (it being God's good pleasure to demonstrate the justice of His decision and the mercy which could have been theirs through the process of creating and redeeming mankind), yet He gave them to see the horror of their final end well ahead of time – and yet they made no effort to repent (trusting instead in Satan's ability to defeat the Lord in the contest ahead: human history).

The last judgment (covered directly below) will likewise take place in a very similar interlude, *after* the destruction of the present heavens and earth (Rev.20:11), but *before* the creation of the new heavens and new earth (Rev.21:1). In this instance too, only the third heaven (inappropriate for the presence of evil or the final place of condemnation) and the subterranean earth will (temporarily) remain. It is within the latter, directly in front of the lake of fire, that the final judgment will take place. Finally, after the creation of the new heavens and new earth and descent from the third heaven to earth of the New Jerusalem (Rev.21:2; 21:10), Isaiah chapter sixty-six above indicates that there will be some sort of visual access to the lake of fire from the new earth (along the lines of the heavenly sea in the third heaven today which acts as a viewing-port for observing events on the present day earth: compare Rev.4:6 with Rev.15:2-3; and cf. Job 1-2; 1Kng.22:19-22; Lk.15:10; Jn.8:56; 1Cor.4:9; 11:10; 1Pet.1:12; Heb.12:1; Rev.6:10).⁵⁶⁷ But just as there is a "great fixed-chasm" between the subterranean paradise and the interim hell of "torments" which prevents any access from one place to the other (Lk.16:26), and just as there was little interest on the part of the departed believers in the just fate of those who rejected God in this life (Lk.16:25), so the lake of fire and final end of all those who arrogantly and deliberately chose to oppose our Lord will be of little moment to those of us who are enjoying the ineffable blessings of eternity in the presence of our dear Savior Jesus Christ.

The quotation from Isaiah above and many other such in scripture put the lie to the evil heresy which proclaims oblivion for those who oppose God in this life and trample the precious sacrifice of Jesus Christ underfoot. The torment of punishment to which all who have no use for the Lord in this life will be subjected is very real, and it will be never ending (e.g., Matt.8:12; 13:42; 13:49-50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; 25:41-46; Lk.13:28; Rev.14:10-11; 21:7-8), consisting of five essential punishments: 1) fire, 2) sulfur, 3) darkness, and 4) separation from God. The first two "active" forms of punishment are what is doubtless meant in the Isaiah passage above by "their worm" (quoted by our Lord at Mk.9:48). This is an extremely vivid image which evokes the consumption of the present body in the grave by worms, teaching that, in contrast to the finite nature of the decomposition of the present body, the body with which the unrighteous dead will be resurrected will endure forever, but for punishment rather than for blessing.⁵⁶⁸ Literal fire and sulfur will form the environment in which unbelievers and fallen angels will pass eternity, the former producing tangible physical pain, the latter generating an unpleasantness affecting the senses of taste and smell. The result will be an agonizing state of suffering which the image of the undying worm brings graphically to mind, resulting in "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt.8:12; 13:42; 13:50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Lk.13:28). But there will also be passive suffering to experience in the lake of fire: darkness (Is.8:22; Matt.8:12; 22:13; 25:30), itself a cause of pain and discomfort (Rev.16:10; cf. Ex.10:21-23; Rev.8:12), and a complete separation from the blessed and glorious Persons of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, whose presence defines what paradise truly is. It is more than fitting that those who rejected the light and loved the darkness in life (Jn.3:19-21; cf. Jn.1:3-9; 1Jn.1:5-7) should dwell in darkness forever (cf. Lk.16:24; 2Pet.2:17; Jude 13), and that those who rejected God and His mercy should spend eternity apart from Him. For those of us who have dedicated ourselves to being near to Him through Jesus Christ, this punishment of being deprived of the Word, even more than the fire, the sulfur, and the darkness, is the most appalling thing to contemplate of all. And while their terrible fate rightly causes us to shudder, there are no grounds for sympathy for those who rejected the blood of Christ. They chose the

lake of fire by rejecting the only One who could rescue them from it. As a result, by their own personal acts of free will unbelievers will be separated from God in eternity, the very God for whom they had absolutely no use in this life. Herein we find the essential significance of the etymology of the most common Hebrew word for hell, "Sheol". Derived from the root *sha'al* (שאל), whose essential meaning is "to ask", this word for "hell" indicates that unbelievers are getting exactly "what they asked for", namely, "freedom" from God, and would no doubt ask for it again and again in precisely the same negative way, even if they had a thousand life-times to reconsider.

VI. The Last Judgment: Revelation 20:11-15

(11) And I saw a throne, a great white one, and Him who was sitting upon it (i.e., Jesus Christ). From His presence the earth and the heavens fled, and no place was found for them. (12) And I saw the dead, both the great and the insignificant, standing in front of the throne. And books were opened; and another book was opened which is the book of life. And the dead were judged on the basis of the things written in the books, according to what they had done. (13) For the sea gave up the dead which were in it, [that is] death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them, and each person was condemned according to what they had done. (14) And death and Hades (i.e., all unbelievers) were cast into the lake of fire. And this is the second death: the lake of fire. (15) And if anyone was not found written in the Book of Life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:11-15

The verses above take us rapidly through all that remains of eschatology up until eternity begins. That is to say, they conclude God's plan for human history, with the exception of His blessed creation of the glorious new heavens and new earth and the commencement of the eternal state (covered in chapters 21-22). The Great White Throne or "last judgment" described above is the final event before darkness, tears and sorrow fade into nothingness forevermore, washed away by the brilliant light of God in the everlasting Kingdom of the Father where we shall enjoy sweet fellowship with Him and our Lord Jesus Christ, world without end. Following the melting away of the old heavens and earth (described in verse eleven), the last phase of the resurrection will take place, wherein all millennial believers will be raised and rewarded with eternal life, while all the unsaved dead will be raised for the judgment described above and the second death. Since the theme of the book of Revelation is one of our Lord's just judgment upon the forces of evil and His total victory over them, it should not be surprising that these latter events, related elsewhere in scripture (and discussed immediately below), give place here to the disposition of the unsaved in order to emphasize the last judgment itself. And there most certainly will be a last judgment of the unsaved dead as the passage above makes clear (along with many other scriptures, e.g., Matt.7:21-23; 16:25-27; Mk.8:35-38; Lk.9:24-26; Acts 24:25, etc.).

Every human being who attains adulthood with normal mental capacity is accountable to God for their free will choices, both their sins and their decisions in regard to seeking out His mercy (or failing to do so). Therefore, just as all are aware of God's existence and character (even if they later deny it or harden their hearts against this universal truth; e.g., Rom.1:18-32), and as all are aware of their own mortality, so all are aware that successfully facing the scrutiny and

judgment of a perfect God on one's own merits is an utterly impossible task. All unbelievers know that this last judgment is coming. The truly surprising thing to those of us who love Jesus Christ is the horrific folly of passively ignoring this problem or even actively rejecting God's grace when such things are true.

(1) The heavens recount the glory of God, and the firmament tells of the work of His hands. (2) One day after another pours forth [His] words, and one night after another declares [His] knowledge. (3) There is no tongue or culture that cannot understand their voice (i.e., of the heavens/firmament). (4) Their design has gone out into (i.e., "is visible throughout") the entire earth, and their words to the end of the world. He has set a tent for the sun within them (i.e., hidden it in the heavens'/firmament's night sky), (5) and from this it goes forth like a [resplendent] bridegroom from his [wedding] canopy. [The sun] exults to run its course like an athlete [does]. (6) Its starting line is at one end of the heavens, and its circuit [takes it] to the ends [of the sky]. And nothing is hidden from its view.

Psalms 19:1-6

He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 NIV

(18) God's wrath is about to be revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness – on men who *suppress the truth* [in their hearts about God] in their unrighteousness. (19) For that which can be known about God [from everyday experience] is obvious to them, because God has made it obvious. (20) His nature, though invisible, is nevertheless plainly apparent, and has been since His foundation of the world, for it may be clearly inferred from this creation of His – [this is true of] both His eternal power and His divinity – so that they are *without any excuse*: (21) *they knew about God*, but they neither honored Him as God nor thanked Him. Instead, they gave themselves over to [the] vanity [of this world] in their speculations, and their senseless hearts were filled with darkness. (22) Claiming to be wise, they became foolish, (23) for they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for images and likenesses of corruptible men, of birds and beasts and reptiles. (24) For this [very] reason, God abandoned them to corruption in the lusts of their own hearts, that they might mutually defile their bodies (i.e., the very thing they lusted to do). (25) [And so] they exchanged the truth of God for the lie [of the devil], and worshiped and served the creature [Satan] in place of the Creator who is [worthy to be] blessed forever. Amen. (26) [Yes,] for this [very] reason God abandoned them to defiling passions. For their females exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones, (27) and likewise also the males abandoned natural relations with the female and burned with desire one for another, males for males, acting out their shamefulness in full, and in their own [flesh] fully receiving the reward due for their error. (28) And just as they did not see fit to keep God in their hearts, God abandoned them to their unfit minds, to do things which are not fitting, (29) filled up with every [sort of] unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, full of envy, murder, strife, guile, maliciousness, gossips, (30) slanderers, God-forsaken-[and]-forsaking, insolent, arrogant, boasters, devisers of evils, not concerned for their parents, (31) unthinking, unreconcilable, uncaring, unmerciful, (32) men who though they had full knowledge of God's righteous decree, namely, that *those who do such things are worthy of death*, not only did [such] things themselves, but even commended those

who made it their practice [to do them].
Romans 1:18-32

(14) For whenever the gentiles who do not have the Law do by nature the things [written in] the Law, these who have no Law are a Law for themselves. (15) For they demonstrate that the essence of the Law has been written in their hearts when their conscience testifies against them, and their [mental] deliberations [based on conscience] alternatively either condemn them or acquit them. (16) [This examination of Rom.2:11-15 will take place] on the day when God will judge the secret things of men through Jesus Christ according to my gospel.
Romans 2:14-16

It is appointed unto men to die once, and, after that, judgment is in store.
Hebrews 9:27

1. The Destruction of the Universe and the Interlude of Final Judgment

a. The Last Resurrection of the Saved and the Unsav

At the end of the thousand-year millennial reign of Jesus Christ, there will be a complete "cleansing of His threshing floor", the post-millennial complement to the Second Advent's "baptism of fire" (Mk.1:8; Matt.3:10-12; Lk.3:9-17; see section I.5 above). At this time all stumbling blocks will be removed from the Messiah's kingdom and cast into eternal fire in preparation for the commencement of the eternal kingdom wherein there will be no evil or unbelief forevermore (a cleansing which requires a prior resurrection and judgment of the unsaved).

(12) His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will sweep clean His threshing floor, and will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.
Matthew 3:12

The wheat are believers; the chaff unbelievers. Bringing the one group into the barn and burning up the other requires the prior resurrection of both and their individual evaluation, an evaluation for reward in the case of believers, but one of judgment for unbelievers.

(47) "Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. (48) When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. (49) This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous (50) and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
Matthew 13:47-48 NIV

The "end of the age" is the end of human history, coterminous with the end of the Millennium. As in the case of John's analogy to the threshing floor, saving the good fish and throwing out the bad requires their prior resurrection (represented by the collecting of all who remain at the end of the age by the "net") and general evaluation (represented by the fishermen who examine the fish to determine their category, good or bad). This initial separation into two essential categories, accomplished by angels in the passage above, is also represented in the sheep and

goats judgment where the Lord will separate the two groups prior to their specific, individual judgment (Matt.25:31-33). The parable of the net also places the disposition of the wicked last in the order of these final events (i.e., they are thrown into the fiery furnace, the lake of fire, only *after* the righteous have been collected). Thus in this passage we have the same sequence as implied by the sheep and goats judgment, John the baptist's description, and our context, Revelation 20:11-15:

- 1) Resurrection of both groups (i.e., all as yet non-resurrected believers along with all the unsaved from the beginning of human history).
- 2) Separation by group (wheat from chaff, sheep from goats, good from bad fish).
- 3) Salvation and evaluation of the righteous.
- 4) Judgment and final disposition of the unrighteous (into the lake of fire).

Furthermore, we know from our context, Revelation 20:11b ("From His presence the earth and the heavens fled, and no place was found for them"), that before the last judgment the old heavens and old earth will be destroyed (2Pet.3:5-13), revealing everything that transpired in all prior history (2Pet.3:10), and that it is only after the completion of this entire process that the new heavens and new earth will be created and eternity will thus begin (cf. Rev.21:1).

(24) Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. (25) But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. (26) When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. (27) "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' (28) " 'An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' (29) " 'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. (30) Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles *to be* burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.' " (36) Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." (37) He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. (38) The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, (39) and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. (40) "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. (41) The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. (42) They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (43) Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear." Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 NIV

The parable of the wheat and the tares (weeds) above presents an identical sequence of events, only somewhat more detailed. The kingdom of heaven is the Messiah's millennial kingdom (cf. Matt.13:47) wherein unbelievers (tares/weeds) grow up in close proximity to believers (wheat).

The harvest is the resurrection (step one) wherein the weeds are separated from the wheat and are prepared for but not committed to the fire (step two).⁵⁶⁹ The righteous are gathered into the barn (step three), and the wicked are then cast into the lake of fire following the last judgment (step four). Finally, this parable adds the additional detail of showing us the righteous after the conclusion of this entire four-step process, now enjoying life everlasting in the eternal state in “the kingdom of their Father” (i.e., the New Heavens and New Earth as opposed to “the kingdom of heaven”, the prior millennial kingdom). For, given that we know from our context in Revelation chapters twenty-one and twenty-two that the Father will only be present on earth after human history has concluded, “the kingdom of their Father” mentioned here as the place where the righteous will “shine like the sun” must certainly be the eternal kingdom of New Jerusalem.⁵⁷⁰

(31) "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. (32) All the nations will be gathered before him (i.e., after that millennial reign), and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. (33) He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. (34) "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. (35) For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, (36) I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' (37) "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? (38) When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? (39) When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' (40) "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' (41) "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (42) For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, (43) I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' (44) "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' (45) "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' (46) "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."
Matthew 25:31-46 NIV

The sheep and goats judgment agrees with this sequence entirely. Verse thirty-one encompasses the final events of human history from the second advent ("When the Son of Man comes in his glory") to the last judgment ("he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory"), with the throne referring to the throne of judgment whereon our Lord Jesus will render a final evaluation of reward for all remaining believers (the sheep) and of judgment for all unbelievers (the goats). The phrase "and [when] all the angels [are] with him" is an additional indication that the judgment upon which this description focuses is post-millennial, as there are no indications from elsewhere in scripture that the angels will play a visible role in Christ's millennial kingdom. Further, the fact that "all" the angels are present implies that the fallen angels have now been removed from the scene (an event which takes place at the Millennium's

close as we saw in section V above). In this description too there is a separation of the righteous and the wicked, with the righteous receiving their evaluation first, and the wicked last (which evaluation is followed by their sequestration into the lake of fire). Finally, here too we see believers enjoying eternity at the end of the process in contrast to the prior damnation experienced by unbelievers ("Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life").

As suggested under step one above, this process of rewarding the millennial believers and judging all unbelievers requires the prior resurrection of all remaining non-resurrected human beings (i.e., the final phase of the resurrection unto life on the one hand, and the joint resurrection of all the unsaved dead on the other).⁵⁷¹ This resurrection is in fact the very last earthly event of human history and a point equally important to emphasize, since it underlines the reality of the eternal consequences of our choices in this life, and the eternal divergence between the two essential elements of the human race based upon these choices, namely, eternal life for all who respond to Jesus Christ, and the second death for all who refuse the grace of God (cf. Matt.10:34).

(2) For many who sleep in the dust *will awake*, some to eternal life, but the *others to shame and eternal separation* [from God]. (3) Then those who have insight will shine like the shining forth of the dawn, even those who led the many to righteousness, like stars forever and ever. Daniel 12:2-3

(21) Just as the Father raises the dead and brings them to life, so the Son brings to life whomever He wishes. (22) And neither does the Father judge anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, (23) in order that all may honor the Son as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. (24) Truly, truly I say to you, that the one who hears My Word and believes in the One who sent Me has eternal life and does not enter into judgment but has passed from death into life. (25) Truly, truly I say to you that an hour is coming when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear it will come to life. (26) For just as the Father has life in Himself, so He has given to the Son to have life in Himself. (27) And He has given authority to Him to render judgment, because He is the Son of Man. (28) Do not be amazed at this [statement], that an hour will come in which all those in their tombs will hear His voice. (29) For they shall come forth – those who have done what is good to *a resurrection of life* (i.e., those who have faithfully followed Jesus Christ), but those who have done what is worthless to *a resurrection of judgment*. John 5:21-29

And I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be *a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked*. Acts 24:15 NIV

b. The Destruction of the Present Heavens and Earth

(25) Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. (26) They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a

garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, *and they shall be changed*.
Psalm 102:26 KJV (cf. Heb.1:11-12)

Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will quake from its place, on account of the anger of the Lord and on the day of His fierce wrath.
Isaiah 13:13 (cf. Hag.2:6; 2:21)

All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and *the sky rolled up like a scroll*; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree.
Isaiah 34:4 NIV (cf. Matt.24:29; Mk.13:24-25)

Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; *the heavens will vanish* like smoke, *the earth will wear out* like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies. But my salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail.
Isaiah 51:6 NIV

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.
Matthew 24:35 NIV (cf. Matt.5:18; Mk.13:31; Lk.21:33)

(25) See to it that you do not ignore the One who is speaking [to you]. For if those [of the Exodus generation] did not escape when they ignored the one who was giving them warning from the earth (i.e., Moses), how much more shall we [not escape, if we] turn away from the One [giving us warning] from heaven? (26) His voice shook the earth at that time [at Mount Sinai], but now He has made [us] this promise, saying, "Yet once more shall I shake not only the earth, but also heaven" (Hag.2:6; cf. Hag.2:21). (27) And this "once more" clearly indicates the [coming] *transformation of things which may be shaken* as things which have been made [by Him], so that the [coming] things which cannot be shaken may abide forever. (28) Since, therefore, we have received a Kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude so that through it we may serve God in a pleasing way with reverence and fear. (29) For our God is a *consuming fire*.
Hebrews 12:25-29

(14) and the *heaven retreated like a scroll* when it is rolled up, and every mountain and hill *was moved from its place*.
Revelation 6:14

And I saw a throne, a great white one, and Him who was sitting upon it (i.e., Jesus Christ). From His presence *the earth and the heavens fled*, and *no place was found for them*.
Revelation 20:11

As the above passages show, the removal of the present cosmos is an essential prerequisite for the commencement of eternity, and precedes the creation of the "new heavens and new earth" which will be the home of all believers and elect angels forevermore.⁵⁷² The reason for their removal is the necessity to remove every taint of sin and unrighteousness, and, as befits such a judgment, the precise manner of their removal will be a fiery destruction (cf. Heb.12:29):

(7) And *the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire* by that same Word (of God), preserved for the day of judgment and the destruction of godless men. (8) Let not this one fact escape your attention then, beloved, namely that one day is like a thousand years in the Lord's eyes, and a thousand years like one day (i.e., that "day" will span a millennium). (9) The Lord is not delaying in the fulfillment of His promise (as some think); rather He is exercising patience for your sake, being unwilling for anyone to perish, but desiring all instead to come to repentance. (10) For the Day of the Lord will come like a thief, a day in (i.e., over the course of) which *the heavens will depart with a roar, the very elements will ignite and dissolve, and the earth and everything which has been done upon it will be laid bare* [for the Lord's inspection]. (11) Since all these things are destined to disintegrate in this way, [consider] what sort of [Christians] we ought to be, [devoted to] holy and godly conduct, (12) as we wait with eager expectation and apprehension the advent of the Day of God. For on that day *the heavens will burst into flame and dissolve, and the elements will catch fire and melt*. (13) But we are awaiting new heavens and a new earth just as He promised – [a world] where righteousness dwells.

2nd Peter 3:7-13

The fact that the present heavens and earth have been "preserved for the day of judgment and the destruction of godless men" (v.7; cf. Matt.24:35-36; Mk.13:31-32; 1Pet.4:5-6), indicates the same sequence of events: the destruction of the universe will precede the last judgment, which judgment will in turn precede the creation of the new heavens and new earth. Therefore the last judgment must take place in a sort of brief interim between time and eternity, occurring after the final resurrection of the living and the dead and the annihilation of the present cosmos, but before the creation of the new heavens and new earth and the commencement of eternity.

c. The Judgment of the Sheep

Since the last judgment of Revelation chapter twenty occurs in an interval or interim period between the end of time (i.e., following the resurrection and the destruction of the old heavens and earth described at Rev.20:11b) but before the beginning of eternity (i.e., prior to the creation of the new heavens and new earth described at Rev.21:1), and since the sheep and goats are judged sequentially and in the same venue in Matthew chapter twenty-five, we conclude that the final evaluation of the "friends of the Bride", that is, all who are saved from the point of Christ's return until the end of human history, also takes place during this interlude. This is the final phase of the resurrection of the living prophesied by the apostle Paul:

(23) But each [will be resurrected] in his own echelon. Christ [is the] first-fruits (i.e., the initial person and echelon of resurrection). Next [will be] those belonging to Christ at His coming, [all believers at the 2nd Advent]. (24) *Then the end* [of human history, the resurrection of millennial believers], when He will hand the Kingdom over to the Father, after He has brought an end to all rule, all power, and all authority (i.e., hostile human and angelic control). (25) For He must rule until He has placed all His enemies under His feet.

1st Corinthians 15:23-25

That the sheep are evaluated first (as we have seen above; see also 1Pet.4:17 where judgment is said to "begin" with the "household of faith", and only afterwards descend upon "those who do not obey the gospel") is also established plainly enough by Matthew 25:31-46; for the sheep on His right hand are commended first (vv.34-40), and only after their evaluation are the goats judged (vv.41-45). Moreover, the evaluation of the sheep for reward is completed before the goats are judged (explaining the absence of believers at the Great White Throne; see the next section immediately below). This evaluation will be precisely along the lines of the evaluation of the Church at Christ's 2nd Advent return (described in section I.7 above); it is only the timing which will be different.

Before moving on to the last judgment of all unbelievers, two common misunderstandings about this final evaluation of resurrected believers must be addressed. First, Matthew 25:46 does not in any way conflict with the fact that only unbelievers are seen before the Great White Throne in Revelation 20:11-15. The righteous have already been evaluated, and so of course "go off into eternal life". Nothing in Matthew 25:46 necessitates either that the sheep should have to "wait" until the goats are condemned to experience eternal life, or far less that they must thus be included in the judgment described at Revelation 20:11-15. The sheep have already received their rewards before the judgment of the goats (i.e., the Great White Throne) even begins, as is abundantly clear from the entire prior description in Matthew chapter twenty-five. Verse 46 merely summarizes the contrasting destinies of the two groups (rather than re-writing the chronological sequence).

Secondly, attempts to equate the sheep and goats judgment with Christ's 2nd Advent (rather than seeing it for what it truly is, the final evaluation of the last echelon of resurrected believers and the last judgment of all unbelievers) are misguided for several reasons:

- 1) The phrases "blessed of the Father" and "the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world" in verse 34 are clear references to the Eternal State rather than the millennial kingdom of Christ. For the Father will not make His abode with us on earth until the end of human history (Rev.21:3; 21:22). Therefore, rather than the thousand year "kingdom of heaven" in time (i.e., Christ's millennial kingdom; contrast in Matt.13:24 and 13:43 respectively), it is the Father's *permanent kingdom in eternity* which these phrases clearly have in mind (1Cor.15:25-28; Heb.12:28; cf. Heb.8:2).
- 2) The sheep and goats are judged at the same venue and sequentially, and the unbelievers are thrown into the lake of fire immediately at the conclusion of the process of judgment. This only happens following the conclusion of human history (Rev.20:14-15).
- 3) The righteous go off "to eternal life" at the conclusion of their judgment, a condition which (while we believers do possess it positionally now, and will have it experientially from the point of our departure to be in the Lord's presence, and bountifully from the time of our resurrection) is only truly descriptive of our ultimate status once eternity begins (i.e., not from the commencement of the Millennium but from the beginning of eternity proper).

4) The separation of a single mixed group into two entirely discrete groups (of believers and unbelievers) is only paralleled in descriptions of the end of history (e.g., the wheat and the tares of Matt.13:24-30, and the good and the bad fish of Matt.13:47-50).

It is no doubt because of the overall theme of the book of Revelation, that is, its focusing on God's judgment upon evil and His defeat of the devil, his minion antichrist, and the wicked in general, that we do not find our context providing all of the other details about this final evaluation of the millennial believers (details which, in any case, are available to us from elsewhere in scripture, as we have just observed).

2. The Great White Throne of Jesus Christ: The Last Judgment of the Unbelieving Dead

When this life is over, everyone is judged "according to their works" (Jn.5:29; 2Cor.5:10). For believers this judgment is one of determining rewards (Matt.16:27; 19:28; Lk.14:14; Rev.11:18; cf. Rom.14:10; 1Cor.3:10-17; 2Cor.5:10), since our eternal life is based upon having God's righteousness through faith in Christ rather than upon anything we have "done" (Rom.3:21-22; 4:5; 4:13; 3:28; 5:1; 6:7; 8:1; 9:30-31; 10:6; 2Cor.5:21; Gal.2:16; Eph.2:8-9; Phil.3:9; Heb.11:7). By the time we have arrived here, Revelation 20:11-15, all believers have already been evaluated and rewarded. The Great White Throne, the final or "last" judgment in human history, concerns unbelievers only, and is synonymous with the "goats" portion of the "sheep and goats" judgment. First and foremost it should be observed that although they have now been resurrected, these individuals are nevertheless described as "the dead" in verse twelve, an appellation appropriate only for unbelievers (as our Lord Himself makes clear: "He is the God *not* of the dead but of the living", Matt.22:32; cf. Mk.12:27; Lk.20:38). Secondly, in contrast to believers who "do not come into judgment" since we have "passed out of death into life" (Jn.5:24) and are thus evaluated for our service in life for the purpose of reward, all unbelievers from the beginning of time are indeed *judged* here at the Great White Throne according to their works, specifically, "judged on the basis of the things written in the books, according to what they had done" (Rev.20:12b). This focus on judgment, the absence of any suggestion of reward in this passage, the context of awe and foreboding (compare Heb.12:18-24), the opening of the books, especially the book of life (on which see below), and, perhaps most significantly, the fact that all those judged arise from places associated with unbelievers only (the sea, death and Hades), make it crystal clear that this passage applies to unbelievers only. The Great White Throne is thus without question the last and the final judgment of "the dead", that is, the venue where all the unbelievers from throughout human history will be judged by Jesus Christ.

[Timothy], I [give] you [this] charge before God and Christ Jesus, *the One who is about to judge the living and the dead* . . .

2nd Timothy 4:1a

Now the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire by that same Word (of God), preserved for *the day of judgment* and the destruction of *godless men*.

2nd Peter 3:7 (cf. 1Pet.4:5-6)

As 2nd Timothy 4:1, the first passage quoted above, indicates (and as scripture frequently confirms: Jn.5:22; 5:27; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom.2:16; 14:10-12; 2Cor.5:10; 2Tim.4:8; Jas.5:9; 1Pet.4:5; Rev.2:5-6; 3:1-3; 3:19-20), as the One into whose hands all judgment has been given as a result of His victory on the cross, the Person sitting on the Great White Throne is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ. He it is who will render final judgment upon the lost, that is, all who refused in life to value and accept His precious sacrifice on their behalf for eternal life.

When the Son of Man has come in His glory and all the angels with Him, then (i.e., at the last judgment) *He* will take His seat on His glorious throne.

Matthew 25:31

Then Jesus came over and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given *to Me*."

Matthew 28:18

(22) For neither does the Father judge anyone, but he has given all judgment *to the Son*, (23) in order that all may honor the Son as they honor the Father.

John 5:22-23a (cf. Jn.5:27)

And He commanded us to proclaim to the people and to bear witness that *this [Jesus] is the One* appointed by God *as judge* of the living *and the dead*.

Acts 10:42

"For [God] has appointed a Day (i.e., the final Day of human history culminating in the Last Judgment) in which He is going to judge the world by [the standard] of righteousness *through a Man whom He has ordained* for this [very purpose], having supplied [us] with the proof [of His identity] by raising Him from the dead."

Acts 17:31

[The examination of Rom.2:11-15 will take place] on the day when God will judge the secret things of men *through Jesus Christ* according to my gospel.

Romans 2:16

In verse twelve of our passage, John is given to see "the dead, both the great and the insignificant, standing in front of the throne". This multitude constitutes the entire number of unbelievers from Cain to those who persist in unbelief at history's end following the conclusion of the Gog-Magog rebellion. All are seen to be "standing" in front of throne (i.e., recognizable as human beings, having been resurrected). But unlike in the case of believers where there are two phases of the resurrection unto life, one at Christ's return and one at the end of the Millennium, those who have rejected Jesus, whether actively or passively, face a single resurrection, unto judgment.

(28) Do not be amazed at this [statement], that an hour will come in which all those in their tombs will hear His voice. (29) For they shall come forth – those who have done what is good *to a resurrection of life* (i.e., those who have faithfully followed Jesus Christ), but those who

have done what is worthless to a *resurrection of judgment*.
John 5:28-29

(2) For many who sleep in the dust will awake, some to eternal life, but the others to shame and eternal separation [from God].
Daniel 12:2

It is appointed unto men to die once, and, after that, judgment is in store.
Hebrews 9:27

Thus this immense assemblage of unbelievers – the vast majority of human beings coming from every race and nation, time and place – must all be judged by our Lord. Having rejected Him or refused to accept Him during their lifetimes, they will now stand before Jesus Christ the King and render an account, not for reward (as was the case of the two-phased resurrection unto life), but in order to demonstrate their inadequacy for eternal life and their refusal to take advantage of God's great grace and mercy while they lived. John's comment about these unbelievers being distinguishable as to the status they possessed in life (i.e., with the words "the great and the insignificant" he gives us the two extremes) shows the value of human achievement apart from God: it will be less than worthless on the day of judgment. The fact that even unbelievers in condemnation will still be recognizable for who they were and what they did in life (cf. Is.14:9-12; Ezek.32:30-32), while no consolation to them since all will share equally in the lake of fire, is surely a solace to us who will have an equal and eternal share in Jesus Christ: we will continue to be "who we are" forever, only with all sin, pain and trouble far removed, and every deed which distinguished us in the service of our Master living on with us for all eternity.

And books were opened; and another book was opened which is the book of life. And the dead were judged on the basis of the things written in the books, according to what they had done.
Revelation 20:12b

The "books" mentioned twice here are distinguished by John from the "book of life", and importantly so. As we have seen in our prior treatments of the Book of Life in this series,⁵⁷³ all human beings have their names recorded in the record of life as part of their birthright as human beings. This is made clear, for example, by Psalm 69:28 where our Lord is asked to blot the godless out of the book, since, being "godless", they never would have had their names recorded in the Book of Life in the first place unless *everyone* was placed in it originally. Moreover, it is entirely just for God to include everyone in the book initially, because Jesus Christ died for all. God desires everyone to be saved (Ezek.18:23; Matt.18:14; Jn.12:47; 1Tim.2:4; 2Tim.2:24-26; 2Pet.3:9), and has made provision for the same by sacrificing His one and only beloved Son for us, judging all sin in Him on the cross.⁵⁷⁴ But while this incomparable offer of eternal life at no cost is available to every human being, the number of those who have embraced God's mercy in this life is infinitesimally small. When a person actively and consciously rejects Jesus Christ in this life, or alternatively resists divine truth persistently until the end of life, that person's name is "blotted out" of the book. The Book of Life thus has at least two important functions: 1) it acts as a safeguard to ensure that no one is condemned who did not deserve condemnation (for only those who are not found in this book will be cast

into the lake of fire: Rev.20:15); 2) it acts as a witness to the inimitable mercy, love and grace of God (for it is only by a person's own actions or refusal to act that their name is erased from the book – that is, through his or her own free will). Only by way of willfully despising the blood of Christ, His death for our sins, will anyone find themselves standing before our Lord's Great White Throne.

The one who believes in Him is not being judged, but the one who does not believe has already been judged on the grounds that he has not put his faith in the Name (i.e., the Person) of God's only Son.

John 3:18

The "other books" mentioned in verse twelve contain the life-record of every human being, preserving their every thought, word and deed. They represent a comprehensive "history", but perfectly recorded and divinely interpreted. For God knows not only the facts of everything our mind conceives, our mouth utters, and our hands undertake – He also knows the motivations behind all that we do, and those motivations will be revealed very clearly and painfully on this day of judgment.

For God will bring *every deed into judgment*, including *every hidden thing*, whether it is good or evil.

Ecclesiastes 12:14 NIV

This [examination will take place] on the day when God *will judge the secret things of men* through Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

Romans 2:16

Therefore, do not make judgments before the time, until the Lord shall come, who will *illuminate the hidden things of darkness*, and reveal *the intents of every heart*.

1st Corinthians 4:5a

God is of course under no obligation to have His Son our Lord conduct this final judgment of those who dismissed Him and His sacrifice in life. These unbelievers have already forfeited any chance of eternal life by rejecting the one and only way to avoid death: salvation through Jesus Christ. Thus even though it results in condemnation, the Great White Throne is a gracious act. No unbeliever will go to perdition without the reasons for their damnation, general and particular, being made abundantly clear.

As to the judgment itself, verse 12 of Revelation chapter 20 states that all unbelievers will be "judged on the basis of the things written in the books", and verse 13 affirms that they were "*condemned* according to what they had done".⁵⁷⁵ These two statements demonstrate respectively that in each and every case a thorough evaluation of the person's entire life will prove that:

1) Whatever they may have done, "good", bad or indifferent, unbelievers have no claim on eternal life apart from God's work in Jesus Christ (whose sacrifice they have rejected). Nothing

they have "done" in their own power could ever be acceptable "coin" to God (Rom.8:8; Heb.11:6).

(7) Surely, no one can redeem a man [from God's hand], no one can pay a ransom to God for him. (8) For *the redemption price of a life is too precious for Him to relent forever*, (9) that one should live on forever, and not see corruption.

Psalm 49:7-9

(26) What point is there for a man to come to possess the entire world, if he should then come to lose his life? Or *what can a man pay to regain his life?* (27) For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay every man in his own coin.

Matthew 16:26-27

2) Their expunging from the Book of Life is therefore entirely just; although they knew the truth, yet they did not give God His proper due by receiving His Son, condemned in their place and ours, but chose instead to face judgment before Jesus Christ rather than submit to Him in faith.

(18) [In contrast to the righteousness of God which is being revealed through faith (vv.16-17)], God's wrath is being revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness – on men who *suppress the truth* in their unrighteousness. (19) For that which can be known about God [from everyday experience] is *obvious* to them, because *God has made it obvious*. (20) His nature, though invisible, is nevertheless plainly apparent, and has been since His foundation of the world, for it may be clearly inferred from this creation of His – [this is true of] both his eternal power and his divinity – so that they are without any excuse: (21) *they knew about God*, but they neither honored Him as God nor thanked Him. Instead, they gave themselves over to [the] vanity [of this world] in their speculations, and their senseless hearts were filled with darkness. (22) Claiming to be wise, they became foolish, (23) for they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for images and likenesses of corruptible men, of birds and beasts and reptiles. (24) For this [very] reason, God abandoned them to corruption in the lusts of their own hearts, that they might mutually defile their bodies (i.e., the very thing they lusted to do). (25) [And so] they exchanged the truth of God for the lie [of the devil], and worshiped and served the creature [Satan] in place of the Creator who is [worthy to be] blessed forever. Amen. (26) [Yes,] for this [very] reason God abandoned them to defiling passions. For their females exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones, (27) and likewise also the males abandoned natural relations with the female and burned with desire one for another, males for males, acting out their shamefulfulness in full, and in their own [flesh] fully receiving the reward due for their error. (28) And just as they did not see fit to keep God in their hearts, God abandoned them to their unfit minds, to do things which are not fitting, (29) filled up with every [sort of] unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, full of envy, murder, strife, guile, maliciousness, gossips, (30) slanderers, God-forsaken [and] forsaking, insolent, arrogant, boasters, devisers of evils, not concerned for their parents, (31) unthinking, unreconcilable, uncaring, unmerciful, (32) men who *though they had full knowledge* of God's righteous decree, namely, that those who do such things are worthy of death, not only did [such] things themselves, but even

commended those who made it their practice [to do them].
Romans 1:18-32

"Judged on the basis of the things written in the books": As explained above, these "other books" contain the complete history of every human being's life, including every thought, word and deed along with the true motives behind them. What the books do *not* contain, what they *could* never contain in the case of any unbeliever, no matter how noble or self-sacrificing, is any trace of evidence for any action or actions worthy of eternal life. That is true for two reasons. First and foremost, no volume of positive deeds could ever suffice to wipe out sin, any sin, no matter how insignificant. Since there is no possible way for us to gain deliverance from the lake of fire on our own, we human beings have thus been placed in an impossible situation at birth – or we would have been, absent the great mercy of God and the great love of Jesus Christ in giving Himself over to death to pay the penalty for all sins in our place. No form of "substitute payment" exists for this inestimable sacrifice (Ps.49:7-9; Matt.16:26-27; Mk.8:36-38; Lk.9:25-26), and none will be accepted before the Great White Throne. Having refused to accept God's solution to the problem of sin, by definition unbelievers have chosen to stand on their own works instead. Here is no solid ground to stand at all, only unstable sand destined to lead to a catastrophic collapse.

(24) Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: (25) And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. (26) And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which *built his house upon the sand*: (27) And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and *great was the fall of it*.

Matthew 7:24-27 KJV

(16) For God loved the world so much that He gave [up] His one and only Son, [with the purpose] that everyone who believes in Him should not be lost [forever], but have eternal life [instead]. (17) For God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him. (18) The one who believes in Him is not being judged, but the one who does not believe has already been *judged on the grounds that he has not put his faith* in the Name (i.e., the Person) of God's one and only Son. (19) And this is the [basis for] judgment: the Light (i.e., Jesus Christ) has come into the world, yet men loved the darkness more than the Light because their deeds were evil. (20) For everyone who commits detestable practices hates the Light and does not come to the Light, lest his deeds be exposed [for what they really are]. (21) But everyone who acts in accordance with the truth comes to the Light so that it becomes obvious that his deeds have been done in God (i.e., in accordance with God's will).

John 3:16-21

(1) Therefore you are without any excuse, my friend, everyone of you who judges. For when you judge someone else, you condemn yourself. For you who render judgment are [in fact] making a practice of doing the very same things. (2) [Yes, you condemn yourself], for we know that

God's judgment is [rendered] in [all] truth against those who practice things of this sort. (3) And do you [actually] imagine, my friend, you who judge those who make a practice of such things which you also do, that you will escape the judgment of God? (4) Or do you esteem as being of little account this truly valuable tolerance He [is exercising towards you] in [all] forbearance and patience? [If you do, it is] because you fail to realize that it is this very tolerance of God that is leading you to (i.e., giving you the opportunity for) repentance. (5) But in accordance with your hardened and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath and revelation of God's righteous judgment (i.e., the Great White Throne). (6) [God], who will give to each person according to his works, (7) to those who by persevering in the good course are seeking glory, honor and immortality, [He will give] eternal life, (8) but to those who out of selfish motivation are disobedient to the truth (i.e., reject Christ) while obedient to injustice, [there will be nothing but] wrath and anger.

Romans 2:1-8

Secondly, even if the blasphemous notion that good works or "charity" ought to weigh in the balance at the last judgment were to be considered (blasphemous, because it necessarily equates what we do with what Christ did), even in such an impossible case, these works would still not suffice, no matter how extensive, because they are necessarily tainted, since they have been done entirely apart from God who alone is good, and therefore cannot in fact be "good" in God's righteous estimate at all (cf. Rom.4:2; Deut.9:5-6).

(1) For if Abraham really was considered righteous (i.e., in the eyes of men) as a result of the works [he did], then he does have something to boast about – but not in front of God! (3) What does the scripture actually say? [It actually says that] "Abraham *believed* in God, and [so his faith] was attributed to him for righteousness."

Romans 4:2-3

(8) For you have been saved by [God's] grace through faith [in Christ]; and this did not come from you – it is God's gift. (9) *Nor did it come from what you have done, lest anyone should boast.* (10) For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for [the purpose of accomplishing] good works, which [very works] God has prepared ahead of time for us, that we might walk in them (i.e., live our Christian lives in the accomplishment of them).

Ephesians 2:8-10

[God] who saved us and called us to a holy calling, *not through our works*, but through His own [sovereign] choice [of us] and [His] grace [towards us], [that grace] which was given to us in Christ Jesus in eternity past.

2nd Timothy 1:9

(3) For we were also once mindless, disobedient, wandering [pointlessly] astray, enslaved to all sorts of lusts and pleasures, living our lives in wickedness and envy, loathsome and hating each other. (4) But [in spite of our prior sinfulness], when the goodness and benevolence of God our Savior appeared [in the flesh], (5) *not on account of [any] works which we had done in [so-called] righteousness* did He save us, but through the washing [away of our sins which leads to our] rebirth and [to our] new beginning from the Holy Spirit (6) whom He poured out upon us bountifully through Jesus Christ our Savior, (7) so that [now] having been justified [in this

way] by His grace, we might become heirs in regard to the eternal life for which we hope.
Titus 3:3-7

True "good" can only be accomplished by the power of God, and, conversely, anything not done in the power of God cannot be truly "good".

Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.
1st Corinthians 12:3 NASB

For what the flesh lusts for is contrary to the Spirit's will, and the Spirit is opposed to what the flesh lusts for. Since these are diametrically opposed to each other in this way, what you are doing is not what you yourself choose.
Galatians 5:17

This impossible situation of being sinful with absolutely no way of redeeming oneself is in fact a great blessing in that it removes the possibility of anyone assuming (in an objective assessment) that there is *any* way to approach God *without* Jesus Christ. That is true even for those who attempt to use the only godly standard of works, namely, the Law, for such purposes – and if it is true of works done according to the God-given Law, how much more is it not true for works done according to some arbitrary human standard?

(19) We know that however many things the Law says it says to those under [the authority of] the Law, [and it does so] in order that every mouth may be shut and that the entire world may be [revealed] as guilty in God's eyes. (20) Therefore no flesh shall be considered righteous before Him through the works of the Law, for it is through the Law that we come to acknowledge [our] sin.
Romans 3:19-20

(22) But scripture has locked everything up under [the power of] sin, so that the promise which is fulfilled through faith in Christ might be given to those who believe. (23) Before faith arrived, we were being guarded under the Law[’s protection], shut in [in anticipation of] our faith which was destined to be revealed. (24) So the Law acts as a guardian to us [who leads us] to Christ so that we might be justified by faith.
Galatians 3:22-24

The above realization of guilt capable of leading to genuine faith in Christ is of course only true for those who have not yet corrupted their thinking so as to imagine that their sins are "not that bad" (erroneously assuming that God uses a relative standard of condemnation: i.e., they don't need God), or that what they have done in life "ought to count for something" (erroneously assuming that anything but the blood of Christ could propitiate God's perfect character where sin is concerned: i.e., God needs their help), or that this last judgment will "never happen" (erroneously assuming that God has no right to judge them: i.e., God should worship them).⁵⁷⁶ These are blasphemous notions which turn God's true righteousness on its head, ignoring His mercy in Jesus Christ and imagining that His love will overlook His justice in their case in spite of their rejection of His sacrifice of His one and only beloved Son. Such thinking reflects the

satanic world view, and only takes hold once our common human appreciation of the true objective reality of life (brought about by natural revelation) has been supplanted by hardness of heart. Since the recognition of the insufficiency of human deeds to effect salvation is universal (until this naturally revealed truth is rejected and the devil's lies accepted in its place), individual judgment will no doubt focus upon the motives behind all such purportedly "good" works wherein the unbeliever placed earthly confidence. The result of divine inspection of these will be to demonstrate without a doubt that even here the deficiency is complete. And that is easy enough to see, for if they have rejected God and His solution in Jesus Christ (as they patently have), how could the blasphemous offering up of a substitute for Christ's work ever be separated from the rebellious motives of heart that steadfastly refused to accept Him in the first place? Therefore the unbelievers' true motivations, more often than not invisible to us here on earth, are quite different than presently may be assumed (especially in those cases where the charitable actions themselves appear beyond reproach). At the Great White Throne, all of these secrets will be completely exposed, for the Lord knows all the true details (Job 34:21; Ps.90:8; 139:1-18; Jer.16:17; 23:24; Heb.4:13), and these will all be brought perspicuously to light at the last judgment (cf. Job 19:29; Eccl.3:17; 11:9; Is.26:21; Matt.10:26-27; 12:36; Lk.2:34-35).

For God will bring every deed into judgment, including *every hidden thing*, whether it is good or evil.

Ecclesiastes 12:14 NIV

(2) There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or *hidden* that will not be made known. (3) What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.

Luke 12:2-3 NIV (cf. Mk.4:22; Lk.8:17)

[This examination of Rom.2:11-15 will take place] on the day when God will judge *the secret things of men* through Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

Romans 2:16

So then each of us will give an account to God concerning himself.

Romans 14:12

The Lord is the One who judges me. Therefore, do not make judgments before the time, until the Lord shall come, who will illuminate the hidden things of darkness, and *reveal the intents of every heart*, and then the praise of each shall come to him from God.

1st Corinthians 4:4-5

For the Day of the Lord will come like a thief, a course of) which the heavens will depart with a roar, the very elements will ignite and dissolve, and the earth and *everything which has been done upon it will be laid bare* [for the Lord's inspection].

2nd Peter 3:10

It should be emphasized here that whatever use is made at this judgment in the analysis of a particular individual's life of the personal sins he or she has committed, while these are most

definitely a part of the record and will no doubt be introduced to demonstrate patterns of behavior, they are not the basis for condemnation. Jesus Christ died for the sins of all mankind, and in doing so atoned for all sins. However, for the forgiveness God provided as a result of that cleansing, His gracious offer of eternal life by grace through faith in Jesus Christ had to have been accepted in life (Matt.12:32; cf. Jn.8:24). After death in torments, and even more especially here at the last judgment, there will no longer be any gap between perception and reality; therefore there will no longer be any possibility of exercising faith or free will. In life, while it is true that the consequences for spurning God's grace are unimaginable, it is entirely possible for a person to shut out that truth. It is in large measure this very deniability of the divine, this ability to reject the truth, that serves as the test of each person's heart. Thus this judgment is not at all about sin; it is instead all about demonstrating definitively how and where and when and why every unbeliever repeatedly rejected the grace of God and His truth. It is all about how everyone condemned chose hell instead of God at every earthly opportunity.

For [God] has appointed a Day (i.e., the final Day of human history culminating in the Last Judgment) in which He is going to judge the world by [the standard] of *righteousness* through a Man whom He has ordained for this [very purpose], having supplied [us] with the proof [of His identity] by raising Him from the dead."

Acts 17:31

"When I choose the appointed time, I will judge *righteously*."

Psalms 75:2

As these verses demonstrate, the standard of judgment at the Great White Throne will be divine righteousness, not human righteousness. It matters not a whit if a person imagines that what they are doing or have done in this life is "right" or "righteous" or "good", not even if most other human beings should happen to agree with him or her, for it is God's perfect standard that counts.

There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

Proverbs 14:12 NASB (cf. Prov.16:25)

Righteousness, true divine righteousness and the unbeliever's lack thereof, will be the touchstone that invalidates all of the unbelievers' so-called "good works". God's character in perfect righteousness demanded a truly perfect and righteous substitute to propitiate sin, and Jesus Christ provided that perfect sacrifice which did indeed satisfy the righteous character of God. But those who reject the gift of Jesus Christ have rejected God's righteousness, choosing to stand judgment on their own self-righteousness instead. We believers have substituted God's righteousness for our own (Rom.1:17; 3:22-26; 4:5-22; 5:18; 5:21; 6:16; 8:10; 9:31; 10:4-10; 1Cor.1:30; 2Cor.5:21; Gal.3:6; 5:5; Eph.4:24; Phil.3:9), and for that reason are considered righteous by God in spite of our own many failings and imperfections. But unbelievers have rejected God's righteousness in the blasphemous assumption that God will somehow accept their "works" in place of the work of Jesus Christ (cf. Is.64:6; Ezek.33:13; Jn.16:8-10; Tit.3:5; Heb.11:7; Jas.2:23; 2Pet.1:1). In truth, not only could no amount of charity ever suffice to wash away the most insignificant sin, but nothing done outside the power of God has the remotest

chance of being truly "good". For everything that is produced by sinful man is tainted and unacceptable to the perfect character of God.

And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, *clean and white*: for the fine linen is the *righteousness* of saints.

Revelation 19:8 KJV

The pristine integrity of God's righteousness and the perfect standard it embodies is seen perspicuously in the appearance of the Great *White* Throne, with that color indicating that no pollution from sin, no matter how small, can be allowed in the new heavens and earth which are about to be created, a place "where righteousness dwells" (2Pet.3:13). All sinful human beings must first have been completely cleansed of all of their sins through faith in Jesus Christ to be allowed to enter the eternal state, the ultimate paradise (cf. Is.1:18). That is why we shall wear white in eternity as the above passage indicates, namely, as sign of the perfect righteousness we now possess through faith in Jesus Christ (Rev.3:4-5; 3:18; 6:11; 7:9; 19:14).

3) And one of the elders who was speaking with me replied, "These people dressed in white robes – who are they and where have they come from?" (14) And I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who are about to come forth from the Great Tribulation. And *they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*." Revelation 7:13-14

But while believers are known by their white attire devoid of any stain or mark, representing the righteousness of God which we possess through faith in Jesus Christ, unbelievers by way of contrast are perspicuous in God's presence in their lack of suitable attire, representing the absence of God's righteousness (and the consequent impossibility of dwelling in His presence). The parable of the wedding banquet illustrates the latter very clearly:

(8) "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. (9) Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' (10) So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, *both good and bad*, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. (11) "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. (12) 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. (13) Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (14) "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

Matthew 22:8-14 NIV

The banquet is the Millennium, and the "good and bad" represent the entrance into the thousand year kingdom of unbelievers as well as believers, everyone who survives the Tribulation (with the exception of those who take the mark of the beast). While those without God's righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ will enjoy the bountiful blessings of the millennial kingdom along with believers, when they come up for inspection at the last judgment (as in the case of the individual in the parable above), they will be condemned – not for any particular offense, but for lack of the righteousness which comes by faith alone. For this

reason, blessing attends all believers who not only have God's righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ, but who guard it zealously by guarding their faith – lest both be lost in the Great Apostasy in the times of trouble ahead of which the book of Revelation warns:

Happy is he who both stays awake and guards his clothing, in order that he may not walk about naked and [people] see his shame.

Revelation 16:15b

Happy are they who are washing their clothing so that they will have a right to the tree of life and they may enter by the gates into the city [of New Jerusalem].

Revelation 22:14

In contrast to the unacceptable works of unbelievers accomplished in the energy of the flesh, believers have been given works to do in the Spirit (Eph.2:10). As we saw in section I.7 above, believers' works, since they are of God, are evaluated for the purpose of reward (to show their value, and also to eliminate from consideration anything that may have been done in the flesh instead of in the Spirit: 1Cor.3:11-15). Rather than pseudo-works proceeding from fleshly motivations, therefore, all believers will have at least one truly "good" work to offer before the Lord on the day of their evaluation – the "work" of putting their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, of accepting the offer of His righteousness in place of their own:

(28) Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" (29) Jesus answered, "The *work* of God is this: *to believe* in the one he has sent."

John 6:28-29 NIV

Therefore true faith is the "work" God requires, *not* a mere intellectual appreciation of who Jesus is and what He has done (for "even the demons" know this), but an *acceptance* and *commitment* of heart to this truth as the way of salvation. It is this change of heart that produces the new birth wherein the human spirit is given to see the truth unimpeded by the sin nature (whereas hardness of heart is the complete subordination of the spirit to the flesh). The struggle between the two led by the Spirit of God then characterizes the believer's life after being born again (Gal.5:15-25), with all who have appropriated the righteousness of God by faith having something "good" to show for their time on earth as a result, the basic "good work", their faith preserved, if nothing else. But unbelievers have no share in any of this. Their "works" are material and of the material with no element of the spiritual whatsoever. Since they were not done by God or through God, and certainly not for God, by definition they are not acceptable to God.

(41) "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (42) For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, (43) I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' (44) "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' (45) "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' (46)

"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."
Matthew 25:41-46 NIV

"The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."
Luke 3:9 NIV

It should thus not be missed that since this is an absolute judgment, there will be no question of degrees of guilt or innocence. All human beings are guilty before Him to whom we must give an account, and our guilt is only removed and replaced by righteousness through the justification we have in Jesus Christ. For unbelievers it will not be a question of "relative worth" or "relative evil". It will avail nothing to have led a moral life, a patriotic life, a life characterized by charity and amity and lawful behavior. It will not make any difference that a person has lived "very well" in comparison to others. For even the most noble and virtuous unbeliever who has ever lived (whoever that may be) will still be steeped in sin from birth, and will still have no answer to the charge that though he or she knew about God and His righteous demands, yet they refused to accept the gift of the One Person whose work would have provided them entrance into eternal life: the blood of Jesus Christ, His work in expiating all sins at the cross.

(23) *For all sin and fall short of God's glory*, (24) [but we believers are all] *justified without cost* by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. (25) God made Him a means of atonement [achieved] by His blood [and claimed] through faith, to give proof of His justice in leaving unpunished in divine forbearance [all] previously committed sins, (26) so as to prove His justice in the present, namely, so that He would be [shown to be] just [in this] and [justified] in justifying the one who has faith in Jesus.
Romans 3:23-26

"Condemned according to what they had done": As the above should make clear, the condemnation of unbelievers in Revelation chapter 20 verse 13 is based not upon their deeds (the examination of which has merely served to demonstrate the truth about their life-choices), but upon their rejection of God's offer of salvation through faith in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. This judgment has shown that nothing *they* "have done" could ever possibly save them – and indeed has instead been the chief exhibit of evidence against them: they have chosen to stand upon their own inadequate, maculate works and self-righteousness instead of upon the sacrifice of Christ and the righteousness of God through faith in Him. Their resultant condemnation is therefore absolutely just.

I will expose your righteousness and your works, and they will not benefit you.
Isaiah 57:12 NIV

Thus the operative portion of "what they have done" in terms of the most important question of life, "What think you of Jesus Christ?", is to have refused God's gracious and merciful offer of eternal life through His Name. It is for this reason that their names were blotted out of the Book of Life.

"He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day."

John 12:48 NASB

As Romans chapter one (translated at the beginning of this section) makes clear, we should not weep for these unbelievers as if what they are about to suffer is unjust or comes as some sort of surprise. In fact, they knew the issues quite clearly. They knew full well about God, for He made His existence and nature evident to them from the way He has constructed the world and from every aspect of life. They realized full well their own mortality, and the conscience we all possess made it abundantly clear to them just how far from perfection they fell short. At some point in their lives, every unbeliever recognized the reality of God, and the problems posed by the fact that they would one day face the perfectly holy Creator – as soiled, imperfect creatures. For all those who have no desire to have a relationship with God on any terms, these are uncomfortable truths indeed, so that it is no great wonder that unbelievers make concerted efforts to blot these divine realities out of their thinking. For all those who respond to the truth in humility and truly desire an eternal relationship with the Almighty, the gospel of Jesus Christ is made available in every case. But for all who have no such desire and merely wish to be “left alone” during this life in spite of the horrific consequences of ignoring life’s fundamental truths, a degeneration of their thinking in respect to these truths inevitably sets in, namely the “hardening of the heart” which makes it possible for those who choose against God to go on with their lives with no further qualms about such matters after decisively rejecting Him. This process and the specific decision points where God’s truth was rejected and the devil’s lies accepted in its place will be made obvious before the Great White Throne. And, these things being so, the condemnation which all unbelievers suffer at this point as recorded here in verse 13 will thereby be seen for what it truly is: not only just and justified, but absolutely necessary and self-selected in the case of every unbeliever.

(5) But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. (6) God "will give to each person according to what he has done." (7) To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. (8) But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. (9) There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; (10) but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. (11) For God does not show favoritism.

Romans 2:5-11 NIV

(3) For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do – living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. (4) They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. (5) But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. (6) For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so *that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.*

1st Peter 4:3-6 NIV

Finally, although they refused to submit to Jesus in faith out of free will during their lives on earth, all unbelievers will nevertheless in any case be forced to acknowledge Him as Lord at the last judgment.

(9) Therefore God exalted [Christ] to the highest place and gave Him the Name that is above every name (10) that at the Name of Jesus *every knee should bow*, in heaven and on earth and under the earth (11) and *every tongue confess* that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:9-11 (cf. Is.45:23; Rom.14:11)

3. The Sea, Death and Hades

For the sea gave up the dead which were in it, [that is] death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them, and each person was condemned according to what they had done.

Revelation 20:13

The passage above is frequently misquoted and just as frequently misunderstood. To interpret these verses properly it is first necessary to understand what "the sea" means in scripture. While many of us romanticize the ocean, in the Bible the sea is nearly always associated with evil and with judgment upon evil since it is God's ultimate means of judgment (e.g., on the original earth and on the world of Noah's time, to name the two most extreme sea-judgments).⁵⁷⁷ That is its primary meaning here, that is, we have to do with a general reference to the place of judgment (the residence of all unbelievers who died prior to the end of history), rather than the literal sea per se. For in biblical "geography", the sea covers and conceals the entire tripartite underworld, "death and Hades" (the place of the unsaved dead), the Abyss (the place of incarcerated fallen angels), and "paradise" or "Abraham's bosom" (the place of the righteous dead before Christ's ascension). Thus in the passage above "the sea" is meant as a sort of short-hand for what we would call "hell" (or *Sheol*), and naturally enough from a biblical point of view since the sea is the restraining capstone or "lid", so to speak, upon the entire underworld where the unsaved dead presently reside. This is made clear as well by the fact that the phrase "death and Hades" is in apposition to "the sea" in verse 13 above. That is to say, "death and Hades" is offered as an explanation of who the dead are that the sea is seen to disgorge: all of previously departed unbelieving humanity (in contrast to those who were still alive at history's end when they experienced the "resurrection of judgment").

The spirits of the departed are in torment under the waters, even all who reside [there below].
Job 26:5

Death and Hades are therefore a single place (one could punctuate the phrase as death-and-Hades). This is the abode of those who died without God and without salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, whatever name be used to describe this portion of the netherworld, *Sheol* (the Hebrew equivalent of Hades), the grave, torments, death or Hades. Further indications that we have here unbelievers only include:

1) the fact that these individuals are "*dead*" and are being kept in "*death-and Hades*" is a further indication that no believers appear among their ranks. For our God is the God of the living, not the dead, and we exit this life for eternal life, not for death (cf. Jesus' argument based on precisely this principle: Matt.22:29-32).

2) the fact that this group is an undifferentiated mass whereas the biblical practice in places where the two groups really are combined is to show the difference between believers and unbelievers (cf. "tares and wheat"; "wheat and chaff", "taken and left", "sheep and goat" or "dead in Christ" vs. merely "dead").

3) the fact that if any of these people were believers, they would not be coming from below the earth (and all of these people come from below the earth), since all believers have gone to be with the Lord in heaven since His ascension.

4. The Final Disposition of the Unsaved Dead

(14) And death and Hades (i.e., all unbelievers) were cast into the lake of fire. And this is the second death: the lake of fire. (15) And if anyone was not found written in the Book of Life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:14-15

The absence of these unbelievers names from the Book of Life is not the result of any arbitrary decision on God's part. Their names were blotted out either as a result of their active choice (i.e., overt rejection of God and His Son in life), or by default of choice (i.e., stubbornly refusing to come to God in Christ throughout the entire span of their lives). It is on this basis, namely, failure to accept God's free gift of eternal life and righteousness through the blood of Christ, that all of history's unbelievers are condemned (Rev.20:13). The checking of the Book of Life described above is therefore not a means of judgment but a safeguard which ensures that no believer will experience the second death, being cast into the lake of fire. Clearly, the Lord knows who are His (2Tim.2:19), and just as clearly He is incapable of making any such mistake. This check is provided and described for our benefit, that we may have complete confidence in our eternal status through faith in Jesus, and that we may also come to understand the entirely just process whereby those who are condemned are consigned to eternal fire: it is only *through their own choice* in rejecting eternal *life* in Jesus Christ who died to provide it that their names are blotted out of the Book of *Life*.

(3b) They have *chosen their own ways*, and their souls delight in their abominations; (4) so I also will choose harsh treatment for them and will bring upon them what they dread. For when I called, no one answered, when I spoke, no one listened. They did evil in my sight and chose what displeases me.

Isaiah 66:3b-4 NIV

Every single unbeliever who stands judgment before the Great White Throne will be shown to have rejected Christ's work in preference to their own works. As a result, every single unbeliever will be condemned at the last judgment, and these all share a common fate: being "cast into the lake of fire". As explained in section V above, the lake of fire is a real place, a

place of eternal torment, not of temporary purging nor of oblivion. As bad as the suffering of that place of darkness and fire will be, however, from the believers' point of view the worst thing about it will be the eternal separation from God which residence therein will entail.

For many who sleep in the dust will awake, some to eternal life, but the others to shame and *eternal separation* [from God].

Daniel 12:2

(5) [These tribulations which you are enduring] are evidence of the righteous judgment of God in His [judging] you to be worthy of His kingdom on behalf of which you are also suffering. (6) Since indeed it is just for God to repay with tribulation those who are subjecting you to tribulation, (7) and to give you who are being distressed relief along with us at the revelation of our Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels, (8) wreaking vengeance in a flame of fire upon those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction *away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power*, (10) when He comes on that [great] day to be glorified in the midst of His saints (i.e., resurrected believers) and to be marveled at among all those who have believed – as our testimony has been believed in your case.

2nd Thessalonians 1:6-10

Thus the Great White Throne judgment is the last stone to be put into place in the edifice of human history before we enter the eternal Kingdom of the Father in the New Jerusalem, the new heavens and the new earth. On that day it will be clear to all, believers and unbelievers, men and angels alike, that God has worked His perfect will in every way and in every individual case from the beginning to the end, with grace and mercy and blessing forever more in abundance for all who would but come to the grace and mercy and blessing He has freely provided through the sacrifice of His one and only Son, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

VII. New Jerusalem and the Eternal state: Revelation: 21:1 - 22:5

1. The New Heavens and the New Earth

(1) And [then] (i.e., at the conclusion of the last judgment) I saw a New Heaven and a New Earth [appear]. For the previous heaven and the previous earth had passed away (Rev.20:11), and the sea [now] no longer existed [on this New Earth].

Revelation 21:1

As we saw in the previous section (VI.1, "The Destruction of the Universe and the Interlude of Final Judgment"), the old heavens and the old earth had already been consumed before the Great White Throne judgment (Rev.20:11), so that John's mention of that event here is retrospective (i.e., they "had" [already] passed away previously, before this coming of the New Heavens and New Earth). The purpose of the repetition here is to emphasize that the New Heavens and the New Earth cannot exist in tandem with the old, that the making of all things new requires the prior destruction of the old, and, most importantly, that the New Jerusalem cannot exist side-by-side with anything sinful or corrupt or maculate in any way (also indicated by the absence of the sea; see immediately below). For the New Jerusalem is the abode of God,

and God the Father will only come to abide with mankind again when the universe has been purged of every trace of evil and has become instead a place where only righteousness dwells (2Pet.3:13).

It is important to understand precisely what is being described here in verse one of chapter twenty one. First, the New Heaven mentioned here consists of both the sky (the first heaven) and the universe (the second heaven), but not what we often call "heaven" per se (i.e., the third heaven, the abode of God). The third heaven is "not part of this [part of the] creation" (Heb.9:11; cf. Heb.7:26 where our Lord ascends to the third heaven which is "higher than *the heavens*"), and has not been contaminated by sin so as to require the same cleansing by fire undergone by the rest of the visible universe (i.e., the earth and the twin heavens). Indeed, the reason for the existence of the third heaven in the first place was to carve out, so to speak, a locality where God and the elect angels could continue to commune despite the pollution of the physical heavens and earth by Satan's rebellion.⁵⁷⁸ This deliberate separation and sanctification of God's presence from the corrupt universe was essential in order to preclude its immediate destruction (a judgment which direct contact of holy God with anything profane necessitates: Ps.5:4-5; cf. Gen.1:6-7; Job 38:4-7; Heb.9:11). This separation of the third heaven from the rest of the cosmos is seen most perspicuously in the symbolism of the veil which closed off the holy of holies in the tabernacle-temple and shielded the *Shekinah* glory of God: only the high priest could enter once a year, and did so as a type of Christ. The veil was split after Christ's death for sin (Matt.27:51; Mk.15:38; Lk.23:46), symbolically demonstrating that the way back to perfect God had now been opened up – for all those cleansed by Christ's sacrifice (Heb.10:19-21).⁵⁷⁹

That John's use of the singular "heaven" here means the twin heavens (i.e., the atmosphere and universe beyond the sky) can be clearly seen from his practice elsewhere in the book. While many biblical writers pluralize the word following the Hebrew custom (i.e., in Hebrew the word "heavens", *shamayim*, שמים, is always in the plural or, more accurately, the dual), of the fifty-one times in Revelation where John uses the Greek word for heaven, *ouranos* (οὐρανός), he employs the singular in every passage save one (Rev.12:12 – to emphasize the devil's fall and confinement to earth). Whether he means by this word the third heaven (as is frequently the case; cf. Rev.8:1) or the physical cosmos (as in, e.g., Rev.8:10) must be determined from context, but, as here, the meaning is always evident.⁵⁸⁰ We may therefore be sure that, although John's habit of expressing this concept is somewhat different from that of other biblical writers (Peter and Isaiah, for example), with the word "heaven" he is indeed referring here both to the sky and to the physical universe beyond it, namely, the visible "twin heavens", but not to the third heaven. For John, then, the term "New Heaven" means precisely the same thing as the phrase "New Heavens" found in Isaiah and 2nd Peter: the physical sky and the physical universe beyond earth's atmosphere – but not the third heaven, God's present dwelling place.

And the replacement of the old earth by the New Earth means precisely that. That is to say, we have to do here *only* with the substitution of the New Earth for the old *earth*, but *not* the replacement of the areas "under the earth" (places which, like the third heaven, are separated from the physical cosmos and not a true part of it). It is true that following the Great White Throne judgment, with all believers resurrected and with all unbelievers and fallen angels

consigned to the lake of fire, there will be no further need for three of the compartments of Hades below the earth (i.e., Paradise, a.k.a. Abraham's Bosom; the Abyss, a.k.a. Tartarus; and Torments, a.k.a., Sheol). However, it is more than likely that this now otherwise empty nether region is also the place of the Lake of the Fire. The Lake of Fire and Hades, the (theologically but not materially) subterranean realm wherein the lake most probably exists, will continue in that existence forever, completely separated from the New Heavens and the New Earth.⁵⁸¹ Theologically speaking, the third heaven and Hades are the two opposite poles which bound the present universe, and, like the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden of Eden, respectively represent the choice which faces every human being: eternity with God through the reconciliation which the sacrifice of Jesus Christ effects for all who desire it, or eternal separation from God. The old cosmos has a limited life-span and will pass from existence in what is, compared to eternity, the blink of an eye. Heaven and hell are, therefore, the only two possible eternal residences, and neither is part of this present creation. But while hell in its permanent iteration will continue to be separate from the New Creation just as it was from the old (with the major difference being that the Lake of Fire will unquestionably be worse than the present day abode of deceased unbelievers, namely, Torments), heaven and earth will be separated no more. No longer will God reside apart, having deliberately and necessarily sequestered Himself from the material universe. With the descent of the New Jerusalem, heaven will come to earth, and there will no longer be any differentiation between the two.

(25) Of old You founded the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. (26) Even they will perish, but You endure; And all of them will wear out like a garment; Like clothing *You will change them and they will be changed.*

Psalm 102:25-26 NASB

"For behold, I am going to create *New Heavens and a New Earth*, so that the former things will not be remembered, nor will they [even] come to mind."

Isaiah 65:17

"For just as *the New Heavens and New Earth* which I am about to make are going to continue before Me", says the Lord, "so your seed and its name will continue".

Isaiah 66:22

(7) And the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire by that same Word (of God), preserved for the day of judgment and the destruction of godless men. (8) Let not this one fact escape your attention then, beloved, namely that one day is like a thousand years in the Lord's eyes, and a thousand years like one day (i.e., the "day" will span a millennium). (9) The Lord is not delaying in the fulfillment of His promise (as some think); rather He is exercising patience for your sake, being unwilling for anyone to perish, but desiring all instead to come to repentance. (10) For the Day of the Lord will come like a thief, a day in (i.e., over the course of) which the heavens will depart with a roar, the very elements will ignite and dissolve, and the earth and everything which has been done upon it will be laid bare [for the Lord's inspection]. (11) Since all these things are destined to disintegrate in this way, [consider] what sort of [Christians] we ought to be, [devoted to] holy and godly conduct, (12) as we wait with eager expectation and apprehension the advent of the Day of God. For on that day the heavens will

burst into flame and dissolve, and the elements will catch fire and melt. (13) But we are awaiting *New Heavens and a New Earth* just as He promised – [a world] where righteousness dwells.

2nd Peter 3:7-13

As it says in Isaiah 65:17 quoted above, the wonders of our eternal existence will be so fantastic, that with an eternity to spend, the old order of things will not only not be remembered, but will never even come to mind. It is on this New Earth that God will reign forever, an earth restored, remade, and specifically reconstructed for saved mankind's eternal blessing. It will be better than the garden of Eden by untold orders of magnitude, better even than Jerusalem in the Millennium. The New Jerusalem will be the paradise par excellence, matchless, eternal, filled with all the blessings exemplified in the previous paradises but superior in ways and to degrees which we cannot even begin to contemplate at present. It will be without sin and without end; it will be the place where we will live forever in the presence of God Himself. The glory, the wonder, and the blessing of the New Heavens and the New Earth can only be dimly imagined at present, "for now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face" (1Cor.13:12 KJV). Nevertheless, the Bible does allow us to say a few things about that blessed eternal state, keeping in mind our present perceptual limitations.

First, the absence of the sea mentioned here in verse one has a significance beyond its mere lack of presence on the New Earth. For one thing, without any sea the entire planet will be available for direct use (instead of the present one fourth or so of dry land). Coupled with the greatly expanded size of the New Earth (see below), this will result in ample and abundant space for all of us destined to inherit eternal life. Even more significant, however, is the symbolism behind the removal of the sea. As we have seen in the past (especially in part 2 of the Satanic Rebellion Series: The Genesis Gap), in terms of biblical symbolism the sea signifies evil, for the sea is one of God's most prominent instruments of judgment. So while many of us today may enjoy certain aspects of the world's oceans, their absence from the New Earth represents the complete and concomitant removal of every aspect of sin and evil with which the present cosmos has been permanently marred by Satan's rebellion (2Pet.3:10-13; Rev.21:7-8; 21:27; 22:14-15; cf. Is.52:1). Thus the lack of any sea is tangible proof that every trace of evil has now been burnt away (2Pet.3:7) so that on the New Earth only righteousness will dwell (2Pet.3:13): even God's most conspicuous reminder of judgment now past will no longer exist. The absence of the sea, therefore, constitutes a promise of eternal peace, blessing and prosperity. Just as the rainbow reminds us of God's pledge not to destroy the present earth by means of the sea (Gen.9:12-17), the fact of the sea's complete removal will be a pledge of the replacement of death and judgment with eternal life and limitless divine blessing, world without end. Once the glory of God has melted away every last trace of corruption, there will be no further need of any sea as a means of judgment and separation from God:

The sea represents death (Rev.20:13); but from now on there will be only life eternal.

- The sea represents judgment (Gen.6-7); but from now on there will be only divine favor.

- The sea represents evil (Rev.11:7; 17:8); but from now on there will be only goodness and blessing.
- The sea was the source of antichrist (Rev.13:1); but from now on we will live with Jesus Christ.
- The sea (the "lid" on the underworld) represents separation from God (Gen.1:7; 1:10; Job 26:5; Ezek.1:22-28; 2Pet.2:4-5; Rev.4:6); but from now on the Father will tent with us.

Finally in this regard, we have seen in previous installments of this series that the heavenly sea, the "waters above" as seen from the heaven-side of things, constitutes a sort of viewing-port for the observation of all that is currently happening on the present earth (Rev.4:6; 15:2; cf. Ezek.1:22-28; 10:1).⁵⁸² We are told in Isaiah's final verse (i.e., Is.66:24), that saved humanity will "go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who rebelled against Me, for their worm will not die and their fire will not be quenched and they will be abhorrent to all flesh". So while the earthly sea will be no more, it is likely that the heavenly sea will come to earth along with the New Jerusalem, with phrasing, "go forth", indicating that the viewing-port will be somewhere outside of the city.

Second, we may draw some comparisons between the New Heavens and the New Earth and what the Bible tells us about the blessed resurrection body which every saved person will enjoy for all eternity. The New Heavens and New Earth appear to be "resurrected" in a fashion analogous to our rising from the dead : they are also transformed completely, but still bear a close enough resemblance to their previous forms to retain the names "heavens" and "earth", even though they will be fundamentally "new". Just as the new covenant is in truth a fulfillment of the promises of the old covenant (and better in every respect: Heb.8:6), and just as the resurrection body is a fulfillment of the promise we now possess of eternal life (and better in every respect: 1Cor.15:35), so the New Heavens and the New Earth are the fulfillment of the promise of the present cosmos, a perfect world not only for the absence of all that is imperfect, but also for the presence of all that is good and right and blessed and delightful. Moreover, there is certainly a direct relationship between the resurrection body and the new cosmos, since the new order of things has been specifically designed by God for us as the place in which to enjoy our eternal life:

- Just as the resurrection body will still be recognizable, merely inestimably better than before (cf., Lk.24:31; Jn.20:16; 20:20; 20:26-28; 21:12), so the New Heavens and New Earth will represent an improvement of unfathomable proportions over the old order (while still being discernible as "heaven and earth").
- Just as the resurrection body will retain all of its legitimate functions, merely adding to them in ways as yet not fully understood (Matt.28:10; 28:18-20; Lk.24:15; Lk.24:43; Jn.21:13-15), so the New Heavens and New Earth will provide all their previous joys and benefits to an infinitely greater degree, and with many other wonders added thereto.
- Just as the resurrection body will no longer be subject to pain, disease or death (Rom.6:9; Rev.21:4), so the New Heavens and New Earth will lack any trace of anything pernicious,

harmful, or disagreeable.

- Just as the resurrection body will be perfectly attuned to the glory, the power and the spirituality of the eternal life which will be ours (1Cor.15:41-44), so the New Heavens and New Earth will be perfectly adapted to us and for our eternal life.
- Just as the resurrection body will be a body of light with all trace of darkness utterly and eternally absent (1Cor.15:43; Rev.1:16b), so the New Heavens and New Earth will be refulgent with the glory of the Father and Son, a place of light without darkness forever for all those who are "light in the Lord" (Eph.5:8).

In short, the transformation of the universe described here is in no way a subtraction of anything good (only of everything evil); rather it will be a multiplication of the good to something better by orders of magnitude we can only superficially and imperfectly limn at present. As will be the case with our eternal bodies, the New Heavens and New Earth will be neither immaterial nor intangible (cf. Matt.28:9; Lk.24:39; Jn.20:17; 20:27); rather they most definitely will be both tangible and material, only without any hint of sin or evil forevermore, like to the Garden of Eden, only without the presence of the tree of knowing good and evil (or any further need for it).

Third, as we have seen and remarked many times in the past, the New Heavens and New Earth are the seventh and the ultimate Paradise. As such, the new cosmos shares all the essential characteristics of the Edens which preceded it.

- Beautiful and Awesome Topography (Gen.2:10-14; Is.14:13; Ezek.28:14-16; compare with Rev.21:10; 21:16).
- Sensual Delightfulness (the name Eden means "delight"; Gen.2:9; 2:18; compare with Rev.21:15-21; 22:1-2).
- Enjoyable Occupation (Gen.2:15; Lk.16:25; 2Tim.2:12; Rev.20:26; compare with Rev.2:7; 2:17; 2:26; 3:12; 3:21; 21:14).
- Peace and Prosperity (Gen.2:16; Is.51:3; Joel 3:18; Mic.5:5; compare with Rev.3:5; 21:26; 22:12).
- Presence of and Fellowship with God (Gen.2:22; 3:8; Ezek.48:35; 1Pet.3:19; compare with Rev.21:3; 21:7; 21:22-23; 22:5).

Fourth, we can get a glimpse of how much better the New Heavens and New Earth will be by comparing their magnitude to that of the present cosmos. The habitable proportions of the New Jerusalem are 1,440,000 greater than those of the millennial Jerusalem (i.e., 1,200 times greater in both length and width; see section VII.6 below). Since the promises of inheritance to Israel will still be valid in the eternal state, we may posit that the eternal territory of Israel, and by necessity the size of the New Earth (and most likely therefore also of the New Heavens) will be expanded to the same, proportional degree. Yet we know from our Lord's resurrection body

that *our* physical shapes will be of approximately the same size. Whether or not the New Heavens and New Earth will 1,440,000 times bigger – and therefore that much better – the imponderable factor remains that while we are now quite limited in our ability to enjoy the universe (spatially, temporally, and morally), at that time there will be no such limitations. Whatever its future size, it is safe to say that the eternity will not suffice to plumb its wonders. Best of all, of course, will be the complete and unfettered fellowship we shall enjoy with our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ as well as with God the Father. That will be an inestimable joy for which there exists no present point of comparison.

2. The Descent of New Jerusalem

(2) And I saw holy city, New Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, beautified as a bride adorned for her [future] husband.

Revelation 21:2

The fact that the New Jerusalem is here described as descending is not meant to suggest that it never comes to rest upon the New Earth, staying suspended above the clouds (as some have suggested). The meaning here is clarified by the similar language used to describe this glorious event earlier in the book:

The one who wins the victory I will make a pillar in the temple of My God and he shall never go out again. And I will write upon him the Name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem (which is going to come down *from heaven* from My God), and My new Name.

Revelation 3:12

The point in both passages is the provenance of New Jerusalem: it comes down *from heaven*. This phraseology places the emphasis on the eternal city's origin and upon the symbolism of its return to earth (for earth is the original paradise: Is.14:13; cf. Ezek.28:14-16). New Jerusalem is the abode of God (2Cor.12:4; Gal.4:26; Heb.12:22). It cannot return from its sequestration in the third heaven (i.e., "from God") before eternity begins, not until all sin and evil have been removed from the cosmos, and the earth and (lower twin-heavens) find themselves renewed, purged of everything and anything unholy: imperfection cannot stand in the presence of holy God (Ex.33:20; Ps.5:4). This descent from the third heaven of the New Jerusalem, holy and pure, signifies the holiness and purity of the New Heavens and New Earth along with all who will inhabit them forever, and heralds the return of the Father to abide with His creatures in this blessed new creation for all eternity (Rev.21:3).

Just as each iteration of paradise manifests certain important common features, so every Eden, every "place of delight", has its own unique characteristics. That is also true of the New Jerusalem, even though the city itself in its archetypical form presently exists in the third heaven (from which it shall descend) in the form of the Heavenly Jerusalem, the present paradise whither all departed believers now go to be with the Lord.

(2) I know a man, [a believer] in Christ – fourteen years earlier such a one was snatched up *to the third heaven* (in his body perhaps, or out of it, I don't know – God knows). (3) And I know

that this man (in his body perhaps, or out of it, I don't know – God knows) (4) was snatched up *to paradise*, and heard inexpressible words which are not permissible for a man to speak.
2nd Corinthians 12:2-4

But *the Jerusalem above* is free (i.e., the heavenly Jerusalem as opposed to the present, earthly Jerusalem which is in bondage to the Law), [and it is she] who is our mother.
Galatians 4:26

(20) For our [true] *citizenship* has a *heavenly existence* (cf. in the Greek text: Acts 23:1; Eph.2:19; Phil.1:27), and it is from there that we expectantly await our Savior, Lord Jesus Christ, (21) who will transform this humble body of ours into one that matches His glorious body through His powerful ability to subordinate everything to Himself.
Philippians 3:20-21

(8) By faith, Abraham, when He was called [by God], obeyed and went forth into the place he was destined to receive as an inheritance. He went forth, moreover, in ignorance of where [exactly] he was heading. (9) By faith, he sojourned as an alien in the land he had been promised, dwelling in tents with Jacob and Isaac, coheirs of [this same] promise. (10) For he was waiting for the foundation of *that city* (i.e., the New Jerusalem) whose architect and builder is God.
Hebrews 11:8-10

(13) These all died [while still walking] in faith, though they had not received the [fulfillment of their] promises. But [while they lived] they did catch sight of [these promises] from a distance and salute them, [so to speak], thus making it plain [to all the world] that they were [in effect] strangers and sojourners on the earth. (14) For people who express [their faith] in this way make it quite evident that they are eagerly in search of a homeland [other than the place they now occupy]. (15) Indeed, if these [believers'] hearts had yearned for the [land] from which they had departed, they would have had [ample] opportunity to turn back. (16) But they were zealous for *a better place, a heavenly one*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God. He has, in fact, prepared *a city* for them (i.e., the New Jerusalem).
Hebrews 11:13-16

(22) But you have come [not to Mount Sinai but] to *Mount Zion* and to the city of the living God, [that is, you have come to] the *Heavenly Jerusalem*, and to myriads of [elect] angels in assembly [before God], and to the Church of the firstborn *enrolled* [as its citizens] in heaven (i.e., all believers, living or dead), and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of justified [believers] [who have now] completed [their tasks] (i.e., departed believers in interim state now residing in the Heavenly Jerusalem), (23) and to Jesus, the Mediator of a better covenant, and to sprinkled blood (i.e., the work of Christ in bearing our sins) which speaks [far] more powerfully than that of Abel[']s sacrifice].
Hebrews 12:22-23

For we do not have here [on earth] a city which [is meant to be] lasting; rather we are eagerly looking forward to *the city that is destined [to come]* (i.e., the New Jerusalem).
Hebrews 13:14

The main differences we may discern from scripture between the present, Heavenly Jerusalem, and the New Jerusalem to come are all explainable by the fact that the ultimate paradise will be attuned to the presence of believers in resurrection and to the New Earth which we shall inhabit forever. For example, in the present Heavenly Jerusalem there is still a temple (Rev.7:15; 11:19; 14:15-17; 15:5-8; 16:17), for the sanctification of God's holy Person against all that is profane is still a necessary symbol (i.e., the temple precinct represents the separation of the holy); no temple will exist in the New Jerusalem (Rev.21:22), since at that blessed future time no longer will any such distinction be necessary with all sin and evil having been cleansed from the New Heavens and New Earth. In the present Heavenly Jerusalem there is no discernible sign of the river of living water nor the tree of life (cf. Rev.4-5); in the New Jerusalem these will be central features of the city, designed for the blessing of the inhabitants, all of whom by that time will occupy resurrection bodies capable of enjoying these delights to the full. In the present Heavenly Jerusalem there is no discernible sign of any walls, or gates or foundations, and reasonably so since it does not rest upon the earth; but all of these features are notable additions to the New Jerusalem to come, familiar forms for our prior earthly existence, only exceeding the most magnificent such in human history by untold orders of magnitude.

3. The Advent of the Father

(3) And there was a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is [now] with men. And He has taken up residence with them, and they will be His people, and He Himself will be their God."

Revelation 21:3

With the descent of New Jerusalem, the tabernacle, a structure which by its very nature is temporary, has become a permanent city (with all the accouterment of a fixed abode). The conflict that was human history is now over; God is here with mankind to stay – forever. The return of the Father to take up residence on earth once more and to dwell with saved mankind for all eternity is the final punctuation, the ultimate exclamation point, on what we know as "history". Satan's revolt, an event occurring untold eons before the creation of human beings, had occasioned the departure of the Godhead from the original earth. The devil's insurrection eventually met with severe divine judgment, executed upon the world of that prehistoric time, but not yet carried out upon Satan and his angels. Human history would constitute God's demonstration to all His creatures of the justice of all He had done in creating them with free will, and of all He was willing to do in His boundless grace and mercy to save those willing to repent of rebellion against Him. For mankind (some small portion of it at least) would do what the rebel angels would not: respond to God's gracious provision, not initially in the garden of Eden, but eventually by way of the cross which opens the way that leads back to paradise and to the presence of God.

Throughout all the ages of Man, God has never left Himself without a witness to the truth, for the whole creation sings of His existence and of His goodness (Ps.19:1-6; Acts 14:17; Rom.1:18-23), and when the fullness of times arrived (Gal.4:4; Eph.1:10; cf. Mk.1:15; Rom.5:6), He sent His one and only Son our Lord to make the promised reconciliation a reality by the sacrifice of Himself on Calvary's cross. Christ's initial return at the conjunction of the ages was the decisive event of the relatively short seven-thousand-year period which followed known to us as "human history". At the cross, He "put death to death" through His own death on our behalf (2Tim.1:10). Heaven has now received our Lord Jesus since His resurrection and ascension (Acts 3:21), and from the Father's right hand He awaits the time of His return when all His enemies will be made the footstool for His feet (Ps.110:1-7). Between the two advents of Christ, we believers of the Church Age, that time wherein the greatest number of His assembly is being called out, have been blessed to experience the advent of the Holy Spirit who empowers all our efforts on behalf of our Lord Jesus. His return too will be interrupted – not for two thousand years, but for the seven year period of the Tribulation (2Thes.2:6-7), after which He will return along with the Son, being poured out abundantly during the glorious millennial reign of Jesus Christ (Joel 2:28-39). At history's end, the Father will join the Son and the Spirit and the restoration will be complete. Eden, paradise, will then have been restored in its perfect and eternal form with the establishment of the New Jerusalem on the New Earth. From this point forward without end and forever, elect angels and saved mankind will enjoy sweet fellowship with the Trinity on earth as it was always meant to be, but in a universe superior in every way to all that went before. When God judges, restores and replaces, it always for the better, and that beyond comprehension.⁵⁸³

(21) For since death [came] through a man, resurrection of the dead also [had to come] through a man. (22) For just as in Adam, all die, so also in Christ, shall all be made alive. (23) But each [will be resurrected] in his own echelon. Christ [is the] first-fruits (i.e., the initial person and echelon of resurrection). Next [will be] those belonging to Christ at His coming (i.e., all believers at the 2nd Advent). (24) Then the end [of human history – the resurrection of millennial believers], when He will hand the Kingdom over to the Father, after He has brought an end to all rule, all power, and all authority (i.e., hostile human and angelic control). (25) For He must rule until He has placed all His enemies under His feet.
1st Corinthians 15:21-25

With the vanquishing of all God's enemies, even death (Is.25:7-8; Hos.13:14; 1Cor.15:26; 15:54-57), and with the removal of sin and unrighteousness from the world (2Pet.3:10-13; Rev.21:7-8; 21:27; 22:14-15), the way will be cleared for the return of the King, that is, the taking up by the Father of His residence once more on earth. He will return not to the original Eden which Satan defiled, but to a new and extraordinary paradise, the New Jerusalem, likewise a paradise of divine design, now constructed in the form of a city, that is, a paradise specifically designed for mass human habitation (Heb.11:10; cf. Heb.2:16). At that time, the Glory will truly return to earth (cf. Ezek.10:18), and God the Father, who gave His Son to take on true humanity in order to save it (Heb.2:14-15), will, along with Christ through whom He made the world and around whom He fashioned the history we are now contemplating, dwell with us and we with Him forevermore. At that time, God will "be all in all" (1Cor.15:28; cf. 1Cor.3:21-23), and that will be the most sublime completion to His creation imaginable.

Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.
Matthew 13:43 NIV

4. The Passing away of the Old

(4) And He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And there will no longer be any death, or cries of pain, or grief. For the previous things have passed away.
Revelation 21:4

Before moving on to the splendors of the New Jerusalem, John is given to assure us here that in addition to all the positives of the eternal state, all of the negatives of this present earthly life will have "passed away". Whatever grief and trouble we know in this world, God will comfort us in eternity. "Wiping away all of our tears" means the removal of every source of heartache and discomfort in a complete and absolute way.

[A]nd the ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.
Isaiah 35:10 NIV

Simply put, we will no longer even remember how to cry, we will no longer be capable of experiencing physical or emotional distress, nor will there be any possible source of such things any longer. Death, the ultimate cause of all our trouble and sorrow, will be no more (2Tim.1:10). Absent also will be any thought of or occasion for physical agony ("cries of pain") or emotional affliction ("cries of grief"). Totally apart from the wonders and blessings of the eternal life to come, all of the things that bring heartache to our present existence will be banished forever. They will not even be remembered.

"For behold, I am going to create New Heavens and a New Earth, so that the former things will not be remembered, nor will they [even] come to mind."
Isaiah 65:17

We should also understand this verse in a positive way, suggesting as it surely does the bliss we shall have from our fellowship with God Himself who is the One described here as wiping away our tears. Just as the old material environment has now been replaced by an entirely new one, so also the old spiritual environment will be completely transformed in eternity. Everything in the past that clouded our view of our dear Savior and interfered with our ability to focus on Him, everything, that is, that disturbed the perfect peace which is our heritage as sons of the Living God and members of the Church of Jesus Christ, has now been taken out of the way. Given our inability now to appreciate or truly understand the blessedness of this aspect of our eternal life to come, this verse concerns itself with communicating to us this future ecstatic spirituality in terms of our present frame of reference by expressing it as the lack of our present-day negatives. For although believers of great spiritual maturity do begin to get an inkling of the rapturous nature of the peace and presence of the Lord (Is.26:3; 51:11b; 54:13;

Jn.14:27; 16:33; Rom.5:1; 15:13; 1Cor.7:15; Phil.4:7), we cannot at present truly begin to appreciate how that eternal peace and spirituality will suffuse and illuminate every aspect of our eternal existence. Since we cannot as yet even dimly assess this positive feature of our coming life with Jesus, scripture expresses it in terms of the comfort we shall have in the removal of all temporal negatives. While false pagan pictures of the afterlife invariably focus upon the satiation of material lusts, the true, biblical picture of eternal life with God is one of spiritual ecstasy beyond our present capacity to apprehend.

5. The Father's Proclamation of Encouragement

(5) Then the One sitting upon the Throne said to me, "Behold! I am making everything new." And He says to me, "Write that these words are faithful and true." (6) And He says to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts [the right] to drink from the fountain of the water of life without cost. (7) The one who conquers (i.e., maintains the victory of faith to the end of life: 1Jn.5:4) will inherit these things (i.e., the blessings of the New Jerusalem), and I will be His God and he himself will be my son. (8) But as for the cowardly and unbelieving and foul and murders and the sexually immoral and those involved in the occult and idolaters and all those who are liars (i.e., all who for a variety of reasons have rejected Christ) – their portion (i.e., "inheritance") will be in the lake burning with fire and sulfur which is the Second Death."

Revelation 21:5-8

John is still viewing the descent of the New Jerusalem from his heavenly perspective (i.e., the same one he has had throughout this extended vision since he was told to "come up here!" at Rev.4:1). Just as he heard a voice coming from the heavenly throne in verse three proclaiming the advent of the Father, now the Father Himself is heard to speak from this throne in the present third heaven. With these words God the Father proclaims the blessings of eternity soon to be dispensed upon His children, thus offering very great encouragement for all believers to persevere through the Tribulation ahead:

1) "Everything new": The fundamental change of things which will obtain in the eternal state is hereby assured. Nothing will remain of the previous corrupt world; nothing will remain of our prior mistakes, regrets, troubles or tears. All that is to come will be "new" and intrinsically so.

We are now "of" the new creation (cf. 2Cor.5:17-19; Gal.6:15; Col.1:2), and we ourselves have in resurrection also been made completely new, having been made to bear "the likeness of the Man from heaven" (1Cor.15:49) in order that we may live with God forever in the New Jerusalem which comes down from heaven.

2) "Words faithful and true": In an analogous way to the oath God took to Abraham which confirmed the promise (for his benefit and encouragement: Heb.6:13-20), so the Father here affirms the truthfulness and unchangeable reality of the blessings to come, reiterated here that we too may take courage during the dark days ahead. All scripture is God-breathed (2Tim.3:16), but here we may be confident of the truth of these encouraging words because the

Father not only proclaims them in His own voice, but also underlines their eternal immutability for our benefit by pronouncing them "faithful and true".

3) "It is done": History is over. The plan of God is complete. All that was meant to happen, all that had to happen, all that God willed and His creatures chose, written in the divine book of history since before the initial creation of the universe, has now been consummated. The old book has now been closed; the new one has now been opened – and will remain open forever. Those who chose for God have been saved; those who chose against Him have been removed from His Kingdom. Whatever deeds of faith had been accomplished by His faithful creatures have received their reward; and lost opportunities have been lost forever. The trials and tribulations of the life we now know are at this future point gone forever, even the most horrendous persecutions and plagues the earth will ever experience during the Tribulation. We may take great consolation and comfort in the sure and certain knowledge that even that terrible period to come has a definite end, so that even if it is given to us to cross through that terrible sea, we will at this point stand safely on its far bank, looking back at our deliverance and our Lord's great victory. The conclusion of history also means the end of any possibility of further change of status. All moral creatures have now made their choice and have been confirmed in that choice forever. For those who chose death, there is no further avenue back to life. And, blessedly, for those of us who have chosen life and have persevered through fire and water safely to the other side, there is no further possibility of falling away from God. In eternity, there will be a tree of life, but there will be no tree of knowing good and evil. For through the process of history, divinely directed, evil has been thoroughly repudiated and defeated. All that is left is "good".

4) "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end": The end of history is nothing to be mourned. God's creatures are created to live with Him. He is our all and our everything, and when this present world passes away, when the Kingdom is handed over to the Father (1Cor.15:24), when these limited bodies are transformed into their eternal form, when we are capable of fellowship with Him in a complete and unencumbered way, He will be our "all in all" (1Cor.15:28), our Alpha and Omega, our beginning and our end, our prime delight forevermore.

5) "The right to drink the water of life": All who overcome, that is, all who give their faithful allegiance to Jesus Christ and maintain that faith firmly until the end, will drink this water of life. Salvation is here promised free of charge to all who are willing to be saved, to all who are willing to choose for Jesus Christ, to all who are willing to endure whatever may come in this life without relinquishing that precious faith, even if that means persevering through the coming Tribulation (see section 9 below for the further blessings this water of life accords).

6) "The one who conquers will inherit these things": All who overcome will not only be delivered from death and punishment, but will have a full share in Jesus Christ and in the New Jerusalem. Our Father makes this statement as John watches the New Jerusalem descend, no doubt a magnificent and overwhelming sight whose true splendor words cannot adequately express. Our eternal home and all it contains, eternal lodgings of transcendent beauty, the river of the water of life, the tree of life, the gates and the glory of the New Jerusalem, and most of all the presence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and His Father and ours will belong to us

forever – in perfect, eternal bodies, decorated and blessed with the rewards we have won in the short span of time all history comprised. Seeing the goal in such a vivid fashion is surely encouragement for us to keep running the race, even if its course takes us through the gathering storm.

7) "I will be His God and he himself will be my son": Perhaps the most encouraging thing of all is this promise of the complete restoration in every single facet of the relationship with God which is ours by virtue of His creation of us. No longer will He be hidden from our view, and our relationship with Him will not merely be formal and will be well beyond amiable: it will be the perfect relationship of Perfect Father to sons made perfect through the sacrifice of our dear Savior Jesus Christ. For those who love Jesus now, the Bible promises sweet fellowship in the midst of this turbulent world, in tribulation and even during the Tribulation (Jn.14:23). For those who remain faithful to the end, this promise of the full experiential reality of the sonship which is ours by position in Jesus today is great encouragement indeed.

8) "The Second Death": As is common in biblical parlance (e.g., 1Cor.6:9-10; Gal.5: 19-21; Eph.5:3-7), the list of offenses given in verse eight is not meant to be comprehensive, nor is it meant to define those who choose against God solely by means of their conduct. Rather, just as godly works are a clear indication of salvation (Jas.2:14-26), so in the case of unbelievers their conduct demonstrates what it is they truly love, having chosen one manner of detestable behavior or another as a characterization of "who they really are" (cf. our Lord's use at Mk.4:40 of "cowardly" as the equivalent of "lacking faith"). For all those who reject the truth in order to embrace the lie in whatever manifestation, instead of having an everlasting inheritance in the New Jerusalem, their portion will be eternal residence in the lake of fire. No more powerful inducement exists for the believer than this reminder of the great benefit of perseverance – eternal life instead of the second death – and of the great calamity of allowing ones' faith to lapse in the trial of life: loss of every good thing which the Father has sworn here to provide for all those who, despite the cost, remain faithful to His beloved Son.

6. The Nature of New Jerusalem

(9) Then one of the seven angels who have the seven bowls filled with the seven final plagues came [up to me], and he spoke with me, saying, "Come. I will show you the Bride, the Lamb's wife". (10) Then he carried me in the Spirit to a mountain, great and high, and he showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, (11) and [it shone] with the glory of God. It was radiant like an extremely precious gemstone, like a [purple] jasper stone, [only] translucent like crystal. (12) It had a wall, great and high with twelve gates, and at the gates were twelve angels. Names were written on [each of] the gates which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. (13) Three gates faced east; three gates faced north; three gates faced west; and three gates faced south. (14) And the city wall had twelve foundations, and on [the twelve foundations] were [written] the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. (15) And the [angel] who was speaking with me had a golden measuring rod [which he used] to measure the city [along with] its gates and its wall. (16) The city was square in its design with its length equal to its width. And he measured the city with his [golden measuring] rod, and [it came] to 12,000 stadia (i.e., approx. 1590 miles): its length and its width and its height were precisely the same. (17) He then measured the [city's] *rim*, 144 cubits (i.e., approx. 84 yards) in

human measurement which is the same [here] as the angelic standard. (18) The wall of [the city] was composed of [purple] jasper, and the city [itself] of pure gold [which was] transparent like crystal.

Revelation 21:9-18

One of the Seven Angels: As mentioned in the previous installment of this series, these seven are the college of archangels of which only two are known by name, Michael and Gabriel. While we are not given his name here, Gabriel would seem to be a likely candidate for the angel speaking with John. For Gabriel is known to us from his explanation of eschatological visions to Daniel (Dan.8:16; 9:21), and from his proclamation of the coming of the Messiah and His herald (Lk.1:19; 1:26), and here we have both categories of prophecy combined into one: the Advent of the Father and of His eternal abode, the capstone of all eschatology in the coming of the New Jerusalem where Father and Son will rule forever.

The Bride: We have already been told (Rev.21:2) that the New Jerusalem appears "beautified as a bride adorned for her [future] husband". Here we see the eternal city actually described as "the Bride, the Lamb's wife". Of course we know – and at this point scripture expects us to know – that the believers resurrected at Jesus' return are "the Bride of Christ". Equating the place with its people is a figure of speech (technically known as a metonymy) where the residence takes on the name of the residents (cf. 1Cor.3:9-17; 6:19; Eph.2:19-22; 1Pet.2:21 and Rev.3:12, where believers are also compared to structures in whole or in part). Apart from the reference to our Lord, John is not given at any point to see the human or angelic residents of New Jerusalem. But since this is to be the Church's eternal residence, describing it as "the Bride" (since that is where the Bride will indeed live forevermore) certainly makes perfect sense.

The Mountain: The existence of this mountain, "great and high", on the New Earth is a clear indication that, apart from the absence of the oceans, its topography will be similar to that with which we are now familiar (though undoubtedly grander in every way as this description suggests). John is taken up to the top of this mountain in order to receive a better perspective on the whole of the new city (in a manner similar to the view the Lord gave Moses of the promised land: Num.27:12; cf. Ezek.40:2). This is our first hint of the massive size of New Jerusalem and also of its essential layout: like the prehistoric "Mountain of God" (Is.14:13) and the miraculously elevated millennial Jerusalem (Is.2:2; Ezek.40:2; Zech.14:10-11), so too the center of the new city must be of considerable height to necessitate this action.⁵⁸⁴

The Exterior of the City: Later in verse eighteen we will find that "the city [itself was composed] of pure gold [which was] transparent like crystal", although here we are told that it appeared to John "radiant like an extremely precious gemstone, like a [purple] jasper stone, [only] translucent like crystal" and that it "[shone] with the glory of God". The apparent discrepancy between the two descriptions has to do with John's change of perspective. Later, he has apparently been conveyed by the angel around the city's exterior and into the city proper (otherwise he would never have been able to see the gates on all sides of the city, or the throne, or the tree of life, or the river of living water, or any of the other sights within its walls). Within, the true nature of the city is plain to see: it is composed of translucent, crystalline-gold. Without, the city has a purple "radiance": the illumination of its exterior by the glory of God

gives it an incandescent appearance of translucent, crystalline-[purple] jasper. This exterior covering has a similar function to the tent of the tabernacle (which was similarly composed of blue, purple and red materials), defining and visibly demarcating the holy space wherein the Glory of God dwells.⁵⁸⁵

The Wall: John employs precisely the same description for the wall, "great and high", as he did for the mountain. This fact alone makes it clear that the 144 cubits mentioned in verse seventeen is not referring to the height of the wall (indeed, it is not referring to the wall *per se* at all; see below). For as monumentally massive as a seventy-yard high wall would be in our present-day experience, those proportions are dwarfed by the size of the city. For someone given to see New Jerusalem in a panoramic view (one wide enough to take in the entire city at once as John is given to do), a structure of such *relatively* meager dimensions would be nearly invisible. We are not, in fact, ever given the dimensions of the wall, but they must be prodigious in order for it to be noteworthy from John's perspective, and especially in order for him to describe it as "great and high" even in comparison with the enormous size of New Jerusalem. We may expect that its dimensions are in perfect proportion to those of the perfect city. We should also note here that by the time the wall becomes visible New Jerusalem has most likely come to earth where John is now seeing it *in situ*.

The Twelve Gates: As in the case of the millennial Jerusalem described in Ezekiel 48:30-34, the New Jerusalem will also have twelve gates bearing the names of the tribes of Israel. There are differences between the two, however, and those differences are profound:

1) The naming of the gates of millennial Jerusalem proceeds in a clockwise fashion (i.e., north to east to south to west), whereas the New Jerusalem's gates are enumerated counterclockwise (east to north to west to south).⁵⁸⁶

2) Millennial Jerusalem has a gate for Levi and combines Ephraim and Manasseh into one tribe, Joseph, whereas the New Jerusalem has no gate for Levi and separate gates for Ephraim and Manasseh.

3) While in the New Jerusalem the order of the gates and tribes associated with them has everything to do with rank (see section VII.7 below, "The Foundations and Gates of the Wall", for the identification of the gemstones with their particular tribes and the significance of their ordering), the gates of millennial Jerusalem are ordered according to birth by means of a formula which takes into consideration both age and motherhood:

north: the three eldest sons of Leah, Reuben, Judah and Levi.

east: the sons of Rachel, Joseph and Benjamin, along with Dan, the first son of her maid, Bilhah.

south: Leah's three other sons, Simeon, Issachar and Zebulun.

west: Gad, Asher, the two sons of Leah's maid (Zilpah); and Naphtali, Bilhah's second son.

As will be seen below, by comparing the arrangement of the jewels of the high priest's ephod with the gemstones which serve as foundations for the wall (along with the gates with which they are thereby necessarily associated), it is possible to determine the specific tribes associated with each gate (and the probable significance of the linkage). This will be covered below in our treatment of Revelation 21:15-21 where these foundations are actually described and ranked. For the moment, it is important to point out that each gate represents a division of the Church, and it is for this reason that each gate has one of the twelve apostles and an angel associated with it. The angels are positioned "at the gates", while the apostles names are inscribed on their respective foundation stones. In terms of the apostles, they would seem to be in charge (or at least to be the titular heads) of the twelve divisions of the Bride of Christ; in terms of the angels, they would seem to be the liaisons to and/or comparable heads of the angelic divisions which correspond to and are eternally associated with the divisions of the Church (and we will suggest the particular identification and assignments of each college of twelve below). As we shall see, this magnificent vision given to John to see in all its glory is not only one of breath-taking beauty, but it also will give us a key to the possibilities of our eternal status, depending upon "what was accomplished through this body, whether it be good or worthless" (2Cor.5:10).

The Measurement and Design of New Jerusalem: Revelation 21:16 tells us that the city will be a cube measuring 12,000 stadia on each side. The stadion/stadium was a Greek measurement of 600 feet (cf. Herodotus 2.149), although the precise length of the "foot" varied from place to place. It is important to note, however, that the precise standard used here is the same one employed for the millennial Jerusalem in Ezekiel chapters 40-48. That is clear for two reasons; first, because in verse 17 we are told that the human and angelic measurement are identical here (i.e., the longer, angelic standard is being employed here for John just as it was when the angel measured the temple for Ezekiel: Ezek.40:5); second, because the length of the sides of the New Jerusalem are precisely 1,200 times longer than those of the millennial Jerusalem (i.e., millennial Jerusalem measures 4000 cubits or 100 stadia per side, subtracting the area for the temple-sanctuary which is not present in New Jerusalem: Ezek.45:2; 48:30), thus indicating that the same heavenly standard is to be understood. Based upon the above, the dimensions of the New Jerusalem would be approximately 1590 of our own statute miles in length, breadth, and height. In terms of the present day earth, the city would not only cover all of the expanded, millennial Israel, but also most of the middle east, with its border running roughly from the river Danube to the Caspian Sea to the Red Sea to the Libyan desert and back north again to the Danube (we know that New Jerusalem's borders run due north to south, and due east to west, because of the orientation of its gates: cf. Rev.21:13). Given the necessity for the eternal territory of Israel to continue to exist outside of this massive city, as suggested above we most likely have to do with a greatly enlarged New Earth which has been expanded proportionally so as to accommodate this need.

The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give *as an everlasting possession* to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.
Genesis 17:7 NIV

One aspect of the New Jerusalem which sometimes leads to confusion is its height, described in verse sixteen as equal to its length and breadth. However, we should not think of the city as

having "floors" stacked some sixteen hundred miles into the sky. Rather, this third dimension will be largely vacant, with the surface of the city functioning in precisely the same way as every other iteration of Jerusalem and of paradise, a habitable two-dimensional surface, but enclosed by a sanctified exterior of three dimensions. The holy of holies in the tabernacle furnishes us with the pattern of interpretation we are to use here. After all, we are explicitly told that the tabernacle was a model of heavenly types (Ex.25:40; Heb.8:5). We have seen before (and will consider below) some of these representations (for example, the ark of the covenant representing the chariot-throne of God, and the threefold illustration of Jesus Christ provided by the altar of incense, the menorah, and the table of the bread of presence).⁵⁸⁷ Apropos of our current discussion is the similarity between the holy of holies and the New Jerusalem in terms of spatial proportion, arrangement of pertinent contents, and exterior covering.

Both the holy of holies in the tabernacle and the New Jerusalem are perfect cubes (cf. Ex.26:16; 36:21). The holy of holies contained the ark of the covenant (corresponding to the throne of God the Father and Lamb: Rev.22:1-2), with the mercy seat and the cherubim overlooking it (corresponding to the angelic presence in the New Jerusalem). However, most of the actual space within the holy of holies was empty.⁵⁸⁸ In a similar fashion, only the surface of the New Jerusalem will be furnished (with the throne, the tree of life, the river of the water of life, the main street, and no doubt with other unnamed glories, our own personal, eternal habitations included). The throne will be found at the center of the city and will be elevated, and, given the proportions of the city, it is probable that the height of the central "mount" will be great (as indeed in relative terms the ark and mercy seat are proportionally quite high as compared to the floor-level of the tabernacle). This is in keeping with the residence of God throughout creature history:

Before the creation of mankind:

For you said in your heart, "I will ascend heavenward. I will set my throne above the stars of God. And I will take my seat on *the mount* of assembly on the sides of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the Most High God.

Isaiah 14:13-14

In Eden:

Now a river was flowing forth from Eden (i.e., *downhill*), in order to water the garden, and from there (i.e., after passing through the garden) it divided so that it turned into four headwaters.

Genesis 2:10

In the present day third heaven:

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem.
Hebrews 12:22a

And I looked, and behold, the Lamb stood upon Mount Zion, and with Him were the 144,000, having His Name and the Name of His Father written upon their foreheads.
Revelation 14:1

In the millennial Jerusalem:

At the end of days, the mountain of the temple of the Lord will be established as the chief of all mountains, and it will be raised higher than all [other] hills, and all the nations will flow to it.
Isaiah 2:2

The man brought me back to the entrance of the temple, and I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, south of the altar.
Ezekiel 47:1 NIV

And in the glorious New Jerusalem to come:

And He showed me the river of the water of life, bright like crystal, coming forth from the throne of God and of the Lamb (i.e., and so flowing *downhill* as in every other such case).
Revelation 22:1

As indicated above, just as the tabernacle was completely covered with an exterior curtain, so the New Jerusalem will have its own distinctive, three-dimensional border. The inner layer of the tabernacle's curtain was composed of linen: blue (reflecting the heavenly origin of the only One who can give us access), purple (reflecting the royalty of the only One who can give us access), and scarlet (reflecting the sacrifice of the only One who can give us access). This layer was also embroidered with cherubim, symbolizing the holy abode of God, the third heaven lying above the firmament of sky and space (unreachable apart from Christ). The outer layer of the tabernacle curtain was composed of dark, leathery "sea-cow skins", symbolizing the firmament of the sky, glistening, shimmering, with a blue-black watery appearance, and impenetrable to the eye. In eternity, there will be no need to shield the glory of God from His creation. Instead of an intricate, multi-layered curtain, however, New Jerusalem will be clothed with translucent jasper, and through that covering the glorious light of His being will illuminate the universe:

And night will no longer exist. And those [with the Name of the Father and the Son on their foreheads] will not have need of the light of a lamp or the light of the sun: the Lord God will shine upon them.
Revelation 22:5a

Just as the tabernacle was illuminated by the lamp and indwelt by the *Shekinah* glory of God, so the New Jerusalem will be illuminated by the true glory of God, with that glory illuminating the exterior covering from within and everything without as well, in keeping with the proclamation that He will be "tenting with us" from this point forth forever.

For my tabernacle will be over them. Then I will be their God, and they will be my people.
Ezekiel 37:27

(5) And the Lord will create over Mount Zion and over all her assemblies a cloud – one of smoke by day, and of a shining flame of fire by night. For there will be a canopy above the glory [of His presence, covering it] entirely. (6) It will be a shelter from the heat by day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain.

Isaiah 4:5-6

The City's Rim and Exterior Wall: Contrary to what is found in most translations of Revelation 21:17, the dimensions of the wall surrounding New Jerusalem are not given. As suggested above, if the 144 cubits mentioned referred to the wall, it would indeed be most odd if this wall with its gates of pearl and foundations made of gemstones had even been particularly noticeable to John in comparison with the massive dimensions of New Jerusalem. Most (though not all) of the versions take the 144 cubits to refer to the height of the wall, though, strangely, height is not mentioned. The NIV is closer to the truth in understanding the measurement as referring to the width of the wall, thus allowing the structure the height necessary in order to be proportional to the towering city. In fact, however, no particular dimension is mentioned in regard to the 144 cubits because it is not the measure of the wall that is being specified (where we would need to know whether width or height was being conveyed), but rather of the *rim* or standoff space between the city and the wall. The reading found in most manuscripts, *teichos* (Gr., "wall") is incorrect. Sinaiticus preserves the correct reading: *cheilos* (Gr., "lip", or "rim"). It is easy enough to see how the former (identical in all letters except for the *tau* in place of the *lambda*) was accidentally read for the latter, especially since the "wall" is in view both immediately before (vv.12, 14, 15) and after (vv.18, 19) verse 17. That is to say, this could be either an error of sense ("wall" is what we have everywhere else, so we expect to have "wall" here as well), or of vision (with *teichos* occurring throughout the context it would have been very easy for a scribe's eye to slip to a neighboring instance of the more common word).

Just as in the case of the tabernacle furniture which also has rims around its sides symbolizing sanctification (Ex.25:11; 25:25; 37:12), and just as in the case of the millennial Jerusalem where there is an area of free space immediately outside the sanctuary (Ezek.45:2), and also outside the city proper (Ezek.48:17), so it is appropriate for the wall of the New Jerusalem to be separated from the city by a symbolic distance (i.e., 144 cubits; cf. the 144,000 martyrs, and the twelve thousand by twelve-thousand-stadion sides of the city). The standoff therefore can only be one of width, and it is for that reason the text does not give us a dimension (whereas if the 144 cubits really were a dimension of the wall, we would be told which dimension).

The construction of the wall is the same as that of the exterior of the city, translucent purple-jasper, demonstrating the intrinsic oneness of city and wall. The wall, or course, will not be necessary either for defense (for never will anything hostile to the Lord exist in the new universe) nor for sanctification (for never will anything unholy exist in the new universe). Rather, as evidenced by the foundation stones which (as we shall see below) are memorials to

the level of service to the Lord we His people evidenced here in time, the wall will serve as a memorial to the fact that the Lord has always been our bulwark of defense.

"For I will be a *wall of fire* for her, roundabout [Jerusalem]", says the Lord, "and I will be her glory [shining forth from] within".
Zechariah 2:5

7. The Foundations and Gates of the Wall

(19) And the foundations of the wall of the city were dressed with every [sort] of precious gemstone.

[*The Southern Gates*]

The first foundation was jasper (*the gate of Gad*).
The second foundation was sapphire (*the gate of Simeon*).
The third foundation was carnelian (*the gate of Reuben*).

[*The Eastern Gates*]

The fourth foundation was emerald (*the gate of Zebulun*).
(20) The fifth foundation was sardonyx (*the gate of Issachar*).
The sixth foundation was sardius (*the gate of Judah*).

[*The Northern Gates*]

The seventh foundation was chrysolite (*the gate of Dan*).
The eighth foundation was beryl (*the gate of Asher*).
The ninth foundation was peridot (*the gate of Naphtali*).

[*The Western Gates*]

The tenth foundation was chrysoprase (*the gate of Ephraim*).
The eleventh foundation was jacinth (*the gate of Manasseh*).
The twelfth foundation was amethyst (*the gate of Benjamin*).

(21a) And the twelve gates were twelve pearls: each gate was made entirely of a single pearl.
Revelation 21:19-21a

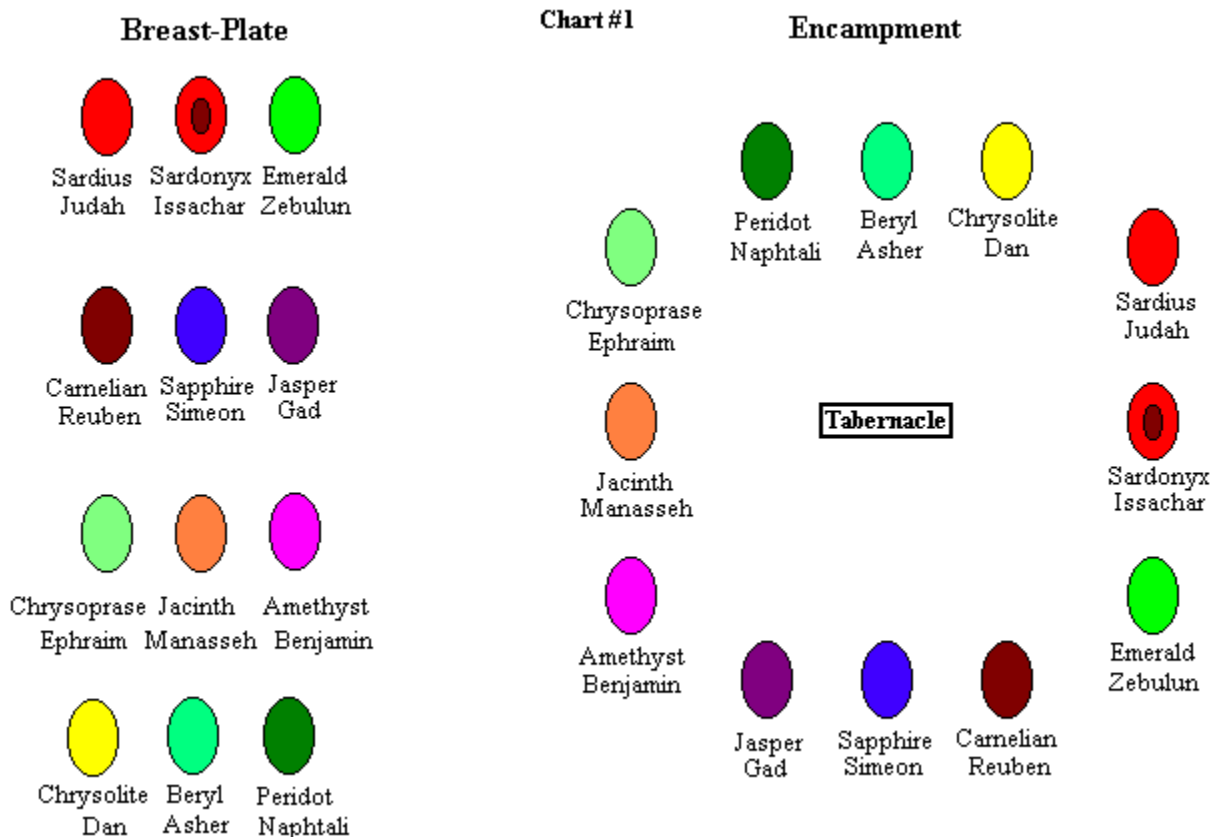
In addition to its role as a memorial to the perfect protection and deliverance which the people of God have experienced throughout human history, the specific features of the wall, namely, its gates and its foundation stones, also serve to demarcate the particular division along with its "colors" to which each believer will belong for all eternity. The description of the foundations of the wall is nested in-between the initial description of the 12 gates in verses 12-13 (where we

are told of the orientation of the gates) and their specific description in verse 21 (where we are told that the gates themselves are identical, made of a single pearl each). Thus the foundations are intrinsically connected to the gates; and, specifically, each gate is associated with a corresponding foundation. This is important for analyzing the particular identification, position, and rank of each foundation stone.

Gemstones were used by the Lord to represent in a memorial way the angelic clans (Ezek.28:13).⁵⁸⁹ They were also used on the high priest's breastplate to represent the twelve tribes of Israel (Ex.28:17-21; 39:10-14). The tribal structure of Israel is the ultimate organization into which all members of the assembly of believers in Jesus Christ (i.e., the *ekklesia* or "Church") will be distributed (Rev.2:17; cf. Ezek.47:21-23; Zech.2:11). This distribution will not be based on heredity (gentiles from before Abraham until the return of Christ will be included), nor on specific lineage (Jewish believers themselves will be rearranged in terms of tribe), but according to merit. We see an indication of this in the fact that the twelve apostles are specifically said in verse 14 to have their names inscribed one to a foundation, with each serving in the capacity of prince for his respective echelon of the duodecad. However, while it is not known to which tribe each of the apostles belonged, it is very clear that they cannot be literal descendants of the twelve tribes, one from each tribe. That is because several of them are brothers (e.g., Peter and Andrew, James and John). We may also be sure that Paul, the greatest of the apostles, will have a grander position than prince of seventh-ranked Benjamin (his ancestral tribe). Therefore we may surmise that the distribution of apostles will take place according to merit rather than genealogy, and that this will be the rule for individual believers in regard to their eternal assignments as well (cf. Gen.48:13-20; Is.66:21; Heb.7:13-14; Rev.7:5-8 [omitting Dan]). Just as the remaining angelic clans which stayed faithful to the Lord were rearranged after Satan's rebellion, and just as individual angels were apparently shifted within these clans as well (especially in regard to those of the three rebel clans who refused to follow the lead of their natural affinities), so also will it be with the 12 tribes (cf. Rev.3:4). In eternity, in addition to any individual rewards won, including our "new name" which will be perfectly reflective of who we are and what we achieved in time (Rev.2:17; 3:12; Is.65:15; cf. Is.62:2b; see section I.7 above, "The Judgment of the Church"), we shall all have a very definite rank and a very specific place in the eternal hierarchy of the New Jerusalem (for we are all individually "precious stones" to God: Zech.9:16; 1Pet.2:5).

Although not generally understood (largely due to a failure to read the correct sequence of John's viewing of the gates, i.e., east-north-west-south), careful attention to the details provided in Revelation chapter twenty-one in comparison to the information about the gemstones and tribes as they appeared on the high priest's breastplate reveals that the order of the gemstone foundations is identical to the order found on the breastplate. John's tour of the gates began on the east (the highest ranking side), and proceeded counter-clockwise to conclude on the south. His description of the gemstones now begins *from that southern perspective*. That is to say, John's enumeration of the gemstones does not begin with the southern-gate foundation stones because they rank first, but because this side of the city wall is where he now finds himself after his first "lap" around the city. Moreover, not only do the gemstone-foundations reflect the breastplate-order in terms of rank (once the ordering is properly understood: Ex.28:17-21; 39:10-14), but they are also identical to the encampment-

order of the tribes around the tabernacle (Num.2:1-31; cf. Num.10:11-33).



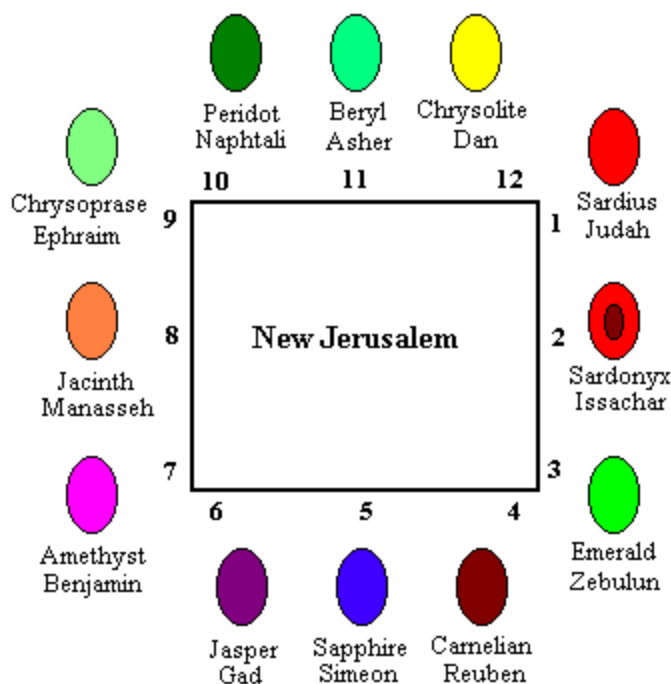
The positioning of the tribes in their encampment-order is identical to the positioning of their respective gates in New Jerusalem. There is, however, a difference in ranking nonetheless. The west-gate tribes in their encampment-order have the same rank as they do on the high priest's breastplate: Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin (for Ephraim was the leader of this triad: Num.2:18-24); however, while the eastern and southern groups maintain their rank, in the case of the north and west-gate tribes we see the first and last of each triad swapping rank in the circular ranking system of New Jerusalem. That is because the encampment-order was designed to facilitate the commencement of the march, whereas the New Jerusalem order reflects status in an absolute way. The result is the relative promotion of Benjamin and Naphtali (from 9th to 7th and from 12th to 10th respectively), and the relative demotion of Ephraim and Dan (from 7th to 9th and from 10th to 12th respectively).⁵⁹⁰ The spiritual application that we do not all end up in the order wherein we begin the Christian race, whether outperforming our station or failing to live up to our advantages, should not be overlooked here. All six of the west and north-gate tribes remain in the same geographic position as was the case when tenting around the tabernacle, but the significance in terms of rank has changed

in the cases mentioned on account of the change of system from march-order to one of consecutive ranking.

In terms of that rank, the true order begins with Judah in the first position at the northernmost eastern gate and proceeds clockwise until we reach Dan in twelfth position at the easternmost northern gate. John's actual listing of the twelve is given in a counter-clockwise fashion, and begins in the middle of the order, and on the south at that (because that is the place where he starts his consideration of the foundations, and it is in that direction in which he is given to view the city). John begins with the foundation stones of the southern gates (because that is where he commenced his second lap around the wall), and concludes on the west:

(S.) 6, 5, 4 — (E.) 3, 2, 1 — (N.) 12, 11, 10 — (W.) 9, 8, 7

Given the impressive nature of the gemstone-foundations and the gates, it is likely that both are correspondingly massive in size so as to match the "great, high wall" which itself harmonizes in magnitude with the monumental New Jerusalem. The most likely layout of these foundation jewels, therefore, is that they occupy the entire area from gate to gate, being also as tall as the gates, with the 1st, 4th, 7th, and 10th foundations wrapping the four corners of the wall so as to connect their gate to the one preceding (leaving the wall itself above the foundations and gates a perfect band of uninterrupted, translucent jasper). The actual ranking (along with the reasons for it and the correct identification of the gemstones) proceeding in a clockwise direction and beginning with the position of honor is as follows:



East-side Tribes: The east side is the place of greatest honor, facing our Lord (cf. the orientation of the tabernacle and temple), and therefore the place of greatest fellowship with the Father and the Son (cf. Ex.25:22; 29:42). Members of the three eastern tribes have all fulfilled the plan of God for their lives, not only believing in Him and His Son our Lord Jesus (as the Messiah either promised before the cross or revealed after the cross), but growing up in Him spiritually, passing the tests of spiritual maturity, and completing the ministries assigned to them by the Lord. This level of achievement is represented in the visible human-face of the cherub who guards the front of the throne. East-side tribal members have advanced to the point of reflecting the Person of Christ (2Cor.3:18; cf. 1Cor.11:1; 1Pet.2:21), having become "complete" in their Christian walk and production of their assigned ministries (Eph.4:13; cf. Jas.1:4; 2:22). While all three eastern tribes share the honor of having accomplished their God-given missions, they have done so to relative degrees, in the manner of "100/60/30 fold" respectively.

1. Judah: Sardius: Hebrew: אדָם / `odhem; Greek: *sardion* / σάρδιον (Gen.49:8-12; Deut.33:7).

2. Issachar: Sardonyx: Hebrew: פִּטְדָה / *pitedhah*; Greek: *sardonyx* / σαρδόνυξ (Gen.49:14-15; Deut.33:18-19).

3. Zebulun: Emerald: Hebrew: ברקת / *bareqeth*; Greek: *smaragdus* / σμάραγδος (Gen.49:13; Deut.33:18-19).

South-side Tribes: The south side is the place of second greatest honor on our Lord's right-hand. Members of the three southern tribes have all made great progress in the plan of God for their lives, not only believing in Him and His Son our Lord Jesus (as the Messiah either promised before the cross or revealed after the cross), but growing up in Him spiritually, and passing the high-level tests of spiritual maturity. This level of achievement is represented in the visible lion-face of the cherub who guards the right-hand side of the throne. South-side tribal members have advanced to the point of honoring the Person of Christ (1Cor.6:20; 2Cor.8:23; Phil.1:20; 1Pet.1:7), having courageously acquitted themselves in the Christian life (Prov.28:1; cf. 1Pet.5:8). While all three southern tribes share the honor of having trusted the Lord in significant testing, they have done so to relative degrees, in the manner of "100/60/30 fold" respectively.

1. Reuben: Carnelian: Hebrew: נֶפֶךְ / *nophekh*; Greek: *chalcedon* / χαλκηδών (Gen.49:3-4; Deut.33:6).

2. Simeon: Sapphire: Hebrew: סַפִּיר / *sappir*; Greek: *sapphiros* / σάπφειρος (Gen.49:5-7; cf. Deut.33:8-11).

3. Gad: Jasper: Hebrew: יַהֲלֹם / *yahalom*; Greek: *iaspis* / ἰασπις (Gen.49:19; Deut.33:20-21).

West-side Tribes: The west side is the place of third greatest honor in the special guardian position behind the throne. Members of the three western tribes have all made progress in the plan of God for their lives, not only believing in Him and His Son our Lord Jesus (as the Messiah either promised before the cross or revealed after the cross), but growing up in Him spiritually. This level of achievement is represented in the visible eagle-face of the cherub who guards the rear of the throne. West-side tribal members have advanced to the point of trusting the Person of Christ (Ex.19:4; Is.40:31; Col.1:10; 2Thes.1:3; 1Pet.2:2; 2Pet.3:18; cf. Eph.4:15-16; Col.2:19), having grown to the point of spiritual maturity in the Christian life (Eph.4:13; Col.4:12; Heb.5:13; Jas.1:3-4). While all three western tribes share the honor of having advanced in the knowledge of the Lord, they have done so to relative degrees, in the manner of "100/60/30 fold" respectively.

1. Benjamin: Amethyst: Hebrew: אַחֲלָמָה / *achalamah*; Greek: *amethystos* / ἀμέθυστος (Gen.49:27; Deut.33:12).

2. Manasseh: Jacinth: Hebrew: לֶשֶׁם / *leshem*; Greek: *hyakinthos* / ὑάκινθος (Gen.49:22-26; Deut.33:13-17).

3. Ephraim: Chrysoprase: Hebrew: שֶׁבוּ / *shebho*; Greek: *chrysoprasos* / χρυσόπρασος (Gen.49:22-26; Deut.33:13-17).

North-side Tribes: The north side is the final place of honor, to the left-hand side of the throne. Members of the three northern tribes have all responded to the plan of God for their lives, not only by believing in Him and His Son our Lord Jesus (as the Messiah either promised before the cross or revealed after the cross), but maintaining their faith safely intact until the end. This level of achievement is represented in the visible bullock-face of the cherub who guards the left-hand side of the throne. North-side tribal members have endured the trials of life while holding firmly to their faith in the Person of Christ (Is.1:3; 1Tim.1:18-19; 6:12; 2Tim.4:7; Heb.4:14), having refused to exchange that precious faith for a mess of pottage (Heb.10:35-39; Heb.12:16; 2Pet.2:21-22). While all three northern tribes share the honor of having kept faith with the Lord, they have done so to relative degrees, in the manner of "100/60/30 fold" respectively.

1. Naphtali: Peridot: Hebrew: יַשְׁפָּה / *yashepheh*; Greek: *topazion* / τοπάζιον (Gen.49:21; Deut.33:23).

2. Asher: Aquamarine-Beryl: Hebrew: שְׁהַם / *shoham*; Greek: *beryllos* / βήρυλλος (Gen.49:20; Deut.33:24-25).

3. Dan: Chrysolite: Hebrew: תַּרְשִׁישׁ / *tarshish*; Greek: *chrysolithos* / χρυσόλιθος (Gen.49:16-18; Deut.33:22).

It is important to note here that the exceptional achievements of some will not in any way disparage the lesser accomplishments of others. Regardless of the "regiment" into which we are eternally enrolled, just as each believer is a special living stone memorialized before the Lord (Zech.9:16; 1Pet.2:5), so each tribe receives its own unique blessings (as can be seen from a comparison of the blessings of Jacob and Moses referenced above). Moreover, each tribe is worthy of special, distinctive memorialization, as evidenced by the beautiful gemstone which is uniquely its own, and by its own individualized gate, each being associated with a specific, high-ranking angel and apostle-prince. Even the lowest-ranking person in the lowest-ranking tribe of Dan, that is, the believer who has earned the least possible reward of everyone in the entire Church, will *still* be blissfully happy for all eternity, possessing a full share of Jesus Christ, access to the tree of life, and an eternal lodging in the New Jerusalem. Thus even the absolute least in the eternal kingdom has "won the victory" (1Cor.15:54-57; 1Jn.5:4; Rev.2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:26; 3:5; 3:12; 3:21), receiving as a result "glory and honor and immortality" with eternal peace and blessing (Rom.2:7-9), and will be inestimably better off than the least unrighteous unbeliever of all condemned to the Lake of Fire.

It will be noted from the above that the tribe of Levi is not assigned a gate in the New Jerusalem. Levi, of course, was selected from the other tribes for special ministry to the Lord. As such, Levi was not represented by a gemstone inscribed with its name on the high priest's breastplate. That did not mean, however, that Levi had no place or inheritance in Israel. Quite to the contrary, the members of that tribe had chosen the Lord over their own flesh and blood (Ex.32:26-29). As a result, Levi's place was special (Duet.33:8-11), and the Lord Himself was their inheritance (Duet.10:9). The Levites were specially "set apart to the Lord" (Ex.32:29), being uniquely blessed on account of their dedication to the Lord rather than somehow left out.

We see evidence of something similar in the existence of special colleges of elect angels (e.g., the cherubs, the archangels, the four angels of the winds, etc.), namely, specific individuals who have been set apart entirely from the organization of angelic clans, no doubt for exemplary service. In this regard, therefore, we may posit that in addition to these twelve divisions of the Church, there also exists an elite cadre of individuals, analogous to and represented by the tribe of Levi, who have an especially close relationship to the Lord – in reward for their esteeming Him beyond all other things in this life. The unnamed two who will sit at Jesus' right and left hands clearly belong to this category, and no doubt the apostles too, despite their princely leadership of the twelve divisions (analogous here to the archangels who likewise form a group apart). We may also expect the Old Testament prophets to be included in this elite group (inasmuch as the Church is built upon the foundation of "the apostles and the prophets": Eph.2:20). The key characteristic which will merit inclusion into this most august number, however, will be martyrdom (Rev.20:4). The 144,000 definitely seem to be included (cf. Rev.14:1-5), for example, and while some of the great prophets and apostles may not have been put to death for the Lord (and while some who die of persecution may not be accorded the honor of inclusion into this exclusive group), martyrdom on the part of exceptional believers who have otherwise achieved the highest level of reward and right to membership in the highest ranking named tribe (i.e., Judah), would seem to be the most common basis for inclusion into the number of the unnamed tribe of Levi, specially set apart to the Lord for all eternity. At the very least, we may expect that all such believers will have come to the point of experiencing serious persecution for the Name of Jesus, not only believing, trusting, honoring, and reflecting the Person of Christ, but also of sharing His sufferings (1Pet.4:13; cf. Rom.8:17; 2Cor.1:5; Phil.3:10; Col.1:24; cf. 2Cor.12:7-10).

(19) For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision that comes from the Spirit of Jesus Christ, (20) in keeping with my expectation and hope that I will in no way be put to shame, but that now as ever, holding nothing back, Christ will be magnified by means of this body of mine, whether through my life, or through my death. (21) For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Philippians 1:20-21

While not specifically named, we may expect that the distribution of apostles and angels associated with the twelve gates and their tribes and gemstones is likewise based upon merit. Therefore it would be most unlikely if Paul were not the apostle of the Judah gate (with John and Peter filling out the east-side tribes). As to the angels, it is perhaps not unwarranted to speculate that the same angels who were associated with the seven eras of the Church are likely to be the individuals who continue in a mission of symbolic human-angelic liaison.⁵⁹¹ To them we may add the unnamed head-angels charged with similar duties during each of the four millennial days preceding the Church, and the angel with this mission during the Tribulation (a special joint period between Israel and the Church, not covered under the seven angels' mandate).⁵⁹²

Finally, as suggested above, it is entirely appropriate that the names of the twelve tribes should be given to the divisions of the eternal organization of the Church; we are all now one in Christ, made near through His blood with the middle wall of partition which divided us removed by His sacrifice (Deut.32:8; Micah 5:3; Rom.11:17-21; Gal.6:15-16; Eph.2:11-21).⁵⁹³ Moreover, as

we have noted in the past, based upon the information given by the Jewish ceremonial calendar the final composition of the family of God (Church and Friends of the Bride taken together) will likely be of original gentiles and original Jews in equal proportion (with Jews streaming to the Lord in disproportionate numbers during the Millennium).⁵⁹⁴

8. The Interior of the City

(21b) And the city's [network of] main streets was pure gold as if [made of] diaphanous crystal. (22) And I did not see a temple in the [city], for the Lord God the Almighty is its temple, and [so is] the Lamb. (23) And the city has no need of the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God illuminated it and the Lamb was its lamp. (24) And the nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory into it. (25) And the gates of the city shall never be closed in the daytime. Indeed, there will be no night there [at all]. (26) And they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations (i.e., everything valuable and fine) into it. (27) And nothing profane and no doer of abominations or any liar will enter into [the city], only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Revelation 21:21b-27

The Streets: The Greek word *plateia* (πλατεῖα), usually translated "street" (ASV, ESV, KJV, NASB; the NIV has "great street"), is actually referring to the main road-network which connects all the aforementioned gates to city's central hub, "the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev.22:1; 22:3). Obviously, for a city of over 2.5 million square miles in area, there is more than one, single street. And just as obviously, each of its twelve main gates must have a major artery entering and exiting through it (for, after all, it must be through these gates that "the kings of the earth bring their glory into [the city]": Rev.21:24). Often, the Greek word in question is used of a city square, and we may imagine that each of the twelve major arteries in this network possess extreme width (in keeping with the vast size of the city and its gates). That is especially so when one considers that these streets will have the river of living water running down through their midst, with a veritable forest of trees, the tree of life, populating both banks in each case. These twelve massive streets must radiate out from the center of the city like spokes from a hub, intersecting the wall at their respective gates. While it is possible that the angles separating them are equal (i.e., 30° each), thus determining the positioning of the gates, it seems much more likely that the courses of these main avenues are determined by the need to intersect their corresponding gates (which are most likely spaced proportionally along the wall). As impressive as this network of boulevards will be, it is its composition which seems to have caught the apostle's attention. The grid is described in terms which are similar but not identical to those of the city. The crystalline gold of which the streets are composed is not merely translucent but "diaphanous". These words are synonyms in English, of course, but the latter word brings out the additional quality which the Greek adjective *diauges* (διαυγής) is meant to convey: not merely transparent but possessing an illuminative property which makes the golden avenues stand out perspicuously even in the midst of a city made of translucent gold. It is certainly appropriate for this network of radiating streets to figure prominently even in the midst a city more beautiful than the mind of man could ever conceive. In this way, both the entrances into the city (which will likewise be exceptionally conspicuous as gigantic, white, shining pearls) and the avenues which lead through the gates to center of the city will symbolize what was most important in this life: they will lead to and point towards the One

who is the Gate to eternal life (Jn.10:7-9; cf. Matt.7:13-14), the One who is the only Way to the Father (Jn.14:6; cf. Matt.7:13-14), our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. For the throne in the city's center will be the hub from which the twelve illuminated arteries radiate and whence they lead, towering above the city below (cf. Zech.8:3; Rev.22:1), and shining forth with the glory of God Himself (Rev.21:23; 22:5).

Lodgings: John's impression of the interior of the city as made of transparent gold (Rev.21:18b) is our only indication of the nature of the lodgings New Jerusalem contains. We have already seen that the city's major avenues will provide an abundance of open space. It also goes without saying that around the throne in the center of the city must be a very large open space to accommodate the assembly of the Lord's people in His presence as it was in the past (Job 1:6; 2:1), and as is presently the case (Rev.5:11; 7:9). Also, we should not imagine that the rest of the city area is entirely "built out" anymore than would be the case with a contemporary *polis*. That is to say, the Greek word πόλις (found at 12 times in Rev.21-22) may envisage an entire country, including all of its territory (and the size of New Jerusalem, after all, is nearly the size of the continental United States). We can say that the buildings must produce a profoundly moving impression to rate the general description John gives of the city proper.

Do not let your heart be troubled. Believe in God, and believe also in Me. *There are many rooms in my Father's house.* If there were not, I would have told you. For I am going in order to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I shall come again and take you to Myself, so that where I am, you may be also.

John 14:1-3

Given the enormous size of New Jerusalem and Jesus' promise above, it is clear that every believer will have an eternal lodging in the golden city, and we may be sure that even for the least and the last that residence will be wonderful beyond description. The present heavenly Jerusalem is also the abode of angels (Heb.12:22), and we may expect that to be the case in New Jerusalem as well (cf. Gen.3:24; Ex.36:8; Ps.36:7 [Hebrew]; Rev.4:4-10; 5:11; 21:12). We cannot say whether or not our eternal dwellings are already presently in place in the heavenly Jerusalem, but as the final full-complement of the Church is apparently precisely equal to the number of fallen angels, the possibility exists that believers will occupy the former residences of Satan's followers, just as we have replaced them in the family of God (cf. Lk.11:22).⁵⁹⁵

One possibility for the distribution of the twelve tribes may be the occupation of the area on both sides of its main avenue to a parallel which is equidistant from the neighboring avenue on either side. If such is the case, the geometric effect will be that the territories of the four tribes occupying the four central-gate regions will be significantly smaller than those of the eight tribes on either side of each of the four corners – that is, assuming, as certainly appears to be the case, that the gates of the city are spaced at equal distances around the wall (and such would certainly seem to be so from the description given in verses nineteen through twenty-one, with the foundations stones appearing to be identical in size, filling the intervals between the gates). For New Jerusalem is a square, not a circle, and therefore the angles at which the twelve major arteries will radiate outward in order to intersect with the gates so positioned will not be identical. The geometric result will be a noticeably smaller area for the tribes occupying the four central-gates regions. Certainly, this disparity might be offset in a number of ways

(e.g., if the central square is positioned obliquely, with its four corners touching the east-west, north-south axes, then at some magnitude its expansion could theoretically render all twelve areas equal, though the unknown width of the avenues makes that point impossible to compute). However, it may also be the case that, as in all other things in the Christian life, extremes whether good or bad tend to be more frequent occurrences than the mean between the two. It may very well be that in all four classes of response to the plan and will of God, more believers have tended to cluster around minimal and maximal effort than to find a medium between the two. In terms of the particular location of our eternal dwelling within the tribe of our final allotment, it is clear that being closer to the Lord will be more desirable, and farther away less so. So is also possible that the tribes will be distributed concentrically with the higher ranking one closer to the throne (with Judah nearest to the central assembly area), and with the lower ranking tribes closer to the wall (with Dan directly next to it). We may expect that in each case the greater the reward earned in this life, the larger the habitation, and the higher up the hill upon which the throne resides and the closer to the Lord it will be. But although a place near the wall is for these reasons the least desirable situation, it will still be infinitely better to be “a doorkeeper in the house of God” than to rate the most prestigious place “in the tents of the wicked” (Ps.84:10).

The Throne: We have had occasion to treat the present-day, heavenly throne along with the angelic elders and cherubs who attend it in our coverage of Revelation chapters 4-7 (in part 2B of this series).

(2) Immediately I came to be in the Spirit, and, behold, a throne had been placed in the [third] heaven, and [some] One was sitting [upon it]. (3) And the One sitting [on the throne was] similar in appearance to a gemstone of jasper or sardius. And there was a *rainbow* (i.e., the glory of God) around the throne similar in appearance to [something] made of emerald. (4) And encircling the throne were twenty-four [other] thrones. And on the[se] thrones twenty-four elders were sitting, dressed in white clothing. And on their heads were golden crowns. (5) And from the throne [of God] come forth flashes of lightning, voices and peals of thunder. And there [stood] burning before the throne seven lamps of fire, which are the seven spirits of God. (6) And in front of the throne [was something] like a sea of glass similar to crystal. And in the midst of throne, encircling the throne, were four living-creatures, laden with eyes in front and in back. (7) And the first living-creature was similar to a lion. And the second living-creature was similar to a young bull. And the third living-creature had a face similar to a man's. And the fourth living-creature was similar to an eagle in flight.

Revelation 4:2-7

Apart from the absence of the indications of judgment (i.e., flashes of lightning, voices and peals of thunder), and the absence of the crystal sea (unnecessary as a view-port to earth since the city has now come to earth), the text suggests that the throne will be the same one upon which the Father and Son presently sit in state. There will be no temple building in New Jerusalem, however, as "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (Rev.21:22; contrast with Rev.7:15; 11:19; 14:15-17; 15:5-6; 16:1; 16:17). Situated at the precise center of the city and on elevated ground from which the river of the water of life flows forth, the glory of God in the Persons of the Father and the Son will illuminate the world with a brilliant rainbow of light more intense than seven suns (Is.30:26), as the *Shekinah* glory can finally be unveiled

without destroying the now perfected creatures privileged to gaze upon the Lord as He actually is (Ex.33:18-23).

Outside the City: The gates of New Jerusalem will always be open (Rev.21:25). For there will nevermore be any night (Rev.21:25; 22:5), no time of insecurity and danger, nor will anything profane even be able to enter in, since all sinfulness has been burnt out of the New Heavens and the New Earth. The "kings of the nations" will "bring their glory" (i.e., everything valuable and fine produced in the perfect new universe) into the city (Rev.21:24; 21:26), and the nations they represent will "walk by its light" (Rev.21:24). Furthermore, the leaves of the tree(s) of life will benefit these nations outside the city wall (Rev.22:2). From this compound description it is very clear that there will be a sizeable population living outside of the city wall. It is also clear that they, and in particular their leaders, will enter the city on a regular basis. Therefore this elect group must be carefully distinguished from those mentioned by John at Revelation 22:15 (i.e., "outside are the dogs", etc.). For those reprobates are being deliberately contrasted in that passage with this group which precedes it in verse fourteen, a whole host of people who have "the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city". The "dogs" are those who have been committed to the Lake of Fire, with "outside" referring to the "outer darkness" (Matt.8:12; 22:13; 25:30, the key idea being one of complete separation from God (the Greek words being *exo* and *exoteros* respectively, the latter being the comparative form of the former). That is to say, "outside" refers *not* just to the New Jerusalem, but to being "outside" the Lord's eternal state *entirely* (i.e., in the Lake of Fire). For only the names of believers will still be found "in the book of life" as the names of outside-believers are said to be (Rev.21:27).

Awake, awake, O Zion, clothe yourself with strength. Put on your garments of splendor, O Jerusalem, the holy city. *The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again.*
Isaiah 52:1 NIV

The population of the New Earth outside of New Jerusalem will be composed of the Friends of the Bride, that is, the contingent of millennial believers not resurrected and rewarded until history's end. In number, these will equal the Bride, so that together saved humanity will be equal in number to elect angelic-kind (Satan and his followers having been replaced one for one by the Church, with the millennial cohort furnishing Christ with His "double portion").⁵⁹⁶ The Friends of the Bride will be composed of gentiles (whose kings are described in Rev.21:24), but also of Jews in disproportionately large numbers (we have posited elsewhere that the proportion of three to one of gentiles to Jews in the Church will be exactly reversed during the Millennium).⁵⁹⁷ Directly outside of the city, therefore, we may expect to find the New Israel, in proportion to its capital city greatly expanded in its territory (cf. Gen.17:7):

"Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out *to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south*. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring."
Genesis 28:14 NIV

The remainder of the greatly enlarged New Earth (and possibly also the rest of the New Heavens, for that matter), will be occupied and husbanded by the gentile Friends of the Bride.

When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when He divided the sons of men, He established the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel.
Deuteronomy 32:8

9. The River of the Water of Life and the Tree of Life

(1) And He showed me the river of the water of life, sparkling like crystal[s of ice], coming forth from the throne of God and of the Lamb. (2) In the middle of the [New Jerusalem's network of twelve main] streets and on both sides of [this] river [of the water of life which ran through them] was the tree of life, producing twelve crops, offering its fruit every month, month by month. And the leaves of the tree are for the enjoyment of [all] the nations, (3a) so that there will no longer be any division.

Revelation 22:1-3a

Just as the river proceeding from Eden (which watered the garden) and the river from the millennial temple (which will water the Arabah and western sea) are prominent elements of their respective paradises, so the river of the water of life will be a dominating feature of New Jerusalem. The same also applies in all three cases to the tree of life. For New Jerusalem, however, this prominence will be abundantly true not only from the tangible aspect of the blessings they will provide forever, but also for their important symbolism. The tree of life represents our Lord Jesus, and eating of its fruit symbolizes placing our faith in Him⁵⁹⁸; the truth about Jesus is the spring of living water welling up to eternal life for all who drink thereof:

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. The one who comes to Me shall not hunger, and the one who believes in Me shall not thirst forever".

John 6:35

And all of them (i.e., the Exodus generation) drank the same spiritual drink (i.e., divinely provided water symbolizing the truth in which one believes). For all of them drank from the spiritual[ly significant] Rock which followed them – for that Rock was Christ.

1st Corinthians 10:4

For those who put their faith in Jesus in this life, the water of life and the tree of life will provide spiritual sustenance and physical blessing beyond present understanding and for all eternity.

(7) [Lord,] how precious is your mercy! Both the mighty ones (i.e., angels) and the sons of men will take shelter under your wings. (8) They will drink their fill from the richness [that flows] from your house, for You will give them drink from your river of delights. (9) For with You is the fountain of life. Through your light [on that day] we shall see [true] light.

Psalm 36:7-9

The River of the Water of Life: Just as the river that watered the garden came forth from God's place of "delight", Eden, and just as the millennial river of water which enlivens the Dead Sea comes forth from the temple, so the eternal river of the water of life will come forth from the throne of God, demonstrating clearly the source of eternal life and source of everlasting blessing. Instead of the river of fire which had flowed forth from the throne for judgment (Dan.7:10), this river emanates from the throne in its final resting place on earth as both a symbolic and tangible source of God's grace for His people.

Ho, everyone who thirsts, let him come to the waters!
Isaiah 55:1

As discussed above, the "street" mentioned in Revelation 22:2 above is really the New Jerusalem's network of streets. Therefore the river of the water of life which comes forth from the throne of the Father and the Son does not descend from the eternal Mount Zion in one channel only, but in twelve, flowing down the middle of *each* of the twelve capacious boulevards, and exiting the city through each of the twelve gates to water the face of the eternal Israel and the New Earth (cf. Ezek.47:1-12: while Ezekiel is given to see only the eastern stream issuing from the millennial temple, there are in fact two: Zech.14:8). The water itself, "sparkling like crystal[s of ice]", will be a delight to behold and will provide physical and spiritual blessings for all who partake of it. Since water is a biblical symbol for God's Word of truth (Is.55:1-3; Jn.3:5; 3:8 [Greek]; 4:10; 4:13-14; 7:37-39; 1Cor.10:4; Eph.5:26; Heb.10:22; 1Jn.5:8 [of the Trinity]; Rev.7:17; 21:6; 22:1; 22:17; cf. Ex 17:5-6; Num. 20:8; Ps.42:1-2; 63:1; 84:5-7; Is.41:17; 44:3), it will perhaps be the case that the particular spiritual nourishment the water provides is precisely that, namely, truth about the Lord, all He is and all He has done. For Jesus is the true spring of living water (Is.8:6; Jer.2:13; 17:13; Jn.4:10-14; 7:38; Rev.7:17). It is thrilling to consider that these waters will never run dry, and that even were a person to drink from them without pause for all eternity, it would still not be possible to drain to the depths the source of truth about the God who made us, loved us, and saved us in Jesus Christ our dear Lord.

One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple.
Psalm 27:4 NIV

And the Spirit and the bride say "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.
Revelation 22:17

The Tree of Life: There are several important things to note about the tree of life which may not be immediately obvious from an English version. First, the word "tree" is used here in a collective sense. What we have to do with here is a veritable forest of trees. Second, this forest lines both sides of the river of living water along all twelve channels, over 20,000 miles of network, and on both sides of the river channels at that. We can also only guess at the width of the river or of breadth of the wooded area occupied on each side, but the proportions of the city and the likely extensive span of each of the twelve avenues argue for a not inconsiderable

distance. Simply put, the tree of life will cover a good deal of territory in New Jerusalem. Third, the twelve crops are not produced sequentially, but simultaneously, *regardless* of the time of the year (that is the meaning of "every month, month by month"). Rather than being temporally separated, the fruit is geographically separated: the trees along each of the twelve branches of the river bring forth a different type of produce, one for each tribe (in a manner analogous to the twelve loaves of the bread of presence set out in the tabernacle to represent the twelve tribes of Israel: Lev.24:5-9). This diversity of location will encourage the visitation of residents of every tribe to all other areas of the city, in order the better to enjoy and appreciate the whole of New Jerusalem.

(12) Walk about Zion, go around her, count her towers, (13) consider well her ramparts, view her citadels, that you may tell of them to the next generation. (14) For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.

Psalm 48:12-14 NIV

When the people of the land come before the Lord at the appointed feasts, whoever enters by the north gate to worship is to go out the south gate; and whoever enters by the south gate is to go out the north gate. No one is to return through the gate by which he entered, but each is to go out the opposite gate.

Ezekiel 46:9 NIV

There are three important aspects to the tree of life and its fruit, all of which are symbolized by the furniture in the tabernacle-temple; and all of these symbols are inextricably bound to the Person of the One who is the revealed member of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, the true tree of life (Jn.15:1-8; Rom.11:17-24). The golden lampstand symbolizes the appearance of the tree of life (Ex.25:33-34)⁵⁹⁹; the bread of the presence on the golden table symbolizes its fruit (Lev.24:5-9); and the incense from the golden altar recalls its fragrance (cf. 2Cor.2:15). For Jesus is the light of the world (Jn.8:12), the bread of life (Jn.6:35), and the sweet savor of salvation which expiates our sins (Eph.5:2; cf. Heb.7:27; 9:14). The tree of life will thus be the source of palpable joy in its appearance, fragrance, and taste (cf. Gen.2:9; Ezek.47:12). And in this last blessing in particular, the feature emphasized in our context with the reference to the twelve crops, the benefits and delights of partaking of the various fruits will be enormous, eternal manna from God, everlasting communion in the participation of the Body of Christ, a pleasurable experience that will surpass to infinity anything offered by this present, visible world.

We are also told that the foliage of the trees will likewise produce great benefits, though here again the English versions can be misleading. The Greek word *therapeia* (θεραπεία), the source of our "therapy", may indeed have a medicinal meaning, but not necessarily so. Its primary application has to do with care and oversight, a function which does not require some prior problem as in the case of illness (cf. Lk.12:42). Therefore "positive use" or "enjoyment" is a far preferable translation in this context where all tears have now been wiped away forever. This benefit of the tree of life will then be some sort of pleasurable activity apart from eating, and one of its prime applications will be the production of unity among all believers. For the occurrence of the word "curse" found in most of the versions in verse three of chapter twenty-two is based upon a misreading of the text (as we have seen, the "curse" of Genesis chapter

three had already been removed at Christ's return: Rom.8:21; cf. Zech.14:11 NASB only). As Sinaiticus makes clear, the correct Greek text reads *katagma* (κατάγμα) "division", not *katathema* (κατάθεμα) "curse". In New Jerusalem there will be no further divisiveness between the tribes, now composed of Jews and gentiles both, nor between the Bride and the Friends of the Bride. The therapeutic foliage of the tree of life will provide a pleasurable means of fellowship and harmony between all believers forevermore (Ps.47:9; Zech.2:11; Jn.10:16; 11:52).

Happy are those who wash their robes so that they may have the right to [access] the tree of life, and [the right to pass through] the gates so that they may enter the city.
Revelation 22:14

10. The Blessed Eternal State of the Saved

(3b) And the throne of God and of the Lamb is within her (i.e., New Jerusalem), and His servants will worship Him, (4) and they will see His face, and His Name will be on their foreheads. (5) And there will no longer be any night nor will they have any need of the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will shine upon them, and they will reign forever and ever.

Revelation 22:3b-5

The Character of our Eternal Life: As to the precise construction of the New Earth and New Heavens and our activities therein, scripture gives us only a little information. That is decidedly a good thing, because if we knew in great detail how wonderful the eternity we anticipate will be, we might be tempted to think of nothing else. Such detailed knowledge also might remove some of the challenge to our spiritual growth. As it is, believers have to exert a certain amount of sanctified will-power to "think about the things above" (as we are commanded to do: Col.3:1-2).

We are given to know certain things, however, and it is possible to make some sanctified assumptions from the information we do have. For example:

- We will inhabit an amazing, perfect body forever. We know some important things about our future resurrection body from the example of our Lord in resurrection, since "when He appears, we shall be like Him" (1Jn.3:2).⁸³
- We will enjoy the visual and sensual delights of the New Jerusalem, the city itself, the river of the water of life, the fruits of the tree of life and leaves of blessing, the beauty of the city, its walls, gates and foundations, the novelties produced and brought into the city, eternal fellowship with all our kindred believers in Jesus Christ, etc. All these will be eternal joys which will be all the more enjoyable because of the perfect body we shall command, being not only incapable of any ill-feeling, but also possessing a greatly expanded capacity to appreciate the

wonders to come.

- We will likely have the expanded and perfected new universe to explore forever. Since our Lord is capable of walking through closed doors, moving immediately from one far distant place to another, and ascending through the universe to the third heaven, it would seem to be rather incongruous to give us His Church bodies capable of such swift, amazing travel, then restrict us to one particular place (viz., we shall be superior to angels, and they currently ply the heavens).
- We will have direct access to the Son and the Father for all time, and that will be by far the "best of the best" of anything anyone could ever possibly have or experience. We only understand that now in principle, but on that glorious day of days we will "know even as we are known" (1Cor.13:12).

In a word, we cannot yet truly appreciate what is to come. We behold that future glory only dimly as a distant reflection (1Cor.13:12), but we can take great encouragement from the contrasts scripture provides between the difficult life we now patiently endure and the blessed existence that awaits us on the other side of the veil.

- Instead of death, only life (Jn.3:15-16).
- Instead of sin, only righteousness (2Pet.3:13).
- Instead of tears, only joy (Ps.16:11).
- Instead of pain, only blessing (Rev.22:2).
- Instead of want, only plenty (Rev.21:24).
- Instead of trouble, only peace (Lk.20:34-36).
- Instead of darkness, only light (Rev.22:5).
- Instead of separation from God, eternity in the presence of God (Rev.22:4).

That this last contrast encapsulates all that will be truly good and wonderful in New Jerusalem may be seen from the context of our passage, Revelation 22:3b-5. For this passage summarizes our blessed eternal status by listing five salient characteristics of our glorious life to come, all five of which are focused not on us or our resurrection bodies but on the Lord:

1. Our Worship of God: "His servants will worship Him": The word often translated "serve" here is better rendered as "worship", for that is the substance of which our eternal service to the Lord will be composed.⁶⁰⁰ These acts of worship which we shall thoroughly enjoy, "with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng" (Ps.42:4 NIV), will not consist of the shadows of the Law or hollow, invented liturgies which are really only "the teachings of men"

(Is.29:13; Col.2:22). Rather, they will be genuine and heart-felt acts of worship occurring in accordance with a perfect and specifically prescribed pattern. This perfect worship arranged, designed, and ordained by God Himself will thrill our hearts in an unimaginable way, and we will never have to wonder about when to come before Him, what to bring, what to do, or whether a particular hymn or rite or ceremony or expression is right or correct. Our worship, our service of adoration to the Lord will be perfect on that great day, and incapable of being otherwise, for we will be an eternal "kingdom of priests" (Rev.1:6; 5:20; 20:6).⁶⁰¹

(23) But the hour is coming, and in fact has already arrived, when the true worshipers [of God] will worship the Father in spirit (i.e., spiritually: our spirit responding to His Spirit) and in truth (i.e., truthfully: our heart responding to His truth). Indeed, it is just such worshipers that the Father is seeking. (24) For God is spirit, and those who worship Him must do so spiritually (lit., in spirit) and truthfully (lit., in truth).

John 4:23-24

2. Our Fellowship with God: "they will see His face": While at present, no one living has seen God (Ex.33:20; Jn.6:46; 1Tim.6:16), on that great day we shall all see Him face to face (1Cor.13:12); we shall all be with and enjoy the presence of dear Lord Jesus in Person (Jn.14:3; 2Thes.1:10). For the Bride and the Groom will be united as one forevermore (Ps.45:9-11), never to part (Rev.3:12; cf. 1Cor.3:16-17; 6:19; 1Pet.2:5). For we shall be His people, and He will be our God (Gen.7:17; Jer.31:33; Ezek.37:27).

3. Our Relationship with God: "His Name will be on their foreheads": The levitical priests wore a plate of pure gold on their turbans inscribed "Holy to the Lord" (Ex.28:36). As a kingdom of priests, we too will have an special identification of our status as God's eternal possessions. For He will place His sacred Name on our foreheads that all who see may know that we belong to Him forever (Is.43:7).

4. Our Capacity to Appreciate God: "the Lord God will shine upon them": The darkness of this present world which symbolized divine judgment has now given way to a universe of light in which darkness has ceased to exist. The presently unapproachably brilliance of the glory of God on that day will be given to us to view in awe and reverence. Indeed, it will be the source of light, infinitely brighter than anything presently imaginable (cf. Is.30:26), which will illuminate the entire New Heavens and New Earth. In resurrection, we will not only have the ability to look upon the *Shekinah* glory without being immediately destroyed, but will also be able to appreciate the wonder of it. One in Jesus, the Light of this present world (Jn.8:12), we will no longer have any need of lamps or the sun or any other indirect source: from the eternal Mount Zion, the "Place-of-Light", the glory of God will suffuse the entire universe. Nor will there ever be another night, nor any need for us to sleep: there will be no need to miss a moment of eternity, and we shall have the capacity to appreciate and enjoy this and every other eternal blessing to the full.

5. Our Sharing of God's Reign: "they will reign forever and ever": Under the Genesis curse, hard work is required to survive in this present world. But mankind was never created to be idle. Even in the garden, Adam was given a desirable and enjoyable occupation, "to work [the

garden] and take care of it" (Gen.2:15), and Eve was designed as a "helper compatible with him" (Gen.2:18). Therefore if the blessings already alluded to do not seem sufficient to pass eternity, we may be sure that we will not find ourselves without delightful and pleasurable tasks to perform, work that is in no way burdensome, but instead perfectly complements who we each are. Beyond all question, the most wonderful such occupation to contemplate is that of sharing in the rulership of the universe with our Lord, a blessing of which our context makes clear even the lowest gatekeeper of New Jerusalem will partake. While the devil and those who chose his side had as their ultimate objective the wresting of universal rulership from God, we who have humbly chosen to follow and serve Jesus in this life will find Him and His Father generously sharing their eternal rule with us forever.

Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.

Daniel 7:27 NIV

But of all these things, our greatest source of joy and surprise, engagement and wonder will be the Person of God Himself in the face of our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We who have trusted God to bring us through the tough times of this life can certainly trust Him that, after the testing and trials of this life are past, He will provide us with only the brightest and the best, things beyond comprehension, "*eternal delights at Thy right hand forevermore*" (Ps.16:11). For Jesus has been our fortress and our refuge in this life, our Shepherd and our Friend. Jesus is our true home, and He will be so forever. Amen.

Do not let your heart be troubled. Believe in God, and believe also in Me. There are many rooms in my Father's house. If there were not, I would have told you. For I am going in order to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I shall come again and take you to Myself, *so that where I am, you may be also.*

John 14:1-3

The Coming Tribulation: A History of the Apocalypse

Part 7

Preparing for Tribulation: Revelation 22:6-21

by Dr. Robert D. Luginbill

I. The Importance of Alertness: Revelation 22:6-21

(6) And he said to me, "These words are worthy of being believed and are true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets sent me, His angel, to demonstrate to His servants what

must happen quickly. (7) Behold, He is coming quickly. Happy is he who guards the words of the prophecy of this book [in his heart]." (8) And I, John, am the one who saw and heard these things. And when I had seen and heard them, I fell down at the feet of the angel who was showing them to me in order to worship him. (9) And he said to me, "Don't do this! I am a fellow servant of your brethren and of the prophets and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!" (10) And he said to me, "Do not seal up these words of this book's prophe[ti]c message], for the time is near. (11) Let the unrighteous continue to act unrighteously, and him who is filthy continue in his filthiness, and let the righteous continue to produce righteousness, and him who is sanctified continue in his sanctification". (12) "Behold", [says the Lord], "I am coming quickly, and I bring my wages for each to be repaid according to his work. (13) I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. (14) Happy are they who wash their robes so that their right of access to the gates will also be like their right of access to the tree of life, that they may enter the city. (15) Outside (i.e., in the lake of fire⁶⁰²) are the dogs (i.e., the unclean and worthless), and those who indulge in witchcraft, and the sexually immoral, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and makes use of the lie (i.e., unbelievers of various stripes)".

(16) "I, Jesus, sent My angel to testify these things to you concerning the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the bright Morning Star. (17) And the Spirit and the bride say 'Come [and be saved]!' And let the one who hears say, 'Come [and be saved]!' And let the one who is thirsty come [to salvation]. Let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost. (18) I bear solemn witness to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, [that] if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues written in this book. (19) And [that] if anyone takes away from the words of this book of prophecy, God will take away his share of the tree of life and of the holy city which have been written [about] in this book." (20) The One who bears witness that these things are so says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen! Come quickly Lord Jesus! (21) The grace of the Lord Jesus be with [you His] holy ones.

Revelation 22:6-21

The importance of spiritual alertness in anticipation of the coming Tribulation and our Lord's return is clearly the theme which runs throughout these final verses of the book of Revelation. These things are prophesied to be about to "happen quickly" (v.6), and Jesus is "coming quickly" (v.7a). Therefore making a special effort to be alert and "guard the words of the prophecy of this book" is essential for every believer (v.7b): the book of Revelation is essential reading so that believers may remain alert and become properly prepared for all that is soon to come, and for that reason it must not be "sealed up" (v.10a), because "the time is near" (v.10b). This is no doubt the reason for the inclusion in verses 8-9 of John's reaction to the angel's emphatic presentation of this message of warning and the angel's equally emphatic reproof: those who "keep the words of this book" (v.9a) are fellow servants of all the elect angels and the prophets. Learning and holding onto the truths of the book of Revelation in all spiritual alertness is what will lead to deliverance, whereas being overly impressed by what we may see and experience (the holy angel's impressive appearance in John's case, the pseudo-miracles of the beast in the case of those who live through the Tribulation) will only distract us from the true object of our faith, our hope and our worship, namely, the one true God

(v.9b). The angel's permissive command in verse 11 is also meant to emphasize the imminence of the end times and to encourage us in our proper application of the Word of God thereby: there is not sufficient time for vacillation; these dramatic events are about to transpire so quickly that no believer will be able to count on having the opportunity to behave like a spiritual yo-yo and still be prepared for what is soon to come – and it is likewise pointless for unbelievers to flirt with salvation without a genuine and whole-hearted commitment, so short is the time (v.11; cf. 1Cor.7:29-31). For the Lord is "coming quickly" and it will soon be time "for each to be repaid according to his work" (v.12). Therefore we need to stay alert at all costs, remembering that He is our "Alpha and Omega" (v.13), fixing our hearts on pleasing Him that we may have access to all the blessings of eternity (v.14), and keeping clearly in mind the terrifying alternative reality awaiting those who fail to do so (v.15).

In the second paragraph beginning in verse 16, the theme of alertness continues with our Lord reminding us that this blessed book of Revelation has come to us directly from Him through the angel He sent. He is the origin, "the Root", of all these blessings, and He is the Light, "the bright Morning Star", the Word of God Himself, to whom we must pay close attention in all spiritual alertness to guide us through that coming darkness until He "rises" (2Pet.1:19), and we rise with Him on that great day of days. That day of salvation is at hand (v.17; cf. Is.49:8; 2Cor.6:2). Therefore diminishing the truth and completeness of this prophecy by adding to it or removing anything from it – particularly in one's heart by embellishing it or failing to believe any part of it through wishful thinking – will blunt spiritual alertness and risk spiritual catastrophe (vv.18-19; cf. Deut.4:2; Prov.30:6; Matt.5:19). For our Lord Jesus Himself tells us that He is "coming quickly" (v.21a) and we should embrace this truth and the spiritual alertness it recommends: "Amen! Come quickly Lord Jesus!" (v.21b). Only in this way will His grace be fully with us for our spiritual safety and deliverance – and great reward for all eternity with all of our brothers and sisters in Christ who have likewise committed themselves to remaining alert throughout those dark days soon to come (v.22).

(1) "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. (2) Five of them were foolish and five were wise. (3) The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. (4) The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. (5) The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. (6) At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' (7) Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. (8) The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' (9) 'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' (10) But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were *ready* went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. (11) Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' (12) But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.' (13) Therefore *keep watch*, because you do not know the day or the hour."

Matthew 25:1-13 NIV

All of the main issues which pertain to the need for spiritual alertness during the Tribulation are covered here in the parable of the ten virgins. The ten represent believers during the Tribulation, the light of their lamps represents their faith, the arrival of the bridegroom

represents Christ's 2nd Advent return, and the oil – which runs out before He arrives and causes the foolish five to miss the celebration – represents the truth of the Word of God taught by the Spirit which feeds and empowers faith, keeping it awake and alert. The phrase emphasized in verse 13 above, "keep watch", means, more precisely translated, "stay awake!", and refers to the need to maintain one's faith during those trying times ahead. Spiritual alertness is all about faith (and prayer is an important part of staying spiritually alert: Matt.26:41; Mk.14:38; Lk.22:40; 22:46; Col.4:2).

Just as being physically tired often induces physical sleep which, if it comes on suddenly and unexpectedly at an inappropriate time or manner, may have extremely negative consequences, so also allowing oneself to become spiritually tired is a problem at any time – how much more so during the dramatic testing of the Tribulation? In the parable of the ten virgins, the light representing the faith of the five is seen to be on the point of being completely "quenched", with the unhappy result that the foolish miss the return of our Lord – which can only mean that they are not resurrected at His return. And since all believers who survive until the Second Advent will be resurrected at that time, this can only mean one of two things: either the five have lost their faith entirely (so as to no longer be believers) or they are no longer alive (having unnecessarily perished *not* from martyrdom but from poor choices made under the pressures of the Tribulation). The detail of their running off to buy oil at a most inopportune moment is also critical. From this we may surmise that 1) they did not have a sufficient store of truth amassed in their hearts before the troubles began to be able to withstand the otherwise unbearable stresses and strains of the Tribulation, and 2) this lack of usable truth made real in their hearts through believing in it and consistently applying it before the time of testing came rendered them vulnerable to taking actions which for Christians are at the very least not salutary and at worst capable of producing the shipwreck of one's faith. And while it may be true that some such unprepared Christians may not lose faith entirely during the Tribulation so as to apostatize (though one third of the Church will do so as we have previously seen, so the danger of this is very real and not to be minimized in any way),⁶⁰³ that is precisely what the five here are meant to represent, namely, believers who have lost their faith and who miss the resurrection as a result: as our Lord says to them, "I tell you the truth, I don't know you".

Whether the believers in this group indulged in inappropriate activities because of their lack of spiritual knowledge (such as becoming involved in some guerilla movement against the beast's forces and being destroyed outside of the will of God as a result; see section II below), or were caught up in the world's enthusiasm for antichrist and through lack of spiritual preparation abandoned their faith altogether and accepted his mark, the result in either case was apostasy. What then, should the foolish five have done to avoid this horrendous outcome? What should they have done to stay spiritually awake? The answer is the same as it has always been: only God's truth consistently sought out, believed and applied in faith can produce spiritual maturity which in turn makes possible the corresponding spiritual alertness necessary to avoid falling spiritually asleep. These foolish five should have been growing up through the milk and solid food of the Word of God before the Tribulation began – storing up sufficient "oil" to keep their "light" of faith aflame during days of darkness ahead – and, having done this, they should have taken great pains to recall that truth and live by it instead of falling into a state of spiritual lethargy. Doing both, i.e., hearing and believing the Word *and* putting it into practice (Matt.7:24-26; Lk.8:21; 6:47-49) are the hallmarks of the mature believer. And

while it may be possible for the spiritually immature who are failing to advance to survive life's pressures today and not lose faith, this will be a much more difficult proposition during the Tribulation (as the Great Apostasy will bear witness).

Therefore being "ready", "keeping watch", and "staying alert" are all synonyms for maintaining one's faith and faithfulness (Eph.6:18; 1Pet.5:8; cf. 1Cor.10:11-12). The three major threats to this posture of Christian readiness, watchfulness and alertness – deadly at all times but even much more so then on account of the nature of the Tribulation – are 1) deception, 2) pressure, and 3) temptation. This may be seen from the many passages in scripture which warn us to be alert during that difficult era soon to come.

(35) "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, (36) like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. (37) It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. (38) It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. (39) But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. (40) *You also must be ready*, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

Luke 12:35-40 NIV

(34) "Watch out for yourselves lest your hearts be burdened down in debauchery and drunkenness and earthly cares, and that day fall upon you suddenly like a trap [snapping shut]. (35) For it will come upon all those who dwell upon the face of the earth. (36) *So be alert at all times*, praying that you might have the strength to endure all these things which are going to happen, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Luke 21:34-36

Arise, sleeper! Awake from the dead, and Christ will shine on you!

Ephesians 5:14

(1) But concerning the times and the seasons (i.e., the time-line and the specific events within it), brothers, you have no need for anyone to write you. (2) For you yourselves know full well that the Day of the Lord is coming just like a thief in the night. (3) When [people] are saying "Peace!" and "Safety!", at that precise time destruction will fall swiftly upon them, just like labor pains on a pregnant woman. (4) But you, brothers, are not in darkness that [this] Day [of the Lord] should catch you out like a thief. (5) For you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness. (6) So let us therefore not sleep like the rest [of unbelieving mankind], but be *awake and alert*. (7) For those who sleep do so at night. And those who get drunk do so at night. (8) But since we are of the day, let us put on the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of hope (i.e., confidence) of salvation. (9) Because God has not appointed us for wrath, but for [taking] possession of [our] salvation (i.e., full gained at the resurrection) through our Lord Jesus Christ, (10) the One who died on our behalf, that, whether we stay awake or sleep (i.e., pass on to heaven), we will be alive together with Him [on that day of

resurrection].

1st Thessalonians 5:1-10

The end of all things has drawn near. Therefore exercise discretion and sober self-control for [the benefit of your] prayers.

1st Peter 4:7

1. Deception:

(3) And when He sat down on the Mount of Olives, His disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us when these things will be, and what the sign is of your return and of the end of the age?" (4) And Jesus answered and said, "See to it that no one deceives you. (5) For many will come in My Name, saying, 'I am the Christ', and they will deceive many people."

Matthew 24:3-5 (cf. Mk.13:4-6)

(24) "At that time if someone says to you 'Look [(as they will tell you then)]! Christ is here!', or 'Here [He is]!', do not believe [it]. For false christs and false prophets will arise and will perform great miracles (lit., "signs") and wonders [sufficient] to deceive even the elect, if [that were] possible. (25) Look [(as I am telling you now)]! I have told you ahead of time. (26) So if they say to you, 'Look! [The Messiah] is [out] in the desert!', don't go out there, or 'Look! He is in the inner rooms (i.e., hidden somewhere in town)!', don't believe [it]."

Matthew 24:23-26 (cf. Mk.13:21-23)

While *deception* has always been a problem in the Church, never will it constitute a graver one than during the Tribulation. With the world following after antichrist as if he were the Christ, with the religions of the world, even putatively conservative Christian organizations, joining in the parade of apostasy, and with the beast himself and his false prophet performing a completely unprecedented display of satanically empowered "miracles", it is perhaps not remarkable that so many will be deceived. Resisting this deception will require the alertness which is the subject of this section, and that alertness will in this case consist of understanding and believing the truth about all these issues. In other words, spiritual maturity based upon prior spiritual growth accomplished through learning and believing the truth of God's Word will be required to stay alert, awake, and effectively on watch for all these developments so as not to be deceived by them when they begin to occur.

After all, we have a tremendous amount of information about the end times in scripture, but that information is of no use to Christians who have not learned it correctly or believed it fully. Without a proper understanding of the circumstances of Christ's return at the Second Advent, for example, immature Christians will be vulnerable to just the sort of deception our Lord warned against in the two quotes above, whereas mature Christians who not only understand these things but have committed them to their hearts by faith *and* hold onto these truths in faith come what may will be able to repel such deceptions through spiritual alertness. It goes without saying that, while we have been given the outlines of the history of the Tribulation (which this series has attempted to sketch in as much detail as scripture permits), many things are likely to happen which, while they may not surprise us in principle, will nonetheless be surprising in their specific manifestations (Hab.1:6).⁶⁰⁴ It is difficult to appreciate now before

the fact the shock which the Tribulation's intensity will deliver to us all, or the degree to which immature Christians will be shaken by those events, or the absolute importance that every single bit of truth no matter how seemingly insignificant now will have for us we who are preparing spiritually now for the challenges ahead. For the antidote to antichrist's deceptions will be the Word in our hearts, held fast in faith and applied with determination in all watchfulness, vigilance, and alertness (2Chron.12:14; Hos.4:6; Rom.13:11; 1Cor.16:13; Col.4:2).

(29) For I know that after my departure fierce *wolves* will enter in among you who will not spare the flock. (30) And even from among your own number [of elders] men will rise up and speak twisted things in order *to entice* the disciples (i.e., believers) to follow them. (31) *So be alert*, remembering that for three years I did not stop warning each of you [about these dangers] day and night with my tears.

Acts 20:29-31

(11) Christ Himself appointed some of us apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers (12) in order to prepare all of His holy people for their own ministry work, that the entire body of Christ might thus be built up, (13) until we all reach that unifying goal of believing what is right and of giving our complete allegiance (Greek: *ἐπίγνωσις*, *epignosis*) to the Son of God, that each of us might be a perfect person, that is, that we might attain to that standard of maturity whose "attainment" is defined by Christ; (14) that we may no longer be immature, swept off-course and carried headlong by every breeze of so-called teaching that emanates from the *trickery* of men in their readiness to do anything to cunningly work their *deceit*, (15) but rather that we may, *by embracing the truth* in love, grow up in all respects with Christ, who is the head of the Church, as our model.

Ephesians 4:11-15

2. Pressure:

(12) Now because of the increase of lawlessness [at that time], the love of the many will cool. (13) But he who endures until the end, this [is the one who] will be saved.

Matthew 24:12-13

(25) "And there will be signs in the sun and the moon and the stars, and on the earth there will be [great] distress among the nations [who will be greatly] bewildered by the roaring of the sea and [its massive] waves, (26) [and] men will lose heart out of fear and expectation of what is about to come upon the inhabited world. For the luminaries of the heavens will be [powerfully] shaken.

Luke 21:25-26

The second factor militating against alertness during Tribulation will be the incredible *pressure* that the difficulties of that most trying time will bring to bear on the faith of all genuine believers. As the passages above indicate, the strain and stress of those difficult days will reduce many Christians who would in normal times otherwise have been able to muddle along in a lukewarm and non-committal way to antipathy towards their fellow believers (Matt. 24:12-13) and to panic and fear (Lk.21:25-26). The Tribulation, it is clearly predicted, will rattle the faith of many, resulting in many cases in a complete loss of reward (e.g., Rev.16:15),

and, in a disturbingly large number of others, in the loss of salvation (i.e., in the Great Apostasy; cf. Rev.14:9). In order to cope with the pressures of that terrible time so as not to lose reward or worse, we will all have need of a great measure of faith and "patient endurance" or perseverance (Greek: *hypomone*, ὑπομονή, etymologically a "standing up under" pressure).

I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Revelation 1:9 NIV

If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.

Revelation 13:10 NIV

This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

Revelation 14:12 NIV

While not impossible, developing the necessary perseverance or ability to withstand pressure on one's faith and not faint will be an extremely difficult proposition during the Tribulation itself. The antidote to having one's love grow cold, one's hope turn to despair, and one's faith dissolve under the great physical, mental and emotional burdens of the Tribulation will be the spiritual resiliency we have previously built up in our hearts through having become accustomed to applying the Word of God to difficult situations in the past, that is, not only having come to know and believe the truth, but also having had that knowledge and faith undergo prior refining in the adversities and vicissitudes of life so that we "know it" in a very deep and abiding way.

(6) In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. (7) These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

1st Peter 1:6-7 NIV

Submitting to this refining of our faith now is the only way to make sure that we will "have what it takes" to endure the severe pressures sure to come upon us then. Prior spiritual growth through believing the truth followed up by successful negotiation of the various trials and tests the Lord sends to refine our faith is thus a necessary element in the watchfulness, vigilance, and alertness needed not to "fall asleep" and suffer the collapse of our Christian virtue in the crucible of the Tribulation's unprecedented pressures.

(33) "Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. (34) It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. (35) Therefore keep watch because you do not

know when the owner of the house will come back – whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. (36) If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. "

Mark 13:33-37 NIV

3. Temptation: Just as the challenge of tribulational deception must be met through the truth in the hearts of the spiritually mature, and just as the challenge of tribulational pressure must be met through the resiliency of the battle-tested virtues of those who have made spiritual advances for Jesus Christ, so the challenge of *temptation* must be met through persistence in ministry by those who have had their dedication to Jesus Christ in service to His Body affirmed through consistent production before the darkness falls.

(34) "Watch out for yourselves lest your hearts be burdened down in debauchery and drunkenness and earthly cares, and that day fall upon you suddenly like a trap [snapping shut]. (35) For it will come upon all those who dwell upon the face of the earth. (36) So *be alert at all times*, praying that you might have the strength to endure all these things which are going to happen, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Luke 21:34-36

For if it is difficult to serve our Lord "in the green wood", then "what of the dry?" (Lk.23:31). And if it is difficult to contend with present-day opposition to ministry, how if we must run not against mere men but "with horses" (Jer.12:5)? Just as we have learned to be consistent in our faith, believing what is true, and consistent in our hope, setting our hearts on what is true, so we must also be consistent in our love, following through on what we know to be true in service to our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, in absolute faith that the rewards to come are of far greater import than any temptations to slackness here on earth. Sticking to our commitment of service in the accomplishment of whatever ministry the Lord has called us to (and we have all been called to ministry in accordance with our individual spiritual gifts: 2Cor.12:1-7) is not easy in good times, is difficult in hard times, and will no doubt be exponentially more challenging during the Tribulation. The temptation to put self first, to slack off under the excuse of everything that is happening, and to back off of our previous production will no doubt be immense. But the loss we stand to incur in so doing is not to be compared to the corresponding gain we stand to reap in holding course in spite of all opposition (2Cor.4:17; 1Pet.1:13; Rev.3:11). And if we are consistent now in being zealous for Jesus Christ whether "in season or out of season" (2Tim.4:2), then we will be all the better prepared to cope with the temptations of that terrible time to come which otherwise may tempt us to relax our grip.

(5) Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. (6) He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.

Psalms 126:5-6 NIV

(42) The Lord answered, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? (43) It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. (44) I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. (45) But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My

master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk. (46) The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers."

Luke 12:42-46 NIV (cf. Matt.24:45-51)

Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

Luke 9:62 NIV

It is important therefore that believers not underestimate the difficulties of the coming Tribulation. For it will almost certainly be worse than any other prior historical period – and history certainly records some exceedingly trying times. But in terms of the deceptions which will attack the faith of the unprepared, the pressures which will cause them to question their hope, and the various trials and temptations which will enervate their love, there is no precedent, either biblical or historical. And without extensive prior preparation and resilient readiness, watchfulness and alertness, there will sadly be many who will fall away. Let us resolve instead to be among the number of the faithful who, through taking pains to prepare now and by remaining alert then, will glorify our Lord by winning the battle of faith.

These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, because He is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, and called, and elect – and *faithful* are those with Him.

Revelation 17:14 (cf. Rev.13:10; 14:12)

II. A Tribulational Code of Conduct

I am a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. I will follow Him faithfully to the end, come what may. I will not abandon my faith in the face of trouble or persecution. I will not worship anyone or anything other than the Lord, nor give my allegiance to any foreign god or false Messiah, nor take any blasphemous mark upon my body. I will not betray my fellow Christians in any way, nor will I hold my life so dear so as to violate God's commandments in order to preserve it. I will do my best to sanctify the Lord Jesus in my heart at all times and to witness to Him with every word and deed until He returns to rescue me. And if it be His will that I be martyred on behalf of His blessed Name, I will do my best to accept His will courageously that I may not be ashamed when I stand before Him but may instead be awarded the crown of life.

The above is offered not as the absolute last word for Christian conduct during the Tribulation but as a general model for the sorts of issues which, while applicable for all Christians living in the world since the beginning of history, have special relevance during the Tribulation. At all other times and in all other eras, during intense persecution Christians could usually count on some solidarity in some sort of familiar organizational structure, as well as some safe-haven elsewhere on earth, even if their present country was making it impossible to live a Christian life. During the Tribulation, however, and especially during its second half, the Great Tribulation, no there will be no official group not coopted by antichrist, and no land or country not under his control. Additionally, the persecution will be so intense and the opposition to

genuine faith so pointed and well-organized, that even friends and family will not be reliable supports in the face of the dire threats to faith destined to come.

Do not believe a friend. Do not put your confidence in a companion. Guard the entrances of your mouth from her who lies in your bosom. For a son will treat his father disgracefully, and a daughter will rise up against her mother, and a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law. A man's enemies will be those of his own household.

Micah 7:5-6 (cf. Jer.9:4-6; Matt.10:34-35; Lk.12:51-53)

While always true in principle, therefore, the Tribulation will a time when individual Christians will need to have their faith solidly founded upon the solid Rock of Jesus Christ alone, and without requiring any associations or associates to prop it up. Because of the dire nature of that trying time to come, moreover, it is appropriate here to provide a "short-list" of some of the major principles necessary to keep in mind to negotiate the Tribulation in an honorable way, maintaining one's faith therein:

- Do Take Shelter from the Storm
- Do Stay Objective and Avoid Reacting to Events
- Do Take Joy in God's Working out of His Plan (instead of being Disheartened by Events)
- Do Continue in Faith, Spiritual Growth, Progress and Production
- Do Heed Specific Divine Commands and Guidance
- Do Not Put any Stock in False Miracles or False Messiahs
- Do Not Continue Association with Individuals and Groups Co-opted by Antichrist
- Do Not Join or Cooperate with Antichrist's False Religion
- Do Not Take the Mark of the Beast
- Do Not Fear Persecution or Martyrdom

1. Do Take Shelter from the Storm:

(20) Get out, My people. Go into your rooms and close your doors behind you. Hide yourselves for a little while until My indignation has run its course. (21) For behold, the Lord is about to come forth from His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity. And the earth will reveal the blood shed upon it, and conceal its slain no longer (i.e., the persecution of believers will be punished).

Isaiah 26:20-21

As the passage above indicates, during this terrible time to come believers should do what they legitimately can do to take shelter from the storm (v.21a) – in order to allow *the Lord's* "indignation to run its course" (v.21b). The "taking of shelter" envisioned here, therefore, is not hiding from the enemy but getting out of the Lord's way – in a manner analogous to the Israelites staying inside "behind the cross of blood" during the first Passover when the first-born of Egypt were destroyed. It will thus be inappropriate for believers to engage in aggressive actions constituting violent opposition to the beast's regime, and not only on account of all the other spiritual problems involved in such behavior – paying back antichrist and his followers is what *the Lord* will be doing, both in the near term (e.g., the seven trumpet judgments and the seven bowl judgments), and of course also at the conclusion of the Tribulation (the seven thunder judgment). Just as there will never be a time in human history when our Lord will be more involved in overtly judging evil on the earth, so there will never be a time when we believers should be more circumspect about usurping His authority in this regard and placing ourselves inadvertently between the Hand of the Lord and His objects of punishment.

(35) "Vengeance is mine and complete retribution [belongs to Me]. At the appropriate time their foot shall slip. For the day of their disaster is at hand, and the [punishment] prepared from them comes swiftly." (36) For the Lord will vindicate his people, and, as to His servants, He will comfort them when he sees that their power is gone and entirely so, whether they be imprisoned or [still] at large.

Deuteronomy 32:35-36

Every stroke the Lord lays on them with his punishing rod will be to the music of tambourines and harps, as he fights them in battle with the blows of his arm.

Isaiah 30:32 NIV

Our task will be to patiently "stand still and watch for the deliverance of the Lord" (Ex.14:13; cf. Zeph.3:8), and to restrain in the process any inclination we may have to allow our own arm to work deliverance for us.

(1) Gather together, gather together, O shameful nation, (2) before the appointed time arrives and that day sweeps on like chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord comes upon you, before the day of the Lord's wrath comes upon you. (3) Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger.

Zephaniah 2:1-3 NIV

As related here, the effective seeking shelter during the Tribulation will be done, for believers who know their God, more by intensifying our walk with Him than by any sort of physical separation or care taken in removing ourselves from the world and its politics (as salutary as the latter is and will be during those dark days). Just as the Israelites were sheltered from the plagues that struck Pharaoh and the Egyptians in the days before the Exodus, so we may be confident that the Lord's punishment of the sinful earth at that time will not be meant for us. In spite of all the horrors predicted to occur, many believers will survive so as to rise up in living resurrection at Jesus' return and so "meet the Lord in the air" (1Thes.4:17). There will

never be a more difficult time for believers, and while we do not know whether or not it will be our lot individually to give up our lives for Jesus Christ, we can be sure that for all who refuse to let themselves be caught up in the passions of the moment, holding fast instead to the truth that we are dead to this world and to sin but alive to Christ, whatever the will of God wills, Christ will be glorified, whether by our life or by our death (Phil.1:20; cf. Rom.6:1-14; 7:1-6; 8:13; Gal.2:19; 5:24; 6:14; Eph.4:22-24; Col.2:20; 3:1-11; Jas.4:4; 1Pet.2:24; 1Jn.2:15).

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.
Ecclesiastes 3:1 NIV

Respect for God's timing be more important than it will be for believers during the Tribulation. Misunderstanding the timing of the resurrection is likely to cause many Christians to enter the Tribulation completely unprepared, on account of their having anticipated being delivered from those harsh seven years by a prior "rapture". Jesus told the 12 and the 72 not to take a sword on their journeys to evangelize Israel as His heralds, but told the apostles on the night before the crucifixion that in the future (i.e., during the Church Age), a different procedure would need to be followed (Lk.22:36). Many such examples of the need to match the appropriate behavior to the appropriate time could be adduced (e.g., the difference between the pre-canon apostolic period where miraculous gifts such as tongues and healing were being given and today when they are not). Failing to appreciate the central facts about and the essential nature of the Tribulation, however, is likely to contribute significantly to the Great Apostasy, the falling away of one third of true believers under the pressures and deceptions of that terrible time to come. By misreading the timing and circumstances, some will see antichrist as Christ. By misreading the timing and circumstances, some will take arms against the beast – and will either die for their trouble or be coopted by Satan's schemes. The Tribulation will be a time like no other when believers will have to rely almost entirely upon God's grace for deliverance instead of upon their own efforts, even such as are certainly appropriate today.

"Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit."
Mark 13:11 NIV

Just as at the present time we would certainly be well-advised to prepare for any legal proceeding or defense of the gospel (1Pet.3:15), but, as in the verse above, during the Tribulation this will be God's province, so also during that time of special testing to come we need to understand that antichrist can only be defeated by Jesus Christ, and that martyrdom, should God will it for anyone of us, is something that cannot be avoided – along with whatever else we are going to be called upon to endure in witnessing for the Lord as shining stars in a world of darkness.

"If anyone is [destined] for captivity [to captivity he will go]. If it is necessary for anyone to be put to death by the sword, by the sword he must be put to death. Herein lies the perseverance and the faithfulness of the holy ones."
Revelation 13:10

These will be unique times when our witness for Jesus will be the number one reason for our continued tenure on earth. Whether martyrdom or deliverance is the outcome of our tribulational experience (and martyrdom, by definition a witness, is also itself a deliverance: 2Tim.4:17-18; cf. Rev.2:10:b), in either case this witness will only be given through implicit faith in the miraculous grace of God alone, trusting in Him to provide everything in the manner of the 12 and the 72. This should be a point of confidence and encouragement for believers who have come to walk closely with Jesus now, but without question it will take great faith to carry out then.

With the beast coming to control the entire world, nationalism, the divine institution provided by God for the protection of human freedom ever since the Tower of Babel, will suddenly become inapplicable, and that will have many spiritual ramifications. Coupled with the Great Apostasy as the prime spiritual trend in the Tribulation's first half and the Great Persecution as the prime spiritual trend in the Tribulation's second half, this will mean that the maintenance of our faith (so as not to apostatize) and the maintenance of our witness (so as to give a good account of ourselves no matter what we may be called upon to suffer) will be the two overriding considerations for Christian tribulational conduct. Since no amount of material preparation before the Tribulation, no matter how extensive, and no amount of physical opposition during the Tribulation, no matter how courageous, will be capable of changing our experience of that time for the good but will carry the very real threat of altering it for the worse – by causing anyone so inclined to rely on themselves at a time when direct reliance on God will be more essential than ever before – it certainly behooves Christians to take this point to heart. God must be our shelter during those seven years rather than anything we have planned or done or dare to do.

Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge.
Psalm 16:1 NIV

In taking shelter from the storm, therefore, there are a number of reasons why Christians who are called upon to endure that trying time of testing to come should err on the side of reliance on God's provision rather than attempting to make their own material preparations now or take their own aggressive physical actions then, for example:

1) The unpredictable nature of the Tribulation: While we do have much information about the end times in scripture, when it comes to the specific details of what will be happening during that time in particular places (like the USA), we are largely in the dark. We know about the major events in the most important area (Israel), and we know about the major trends of the Tribulation itself, but we do not know, for example, precisely how the beast will gain control of this country, or exactly who he will be, or what his political and religious program will entail in its specifics. Indeed, the many possible variations in those specifics are so numerous that any sort of judgment now about organizing for resistance or making material preparations in advance is almost certainly going to miss the mark. We do know, however, that the Tribulation will try the hearts and minds of earth's inhabitants as at no time before or since (Matt.24:21; Mk.13:19). That being the case, an ounce of spiritual preparation will surely prove to be of more value than a thousand pounds of hypothesizing or stockpiling. Since fully one third of believers are prophesied to fall away during the pressures of that stressful time in the Great

Apostasy, we can be sure that the spiritual pressures of the Tribulation will inestimably outweigh the material ones, as great as the latter may be. We cannot predict the precise threats to our faith that the beast's religious and political activities will entail, but we do know that if we are personally ill-prepared in a spiritual sense, no social support or personal hoard will save us from falling away.

2) God's purpose for us in the Tribulation: As we have seen, Revelation 13:10 states that our "perseverance and faithfulness" lies on our acceptance of the fact that we may very well face imprisonment and/or martyrdom. While it is true that some believers will survive the Tribulation (most likely a large number but a small percentage of those who enter it), it is also true that God's express purpose for others during that time of testing will be the witness of martyrdom. The entire complement of the 144,000 will be martyred along with the two witnesses, Moses and Elijah. Thus we may be sure that martyrdom will be a great compliment from God paid to those who are chosen to endure it. Naturally, none of us want (or should want) to be put to death. But as Christians we should all be willing to die for the Lord who died for us – should that be His will for us. We cannot know at present precisely how these things will transpire for us personally during the Tribulation, but it is fair to say that if we have committed ourselves ahead of time to a course of "survival", we will at least be leaning in the wrong direction if it should be our Lord's will to make use of us in this unique way. The tribulation martyrs will be witnesses to the entire world of men and angels both that the power of God's truth is greater to them than their own lives – and they will be rewarded accordingly for all eternity. Planning is often necessary, although scripture is very clear that we are to be wary of putting too much stock in human plans (Jas.4:13-17), and if this planning is ever the result of worry (Matt.6:25-34), or if it should ever occasion greed in keeping our stockpiles to ourselves (and for many this would be a very real temptation), then this would most certainly defeat the purpose of such preparation. The Tribulation will be a unique time wherein there will be no safe-haven in the world to which a sagacious person might otherwise repair. There will be no place to hide and no way to resist in any effective way the beast's gaining of control of the entire world. Since scripture is clear on these points, actions which are taken under the "old rules" of how things work now before the Tribulation will be largely missing the point, and such a mind-set could lead a person into doing the wrong things for the wrong reasons. Instead, therefore, believers should steel themselves ahead of time to continue as before as law-abiding citizens as best they can in whatever country they find themselves, drawing the line on spiritual matters only: preferring death to taking the mark or worshiping the beast.

3) The counter-intuitive nature of prior tribulation preparation: The Tribulation will be a unique period of history in many ways. The fact of world-wide satanic control with no safe-haven will mean that for any idea of a "resistance movement" in particular there will be no comparable prior experience to use as a model. In the past, individuals who were opposed to national religious policies were able to flee to sympathetic countries or to uninhabited quadrants of the globe – or at least to make common cause with a large plurality of their fellow countrymen (with usually some region of a polity experiencing religious revolution holding to the previous views and being willing to defend them). None of these conditions will obtain during the Tribulation. By its mid-point, there will be no place left on earth not controlled by the beast, and the descriptions in Revelation make it very clear that the vast majority of the

world's population in every nation will be very supportive of him and his policies, political and religious, even going so far as to enthusiastically worship him and his father the devil:

And [the population of the world] worshiped the dragon because he had given his authority to the beast. And they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? And who is able to make war with him?"

Revelation 13:3-4

The only place in the world where there will be any (temporarily) effective opposition to antichrist will be in Israel, and without the timely return of our Lord, the final campaign to destroy the Jewish nation would certainly have succeeded. Because of the prior events in the middle east, however, removing oneself to Israel *before* the proper and appropriate time (i.e., before the heavenly command to "flee Babylon" in the months before Armageddon), will not only be impractical but will also be fraught with material and spiritual danger.⁶⁰⁵ On the other hand, Babylon, the tribulational USA, may be the one place where there will be some possibility of safety for believers (not absence of persecution or trouble, but possibly the opportunity of surviving until the command to flee). For we know that many Jews will survive the Tribulation to be regathered into Israel at our Lord's return (cf. Jer.46:28). These individuals have to come from somewhere, and the USA is a very likely guess for a variety of reasons. Staying put and enduring whatever comes by going about our business without spiritual compromise will no doubt lead to martyrdom in some cases but will also most probably lead to survival in many more. However, active political and/or armed opposition to antichrist will surely lead to destruction, and it seems certain that such individuals will not be genuine martyrs since they will have chosen their own ways instead of trusting in the Lord and allowing Him to choose their path during this unprecedented time.

4) Deception: We should be careful not to underestimate the incredibly large role that clever deception will play in antichrist's ascension to power. It is likely that just as Satan has a role in many political movements on both sides of the ideological spectrum today, so during the run up to the beast's conquest of the world he will be moving all the pieces on the political board for his own ends. By signing on to a political movement, we Christians always run the risk of being spiritually compromised. If that is true today (and it most assuredly is), then how much more will that not be the case after the removal of the Holy Spirit's restraint on lawlessness in the time when the devil has more direct control over human affairs than ever before? There is not a trace of a suggestion in scripture that any positive group effort against the beast taking political or military form will have any success. To the contrary, it is left entirely to our Lord to personally destroy him and his forces at the battle of Armageddon. Therefore, outside of communion for spiritual growth and ministry, group action of any sort by believers will not only constitute a waste of time but will also potentially be a very dangerous mistake, with the potential of proving fatal to spirituality and even to salvation in some cases. Many of the "contra" groups which do form are likely to be co-opted, and at this point our dim understanding of the precise course of political events in that time to come is more likely to result in our making just such mistakes, allying ourselves to groups whose leaders are really in antichrist's camp. There is of course a reason why the Bible has much to say about "big picture" events and little to say about the political specifics: we definitely need to know the

former, but morbid attention to the latter only stands to lead us in the wrong direction and result in serious trouble.

5) Time, effort and true preparation: Finally and perhaps most importantly, everything scripture has to say about the Tribulation suggests that, when that dark final day arrives, five minutes of prior spiritual preparation will likely be of more value to individual believers than five years of material preparation (and five millennia of political preparation). This being the case, do we really want to waste our precious time and energy on something that due to the nature of the situation will be largely if not entirely useless (and possible counterproductive in the extreme)? The better course would be for all believers to focus on the place God has put His emphasis in the Bible, namely, preparing our inner-man through spiritual growth. In that way, we shall be ready for absolutely anything, come what may. But if we are prepared for one particular material situation that does not transpire the way we suppose now, we shall be sorely disappointed, and so much the more so if as a result we have missed out in the process on the spiritual preparations we should have been making now.

(34) Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. (35) For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. (36) What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? (37) Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? (38) If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

Mark 8:34-38 NIV

Let us therefore resolve to take shelter in the way the Lord would have us to do so, not cowering in fear or hoarding in greed, but instead being willing to die for the Lord and our fellow believers; not taking up arms in a vain political struggle in hopes of survival, but instead being willing to witness for the Lord in the precise way He has determined for each of us, come what may.

2. Do Stay Objective and Avoid Reacting to Events: The Tribulation will be a time as never before when Christians will do well not to "take it personally" when they find themselves subject to stress, ostracism and even persecution.

(20) "Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. (21) They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me."

John 15:20-21 NIV

Staying objective in this way, that is, not reacting in a personal way to the terrible things that may happen to us and ours, but keeping solidly in our hearts instead Jesus' words above, will be a great help in focusing in on the big picture so as not to get overly depressed by events. Not that this will be easy. Most of us have a tendency to concentrate on ourselves and our own problems, especially if we feel we are being "picked on" unfairly. Job courageously endured the

most extreme personal tribulation with the greatest of patience because he kept his eyes on the Lord and the Lord's will (Job 1:21; 2:10), but even he was temporarily tripped up when blamed unfairly by his friends for being the cause of his own suffering. During the Tribulation, believers will be pariahs as never before, especially during the persecutions of its second half. Under such circumstances, remembering who it is we serve and why it is we are being targeted will be a great challenge – but a necessary one to meet if we are to honor our dear Lord Jesus and maintain the spiritual progress we have attained.

But with respect to the progress you have made, keep on advancing in the same way!
Philippians 3:16

(6) So then, exactly as you [originally] received Christ Jesus as [your] Lord, be walking in Him [in the very same way], (7) rooted and built up in him, established in the faith just as you were taught, overflowing with thanksgiving.
Colossians 2:6-7

Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.
2nd John 1:8 NIV

"I am coming quickly. Hold on to what you have that no one takes your crown [away]."
Revelation 3:11

In order to avoid becoming overly subjective – an occupational hazard for believers in times of tribulation (e.g., 1Pet.4:12-13) – we need to carefully heed the Bible's advice about objectivity, and, specifically, about the true Object upon whom we should be focusing our thinking, our dear Lord Jesus:

(1) Since then we too [like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and run with endurance the race set before us, (2) turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith (cf. "Alpha and Omega"), who, for the joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despite, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God.
Hebrews 12:1-2

And in your hearts set apart in sanctification Christ as [your] Lord.
1st Peter 3:15 (cf. Is.8:13)

And we need also to keep it firmly in mind that God will deliver us – if it is our destiny to be delivered rather than martyred.

Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies. But my salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail.
Isaiah 51:6 NIV

The cowering prisoners will soon be set free; they will not die in their dungeon, nor will they lack bread.

Isaiah 51:14 NIV

Instead of being subjective – focusing on ourselves and our own suffering – during the Tribulation it will be more important than ever to be objective: focusing on *the* "object" of our faith, our hope and our love, the Lord Jesus Christ. At all times in human history believers have had to walk by faith, passing through this world as pilgrims and sojourners, looking unto the Lord for the spiritual refreshment necessary to get through.

(5) Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. (6) As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. (7) They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion. Psalm 84:5-7 NIV

Therefore remembering God's grace and deliverance through all of our prior personal tribulations will be one important way in which we who are called upon to negotiate that coming "valley of the death shadow" will be able to do so in confidence and objectivity – because we are keeping our eyes on Jesus Christ and His purpose for us rather than on our day to day condition.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.

Psalm 23:4a NIV

If we do make it our practice to handle personal tribulation now in the proper way, namely, remembering that this satanic opposition is not a personal thing but a necessary by-product of taking the side of our Lord Jesus Christ in this present conflict, and if we do make it our practice to do the same then, remembering and benefitting from the lessons we have learned before the Tribulation's onset, then if so wills the Will of God we can be confident of great joy and songs of exultation in the deliverance He will work out for us on that great day of days when we see Him with our own eyes, namely, at the return of our dear Lord Jesus at the Tribulation's end.

"Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea." Exodus 15:21b NIV

In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."

Isaiah 25:9 NIV

3. Do Take Joy in God's Working out of His Plan (instead of being Disheartened by Events):

The Tribulation will be the time of God's great judgment upon the earth, and that judgment will be its most prominent characteristic.⁶⁰⁶ The Tribulation will also be the time of the devil's

greatest influence and control of human affairs, and, as a result, the time of the greatest persecution of believers.⁶⁰⁷ The fact that the Tribulation will thus be the most intensive phase of the conflict occasioned by Satan's rebellion against our Lord inevitably means that believers alive during that future day will experience the most difficult time to be alive in all of human history (a principle we have already explored at great length in this series). And while we may certainly take comfort in the fact that we will receive special protection from judgments directed by God upon the world of unbelievers, we should not expect that the unprecedented dislocations of normal human life will not affect us significantly (cf. Jer.45), even it be our lot to be protected from the martyrdom that will claim one third of the true Church. Under such circumstances, during the Tribulation it will be more important than ever before for believers to hold fast to the heavenly high-ground in all of our thinking, to adopt and maintain the divine viewpoint in all of our sufferings, and, critically, to develop and maintain an active joy in the watching the cataclysmic events sent by God upon the unbelieving world – precisely because these judgments to come will represent our God's vindication of us, His Church, even as they signal the ever-nearer return of our dear Lord Jesus.

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.
Habakkuk 3:17-18 NIV

"When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."
Luke 21:28 NIV

The tribulational judgments from God upon the devil's world will be, after all, objectively "good things", just as the judgments He sent upon Pharaoh were (a type of antichrist). The terrible things that happened to Egypt – judgments from which the children of Israel were for the most part miraculously exempted (e.g., Ex.8:23) – were necessary preliminaries to the deliverance of God's people. We know from the parallel that the Israelites were not as confident of God's deliverance or as joyous in observing these events as they should have been (e.g., Ex.5:21-23; 6:9; 14:11-12), so we should learn from their negative example and make it a point before the fact to begin training ourselves and our perspective in this regard. Knowing ahead of time from scripture precisely what it is that God is working out, we who believe can be joyful over what the world finds woeful. And so we should be, for we believe that God will bring us safely through the maelstrom to come – or glorify Himself with our witness in death if He so wills – increasing by degrees the judgment on the evil one's realm until He brings it to complete destruction.

(10) For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver. (11) You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. (12) You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance.
Psalm 66:10-12 NIV

We know of a surety that when our Lord returns that we shall rejoice in His victory and exuberantly so.

But to the degree that you are [truly] participating in Christ's sufferings, be joyful about it, so that at His glorious revelation, you may also rejoice with great gladness.

1st Peter 4:13

All the more reason to take on that perspective now and resolve to maintain it with dogged determination throughout those seven years to come. All the suffering we have to endure during those difficult days will come from the hands of the enemy and his minions. Therefore it will be right and proper for us who believe to rejoice in the judgments the Lord sends upon them in response to the suffering they inflict upon us – judgments sent *in response to our prayers* (Rev.5:8; 8:3-5).

Rise up, O Judge of the earth; pay back to the proud what they deserve.

Psalm 94:2 NIV

He will repay them for their sins and destroy them for their wickedness; the Lord our God will destroy them.

Psalm 94:23 NIV

(5) [These tribulations which you are enduring] are evidence of the righteous judgment of God in His [judging] you to be worthy of His kingdom on behalf of which you are also suffering. (6) Since indeed it is just for God to repay with tribulation those who are subjecting you to tribulation, (7) and to give you who are being distressed relief along with us at the revelation of our Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels, (8) wreaking vengeance in a flame of fire upon those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power, (10) when He comes on that [great] day to be glorified in the midst of His saints (i.e., resurrected believers) and to be marveled at among all those who have believed – as our testimony has been believed in your case.

2nd Thessalonians 1:5-10

"Rejoice over her, O heaven, even [all] the saints and the apostles and the prophets, because God has exacted from her the retribution due you!"

Revelation 18:20

Therefore the perspective which should be our present day "normal" Christian approach of joy in the midst of suffering (e.g., Jas.1:2; cf. Rom.5:3-5; 1Pet.1:6), will need to be carefully maintained during the troubles of that future time and wedded deeply to an attitude of hope and thanksgiving: hope in the soon to come deliverance and return of our dear Lord (Ps.14:7; Rom.8:23-24; 1Cor.16:22; Col.1:27; cf.), and thanksgiving at the recompense He is leveling upon the unbelieving world (Eph.1:16; 5:4; 5:20; Col.1:12; 2:7; 3:15; 1Th 5:18; Heb.13:15; cf. Ps.2; 83).⁶⁰⁸

(1) God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. (2) Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, (3) though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.

Psalm 46:1-3 NIV

4. Do Continue in Faith, Spiritual Growth, Progress and Production: Despite the difficulties of that future trial, life will continue (cf. Matt.24:40-41). Therefore the Tribulation will be no time for us to put our light under a bushel (Matt.5:15; Mk.4:21; Lk.11:33). A morbid preoccupation with personal survival, in addition to catering to all sorts of base sinful tendencies, is likely to make personal spiritual growth, spiritual progress, and personal ministry next to impossible. But if these things are good for us to be doing now – and there is no question but that they are – we need to make it our intention now to continue to keep at them then, to the degree that we can and in whatever avenues the Lord opens up for us. Without question, those days to come will test our faith and make both receiving God's Word and ministering it to others a much more difficult prospect. But if we are not committed to doing so now, and committed also in our hearts to continuing on this one good road then, we are very likely to miss the path entirely.

Without question, continuing to seek out substantive Bible teaching, continuing to walk the way Christ would have us walk, and continuing to help our fellow Christians as we minister God's grace through whatever spiritual gifts we have been given will not be without risk during the Tribulation, and the concomitant activities they entail will no doubt run entirely counter to the "safe" course and will most certainly be inimical to the "survival" approach. And that is the point. We remain here on earth after salvation for the primary reason of serving Jesus Christ through the three-fold process of growth, progress and production. He is our hope and the one we long for (Col.1:27; Tit.2:13; cf. 1Thes.1:10; 1Tim.6:14), not the world and the things of the world (1Jn.2:15-17). But if we react to the troubles of that dark time to come by giving all our efforts only to preserve our physical lives, the best we can hope for is to survive until the Lord's return. But even if we do, how happy can we expect Him to be with us if we have "survived" only by neglecting the work He had for us to do? In reality, there is no physical safety without spiritual safety. If we are physically "safe" but compromise our spirituality in the process, nothing is gained and much may be lost. But if instead we focus on our spiritual safety and leave the rest to the Lord, even if we are called upon to give up our physical safety entirely in the ultimate sacrifice of martyrdom, we may be assured that Jesus will be with us in so doing and that our reward will be great. This life is very short. What is coming is what really counts. Knowing all this full well ahead of time – and believing it to the depth of our being – it behooves all serious Christians who want to please Jesus Christ above all else to take pains then as now to maintain our faith, our hope, and our love, come what may.

But when the Son of Man returns, will He find *faith* [still existing] on the earth?

Luke 18:8b

[W]e who are awaiting the blessed *hope*, namely the epiphany of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (i.e., when we too will be resurrected in glory when He appears).

Titus 2:13

(12) Now because of the increase of lawlessness [at that time], the *love* of the many will cool. (13) But he who endures until the end, this [is the one who] will be saved.
Matthew 24:12-13

This principle is especially applicable to pastor-teachers and all others who have ministries upon which others depend. For all who are running a good race in anticipation of the three crowns, the Tribulation will very much be the time which tests the quality of that work – and no time to shrink back from doing what Jesus expects us to keep doing.

But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.
2nd Chronicles 15:7 NIV

(3) Strengthen the hands that are weak. Bolster the knees that are giving way. (4) Say to those with anxious hearts, "Be strong! Don't be afraid! Behold! Your God will come, as an Avenger. [Your] God will come, as a Rewarder. He will come, and He will deliver you."
Isaiah 35:3-4 (cf. Zeph.3:16-17; 2Chron.32:7-8)

(33) And those among the people who have insight will teach the people who will be persecuted by sword (i.e., martyrdom), and flame (i.e., torture leading to martyrdom), and captivity (i.e., imprisonment), and plundering (i.e., confiscation of property), for some time. (34) And when they are persecuted, they will receive a little help . . .
Daniel 11:33-34a

The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."
John 21:17 NIV

5. Do Heed Specific Divine Commands and Guidance: In addition to the holy scriptures which provide every believer with voluminous, complete guidance for living the Christian life, during the Tribulation there will be specific prohibitions and directives to meet some of its unique circumstance, and paying close heed to these commands and this guidance will be critical for our spiritual safety. Some of these instructions are no doubt not known at present. We can expect, for example, that in the direction of their worldwide evangelical ministry Moses and Elijah will have much to say to all believers for our benefit. Some of these Tribulation-specific instructions we already know about from scripture, even if their precise circumstances have not yet been completely revealed. Perhaps the most obvious of these is the prohibition against taking the mark or name of the beast (Rev.14:9-11). While we do not know as yet of what precisely this will consist, the Bible is so very precise and insistent about the fact that taking this mark or name will result in condemnation that there can be no question or doubt about the need to be equally adamant in our refusal to do so. Given the importance of this specific command, we have devoted a separate point to it below. There are, however, others, notably the command to "flee Babylon".⁶⁰⁹ Responding correctly to this command will require careful attention to God's timing, refraining on the one hand from exiting Babylon before the appropriate time (for believers living here during the Tribulation), yet not hesitating to depart immediately once the command is given. There is a "right time" for everything, and getting

that timing right through heeding God's specific directives in a precise fashion will never be more important than during the Tribulation.

To every [thing there is] a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.
Ecclesiastes 3:1 KJV

(1) But concerning the times and the seasons (i.e., the time-line of future prophecy and its specific events), brothers, you have no need for anyone to write you. (2) For you yourselves know full well that the Day of the Lord (i.e., God's eschatological time of judgment beginning with the Tribulation) is coming just like a thief in the night. (3) When [people] are saying "Peace!" and "Safety!", at that precise time destruction will fall swiftly upon them, just like labor pains on a pregnant woman.
1st Thessalonians 5:1-3

6. Do Not Put any Stock in False Miracles or False Messiahs:

"For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible."
Matthew 24:24 NIV (cf. Mk.13:22)

This warning from our Lord Himself is very important information to have – otherwise, not only would there be the danger (for those who are not adequately versed in scripture) of mistaking antichrist for Christ, but even believers who do recognize that the beast is the antichrist (and that his prophet is the false prophet), might potentially be led astray someone else claiming to be Christ or a prophet. As it is, during the Tribulation, the world, including, sadly, many Christians, will go following after antichrist, and certainly not because he is unpersuasive in his performance of signs and miracles and in his pretense of being Jesus Christ.⁶¹⁰ Faithful Christians who truly know their God must assiduously avoid getting wrapped up in the hoopla prophesied to come (whether from emanating from the beast himself or from others falsely claiming to be from God) by focusing instead on what the scriptures actually say and not on what our eyes see or our ears hear.

"At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it."
Mark 13:21 NIV (cf. Matt.24:23)

"Men will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' Do not go running off after them."
Luke 17:23 NIV

He replied: "Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and, 'The time is near.' Do not follow them."
Luke 21:8 NIV

"So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time."
Mark 13:23 NIV

7. Do Not Continue Association with Individuals and Groups Co-opted by Antichrist: At Hebrews 10:25, Paul instructs the Jerusalem believers not to "give up meeting together", but what is often overlooked in this passage is the purpose of assembly: to "encourage one another" – and genuine Christian encouragement only comes through the truth of the Word of God (whether from the pastor or from fellow members of the congregation). In our era of Laodicea, association with lukewarm congregations and/or denominations while often a negative thing in spiritual terms, partly because of the waste of the time and effort which could be used to grow in the truth, partly because of the false, legalistic and watered-down teaching (if any) which is the rule in such groups, is not necessarily spiritually fatal. That will not be the case during the Tribulation, however, when most if not all such groups will be amalgamated into antichrist's universal religion. Continuing fellowship under *those* circumstances will not only not be encouraging or spiritually edifying but will actually be spiritually dangerous in the extreme since antichrist, the devil's son, will by then have become the object of worship, not Jesus Christ (not even by way of the tokenism which is often the case today).⁶¹¹ No fellowship with individual Christians, no matter how prized, will be worth such a fundamental compromise. And no individual Christians who are determined to remain in such a fatally polluted fellowship are worthy of continued association. All one can expect from failing to part company with organized Christian religion during the Tribulation is heartbreak, compromise, and extreme spiritual danger. For many the prospect of shunning and ostracism will no doubt be hard to bear, but in truth it will be a badge of honor and a true service to Jesus Christ.

(12) Therefore Jesus too, in order that He might sanctify the people through His own blood (i.e., His death on the cross), suffered outside the gate (i.e., separated from fellowship). (13) So then let us go out to Him outside of the camp (i.e., likewise choosing God over the world), bearing His reproach. (14) For we do not have here [on earth] a city which [is meant to be] lasting; rather we are eagerly looking forward to the city that is destined [to come] (i.e., the New Jerusalem).

Hebrews 13:12-14

8. Do Not Join or Cooperate with Antichrist's False Religion: Far worse than failure to separate from lukewarm Christian groups caught up in the wave of enthusiasm for antichrist during the Tribulation's first half will be the formal joining of the beast's false religion during the Tribulation's second half. Even if this happens by default, that is, by continuing membership in a church or denomination which formally attaches itself to the beast's religion, the danger of being party to such an arrangement will be as close to spiritually fatal as possible short of outright apostasy. At this point in the Tribulation, antichrist will openly and officially proclaim himself to be Christ, taking his seat in God's temple in Jerusalem, and will then begin the Great Persecution of believers worldwide. It is certainly understandable on a worldly level that some will want to deflect attention from themselves by continuing fellowship and by seeming to go along with the apostate course their church or denomination has set. However, while there may be some debate as to whether it will really be possible to continue membership in an organization which blasphemously accepts the beast as Jesus Christ and yet at the same time maintain a genuine faith in the true Savior (through the exercise of strenuous mental reservation), there is no doubt whatsoever about the fact that such a course of action will be at the very least be incredibly dangerous, risking spiritual security for a very precarious sort of physical security. Such an approach will not only constitute a very poor bargain, but even if

someone inclined to avoid persecution through such dishonest association might theoretically hang onto to their faith initially, the compromised spiritual position this policy will put them in coupled with the diminution of courage such a false posture must necessarily engender will make it very difficult not to accept the mark of the beast when the time comes.

Even before that point of no return arrives, it is likely that antichrist and his false prophet will make use of their worldwide religion in particular to identify and help to "process" true believers who are unwilling to compromise in this way. This sort of thing has happened before (in the Roman Catholic persecutions of Protestants during the Reformation and in the rounding up of Europe's Jews by the Nazis, for example), and it is utterly foolish to believe that anyone will be able to continue in membership in a church which has not only been coopted but actually incorporated into antichrist's "universal church" without facing just such grim moral choices. If a person is in effect hiding out in some such organization, what are the chances that when their turn comes to betray another believer that at they point they will miraculously find the spiritual courage to say no? Will it not rather be overwhelmingly tempting for such individuals to rationalize their actions as protecting those who are "kept safe" through their betrayal of others (and even scandalously justifying such betrayal as "not wishing to tell a lie" even as they are living one!).⁶¹²

The above assumes that all believers will fully understand all of these matters ahead of time (and that only the exceptionally cowardly will fall into this trap). However, given the fact that we live in the lukewarm Church era of Laodicea, that assumption is of course not valid. The current level of spiritual immaturity within the Church guarantees that this problem of potential compromise by association will be compounded exponentially for those who enter the Tribulation unprepared. So while in many respects the problems and dangers facing unprepared believers during the Tribulation will be precisely the same as they are today, the circumstances then will lead to a much increased magnitude of danger and with a much reduced period of germination before spiritual disaster results.

Anticipating these same perils in his final address to the Ephesian elders, the apostle Paul sets out for us the mind-set we should adopt when facing these pressures of attack which emanate both from without and within the church-visible of that day (Acts 20:27-35):

1) Genuine teachers of the gospel proclaim the whole truth of scripture:

"For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God."
Acts 20:27 NIV (cf. v.20)

2) As legitimate servants of Christ, genuine teachers of the gospel are concerned about the congregation's true spiritual welfare:

"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood."
Acts 20:28 NIV

3) Even genuine Christian groups will suffer severe infiltration attacks by Satan's servants:

"I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock."
Acts 20:29 NIV

4) Apostates will arise to corrupt and mislead even genuine Christian groups by distorting the truth of the Word:

"Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them."
Acts 20:30 NIV

5) Alertness to these dangers is thus essential and is the proper response to the voluminous scriptural warnings on this subject:

"So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. "
Acts 20:31 NIV

6) The only true defense against these things is spiritual edification accomplished through hearing, understanding, believing and applying the Word of God:

"Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."
Acts 20:32 NIV

7) Since genuine teachers of the gospel set an incorruptible example in all things, false teachers (and by application their false teachings) may be easily recognized by their falling short of the true standard (in case anyone is in doubt about which is which):

(33) "I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. (34) You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. (35) In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "

Acts 20:33-35 NIV

There is an important sense in which these words of Paul not only apply to us now but especially also to the experiences of the Tribulation. In warning against distorted truth and in emphasizing the importance of telling the whole truth, the apostle brings to mind the three popular false doctrines so prevalent in the church-visible of our own day, each of which will predispose those who wrongfully accept them towards falling into this trap of assimilation and compromise with the beast's religion during the Tribulation (these are all covered in greater detail in the next point):

- False belief in a pre-Tribulation resurrection (i.e., "the rapture"): Many Christians will find themselves completely ignorant about the Tribulation once it begins due in no small part to the supposition that they would not have to face it. Not only will the realization that they have been wrong about such a deeply cherished false belief tend to shake their faith generally when it proves not to be true, but this particular false doctrine breeds complacency and worldliness through the false sense of security it provides and is contributing here and now to spiritual immaturity and the foolish notion that lack of spiritual preparation is somehow not dangerous because at least the Tribulation will not have to be endured.
- False belief in a state of unconditional eternal security (i.e., "once saved, always saved"): This erroneous belief, dangerous enough during good times, will prove doubly malicious during the Tribulation. Apropos of our current point, those who imagine that they will be saved no matter what they do are likely to see compromising with the beast's religion as at least not risking their eternal future – and may even foolishly assume that this applies also to taking the mark of the beast, despite the very clear warnings of scripture.
- False belief in spiritual security through institutional membership (i.e., "salvation through works"): If it is assumed that everyone who maintains fellowship within a Christian church or denomination is automatically protected, the tendency will then be to continue that fellowship at the very point when separation will be necessary for true spiritual safety. Whether membership or tithing or water-baptism or any other tangible ritual, rite or procedure is wrongly invested with magical significance, the net effect is to make the faith of the believer in question more dependent upon those fleshly works than upon the Rock of our salvation, Jesus Christ, and then to make him or her all the more vulnerable to a fatal compromise when the moment of decision comes.

If the above three false doctrines effectively crystalize the problems facing Christians in our era of lukewarmness on the cusp of the Tribulation, the solution to them is equally easy to summarize, along with the basis for the proper mind-set of spiritual courage in contrast to the spiritual cowardice which any cooperation with antichrist's religion exemplifies. As with all things in the Christian life, the truth, its belief, application and ministration, is the answer for all who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ, the very Word of God. Once spiritual maturity, progress and production have been incorporated into the believer's walk with Jesus, the proper mind-set to counter-balance the pressures we face now and will most certainly have to endure in a much more concentrated and intense form in the future is one of attentively walking with Him – and especially, when the Tribulation begins, of waiting patiently for Him.

Thy kingdom come!
Matthew 6:10a KJV

(7) Therefore you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you *await the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ*. (8) God will also make you to stand firm without reproach until the end on that

day of our Lord Jesus Christ (i.e., the 2nd Advent).
1st Corinthians 1:7-8

Marana Tha! ["Return to us, O thou our Lord!"]
1st Corinthians 16:22

(9b) They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, (10) and *to wait for his Son* from heaven (i.e., the 2nd Advent), whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.
1st Thessalonians 1:9b-10 NIV

(6) God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you (7) and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen *when the Lord Jesus is revealed* from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels (i.e., the 2nd Advent).
2nd Thessalonians 1:6-7 NIV

[W]e who are *awaiting the blessed hope*, namely the epiphany of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (i.e., when we too will be resurrected in glory when He appears at the 2nd Advent).
Titus 2:13

But your faith, when proven genuine in the crucible of life, will result in praise, glory and honor for you at the revelation of Jesus Christ (i.e., the 2nd Advent).
1st Peter 1:7

All believers should therefore be perfecting the art of waiting for Jesus now (e.g., 1Cor.1:7; Phil.3:20; 1Thes.1:10; Tit.2:13; Heb.9:28; cf. Mk.15:43; Lk.2:25; 2:38; 12:36; 23:51; Acts 24:15; Rom.5:1-5; 8:23-25; Gal.5:5; Jas.5:7-8; 2Pet.3:12-14; Jude 1:21), the better to avoid getting caught up in the excitement of antichrist's new religion on the one hand and the better to endure the loss of former fellowship and socializing as we become pariahs to those who compromise with the beast on the other. Jesus has us by the hand now. Are we witnessing to men and angels as we should? If not, what can we expect when the pressure is really on? Focusing our attention on the Lord and anticipating His timely return now will thus allow us to overcome the world in hearts more effectively then, regardless of what the world may be doing to our physical bodies (Is.16:4b; 35:1-2; 2Pet.3:10-12)

Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up.
Psalm 71:20 NIV

But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me. Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light.
Micah 7:7-8 NIV

9. Do Not Take the Mark of the Beast: The worst of all possible violations of the particular instructions to Christians during the Tribulation will be to take the mark of the beast.

(9) And yet a third angel followed them, saying in a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives [his] mark upon his forehead or upon his hand, (10) he himself will also drink from the wine of God's wrath which has been mixed undiluted in the cup of His anger. And [that person] will be tormented in fire and sulfur before angels, [and] saints, and before the Lamb. (11) And the smoke of their torment will go up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night, those who worship the beast and his image and whoever takes the mark of his name."

Revelation 14:9-11

Nothing could be more clear. But for believers who have failed to heed the prior eight points and find themselves deeply immersed in the compromise of antichrist's false religion, crossing over this irrevocable dead-line will perhaps not seem as horrendous and unthinkable as it surely is. The real problem here will be a complete concentration on the visible world instead of on the invisible things to come, the proper focus of every true Christian's heart. Only by continuing to walk closely with Him who is invisible, our dear Lord Jesus (Heb.11:27), will tribulational believers be able to endure the separation from prior close associations along with the shunning and verbal abuse that will no doubt come the way of all who are determined to choose for the truth during the Tribulation's first half. Likewise, once antichrist's religion comes to dominate the world during the Great Tribulation, it will only be by putting Jesus first and concentrating on the blessings to come that true Christians will be able to cope with the severe economic penalties that fall to the lot of those who refuse to take the mark – let alone the Great Persecution which follows. Our true citizenship is not here on earth but in heaven (Phil.3:20). It is there that we have stored up our treasures (Matt.16:19-20); it is there that the Lord is guarding the deposit we have made with Him (2Tim.1:12; cf. Eph.1:14; 2Tim.1:14); and it is from there that we aspire to inherit the prize of salvation in resurrection and reward at His glorious return (1Pet.1:7-8; cf. Tit.2:13; 1Jn.3:2-3). In contrast, everything the world esteems is in actuality less than trivial.

The peoples exhaust themselves for nothing, the nations' labor is only fuel for the flames.
Jeremiah 51:58b NIV

It is a faithful saying: "Only one life, it will soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last". Everything we do in Jesus' Name will find a reward, but the things of this world are more temporary than we can presently imagine. That some of our brothers and sisters will, for the sake of "a little pottage" enjoyed over the course of a few short years at most, risk and, in the case of those who take the mark, sacrifice eons upon eons of eternal bliss without end is a staggeringly horrible thing to contemplate, and only serves to show how dangerous it will be to lose our Christian focus as we negotiate that difficult wilderness to come. Only by sanctifying Jesus in our hearts and by refusing to worship the devil's substitute will we make it safely across the desert of the Tribulation to meet our Lord in Zion (Is.8:13; 1Pet.3:15).

(5) Happy is everyone whose strength is in You. Their hearts are set on the highways [of pilgrimage to Zion]. (6) As they pass through the [dry] valley of Bachah (i.e., the wilderness of

life), they make it a place of springs. Even the early rains enwrap it with [their] blessings. (7) They go from strength to strength, until they appear before God in Zion.
Psalm 84:5-7

(5) Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. (6) He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.
Psalm 126:5-6 NIV

While those who persevere in Jesus will see their tears turned to joy at His return, there will most certainly be a different result for those who turn back to Egypt in their hearts and accommodate with the world by taking the mark of the beast:

(35) So do not throw away this conviction of yours – it leads to a great reward. (36) You need to keep persevering so that you may carry off in victory what has been promised – after you have accomplished God's will. (37) For yet a little while, how short, how [short the wait], and He who is coming shall come, nor will He delay. (38) "Then shall my righteous one live by his faith, but if he shrinks back, My heart takes no pleasure in him (Hab.2:3-4)."
Hebrews 10:35-38

Before He endured the various trials of His three and half year public ministry – a time precisely equal to the length of the Great Tribulation (and deliberately so) – our Lord Jesus was first subjected to thirty years of intense preparation, crowned by the forty days of testing in the wilderness. To the extent that we are willing to accept it, we too are being prepared for what lies ahead. We too can learn now how to have joy in the midst of personal tribulation (Jas.1:3), and how to have peace in the midst of turmoil and testing (Jn.16:33). Rather than preparing for what is soon to come, however, the great majority of believers in our era of Laodicea are only making themselves vulnerable to the pressures of that future day, and it is that very vulnerability engendered through spiritual apathy which explains how so many erstwhile Christians will succumb to coercion and take the mark of the beast. Being completely unprepared spiritually speaking, many of our brothers and sisters on that day will find the pressures too great to bear, precisely because their hearts will be focused on those pressures instead of on the Lord.

(20) And he who was sown on the rocky places, this is the one who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy. (21) He has no roots [to his faith], however, but lasts only a short time. So when tribulation or persecution occurs on account of the Word, he is immediately tripped up (i.e., he apostatizes).
Matthew 13:20-21

As mentioned above, while there are many reasons for the reign of apathy in our current era of Laodicea, there are three widespread fallacies which are presently contributing mightily to the spiritual complacency which characterizes the church visible of our present day:

The Tribulation is of no concern because of the "rapture" – but what if the Church does go through the Tribulation? And it will.

Apostasy is of no concern because of "absolute eternal security" – but what if genuine Christians can lose their salvation through complete loss of faith? And many will.

Spiritual immaturity is of no concern because of the safety provided by "belonging" to a Christian church – but what if all organized Christian groups join the beast? And they will.

Christians who are not only ignorant of eschatology but who have failed to heed the biblical warnings bound up with the Tribulation because they thought these did not apply to them (on account of the false doctrine of "rapture"), who have not only failed to take measures to build up their faith through spiritual growth but are actually in denial about the possibility of their faith being threatened at all (on account of the false doctrine of "once saved, always saved"), and who have neglected the entire process of spiritual growth (on account of the false doctrine of "safety through membership"), will find their entire security system threatened at every point once the Tribulation begins. Instead of a "rapture", they will find themselves in the middle of the Tribulation. Instead of enjoying "unconditional eternal security", they will find themselves in the middle of a great contest of faith. And instead of being able to take shelter in a particular church or group, they will find these very organizations compromising with and eventually joining without reservation the beast and his religion. In short, for the average believer in Laodicea, that day of testing will find them completely unprepared and terribly vulnerable on every front. Under the circumstances, the surprising thing is not that a third of the Church will apostatize and take the mark, but that two thirds will not, with fully one third preferring death and martyrdom to spiritual compromise. It is a measure of the magnitude of God's grace and the power of His Word that so many whose prospects for spiritual survival may look very dim to us now will indeed rise to the occasion and honor our Lord by persevering and, in very many cases, giving up their lives for Him. It certainly behooves those of us who have not succumbed to these false teachings so prevalent in our time to do all that we can to prepare ourselves now in order to be of use to our Lord in helping our brothers and sisters meet the challenges ahead once reality sets in and sweeps away the present complacency of Laodicea.

(14) But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." (15) But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

1st Peter 3:14-15a

10. Do Not Fear Persecution and Martyrdom: As believers in Jesus Christ, although we are not of this world, we remain in it in order to serve our Lord by witnessing to the power of His truth through our response to it (Jn.15:19; 17:14-16; 18:36). For all who take their discipleship to Jesus seriously, those who are truly looking forward to an eternal reward and viewing this present world from that heavenly perspective, the emotional and physical troubles the evil one hurls at us should be easier to bear, at least to the extent that our deep faith in the Lord continually reminds us that death is nothing to fear, since death will only end those sufferings and bring us face to face with the Lord we love so much.

(31) So what shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? (32) He who did not spare His own Son, but handed Him over for our sake, how will He not also graciously give us everything [we need] along with [that gift of] Him? (33) Who will [dare to] bring charges against God's elect? God is the One who is pronouncing [us] justified. (34) Who is he that condemns [us]? Christ Jesus is the One who died [condemned in our place], and the One, moreover, who was raised from the dead [for us], who is [seated] at the right hand of God, who is also making petitions on our behalf. (35) What will separate us from Christ's love? Tribulation? Or privation? Or persecution? Or hunger? Or destitution? Or danger? Or violence? (36) As it is written, "For your sake we are being put to death all day long. We were accounted as sheep for slaughter". (37) But in all such things we are decisively victorious through Him who loved us [enough to do what He did for us]. (38) For I am persuaded that *neither death* nor life, neither angelic nor human authorities, neither things present nor things to come, neither heavenly powers, (39) be they the highest [of the elect] or the lowest [of the fallen], nor any other created thing [on this earth] will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:31-39

For to me, to live is Christ, and *to die is gain*.

Philippians 1:21

(14) Therefore since these children (i.e., of v.13) have a common heritage of flesh and blood, [Christ] too partook of these same [common elements] in a very similar fashion (i.e., not identical only in that He was virgin born and so without sin), in order that through His death He might put an end to the one possessing the power of death, that is, the devil, (15) and might reconcile those who were subject to being slaves their whole lives long *by their fear of death*.

Hebrews 2:14-15

Knowing these things, remembering that we are sealed and protected by the Holy Spirit (2Cor.1:21-22; Eph.1:13-14; 4:30), and in sure and certain confidence that, no matter how severe, we will never be tested beyond what we are genuinely capable of enduring (regardless of what our eyes and ears may tell us: 1Cor.10:13), it will be possible for mature, prepared believers to endure the persecution, imprisonment, torture, and even martyrdom – if so wills the Will of God – in a way that honors the Lord who gave up everything on our behalf, not only preserving the eternal rewards upon which we have set a value beyond that of anything this temporary world may offer but actually guaranteeing them and maximizing them by our willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice for Jesus Christ – for He sacrificed His all for us.

[Jesus] went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done."

Matthew 26:42 KJV

This last point, if fully digested and properly implemented, will resolve most if not all of the prior points. Being prepared to suffer death for Jesus' Name is the stuff of deep spiritual maturity. So let us one and all who see the storm clouds rising dedicate ourselves to doing whatever is necessary now to possess abundantly then the requisite depth and resiliency of faith needed to honor our Lord in this way should it be necessary to do so, and thereby to

witness to the rest of Church in hopes of their perseverance through the encouragement of our example, whatever it be God's purpose for us to endure in those difficult days to come.

(13) Then Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid! Take your positions and watch the deliverance of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will not see ever again forever. (14) The Lord will fight for you, but you must keep quiet."

Exodus 14:13-14

(12b) You shall not fear that which makes them afraid nor tremble at it. (13) It is the Lord of Hosts whom you shall sanctify [in your hearts this way], and He is the One who shall be your fear, and He is the One at whom you shall tremble.

Isaiah 8:12b-13

(12) "I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mortal men, the sons of men, who are but grass, (13) that you forget the Lord your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth, that you live in constant terror every day because of the wrath of the oppressor, who is bent on destruction? For where is the wrath of the oppressor? (14) The cowering prisoners will soon be set free; they will not die in their dungeon, nor will they lack bread."

Isaiah 51:12-14 NIV

(21) Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: (22) Because of the Lord's great love (lit., "mercies") we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. (23) They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (24) I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."

Lamentations 3:21-24 NIV

(24) Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wants to follow Me, let him [first] abandon his own aspirations, [then] pick up his cross and follow Me. (25) For whoever makes it his purpose to preserve his life will end up losing it, but whoever forfeits his life for My sake will find that he has preserved it."

Matthew 16:24-25

(12) But, [what is] even more [grievous] than these things (i.e., the events of vv.8-11), they will lay hands upon them, betraying them into [the hands of] their [religious] assemblies and prisons, haling them before kings and governors for the sake of my Name. (13) For this will result for you in an act of witnessing [for Me]. (14) So set it [firmly] in you hearts not to prepare ahead of time to make a defense. (15) For I will give you a mouth and wisdom which none of your enemies will be able to oppose or refute. (16) And you will be betrayed even by parents and siblings and friends. And they will put some of you to death, (17) and you will be hated by everyone because of my Name. (18) But not even a hair on your head will perish. (19) Through the perseverance [of your faith] you will preserve your [eternal] lives.

Luke 21:12-19 (cf. Matt.24:13; Mk.13:3)

(40) Then [the council] called the apostles back in. After they had them beaten, they released them, commanding them not to speak in the name of Jesus. (41) So they went forth from the council rejoicing, because they had been deemed worthy to suffer dishonor on behalf of His name.

Acts 5:40-41

"Have no fear of what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Demonstrate faithfulness unto death, and I will give you the crown of life."

Revelation 2:10

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on so that they may rest from their labors", says the Spirit. "For their deeds follow with them."

Revelation 14:13

III. Paradigms for the Tribulation

Every Christian life, at least in the case of those who are truly walking with Jesus, is to some degree a pattern and a template of the Tribulation. Personal tribulation comes into the lives of all mature believers at one time or another, and it is often the case that just as a closer walk with Jesus and a more effective witness for Him in ministering to His Church goes hand in hand with increasing spirituality, so satanic opposition grows as we do as well. Peter, Paul and John, the three most effective apostles, certainly exemplify this principle of growth in the effectiveness of their ministries being matched throughout their lives by a concomitant opposition to them from the evil one, with the result that all three had to endure ever greater persecution in His service and eventually end their lives in martyrdom. Therefore while the challenges to be faced by the tribulational generation will be severe and in some ways unique, they will not be entirely unprecedented. There are a number of patterns or paradigms which scripture provides of the community of faith enduring hardship in tribulation which are, by divine design, illustrative of the coming Tribulation, and so well worth our effort in examining.

1. The Analogy of Noah and the Great Flood:

(26) "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. (27) People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.

Luke 17:26-27 NIV (cf. Mat 24:37-42)

As these verses show, the parallel between the Great Flood and the Great Tribulation is biblically asserted – by the Lord Himself. In Genesis chapters 6-8, Noah is warned of the coming flood and is given very specific actions to follow in order to be delivered along with his family. Surprisingly, for all of us (those with any experience of human nature, that is), Noah followed the Lord's instructions *precisely*.

By faith, Noah, when divinely informed about things which were not yet visible, in reverent piety constructed an ark for the deliverance of his family, through which [same] faith [by responding to God] he condemned the world and became heir to the righteousness which is [awarded] according to faith.

Hebrews 11:7

As will be the case during the Tribulation, the Lord's intention to judge the world of that time stemmed from its excessive corruption (compare Gen.6:11-13 with Rev.9:20-21). Unlike the other human beings of his generation, Noah kept himself and his family separate from his corrupt and (literally) physically degenerate contemporaries (cf. 2Pet.2:5-9),⁶¹³ and one of the key challenges for believers now in the lead up to the Tribulation and even more so once it begins will be the necessity of staying clear of the influence of spiritual degeneration, especially when it becomes institutionalized in antichrist's world religion. For as in Noah's day, we may consider these last few years before the Tribulation begins a period of preparation. By all estimates, Noah had less than a hundred years to build the massive ark, and possibly far less time than that (cf. Gen.5:32; 6:3; 6:18; 7:6). Our life spans are obviously much shorter than those of Noah's generation, and to prepare for our own Great Flood, we have, at time of writing, less than two decades remaining.⁶¹⁴ Nor should we underestimate the magnitude of the task of making ourselves spiritually ready to endure the most difficult seven years in human history: Noah's ark was a physical one, constructed not without spiritual help; our "ark" is a spiritual one, but it will require the deployment of considerable effort on our part to make it seaworthy before the cataclysm arrives (i.e., by engaging aggressively in the process of spiritual growth, application, and ministry).

(19) It was also by means of the Spirit that [Christ] visited the [angelic] spirits in prison (i.e., in Tartarus in the Abyss), and proclaimed [His victory]. (20) [These are the angels who] were disobedient in the days of Noah at the time when God patiently waited (i.e., delayed judgment) while the ark was being built. [Having entered] into this ark [as a sort of baptism "into it"], a [precious] few, specifically, eight people, were brought safe through the water.

1st Peter 3:19-20

The physical ark protected Noah and his family once the flood arrived. Analogously, tribulational survival will require of believers the entering in to a spiritually safe place, one sound and secure enough to bring us safely through the raging waters of the Tribulation. This can only mean our steadfastness in abiding in Jesus Christ – just as the physical ark which brought Noah and his family through the flood was a type of Christ.⁶¹⁵

(21) And it is [this true] baptism [of the Spirit] which saves you (lit. as an "antitype" or analogy to the ark's bringing of "salvation through the water": just as they were saved by being "baptized" into the ark, we are saved by being baptized by the Spirit into Christ). Not any [literal] washing away of filth from your flesh, but an appeal to God for a clean conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (i.e., repentance and faith which result in Spirit baptism, union with Christ, and resultant salvation).

1st Peter 3:21

Just as the remnant of antediluvian believers was brought safe through the trial of the flood by being "in the ark", so also believers during the Tribulation must remain "in Christ" in order to survive spiritually. As Noah and his family did, we enter through the one Door, being baptized into Christ by the Spirit at the point of salvation through faith. Many during the Tribulation will fall away from Christ during the Great Apostasy. To be brought through safely, we must abide *in* Christ. Martyrdom in the case of all believers whose lives are taken during the Great Persecution is not an exception. Martyrdom, in addition to being an exceptional way to honor our Lord Jesus Christ (a way chosen by Him, not us) will be a great deliverance in that it will guarantee that believers so affected will have come through that great trial with their faith (and rewards) intact.⁶¹⁶ But while believers are rescued out of trouble, either as martyrs or at the living resurrection when Christ returns, just as the unbelievers of Noah's day were swept away in the judgment of the flood, in similar fashion the unbelievers of that future day will likewise be subject to God's seven 2nd Advent judgments – if they have not already succumbed to the seven warning judgments (i.e., the trumpet judgments) or the seven punitive judgments (i.e., the bowl judgments).⁶¹⁷

(5) [These tribulations which you are enduring] are evidence of the righteous judgment of God in His [judging] you to be worthy of His kingdom on behalf of which you are also suffering. (6) Since indeed it is just for God to repay with tribulation those who are subjecting you to tribulation, (7) and to give you who are being distressed relief along with us at the revelation of our Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels, (8) wreaking vengeance in a flame of fire upon those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.
2nd Thessalonians 1:5-8

Readers meditating on this comparison between Noah and the tribulational believers will easily be able to bring many other parallels to mind. For example: the parallel between the promise to Noah in Genesis 6:18 and the gospel through which we are in Christ; between the Nephilim destroyed in the flood and the Nephilim antichrist and his ten kings destroyed at the 2nd Advent; between the literal flood and the "flood" of antichrist's armies at Armageddon (cf. Dan.9:26; 11:22 in the Hebrew); between the supernatural provisions to Noah of the animals "coming" to him (Gen.7:9) or God Himself shutting the believers in and the many deliverances prophesied to keep believers safe during the Tribulation such as the sealing of the 144,000; between the peace and safety of the ark and the safe haven in the wilderness for all who flee Israel at the Tribulation's mid-point; between the specific command from God to come out of the ark only when it is safe (Gen.8:15) and our mandate from Jesus not to believe premature false reports of His return (Matt.24:26; for His return will be as unmistakable as lightning: Matt.24:27); between the olive branch, the sign of deliverance from the flood, and the return of the Branch, our Lord Jesus; between the rainbow God sets in the sky after the flood and the rainbow-glory of the Messiah who rules personally in manifest divine glory during the Millennium. The main things to keep in mind when considering this parallel between the Great Flood and the coming Tribulation, however, are Noah's faith in God and God's faithfulness to Noah. In spite of all visual evidence to the contrary, preparing for the coming trouble by doing precisely what God told him to do was the safe path, and Noah's following through by continuing to act in faith up to and all the way through the crisis was the means the Lord used to bring about his deliverance. Similarly, we believers today need to continue day by

day to grow and prepare spiritually, resolving in our heart of hearts to stay true to the Lord Jesus when those days of trouble come, no matter what may betide.

(5) [God] did not spare the antediluvian world, but kept safe Noah, as a proclaimer of righteousness, and the seven with him when He brought the flood upon the ungodly inhabitants of the world . . . (9) For the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment.

2nd Peter 2:5 and 2:9

2. The Analogy the Exodus: The example of the Exodus is both the closest and best documented biblical parallel to the coming Tribulation. As with the case of Noah, scripture itself invites us to see the Exodus as just such an analogy, stating that the comparison is directly applicable to us "who live at the culmination of the ages" (1Cor.10:11). We have already seen how that the Pharaoh of the Exodus is a representative type of antichrist, and that in many respects the experience of the children of Israel in escaping from Egypt and Pharaoh's efforts to destroy them forms a close parallel to the future experiences of believers who will pass through the Tribulation, with antichrist in the role of Pharaoh, and the journey out of Egypt into the "promised land" being analogous to the passage through all the trials and troubles that will befall believers of that future day during those most difficult seven years.⁶¹⁸ Not only is the utter arrogance and implacable hostility of Pharaoh unparalleled except in the case of the beast (cf. Ex.9:16 with Dan.8:23; 11:21), but just as "beast" in Revelation refers both to antichrist and his empire (cf. Rev.13:1-8 with Dan.7:1-11; 7:19-25; Rev.17:3), so in the case of Pharaoh the Bible identifies the evil emperor with his evil empire in an inextricable way (Job 9:13, 26:12-13; Ps.87:4; 89:9-10; Is.30:7; 51:9-10).

(13) It was you who split open the sea by your power; you broke the heads of the monster in the waters. (14) It was you who crushed the heads of Leviathan and gave him as food to the creatures of the desert.

Psalms 74:13-14 NIV

Both Pharaoh and the beast seek to destroy the people of God (Ex.14; Rev.12:17), and in doing so subject them to harsh economic sanctions (Ex.5:7-13; Rev.13:16-17), measures which are designed to undermine their faithfulness to God (Ex.5:17; Rev.13:15). And in both cases unprecedented divine plagues follow as the Lord responds to the oppression of His chosen people (Ex.7-11; Rev.8-9 and Rev.16). Other close parallels in the progression of the Exodus and the Tribulation respectively include:

- Mass apostasy in the face of pressure and persecution in both cases (Num.13-20; 2Thes.2:3), stemming from false religion (Ezek.20:7-8; Rev.13:15; cf. 1Cor.10:14).
- The effort needed in both cases to maintain faith under such pressures (Ex.5:22-23; 6:9; 6:12; Lk.21:26), and to keep the light of faith from being extinguished (as in the smoldering wick of Is.42:3 and Matt.12:20, parallel to the fire pot of Gen.15:17 related specifically to the Exodus in context: Gen.15:13-14; cf. also the lamps of the ten virgins: Matt.25:1-12).

- The intensification of the trial as Pharaoh and antichrist continually ramp up their opposition to God's people in response to the divine message delivered by Moses himself in both instances (Ex.7-11; Matt.17:3-4; Rev.11:3-11).
- The plagues of the Exodus and the plagues of the Tribulation both being divine responses to the devil and his prince as well as the means of deliverance for God's people (Ex.7-11; Rev.8-9 and Rev.16).
- The many similarities between the rapid departure from Egypt and the rapid departure from Babylon in the last months of the Tribulation (in CT 5; see previous footnote), with divine provision being instrumental at every step of each deliverance (Ex.23:20; Rev.18:4).
- The cloud which covers and protects the children of Israel being analogous to the sealing of the 144,000 (and the special protection of believers during this time as we have seen; Ex.14:19-20; 1Cor.10:2; Rev.7:3-8).
- The time and place where Pharaoh and the beast respectively plan to destroy utterly the people of God becoming instead the time and place of their own destruction (i.e., the Red Sea and Armageddon respectively: Ex.14; Rev.19).
- The supernatural darkness at the Red Sea and the supernatural darkness just before the 2nd Advent being in both cases the divine means of giving respite to the people of God just before total deliverance (Ex.14:20; Zech.1:6-7).
- The literal sea miraculously crossed by the Israelites (Ex.14; cf. Ps.78:53; 106:9-11) parallel to the "sea of trouble" which is the Tribulation (Zech.10:11; cf. Rev.21:1; and the sea is the point of origin for antichrist: Rev.13:1).
- Pharaoh is destroyed by the Lord through being drowned in the Red Sea (Ex.14:18; 14:28; Ps.136:15), while antichrist is thrown directly into the Lake of Fire at our Lord's return (Rev.19:20).
- The wilderness on the other side of the sea being analogous the place of purging of Israel restored to the land after the Tribulation (Num.13; Ezek.20:35).⁶¹⁹
- The entrance into the land being analogous to the entrance of the redeemed into the Millennial Kingdom of Christ.
- The exceptional glory won by the Lord at the Exodus being analogous to the even greater glory won by Him at Armageddon (Dan.9:15; Rev.19:1).

One of the passages which connects the Exodus with the end times most directly also assures us of God's deliverance through the difficult time to come even as He delivered that generation of Israel through their analogous time of trouble:

(11) All these things happened to them *as an example to us, and were written to warn us* – we who live at the culmination of the ages. (12) So let him who thinks he stands firm beware lest he fall. (13) You have not suffered any testing beyond normal human [experience]. And God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your capacity, but, along with the test, He will grant you the way out, so that you can bear up under it (i.e., even if you have to face the

Tribulation).

1st Corinthians 10:11-13

And if it be our lot to be martyred, that too is a deliverance through the sea of the Great Tribulation. This truth can be seen from the following passage in Revelation which directly connects the last plagues of God's wrath in vindicating His tribulational martyrs to His prior deliverance of the children of Israel: in both cases the "song of Moses" celebrates the victory of our Lord (Ex.15; cf. 2Tim.4:17-18; Rev.2:10:b):

(2) And I saw [something] like a sea of glass, [but this time it was] mixed with fire, and those who were [in the process of] winning the victory over the beast and his image and over the number of his name were standing on the sea of glass holding lyres of the Lord God, (3) and they were singing the song of Moses the servant of God, even the song of the Lamb.

Revelation 15:2-3a

3. The Analogy of the Life of Christ: Every Christian is called to follow in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus (e.g., Lk.9:59; 14:27; Jn.12:26; 1Cor.11:1; 1Pet.2:21), and to share in His sufferings (1Pet.4:12-13; cf. Mk.10:38-39; Acts 5:41; Rom.8:17; 2Cor.1:5; Phil.1:29-30; 3:10; Col.1:24). No greater life of tribulation, opposition and suffering was ever lived than the one our Lord lived for us – and then He faced the cross and judgment for all of our sins.⁶²⁰ Jesus' life thus provides a fitting parallel both in terms of the extensive preparation He went through before His public ministry and in the three and one half years of witnessing to God's truth in proclaiming the Kingdom before He went to the cross. Those three and a half years are of course identical in time to the period of the Great Tribulation and will end for many in martyrdom.

(18) "I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." (19) Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

John 21:18-19 NIV

The pattern set by our Lord for endurance of persecution, and persistence through ridicule, apathy, resistance, and potential martyrdom is one every believer should take to heart. Jesus looked to the deliverance and the reward on the other side even though His life, His ordeal, and the judgment of spiritual death on the cross were inestimably more difficult than the worst that will be faced by any of us His followers even in the depth of the Great Tribulation, so that His example is the one we should keep preeminently in mind.

(1) Since then we too [like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and run with endurance the race set before us, (2) turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith (cf. "Alpha and Omega"), who, *for the joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross*, treating it with despite, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (3) Keep in mind all the terrible opposition He endured

against Himself at the hands of sinful men, so as not to grow sick at heart and give up.
Hebrews 12:1-3

4. Other Analogies to Traversing the Tribulation: Since the devil makes it his business to persecute believers who are genuinely committed to following the Lord, it would be difficult to find a single great believer of the Bible whose life does not in some way follow the pattern of personal tribulation modeling *the* Tribulation followed by dramatic divine deliverance (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, certainly do, just to take the first four generations of Israel as an example). Some notably precise parallels worthy of mentioning here (in a list in no way meant to be exhaustive) are:

- The Analogy of Lot Escaping from Sodom: In the gospel of Luke, our Lord specifically links the deliverance of Lot from Sodom to the resurrection at His return just before the destruction of Armageddon (Lk.17:28-37). Lot was severely tested during the not inconsiderable time he was there (2Pet.2:5-9), but "righteous Lot" did not lose his faith, and in the end was miraculously delivered from the destruction that befell Sodom.
- The Analogy of David in the Wilderness: David's tribulations in hiding from Saul for what must have been roughly seven years (i.e., according to 2Sam.5:4, he was 30 when he became king and had served as a commander of Saul's army for a number of years as an adult before being forced to flee) are illustrative both of the trouble we may face in the Tribulation but also of the spiritual resources needed to endure them. It may well be the case that those of us who refuse to worship the beast will likewise be forced into hiding, and it well behooves us to take the same solace in the Lord and place the same confidence in His deliverance we see David exhibiting, especially as is made clear in the Psalms.
- The Analogy of Elijah's Time in Hiding: Elijah's ordeal we know lasted precisely three and a half years, the same length as the Great Tribulation (Lk.4:25; Jas.5:16-18). We also know that at that time too only a small remnant remained faithful to the Lord (i.e., the 7,000 of 1Kng.19:18). Throughout that time of testing, although he had made no special preparations himself, God provided for him in miraculous fashion, sending the ravens to feed him (1Kng.17:4-6). We can also learn from Elijah's unfortunate reaction to Jezebel's threats – directly after a momentous spiritual victory – the need to put our lives entirely in the Lord's hands during that coming trial and be ready to accept martyrdom with courage if so wills the Will of God.
- The Analogy of the Assyrian Invasion of Judah: We have previously seen (in part 3B of this series) how that the King of Assyria is a prophetic type of antichrist. Likewise the Assyrian invasion of Judah in ca. 701 B.C. is clearly analogous to the beast's Armageddon campaign, and the "Day of the Lord Paradigm" is often used in scriptural descriptions of it (especially in Isaiah: e.g., Is.13:6-13).⁶²¹ For those of us who have fled Babylon for Israel and are awaiting the Lord's return in the waning days of the Great Tribulation, the utter and miraculous destruction of the Assyrian army at that time will be important to keep in mind as the seemingly irresistible forces of antichrist gather to destroy Jerusalem.
- The Analogy of Daniel and his Three Friends: The story of God's repeated, miraculous deliverances of these four great believers who find themselves in the midst of a pagan and completely hostile country is a veritable "play book" for believers of that challenging time

ahead. Just as was the case for Daniel and his friends, so for us there will no doubt be many decision points where compromise with evil or martyrdom will be the only options. We must develop the mind-set now not to fear the latter, determined under no circumstances to admit the former, and remembering at all times that the Lord is capable of delivering us even in impossible situations – even if we find ourselves cast into the fiery furnace or the lions' den (Dan.3:28; 6:23).

IV. Preparing for Tribulation

(1) Since then we too [like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and run with endurance the race set before us, (2) turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith (cf. "Alpha and Omega"), who, for the joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despite, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (3) Keep in mind all the terrible opposition He endured against Himself at the hands of sinful men, so as not to grow sick at heart and give up. Hebrews 12:1-3

When all is said and done, the best and really the only way to prepare for the coming Tribulation is to continue to do what we ought to have been doing all along: growing spiritually through taking in and believing the truth of the Word of God, applying that truth to our lives in our Christian walk and especially in successful negotiation of the testing that comes our way meant to refine our faith, and helping our fellow believers grow and progress as well through judicious and godly exercise of the gifts and ministries we have been given, all of which are designed for the edification of the Body of Christ. As we have seen many times, these three facets of the productive Christian life are layered rather than sequential, and in terms of testing in particular the Lord allows us to face ever greater opposition as we grow ever closer to Him.

(3) May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be praised, who has in His great mercy caused us to be reborn to a hope which lives through Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead, (4) and to an inheritance which will never be destroyed, defiled, or dimmed, but which is being guarded in heaven for us, (5) who are ourselves also being kept safe by God's power and our faith in Him to an ultimate deliverance ready to be unveiled at the end of time. (6) In anticipation of this ultimate deliverance, your joy overflows, though *at present it may be your lot to suffer for a time through various trials* (7) to the end that your faith may be shown to be genuine. This validation of your faith is far more valuable than gold, for gold, though it too is assayed by fire, ultimately perishes. But your faith, when proven genuine in the crucible of life, will result in praise, glory and honor for you at the glorious return of Jesus Christ. (8) Though you have never laid eyes on Him, yet you love Him. And though you cannot see Him at this present time, yet you have faith in Him. For this reason you rejoice with an inexpressible joy that bespeaks the glorious future to come, (9) when you shall carry off in victory the ultimate prize – the [eternal] deliverance of your lives – which is the very purpose and objective of this faith of yours.

1st Peter 1:3-9

As mentioned several times already, all Christians are called to "share the sufferings of Christ" (Rom.8:17; 2Cor.1:5; Phil.1:29-30; 3:10; Col.1:24; 1Pet.4:12-13; cf. Mk.10:38-39; Acts 5:41; 2Cor.4:10-11; Gal.6:17; 1Thes.1:6; 2Thes.1:4-5; 2Tim.3:12), and as the passage above makes clear the endurance of such trials and personal tribulations is in fact a necessary part of the Christian growth-process. If the experience of genuine Christians who are truly making a difference for Jesus and His Church seems somewhat more rare today than has historically been the case, that is because the Lord does not place the burden of undeserved suffering (as opposed to divine discipline) upon immature believers who are ill-equipped to handle it (1Cor.10:11; cf. Matt.11:29-30). In our lukewarm era of Laodicea where spiritual immaturity is the rule, the instances of believers actually sharing Christ's sufferings in enduring personal tribulations wherein they glorify God by winning the victory through faith are sadly few and far between. Not only are the immature protected from what they cannot handle but it is also certainly true that the devil saves his best attacks for those who are actually making spiritual progress and genuinely contributing to the advance of God's plan (as the examples of Job and Paul make clear, just to name two of the most salient cases).

(18) Though the world hates you, know that it came to hate Me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own. (19) Now because you are not [a part] of the world, but I chose you out of the world, for this reason the world hates you. (20) Remember this principle I taught you: A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.

John 15:18-20

(8) Stay sober and stay awake [on guard]. Our adversary the devil roams about like a roaring lion, looking for someone he can devour. (9) Resist him, strong in your faith, remembering that your fellow believers in this world are undergoing the exact same sort of suffering [that you are].

1st Peter 5:8-9

In spite of the poor track record of our era of Laodicea thus far, there is some indication that the last generation of this time of lukewarmness will be among the greatest. After all, the era of Laodicea is destined to flow directly into the coming Tribulation. There is therefore little doubt but that it will be those who are preparing now who will constitute the foundation for equipping and encouraging the saints of that fast approaching day to resist the beast, come what may. One third of the Church, it is true, will fall away into apostasy, reaping to the full their present lack of preparation and lackadaisical attitude, but the remainder of those future believers will be split equally between those who give up their lives for Christ in martyrdom and those who endure the entire Tribulation and rise up while yet alive to meet the Lord in the air (1Thes.4:17). Therefore the mission that falls to the lot of believers today who are bucking the trend of Laodicea is greater than that of personal spiritual growth, progress and production – as vitally important as these things are. The mission for present day advancing believers here on the cusp of the Tribulation is also one of intensive spiritual preparation in order to be able to endure what is to come *and thereby* to be ready to help others who were not prudent enough to do so ahead of time come up to speed in as short a time as possible once the realization of the Tribulation's arrival sets in.

In short, it should not be surprising if there seems to be an unprecedented disparity today between the lives of ease many of our brethren seem to be living and the disproportionate share of trouble that is befalling those who truly seem to be the salt of the earth: God is preparing a cadre for rectifying the deficiencies in His Church once events produce sufficient motivation for a proper response.

We have had occasion to note many times in the past that making material preparations for the Tribulation is a fool's errand because we cannot anticipate the precise course of events or the details of the crises with which we will have to cope during those distressing times ahead. This issue is of such importance, however, that it is fitting to repeat and emphasize it: better truth stored in the heart than canned goods in the cellar once that day arrives. Stockpiling and the like is also a waste of our time, energy and resources now which are better spent in pursuing the perfection of our Christian walk and making every effort to maximize personal spiritual readiness. Perhaps the most serious problems with a survivalist approach are that 1) it predisposes those so involved against the very real possibility (50/50 for those who stay faithful and refuse to apostatize) that the Lord has marked us out for martyrdom; and perhaps even more importantly 2) it contributes to entirely the wrong mind-set: such preparations by their very nature incline toward selfishness and *self*-preservation. Those of us who are truly following Jesus now should instead make it part of our life's purpose to prepare not only to be spiritually able to endure what is to come but also to be ready to help our less prudent brothers and sisters in Christ through the storm ahead as well. As we have seen in the past, the Tribulation, not to mention its final half, the Great Tribulation, will not be the best time for our lukewarm brethren to embark upon a crash-course in spiritual growth, but that is exactly the situation perhaps the majority will find themselves in, and it is doubtful if many of these unprepared believers will be able to make it safe through the Tribulation without a large amount of help from those of us who have made adequate spiritual preparations ahead of time.⁶²²

For these reasons we can expect the "boot camp" experiences the Lord puts us through in preparation for those trying times ahead to be intense. The first generation of the cross which was also the foundational one of the Church Age was the "greatest generation" of Christians thus far, and for the most part these exceptional believers had to fight it out in the wilderness for the better part of their lives. The experiences of Mary, Joseph, John's parents, Anna, Simeon, the shepherds, and of course John the baptist, the apostles, and the other early church heroes contrast markedly with what we find in the next and most of the following eras of the Church. If Laodicea is going to rise up and rival that prior great generation – as seemingly it must do for the exceptional witness prophesied by the tribulational believers who do persevere to come to pass – not only will an intense purging be necessary but also an equally intensive push towards growth when once Laodicea finally awakes. To accomplish this will require the ready assistance of all who have adequately prepared themselves before the fact for service to Christ's Body. What this means in practical terms, dear Christian, is that even though your gifts may seem under-used, under-valued, and unappreciated at present, you should nevertheless make every effort to persevere in your good approach, because the day is fast approaching when these gifts will be employed in a very necessary way. What this means in personal terms, dear friends, is that the hardships, ostracism, trouble, testing and tribulations of the present day are not only not accidental but are also very much needful to temper your

edge to just the right sharpness in order to be of service to Jesus Christ in that most trying time to come.

Endure hardship with me like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.
2nd Timothy 2:3 (cf. 1Tim.1:18; 6:12a; Deut.8:15-16)

I have fought the good fight. I have completed my course. I have kept the faith.
2nd Timothy 4:7

We are soldiers of the Lord Jesus, and we are being carefully and deliberately trained by Him to stand in the gap on the day of battle soon to come, when we will be called upon to encourage our weaker brethren, giving them an example to follow that they may not faint in their faith.

Then those who have insight will shine like the shining forth of the dawn – even those who led the many to righteousness – like stars forever and ever.
Daniel 12:3

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.
2nd Timothy 2:2 NIV

To meet this challenge will require prior preparation of an unusual sort. Rather than despairing at our present troubles, therefore, we must come to regard them as necessary for our Lord's purposes, and resolve to make the most of them in hope of being as useful to Him as possible in the crisis to come.

"As long as it is day, we must do the work of Him who sent Me. Night is coming, when no one can work."
John 19:4 NIV (cf. Is.55:6; Jer.13:6)

Redeem your time, for the days are evil.
Ephesians 5:16

Let us resolve, therefore, to make the most of the time we have and the circumstances with which we are presented, considering the troubles and the trials of the present not only necessary for our spiritual growth but actually welcoming them – in a complete reversal of the "normal" worldly approach – as opportunities to prepare so as to be as useful as possible to the Lord and to His Body the Church our fellow believers when that time of great tribulation arrives.

(2) Brothers, when you are being beset with all manner of trials, take pains to be joyful. (3) For you should keep in mind that this testing of your faith develops perseverance. (4) So let your perseverance develop fully, that you may become fully mature and entitled to a full reward, having been found lacking in no respect.
James 1:2-4

(3) And not only this, but let us glory in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces patience, (4) and patience produces proven character, and proven character produces hope – (5) and this hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us.

Romans 5:3-5

For I do not consider these present hardships in any way comparable to the glory destined to be revealed for us.

Romans 8:18

(17) For this present light affliction of ours is working out for us an eternal weight of glory beyond any possible estimation. (18) [Let us] not [then be] having [any] regard for what can be seen, but [instead] for what cannot be seen. For the things which can be seen are ephemeral. But the things which cannot be seen are eternal.

2nd Corinthians 4:17-18

We should therefore take pains now to practice and to perfect patience and perseverance as the Lord trains us for the trials to come, in addition to everything we have discussed so far always remembering also (among many other principles of truth) these twelve points:

1. The fiery trial is inevitable, but the furnace of testing is the place of the most intimate fellowship with our dear Lord Jesus (Dan.3:25), and the lions' den is where we are called upon to trust in Him most intensely (Dan.6:22-23).

(12) Beloved, don't be amazed at the fiery ordeal of testing you are now undergoing, as if something out of the ordinary were happening to you. (13) But to the degree that you are [truly] participating in Christ's sufferings, be joyful about it, so that at His glorious revelation, you may also rejoice with great gladness.

1st Peter 4:12-13

It is often necessary to endure great suffering in order to appreciate and experience the intensity of the comfort and encouragement God provides to those so afflicted (Ps.23:4; 94:19; 119:50; Is.51:12; 61:1-2; Acts 9:31; 2Cor.13:11; Phil.2:1-2; 2Thes.2:16-17).

(3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of compassion and all encouragement, (4) the One who encourages us in all our tribulation so that we in turn may be able to encourage those in all types of tribulation by means of the very encouragement which we ourselves received from God. (5) Because as our sufferings for Christ multiplied in service to you, so through Christ did the encouragement we received multiply to the same degree. So if we are experiencing tribulation, it is to provide you with encouragement and salvation. (6) And if we are being encouraged, it is for the sake of the encouragement you have received, which is now at work in your successful endurance of the same sufferings which we also experienced. (7) And so our hope for you is a solid one, since we know that as you have become partakers of suffering, in the same way will you also become partakers of encouragement.

2nd Corinthians 1:3-7

It is in the midst of fight that we see Jesus the most clearly.

(7) I will bless [with praise] the Lord who gives me counsel. Indeed, even at night my emotions will instruct me [in His praises]. (8) I have kept the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be moved.

Psalm 16:7-8

(24) By faith, Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, (25) and chose instead to suffer maltreatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin, (26) because he considered the reproach [suffered on behalf] of Christ greater riches than [all the] treasure vaults of Egypt. For he was looking to his reward. (27) By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king. For he grew strong by seeing the One who cannot be seen (i.e., by keeping his mind's eye on the invisible Lord Jesus Christ).

Hebrews 11:24-27

(8) Though you have never laid eyes on Him, yet you love Him. And though you cannot see Him at this present time, yet you have faith in Him. For this reason you rejoice with an inexpressible joy that bespeaks the glorious future to come, (9) when you shall carry off in victory the ultimate prize – the [eternal] deliverance of your lives – which is the very purpose and objective of this faith of yours.

1st Peter 1:8-9

2. This world we behold is passing away, and we have a sure and certain future ahead in the world to come, one which is beyond comparison for good in every way. We have a better city, the New Jerusalem, whose planner and builder is God Himself (Heb.11:10; Rev.21-22). We have a better citizenship, one which is heavenly and eternal and entails extraordinary privileges which cannot yet be known or fully appreciated (Phil.3:20). We have a better inheritance, one which can never dim or be lost or stolen or defiled (Matt.16:19-20; 1Pet.1:4; Heb.11:40). We have a better body, one which is indestructible and fit in every way for life eternal (1Cor.15:35-50; Phil.3:21; 1Jn.3:2). And we most certainly have a better Ruler, a better Husband, a better Friend, a better Lord and Master, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, with whom we shall enjoy sweet fellowship forever and ever. These are the things with which we ought to be occupying ourselves instead of becoming fixated on the worries of this world (Matt.6:25-34).

(1) Therefore since you have been resurrected [positionally] with Christ, keep seeking after the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (2) Keep thinking on the things above, and not the things on the earth.

Colossians 3:1-2

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.

Philippians 4:8 NIV

3. We have the ability and the responsibility to encourage ourselves and each other in the Lord when the pressures of this life seem unendurable.

Moreover David was greatly distressed because the people spoke of stoning him, for all the people were embittered, each one because of his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.

1st Samuel 30:6 NASB

(3) Strengthen the hands that are weak. Bolster the knees that are giving way. (4) Say to those with anxious hearts, "Be strong! Don't be afraid! Behold! Your God will come, as an Avenger. [Your] God will come, as a Rewarder. He will come, and He will deliver you".

Isaiah 35:3-4

And they will say on that day, "Behold! This is our God! We waited in hope for Him to deliver us. This is our Lord. We waited in hope for Him. Let us rejoice and be glad in His deliverance!"

Isaiah 25:9

(12) Make sure, brothers, that none of you develop an evil heart of unbelief (i.e., lack of faith) by turning away (lit. "apostatizing") from the living God. (13) Rather keep encouraging each other every day as long as we still call it "today" (i.e. as long as we still remain in this world), lest any of you be hardened [in heart] by the deception of sin.

Hebrews 3:12-13

Since the Lord is our Rock and our Refuge, let us resolve to face whatever may come with a fortitude and courage that befits people of faith.

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you".

Deuteronomy 31:6 NIV (cf. Josh.1:6-7)

"The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

Deuteronomy 33:27a NIV

"The Lord is my Rock, my fortress and my deliverer; (3) my God is my Rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation. He is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior – from violent men you save me".

2nd Samuel 22:2-3 NIV

(1b) Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. (2) Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

Psalms 90:1b-2 NIV

Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong.
1st Corinthians 16:13 NIV

4. We also have the ability and the responsibility to stand fast with determination and without compromise in the face of seemingly irresistible pressures, remembering that our salvation and eternal reward depends upon the steadfastness of our faith manifest in self-control, self-discipline, and perseverance (Rom.5:3-4; Gal.5:22-23; Col.2:5; 2Thes.1:4; 1Tim.4:8; 2Tim.1:7; Tit.1:8-9; Jas.1:2-4; 5:10-11; 2Pet.1:5-8; Rev.2:19; cf. Acts 24:25).

(24) Don't you know that all the runners in the stadium run the race, but that only one receives the prize? Run in such a way so as to achieve what you are after. (25) And again, everyone involved in competition exercises *self-control* in all respects. Those athletes go through such things so that they may receive a perishable crown of victory, but we do it to receive an imperishable one. (26) So as I run this race of ours, I'm heading straight for the finish line; and as I box this bout of ours, I'm making every punch count. (27) I'm "pummeling my body", one might say, bringing myself under *strict control* so that, after having preached [the gospel] to others, I might not myself be disqualified [from receiving the prize we all seek].

1st Corinthians 9:25-27

(3) May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be praised, who has in His great mercy caused us to be reborn to a hope which lives through Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead, (4) and to an inheritance which will never be destroyed, defiled, or dimmed, but which is being guarded in heaven for us, (5) who are ourselves also being *kept safe* by God's power *and by our faith in Him* to an ultimate deliverance ready to be unveiled at the end of time.

1st Peter 1:3-5

(35) So do not throw away this conviction of yours – it leads to a great reward. (36) You need to *keep persevering* so that you may carry off in victory what has been promised – after you have accomplished God's will. (37) For yet a little while, how short, how [short the wait], and He who is coming shall come, nor will He delay. (38) "Then shall my righteous one live by his faith, but if he shrinks back, My heart takes no pleasure in him (Hab.2:3-4)." (39) Now we are not possessed of cowardly apostasy which leads to destruction, but *we have faith* which leads to [eternal] life.

Hebrews 10:35-39

5. We need to remember always – but especially in times of tribulation – that Jesus is our example, the One we serve and follow. He was willing to die for us, and did so. In emulation of Him, we need to be ready to endure whatever He calls upon us to endure, even if we are chosen to honor Him through martyrdom.

If anyone wants to follow Me, let him [first] deny himself, then pick up his cross and follow Me.
Matthew 16:24

(1) Since then we too [like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and run with endurance the race set before us, (2) turning our gaze unto

Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith (cf. "Alpha and Omega"), who, for the joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despite, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (3) Keep in mind all the terrible opposition He endured against Himself at the hands of sinful men, so as not to grow sick at heart and give up.
Hebrews 12:1-3

(19) This is pleasing [in God's sight], [namely] if for conscience' sake someone bears up under afflictions when unjustly [subjected to] suffering. (20) But what sort of glory [is yours] if you endure punishment for having sinned? But if you endure suffering for doing what is good, this is pleasing to God. (21) It is to this [sharing in the sufferings of Christ] that you have been called, for Christ also died on your behalf, leaving you an example so that you might follow in His footsteps. (22) He committed no sin, nor was any guile found in His mouth. (23) He did not return slander when He was slandered, did not threaten when He suffered, but entrusted Himself to the One who judges righteously.
1st Peter 2:21-23

6. If we are following Jesus as we should, there is no obstacle we cannot overcome in following Him. Even though we face a raging sea of tribulation, we can have confidence that our Lord will see us safely through. In spite of the storm, the wind, the rain, the waves, the noise, the darkness, the lightning, in Jesus we can walk in peace and calm and joy and confidence, if only we have "a little faith" and are ready to live or to die for the Lord, confident that whatever He chooses will be for our ultimate good.

(1b) God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. (2) Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, (3) though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. Selah
Psalm 46:1b-3 NIV

(10) For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver. (11) You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. (12) You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance.
Psalm 66:10-12 NIV

He divided the sea and led them through; he made the water stand firm like a wall.
Psalm 78:13 NIV

(25) During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. (26) When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. (27) But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." (28) "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." (29) "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. (30) But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" (31) Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" (32) And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.
Matthew 14:25-32 NIV

(21) Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. (22) If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."
Matthew 21:21-22 NIV

And God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your capacity, but, along with the test, He will grant you the way out, so that you can bear up under it (i.e., even if you have to face the Tribulation).
1st Corinthians 10:13b

7. If we are serving Jesus as we should, there is no burden we cannot bear, because He is the One who is empowering us and carrying the weight.

But those who wait on the Lord Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.
Isaiah 40:31 NKJV

(28) "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. (29) Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (30) For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."
Matthew 11:28-30 NIV

For this present light affliction of ours is working out for us an eternal weight of glory beyond any possible estimation.
2nd Corinthians 4:17

8. In all things we may be called upon to suffer and endure and bear and overcome in those dark days ahead, we may be absolutely certain that God's grace will be sufficient to see us through.

(21) This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. (22) It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. (23) They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.
Lamentations 3:21-23 KJV

(9) But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. (10) That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.
2nd Corinthians 12:9-10 NIV

(12) I know how to handle humiliation; I also know how to handle prosperity. I have learned by experience in each and every way how to handle being abundantly provided for and being impoverished, being in prosperity and being in a state of deprivation. (13) I have the strength to endure all [extremes] in the One who empowers me to do so.
Philippians 4:12-13

9. Our guide and encouragement in this fight must remain at all times the truth of the Word of God as we apply it in faith, illuminated and empowered by the Holy Spirit (Zech.7:12).

Thy Word [is] a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.
Psalm 119:95 KJV

"Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit" says the Lord of Hosts.
Zechariah 4:6

(9) But as it is written: "What the eye has not seen and the ear has not heard, and [what] has not entered the heart of man, [these are the very] things which God has prepared for those who love Him". (10) And God has revealed [these very things] to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches out everything, even the deep things of God. (11) For who knows the things of a man except the spirit of man which is in him? In the same way too no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. (12) And we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, in order that we might know the things graciously given to us by God. (13) And these are the very things we are speaking about, not in words taught by human wisdom, but with words of the Spirit, communicating spiritual information to spiritual people. (14) Now the unspiritual man does not receive the [deeper] things of the Spirit of God. For they are foolishness to him and he is not able to understand them because they are appreciated [only] through spiritual means. (15) But the spiritual man does appreciate them all, though he himself is not appreciated [in this regard] by anyone. (16) For [as it says] "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Who will instruct Him?" But we do have the very thinking (lit., "mind") of Christ (i.e., His truth taught by the Spirit).
1st Corinthians 2:9-16

And [in this spiritual warfare] put on the helmet of salvation and gird on the sword of the Spirit – which is the Word of truth.
Ephesians 6:17

For the Word of God is living and powerful; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even to the point of being able to divide the spirit from its earthly life and the marrow from its bones; [for] it (i.e., the Word when resident in our conscience by faith) acts as a judge of our heart's intentions and emotions.
Hebrews 4:12

Yet I consider the prophetically inspired Word (i.e. the Bible) even more reliable (i.e., than witnessing the transfiguration of vv.16-18). You too would do well to pay the closest attention to it (i.e., scripture), just as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the Morning Star rises (i.e., the Second Advent).
2nd Peter 1:19

10. We are not alone. God is in control. His plan was complete in every respect before He even created the world, including making every provision for us individually and at every step of the way, whether these provisions be seen or unseen (Ps.121; Is.37:26).

(15) When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked. (16) "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." (17) And Elisha prayed, "O Lord, open his eyes so he may see." Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

2nd Kings 6:15-17 NIV

(28) And we know that, for those who love God, He works everything together for good – [that is to say,] for those who have been called according to His plan. (29) For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined (i.e., foreordained) to share the likeness of His Son, so that He might be the Firstborn over many brothers [and sisters]. (30) And those whom He predestined (i.e., foreordained), these He also called [to salvation], and those whom He called, He also justified (i.e., made righteous through faith in Christ), and those whom He justified, these He also glorified (i.e., our future resurrection and eternal life). (31) So what shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? (32) He who did not spare His own Son, but handed Him over for our sake, how will He not also graciously give us everything [we need] along with [that gift of] Him? (33) Who will [dare to] bring charges against God's elect? God is the One who is pronouncing [us] justified. (34) Who is he that condemns [us]? Christ Jesus is the One who died [condemned in our place], and the One, moreover, who was raised from the dead [for us], who is [seated] at the right hand of God, who is also making petitions on our behalf. (35) What will separate us from Christ's love? Tribulation? Or privation? Or persecution? Or hunger? Or destitution? Or danger? Or violence? (36) As it is written, "For your sake we are being put to death all day long. We were accounted as sheep for slaughter". (37) But in all such things we are decisively victorious through Him who loved us [enough to do what He did for us]. (38) For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, neither angelic nor human authorities, neither things present nor things to come, neither heavenly powers, (39) be they the highest [of the elect] or the lowest [of the fallen], nor any other created thing [on this earth] will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:28-39

11. The Lord will deliver us through all of our troubles, both now and then.

"Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me."

Psalm 50:15 NIV

(14) "Because he loves me," says the Lord, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. (15) He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. (16) With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation."

Psalm 91:14-16 NIV

(23) Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. (24) You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. (25) Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. (26) My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the

strength of my heart and my portion forever.
Psalm 73:23-26 NIV

(1) God is our refuge and strength. [He is] our help in [times of] tribulation, [and] very quick to be found. (2) Therefore we shall not fear when the earth totters, when the mountains quake in the heart of the seas, (3) [when] its waters roar and foam, when the mountains shake on account of its swells.
Psalm 46:1-2

The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.
2nd Timothy 4:18 NIV

12. And if so wills the Will of God for this deliverance to take the form of martyrdom, we have the comfort of knowing that this was always His Will for us, that this departure glorifies our Lord Jesus and guarantees our reward, and that by this means we have indeed been delivered from trouble.

(1) The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. (2) Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death.
Isaiah 57:1-2 NIV

Precious in the sight of the LORD Is the death of His godly ones.
Psalm 116:15 NASB

For this is God, our God forever and ever. He will be our guide, even unto death.
Psalm 48:14

This is the rest, this is the peace our Lord has called us to, that we may have peace and confidence through faith in Him, even though we stand in the eye of the Tribulation's storm. Let us make every effort to enter into this peace and rest now, so that we may be well-practiced at negotiating the tempests of life before the whirlwind of the Tribulation hits full on (Deut.33:27; Is.30:15; 57:19; Heb.3:19 - 4:3; cf. Ps.62:1; 116:7; Is.8:6-7; 28:12; Jer.6:16; Eph.2:14-22).

(9) So there does remain a "Sabbath day's rest" for the people of God. (10) For he who has entered into [God's] rest has himself ceased from his works just as God did from His own. (11) Let us therefore be eager to enter into that [continual and spiritual] rest, lest anyone fall [from grace] following the same pattern of disobedience [as the Exodus generation did].
Hebrews 4:9-11

And the peace of God which surpasses every thought will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
Philippians 4:7

Peace I leave for you; peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you.
John 14:27

You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.
Isaiah 26:3 NIV

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.
Colossians 3:15 NIV

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."
John 16:33 NIV

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.
2nd Thessalonians 3:16 NIV

For true believers in Jesus Christ, even at the best of times life is often an itch that cannot be scratched. We are destined to be opposed by the evil one at every good step we make, and need to learn to live with the uncomfortable nature of the world by setting our hearts on the Lord and on the things which cannot be seen (Col.3:1). Above is where our Lord is, and above is where our treasure is too. Learning to keep our inner eye on those truths, learning to esteem Him and our eternal future more than this life and this world, requires the development of a tenacious pattern of thinking not easily swamped by the vicissitudes of life. In other words, living with this kind of true peace requires spiritual maturity. For this reason, the testing we are receiving now before the Tribulation begins is actually a gracious blessing from our Lord designed to prepare us for all the trouble yet to come. And so it will – if we allow patience to work its perfecting ways (Jas.1:2-4), making the most of the day by day opportunities we are being given to trust our Lord and not our eyes and ears. Day by day we pray the prayer our Lord gave us to pray. We pray for provision. And He does take care of us on every "today". We pray for forgiveness. And He has delivered us on that "yesterday" when He died for us. We pray for deliverance. And He will rescue us from all of our present troubles and bring us through whatever is to come – of that we may be absolutely certain. The only real question is whether or not we will believe the truth resiliently enough actually to *be* absolutely certain and sure in exercising and applying faith once the trial of trials begins. The time to prepare is now.

(25) For this reason I tell you [to] stop worrying about your life, that is, [worrying about] what you will [have to] eat. And stop [worrying] about your body, that is, [worrying about] what you will [have to] wear. Isn't your life more [meaningful] than food? And isn't your body more [meaningful] than clothing? (26) Look at the birds of the sky – they neither sow, nor reap, nor gather into granaries. And [yet] your heavenly Father feeds them. You are more important than they are, aren't you? (27) Now which of you can add a foot and a half to his height by worrying? (28) Why then do you worry about clothing? Consider well the wild lilies – how [it is] that they grow, though neither toiling nor spinning. (29) But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his glory used to clothe himself like one of these. (30) And if God dresses the

wild plants in such a way – here today but thrown into the oven tomorrow – will He not all the more do so for you, O you of little faith? (31) So don't worry, saying "What shall we [have to] eat?" or "What shall we [have to] drink?" or "What shall we [have to] wear?" (32) After all, these are the things that the gentiles are frantically pursuing. Now your heavenly Father knows you need all these things. (33) Therefore *seek first the Kingdom* and its righteousness, and then all these things will be given to you in addition. (34) So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself: there is [already] sufficient evil in any given day [without you adding to it ahead of time].

Matthew 6:25-34

Thy *Kingdom* come!

Matthew 6:10 KJV (cf. Lk.11:2)

V. The Kingdom of God

Apropos of section IV above, spiritual preparation for crisis is in its essence the development as one's basic mind-set the putting to death in our hearts of the visible world as something rotten and temporary, while living instead for the world to come which is eternal and wonderful in every way. All of the principles considered above may be resolved into loving the Lord and our eternity with Him to the exclusion of any serious emotional attachment to the physical world our eyes behold. Seeing Him who is invisible and blinding ourselves to the visible world is the preeminent way we Christians "seek the Kingdom as our first priority" (Matt.6:33).

(18) "Though the world hates you, know that it came to hate Me first. (19) If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own. Now because you are not [a part] of the world, but I chose you out of the world, for this reason the world hates you."

John 15:19

"I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world."

John 17:14

(15) Do not be a lover of this world, nor of what is in this world. If anyone is a lover of this world, a [genuine] love for the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. (17) The world and its lust are passing away, but whoever does God's will is [going] to stay [alive with God] forever.

1st John 2:15-17

Once this fundamental shift in orientation has occupied our entire heart, the Kingdom, our eternity with the King in His eternal capital city where we will enjoy forever the rewards earned by serving Him properly in this short life, will truly be the purpose of our efforts for Jesus here on earth and the goal of all we are striving for "by means of the body" (2Cor.5:10). Properly understood, the Kingdom, the realm of the King, is our all in all. It represents everything for which we as Christians legitimately strive, and for which we endure all that we endure.

(45) "Again, the *kingdom of heaven* is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. (46) When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."
Matthew 13:45-46 NIV

"Be happy, even though you are poor, for yours is the *Kingdom of God*."
Luke 6:20b

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he is not able to see the *Kingdom of God*".
John 3:3

(12) Giving thanks to the Father who has rendered you sufficient to receive your share in the inheritance of the saints in the light [of eternity], [the very One] (13) who rescued us from the power of darkness and delivered us into the *Kingdom* of His beloved Son.
Colossians 1:12-13

(4) So we ourselves [also] are boasting to the churches of God about your endurance and your faith in the persecutions and in the tribulations which you are [presently] enduring. (5) These are [all actually] evidence of the righteous judgment of God in His [judging] you to be worthy of His *Kingdom* on behalf of which you are also suffering.
2nd Thessalonians 1:5

Since, therefore, we have received a *Kingdom* which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude so that through it we may serve God in a pleasing way with reverence and fear.
Hebrews 12:28

(10) So strive all that much more then, brothers, to make your calling and election secure through these good works. By devoting yourselves to these things (i.e., virtue, growth and the Christian production which springs from faith) you shall never be tripped up along your way. (11) For it is by such means that your path into the eternal *Kingdom* of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be smoothly and generously paved.
2nd Peter 1:10-11

I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and *Kingdom* and perseverance in Jesus was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.
Revelation 1:9

The Kingdom of God (also called in scripture the Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew's gospel as in the first passage above) is mentioned nearly a hundred times by name in the New Testament in addition to numerous other passages which clearly refer to it (and it is certainly anticipated if not mentioned precisely by name in all Old Testament Messianic prophecy). While books have been written on the subject,⁶²³ and while the usage of these terms may seem in some respect diverse, all scriptural reference to the coming Kingdom have one essential idea at their core, namely, the fact that for believers it is the Kingdom to come which constitutes our true and eternal habitation (rather than this temporary world with all its trials and tribulations).

Jesus answered [Pilate], "My Kingdom is not of this world. If my Kingdom were of this world, my servants would be fighting on my behalf so that I might not be handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my Kingdom is not from here".

John 18:36

Therefore for all believers at all times – but never more so than for believers during the Tribulation – the Kingdom must become more than an idea: it must become the fundamental mind-set we adopt, the essential objective for which we strive, in order to cope with the tribulations of life, and especially to cope with the Great Tribulation (Dan.9:27).

(8) By faith, Abraham, when He was called [by God], obeyed and went forth into the place he was destined to receive as an inheritance. He went forth, moreover, in ignorance of where [exactly] he was heading. (9) By faith, he sojourned as an alien in the land he had been promised, dwelling in tents with Jacob and Isaac, coheirs of [this same] promise. (10) For he was waiting for the foundation of *that city* (i.e., the New Jerusalem, capital of the Kingdom) whose architect and builder is God.

Hebrews 11:8-10

According to His will and in keeping with the basic principle of His plan to "work all things together for [the absolute divine] good" (Rom.8:28), God may or may not deliver us in the way we desire from the troubles we are presently experiencing. As we have seen above and repeatedly elsewhere in this series, not only is suffering for Jesus Christ an essential part of the mature believer's burden necessary for spiritual growth, but during the Great Tribulation half of those who persevere will be called upon to honor our Lord Jesus in martyrdom. But whatever it be our lot to suffer in this life, as believers who have a full share in Jesus Christ we also have a full share in His coming Kingdom, an inheritance which cannot be lost or defiled, one which is secure and waiting in heaven for us to claim it (1Pet.1:4). So it is that the Kingdom, the eternal destination of the Plan of God for all of us who have been saved through the blood of Jesus Christ the King, is really the ultimate embodiment and fulfillment of that plan as the place where we who have chosen to follow the Lord will enjoy our eternity and all of our eternal rewards face to face with Him forevermore (1Thes.2:12). As those who love Jesus Christ more than life itself, therefore, our true and proper focus is not to be on this world or the things of this world but on the next world and the things to come. Our true and proper focus is to be the coming Kingdom of the Son of God – wherein we shall share His earthly rule in glorious resurrection – and on the coming Kingdom of the Father and our eternal place in New Jerusalem.

(19) Do not store up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and corrosion eat them away and where thieves dig through and steal them. (20) But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor corrosion eat them away and where thieves neither dig through nor steal them. (21) For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:19-21

(20) For our [true] citizenship has a heavenly existence, and it is from there that we expectantly await our Savior, Lord Jesus Christ, (21) who will transform this humble body of ours into one that matches His glorious body through His powerful ability to subordinate

everything to Himself.
Philippians 3:20-21

(1) Therefore since you have been resurrected [positionally] with Christ, keep seeking after the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (2) Keep thinking on the things above, and not the things on the earth.

Colossians 3:1-2

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem.
Hebrews 12:22a

Jesus is our King, the Son of the Great King Eternal, our heavenly Father. When we think about the King – as we ought to strive to do continually (e.g., Heb.11:24-27; 12:1-3; cf. Col.3:1-4; Phil.4:8) – it is right and proper that we also direct our thoughts to His Kingdom, and to the blessings we will enjoy when we partake of it fully in resurrection on that great day to come.

[Let us] not [be] having [any] regard for what can be seen, but [instead] for what cannot be seen. For the things which can be seen are ephemeral. But the things which cannot be seen are eternal.

2nd Corinthians 4:18

Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

Galatians 6:14

[W]e who are awaiting the blessed hope, namely the epiphany of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (i.e., when we too will be resurrected in glory when He appears).

Titus 2:13

A believer on the cusp of the Tribulation could do worse than developing a deliberate pattern of thinking about the glorious Kingdom we await, making it a habit to meditate on the following points:

- Jesus Christ, the coming Messiah, is the One who is our King (Heb.7:1-3; Rev.17:14; 19:16; cf. Matt.21:5; Mk.15:2).
- We are His soldiers here on earth (Jn.18:36; 1Cor.9:7; Phil.2:25; 2Tim.2:3-4; Philem.1:2).
- We are engaged in spiritual combat on His behalf and on behalf of His Kingdom (Matt.11:12; 2Cor.10:4; Eph.6:10-17; 1Tim.1:18).
- We are awaiting the return of our victorious King and the commencement of His glorious Kingdom (Rev.11:15; 12:10).

- We are anticipating being rewarded for our service to Him through sharing in the plunder He has won (Is.53:12; Lk.11:21-22; Eph.7:4-10).

Everything we have, are, and will suffer for Jesus Christ will be worth it – and that truth will become brilliantly clear when we behold His majestic return on that inexpressibly sublime day to come. May we all prove worthy in the trial ahead.

[These tribulations which you are enduring] are evidence of the righteous judgment of God in His [judging] you to be worthy of His Kingdom on behalf of which you are also suffering.
2nd Thessalonians 1:5

A Warning From Christ:

In the parable of the widow and the judge, Jesus teaches his disciples that it is worthwhile to "pray at all times" (Lk.18:1-8). For, as He explains, even the unjust, unwilling judge yielded to the widow's persistence in the end. We are to understand, then, that God, who is just, will not long delay in bringing aid to His elect as they persist in prayer. Our Lord concludes this parable with a remark which may seem somewhat curious at first glance, but which in fact is rife with significance for the Church at this moment in history as we stand at the threshold of the end times. He closes the parable with this rather disturbing remark: "But when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" Jesus' question should give pause to those who are a bit too sanguine about the Church's prospects as we draw ever closer to the prophetic events which are to usher in the final phase of history. For the question suggests that the issue is in some doubt, that if faith does endure the catastrophic period destined to precede our Lord's return, it will be a very near thing. The intensive, persistent prayer given as a motive for the parable may very well be a necessity rather than a luxury for those who are to face the challenge of surviving that future time while preserving their faith intact.

Luke's mention of another, supporting point to the parable of the widow and the judge gives us the basis for Jesus' concern which led to His probing question in the first place. He tells us that Jesus' purpose in telling this parable was not only to teach the disciples that they must pray at all times, but also that they must "not lose heart" (Lk.18:1)." The "loss of heart" or despair mentioned in verse one may seem at first to apply only to the issue of persistent prayer, but Jesus' question makes it clear that He was concerned that many believers, perhaps the majority of believers, would be so severely tested by the trials to come at the end of the age that their faith would buckle under the pressure of those events and that a wholesale "loss of faith" might result.

Clearly, our Lord's words are inspired and prophetic. As believers who consider all scripture sacred and invaluable for our instruction, we cannot help but be filled with a certain amount of trepidation at the thought that our faith might possibly come under testing of such a severe degree. Moreover, that our faith and everything of a spiritual nature which we have accomplished in this life, even our salvation might be at risk should we find ourselves living through the terrible times to come is a sobering thought indeed. We cannot afford to ignore the very real possibility that it may be our generation to which Jesus' question may finally apply. It may well be that some of us shall find ourselves face to face with the ultimate

challenge to faith destined to be presented by future events. It may well be that some of us may fail that challenge. That is a risk which no believer can afford to run. It is certainly not a risk which any believer should face in ignorance.

In an age when Christianity seems to have gained such impressive advance all around the world, when millions of people all over the globe freely identify themselves as Christians, the need for concern may seem less than pressing. But let everyone who takes the scriptures seriously take a moment to consider Luke 18:8. For our Lord Jesus Christ is clearly indicating that in fact by the time of his return, faith will be a rare commodity on earth.

But when the Son of Man returns, will He find faith on the earth?
Luke 18:8b

The cause of this frightening reversal between the present day state of affairs and the dark situation implied in Christ's question to His disciples is certainly the tremendous pressure and persecution destined to be released upon believers in the final period of history before our Lord's return, namely, the Great Tribulation. The grim foreshadowing of the challenge to faith posed by the Tribulation as introduced by our Lord's question in Luke chapter eighteen is not confined to that passage. For it is during this future period that "the love of many will grow cold"

(Matt.24:12), that a great "falling away" from the faith is predicted (2Thes.2:3), and that "many will defect from the faith" (1Tim.4:1).⁶²⁴ It is during that final conflagration that faith will face its most severe test of all. Christ's question is more than just a question. It is a warning which no believer can afford to ignore.

"The days are near when every vision will be fulfilled".
Ezekiel 12:23b NIV

(27) "Son of man, the house of Israel is saying, 'The vision he sees is for many years from now, and he prophesies about the distant future.' (28) "Therefore say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: None of my words will be delayed any longer; whatever I say will be fulfilled, declares the Sovereign Lord.' "
Ezekiel 12:27-28 NIV

(3) Keep this foremost in your mind: in the end times cynics will ridicule [the truth], acting out of their own selfish lusts (4) and saying, "Where is that 'return' He promised? Everything is the same now as it was since the beginning of the world, since the time our forefathers passed on." (5) But it escapes their notice in asserting this, namely, that there were heavens long ago too, and an earth, which was [re-]established (Gen.1:2ff.) out from under water (i.e., the "waters below") and through [the midst of] water (i.e., the "waters above") by the Word of God – (6) [and that it was also] through these two [sets of waters] that the world of that time (i.e., in Noah's day) was deluged by water [from above and below] and destroyed. (7) Now the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire by that same Word (of God), preserved for the day of judgment and the destruction of godless men (i.e., at the end of history). (8) Let not this one fact escape your attention then, beloved, namely that one day is like a thousand years in the Lord's eyes, and a thousand years like one day (i.e., the final "day" will span a

millennium). (9) The Lord is not delaying in the fulfillment of His promise (as some think); rather He is exercising patience for your sake, being unwilling for anyone to perish, but desiring all instead to come to repentance. (10) For the Day of the Lord will come like a thief, a day in (i.e., over the course of) which the heavens will depart with a roar (i.e., at the end of the Millennium), the very elements will ignite and dissolve, and the earth and everything which has been done upon it will be laid bare [for the Lord's inspection] (i.e., the last judgment). (11) Since all these things are destined to disintegrate in this way, [consider] what sort of [Christians] we ought to be, [devoted to] holy and godly conduct, (12) as we wait with eager expectation and apprehension the advent of the Day of God (i.e., the 2nd Advent). For on that day (i.e., at the end of it) the heavens will burst into flame and dissolve, and the elements will catch fire and melt. (13) But we are awaiting new heavens and a new earth just as He promised – [a world] where [only] righteousness dwells.

2nd Peter 3:3-13

For those whom that day finds ready and spiritually prepared, the Tribulation stands to be our finest hour. We have confidence in the Shepherd who will lead us through it, providing for our material needs, providing for our spiritual needs with the water of truth, and leading us on the righteous road to Zion. Though it be our lot to travel that road through darkness and storm, through the very shadow of death, we need have no fear because He will preserve and protect us. Even in the kingdom of the beast, Jesus will provide for us, and bountifully so, empowering us with His Spirit, and blessing us with the most intense spiritual experiences wherewith we stand to win untold eternal blessings, an overflowing cup of them. And until that day when we see our dear Lord Jesus face to face we know that He will never withhold His blessing and His mercy from us, having made a place for us in the New Jerusalem forever – one which comports to the service and sacrifice we offer up to Him, come what may.

(1b) The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. (2) He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, (3) he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. (4) Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (5) You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. (6) Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Psalms 23:1b-6 NIV

And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

Romans 13:11 NIV

And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

1John 2:28 NKJV

"Behold, He is coming quickly. Happy is he who guards the words of the prophecy of this book [in his heart]."
Revelation 22:7

<http://ichthys.com>

¹ The important subject of personal tribulation is covered in the Peter series (a series devoted to the problem of the suffering of the believer), especially lessons 25, 26, 27. The reader is advised that a sound knowledge of what the Bible has to say about personal tribulation is a prerequisite to a proper understanding of *the* Tribulation.

² This methodology can also be gleaned from the overall outline of this seven-part series.

³ It is also the conclusion of the Jewish Age, "Daniel's Seventieth Week". See part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", for a detailed discussion of the chronology of the Church Age.

⁴ A proper understanding of the true nature of the Church and its composition (i.e., all believers from Adam to the second coming of Jesus Christ) is essential for grasping the concepts taught here. See part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement".

⁵ See the series Exodus 14: Hardening Pharaoh's Heart for the explanation of "God hardening Pharaoh's heart" as allowing Pharaoh's human will to transgress divinely set barriers beyond normal human limitations. The Exodus in general as a biblical paradigm for the Tribulation will be covered in part 7 of the present series.

⁶ The removal of the "seals" in Revelation chapter 6. This issue will be addressed in part 2 of the present series.

⁷ See the Peter's Epistles series.

⁸ For an overview of Daniel, see section IV.2.a below. The details of Daniel's prophecies regarding the Tribulation are covered in depth in parts 3A, 3B and 4 of this series.

⁹ The seven churches of Revelation (chapters 2-3) is covered in part 2A of this series.

¹⁰ See part 3B of this series for details.

¹¹ This subject is given extensive coverage in the Peter series, lesson #27.

¹² For more detailed discussions of the Plan of God, see the Peter series, lessons 3, 8, 9 and 13, and especially section II of part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series.

13 These are delineated in part 5 of the previous series, The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement".

14 See part 2 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation, "The Genesis Gap".

15 The "Gog-Magog rebellion" (which immediately precedes the end of history) is the one significant exception (Rev.20:7-10): see part 6 of this series, section IV.

16 I am indebted to Dr. Carmen Hardin for this reference. Compare Zech.9:12.

17 See section I (the Purpose of Man), and section II.1 (the Image and Likeness of God) in The Satanic Rebellion Part 3: The Purpose, Creation and Fall of Man.

18 See section II.7, "Law and nationalism as restrainers of satanic influence" in part 4 of The Satanic Rebellion, "Satan's World System".

19 Or "land" of Israel. It is no accident that the Hebrew word `arets (ארץ) can be taken in either sense, for this prophecy, like so many involving Israel, has a wider application as well. See section IV.1 below, "Hermeneutic Issues".

20 See section II.8.c, "The Jewish Ceremonial Calendar" in part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement" (especially chart #3 and its discussion).

21 See part 4 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Satan's World System".

22 See "Law and nationalism as a restrainers of satanic influence", section II.7 of part 4 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Satan's World System".

23 See part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section III.1, "Satan's antediluvian attack on the purity of the human line (the Nephilim)".

24 See the series: Exodus 14: Hardening Pharaoh's Heart.

25 A similar prophetic foreshortening occurs in the case of the doctrine of the Trinity in the Old Testament. See section II.C of Essential Doctrines of the Bible in Outline, Part 1; Theology: The Study of God.

26 See section II.7, "The Seven Days of Human History", in part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement".

27 See part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement".

28 Notably the fifth century B.C. Greek historian Thucydides in his History of the Peloponnesian War.

29 See especially "The Vanity of Life", section I.2 of part 4 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Satan's World-System: Past, Present and Future".

30 Isaiah lived and prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, i.e., circa 783-687 B.C. (Is.1:1). The year of Isaiah's commission (Is. 6:1) almost certainly forms the terminus post quem for the beginning of his ministry (ca. 740-42 B.C.), while Sennacherib's attack on Judah (ca. 701 B.C.) can be used as a solid terminus ante quem for the composition of the previous chapters (interpretation of historical allusions in the text as well as specific assumptions about the composition of the book in toto are necessary to pin down the date more precisely). The exiles began to return from the later Babylonian captivity in 538 B.C., while the seventy years ended "officially" in 516 B.C. These dates would give us an absolute maximum for the time between prophecy and initial fulfilment of ca. 227 years, and an absolute minimum of ca. 163 years.

31 See part 1 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall", for exegesis of Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28.

32 See Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War.

33 For more on the scriptural typology of Jesus Christ in general, see Bible Basics: Part 1: "Theology: The Study of God", section II.C.2: "The Messiah Pre-figured in the Old Testament".

34 These paradigms will be treated in part 7 of this series.

35 The organization of roughly the first half of Psalms into two books is almost certainly the work of that gifted prophet of God, king David, the author of the majority of the psalms contained therein (though he chose to open both books I and II with psalms not attributed to himself, psalms 1-2 and 42-50 respectively, a mark of true humility on the part of that great believer). After David's death, Solomon placed the capstone on book II with Psalm 72, and Psalms was subsequently expanded to our current collection of 150 psalms in five books (this explains Ps.72:20 and the fact that there are more "psalms of David" later in the book: these were not organized into the collection by his hand as was the case in books I and II).

36 As M.F. Unger points out in Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament v.1 (Grand Rapids 1964) 781, many of the psalms (Unger calls attention specifically to 25-39) have a four-fold application: 1) to David, 2) to the trials of the godly in every generation, 3) to the sufferings of the Jewish remnant in the Tribulation, and 4) to the suffering of our Lord during His First Advent.

37 Contrary to the opinio communis, Revelation was written toward the end of the emperor Nero's reign. Nero is the sixth king who "now is" at John's time of writing (Rev.17:10), the last of the Julio-Claudian emperors to be followed in the far future by the "seventh king" (antichrist).

38 For more on this issue see the special Read Your Bible: Protection against Cults.

39 See the special Read Your Bible: Protection against Cults.

40 Indeed, claiming that the 2nd Advent "is near", although in truth the prophesied tribulational events have yet to run their course is a characteristic doctrine of the coming "antichrists" predicted by our Lord Himself (Lk.21:8).

41 See n.1 above.

42 Compare 1Pet.1:2 and 2Pet.1:2 where we find the full construction, with the verb in the optative included: "may grace and peace abound for you".

43 The NIV's alternative reading for this and the other Revelation "seven spirits" passages of "the seven-fold Spirit of God" suggests a similar interpretation.

44 For more on the Spirit's ministry see part 5 of Bible Basics: Pneumatology.

45 This is a quote from Ex.19:6 applied here by John under the guidance of the Spirit to the entire Church, not exclusively to Israel. For the incorporation of the gentiles into Israel as the bride of Christ, see part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section II.8.

46 For the combination of the gentiles with Israel in the Church of Christ, see the discussion in part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section II.8. See section IV of the same study for the specific issue of "restoration" in God's plan.

47 Most apparent instances in the Old Testaments are actually of the Son speaking for the Father. See part 1 of Bible Basics Part 1: "Theology: The Study of God", section II, "The Trinity". There are similar overt validations by the Father of Christ's ministry during His 1st Advent: a) at its beginning with the baptism of Christ (Matt.3:17; Mk.1:11; Lk.3:22); b) at its foreshadowed conclusion at the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt.17:5; Mk.9:7; Lk.9:35); c) in response to Christ's prayer prior to His crucifixion (Jn.12:28).

48 The expression "filled with the Spirit" is also used of this ecstatic prophetic state and similar miraculous empowerments of the Spirit (cf. Lk.1:15; 1:41; 1:67; Acts 2:4; 4:8; 4:31; 9:17; 13:9). The phrase "filled with the Spirit" should, however, be carefully distinguished from Paul's command in Ephesians 5:18 which is often mistranslated. A better rendering is "keep on being full-filled or "made full" by means of the Spirit" (i.e.,

keep growing in Christ with the help of the Spirit's ministry). The verb in Ephesians is different from the Luke-Acts passages referenced above (pleroo versus pimplemi) and the Luke-Acts passages use the genitive (of filling) versus the preposition en with the dative in Ephesians 5:18. We are not commanded today to enter into this or any other state of ecstasy (generally reserved for prophets and the unique times of the inception of the Church) anymore than we are meant today to engage in speaking in tongues. See the discussion in Peter #13. For more information on the guidance the Holy Spirit provides to believers, see the Peter series, lessons 7, 14, 16 and 18. Parts 5 and 6A of Bible Basics (Pneumatology and Peripateology respectively) will deal with this topic in more detail.

49 For light as symbol of good, see part 2 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "The Genesis Gap", section II.2.b.

50 The Greek has "a son of man", a reference here (without the definite article) to the fact that this was definitely a genuine human being John saw (as opposed to an angel or a Theophany [i.e., an apparition of God in human form]). So while it is true that Jesus is indeed the Son of Man (i.e., the archetypical, perfect, genuine human being: Mk.8:31), the purpose of this reference is to assure us that Jesus is human, even in His awesome, glorified state (quite an encouragement for us who look forward to the day of our own resurrection and glorification: Rom.8:30).

51 For more information on Hades, see the Satanic Rebellion series, part 1, section II.6.d; part 2, section II.3.b; and part 5, note #28 (where Peter's role in Matt.16:18-19 is discussed).

52 It is very likely that these seven are the seven archangels. See Coming Tribulation part 3A, section I.1, "The Seven Archangels with the Seven Trumpets".

53 This is especially so since Church Age believers will ultimately be enrolled into these tribes. See part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", under "The Symbolism of the Four Gaps and their Twelve-Day Groupings".

54 The historical testimony for placing the death of John later is somewhat contradictory and entirely unconvincing. The "evidence" that does survive is derivative – both the traditional date of the book of Revelation and that of John's death are suspiciously juxtaposed with Domitian's admittedly fierce persecution of the Church. But Irenaeus' statements from which these dates are largely derived (see especially *Adversus Omnes Haereses* 5.30.3: Irenaeus is good on theological issues but notoriously deficient in chronological matters) are in themselves confusing and open to interpretation. It is easy to see how early historians without any particular evidence would naturally wish link John's death with a martyrdom at the hands of Domitian. For details and commentary see R.H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids 1998) 12, n.60, and R.H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John v.1* (Edinburgh 1920) xlv-1. However, as was argued in part 1, Revelation is best taken as having been written toward the end of the emperor Nero's reign. For Nero is the sixth king who "now is" at John's time of writing (Rev.17:10: see discussion in part 3B, section II.1.c.4), the last of the Julio-Claudian

emperors to be followed in the far future by the "seventh king" (antichrist). Therefore that John's death should occur shortly after the writing of this final book of the canon and prior to the end of the Old Testament dispensation of temple worship (which ought not extend past the point of the Church's full operational status with the passing of the apostles) is far a more likely construction of events.

⁵⁵ See n.1 above.

⁵⁶ See the discussion of "dispensations" in section II.5 of part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement".

⁵⁷ It will be recalled as well that the number "12" (i.e., the "duo-decade") is also the base unit of days in the Jewish ceremonial calendar, reflecting the proportion of believers in each of the four Ages of Human History. See section II.8.c of part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement".

⁵⁸ See in particular "The Day of the Lord Paradigm" in part 1 of the present series, section IV.1.b.

⁵⁹ See section II.8.c of part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement".

⁶⁰ Time and space will not permit a detailed consideration of the phenomenon of water baptism, a topic to be covered in Bible Basics: Part 6B: Ecclesiology. It must suffice here to point out that in New Testament passages which discuss the issue of baptism the focus is almost universally upon the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the blessed reality of unity with Christ that accompanies the salvation of every believer, with no ritual (and no water) in view (see especially Eph.4:5; and cf. Rom.6:3-4; 1Cor.12:13; Gal.3:27; Col.2:12; Tit.3:5-6; 1Pet.3:21 [no "water" in the Greek]).

⁶¹ For example, Paul goes to some lengths to describe the qualifications of deacons and elders (1Tim.3:1-13; Tit.1:5-9), but gives no suggestions about how these are to organize their church(es). Peter says nothing on the subject at all, and John in particular, although the last of the apostles, is most deferential in the use of his own authority, even in some very taxing circumstances (cf. 3rd John). We may compare the situation that confronted Moses in the organization of early Israel (Ex.18:13-26). Although he would be given the most specific guidance on many subjects, administration was something that demanded flexibility as to time and circumstances; it fell to the lot of his gentile father-in-law to suggest better arrangements.

⁶² Consider also Gal.1:6-9; 4:8-11; 4:19; Heb.5:11-14.

⁶³ This is an important caveat to keep in mind for all seven Church eras. The things that interest historians, the things that were recorded in the past, do not represent the complete record of events. We can only hope to achieve an approximate parity in matching the divinely inspired assessment of events during these seven time periods as given here with the non-inspired broad strokes of "Church history" as it has been preserved for us.

⁶⁴ See the series Peter's Epistles, lessons #10-14.

⁶⁵ This system, the devil's "world-system" of control, is the main theme of part 4 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Satan's World System". For his implementation of that system in human history, see also "Satan's Counter Strategy" in section III of part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement". Additional information on false teaching and the infiltration of the true Church is also to be found in part 3A of the present series, section II, "the Great Apostasy". See also the special Read your Bible: Protection against Cults.

⁶⁶ It is also the case that unverified rumors (which may be slanderous lies) should be paid no heed: these are inevitably more damaging to those who are innocent, for the truly guilty often take pains to squelch and conceal reports of their offensive behavior. After all, on at least one occasion, our Lord was doubted by the population of Jerusalem on the false grounds that He "was from Nazareth, not Bethlehem", which was, however, the true place of His birth (contrary to the rumor: Jn.7:41-42; cf. Matt.2:1).

⁶⁷ For detailed commentary and consideration of the devil's temptation of Eve, see Peter's Epistles #27, and part 3 of The Satanic Rebellion: "The Purpose, Creation and Fall of Man" (section IV.1-2).

⁶⁸ See especially the discussion on so-called "eternal security" in Peter's Epistles #27: Three False Doctrines that Threaten Faith.

⁶⁹ Cf. Dr. James Rosscup's, "The Overcomer of the Apocalypse," Grace Theological Journal, 3:2 (Fall, 1982) 261-86.

⁷⁰ The "tree of life" as it will exist in the New Jerusalem is covered in part 6 of the present series. For a discussion of the original "tree of life" in the garden of Eden, see section IV passim of part 3 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "The Purpose, Creation and Fall of Man". For the "seven Edens", see section II.6 of part 1 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall".

⁷¹ See A.C. Gaebelien, The Revelation, p.35f; et vid. lexica.

⁷² These principles are discussed under "The Uniqueness of Israel" in section II.8.b.i of part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement".

⁷³ See especially part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section II.8, "Evidence for the "Seven Days" Interpretation".

⁷⁴ In addition to our incomplete sources, some of these persecutions overlapped imperial reigns, with that of Septimius Severus continuing in North Africa under his successor Caracalla's reign, and that of Marcus Aurelius extending into the reign of Commodus (wherein it eventually died down).

⁷⁵ The doctrine of crowns is covered in detail in lesson #18 of the Peter's Epistles series and in part 6 of Coming Tribulation, section I.7, "The Judgment and Reward of the Church".

⁷⁶ From paragraph 50 of his Apologeticum: Plures efficimur quotiens metimur a vobis; semen est sanguis Christianorum.

77 The troubles which both the eastern and western halves of the empire suffered during the fourth and fifth centuries, especially the barbarian invasions, undoubtedly contributed to this perspective.

78 Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (3rd rev. ed.: New York 1970) 102.

79 See part 4 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Satan's World System".

80 In terms of organization, Paul's instructions to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:13-35), and to Titus concerning the situation on Crete (cf. Tit.1:5-9), John's instructions to Gaius (3Jn.1:3-10), and Peter's instructions to elders in general (1Pet.5:1-4) all indicate a large degree of local autonomy in individual churches, even while the supremely authoritative administrative gift of apostleship was still functioning. These and other passages strongly suggest that while there is no biblically ordained system of local church organizational structure (beyond the presence of gifted men to administer and teach), the existence of extra-local super-organizations is not a biblical development. This subject will be covered in detail in part 6B of Bible Basics: "Ecclesiology".

81 See part 4 of this series, "The Great Tribulation".

82 It is true that no mention of "deeds" (Greek: erga) is to be found in the case of Smyrna either (the only other church with a largely positive report), but then Smyrna is the one era wherein persecution and martyrdom were the rule – these were her works, so that our Lord says not "I know your deeds", but "I know your tribulation" (Greek: thlipsis, the root word of the Tribulation) and your poverty, but you are rich. (Rev.2:9).

83 Interestingly, Balaam's name admits of a similar etymology, for it is possible to see in the two elements of which it is built, the Hebrew words for "lord" (Baal) and "people" ('am), yielding a potential meaning of "the people are lord [or even God]".

84 Compare the stone set before Joshua the high priest in Zechariah 3:9 as a symbol of sin removed, the basis for our redemption in Jesus Christ. The color white as an indication in this context of sins cleansed is well known (cf. Is.1:18), and it is interesting to note that also in the secular world of this time, white was the color of acquittal: compare Ovid *Metamorphoses* 15.41, where a white "pebble" was used by jurymen to acquit (with a dark one used to record a guilty verdict).

85 See section III.f of part 1 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall". For the fact that part of the "name" here includes our new tribal affiliation within Israel, see section II.9.b, "Israel the ultimate organization", in part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", and see especially part 6 of this present series, section VII.7, "The Gemstone Foundations and the Tribal Gates of New Jerusalem".

86 The name is a combination of two Greek elements, the first from the verb thuo (θύω), meaning "to offer sacrifices", and the second from the adjective ateires (ἀ τειρής), meaning "unwearied/untiring".

87 We should note, moreover, that the listing of spiritual infidelity first in the sequence,

that is, before the participation in idolatry, is a clear indication that the situation has worsened since the days of Pergamum (since now the more severe offense comes first).

88 During this time period the "imperial Roman church" and the "imperial papacy" truly came into their own. True enough, one finds the roots of such behavior in the previous Church era. Consider for example Leo I (dubbed by contemporaries "the secret western emperor"), or Gregory the Great (ca. 590-640). But, beginning with the reign of Charlemagne and the establishment of the "Holy Roman Empire", it was in the era of Thyatira that the Roman see and the papacy began to effectively assert their power throughout Christendom in an ever tightening marriage of church and state. The pseudo-Isidorian decretals, the particularly venal papacy of Benedict the 9th (who became Pope at the age of only twelve years old and later sold the office for several thousand pounds of silver), and Pope Hildebrand's use of excommunication to humiliate and control the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry IV (1076), are just a few outstanding symptoms of this "Jezebel-trend".

89 For a discussion of similar events in the beast's worldwide religion, see part 4 of this series, "The Great Tribulation", and part 5, "The 2nd Advent and Armageddon".

90 It is tempting to see in the widespread elimination of so many nominal "Christians" during the next era's "black death" (mid-fourteenth century) a partial fulfillment of this prophecy, clearing away much dead wood and allowing the opportunity for spiritual rebirth (a development which would, in the event, wait upon the era of Philadelphia).

91 It is important to note that God's "mysteries" are either known only to Him, or are brought to light by Him for all those who truly want to know Him and His truth (Matt.13:11; cf. 1Cor.2:7; 1Cor.15:51). The "mystery" of Christ, and of the uniting of the gentile believers to His people Israel is essentially synonymous with the gospel (see The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5, under "The Church" and "the Mystery of Christ"), a mystery which has truly been "shouted from the roof-tops" (Lk.12:3), and which will be proclaimed worldwide in many spectacular ways before the end comes (Matt.24:14; Rev.14:6).

92 This theme of light versus darkness and day versus night to represent good versus evil is found often in scripture (cf. 1Thes.5:2-8). For a detailed treatment of the theme see part 2 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "The Genesis Gap", section II.2.

93 See part 1 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall", section III.a, "The Morning Star".

94 See section 5 of part 1 of this series under "The seven churches' angels".

95 See section 5 of part 1 of this series under "The seven spirits".

96 For more on the issue of faith and production, see in particular Peter's Epistles, Lesson #14: "Believing and Spiritual Growth", and Lesson #24, "Faith Dynamics".

97 See Peter's Epistles, lesson #13, "Sanctification".

98 The subject of the resurrection is covered in detail in part 5 of this series, section V,

"The Resurrection of the Lamb's Bride". See also Peter's Epistles: Lesson #20: "The Resurrection".

99 Now that all judgment has been committed to Him, our Lord Jesus Christ is the Judge of the living and the dead (Jn.5:22-27; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom.14:9-12; 2Tim.4:1; 1Pet.4:5).

100 See the discussion under "Ephesus" above. The issue of Church governance is to be covered in part 6B of Bible Basics: Ecclesiology. Even a cursory reading of Acts will show that the apostles and company did not proceed from a dogmatically specific blue-print on this score, but rather combined old approaches and new ideas in a very practical way, adapting what was flexible (organization) in order to serve the true goal (the gospel of Jesus Christ: salvation, sanctification, spiritual growth, and service to Him).

101 See Peter's Epistles: Lesson #13: "Sanctification".

102 For a more detailed discussion, see "The Uniqueness of Israel" in section II.8.b.i of part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement".

103 On the misapplication of this passage in support of the so-called "pre-tribulational rapture", see Peter's Epistles #27: Three False Doctrines that Threaten Faith.

104 The doctrine of crowns is covered in Peter's Epistles, lesson #18, "Eternal Rewards", and in part 6 of this series, section I.7, "The Judgment and Reward of the Church".

105 For more on our eternal body, see Peter's Epistles, lesson #20, "The Resurrection".

106 See "Man created for the glory of God" in section I.3 of part 3 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "The Purpose, Creation and Fall of Man".

107 See the discussion above in the general introduction to this section on the Seven Churches.

108 Hodge, who died in 1878, is most famous for his Systematic Theology, a careful combination of the best of the reformed teachings along with a scholarly apologetic directed against the new religion of science. Darwin, best known for his Origin of the Species, died a few years later in 1882. According to the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, he "gradually became more and more of an agnostic in religion." Darwin therefore is paradigmatic of the Laodicean Christians, waffling and wavering until finally allowing his skepticism and faith in science to quench his faith in God (apparently). One might also include F. Delitzsch (d. 1890) as a middle figure between these two. Delitzsch, a great man whose works are still of tremendous value to those pursuing biblical truth today, began to waver in his old age (under the influence of his secularly inclined son, in this writer's opinion), eventually giving credence to "modern" text-critical views of the Old Testament. In this way, it is possible to see his life as a paradigm of the transition from the Philadelphia reformers to the "modern" Laodiceans, as faith breaks down under the influence of "scientific proof".

109 Wellhausen's work ca. 1871 may be taken as the origin of source criticism, while Gunkel, ca. 1901, marks the inception of form criticism.

110 See section I.2 of part 4 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Satan's World System". Additionally, there are a number of e-mail responses on this topic posted at the Ichthys

website (see the link: Previous Postings).

111 Compare the very obvious analogy in Revelation 16:15 where clothing represents just such personal sanctification, while the lack of it occasions shame.

112 e.g., these same two roots are also paired in the Hebrews 12:5 quote of Proverbs 3:11.

113 "Jealous" and "zealous" are the exact same word in Hebrew: qana`, קנא. The root idea is of redness in the face, betokening a deep inner stirring that may be for positive ("zealous") or negative ("jealous") ends. See BDB in loco.

114 See The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 1, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall", section II.3, "The Three Heavens".

115 It will also be recalled that Philadelphia, the penultimate Church era preceding Laodicea, is "kept from the great hour of testing" in chronological terms by the interposition of Laodicea, the current Church era which will spill into the Tribulation.

116 To understand the phrase in Revelation 1:19 "the things that are [now] happening" any other way than as an overview of the entire Church Age would necessarily require us also to perversely assume that the entire Church Age has for some reason been left out of our Lord's synopsis of future events (with the exception of the contemporary situation of seven local churches, a small part of the Church even at that time).

117 For a synopsis of this process in the future, see part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section IV, "Things to Come: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement Phases II and III".

118 This principle, true of salvation, also holds good for the cleansing of our sin through confession, and the laver was indeed used for symbolic cleansing (compare Ex.30:19-21 with Jn.13:1-20, where in both cases only the hands and feet are washed; cf. 1Jn.1:9).

119 Symbolism of the colors is according to M.F. Unger, Commentary on the Old Testament (Chicago 1981) v.1, p.135. These features are also true of the inner veil (Ex.26:31).

120 See The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 1, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall", section II.6, "The Seven Edens".

121 See The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 1, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall", II.5.b, "The Illustration of the Tabernacle".

122 Literally, "newly slain".

123 The twelve loaves show that He is sufficient for all: one loaf for each of the tribes of Israel, with Israel itself representing the entire future Body of Christ (see part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section II.8.b.i, "The Uniqueness of Israel").

124 As the Word is immaterial and divine in every way, so the lampstand, representing the light of the gospel in the Person of Christ, contains no earthly element (i.e., all gold, no acacia wood). Likely for this same reason, the lampstand lacks the golden "crown" (zer) which the altar and table possess, since this "crown" is indicative of the reign of the Messiah "in the flesh".

125 Significantly, the table in the tabernacle was also placed "below" the altar, that is,

farther away from the veil, just as from John's perspective these believers are closer to him than to the altar, the import of "below" in Revelation 6:9 (cf. Ex.40:22-28).

126 The same is also most likely true of the second temple of Zerubbabel (cf. Ezra 6:3), later "rebuilt" by Herod. Of this temple, before its reconstruction, we have only the description in Cyrus' letter (in the citation above), of which the critical phrase is "let the foundations (i.e., of the first temple) be repaired" (so NASB, Koeler-Baumgartner's Lexicon, C.F. Keil's Commentary, omn. in loc.). This would have preserved the original dimensions of width and breadth (and one must assume that the same height was preserved as well, producing the same cube shape). The specific width and height given later in the letter in neither case determine the internal dimensions (just as Solomon's temple was "thirty cubits high" overall, but the holy of holies only twenty cubits high, a fact that can only be interpreted to mean that the preservation of the cubical shape of the tabernacle's holy of holies was deliberate: compare 1Ki.6:2 with 1Ki.6:20). If Josephus is to be believed, Herod's modifications resulted in a "raising of the roof" of the inner sanctum to thirty cubits, thus defacing the cube (and how typical of unbelieving "worship" of God to replace truth and true symbol with a meaningless, even a defiling sort of ornamentation).

127 In this imagery, moreover, the relationship of Moses to Christ on earth parallels that of Jesus and the Father in heaven: cf. Ex.25:22: "there . . . I [Jesus representing the Father] will meet with you [Moses a type of Christ; cf. Deut.18:18; Heb.3:1-6]; there are many points of typological symbolism between Moses and Christ in scripture.

128 Jesus, of course, offered up His life, not literally His blood, and in the book of Hebrews great care is taken to avoid giving this misleading impression (cf. Heb.8:3: "something to offer"). For "the blood of Christ" is a symbol of Jesus' sacrifice just as "the Lamb of God" is a title symbolic of His sacrifice. The analogy is of sacrificial animals as types of Jesus, and animal blood as types of His death on the cross. We are not to take Jesus' "blood" in this figure as literal anymore than we are to consider Him a literal "lamb" (i.e., animals represent Christ; animal blood represents Christ's spiritual death for us; cf. Jn.1:29; 1Cor.11:23-26). The aim of avoiding such heresy is one reason why John takes such great pains to show that Jesus did not bleed to death, but "gave up His spirit" while the blood was yet in His body (Jn.19:33-35; cf. Matt.27:50; Mk.15:37; Lk.23:46; Jn.19:30; 1Jn.5:6-8). See also Peter's Epistles #9: "Salvation through Faith, and the Blood of Christ".

129 The ark itself will appear in the heavenly temple later at Revelation 11:19, but as a symbol of the true temple and worship of God and the impending judgment upon the anti-God religion which the beast has centered in the earthly temple (the rightful place of the ark; see in loc.).

130 See "The Illustration of the Tabernacle" in section II.5.b of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 1, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall". More detailed discussions of the cherubim may also be found in The Satanic Rebellion series, parts 1 (section III.i), 4 (section III.3.b.1), and 5 (section II.4).

131 It is possible that this close relationship of the Messiah to the Father in physically sharing His throne was also represented in the construction of Solomon's exceptional kingly throne. In 2nd Chronicles 9:17-19, we are told that a golden "footstool" or chebesh was attached to this throne (along with the steps), but the meaning of the word is not clear, and it is within the realm of possibility that the chebesh represents a secondary seat within the throne itself rather than a footstool. This possibility is strengthened when we consider that 1) chebesh is not the normal word for "footstool" in Hebrew; 2) the word chebesh is otherwise unattested in Hebrew, occurring only in this verse (so that this context can be our only clear guide to its meaning), and 3) at least one manuscript and edition read chebhes instead of chebesh. The alternative reading might mean that the throne included a secondary seat called a "lamb" (the word indicated by the spelling change). This name would no doubt come from the shape of the seat (consider the fact that the back of the throne is an 'egel, or "calf", from the rounded shape of a calf's head: 1Ki.10:19). Considering that the "Lamb" is soon to appear in the midst of the heavenly throne (Rev.5:6), this reading of 2nd Chronicles 9:17-19 at least deserves consideration.

132 See especially part 1, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall", section III.i "Satan's Original Status: Cherub"; part 4, "Satan's World-System, Past, Present and Future", section III.3.b.1 "Titles of Rank: Cherubs"; and part 5, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section II.4 "The Four Ages of Human History (represented by the cherubim)".

133 This "problem" of the incompatibility of a Holy God with a corrupted earth was apparently anticipated by the devil and used as propaganda to convince his fellows of God's inability to react to his rebellion short of destroying all creation. But while Satan anticipated the "problem", he was completely surprised by God's blessed and unparalleled solution in the Person of Jesus Christ. See "Satan's coup d'état", section III.3.1 of Part 1 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall".

134 "Two-heavens" is the literal meaning of the Hebrew dual form of the common word translated "heaven" in most versions of the Old Testament. See "The Three Heavens", section II.3 of Part 1 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall".

135 See The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 1, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall", section II.6, "The Seven Edens".

136 See "Definition of Theophany and Christophany", section II.C.3.a, in part 1 of Bible Basics: "Theology: the Study of God".

137 Therefore most of the appearances noted above are really of our Lord Jesus Christ acting in the Father's stead (compare Is.6:1-6 with Jn.12:41). Given that Christ is acting for the Father and as the Father (i.e., His close representative, so close that distinction is difficult to make without scriptural guidance), the descriptions provided by these passages may be taken as also applicable to the Father's theophanies (a point indicated as well by the close similarity in appearance between the two noted above; see

"Appearances of Christ in the Old Testament", section II.C.3, in part 1 of Bible Basics: "Theology: the Study of God").

¹³⁸ This correspondence of Hebrew gemstones with Greek equivalents which we have noted in the past is maintained by John also in his description of the gates of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:18-21. Compare Exodus 28:17-20; 39:10-13; Ezekiel 28:13, and see the series, The Satanic Rebellion, part 4, section III.3.b.2, part 5, section II.8.b.i.7, and Coming Tribulation, part 6, section VII.7.

¹³⁹ In the same way, the strong angel with the rainbow in Revelation 10:1 who is a type of Christ likewise symbolizes God's re-conquest and restoration of the earth in the Person of the returning Messiah.

¹⁴⁰ See The Satanic Rebellion, part 4, "Satan's World-System, Past, Present and Future", section III.3.b.2, "Elders".

¹⁴¹ See Peter's Epistles: Lesson #18: "Eternal Rewards", and Coming Tribulation part 6, section I.7, "The Judgment and Reward of the Church".

¹⁴² See "the Holy Spirit (the 3rd Person of the Trinity)", section II.B.3.b.3 in part 1 of Bible Basics: "Theology: the Study of God".

¹⁴³ For more details, see The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 2, "The Genesis Gap".

¹⁴⁴ It should be remembered, however, that while in spatial terms the distance between the earth and these "waters above" on the other side of the universe is immense (and perhaps even unknowable), in theological terms the "distance" between us and the third heaven behind this final barrier is infinitely small, if invisible. For God is omnipresent, although only visible with the eyes of faith through the clear witness He provides. See figure #2 above.

¹⁴⁵ For a discussion of this truly dual form (pace most secular scholarship), see "The Three Heavens", section II.3 of Part 1 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall", especially footnote #12.

¹⁴⁶ See 1st Peter 3:20 for a similar use of the preposition *dia*, where it also means "going in-between" (rather than "by means of").

¹⁴⁷ Mentioned as a possibility in both the Bauer-Leander grammar and the Koehler-Baumgartner lexicon. See references in Jenni and Westermann's *Theologisches Handwoerterbuch zum Alten Testament* v.2 (Munich 1979) s.v. שמים.

¹⁴⁸ "Abyss" is properly a name for the sea: see The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 2, "The Genesis Gap", section II.3.b, "The Sea as a Sign of Divine Judgment".

¹⁴⁹ See The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 2, "The Genesis Gap", section II.3, "The Sea".

¹⁵⁰ See especially The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: part 5, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section II.4, "The Four Ages of Human

History", where the supposed differences of representation between the cherubs of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Revelation are reconciled and explained. In the same series, see also part 1, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall", section III.i, "Cherub", part 4 of "Satan's World System", section III.3.b.1, "Cherubs", and in Bible Basics, part 2A: "Angelology", section II.9.3.1, "Cherubs".

¹⁵¹ See R.L. Harris' article sub voce in the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (Chicago 1980), as well the Gesenius, KB, and BDB lexicon entries.

¹⁵² From the Hebrew root seraph , שרף "to burn". See The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 1, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall", section III.i, "Cherub".

¹⁵³ i.e., a Christophany, or pre-incarnation manifestation of Jesus Christ. See Bible Basics: Part 1, "Theology: the Study of God", section II.C.3, "Appearances of Christ in the Old Testament".

¹⁵⁴ See The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 5, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section II.4, "The Four Ages of Human History".

¹⁵⁵ See The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 5, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section IV.3.c, "Replacement III: The Advent of the Father".

¹⁵⁶ See The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 1, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall", section III.g, "Satan's Original Status: Tabrets and pipes"

¹⁵⁷ In addition to the section "Elders" above, see The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation Part 4, "Satan's World-System, Past, Present and Future", section III.3.b.2 "Titles of Rank: Elders".

¹⁵⁸ If not meant to be literally future from this point (i.e., only to begin happening at the inception of the Tribulation), this would be a completely unparalleled usage of the future tense in Greek (including in the New Testament). Attempts to explain these futures as influenced by the Hebrew imperfect (so Moulton, Grammar of the Greek New Testament [Edinburgh 1963] v.3, p.86, et al.), not only fail to persuade, but also fail to solve the problem: the Hebrew imperfect in a completely parallel construction would also be prima facie future.

¹⁵⁹ That is, at the end of the Church Age: see part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion Series, "Judgment, Restoration, and Replacement", section II.4, "The Four Ages of Human History".

¹⁶⁰ It is quite possible that the bound codex book with which we are now so familiar was invented (or at least brought to prominence) by Christians in order to provide a complete copy of the scriptures in one piece. See the article by Peter Katz, "The Early Christians' use of Codices instead of rolls", JTS 44 (1945) 63-65.

¹⁶¹ The Hebrew imperfect tense in combination with the preposition 'adh, עד, allows in this instance for the commencement of the process rather than requiring its prior completion (i.e., "Sit down until the rendering of Your enemies a footstool for your feet"). The Messiah is not being told to wait passively in heaven until everything is resolved, but to wait upon the appointed time when things will begin to be resolved. Thus Christ's direct participation in the Tribulation (most prominently in His personal destruction of the armies of antichrist at Armageddon) is not in any way in conflict with this passage.

¹⁶² See The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 3, "The Purpose, Creation and Fall of Man", section I.2, "Man created to replace Satan and his angels".

¹⁶³ The reading of the best Greek text has been given here. Most translation erroneously place the creation in the role of choir (based upon the reading of less authoritative manuscripts), whereas the entire creation is in actuality represented here as the substantive element over which our Lord is about to take control.

¹⁶⁴ See "Roles of the Trinity in the Plan of God", section II.B.3, in part 1 of Bible Basics: "Theology: the Study of God".

¹⁶⁵ See part 2 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: "The Genesis Gap", section II.4: "The Restraining Ministry of the Holy Spirit".

¹⁶⁶ See part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section III.1: "Satan's antediluvian attack on the purity of the human line (the Nephilim)".

¹⁶⁷ See The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: part 4 "Satan's World System", section II.5 "The Limits of Satan's Control over the World"; and part 1, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall", section II.4, "The Operational Sphere of Angels".

¹⁶⁸ As we shall see in due course, both the trumpets and the bowls represent cycles of actual divine judgments, with the trumpets representing an inaugural sequence (akin to the ten plagues against Egypt), and the bowls representing God's final prelude of warning prior to the Second Advent.

¹⁶⁹ See Part 1: "Introduction", section I.2.a, "Tribulation".

¹⁷⁰ Antichrist's kingdom is the same as Daniel's fourth beast, revived Rome (compare Dan.2:40-43 with Dan.9:26), a topic taken up in part 3B of this series. On the symbolism of white as the Roman color of victory (especially the white horse), see H.B. Swete's note in The Apocalypse of Saint John (Cambridge 1908) 93: "cf. Verg. Aen. iii.537 'quattuor hic, primum omen, equos in gramine vidi | tondentes campum late candore nivali'; on which Servius remarks, 'hoc ad victoriae omen pertinet'" (emphasis added).

¹⁷¹ The devil will "pull out all the stops" during this final seven years of his semi-rule. See part one of this series, section III, "General Character of the Tribulation".

¹⁷² cf. 2Ki.3:22, "red like blood", where in the Septuagint version the same Greek word for "red" is used as in our context: pyrros (πυρρός). We can also see here from the fact that red is the color of the dragon, Satan, in Revelation 12:3 a clear reference to evil (in this context the evil manifest in murder and bloodshed).

¹⁷³ This is not yet religious persecution – believers at this time are housed in heaven after death, not Hades (as they were before the ascension of our Lord: see above under our discussion of "The Holy Place").

¹⁷⁴ Compare the Septuagint's habitual translation of the Hebrew dheber ("plague": דבר) with the Greek thanatos ("death": θάνατος, as in here in Revelation 6:8): e.g., Lev.26:25; 1Chron.21:12; Jer.21:6-7; Ezek.5:12 (et passim in Ezek.).

¹⁷⁵ As we have a plural, the definite article here can hardly be generic, thus providing a further grammatical obstacle for taking these as wild beasts in general rather than as particular and well-known "beasts", namely the "beasts" who can only be antichrist and his false prophet. Moreover, in the Ezekiel chapter 14 parallel, the beasts come last; in

Revelation 6, beasts are not mentioned until this point – except for the beast, antichrist, the focus of the very first seal.

176 The phraseology "of the earth" (where a simple genitive is used) is different from that in Revelation 13:11 (where we find the preposition ek, "from", describing the false prophet's origin). Both antichrist and his false prophet are "of the earth" (i.e., earthly, indicating these trends are not of divine orchestration), whereas the false prophet originates "from the earth" as opposed to the origin of antichrist "from the sea" in Rev.12:17-13:1 (to be discussed in part 4 of this series).

177 It is true that the "first" is literally to be rendered "one of the living creatures", but the occurrence of the cardinal number "one" to lead a sequence of following ordinals is not unprecedented in biblical usage: cf. the Genesis days of recreation where "one day" in Gen.1:5 is followed by "the second day", "the third day", etc., and is therefore usually translated "the first day" [so KJV, NIV, though NASB does have "one day"].

178 They are not "under" the altar, but "below" it in the sense that they are standing lower than the altar which is before the elevated throne. The mention of the altar, a type of Christ as we have seen above, emphasizes the blessed fellowship with Him that all who have died for Him will ever enjoy. Soon to join these martyrs of the past in this same place of honor "before the throne" [= "below the altar"] will be the tribulational martyrs (Rev.7:9).

179 On this most extreme example of suffering for Christ, see Peter's Epistles #25: "Personal Tribulation", and

180 The immaterial part of the human being is, properly speaking, the [human] spirit. In combination with the body, this immaterial part of mankind enjoys an inner life – the thoughts and intents of the heart, which word is a virtual biblical synonym for "soul". For a detailed explanation of the biblical usage of "soul", "heart", and "spirit", see The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: part 3, "The Purpose, Creation and Fall of Man", section II.3, "The Human Spirit", and section II.4, "The Dichotomy of Man".

181 For discussion of the resurrection body and the believer's interim state after death, see also Peter's Epistles #20: "The Resurrection".

182 It should be noted here, given the context of the first four seals (whose horses are symbolic of tribulational trends) that these horses of Zechariah chapter six are real (albeit heavenly). Compare the horse and horses of Christ and His army of resurrected believers in Revelation 19:11-14 (and cf. 2Ki.2:11; 6:17; Ps.68:17; Is.66:15; Hab.3:8; 3:15; Zech.1:8-11).

183 In spiritual terms, this, of course, is a mandate given to all believers (cf. 1Cor.11:1; 1Thes.1:6). See Peter's Epistles #17, "Imitating Christ".

184 See part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section II.8.c, "The Symbolism of the Four Gaps and their Twelve-Day Groupings" point #5, "Israel is the ultimate organization".

185 The clear implication for gentile Christians, many of whom do not fully appreciate the historical importance of Jews in the Church or their primacy in the plan of God, is that care and circumspection should be exercised when giving the gospel to those of Jewish background who have not as yet put their faith in Jesus Christ. We are all responsible to witness to our Lord, but we must always do so with sensitivity (cf. 1Cor.9:19-23).

186 A phenomenon we have discussed before: see part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section II.8.b.i, "The Uniqueness of Israel".

187 The apostle Paul's life of ministry is also strikingly similar in this regard (1Cor.4:8-13; 2Cor.4:7-12; 6:3-10; 11:16-33; Phil.3:7-11; et passim in Acts and the Pauline Epistles), a fact that should not surprise given his close "imitation of Christ" (1Cor.11:1).

188 . cf. the Passover mark (Ex.12:7). Other examples of unseen divine protection of believers include, but are certainly not limited to, the universal sealing of the Holy Spirit for Church-Age believers (2Cor.1:21-22; Eph.1:13-14; 4:30), Elisha's chariots of fire (2Ki.6:17), the Angel of the Lord's protection of Israel (Is.37:36; 63:9), and the "guardian angels" of individual believers (Matt.18:10; cf. Ps.91).

189 Compare also the "sealing" of the Spirit that all believers now enjoy which guarantees our resurrection as believers in Jesus Christ (see section III.2 above; cf. 2Cor.1:21-22; Eph.1:13-14; 4:30), and also the seven seals on the "scroll" of the book of Revelation which prevent (on God's authority) its implementation before the proper time (see section IV above).

190 The ministry and sacrifice of the 144,000 is unquestionably at least partially in view in Revelation 17:6 where the woman Babylon is drunk with "the blood of the saints, even from the blood of the witnesses (i.e., martyrs) of Jesus" (cf. Lk.21:13).

191 On the connection of this passage with worldwide evangelism as a sign of the "end", see below, section VII, "Signs of the Coming Tribulation".

192 For the chronology of the ministries of Jesus and John, see part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section II.9.a.3, "The Crucifixion of Christ".

193 Ephraim is the younger yet "greater" son, and is therefore identified here by his father's name (cf. Gen.48:19; Num.13:11 has "tribe of Joseph" explained by "tribe of Manasseh").

194 Compare, for example, the special honors that fall to the lot of the twelve apostles (the "thrones of the twelve" of Lk.22:30; their "twelve gates" of Rev.21:14).

195 . See part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section II.8.c.7, "The Jewish Ceremonial Calendar: Tabernacles (Booths)".

196 See part 1 of this series, section V, under Revelation 1:3, "because the time is near".

197 See part 4 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Satan's World System".

198 For extensive discussion, see Peter's Epistles #27: "Three Doctrines that Threaten Faith".

199 Acts 1:7 is often mistranslated "It is not for you to know", but should be rendered "It is not for you to decide the times and the seasons". The Greek verb gignosko commonly has this meaning of "decide" especially when it is in the aorist as it is here. The context strongly supports this revised translation since our Lord immediately adds "which the Father has ordained by His authority". That is to say, Jesus' point is that it is the Father who has decided these matters; they are not to be decided by your wishes. For our Lord's disciples had just very clearly expressed the wish through their question in the preceding verse six for Him to establish the Kingdom immediately. Therefore our Lord's reproof in verse seven is not a commendation of complete ignorance about the Father's timetable, but rather a reminder to them that it is His will in these matters that counts, not theirs; they would have to remain patient, even though from their perspective the time seemed ripe for the commencement of the Messiah's kingdom. We must also take into consideration the fact that this statement was given to the apostles prior to the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost. The Spirit is the agent of inspiration, chronology included, who, as Jesus had already made clear, would be the One to relate to them "the things to come" (Jn.16:13; cf. 2Pet.1:16-21). Since they will later come to understand the "things to come", verse seven must also be understood in conjunction with verse eight: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you . . .", a statement that clearly includes the previously promised further revelation of the Spirit (not excluding information about the end times). This is why, a few short years later, Paul can tell the Thessalonians the exact opposite of Acts 1:7 (that is, as it is generally misconstrued): "concerning the times and the seasons, you have no need that anyone write you, for you know very well . . ." (1Thes.5:1-2).

200 In fact, all of the specific references to be on watch which occur in the Bible are not pre-tribulational in application, but pre-Great Tribulation and pre-2nd Advent (e.g., Lk.12:39-40; 17:26-36; 21:7-36).

201 See part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section III.1, "Satan's antediluvian attack on the purity of the human line (the Nephilim)".

202 There are, of course, elements within the contemporary state of Israel who would like to begin reconstruction immediately (Gershon Solomon's "Temple Faithful" movement being perhaps the best known), but the political obstacles to this are

formidable.

203 The reading of codex Sinaiticus, "inner" (Greek esother: ἔσωθεν), is the correct one. For the naos or temple includes the innermost or "priest's" court (including the altar) which has here been "given to the gentiles" who are trampling the city – i.e., these gentiles should not be in this sacred place. The reading exother is incorrect, and we do not have here a reference to the Herodian "court of the gentiles".

204 While Zechariah 6:12-13 may seem to imply that the Messiah is the one who will rebuild the temple, it is more likely that yibneh in that context means "build up" (cf. Ps.147:2 et al.), and refers to the cleansing, repair, and expansion of the whole temple complex rather than its initial rebuilding (similarly, Zech.6:12; cf. 1Ki.6:1). We may compare Ezekiel 40-44 wherein the millennial temple complex is much more extensive than anything we are given to assume about the tribulational temple. What Herod did in turning the small second temple into a massive structure furnishes a loose parallel.

205 Literally, "thunders and voices", but these are one and **Error! Main Document Only**.the same (i.e., this is a hendiadys); the voices are words of God, incomprehensible to the world at large, which are comparable to thunder, though discernible from it (cf. Jn.12:28-30; and see below).

206 See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section II.8, "Evidence for "The Seven Days of Re-Creation".

207 See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section II.8.c "The Jewish Ceremonial Calendar".

208 See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 4: "Satan's World System", section III.3.b.3, "Archangels".

209 Probably because of a failure to understand that the incense empowers prayers (lit., is "for [the benefit of] the prayers"), the use of the dative case here has proved puzzling for many commentators. The dative case in Greek is frequently used in this sense of "for the benefit of" (often termed the "dative of advantage", essentially equivalent to our English preposition "for" in this sense).

210 See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 4: "Satan's World System", section III.3.b.4, "Authorities".

211 See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 1: "Satan's Rebellion and Fall", section II.5.b, "The Illustration of the Tabernacle".

212 See especially Peter's Epistles, lesson #8, "The Results of our Election", and lesson #13, "Sanctification".

213 See [The Satanic Rebellion: Part 4: "Satan's World System"](#).

214 All of the so-called "Psalms of imprecation" are at their base just such calls upon the Almighty to judge evil and evildoers, a valid and appropriate sort of prayer which takes the matter out of the believer's own hands and commits it to God (just as we all should do at all times).

215 See [The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: "The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation"](#), section VII, "Signs of the Coming Tribulation".

216 The question as to whether believers will understand these "voices" is an open one. Christ certainly understood the "voice" of the Father in the example quoted (Jn.12:28-30; cf. Matt.3:17; Rev.10:3-4), but it is unclear whether John and His other disciples did (they may well have received instruction from our Lord after the fact in an analogous manner to the parables). Paul understands the Lord's "voice" in Acts 9:3-7 (where it is accompanied by flashing light), but his companions do not (Acts 22:9). We are given no clear indication here about believers' perception of these future messages and can only say that this question must wait upon the event to reveal the answer.

217 See [The Satanic Rebellion: Part 4: "Satan's World System"](#), section III.3.b.3, "Elders".

218 The typological blending of Satan and antichrist seen here is not unparalleled in biblical prophecy (cf. the "king of Babylon" in Is.14:3-23, who likewise represents the careers of both the devil and his earthly pseudo-Messiah). For more on the use of typology in biblical prophecy, see [The Coming Tribulation: Part 1: "Introduction"](#), section IV.1.d, "Typology and Sequence in Old Testament Prophecy".

219 See [The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: "The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation"](#), section III, "The Restraining Ministry of the Holy Spirit".

220 Abraham had thought there were at least "ten righteous", but only Lot, Lot's wife, and their two daughters were escorted from Sodom – and Lot's wife, upon "looking back", turned into a pillar of salt (Gen.19:26). Given the behavior of his daughters later in the same chapter, we would be right to question whether any were righteous apart from Lot (see 2Pet.2:6-9), an exigency which would render Abraham's assessment a ten-fold over-estimate.

221 See [Peter's Epistles lessons #26, "Reactions to Personal Tribulation"](#), and #27 "Three False Doctrines That Threaten Faith".

222 As may be expected, there are many other words in both the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament used to represent the concept of apostasy, for example, *anakampto* (ἀνακάμπτω, "to turn back"; cf. 2Pet.2:21), *skandalizo* (σκανδαλίζω, "to make stumble"; cf. Matt.24:10), *pasha* (פּשָׁע, "rebellion"; cf. Dan.9:24), *sur* (סור,

"apostasy"; cf. Is.1:5), *maradh* (מרד, "to rebel"; cf. Num.14:9), and all of their cognates, to name but a few.

223 See [Peter's Epistles](#), lessons #21, #26, and #27, and the series [Exodus 14: Hardening Pharaoh's Heart](#).

224 See [The Satanic Rebellion: Part 3: "The Purpose, Creation, and Fall of Man"](#), section I, "The Purpose of Man".

225 See [The Coming Tribulation: Part 2A: "The Seven Churches"](#) under the discussions of Ephesus and Pergamum.

226 That the information in Daniel chapter 8 applies to the end times is made clear in verse 19: "[The angel] said, 'Behold, I am going to make known to you what will happen at the latter [time] of [God's] wrath (i.e., the Tribulation), for [this will all happen] at the appointed time of the end (i.e., the end times)'".

227 For the seven Church eras and their prophetic significance, see [The Coming Tribulation: Part 2A: "The Seven Churches"](#).

228 Compare Joseph's dream of the seven years of prosperity preceding the seven years of famine in Egypt (prophetic of the Tribulation: Gen.41:1-40), and see also [The Coming Tribulation: Part 1: "Introduction"](#), section IV.1.b., "The "Day of the Lord" Paradigm".

229 On the melding of organized "Christianity" into worship of antichrist, see part 4 of this series, section VI.1, "The Anti-Christian Religion and its Worldwide Expansion".

230 See [The Coming Tribulation: Part 2A: "The Seven Churches"](#), section 7, "Laodicea: Apathy".

231 For an introduction to spiritual growth, see the [Peter's Epistles](#) series, especially lessons 10-14.

232 See [The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement"](#), section II.8.b.ii and iii, "The Church" and "the Mystery of Christ".

233 See [The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: "The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation"](#), section III.2, "The Mystery of Lawlessness".

234 See [The Satanic Rebellion](#) series, in particular part 4, "Satan's World System", and part 5, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement".

235 See [The Satanic Rebellion: Part 4: "Satan's World System"](#), section IV, "Satan's World-System: Tactical Doctrine [the three strategic lies]", and V.2, "Demon Influence".

236 See [The Satanic Rebellion: Part 4: "Satan's World System"](#), section II.6, "The

conscience as a restrainer of satanic influence", and section II.7, "Law and nationalism as a restrainers of satanic influence".

²³⁷ See [The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: "The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation"](#), section III, "The Restraining Ministry of the Holy Spirit".

²³⁸ See [The Satanic Rebellion: Part 1: "Satan's Rebellion and Fall"](#), section II.6, "The Seven Edens".

²³⁹ See [The Coming Tribulation: Part 1: "Introduction"](#), section I, "Definition and Overview of the Tribulation", and section II, "The Tribulation in Context: Satan's Rebellion and the Plan of God".

²⁴⁰ See [The Satanic Rebellion: Part 4: "Satan's World System"](#), section II.7, "Law and nationalism as a restrainers of satanic influence".

²⁴¹ Literally "women" who are singled out here because they were the traditional administrative heads of households in the ancient world (cf. Prov.31:10-31), and households tended to act corporately (Tit.1:11; cf. Acts 16:31) **Error! Main Document Only.** – but the characterization in the quote here is certainly meant to be understood as applicable to men as well.

²⁴² See the series [Exodus 14: Hardening Pharaoh's Heart](#), and [Peter's Epistles](#), lessons #21, #26, and #27.

²⁴³ See [The Satanic Rebellion: Part 1: "Satan's Rebellion and Fall"](#), section I.3.d, "Angels are similar to mankind in several important ways", and [Peter's Epistles](#), lesson #22, under "Angels are Watching Us".

²⁴⁴ Chapters one and two of Habakkuk are a clear case of "the Day of the Lord paradigm", with Babylon and its king doubling for the tribulational Babylon and antichrist. See [The Coming Tribulation: Part 1: "Introduction"](#), section IV.1.a, "The 'Day of the Lord' Paradigm".

²⁴⁵ For more on these basic Christian virtues, see [Peter's Epistles](#), lessons #16 and #17 on "virtue thinking"; #21: "Perseverance of Faith"; #24: "Faith Dynamics", and see also [The Satanic Rebellion: Part 4: "Satan's World System"](#), section IV, "Satan's World-System: Tactical Doctrine", for the three virtues of faith, hope and love as they counter Satan's lies.

²⁴⁶ This is an extensive topic which can only be covered in part here. The reader is strongly urged to consult the other detailed treatments of this critical subject contained in 1) [Peter's Epistles #27 "Three False Doctrines That Threaten Faith"](#), 2) [Read your Bible: Protection against Cults](#), 3) [The Satanic Rebellion: Part 4: "Satan's World System"](#), section IV, "Satan's Tactical Doctrine", and 4) [The Coming Tribulation: Part 2A: "The Seven Churches" "False Teachers, False Doctrines, and False Christians"](#)

(under the discussion of Ephesus).

²⁴⁷ See [The Satanic Rebellion: Part 1: "Satan's Rebellion and Fall"](#), section IV.3.b, "Satan's Revolutionary Platform".

²⁴⁸ This last "face" put forward by antichrist may seem somewhat bizarre to many contemporary believers, but it is well to remember that during the early history of the Church the worship of angels constituted one of its most deadly threats. The book of Hebrews is directed in no small part against this heresy as contemporary Judaism saw the Messiah as an angel (this explains why the book focuses so heavily upon proving Jesus' superiority to angels and at the same time demonstrating His true humanity). Later Jewish lore explained "let us make man" in Gen.1:26, for example, as God in consultation with the angels. Ephesians and Colossians likewise are aimed in no small part at combating the incipient heresy of Gnosticism which is also a form of angel-worship (see part 2A of this series).

²⁴⁹ See [The Satanic Rebellion: Part 3: "The Purpose, Creation, and Fall of Man"](#), section IV, "The Fall of Man", and [Peter's Epistles lesson #27 "Three False Doctrines That Threaten Faith"](#).

²⁵⁰ See [The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement"](#), section III.1, "Satan's antediluvian attack on the purity of the human line (the Nephilim)".

²⁵¹ See [The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement"](#), section III.2, "Satan's postdiluvian attack on human freedom (the Tower of Babel: Genesis 11:1-9)".

²⁵² The "miracles" performed by Pharaoh's court magicians, Jannes and Jambres, provide a parallel (Ex.7:11; 7:22; 2Tim.3:8-9). In both the past and future cases, however, the power of God will prove superior and more impressive to an incalculable degree.

²⁵³ See "The Christ Test" in, [Read Your Bible: A Basic Christian Right and Responsibility](#).

²⁵⁴ For an overview of these difficulties, see [The Coming Tribulation: Part 1: "Introduction"](#), section III, "General Character of the Tribulation".

²⁵⁵ Psalm 66 as a whole has prophetic application as a victory Psalm for the Messiah's return (with the verses quoted here focusing on the tribulation from which the congregation of the faithful have been delivered).

²⁵⁶ See [The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement"](#), section II.8.c.3.5, "Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah)".

257 In terms of their rank, these four angels are most likely "authorities" (Greek: *exousiai*, *exousiai*), the next highest ranking of the elect angels after the archangels (who sound the trumpet blasts which set these subordinate angels to work). See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 4: "Satan's World System", section III.3.b.4, "Authorities".

258 See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 4: "Satan's World System", section III.5, "God's employment of evil spirits".

259 See Bible Basics: Part 2A: Angelology, section II.9.3.4, "Authorities".

260 See section V. below.

261 In contrast to this rocky hail, both the hail accompanying the earthquake following the seventh trumpet at the commencement of the Great Tribulation (Rev.11:19), and the hail accompanying the great earthquake as part of the seventh bowl judgment (Rev.16:21) will apparently be composed of ice.

262 The Greek "*chalaza kai pyr*", "hail and fire", is what is known as a "hendiadys", that is, a figure of speech whereby a single element (in this case, the flaming meteorites) is described in terms of its two prime characteristics individually in order to give each characteristic the maximum emphasis **Error! Main Document Only.** – just as in the case of the "fire and brimstone" rained on Sodom and Gomorrah, where we are to understand that the sulfur was aflame, not that the fire and the sulfur fragments were somehow separate.

263 It is often the case that widespread phenomena, even relatively mild ones, can be more fatal than even the most dramatic localized ones. To take but one well-known example, the influenza epidemic which followed the First World War killed considerably more people worldwide than died as combatants in the war itself.

264 See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 2: "The Genesis Gap", section II.2.d, "Darkness resulting from divine judgment".

265 See Bible Basics: Part 2A: Angelology, section II.9.7, "God's employment of evil spirits".

266 See Part 2: "The Genesis Gap", section II.b, "The Sea as a Sign of Divine Judgment". See also The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: "The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation", section I under "The Sea".

267 On angels as stars, compare Is.40:26 with Lk.2:13.

268 See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section III.1, "Satan's antediluvian attack on the purity of the human line (the Nephilim)".

269 The "hornet" is entirely metaphorical designed to provide a point of human appreciation for the divine demoralization God would produce as comparable to a plague of hornets. This is clear from the fact the that Angel of the Lord is really responsible for this effect in Exodus 23:23.

270 The idea that the underworld (Hades-Torments for unbelievers, Tartarus-Abyss for fallen angels, and Abraham's bosom-Paradise for believers) contains creatures of any other kind (apart from departed human beings and incarcerated demons) is erroneous and non-biblical.

271 Clouds whether of water vapor, smoke or dust are all treated as similar phenomena in biblical usage and in the ancient world generally, making the parallel between the dust cloud of gnats and the smoke cloud of locust more precise than is immediately obvious to English readers.

272 See The Coming Tribulation: Part 1: "Introduction", section IV.1.b, "The 'Day of the Lord' Paradigm".

273 While it is true that Abaddon-Apollyon is called a "king" here, it is probable that his rank in the hierarchy of fallen angels is that of "prince", the demon equivalent of archangel. The Hebrew word for this rank, *sar*, is translated at least once in the Septuagint as "king" or *basileus* (the Greek word in context here). Significantly, this commander is also called "**the angel** of the Abyss", though we know from our context and other passages (e.g., Jude 6 and 2Pet.2:4), that there are many angels in the Abyss. In the one other scripture where "angel" means more than just some generic angel, 1st Peter 3:22, the phrasing is indeed shorthand for "**arch**-angel". See Bible Basics: Part 2A: Angelology, section II.9.6.3, "Princes".

274 The demon commander's Hebrew name, Abaddon, is similar in meaning to the Greek title, although this word technically refers to the place of destruction (i.e., "hell" or Sheol as at Job 26:6; Ps.88:11; Prov.15:11; 27:20; cf. Job 28:22; 31:12).

275 The Greek verb *deo* (dew), is commonly used in the New Testament to describe restraint of or by demonic forces (cf. Matt.12:29; Mk.3:27; 5:3-4; Lk.13:16; Rev.20:2).

276 See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section III.2, "Satan's postdiluvian attack on human freedom (the Tower of Babel: Genesis 11:1-9)".

277 They are described as "**the** four angels", a title which is shorthand for "archangel" or the demon equivalent, namely *sar* or "prince". See Bible Basics: Part 2A: Angelology, section II.9.6.3, "Princes".

278 The fact that John makes a point of calling this angel "strong" or "powerful" (Greek *ischyros*, not *dynatos*), means that we should understand him to be of high rank. Since this description is distinct from that normally applied to archangels, we may assume

that he is of the next highest classification, namely, that of "authority". See Bible Basics: Part 2A: Angelology, section II.9.3.4, "Authorities".

279 See The Coming Tribulation: Part 1: "Introduction", section I.2.c.

280 See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", in section II.8.b, "The Church" and "the Mystery of Christ".

281 See Swete's The Apocalypse of St. John in loc.

282 As pointed out in the previous installment of this series, codex Sinaiticus correctly reads "inner" here (Greek *esothern*: ἔσωθεν). The *naos* or temple includes the innermost or priest's court with the altar which has been "given to the gentiles" who will trample the city – i.e, these gentiles should *not* be in this sacred place. The reading *exothern* is incorrect, and we do not have here a reference to the Herodian "court of the gentiles".

283 On the biblical practice of using shorter units of time (such as hours, days, weeks, times) to express prophetically much longer divisions, see The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section II.8, "Evidence for the ""The Seven Days of Re-Creation"", and The Coming Tribulation: Part 1: "Introduction", section IV.1.b., "The 'Day of the Lord' Paradigm".

284 The process and concept of such measurement with rods and plumb lines often involves the idea of employing a divine standard, often one which results in judgment when these standards are violated (cf. Job 38:5; Is.28:17; 34:11; Jer.31:39; Lam.2:8; Ezek.40:3; 47:3; Amos 7:7-9; Zech.1:16; 2:1; 4:10; cf. also 2Sam.8:2). Ezekiel 43 contains the procedures for its initial ceremonial cleansing.

285 See The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: "The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation", section V, "The Sealing of the 144,000", and part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section II.8.b.i, "The Uniqueness of Israel".

286 Rather than providing parameters for its construction, Ezekiel 43:10-11 **Error! Main Document Only**.is meant to promote 1) the godly contemplation of the future temple before construction, and 2) the preservation of the temple and its complex once constructed.

287 This was written after the second temple had already been begun (compare Zech.1:7 with Hag.1:15). And we know from Zechariah's contemporary and associate, Haggai, that even the foundation of the temple without any superstructure could be referred to as the temple (Hag.2:3, "this house"; cf. Ezra 3:12).

288 This is yet another clear indication that the final Church era of Laodicea has come to a close with the inception of the Tribulation: its "lampstand" of witness ministry has

been replaced by the ministry of the two lampstands, the two anointing witnesses Moses and Elijah. See [The Coming Tribulation: Part 2A: "The Seven Churches"](#), section 7, "Laodicea".

289 In Zechariah 4:12, instead of again being termed olive *trees*, the two are suddenly called olive "branches", in emulation of the Branch who is Savior of us all (Is.4:2; 11:1; 53:2; Zech.3:8). The Hebrew word used there (*shebholeth*, שֶׁבֹלֶת; literally, "spike of grain"), however, is chosen to emphasize the subordination of these two to The Branch (cf. Zech.6:12-13).

290 See [The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: "The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation"](#), section I.2.b, "The Golden Lampstand", and [The Satanic Rebellion: Part 1: "Satan's Rebellion and Fall"](#), section II.5.b, "The Illustration of the Tabernacle".

291 The Hebrew preposition '*al* (על) used in Zechariah 4:14 may also be rendered "who stand *for* the Lord of all the earth", i.e., as surrogates, witnesses, forerunners and heralds of Christ. It may be, therefore, that we are also to understand Moses and Elijah as symbolically portraying the kingship (cf. Mic.6:4) and high priesthood (Jas.5:17-18) of Christ respectively, the two offices which He will combine into one as He rules as King from the temple, representing all mankind before God as the appointed Sovereign of the earth (cf. Zech.6:12-13).

292 Simply put, "typology" is the use of a an analogous substitute (a "type") to represent, explain or symbolize an exemplar or model (an "antitype"), as, for example, the brazen altar being a type of the cross (it both foreshadows it and explains its significance). See [The Coming Tribulation: Part 1: "Introduction"](#), section IV.1.d, "Typology and Sequence in Old Testament Prophecy".

293 For more specifics on this point, see [The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: "The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation"](#), section V, "The Sealing of the 144,000" under "The Course of the Ministry of the 144,000".

294 See [The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement"](#), section II.9.a.2, "The Crucifixion of Christ".

295 This analogy, a deliberate and scriptural one, will be explored in detail in part 7 of this series.

296 Only Elisha comes close, and his miracles were performed through the granting of a double portion of *Elijah's* special unction of the Spirit, before the granting of which Elisha did no miracles (2Kng.2:9-10; cf. Lk.1:17).

297 The "third" year mentioned in 1st Kings 18:1 dates from Elijah's stay in Zarephath, rather than from the beginning of the drought.

298 For a full treatment of these issues, see Peter's Epistles: lesson #20, "The Resurrection".

299 Incidentally, both men are "followed" by Christ-types, Moses by Joshua who brings the Israelites into the land (just as the Messiah will do at the Second Advent), and Elijah by Elisha who performs even more miracles than Elijah (very reminiscent of those accomplished by our Lord during His First Advent). The names Joshua and Elisha, moreover, are very close, meaning "The Lord saves" and "My God is salvation" respectively, with the name "Joshua" being the Hebrew name to which Jesus is the Greek equivalent.

300 See The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: "The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation", section II, "The Lamb and The Scroll".

301 Compare the similar effect that John the baptist had on behalf of our Lord's ministry until he was executed by Herod: see The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section II.9.3, "The Crucifixion of Christ".

302 Antichrist forms the main topic for part 3B of this series. Consequently, a detailed treatment of this subject has been reserved for the following installment.

303 See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 2: "The Genesis Gap", section II.3, "The Sea".

304 See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 2: "The Genesis Gap", section II.3.e, "The Sea as the Point of Origin for the Antichrist".

305 See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section II.8, "Evidence for the "The Seven Days of Re-Creation".

306 See Peter's Epistles: lesson #20, "The Resurrection".

307 This is technically true only of Elijah, but, as we have seen, Moses' body was later given similar treatment (Jude 1:9). Of course only our Lord Jesus Christ has ever truly "ascended" into heaven in bodily form. It is the *method of transition* of the two witnesses from this earth into heaven above that is unique, not their status once they arrive in the presence of God.

308 See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 3: The Purpose, Creation and Fall of Man, section II.3, "The human spirit".

309 See The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation, section III, "The Restraining Ministry of the Holy Spirit".

310 See The Coming Tribulation: Part 3A: The Tribulation Begins, section II, "The Great Apostasy".

311 For more on the theory and application of biblical types and antitypes, see *The Coming Tribulation: Part 1: Introduction*, section IV.1.d, "Typology and Sequence in Old Testament Prophecy".

312 See *The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement"*, section III.2, "Satan's postdiluvian attack on human freedom (the Tower of Babel)".

313 See *The Coming Tribulation: Part 3A: "The Tribulation Begins: From the Seventh Seal to the Two Witnesses"* section II.3.a, "The unleashing of the "mystery of lawlessness".

314 The Great Persecution takes place during the Tribulation's second half, and is covered in part 4 of this series.

315 See part 2 of the series *Exodus 14: Hardening Pharaoh's Heart*.

316 See *The Coming Tribulation: Part 1: Introduction*, section IV.1.b, "The 'Day of the Lord' Paradigm", and section IV.2.a, "Biblical sources for the end times: Old Testament: Isaiah".

317 For commentary, see especially Bevan, E.R., "A Note on Antiochus Epiphanes", *JHS* 20 (1900) 26-30, and Morkhølm, O. *Antiochus IV of Syria* (Copenhagen 1966). Book 24 of Polybius' *Histories* and 1st and 2nd *Maccabees* (of the Apocrypha) are the most extensive ancient sources for Antiochus.

318 Jerome, in his commentary on the book of Daniel, likewise takes the discussion about Antiochus starting at Dan.11:21 to be applicable to antichrist.

319 See sub voce "Antiochus" in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville 1962).

320 While the "seed of Satan" can also refer to all who follow him (cf. Jn.8:44), this passage finds its ultimate fulfillment in the person of antichrist.

321 See L.S. Chafer's discussion of C. Larkin's *The Spirit World: Systematic Theology v.2* (Dallas 1947) 114-117.

322 See *The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement"*, section III.1, "Satan's antediluvian attack on the purity of the human line (the Nephilim)".

323 For a discussion of the rationale behind the devil's attempt to supplant God, see *The Satanic Rebellion: Part 1: "Satan's Rebellion and Fall"*, especially section IV.3 "Satan's

Fall".

324 On the symbolism of the sea, see above and also *The Satanic Rebellion: Part 2: "The Genesis Gap"*, section II.3, "The Sea".

325 See *The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement"*, section II.9, "Specific Chronology of the Seven Days of Human History".

326 On both of these points, see *The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement"*, section II.9, "Specific Chronology of the Seven Days of Human History".

327 See *The Coming Tribulation: Part 1: Introduction*, section I.2.h, "Other Passages [referencing the Tribulation]".

328 While the original root of shiphiphon is impossible to determine with certainty, there is no question but that the sound and feel of the word would remind the attentive reader of the verb in Genesis 3:15, especially given the similarities of the contexts.

329 Antichrist claims to be the Lion of Judah, but in reality he is a "ravening lion" bent on the destruction of the righteous in a manner similar to his father the devil (1Pet.5:8), who also makes a habit of masquerading as an angel of light (2Cor.11:13-15).

330 Indeed, it is the latter of these two passages which was taken by Irenaeus to be preeminent proof that antichrist would arise from the tribe of Dan: "Hieremias . . . et tribum ex qua veniet [Antichristus] manifestavit dicens: ex Dan audiemus vocem velocitatis equorum eius (Jer.8:16) . . . et propter hoc non adnumeratur tribus haec in Apocalypsi cum his quae salvantur" (Adv. Haer. 5.30.2).

331 In addition to its near term fulfillment in regard to historical Babylon, and its forward-looking eschatological application discussed here, this prophecy also relates the pre-historic fall of Satan, the father, mentor, and type of the beast. See *The Satanic Rebellion: Part 1 "Satan's Rebellion"*, section IV, "Satan's Character, Sin and Fall". For the multiple application of biblical prophecy in general and on this passage in particular, see part 1 of this series, section IV, "The Biblical Sources for the History of the Tribulation".

332 See the preceding note for the application of this passage to historical Babylon and to Satan's prehistoric rebellion.

333 Both this and the previous cryptogram are derived by a device known as "athbash", an alphabet code whereby the encoded letter stands for the same number sequence letter of the alphabet read in reverse (i.e., tav, the first letter read from the end of the alphabet stands for aleph, the first in the normal order, while shin, the second from the end, stands for beth, the second from the front, etc. – hence the name, a=th-ba=sh, v= k

- ן=א).

334 It is precisely for this reason that John describes the armies and their leader which encircle millennial Jerusalem at the end of our Lord's thousand year reign as "Gog and Magog" (Rev.20:8) – not because Ezekiel 38-39 have their primary application at that time (e.g., there would be no time or need or possibility for a seven year period of plundering the remains of these armies if the eternal state follows immediately as it surely does: cf. Ezek.39:9-10) – but because in that instance too we have a worldwide confederacy led by a single anti-God ruler directed behind the scenes by Satan (just as in the case of antichrist and his coalition).

335 In an alternative alphabet code, decoding Magog by using the previous letter of the Hebrew alphabet for each of its three consonants, then reading the word right to left instead of left to right, one achieves the result "Babel", the Hebrew word for Babylon (i.e., m-g-g [ג-ג-מ] reversed = g-g-m [מ-ג-ג], then substituting the previous alphabet letter for each consonant one arrives at b-b-l [ל-ב-ב]). It is also possible to see in the name "Gog" a doubling of the Hebrew word for gentile, goy, a formation which would identify antichrist as the ultimate profane gentile ruler.

336 The Hebrew prefix m- [מ] bearing a locative sense as is often the case in nominal formations.

337 For a discussion of the chronological issues involved in determining the birth date of our Lord, see the Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section II.9.a.1, "the Birth of Christ".

338 In the Greek text (see ms. א), the phrase "this [one] is the eighth" is masculine, meaning that the reference has to be to the kings, and not the beast per se (neuter in Greek), or to one of the heads (neuter in Greek), or to one of the mountains (feminine in Greek). The same is true for the "other", i.e., "last" in the sequence of the seven, so that in both instances the reference is to antichrist rather than to his ten-kingdom empire.

339 See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section III.2, "Satan's postdiluvian attack on human freedom (the Tower of Babel)".

340 See also the comments in the preceding part 3A regarding the Euphrates and Babylon as the center of the world from the standpoint of satanic opposition to God's plan: section III.6, "The Second Woe: Demon Destruction (9:13-19)".

341 See section IV.2.a of part 1, "Biblical Sources for the End Times: the Old Testament".

342 See M.F. Unger, Commentary on the Old Testament in. loc.

343 See the discussion of the four biblical quarters of the earth in The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation, section IV.4b, "Summary

of the Four Horsemen".

344 For the likely commencement of the Tribulation according to the seven millennia age day interpretation of scripture, see part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, section II.9, "Specific Chronology of the Seven Days of Human History".

345 On the removal of the Holy Spirit's restraining ministry see part 2B of this series, section III.

346 cf. the many revivals in ancient Israel later followed by apostasy (e.g., Judg.2:10-15). It is more than interesting to note that the destruction of Assyria followed the revival begun by Jonah by approximately the same number of years allotted to this final era of the Church, that of Laodicea wherein lukewarmness comes to a head.

347 cf. the niphal of sha'al, where nish'al, means to "ask for oneself" in Neh.13:6.

348 That is not to say that this fact provides the full interpretation of the "gematria" device we are given at Revelation 13:18. The complete resolution of 666 will only be possible when one calculates the numerical value of antichrist's name (a virtual impossibility without first having the proper name to check). See the forthcoming part 4 of this series for a complete discussion.

349 See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section III.1, "Satan's antediluvian attack on the purity of the human line (the Nephilim)".

350 The Hebrew of the book of Daniel is particularly and peculiarly abbreviated and succinct, often to the point of what would be obscurity without a prior detailed and specific understanding of the interpretation at hand (and nowhere is this more evident than in chapter eleven).

351 See The Coming Tribulation: Part 1: Introduction, section I.2.h, "Other Passages [referencing the Tribulation]".

352 Jerome seems to have been the earliest to appreciate that the description of antichrist begins in verse twenty-one.

353 See the following note.

354 The phenomenon seen here and in verse 23 of a leading synopsis or first account followed by a more detailed account or a "flashback" summary is a common one in scripture. Compare the summary of the seven days of re-creation given at Genesis 2:4 which is then followed by a more detailed treatment of the creation of Adam and Eve which took place within the prior description. See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 2: "The Genesis Gap", section III.2, "The Genesis 2:4 Summary".

355 Compare the methodology of similar "trafficking" employed by the beast's father in his suborning of the [fallen] angels to follow him in rebelling against the Lord. See *The Satanic Rebellion: Part 1: "Satan's Rebellion and Fall"*, section IV.3.

356 See *The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement"*, sections II.7-9, "The Seven Days of Human History".

357 For more specifics on antichrist's religious movement, see *The Coming Tribulation: Part 3A: The Tribulation Begins*, section II.3.c.2, "The persuasiveness of the tribulational false religion", and, in the forthcoming part 4 of this series, section VI.1, "The Anti-Christian Religion and its Worldwide Expansion" .

358 See *The Coming Tribulation: Part 3A: "The Tribulation Begins: From the Seventh Seal to the Two Witnesses"* section II.3.a, "The unleashing of the "mystery of lawlessness".

359 See part 1 and part 3 respectively of *The Satanic Rebellion*.

360 e.g., Herodotus (Hist. 3.94; 7:78) as well as Assyrian records. See Unger's Bible Dictionary, and *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. "Meshech" and "Tubhal".

361 The heads have a dual interpretation as we saw in section II.1.c.3 above: they also refer to the progression of "emperors" which culminates in antichrist. This is why the beast is said to be "one of the seven" (i.e., the ultimate emperor of [revived] Rome) and at the same time also "the eighth" (i.e., king of a kingdom [Babylon] which is separate from revived Rome). This is analogous to the case of the little horn of Daniel chapter seven which is likewise described as a horn, yet separate from the other ten.

362 This phrase is generally misunderstood in the versions, at least in part. The Hebrew adjective *mishman*, מִשְׁמָנִים, from the root *shaman*, שָׁמַן, while literally meaning "fat", is often employed in the sense of strength as well as of wealth, and that is the meaning here (cf. Is.10:16, "stout warriors"). The word we are translating "empire" is the Hebrew noun *medinah*, מְדִינָה, an Aramaic loan word which, while it can mean province in Hebrew, does so primarily through application of the word to Judah, a province of the Babylonian and Persian empires. On its own, there is evidence that the word means "city" and since it occurs here without the definite article, it must be regarded as a proper noun, that is, not "city", but "City", namely, the capital city of an empire and by extension the empire itself (this is essentially the way the noun is used in the Targums for both Rome and Constantinople). The NASB comes the closest of all the version to capturing the precise meaning on this point with its rendering "the richest places of the realm".

363 The phrase "throw it to the potter" refers to the purchasing of the "potter's field" (cf. Matt.26:14-15; 27:3-10), a place in any major town where clay for pots was quarried.

Any such field would, over time, become pockmarked with numerous holes large and small and be good for nothing except a mean burial.

364 See part 1 of this series, section IV.1.b., "The 'Day of the Lord' Paradigm".

365 cf. M.F. Unger on this phrase: "a designation (i.e., "holy covenant") of the Jewish nation embracing the knowledge and worship of the true God", Commentary on the Old Testament v. 2 (Chicago 1981) p.1684.

366 These ships will also be instrumental in the exploitation of the beast's victory (Ezek.30:9-12), and the emphasis in scripture of the destruction of these naval forces of antichrist at the Second Advent underscores this point (Ps.48:4-7; Is.2:16; 33:21-23; 43:14; cf. Ps.72:10).

367 We also see in Ezekiel chapter 31 in the parable of the tree representing Assyria taken down by "the ruler of the nations" (i.e., Nebuchadnezzar-antichrist), followed by the similar fate that befalls the tree representing Egypt, a parallel to the fall of revived Rome at the hands of the beast's Babylon prior to antichrist's conquest of the southern alliance (centered on Egypt).

368 This sixth trumpet judgment is covered in part 3A of this series, section III.6.

369 The future sense is derived here as it frequently is in Biblical Hebrew from the waw which precedes in the future sequence begun in verse 29 (yashubh ubha', ישוב ובה).

370 cf. the Vulgate's rendering: percutietur.

371 I am grateful to Mr. Barney Blankenship for his comments in this regard.

372 See part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section III.1, "Satan's antediluvian attack on the purity of the human line (the Nephilim)".

373 This devastation of physical and spiritual life is what is truly at the heart of the Hebrew root here, shamam; שָׁמַם. See especially Jenni and Westermann, T.H.A.T., s.v., v.2 col.971: "vom Leben abgeschnitten sein".

374 For further references and discussion see J.J. Davis, Biblical Numerology (Grand Rapids 1968) 116ff.

375 On the symbolism of the Day of the Lord, see Part 1 of this series, section IV.1.b., "The 'Day of the Lord' Paradigm".

376 See part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section IV, "Things to Come: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement Phases II and III".

377 i.e., our Lord is already the true ruler of this world by virtue of His victory on the cross (cf. Matt.28:18-20): for details see part 4 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: "Satan's World System", section II.8, "Satan is now on the defensive".

378 See especially Part 2B of this series, “The Earthly Tabernacle and Temple as a Type of the Heavenly Temple:” in section I.

379 Red, the color of blood (cf. Rev.6:4 which also uses as in this passage the Greek adjective pyrros; cf. Is.63:2), is suggestive here of the sin of bloody murder in particular (Is.1:15-21; cf. NIV Study Bible note in loc. Is.15:18).

380 See The Coming Tribulation: Part 3B: Antichrist and his Kingdom, section III, “The Kingdom of the Beast”.

381 For a discussion of the symbolism and a treatment of the stars in this passage as both apostate believers and fallen angels, see The Coming Tribulation: Part 3A: From the Seventh Seal to the Two Witnesses, section II.1.a, “The Great Apostasy: Definition”. See also part 4 of Satanic Rebellion: Satan's World System, section III.3, under “Titles of Rank: 2) Elders”.

382 The “flight of the woman, Israel” does not occur until after the devil is cast down to earth as the following verses make clear (cf. especially Rev.12:13). Revelation 12:6 is therefore to be understood as prospective, giving us a preview of the escape to the desert of all those in Israel who responded to the ministry of Moses and Elijah, with the details being provided in Revelation 12:13-17.

383 These themes are treated in detail in the Satanic Rebellion series. See especially part 5, “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”.

384 See part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section IV, “Things to Come: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement Phases II and III”.

385 i.e., this is the end of the “truce” which has been in place since God's initial judgment of the universe in response to Satan's coup d'etat. See part 4 of the Satanic Rebellion series, section III.1, “The current heavenly truce”.

386 See part 2B of this series for the former, parts 3A and 3B for the latter set of developments mentioned here.

387 We have dealt extensively with these matters before. See especially Bible Basics: Part 2A: Angelology, and part 4 of the Satanic Rebellion series, section III, “Satan's Order of Battle”.

388 See part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section II.7, “The Seven Days of Human History”.

389 See part 3A of Coming Tribulation: From the Seventh Seal to the Two Witnesses, section I.1 “The Seven Archangels with the Seven Trumpets”.

390 See part 4 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Satan's World System, section III.3, “The Organization of the Holy Angels”.

391 See part 4 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: “Satan's World System”, section V.5, “[Satan's] Accusation of Believers”.

392 See part 4 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: “Satan's World System”, section V.1, “Names for the Devil”.

393 For the importance to the plan of God of the filling up of the full number of the Church and the devil's attempts to thwart this

process see part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion, section II, “The Plan of God in Human History” and section III, “Satan's Counter-Strategy”.

394 Compare the “eagle Cherub” representing the victorious, returning Messiah (see part 2B of this series, section I, under “The Four Living Creatures”). The eagle reference also reminds us of our Lord's comparison of the Second Advent to a “gathering of eagles” (Matt.24:28; Lk.17:37).

395 The “times of gentiles” refers specifically to the 42 months of antichrist's control of Jerusalem which does not extend to the entire temple mount for this entire period, since that place will be regained by the rebels along with some other parts of Jerusalem during the final days of the Tribulation (cf. Dan.8:13-14; Zech.12:1-9; 14:1-5). See The Coming Tribulation: Part 3A: The Tribulation Begins, section V, “The Two Witnesses”, and The Coming Tribulation: Part 3B: Antichrist and his Kingdom, section VIII, “The Abomination of Desolation”.

396 There is also application here to our Lord's regathering of Israel at His Second Advent, bringing her first into the desert to separate the wheat from the chaff (cf. Ezek.20:32-38). See part 6 of this series, section I.6, “The Regathering and Purging of Israel”.

397 Compare our Lord's command in Lk.21:21 not to enter Jerusalem which sits in the midst of the Judean hills, showing that these are most assuredly not the “mountains” meant.

398 As this point has been covered exhaustively in section II.3 of The Satanic Rebellion: Part 2: The Genesis Gap, “The Sea”, the details are not repeated here.

399 Compare the fact that Gen.49:17, which speaks of antichrist, recalls Gen.3:15, which speaks of Satan. Consider also the scriptural parallel noted in part 3B between antichrist and Judas who was possessed by the devil (cf. the serpent of Genesis 3, likewise possessed by Satan).

400 See part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement, section III.2, “Satan's postdiluvian attack on human freedom (the Tower of Babel)”.

401 The word “law”(Heb. dhat, ^ל) commonly refers to statutory law. On the significance of “times” (Heb. 'itym, ^ת) as referring to established customary practices which often have the force of “common law”, see Esther 1:13 “wise men knowing the times”, a phrase which in the context of that verse clearly sums up every aspect of “law and justice” both (cf. Est.1:19; 4:11; 4:16; 1:15; 1Chron.12:32; Jer.46:17).

402 See the study, Read your Bible: Protection against Cults.

403 i.e., Babylon's English to be replaced by Zion's Hebrew.

404 For a full discussion of this facilitation of unbelieving hardness of heart, see The Coming Tribulation: Part 3A, section II.3.a, “The unleashing of the ‘mystery of lawlessness”.

405 See part 1 of the Satanic Rebellion series, section II.6, “The Seven Edens”.

406 See The Coming Tribulation: Part 3A: From the Seventh Seal to the Two Witnesses, section II.3.a, “The unleashing of the ‘mystery of lawlessness”.

407 See The Coming Tribulation: Part 3A: From the Seventh Seal to the Two Witnesses, section II.3.c, “The rise of false teaching”.

408 See The Coming Tribulation: Part 3A: From the Seventh Seal to the Two Witnesses, section II.3.c.1, “The persuasiveness of tribulational false teaching”.

409 It is interesting to note that, like antichrist who is the preeminent antitype of many other lesser “antichrists” (2:18-22; 4:3), so in the case of this premier “false prophet” scripture describes him as an exemplar, so to speak, of other lesser false prophets (Matt.24:23-24; 2Pet.2:11; 4:1).

410 Reading tokh instead of tavekh, a change in vocalization but not in the orthography of the MT.

411 See The Coming Tribulation: Part 3B: Antichrist and his Kingdom, section VIII, “The ‘Abomination of Desolation’ and the ‘Session’ of Antichrist”.

412 See the discussion of the “third horseman” in The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation, section IV.3, “The Black Horse: Economic Constraint”.

413 See also in The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation, section V, “The Sealing of the 144,000”.

414 On the significance of seven as the number representing perfection and completeness, consider the seven Genesis days of re-creation, the seven millennial days of human history, the seven Spirits of God (i.e., the Holy Spirit described in this formula of perfection: Is.11:2-3; Rev.1:4; 1:20; 3:1; 5:1ff.; cf. Ps.12:6; 119:164; Prov.6:16; 9:1). For further references and discussion see J.J. Davis, Biblical Numerology (Grand Rapids 1968) 116ff.

415 We find hexakosiai (ἑξάκοσται), the feminine form of the number meaning “six hundred”, both in Sinaiticus (S) and Ephraemi Rescriptus (C), two of the best ancient witnesses to the Greek text.

416 See The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: “The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation”, section I, Revelation 4:1-11.

417 This point is universally misunderstood in the versions and is incorrectly rendered in, e.g., the KJV: “that had gotten the victory”; the NASB: “who had come off victorious”; and the NIV “who had been victorious”.

418 See The Coming Tribulation: Part 3A: “From the Seventh Seal to the Two Witnesses”, section II, “The Great Apostasy”.

419 See especially Peter lesson #25, “Personal Tribulation”.

420 For crowns as indicating levels of eternal reward, see Peter #18, “Eternal Rewards”.

421 The use of the Greek preposition pro in the phrase pro de touton (πρὸ δὲ τούτων) is misunderstood in the versions as being temporal, whereas it should be taken here as preferential in degree rather than in time, that is “more significant” rather than “more recent” (cf. 1Tim.2:1; Jas.5:12; 1Pet.4:8). The point is that for believers the Great Persecution will be much more of a shock to the system than even the horrendous and notable judgments for which the Tribulation is renowned.

422 See *The Coming Tribulation: Part 3A: From the Seventh Seal to the Two Witnesses*, section II.2, “The Situation of the Church-visible on the Eve of the Tribulation”.

423 See part 4 of *The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: “Satan's World System, Past, Present, and Future”*, section I, “Strangers in the Devil's Realm”.

424 For all of these issues involving the 144,000, please see in *The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation*, section V, “The Sealing of the 144,000”.

425 cf. Ps.33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Is.42:10; see also the treatment of this phrase as it occurs in Rev.5:9 in part 2B of this series.

426 Our best biblical manuscript, Sinaiticus (or ^Σ as it is often represented in critical editions), has, in addition to the number, the word mian (μίαν). This is the accusative feminine of the Greek integer “one”, but is being used here adverbially to mean “as one” (a usage paralleled in koine inscriptions).

427 The translation here follows the text of Sinaiticus (or ^Σ), which does not have the participle “saying”, but does have the verb meaning “to proclaim the gospel” in the imperative or command mood rather than in the infinitive. Confusion about the fact that this angel is giving the command to others apparently led to textual confusion in later versions.

428 See the discussion in *Bible Basics: Part 2A: Angelology*, section II.9.3, “Archangels”.

429 i.e., there is no connective here as is normally the case in Greek, a device which is often used to call special attention to what follows. The relative pronoun he [ἃ] is absent in the best manuscripts.

430 The absence of the definite article in the Greek text preceding the words “angels” and “holy [ones]” allows for the possibility that the adjective is being used here as a substantive, referring to resurrected believers. There is no reason for believers to be absent from this picture (cf. Rev.20:4), and the phrase “holy angels” is relatively rare in scripture, occurring only twice in the New Testament and in both instances in company with the definite article which is absent here (Mk.8:38; Lk.9:27; cf. Acts 10:22).

431 An example of prophetic conflation of end time events for simplicity's sake, a phenomenon which we have studied before: see Part 1 of this series, section IV.1.b, “The ‘Day of the Lord’ Paradigm”.

432 For crowns as indicating levels of eternal reward, see Peter #18, “Eternal Rewards”, and section I.7 of *Coming Tribulation* part 6, “The Judgment and Reward of the Church”.

433 See *Bible Basics: Part 2A: Angelology*, section II.9.3, “The Organization of Elect Angels”.

434 See Part 2B of this series, section I, “The Sea”.

435 The lyres too are symbolic (cf. our discussion of the 144,000 above), indicating the pleasing nature of this song as it rises to heaven into the presence of the Lord (cf. the incense of Rev.8:3-4).

436 See *The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”*, section III.8.c, “The Jewish Ceremonial Calendar”.

437 As explained in part 1 of this series, section IV.b.2, “The Day of Vengeance”, this “day” and “year”, strictly speaking, refer to the entire tribulational period, the “Day of the Lord”.

438 See part 3A of this series, section I.1, “The Seven Archangels with the Seven Trumpets”.

439 See the series, Exodus 14: Hardening Pharaoh's Heart, and part 3A of the present series, “The Tribulation Begins”, section II.c, “The Process of Apostasy”.

440 See part 2 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: “The Genesis Gap”, section II.2, “The Darkness”.

441 See part 3A of the present series regarding the fourth trumpet judgment, section III.4, “The Heavenly Lights Stricken”.

442 See part 2 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: “The Genesis Gap”, section II.2.d.3, “The Supernatural Darkness at the Second Advent”.

443 Compare the parallel situation described in Isaiah 37:9 where a similar “rumor” caused the Assyrian king (typologically reminiscent of antichrist as we have seen in part 3B of this series) to quit the land of Israel.

444 See part 2B of this series, section IV, “The Seven Seals”, and part 3B, section II.2.c, “Gleanings from the Policies of antichrist”.

445 . This also explains why “Gog”, a.k.a. antichrist, is called the *chief* prince of Meshech and Tubhal” (Ezek.38:1; 39:12), namely, because there is also a [non-chief] secondary prince of Magog (i.e., eschatological Babylon), until she is destroyed (cf. Ezek.39:6).

446 The appellations Peqod and Merathaim in Jeremiah 50:21 speak to this point, with the former meaning “visitation” representing her destruction, and the latter meaning “double rebellion” bespeaking her rebellion against antichrist.

447 In many cases, of course, Pharaoh is a type of the beast. For explanations of that typology, see part 3B of this series, section I.3, “Prophetic Types”, and section II, “The Origin, Character and Rise of Antichrist”.

448 That is, according to the prophetic-year scale of 12 thirty day months per year consistently used in scripture to describe this period (Dan.7:25; 9:27; 12:7; Rev.11:2; 12:6; 12:14; 13:5). Of course, the addition of the requisite “solar days” and the fact that the end of the Tribulation will be “shortened for the sake of the elect” (Matt.24:22; Mk.13:20), means that we can take our Lord's assurance that “no one knows the [precise] *day* or the [precise] *hour*” quite literally **Error! Main Document Only.**(i.e.,

it is "a unique *day*, without daytime or nighttime – a *day* known to the Lord. When *evening* comes, there will be light" Zech.14:7 NIV; cf. Matt.24:36; Mk.13:32).

449 Compare the Persian empire's similar mobilization scheme. During its heyday, full military mobilization required at least a year, but when invoked produced numbers on a scale that dwarfed any contemporary empire. This characteristic is reflected in the imagery of the "feet of the bear" of Revelation 13:12, extremely powerful but much less swift than the other symbolic beasts mentioned in Daniel chapter seven (i.e., the winged lion and the leopard).

450 See Part 2B of this series, section III "The Restraining Ministry of the Holy Spirit".

451 See Part 4 of this series, section VI.2 "The False Prophet".

452 Part 7 of this series, "Preparing for Tribulation", will be concerned exclusively with these issues.

453 Only once out of twelve occurrences do we find this form concluded with the Hebrew letter "n" or *nun* מגידון *Megiddon*). That is at Zechariah 12:11 where it is entirely possible that the reference there is not to "Megiddo" at all (the LXX, for example, certainly does not see "Megiddo" at Zech.12:11).

454 See S. Moscati et al., An Introduction to the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages (Wiesbaden 1969) 80-81. What we have here is most likely a *maqtil* "ground form" on the order of *machshelah* (כשלה), "a ruin" or "a place of falling", from *chashal* (כשל), "to fall or stumble". See Gensenius' Hebrew Grammar, ed. E. Kautzsch (Oxford 1980) 237.

455 See Alan Johnston "Revelation" in The Expositor's Bible Commentary ed. F.E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids 1981) v.12, p. 552.

456 See part 1 of this series, section IV.1.a "Prophetical Foreshortening".

457 See part 3A of this series, section I.5, "The Thunderous Voices, Lightning, and Earthquake". For the awesome nature and symbolism of the throne from which these voices proceed, see part 2B of this series, "The Throne", in section I.3.b.

458 Of course at Mount Sinai the standard of judgment was given (i.e., the Ten Commandments), whereas the Second Advent will find our Lord carrying out a series of righteous judgments based upon the perfect divine standard of justice.

459 While merely hypothetical since scripture does not mention it, the explosion of Krakatoa in 1883 at the beginning of the Laodicean era is perhaps not merely coincidental in this regard (the era of Laodicea commencing in ca. 1882 according to our reckoning in part 2A of this series).

460 See the note on Rev.4:2 in part 2B of this series. The phrase “in the Spirit” as it used here does not refer to an entrance into a completely new spiritual state as in Rev.1:10, but of the provision of a new revelation through the Holy Spirit as in Rev.4:2 and Rev.21:10.

461 Compare Rev.13:1 where a single salient “name of blasphemy” (antichrist arrogating the title “Christ” to himself) is written distributively on the heads of the beast in contrast to the collection of blasphemous names covering the beast's body being described here.

462 The symbolism and meaning of the seven heads and ten crowns of the beast (referring to the nations which, in addition to Babylon, make up antichrist's kingdom) is covered in detail in part 3B of this series, section III.1, “The Ten Horns of the Beast”.

463 Since red is the color of blood (cf. Rev.6:4; 12:3; and compare Is.1:15 with 1:18). The Hebrew word for blood, *dham* (דָּם), is probably derived from ‘*adham* (אָדָם), i.e., “Adam”, whose name means red or ruddy

464 Babylon is thus very much like her master, the beast on which she rides. Compare Hab.2:5: “If you think that *wine* deceives, [how much more will he! (i.e., antichrist)]”. See part 3B of this series, section II.2.b, “Characteristics of antichrist”.

465 See Coming Tribulation part 4: “The Great Tribulation”, section VI.1, sub verse 39, “The Book of Life”.

466 This number contemplates six emperors from the Julio-Claudian family, and includes Julius Caesar, the founder of the dynasty and first true imperial ruler. See Coming Tribulation 3B: Antichrist and his Kingdom, section II.1.c.4.

467 cf. the description of antichrist in the destruction of Babylon as the Lord's “chosen ally” in Is.48:14.

468 See part 3A of this series, section IV.1, “The Powerful Angel is a Type of Christ”.

469 See part 6 of this series, section I, “The Second Advent Judgments”.

470 To the extent that the presence of unclean birds and the restriction of demons to Babylon is literal, it must be short-lived, for on the one hand the Millennium will be a time of unimaginable blessing worldwide, and on the other all fallen angels will be removed from the earth at our Lord's return once and for all with only the devil being temporarily released at the end of the thousand years (Rev.20:7-10). See part 6 of this series, section I.4, “The Incarceration of Satan and his Demons”.

471 See part 2 of the Satanic Rebellion: “The Genesis Gap.

472 See Bible Basics part 2A: Angelology, section II.9.7, “God's use of evil spirits”.

473 On Tyre as an alternative designation for Babylon compare Revelation 18:11-24 with Ezekiel chapters 26-27, and part 3B of this series *passim*. It will also be recalled that antichrist, the King of Babylon, is also represented as the King of Tyre in Ezekiel 28:11-19 (Coming Tribulation part 3B, section II.1.c.1). The similar comparison between Pharaoh/antichrist and Egypt/kingdom of the beast also suggests the diminution of indigenous military power at this time and its destruction at the hands of the beast, the “king of Babylon”(Ezek.32:11-12).

474 Quotations in this section referring to contemporary Tyre, Egypt and Assyria have secondary prophetic application to Babylon as the realm of antichrist, the ultimate eschatological referent under the “Day of the Lord paradigm” (see part 1 of this series, section IV.1.b).

475 Literally, “deaths”, but the plural here is indicative of intensity, hence the translation “violent death”.

476 In both of these respects, that is, the nature of her cruel economic and political imperialism under the beast and the re-institution of slavery and virtually debt-slavery, we see important distinctions between the eschatological Babylon of antichrist and the contemporary U.S.

477 For the practice of pillaging as characteristic of antichrist's forces, see Ezek.38:11-13.

478 The possibility at least exists for such a scenario when we consider that Tyre, a synonym for eschatological Babylon, is likewise destined for complete destruction, but also for a later reestablishment after a symbolic seventy year hiatus (compare Is.23:17 and Ps.45:12 to Ezek.26-28). Compare also Zeph.1:3 and 1:18 where worldwide destruction is described in terms of totality, yet we know of a certainty that some will survive the Tribulation to form the nucleus of the millennial population (cf. the regathering of Israel described in the next installment of this series). And see Obadiah 1:21 in comparison with the book as a whole where Edom's fate is described in similar terms.

479 See Coming Tribulation part 4: “The Great Tribulation”, section VII.9, “The Role of Babylon”.

480 Since this will be antichrist's third invasion of Israel from the north, we can anticipate that the logistical procedures and supply lines developed in the two previous conflicts with the southern alliance will greatly facilitate this third invasion and contribute to the speed with which it is conducted. It will also be remembered that a major amphibious assault on the coast of Israel was critical to the beast's success in the decisive second campaign against the south, and we certainly should not rule out the possibility of many formations being brought to Israel by the beast's extensive navy

(especially in the case of those units just recently deployed against Babylon).

481 “*Athbash*”, is an alphabet code whereby the encoded letter stands for the same number sequence letter of the alphabet read in reverse (i.e., *taw*, the first letter read from the end of the alphabet stands for *aleph*, the first in the normal order, while *shin*, the second from the end, stands for *beth*, the second from the front, etc. - hence the name, *a=th-ba=sh*, $\psi=\beth - \eta=\aleph$).

482 Moreover, the Hebrew letter *m-* [מ], which frequently bears a locative sense in nominal formations of this sort as it does in the name “Magog”, is always used as a prefix in this sense, never as a suffix.

483 Scholarship generally assigns Magog a place ranging from the Russian steppes in the north (i.e., “Scythians” acc. to Josephus), and from Lydia-Cappadocia (in present day Turkey; cf. “Gog”/“Gyges”) to Media (present day Iran; “Madai” is the next son of Japheth) in the south, with a “center of gravity” in the Caucasus mountains. See the lexicons *sub voc.* (BDB, Gesenius, and KB), as well as Keil and Delitzsch, S.R. Driver's *Genesis* (London 1904), and J. Skinner's *I.C.C. Genesis* (Edinburgh 1910).

484 Please see the discussion in part 3B of this series: Antichrist and his Kingdom, section III, “The Kingdom of the Beast”. The use of Meshech and Tubhal to describe the two discrete parts of revived Rome is particularly appropriate, since these two tribes are often associated with one another not only in scripture but also in ancient secular history (cf. Gen.10:2; 1Chron.1:5; Is.66:19; Ezek.27:13; 32:26; 39:1) e.g., Herodotus (*Hist.* 3.94; 7:78) as well as Assyrian records. See Unger's Bible Dictionary, and The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, s.v. “Meshech” and “Tubhal”.

485 The translation “I shall thoroughly deceive you” is also possible, deriving the verb not from the otherwise unattested *shasha* (ששש), but considering it a *shaphel* formation from *nasha'* (נשנ), with the *nun* assimilated in a not unprecedented syncopation of this rather long form.

486 See the references cited in note 49.

487 For the doctrine of Christophany, see Bible Basics part 1: Theology, section II.C.3, “Appearances of Christ in the Old Testament”.

488 The use of this parallel reference in the “Day of the Lord paradigm” is particularly prevalent in Isaiah precisely because Isaiah was imploring Judah to avoid following the coming pattern of rejection of the Lord which has led in the case we are studying here to this judgment and destruction.

489 Indeed, as Dr. Charles Feinberg pointed out, many of the details here do not actually fit with the Babylonian invasion of Jeremiah's day and yet that invasion must be the main historical reference: Jeremiah (Grand Rapids 1982) 50. The answer to the

apparent discrepancy is again the incorporation of details referring to the future invasion of antichrist as a chilling point of comparison for Jeremiah's contemporary audience.

490 We may also see in the rejection of Shebna for Eliakim (Is.22:20-25) the change of leadership which accompanied the coup in the absence of antichrist. For although Eliakim is clearly superior to the disgraceful Shebna, nevertheless he too will fall from the weight of the pressures unleashed against Israel because the beast's advance cannot be checked through human efforts.

491 For a synopsis of the three phases of God's plan in judgment, restoration and replacement, see The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section IV, "Things to Come: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement Phases II and III".

492 See part 2B of this series in section I, "The Earthly Tabernacle and Temple as a Type of the Heavenly Temple".

493 Cf. also the parallels of light separated from darkness in the deliverance of the Exodus (Ex.14:19-20; cf. Ex.10:21-22), and the unique day of Gibeon as Joshua, a type of Christ, leads Israel into the land of promise (Josh.10:12-13).

494 See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section III.8.b.iv, "The Bride".

495 In chapter 20:4-6 we do see the Church, but already resurrected at that point. The verb translated "they came to life" in verse four does refer to this moment of Christ's 2nd Advent and the resurrection of the Church we are covering here, but does so as a "flash-back" to the point of time we are presently considering (for, clearly, the Church is resurrected before we actually take our seats on our thrones of judgment).

496 For a more detailed discussion of the resurrection from the point of view of the individual believer, see Peter's Epistles, lesson #20, "The Resurrection", and part 2B of the Bible Basics series: "Eschatology".

497 The fact that all who have believed up to this point, Jews and gentiles alike, alive or dead, are resurrected together as the Bride of Christ belies the false distinction often proffered which seeks to divide as "the Church" believers since the cross from those who came before (a heresy effectively refuted by Paul in Romans 11). See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section III.8.b.ii, "The Church".

498 See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section III.8.c, "The Jewish Ceremonial Calendar".

499 The connection in the following passages between the analogy of eagles or “vultures” attracted by a body and the communion metaphor is surely deliberate; cf. Job 39:27-30.

500 See especially Ephesians 5:22-33, and The Song of Solomon, which is largely a simile describing the Church's relationship with Jesus (S.S. passim, as is Ps.45:8-17; cf. Is.62:5; Jn.3:29). See also The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section III.8.b.iv, “The Bride”.

501 Revelation 19:8 does not constitute an exception to the usual shame vs. sanctification image in the white clothing analogy of Revelation 3:18 and 16:15 (cf. Zech.3:4; Rev.3:4-5; 7:9-14; 19:14). The “righteous acts” here (Greek *dikaïoma*; δικαίωμα), are our non-meritorious faith responses to the will of God, the works which He “has prepared ahead of time for us, that we might walk in them” (Eph.2:10). The brilliant white clothing in which the entire Church is dressed represents the fact that every member of the Church has earned at least some eternal reward for this service on earth, since faith without any “works” is dead (Jas.2:14-26).

502 The Day of Atonement, “Yom Kippur”, looks forward to this event. The “afflicting of heart” commanded of all Israel on that day (Lev.23:27, 29 & 32; Num.29:7), and God's resultant cleansing are symbolic of God's forgiveness of all in Israel who respond in this appropriate fashion at Christ's return (compare Lev.16:30 with Is.4:2-6; 59:20-21; Jer.31:34; 50:20; Ezek.20:33-38; 36:24-38; Joel 2:30-32; Zech.12:10-3:1; Mal.3:2-4; Rom.11:26).

503 There is no question but that the cross is the “sign” mentioned in Matt.24:30. For the cross is the universal *biblical* symbol for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on our behalf (e.g., Matt.10:38; 16:34; Mk.8:34; Lk.9:23; 14:27; 1Cor.1:17-18; Gal.5:11; 6:12-14; Eph.2:16; Phil.2:8; 3:18; Col.1:20; 2:14; Heb.12:2), and as such the fact of its appearance upon His glorious return is what will make the association of His previous sacrifice and future return unmistakable to all.

504 In the terminology we have been employing in this and in the previous Satanic Rebellion series, this is “phase II judgment” culminating in the battle of Armageddon and the associated post-2nd Advent judgments (see part 6 of this series, section I), which is closely followed by “phase II restoration”: the Millennial rule of Jesus Christ.

505 For example, the Messianic hope of Christ's return and His judgment on Israel's enemies is ubiquitous in the Psalms and prophets, e.g., Ps.21:8; 98:1-9; 102:12-17, etc., as will be evident from the many passages quoted and cited in the remainder of this study.

506 See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section III.8.c, “The Jewish Ceremonial Calendar”.

507 Our participation in the angelic part of the battle will be covered part 6.

508 The second death and the lake of fire will be covered in detail in part 6 of this series.

509 Reading with a change of vowel pointing, and understanding *etsel* instead of *Atzel*, since verse eight tells us that this will be the *same* valley whereby the water which proceeds from millennial Jerusalem will enter the Arabah, the Jordan rift, and thus must go “*all the way up to (etsel) Jerusalem*”.

510 This also explains why at times our Lord's Second Advent is described as coming from a southerly direction, for that is the direction in which His campaign of retribution will proceed: Deut.33:2-5; Is.63:1-6; Hab.3:3-13, on which see esp. vv.13-14 where the reference is to antichrist; Zech.9:14).

511 The historical context in this passage is the imminent destruction of the northern kingdom using the day of the Lord paradigm to compare to the terrors of Armageddon to Israel's plight. Note that verse two of Isaiah 28 is a prophetic reference to antichrist (whom the Lord will “throw forcefully to the ground”).

512 This “judgment on the nations” is likewise a prophesy of Armageddon where all the nations will assemble against Jerusalem (cf. the many prophecies against the nations: Is.14-27; Jer.46-51; Ezek.25; 35; Amos 1-2; Obadiah; Zeph.2).

513 As to the eastern approaches of the Kidron valley which separates the city of David from the Mount of Olives, although this is often conjectured to be the valley referred to here, the fact that the population of Jerusalem will have to flee *across* the Kidron valley through the split-open Mount of Olives is a fatal flaw for that particular interpretation.

514 See M.F. Unger, Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament vol. 2 (Chicago: Moody, 1981), *in loc*.

515 Antichrist is also described as “king of the north” in Daniel for the same reason (Dan.11:21-45). In the earlier context of our present passage, Joel 2:11, we see a rapid-fire switch from the description of the locust to this section dealing primarily with the 2nd Advent, a common phenomenon in biblical prophecy according to the Day of the Lord paradigm as we have seen now many times in our study of the Coming Tribulation (see part 1, section IV.1.b).

516 Not even the naval forces of the beast will be immune from this total annihilation: Ps.48:4-7 [Hebrew]; Is.2:16-17; cf. Ps.72:10; Is.33:21-23; 43:14.

517 To such a degree is this true that the large number of passages quoted in this section is only a representative sample (cf. Ps.65). See part 1 of this series, section IV.1.b, “The Day of the Lord Paradigm”.

518 Verses 1-6 find their complete fulfillment only at the end of the Millennium in the

final rebellion against Messiah (Rev.20:7-10), but, in addition to the applicability of verses 1-6 also to Armageddon, the remaining verses use the future incident of the Gog-Magog rebellion as a point of departure for describing Christ's millennial reign.

519 See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 1, section II.6, "The Seven Edens".

520 In Psalm 29:3-9 the "voice of the Lord" is also expressed in thunder and the phrase occurs seven times. Since the ending context of the Psalm is one of Christ's millennial session (v.10b), it is likely that we are meant at the very least to have this passage in mind when reading Revelation 10:1-11. I owe this observation to Ms. Susan Phillips.

521 See The Satanic Rebellion Part 5: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement, section IV, "Things to Come: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement Phases II and III".

522 The context in Revelation chapter ten is that of the coming of the powerful angel who is meant to represent Christ and His Second Advent. It is for this reason that the judgments accompanying that return are represented (by the thunders), but not yet explained (since that would have to wait until their chronological occurrence later in the book).

523 See also in particular Isaiah chapters 13-14; 46-47; and Jeremiah 50.

524 See part 4 of this series, section III, "Michael"; part 3A section I.1 "The Seven Archangels with the Seven Trumpets"; and part 2A of Bible Basics, section II.9.3.3, "Archangels".

525 See part 3A of this series, section III.6 "The Second Woe: Demon Destruction".

526 See "The Abyss", in section IV of The Satanic Rebellion Part 5: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement. The reference in Revelation 18:2 about Babylon as a "dwelling place for demons, and a place of confinement for every [sort of] unclean spirit" refers to the condition of that country after divine judgment: that is now all that it is suitable for (e.g., Matt.12:43; cf. Is.13:31-32; 34:13-17).

527 Apocalyptic references to the "blacking out" of the "hosts of heaven" and the "falling of the stars" to earth may also anticipate this glorious moment of demonic removal (e.g., Is.34:4; Joel 3:15; Mk.13:24-25; Rev.6:13; cf. Jer.10:11).

528 See part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion series, section II.8.c, under "The Jewish Ceremonial Calendar".

529 However, it is true that elect angels do this where such activity is recorded elsewhere (Rev.20:1-3; cf. Rev.9:1-3; 12:7-9).

530 See part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion series, section IV.2.c, "Replacement II: Christ the

King and His Church” for the principle in the plan of God of Christ and the Church replacing Satan and his angels.

531 For passages which describe the southerly approach of our Lord’s Armageddon campaign, see the previous installment of this series, The Coming Tribulation, part 5, note #75, and section VII.5.c, “Israel Fights”.

532 See the discussion in part 4 of this series, section VII.2.c, under “Torment in fire and sulphur”. Revelation 14:9-11, while technically referring to the ultimate state of those who receive the mark, is yet a sobering warning about the more immediate consequences discussed here: a fiery death which transitions the offenders to Torments in Hades, followed by an eternity in the Lake of Fire as a result of the Last Judgment.

533 We have studied before the subject of prophetic conflation for simplicity’s sake of end time events: see Part 1 of this series, section IV.1.b, “The ‘Day of the Lord’ Paradigm”.

534 And we know that there will be survivors who are not believers (Is.66:19; Rev.1:7; cf. Is.2:2-3).

535 See part 5 of this series, section V., “The Resurrection of the Lamb’s Bride”.

536 See the excellent discussion on this point by C.F. Keil in v.9 of Commentary on the Old Testament (rpr. Grand Rapids 1980) *in loc*.

537 Cf. Daniel 12:1: “but during that time your people will escape, [that is,] everyone who[se name] is found written in the book [of life]”; that is, the names of all those who refused the mark remain in the Book of Life and so that they are not subject to the baptism of fire.

538 Even positing a very conservative and almost certainly far too small total number of believers at 1.2 billion over the prior six thousand years, nevertheless some 68,000 years of day and night judgment would be required in “real time”, with only one half an hour a piece available for each person to receive the promised personal judgment from our Lord.

539 Satan was able to show our Lord the kingdoms of the world and all their glory “in an instant of time” (Lk.4:5). If a mere creature (and an evil one at that) were capable of such time compression in the present *kosmos*, we can be sure that our Lord can compress the time of our judgment into the blink of an eye in human chronological terms.

540 Our Lord's synoptic "telescoping" of the entire process of eternal judgment into one (although in terms of its actual process it will involve two evaluations of believers and one of unbelievers) is a standard prophetic device known as "prophetic foreshortening" (covered in part 1 of this series, section IV.1.a).

541 Literally, "treasuring up" from the Greek *thesaurizo* (θησαυρίζω; cf. English "thesaurus"), the same verb used by our Lord Jesus to commend our "storing up" of treasures in heaven instead of on the earth (Matt.6:19-24).

542 These two extensive topics, spiritual growth and Christian epistemology, introduced only briefly here, will be covered in detail in parts 5 and 6A of the Bible Basics series, "Pneumatology" and "Peripateology" respectively. I am indebted to Col. R.B. Thieme Jr. for recognizing the critical distinction between *gnosis* and *epignosis*: The Grace Apparatus for Perception (Houston 1969).

543 See the Peter series, especially lessons #13-18.

544 It would also certainly stand to reason that our "jobs" during the Millennium will be compatible with our present spiritual gifts (an observation I owe to Mr. Lynn Murray).

545 E.g., see the notes on the Song of Solomon in the 1599 Geneva Bible.

546 We may expect that this also involves some sort of supernatural accommodation for the extremely large number of participants (analogous to the supernatural compaction of time during the judgment of the Church).

547 The sentence "*But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished*" (KJV), is a later, non-scriptural addition, and is not a part of the actual biblical text.

548 See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 1, section II.6, "The Seven Edens".

549 These are Phase I restoration and Phase II restoration respectively (with Phase III being the Eternal State). See The Satanic Rebellion Series: Part 5: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement, section IV, "Things to Come: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement Phases II and III".

550 See The Satanic Rebellion series, especially part 5, section II.8.b, "The Seven Days of Re-Creation".

551 See The Satanic Rebellion Part 4: Satan's World System: Past, Present and Future.

552 See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 1, section II.6, "The Seven Edens".

553 See the introduction above, and The Satanic Rebellion Part 5: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement, section IV, “Things to Come: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement Phases II and III”).

554 On this subject, see R.B. Thieme, Victorious Proclamation (Houston, 2nd ed. 1977).

555 Since the prince can give allotments “to his sons”, we may be sure that a descendent of David and not David himself is meant by this title. Ezekiel 46:16-18 does not actually contemplate the prince dying; he will have “sons”, and will give them an inheritance while he is still alive – probably all the way to the end of the Millennium (in keeping with the return during this penultimate Eden to pre-flood life spans; see section c, immediately following).

556 See The Coming Tribulation, part 2B, section III, “The Restraining Ministry of the Holy Spirit”.

557 See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 1, section II.6, “The Seven Edens”.

558 Not an unparalleled phenomenon (2Kng.7:5-8; and cf. Libya’s status as a major iron and steel scrap exporter for years after World War II), but in scope far beyond anything in the prior history of the world.

559 On this translation (which is the author's), see Irenaeus *Adv. Her.* 5.34.4.

560 The prophecy of Zechariah 6:12-13 (quoted immediately below) does not necessitate that there be no temple in place when our Lord returns. Rather, the Hebrew verb *bahah* indicates in this instance just such a process of ornamentation, that is to say, Messiah will “build it up” rather than “build it from scratch”; cf. the precise same use of the bare verb *banah* in Psalm 147:2: “The Lord builds up [*boneh* fr. *banah*] Jerusalem; he gathers the exiles of Israel” (NIV), where, obviously, Jerusalem already exists when it is thus beautified.

561 On the ark of the covenant as symbolizing both God’s throne and battle-chariot, see part 2B of Coming Tribulation, section I.1.2.b, “The Throne”.

562 See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”; and, specifically, for a discussion of these millennial believers as Christ’s “double portion”, see “Day 7” in section II.8.b of the same study.

563 See the discussion in part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion, section II.8.c., “The Jewish Ceremonial Calendar”.

564 For example, fire consumes the rebels here, whereas there are no “birds” summoned to eat the corpses as at Armageddon, and no seven years necessary for burial (as history

will conclude immediately following this battle in any case; see section VI below). See part 5 of the present series, section III, “The Beast's Armageddon Crusade”, for the full discussion concerning “Gog of Magog”.

565 See part 2 of The Satanic Rebellion series, “The Genesis Gap”.

566 It is also likely that the demons (who are very aware of God’s existence: Jas.2:19), know very well that this day is coming. That is the best way to understand the response of the legion of demons at Matthew 8:29, "What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us *before the appointed time?*" (NIV). I am indebted to Ms. Nancy Lamoureux for this observation.

567 Compare the description at Rev.19:3 of Babylon’s destruction being visible “forever”.

568 Isaiah is making his point in a poetic fashion (this chapter, as with most of Isaiah, is in poetic form in the Hebrew text). We find a very similar usage in Isaiah 14:9-11, where the "king of Babylon" goes down "to the grave" and is covered with "maggots and worms". Isaiah is thus combining here a picture of the literal "grave" with that of the eternal "grave" of the non-believer.

569 The NIV’s “First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles *to be burned*” is an accurate rendering of the Greek text of verse thirty, *pros to katakausai auta* (πρὸς τὸ κατακαῦσαι αὐτά), indicating the preparation of the chaff for burning. However the wheat is brought into the barn first, reflecting the fact that the wheat is more important: there will be plenty of time to burn the bundled chaff later once the wheat has been safely stored in the barn.

570 I.e., Matt.13:43 parallels the picture given in Rev.21:3 precisely.

571 The actual separation of the resurrection of the living into phases (i.e., after our Lord, the pre and post-millennial resurrections of the living: 1Cor.15:23-25) is, of course, a “mystery” (1Cor.15:51-52) not revealed until apostolic times (explaining the conflation of the resurrection in passages such as Dan.12:2-3).

572 Despite appearances, passages such as Psalm 104:5 and Ecclesiastes 1:4 are not in fact inconsistent with the clear teaching of fundamental renewal quoted above. The earth will endure as it is presently constituted “until eternity”, but it is precisely at the commencement of eternity when the new heavens and earth will replace the old.

573 In section 5 of part 2A, and in section VI.1 of part 4.

574 The doctrine of unlimited atonement is discussed in section II.3 of Bible Basics: Part 4A: Christology.

575 Reading *kata-krino* in verse 13 with Sinaiticus in the second instance (rather than

the simplex form *krino*).

576 See part 4 of [The Satanic Rebellion](#) series, “Satan’s World System”, section IV, “Tactical Doctrine” for a discussion of these three essential satanic lies.

577 This principle of interpretation is covered in detail in part 2 of [The Satanic Rebellion](#) series, “The Genesis Gap”, section II.3, “The Sea”.

578 See [The Satanic Rebellion: Part 1](#), section II.6, “The Seven Edens”.

579 This is also why believers were only transferred to “heaven” from “paradise” below the earth after Christ’s ascension. See [Bible Basics 4A: Christology](#), section I.5.0.2.3, “The Transfer of Believers from the Subterranean Paradise to the Third Heaven”.

580 In the Gospel of John, we have at least one instance where the singular *ouranos* is used to translate *shamayim* (i.e., Jn.6:31 compared to Ps.78:24b). John uses *ouranos* seventeen times in his gospel, and only (possibly) once in the plural in John 3:5, where a good textual case can be made for reading “kingdom of *God*” instead of “kingdom of *heaven[s]*”.

581 It is interesting to note that in Daniel 7:10, the river of fire (which fills the Lake of Fire, cf. Dan.7:11) proceeds directly from the throne, indicating a very close proximity between the throne and the lake.

582 See “The Sea”, in section I of [Coming Tribulation part 2B: The Heavenly Prelude](#).

583 See [The Satanic Rebellion](#) series, and, in particular, part 5, “Judgment, Restoration, and Replacement”.

584 Elevation and/or separation as an indication of the rank of deity is a common feature of paradise in all its iterations: see [The Satanic Rebellion: Part 1](#), section II.6, “The Seven Edens”.

585 See [The Coming Tribulation](#), part 2B, section I.1.d, “The tabernacle and the first curtain”.

586 This is the order actually described in the Greek text. Many versions incorrectly reverse south and west in verse 13. The tradition reflected in Alexandrinus (codex A) is in fact the one followed by the queen of biblical manuscripts, Sinaiticus (codex \aleph), despite what one may gather from various textual apparatuses. There was a scribal error in \aleph (accidentally writing “north” twice), but the correction to “south / west” instead of “west / south” is late and incorrect. After writing north a second time, the scribe next wrote “south” and there ended the series (proving that “south” is the final set of gates).

587 See part 1 of [The Satanic Rebellion](#) series, section II.5.b “The Illustration of the

Tabernacle”, and part 2B of the Coming Tribulation series, in section I, “The Earthly Tabernacle and Temple as a Type of the Heavenly Temple”.

588 Herein we see a parallel to the universe as a whole which is, and will no doubt remain, mostly space with a small percentage of material; the perfect cube of the holy of holies and of the New Jerusalem argue for this being the true shape of the material universe as well. Compare Is.40:22 where the universe is described as God’s “tent” (and that would by definition be a perfect cube after the fashion of the holy of holies and the New Jerusalem).

589 Nine such stones were worn by Satan before his fall. Additionally, stones of memorial for each angel, the “stones of fire” of Ezekiel 28:14-16, were present in the initial paradise. Three of the nine clans seceded to join the devil in rebellion against God. See part 4 of The Satanic Rebellion series for discussion, section III.3.b.2, “Angelic Elders”, and part 1 of the same series, section III.1 “Walking Amidst the Stones of Fire”.

590 We find a similar adjustment of relative rank in the reorganization of the angelic clans evident from comparison of Ezekiel 28:13 with Exodus 28:17-21 and 39:10-14. See part 4 of The Satanic Rebellion series, section III.3.b.2, “Angelic Elders”.

591 See part 1 of Coming Tribulation, in section V, “The Seven Churches’ Angels”.

592 No operative liaison will be necessary during the Millennium because of the presence of the resurrected Church.

593 See part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion series, in section II.8.b.i, “Israel the Ultimate Organization”.

594 See part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion series, in section II.8.b.i, “The Symbolism of the Four Gaps and their Twelve-Day Groupings”.

595 See part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion series, in section II.8.c, point 5 under “The Symbolism of the Four Gaps and their Twelve-Day Groupings”, “Israel is the Ultimate Organization”: “Thus the final organization of the family of God would seem to be as follows: 6 clans of elect angels represented by 24 elders on the one hand, complemented by and *equal in number* to 12 tribes of saved and resurrected human beings, organized into 24 echelons on the other, both ruled over by the God Man Jesus Christ.”

596 See part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion series, in section II.8.b, under “Day 7”, “Evidence for the “Seven Days” Interpretation”.

597 See part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion series, in section II.8.c, point 5 under “The Symbolism of the Four Gaps and their Twelve-Day Groupings”.

598 Compare the identical symbolism behind the bread of presence in the tabernacle. See

part 1 of The Satanic Rebellion series, section II.5.b “The Illustration of the Tabernacle”, and part 2B of the Coming Tribulation series, in section I, “The Earthly Tabernacle and Temple as a Type of the Heavenly Temple”.

599 In addition to the information on this subject to found in section I.7 above, "The Judgment of the Church", see also part 5 of this series, section V, “The Resurrection of the Lamb's Bride”, and lesson #20 of the Peter's Epistles, “The Resurrection”.

600 For this usage of the Greek verb *latreuo* (λατρεύω), compare especially Acts 7:7; 24:14; Heb.9:9; 10:2; Rev.7:15.

601 God is the object of our worship in this verse, and by this time Christ has subordinated the millennial Kingdom to the Father (1Cor.15:25-28). Yet there is only one throne, occupied by “God [the Father] and the Lamb”, showing that while the Father is now revealed as the ultimate Person to be worshiped, the Lamb, our Lord Jesus, is most certainly not excluded from our eternal adoration. Compare Revelation 5:13: “To the One who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb [be] the blessing and the honor and the glory and the power for ever and ever!”.

602 Cf. Matt.8:12, where the "outer darkness" refers to this same separation from God (Greek *e)co/teron*, of the same root as the *e/cw* of the text here).

603 See Coming Tribulation: Part 3A, section II, "The Great Apostasy".

604 E.g., this is the real force of our Lord's statements about the need for alertness on account of the fact that the precise "day and hour" of His return is unknown (Matt.24:42; 24:44; 25:13; Mk.13:35; Lk.12:40).

605 See part 5 of this series, section II.4, "Flee Babylon!".

606 See Coming Tribulation: Part 1, section III, "General Character of the Tribulation".

607 See Coming Tribulation: Part 4, section VII, "The Great Persecution".

608 Many of the Psalms (and other prophetic passages) which believers have long quoted as encouragement in times of distress and persecution find their complete fulfillment in those days of testing which precede our Lord's return (e.g., Ps.2; 24; 46; 47; 48; 50:1-4; 53:6 et passim; 76; 79; 106).

609 . See Coming Tribulation: Part 5, section II.4, "Flee Babylon".

610 . See Coming Tribulation: Part 3A, section II.3.c.1, "The persuasiveness of tribulational false teaching".

611 See Coming Tribulation: Part 3A, section II.3, "The Causes of the Great Apostasy".

612 While there are certainly examples in scripture of believers dissembling in a righteous way in order to protect others (e.g., Rahab's hiding of the Israelite spies; cf. James' characterization of this lie as righteousness: Jas.2:25), adopting a posture of falsehood out of a desire for personal safety will be at the very least a questionable course during the Tribulation, and one which will be absolutely reprehensible and indefensible if it leads to the harming of other believers.

613 See part 4 of the Satanic Rebellion series, section III.1 "Satan's antediluvian attack on the purity of the human line (the Nephilim)".

614 See part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, section II.9 "Specific Chronology of the Seven Days of Human History".

615 . As a comparison between the two parts of the passage quoted here (i.e., 1st Peter 3:19-20 with 1st Peter 3:21) indicates, and as many biblical commentators have noted in the past. See especially M.F. Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament, and Arthur Pink's Gleanings in Genesis (both in loc.).

616 It is in this sense that we should understand out Lord's words at Luke 21:18 about "not a hair of our heads" being harmed: while this will be literally true in many cases, martyrdom will constitute a complete spiritual deliverance comparable to this corresponding physical deliverance. Compare also Paul's similar confidence in deliverance in 2nd Timothy 4:18: "The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom" (NIV), which deliverance most likely also took place by way of martyrdom (cf. Rev.2:10:b).

617 See Coming Tribulation: Part 6, section I, "The Second Advent Judgments".

618 See Coming Tribulation: Part 3B, section I.3.b, "Pharaoh", and Coming Tribulation: Part 5, in section II.4, "The Exodus parallel".

619 See Coming Tribulation: Part 6, section I.6, "The Regathering and Purging of Israel".

620 For the details, the reader is encouraged to see part 4A of Bible Basics: Soteriology, section I.5, "The Life of Christ".

621 See Coming Tribulation: Part 1, section IV.1.b, "The Day of the Lord Paradigm".

622 Coming Tribulation: Part 3A, section II.3.b, "The dearth of Bible teaching during the Tribulation".

⁶²³ Notably, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Chicago: 1968), by A.J. McClain.

⁶²⁴ . See part 3A of this series, section II, "The Great Apostasy".