

# POULIOT, STUART H (2002) - THE REIGN OF THE HEAVENS, VOL I

by Pouliot Stuart h 2002

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*Pouliot's theological study of God's kingdom and heavenly reign, exploring biblical themes including the Word of God, divine sovereignty, kingdom destiny, Christ's person, salvation, faith, judgment, rewards, and the eternal nature of God's rule.*

27 Chapters

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## **(a). Import Note**

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## **(b) Title - The Reign Of The Heavens**

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The Reign Of The Heavens

Volume 1 by Stuart H. Pouliot

PO Box 3863 Richmond, VA 23235 USA

April, 2002 theupwardcall@juno.com I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.(Php 3:14)

## (c). The Use of Scriptures

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### The Use Of Scriptures Cited In This Book

Unless otherwise noted, the Scriptures used throughout this book have been taken from the New American Standard Bible (NAS). When other translations are used, they are identified using one of the following abbreviations; for example: (Matthew 7:21 YLT).

AB

Amplified Bible

ASV

American Standard Version 1901 Bible

JND

A New Translation from the Original Languages by J.N. Darby

KJV

King James Version of the Bible

KSW

The New Testament-An Expanded Translation by K.S. Wuest

NAS

New American Standard Bible

NIV

New International Version

NKJ

New King James Bible

RFW

New Testament in Modern Speech by R.F. Weymouth

TLB

The Living Bible

YLT

Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible

To add emphasis, some portions of Scriptures have been highlighted in all caps. Where this has been done, a notation {ea} has been included along with the Scripture reference. The {ea} stands for "emphasis added"; for example: Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot {discern} the signs of the times?" (Matthew 16:3 {ea}).

Some words taken from the Scriptures have been capitalized to emphasize the eternal, heavenly or Kingdom nature of the word; for example: the Day (the Second Coming), the Kingdom and Glory, the Kingdom of Heaven, the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, the Wife of the Lamb. The word church is capitalized when it refers to the heavenly nature of the Church or the entire Church throughout the last two millennia, but not when referring to a local assembly on earth.

Special note: The Scriptures use the lunar year of 360 days (12 months times 30 days per month), not the solar year of 365 days. For example, comparing Genesis 7:11 with Genesis 8:3-4 reveals that 150 days equaled 5 months, which is a 30-day month. Also, comparing Revelation 11:2 with Revelation 11:3 reveals that 42 months and 1,260 days are the same, based on a 30-day month.

Throughout this book, all years referring to the times or ages are lunar years.

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## (e). Foreword

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Foreword In writing a book, the author must have some particular purpose or objective. After all, why write a book if you are not attempting to achieve a particular goal? This book is no exception.

There are seven objectives behind the writing of this book. They are... To challenge your thinking. In today's Christian world, there are many views that are held; some are based on sound interpretation of the Scriptures and some are not. It has been this way for nearly 2,000 years. Unfortunately over time, teachings or doctrines have developed that are based not so much on the Scriptures but on tradition which may or may not be supported by the Scriptures. For example, why do we have single pastors heading up local assemblies when the Scriptures are silent on such a thing and, in fact, reveal just the opposite existed in the early church? Or why do people believe that the Kingdom of God's Son has already come when it is very clear from the condition of the world governments that a Righteous King is not ruling over the nations at this point in time? Or why do so many Christians believe that when they die, they will go to heaven, receive reward and enter into the Kingdom, when we are to be waiting for the One who comes from heaven, at which time (future time) He will take the scepter of the Kingdom and begin ruling over the earth? Or why do some Christians believe that the Kingdom resides in them in some mystery, when the Kingdom refers to the literal and absolute rule of God's King, who is coming very soon? Or why do others believe that the church must take the world for the Lord, establishing His Kingdom on earth so that He can come back, when the Scriptures state that the church will be in apostasy when He returns? Or why are pastors-teachers telling people that the Lord cannot come back for many years (some say 500 years) and others are saying they do not want Him to come soon because they have too much to do for the Lord, when the Scriptures reveal that His return is not dependent on us but on the Father who has set the time, and our time is almost up? Obviously, this list of questions could go on almost endlessly. The point is that we need to be challenged in these last days because there is much deception and it will lead the Lord's people away from the truth and into false teachings that will leave them unprepared to appear before the judgment seat of Christ. To encourage you to become like a Berean. In the book of Acts, it is revealed that the believers in Berea received the word with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so (Acts 17:11). In other words, they heard what was taught but they dug into the Scriptures to see if it was true. They did not take man's word for it; they wanted to see for themselves.

Today, how many of the Lord's people, when they hear something, search the Word of God on their own to see if what they have heard matches the Scriptures? Too often, believers are spoon fed every Sunday, to the point that all they know is what someone else has told them, whether it is sound or not. The result is that they fail to develop a discerning ear that knows truth from error. Don't take man's word for it; study the Word of God, asking the Holy Spirit to shed His light upon the Word that the eyes of your heart might be enlightened (Ephesians 1:18). You are encouraged to take every thought in this book to the Lord and search His Word to see if it is so.

Man's word is here today and gone tomorrow, but God's Word remains forever. No man can write a book without injecting his own words; however, if we remain close to the Scriptures, comparing Scripture to Scripture and allowing the Scriptures to teach us, then there is value to the words. We need the God-breathed Word, for this is what is profitable. To commit the content of this book to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Today, there is a desperate need to teach the Lord's people regarding the Word of the Kingdom and the coming of the Lord Jesus when He ushers in the Kingdom Age (the Reign of the Heavens). Sufficient Scriptures and explanation of the Scriptures are presented so that those who have a mind to be a Berean and who want to teach others in like fashion can do so. Further, some Scriptures along with discussion of the context are repeated in various ways throughout the pages that follow. This is by design. As Paul wrote to the Philippians: To write the same things {again} is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you (Php 3:1). To produce in your heart an eager expectancy for the return of the Lord. How many Christians do you know who are eagerly, even anxiously, awaiting the arrival of our beloved Lord Jesus? How many even realize that we are in the last days right before the final seven years of Man's Day? We do not know the exact day and hour of His return, but we are to know the season. We are in the season of His return and we need to be watchful until He comes. To encourage you to nurture a personal love relationship with the Lord Jesus. Our beloved Lord is coming back to receive a bride who will sit upon His throne to rule with Him for the next 1,000 years and then into the eternal ages. How can one be a bride if the person has not developed a personal relationship with the bridegroom? Why would it be any different for the Bridegroom? He is coming for a people who know Him, not merely know of Him, and who have loved Him with their whole heart. He is after a lover to reign with Him. While we remain in the body, we are to seek Him, spend time with Him, walk with Him and love Him. Love is one of the foundational themes of this book. To explain the Word of the Kingdom and the Reign of the Heavens. The prophetic Scriptures point to one event, and that is the day when the kingdom of this world becomes the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (Revelation 11:15). For the last 6,000 years, the history of the world has been heading toward this one glorious day. It is the age of the Kingdom and Glory. There is no subject as important and foundational as the King and the Kingdom of Glory. In fact, this is the central message of the Scriptures. Some sections of this book are devoted to proving that Christ and His Kingdom is the foundation upon which rests all Scripture. In fact, once the proper foundation is laid, the Scriptures will be opened up in ways that you never imagined. Scriptures that were hard to understand or confusing will become clearer once the Kingdom comes clearly into view. To encourage you to press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. The children of God have set before them the most unbelievable goal, and that is to enter the Kingdom and reign in glory for the 1,000 years that precede the eternal ages. This is what the Word of the Kingdom is all about, but we must pursue the coming Kingdom as a goal to be won like a race. If a born-again Christian runs the race in the proper fashion, there is a prize, a crown awaiting him in the Day of Christ. One who is given a crown is one who has successfully run the race of the faith and who will be approved at the judgment seat of Christ to enter the Reign of the Heavens to rule and reign with Christ. This book will have met its objective if you begin to press on toward the goal, or if you have already been pressing on, it encourages your heart to continue.

## Part 1.1 - ..The Word Of The Kingdom

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Introduction-The Word Of The Kingdom The New Testament starts with the Gospel of Matthew for a very good reason; it presents the King and the Kingdom, which is the central theme of the Scriptures. All of the prophetic Scriptures point to one glorious event, and that is the day in which God's Son-His Anointed King, Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world-will come to this earth and take the scepter of the Kingdom of the Heavens (as rendered in the Greek text) to rule over this earth for 1,000 years. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to God's King, but He has not begun to exercise His absolute reign over this earth. This day is coming soon, and we must be readied in this day to stand in His presence in His Day. The Gospel of Matthew is unique because it alone uses the phrase the Kingdom of the Heavens, and the title of this book comes from this phrase. In the translation of the New Testament from the Greek to English, the meaning of some words and phrases has been lost or diminished. The words can seem sort of static. The Kingdom of the Heavens is one of those phrases that loses some of its original meaning. The Kingdom of the Heavens is best translated as the Reign of the Heavens. The word reign implies action (ruling, governing), and the heavens describes where the action is occurring. The Scriptures declare that the heavens do rule (Daniel 4:26ASV). Since the Bible focuses almost entirely on the affairs of this earth and not on God's Universal Kingdom that encompasses His entire creation, the heavens do rule declares that the rule over this earth, in this age and in the age to come, comes from the heavenly realm associated with the earth. In other words, whoever sits in the heavenly realm rules. In writing to the Ephesians, Paul the apostle used the phrase in the heavenly places (high places in some translations) five times in referring to where Christ is seated, where His people are seated and from which they receive every spiritual blessing, and where the powers of darkness, the rulers of this world, also are seated (Ephesians 1:3; Ephesians 1:20; Ephesians 2:6; Ephesians 3:10; Ephesians 6:12). The word heavenly means "above the sky," and the word places, which is not found in the original Greek, was added by the translators for readability. Perhaps it would be best to paraphrase this term as reigning from the heavenly places.

Thus, the Kingdom of the Heavens or the Reign of the Heavens means that powers and principalities in the heavens or the heavenly places rule this earth. Today, the heavenly rulers are the angels; but when the Kingdom of God's Son comes, the rulers will be man, the one new man in Christ. The writer of the Hebrews letter, which was written with the coming Kingdom Age in view, declared: For He did not subject to angels the world [age] to come, concerning which we are speaking (Hebrews 2:5). The rule of the earth comes from the sphere of heaven in which the earth is suspended, and one day, the rulers of this earth will be those born-again sons of God who will have been found worthy to attain unto the Kingdom Age, to rule with Christ as He sits upon His throne (Revelation 3:21).

According to the Scriptures, the Kingdom of the Heavens or the Reign of the Heavens is revealed in what the Lord Jesus described as the Word of the Kingdom (Matthew 13:19), which very simply is the message of the Kingdom of God's beloved Son. Contained also in this message is the need

for every born-again child of God to walk worthy of their calling into the coming Kingdom (Ephesians 4:1). It is about the King and the Kingdom and those who will be found worthy to reign with the King of kings and the Lord of lords during His millennial reign. The Lord Himself has left us His word on the way into the Reign of the Heavens.

"Not everyone who is saying to me, 'Lord, lord,' shall come into the reign of the heavens; but he who is doing the will of my Father who is in the heavens." (Matthew 7:21 YLT {ea})

Obedying the will of God is the key to entering the Reign of the Heavens. Today, the Holy Spirit is searching for an obedient people who will be called out of the Body of Christ into the place of dominion (ruling and reigning with Christ), and this requires those who have believed on Jesus (born again) to walk worthy of the God who calls them into His own Kingdom and Glory (1 Thessalonians 2:12). At the heart of the Word of the Kingdom is Christ, the Author and Captain of salvation, and the bringing of many sons unto glory (Hebrews 2:10).

It cannot be stressed enough that there is no greater subject in the Scriptures than the subject of the King and the Kingdom. In fact, it is the message of the prophetic Scriptures. The prophets of old looked for the King and the Kingdom. When Christ came the first time, the Jews were looking for their King to come and deliver them and set up His Kingdom on earth. John the Baptist proclaimed the Kingdom; Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom; the apostles preached the Kingdom. The book of Acts begins with the resurrected Jesus teaching His disciples on the Kingdom, and it ends with Paul under arrest and yet unhindered in preaching the Kingdom. The Bible, from the beginning, sets the principle of the Kingdom, as man was created to have dominion, to rule over this earth; and it ends with the arrival of the King of kings as Christ Jesus, the second Man, steps back on this earth, takes the scepter of the Kingdom of the Heavens and sits upon the throne of David. In that day, the Son of God will restore man back to his very purpose for being created—to have dominion (Genesis 1:26-28). Those called out from the one new man in Christ will sit upon His throne as co-heirs of the Kingdom. The Son of God is God's King. It is the Kingdom of the Son of God's love (Colossians 1:13 NKJ) to which all Scripture points. The King and the Kingdom cannot be separated. To understand God's King, we must understand the Kingdom. To understand the Kingdom, we must understand the King. We cannot separate the King and the Kingdom any more than we can separate the Word of God and the Word of the Kingdom. They are one word and they center entirely on God's Son and God's purpose and plan. They are one; for God has set His King on His holy hill of Zion, and He is coming to rule over this earth with a rod of iron until all His enemies have been subdued, until even death itself is no more (Psalms 2:6; Psalms 2:9; Revelation 19:15; 1 Corinthians 15:25-26). The Kingdom of the Son must come before the eternal ages are ushered in. In fact, it is the Kingdom of the Son that brings in eternity, when God will be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28). A careful study of the New Testament will reveal that the Kingdom that is coming was the central message of the early church. Whether the word kingdom is used or not, this was the view of the first pioneers of the church. Since the birth of the Church, the spiritual battle that every Christian is brought into, whether they know it or not, is over this matter of the Kingdom. The battle that rages with the unseen powers of darkness is over the Word of the Kingdom.

"When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, the evil {one} comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart." (Matthew 13:19 {ea}) The Reign of the

Heavens is the central message of the Bible and is explained through the Word of the Kingdom. This is the message that Satan seeks to rob from God's people. Why? Because the day that the Kingdom of the Son comes, Satan and his angels will be completely and utterly defeated and cast out of their places of dominion in the heavenly places. In that day, Christ will rule supreme, along with those who are counted worthy to reign with Him. The Kingdom is so central to all Scripture that if we miss the true nature of the Kingdom, we will miss the very purpose for the creation of man, the redemption of man, the battle over man, the millennial reign; the place of the Gentile nations, the nation of Israel and the Church of God during the Kingdom Age; and the ultimate intention of God in the eternal ages. The message of the Kingdom is what connects all prophetic Scripture and expresses God's purpose and plan for the 7,000-year history of this earth upon which we live. Miss the Kingdom and we will miss the very key to understanding the Bible. Miss the Kingdom and we will miss the purpose for man's creation and redemption. Miss the Kingdom and we will miss God's heart for sending His only begotten Son to this earth to die for the sin of the world. Miss the Kingdom and we will miss the King!

Since the very beginning of God's restoration work (Genesis 1:2 b), everything in the history of man and this world has been moving toward one tremendous and glorious day when God's Son will take the scepter of the Kingdom of the Heavens and rule over this earth for 1,000 years. Very soon, God will break into the history of this world, forever changing the kingdoms of this world. The King is coming!

## Part 2.1 - .. Most High Rules Over All

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### The Most High Rules Over All God's Universal Kingdom

Since God is the Creator, the entire universe lies under His Sovereign control and rule. In other words, it is His Kingdom-the Kingdom of God. The Greek word for kingdom is *basileia*, which means "reign," "rule" or "sovereignty, royal power, dominion." Thus, kingdom refers to the rule or reign over a realm. God's realm is His entire creation. God alone rules and reigns over His creation. There is no one higher than God and no one who rules beyond God. He is the Sovereign. For You, LORD, are most high above all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods (Psalms 97:9NKJ). All power and dominion belong to God alone. God rules over all and absolutely nothing happens in His creation apart from His Sovereign rule. There is no place in this vast universe that is outside of His realm. He sees all that is going on in His universe and He is Sovereign over all that is going on. Most importantly, He is working all things in His universe according to His Divine purpose and plan. All things are worked after the counsel of His will (Ephesians 1:11). For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him {be} the glory forever. Amen (Romans 11:36).

David declared: The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His sovereignty (kingdom) rules over all (Psalms 103:19). A throne is the seat of authority. It is the place from which the rule comes forth. In the Hebrew language, throne conveys the thought of a canopy or a covering, implying protection. Thus, from the throne comes the rule over a realm and it is this rule that provides protection to the realm over which it presides.

God alone is the One who rules over the universe in which our earth is located. It is His throne, His realm, His Kingdom; and His throne is the canopy or protection over His entire realm. In other words, all rule comes from His throne which is in heaven.

Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and You are exalted as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; in Your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. (1 Chronicles 29:11-12NKJ)

"O LORD, the God of our fathers, art Thou not God in the heavens? And art Thou not ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations? Power and might are in Thy hand so that no one can stand against Thee." (2 Chronicles 20:6)

We must be clear that in God's creation there really is only one kingdom. So that we maintain a clear perspective, let us call it God's Universal Kingdom. This is not an attempt to introduce another term, one that is not in the Bible, but rather it is an attempt to define what the Kingdom of God is in its purest, highest sense. Technically, the phrase the Kingdom of God generally is used throughout Scripture in a more restrictive manner, referring to this earth and not the entire universe. This is taken up in the next chapter. However, as we begin to look at this whole matter of the Word of the Kingdom and the Reign of the Heavens, we need to start at the highest, most

inclusive place we can. The highest place is represented by the Universal Kingdom of God.

Within God's Universal Kingdom, there most likely are kingdoms ruled by rulers (angels) appointed by God. These are kingdoms within God's Universal Kingdom, which could be called provinces or places of dominion. It is very similar to what we see in countries throughout the world. Most countries are divided in some manner, whether the division is called a province, state, region or some other designation. In each division, there are authorities who report to higher authorities in the country. God's Universal Kingdom most likely is divided in a similar fashion, and the earth is within one of these divisions or provinces. Actually, God the Son is the one who created all authority so it only makes sense that what we see on earth today, although it has been corrupted by Satan and by the fall of man, is in some measure a reflection of God's creative genius. Speaking of the Son, the Word tells us: For by Him all things were created, {both} in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-all things have been created by Him and for Him (Colossians 1:16).

Now, all of this might seem to be very obvious because God is God. Who is higher than God? Who is beyond God? No one is, for God alone is the beginning and end of all things. He is the Eternal of all things!

He is the God of this universe in which earth is suspended and He is the God of the history of the universe. Nothing happens apart from our God. He is supreme and He is central in His universe. It is His Kingdom that rules over all, for the Most High rules and His rule is absolute.

Once we are clear on these basic but essential facts, it is instructive for us to have a further understanding of how God rules, at least to the degree of understanding that we are given in His Word. Who can fathom the mind of God? At best we only see in part. How great are Thy works, O LORD! Thy thoughts are very deep (Psalms 92:5). In All Places Of His Dominion

Sometimes we might wonder if the planet on which we live is the only place in God's vast universe that has created beings in residence. If earth is the only inhabited place, then the extent of God's actual rule is restricted to one minuscule planet floating in an immensely huge universe. Earth is so small that it does not even measure up to one speck of dust. Is earth all there is? Probably not.

David declared: "Bless the Lord, all His works, in all places of His dominion" (Psalms 103:22NKJ). Considering the dimensions of the universe, God must have countless places of His dominion. Although man has long studied the universe and through recent advances in technology has scanned the vastness of the universe, he still does not know the full dimensions of God's creation. Consider what we do know-Our earth is located in a galaxy with a medium-size star as our sun. Within our galaxy are estimated to be two hundred billion other stars. It is one hundred light years across our galaxy. Our galaxy is only one of billions of other galaxies in the universe. The nearest galaxy to ours is estimated to be up to two and one-half million light years away. Thus, the size of the universe is beyond man's comprehension. We just can not fathom the dimensions of what God has created.

How many places of His dominion are there? We do not know and we are not told. We have not been given much information beyond our own earth; therefore, we should not speculate over what we have not been given. In fact, it is essential to understand that the Bible focuses almost exclusively on what God has been doing and continues to do in reference to the earth on which we

live. The Bible does not deal with anything beyond our earth except in a very limited way. Further, God's interest is focused entirely on one object on earth and that is His created being, man. The earth is man's domain and all that God does in relation to this earth has to do with His work with man, the object of His love.

However, one of the oldest books of the Bible, Job, does give an indication that there are other inhabited places of His dominion in the universe.

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. And the LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" So Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it." (Job 1:6-7NKJ)

God's question to Satan, "From where do you come?" implies that the sons of God came from various places in the universe. We are not told from where the other sons came, but we are told that Satan came from walking the earth. From God's question, "Have you considered My servant Job?" we know that Satan was observing man. What were the other sons of God doing that they had to report to God? We are not told, but if they were like Satan, they too were observing. But for what purpose? What were they charged to do that they had to appear before the throne of God? The answer may lie in the reason they are called sons of God.

God Rules Through Sons Who are sons of God and what does a son mean to God? Throughout the Scriptures, being a son of God always refers to one who is in a position to rule in God's Kingdom, whether an angel or a man. Angels, created beings, are sons of God (Genesis 6:2; Genesis 6:4; Job 38:7). Adam was a son of God (Luke 3:38) who was created in the image of God to have dominion over the earth. If he had not fallen in sin, all of his race would have become sons of God in ruling over this earth. However, because of the fall, all of mankind born of Adam's fallen race are not sons of God. Israel as a nation was brought forth as a special creation, a first-born son of God (Exodus 4:22) to be the head of all the nations through which God would rule as a theocracy (Deuteronomy 28:1; Deuteronomy 28:13). In the age to come, faithful Christians who walk by the Spirit in this age and walk worthy of the God who calls them into His own Kingdom and Glory (1 Thessalonians 2:12) will be placed (adopted) as sons (Galatians 4:5) in the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (Revelation 11:15). Finally, and most important, God's Son will take the scepter of the Kingdom of Heaven and rule over this earth for 1,000 years. In that day, God will bring many sons to glory to rule with His Son (Hebrews 2:10). So being a son of God must refer to one who has been given the right to rule in God's Kingdom. The account of Job reveals an essential principle of God's rule-He rules through sons, whether angels or men. Through Job, we are given a glimpse of the manner in which God rules over His Kingdom through His angels. There came another day when the sons of God had to appear before the throne of God, apparently to report on their activities in their assigned places in God's Universal Kingdom.

Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LORD. And the LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" So Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it." (Job 2:1-2NKJ)

They all appeared at the mount of the congregation [meeting place (Isaiah 14:13)]. Evidently, God summoned His ruling angels before His throne that is on the farthest sides of the north (Isaiah 14:13). Since the earth is the subject matter of the Bible, we must assume that the farthest sides (the uttermost parts) of the north must be north of the planet earth, probably outside the area of all other galaxies. God held counsels with His angels who were ruling in various parts of His universe-the places of His dominion. At these counsels, Satan presented himself, having come from the earth, the place of his ruling.

[We receive another glimpse of the council in one of the Psalms. For who in the skies is comparable to the LORD? Who among the sons of the mighty is like the LORD, a God greatly feared in the council of the holy ones, and awesome above all those who are around Him? (Psalms 89:6-7). The sons of the mighty and the holy ones are references to the angels.]

Thus, Satan is not alone in his place of ruling in God's universe. Other sons of God probably rule in other places in this vast expanse of God's creation. We are not told anything about the ruling of these other sons of God, but we are given a clear indication that our earth is not the only place of habitation in God's Universal Kingdom. The earth is only one of probably countless places of His dominion, which are ruled by anointed angels appointed by God to rule under His sovereignty. However, to our knowledge, Satan and his angels stand alone as the only rebels amongst God's ruling angels.

[In Ezekiel 28:14, we discover a probable reference to Satan before he fell in sin. He is called "the anointed cherub who covers." Since the word throne has the meaning of "a covering," this might imply that this anointed cherub had a throne in God's Kingdom. In the Old Testament, all the kings were anointed to serve in this capacity. Thus, rulers can be seen as anointed ones. In the case of the ruling angels, we could call them messianic (anointed) angels. Of course, the Lord Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah.]

Satan, the ruler of this world, the god of this age, is a ruler within God's Kingdom, placed in that position by God; and he rules at the discretion of God and for the purpose of God. Satan is not outside the realm of God's Universal Kingdom, nor is he merely some lost angel who is out to make trouble for God and man. He is a ruling angel and that makes his actions all the more serious in God's Kingdom. Although Satan is the adversary of God and of man, he continues to rule because God has allowed him to rule even to this day as God works out His eternal purpose and plan. Today, Satan is a disqualified ruler who rules over a fallen, defeated kingdom which is in ruin and chaos. He has a throne from which he rules over his domain of darkness (Revelation 2:13; Revelation 13:2). When Satan rebelled, one-third of the angels under his charge also rebelled with him (Revelation 12:4); therefore, his kingdom cannot operate as God intended it. Praise God, Satan will be dethroned very soon by the rightful heir of this earth, God's Son, who will come and restore order to this earth.

Because God allows Satan to continue to rule does not mean that God approves of evil or that evil (darkness) is in God. Never! God is light and in Him is no darkness. However, God's ways are higher than man's ways (Isaiah 55:8-9). God operates by unchangeable principles in ruling His universe. As already stated, God uses Satan to bring about His purpose and plan. One example is Paul the apostle who was given abundant revelations from God. To keep Paul from exalting himself and creating a "ministry" centered on himself, God sent a messenger (an angel) of Satan

to buffet Paul all his life (2 Corinthians 12:7). Paul asked for the messenger to be taken out of the way, but the Lord answered, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power (My power) is perfected in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Thus, God used Satan to keep Paul from relying on himself. In Job's life, we also see the same principle at work. In both cases, it is important to note that Satan was limited in what he could do and could not do. In Job's case, God first told Satan he could not touch Job's body, and then He gave him permission to touch his body but not to kill him (Job 1:12; Job 2:6). In the end, God received the glory from Job's life. "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear. But now my eye sees Thee; therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5-6).

We must keep a proper perspective. Satan cannot work outside the will of God and not everything done on earth is from Satan's hand. Let us not look for Satan under every rock, but let us be wise and alert.

It seems that God has set a principle that an incumbent ruler remains ruling until another ruler is brought forth to replace the incumbent. This can be seen in type through the story of King Saul and King David (1 Samuel 10:1; 1 Samuel 16:1; 1 Samuel 16:12-14; 1 Samuel 24:6; 1 Samuel 24:8; 1 Samuel 24:20; 1 Samuel 31:5-6; 2 Samuel 5:1-5). Both men were anointed kings at the same time, but David could not take the scepter of the kingdom until Saul was dead. Likewise, God's Son will not take the scepter of the Kingdom of Heaven until Satan has been cast down and bound in the abyss for 1,000 years. A second principle is that the ruler continues to have access to the throne of God. As revealed in the book of Job, Satan, although disqualified to rule, appeared with other messianic (ruling) angels as an apparent equal amongst them. Even today, he continues to appear before the throne of God as the accuser of the brethren, day and night. Thank God, the day is coming when Satan will no longer have access to the throne and he will be cast down from his heavenly rule forever, never to accuse the brethren again (Revelation 12:10). The Heavens Do Rule And whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree; thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee, after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule. (Daniel 4:26ASV)

God has another principle in ruling over His places of dominion-The heavens do rule. In other words, the rule over any place in God's universe comes from the heavenly realm associated with that place of dominion. The heavens rule over God's provinces such as earth. This is vital to our understanding of the spiritual battle Christians find themselves in today and to our understanding of the destiny of all Christians who overcome and are found worthy to be placed as rulers in the Kingdom of the Son in the coming age. The destiny of the many sons who will be brought to glory (Hebrews 2:10) is to rule over this earth in the heavenly places for 1,000 years. Another way of stating this destiny is that they will come into the Reign of the Heavens. Thus, the spiritual warfare in which Christians find themselves engaged is over who will rule over this earth-man, or Satan and his fallen angels. Because of Calvary, we know the conclusion of this warfare. Jesus Christ has secured the right to reign over this earth. His victory over sin and death has regained the right for man to rule as God intended when He first created man. The order of God's rule in His universe flows from His throne in heaven (God's sovereignty) and progresses to ruling angels placed over provinces or kingdoms (places of His dominion) in His Universal Kingdom. Within God's Kingdom there seems to be a hierarchy of command amongst the angels. For example, when that day comes for Satan to be cast out of the heavenly places, it is recorded that Michael and his angels

will battle and defeat Satan (the dragon) and his angels (Revelation 12:7). In the case of the earth, one of many provinces in God's Kingdom, angels ruling over the earth have counterparts on the earth in man's government. In other words, angels ruling from the heavenly places over this earth have some form of rule or authority (perhaps influence) over man's rulers on earth. These ruling angels are under the charge of Satan who rules over this earth. The whole world (the world system and its government) lies in the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19). Today, the battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual {forces} of wickedness in the heavenly {places} (Ephesians 6:12). This is best seen in the story of Daniel as he mourned for three weeks after he had received a latter day message (whose appointed time was long) that would not be fulfilled for nearly 2,500 years from Daniel's time. As Daniel's mourning reached three full weeks, an angel appeared to him whose appearance left him frail and with no strength. As he was in a deep sleep with his face to the ground, Daniel was touched by the angel who spoke to him.

Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel; for from the first day that thou didst set thy heart to understand, and to humble thyself before thy God, thy words were heard: and I am come for thy words' sake. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days; but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me: and I remained there with the kings of Persia. (Daniel 10:12-13ASV) In the book of Daniel, the prophetic Scriptures give us a glimpse into the heavenly realm or rule over this earth. A prince of the kingdom of Persia along with the kings of Persia (angels ruling over the kingdom of Persia) fought against Michael, a chief prince. The angel speaking to Daniel then spoke of another ruler who was about to come.

Then said he, Knowest thou wherefore I am come unto thee? and now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia: and when I go forth, lo, the prince of Greece shall come. But I will tell thee that which is inscribed in the writing of truth: and there is none that holdeth with me against these, but Michael your prince. (Daniel 10:20-21ASV)

There was a prince (ruling angel) of Greece. So in these few verses we discover that for all kingdoms (human government) on earth, there seems to be counterparts in the heavenly places that rule over these earthly governments. There are chief princes (Michael), princes and kings amongst the angels, and they are assigned places of ruling.

Obviously, we do not see these heavenly rulers and they do not appear on earth to direct men. The heavenly realm is a spiritual realm. However, in the unseen, spiritual realm (not seen by man) they are directing (influencing) the affairs of government upon the earth. Warning: This does not mean that we should worship angels, that we should seek after angels or that we can command angels. Man was made for a while a little lower than the angels (Hebrews 2:7), that is, lower in position and rank in God's Kingdom. This will change when Jesus, who is crowned with glory and honor, takes the scepter of the Kingdom of Heaven, ascends the throne to rule over this earth with the many sons who will come to glory (Hebrews 2:6-10). Whoever is seated on the throne(s) in the heavenly places associated with this earth rules. Today, the angels rule; but in the day that is coming, the Kingdom Age, man will rule with Christ. The world or age to come will not be subject to angels but to man (Hebrews 2:5). The Most High Rules In The Kingdom Of Men

Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. (Romans 13:1)

Another principle that is essential to our understanding of God's Kingdom and His sovereignty is that God alone sets all rulers in place, both heavenly and earthly. One compelling proof is seen when our Lord was in the custody of Pilate who sought to release Him.

Pilate therefore said to Him, "You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?" Jesus answered, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me up to you has {the} greater sin." (John 19:10-11)

Further, Paul the apostle wrote to the Romans reminding them that there is no authority except from God. In other words, no individual in a place of governmental authority in the heavens or on the earth holds a ruling position apart from the sovereign will of God. This may be difficult for us to understand; but whether the ruler believes in God or does not believe, is righteous or unrighteous, is good or evil, is just or unjust, that ruler exists because of God. If this were not true, then God would not truly be the Sovereign of His Kingdom. In fact, as mentioned earlier, the Word tells us that all authority, visible or invisible, heavenly or earthly, is created by God's Son. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him. (Colossians 1:16) This principle of God's rule is most clearly demonstrated in the story of Nebuchadnezzar. In the book of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar was given dreams and Daniel was called upon to interpret them because in him was the Spirit of the Holy God (Daniel 4:8). At the conclusion of the second dream, it is declared that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men. The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones; to the intent that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the lowest of men. (Daniel 4:17ASV)

Through this dream, Nebuchadnezzar was warned to break off his sins by being righteous and his iniquities by showing mercy to the poor (Daniel 4:27). If he did not turn from his ways, his kingdom would be cut off from him for a season until he realized that the heavens do rule. Instead of heeding the warning, the king glorified himself, giving himself honor. When he exalted himself above God (denying God's rule over his kingdom), his kingdom departed from him. Seven times passed over him until he knew that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men. [Seven is God's number of perfection. It is the perfect completion of that which is in view. In this case, it was the completion of Nebuchadnezzar's chastisement.] When Nebuchadnezzar returned to his senses, he declared: And at the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honored him that liveth for ever; for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom from generation to generation; and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? (Daniel 4:34-35ASV). With this historical record, we discover that God rules. Whether a ruler, one who is in authority, is good or bad, righteous or unrighteous, a believer in God or not, it is God who places that one in authority. Absolutely no one is in authority except from God. God has complete sovereignty over who rules and who does not. Why? Because God alone is working out His purpose and plan. All that God does in relation to this earth and man points to one goal, and that is the coming Kingdom of the Son of His love (Colossians 1:13).

Although this earth is ruled by a fallen angel who seeks to devour Christians who are destined to take the rulership over this earth, God today rules in the kingdoms of men. God rules and overrules when it comes to the kingdoms of this earth. God is Sovereign in the affairs of His Kingdom. If He were not the ultimate authority over this earth, then the rule of Satan would unleash every form of evil and wickedness. Praise God that our God continues to rule in the kingdoms of men in spite of a rebel ruler of this world. This should encourage our hearts because God will not and cannot fail in bringing to conclusion that which is His purpose and plan. His Son shall take the scepter of the Kingdom of Heaven and rule over this earth (Psalms 45:6; Hebrews 1:8).

Let us not forget that Jesus Christ has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). On the cross He disarmed principalities and powers (Colossians 2:15). He is the head of all principality and power (Colossians 2:10). God raised His Son from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come (Ephesians 1:20-21). Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Php 2:9-11). Hallelujah! We don't see His authority fully manifested over this earth at this time except in His Church (the Church He is building, not what is seen in the world today which many Christians as well as the world call the "church"). But praise God, the day is coming soon when He shall rule with a rod of iron. In that day He will sit upon His own throne (Revelation 3:21) and the Most High will rule in person, no longer hidden from man's view. God's King is coming! For the kingdom is the LORD'S, and He rules over the nations. (Psalms 22:28)

## Part 3.1 - The Kingdom Future

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### The Kingdom Future

Although all of creation is under the Sovereign rule of God in His Universal Kingdom, the Bible and most specifically the New Testament, refers to the Kingdom in a more restrictive way, that is, it refers to the affairs of the planet earth, the heaven associated with it (near proximity) and with man, God's created being who was created to have dominion over the earth. Therefore, generally, when the Scriptures refer to the Kingdom of Heaven (the Reign of the Heavens) or the Kingdom of God, they are encompassing that which deals directly with this earth and man, not God's Universal Kingdom that stretches far beyond this earth and heaven.

Further, the Kingdom, as presented in Scripture, also encompasses a very specific period of time that precedes eternity. It refers to the 1,000-year Messianic Era or the Kingdom Age which concludes the history of this world and which ushers in the eternal ages. It is vital that we understand that the Kingdom presented in the Bible is not eternity which does not come into view until Revelation 21:1-27 after the present heaven and earth have passed away and God brings forth a new heaven and a new earth. In that day, it truly can be declared: "Behold, I make all things new. It is done!" (Revelation 21:5-6). But the Kingdom that most of the Bible points to and which is the subject of this book deals almost exclusively with the coming millennial Kingdom of God's Son. This is what is encompassed in the Word of the Kingdom or the message of the Kingdom, which speaks of the Reign of the Heavens.

Throughout the Scriptures, the Kingdom is referred to in a variety of ways. The two most common phrases are the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven, however, other terms are used as well, such as the kingdom of their Father (Matthew 13:43), the Son of Man coming in His kingdom (Matthew 16:28; Luke 12:31; Hebrews 1:8), My Father's kingdom (Matthew 26:29), the coming kingdom of our father David (Mark 11:10), My kingdom (John 18:36), the kingdom of Christ and God (Ephesians 5:5), the kingdom of His beloved Son (Colossians 1:13), His heavenly kingdom (2 Timothy 4:18), the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:11); the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (Revelation 11:15), the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ (Revelation 12:10). It is interesting to note that the Kingdom is referred to as the Kingdom of the Son and of the Father. This might lead some to wonder whose Kingdom it is or at least what is the relationship between the Father and the Son in regard to the Kingdom. The answer is quite simple. The Kingdom Of The Son

Today, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, sits upon His Father's throne in heaven, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion (Ephesians 1:20-21). A day is coming when He will sit on the throne of David and upon His own throne over this earth; and those who overcome will sit with Him upon His throne as He has sat upon His Father's throne (Revelation 3:21). His reign will be both heavenly and earthly with the Church (specifically, the Bride of Christ) which is destined to reign with Him in heaven and with the revived nation of Israel which is destined to reign with Him on earth. Christ has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18) and

He will fully exercise this authority in the age of His Kingdom.

There will be no end to the increase of {His} government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. (Isaiah 9:7)

It will be the time of the Kingdom of the Son and the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. However, as we have already observed, at times it is called His Kingdom and at other times it is called His Father's Kingdom. It is even called the Kingdom of Christ and of God. How is this resolved? In the book of Revelation, when the Son takes the scepter of the Kingdom, the same event is declared in two ways: the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (Revelation 11:15) and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ (Revelation 12:10). When the Kingdom of the Son comes, it is called both His Kingdom and God's Kingdom. It is very easy to understand why this is so. First, the Son is God (John 5:18; John 20:28; Php 2:6; Titus 1:3-4; Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:1). Second, the Father and the Son are one. Apart from three hours on the cross when Jesus was separated from His Father in heaven, the Father and the Son have never been separated. "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30).

While Jesus walked on this earth, His whole life was set on the Father's will. He did absolutely nothing apart from His Father. They were bound together by an unchangeable love.

"The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand." (John 3:35)

Jesus therefore answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless {it is} something He sees the Father doing; for whatever {the Father} does, these things the Son also does in like manner." (John 5:19) When it comes to the Kingdom, the relationship between the Father and the Son does not change. All that is the Father's is the Son's and all that is the Son's is the Father's. All of history has been moving toward this one event that is summed up in the Kingdom of the Son. Jesus Christ our Lord will sit upon His throne of glory, and He will have a people (kings and lords) who will sit upon thrones (Matthew 19:28; Matthew 25:31; 1 Corinthians 6:2-3; Revelation 20:4) granted to them by the King of kings and Lord of lords. For 1,000 years this earth will be ruled with a rod of iron. The word of the Son will be absolute and all disobedience will be judged immediately. His Kingdom will not be a democracy where every man's opinion must be taken into account. No! The King's word will stand in that day because there is an objective to the Son's rule, and He will bring it to its full completion. The Son's purpose is to sum up or head up all things (Ephesians 1:10) so that He can present a fully restored kingdom to the Father that is free of all enemies and rebels against God's Sovereignty. That which was created in perfect order with no death and which fell into disorder with death its only course will be brought back to its original state of God's Divine perfect order. God's Son won the right to subdue all the enemies of God, even death itself, because He overcame death through the cross of Calvary. He secured for man what man could never do for himself-overcome sin and death. After 1,000 years of reigning over this earth and putting an end to all rule and all authority and power, bringing all His enemies under His feet, even destroying the last enemy death, the Son will deliver the Kingdom to God the Father that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). When the Son delivers the Kingdom to the Father at the end of His millennial reign and the New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven having the glory of God, the throne of God will be in the midst of this glorious city. However, notice that it is not only the throne of God, it is the throne of

God and of the Lamb (Revelation 22:1; Revelation 22:3). "I and the Father are one." The Father and the Son will sit upon the throne of the Kingdom of the Universe ruling for the ages of ages with man having dominion with them. Hallelujah!

There is no division in the Godhead. The Kingdom of the Son and the Kingdom of God are one kingdom. Let us not forget the Holy Spirit, for the Kingdom of God is in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17).

### Comparing The Two Terms

Now, let us turn to the two most common terms used to describe the Kingdom. A question is often raised as to the difference between the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God. In comparing the two terms, for the most part there is no difference. The Kingdom of Heaven is equivalent to the Kingdom of God. This is easy to prove by comparing parallel passages in the Gospels. For example, Matthew 11:11 says: "Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen {anyone} greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." The same reference to John the Baptist in Luke 7:28 reads: "I say to you, among those born of women, there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." The most direct evidence of the equivalence of these two terms is found in Matthew 19:23-24 : And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Other passages that reveal the equivalence of the terms can be found as follows: Matthew 4:17/Mark 1:15; Matthew 5:3/Luke 6:20; Matthew 13:11/Mark 4:11/Luke 8:10; Matthew 13:31/Mark 4:30/Luke 13:18; Matthew 13:33/Luke 13:20; Matthew 19:14/Mark 10:14/Luke 18:16; and Matthew 19:23/Mark 10:23/Luke 18:24.

Although the two terms are equivalent, there are some subtle differences as well. So let us look at each term separately. The Kingdom Of Heaven The New Testament starts with the Gospel of Matthew for a very good reason; it presents the King and the Kingdom, which is the central theme of the Scriptures. The entire prophetic Scriptures point toward one great event, and that event centers on God's Son when He comes to sit upon His throne and set up His millennial reign over the earth. The Gospel of Matthew is unique because it alone uses the phrase the Kingdom of Heaven, which is used thirty-two times.

What does the Kingdom of Heaven mean? Understanding the meaning of the heavens do rule sheds light on the meaning of the Kingdom of Heaven, or in the original Greek, the Kingdom of the Heavens or the Reign of the Heavens. The Kingdom of Heaven refers to the reign or rule from heaven that is directed over this earth. It means the reign of the heavens. In other words, it refers to the sphere or realm which is ruling over the earth. The rule comes from the heavenly realm associated with the earth. The Bible focuses almost entirely on the affairs of this earth. When God's throne is in view, it is directed toward the activities associated with the earth. In other words, the Kingdom of Heaven means that the rule of the earth comes from the sphere of heaven in which the earth is suspended. In writing to the Ephesians, Paul warned that our battle is against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12). Satan and his angels rule from the heavenly places around the

earth; but one day soon the Son of Man will come and He will take the scepter of the Kingdom and rule over the earth, not only from the heavenly realm but also from the earth. So very simply, the Kingdom of Heaven is the reign over this earth from the heavenly realm, for the heavens do rule. Whoever sits in the place of power in the heavenly realm rules. Today, it is the angels; but a day is coming when it will be man who will rule, for the second Man, Christ, will sit upon the throne. The reason that the book of Matthew uses this term almost exclusively is because the emphasis is on the Lord offering the Kingdom first to the nation of Israel, which rejected the offer, and then to the new creation in Christ (the Church, the Body of Christ) that was birthed at Calvary. The offer of the Kingdom to Israel was a legitimate offer; however, the Lord knew that it would be rejected and a new creation was about to come into being (Matthew 16:18), a new, holy nation (1 Peter 2:9) that would be offered the heavenly portion of the coming Kingdom (Matthew 21:43). The Church's destiny is to enter the heavenly reign with Christ, just as the angels reign today. The Church, which is simply those who have been called out of the world, does not have an earthly call. It is an upward, heavenly call (Php 3:14; Hebrews 3:1). This is why those of like precious faith are exhorted as sojourners and pilgrims (1 Peter 2:11). Unlike the nation of Israel which has an earthly destiny, for they are to be married to the land of promise (Isaiah 62:4), the Church has a heavenly destiny; for Christians are being called into the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6), for they are to be married to Another who was raised from the dead (Romans 7:4NKJ; 2 Corinthians 11:2). At the end of his life, Paul declared: "The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (2 Timothy 4:18). This is the destiny of the called-out ones of God. It is a heavenly Kingdom into which we are called. "My kingdom is not of this realm" (John 18:36). The Christian's call is to another realm. The Kingdom Of God The most common phrase used in the New Testament is the Kingdom of God, which is used about sixty-six times. As stated previously, the Bible focuses almost entirely on the affairs of this earth. However, as already presented in the first chapter, in a pure sense, the Kingdom of God refers to the absolute rule of God, whether on earth or in the heavenly places or, for that matter, any place in God's creation. It means that God is reigning no matter what realm we are in and no matter what time period we are in, including the endless ages of eternity. Everything in God's creation is in His Kingdom and He reigns over His creation. As David wrote, Thou art my King, O God (Psalms 44:4).

However, in this one province of His creation in which the earth is suspended in a heavenly realm, God has encountered great opposition. First, Satan rebelled along with a third of the angels under his charge. Sin came into this province and Satan's kingdom went into ruin. Then, Adam rebelled and sin entered into his race, bringing ruin to this earth once again. Today, man, apart from Christians, and the nations of the world, for the most part, remain in a state of rebellion against God's Sovereignty. Also, let us not forget that there is a host of angels who remain in rebellion as well. To put it another way, although the earth is under the Sovereign rule of God, His authority is not recognized amongst all the nations and peoples of the earth. It has been this way since Adam's fall. Today, the world is not ruled according to the righteousness of God. Christians are to be living under the rule of Christ, but they are the only ones who truly acknowledge the reign of God over their lives. In the kingdoms of this world, Christ is not all in all and God is not all in all.

Thus, we cannot state that the Kingdom of God has come upon the earth. The earth is a mixture of Gentiles (the lost not living under the righteousness of Christ), the Jews (scattered amongst the

nations with the remnant nation of Israel on the land but in unbelief) and the Church [which is the Body of Christ on earth (1 Corinthians 10:32)]. In addition to this fact, the earth continues to lie under the influence of the powers of darkness that rule in the heavenly places. Putting all these facts together, it is easy to see that the world in which we now live has not submitted itself to the total authority and power of God. The fact of the matter is that much of the world and some of the heavenly host reject God and His authority. When the prophetic Scriptures declare that the Kingdom of our Lord has come or that the Kingdom of God has come, it speaks of Christ taking total authority over the earth. There will no longer be any rebellion amongst the nations. There will no longer be any doubt who is in control. When He reigns, He will reign with a rod of iron (Psalms 2:9; Revelation 2:27; Revelation 19:15); and righteousness and justice will be absolute. He will reign until He has put all enemies under His feet, including death itself (1 Corinthians 15:25-26). Christ will truly be all in all. And when He has subdued all things for the Father, Christ will put an end to all rule and all authority and power and deliver the Kingdom to God that God will be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). Eternity begins when all things have been restored and given unto the Father. In that day, the Kingdom of God will come in all the fulness and glory of God. God will be the Absolute Ruler. He will rule His universe from the throne of God and of the Lamb which will be in the midst of the New Jerusalem which will reside on a new earth in a new heaven (Revelation 21:1; Revelation 22:1; Revelation 22:3). In the eternal ages, the Father and the Son will rule over the universe from the holy city, New Jerusalem, the Wife of the Lamb (Revelation 21:2; Revelation 21:9-11). God's purpose and plan will have been completed and He will begin a new work that will extend throughout His universe with man participating in all that God has in store for those who love Him. Just the thought of being in the center of what God is going to do beyond the 7,000 years allocated for this earth should cause our hearts to leap for joy.

What a glorious day that will be. Peter called it the Day of God. It will be the day in which righteousness finally rules absolute in God's universe. Righteousness will be the very fiber of all of God's creation (2 Peter 3:12-13). All of creation will be full of the knowledge and the glory of God. Hallelujah! The eternal ages are not upon us yet-we still have at least another 1,000 years to go-but let us not forget that the millennial reign of Christ will be glorious years that eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them who love Him (1 Corinthians 2:9). Just meditate on the thought that one day soon those who have loved Christ and His appearing (2 Timothy 4:8) will be standing in the glory of His presence. It has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2NKJ). When He comes in the glory of His power, He will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory and He will be glorified in His saints and marveled at among all who have believed (Php 3:21; 2 Thessalonians 1:9-10). This day is coming. Are you longing for it?

God reveals these wonders to us through His Spirit and the Spirit reveals that it is centered on His Son, the Lord of Glory. All things are rapidly moving toward the Kingdom and Glory of the Son of God's love. He will close the final chapter of the history of this world as we know it. Then God will declare: "Behold, I make all things new. It is done!" (Revelation 21:5-6). Let us continually pray, "Thy Kingdom come!"

## Part 4.1 - The King, R,R,R.

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The King-Raised, Returning, Reigning The Kingdom future is totally dependent on God's Son, the King. If His Kingdom does not come, then this world is destined to be locked in time with Satan and his angels ruling in the heavenly places. If this were possible, sin and death would continue to keep man under its power and the whole world would continue in slavery to corruption (Romans 8:21). Praise God; this is not possible because God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, has overcome sin and death and has defeated all the powers and principalities, disarming the rulers and authorities and triumphing over them (Colossians 2:15). The message of the Kingdom of God's Son, the Kingdom future, rests entirely on three essential facts-Christ was raised from the dead; He is coming again; and when He comes, He will reign over this earth. The foundation of God's purpose and plan rests on these profound facts. Without them there would be no Word of the Kingdom as presented in the Scriptures because the heart of this message centers on the Son of God's love. It is through God's Son and Him alone that man will be brought into the Reign of the Heavens to live in the glory of God.

If you were required to defend yourself in a court of law, you would want as much evidence as you could gather to defend your position. In fact, you would want to enter court with an abundance or a preponderance of evidence. If you were to go into court with very few facts to support your case, then the odds of convincing a jury or a judge of your position would be greatly reduced. God does not have to defend Himself; nevertheless, He has presented His case in the Scriptures in such a way that the things with which He wants to captivate our hearts are presented with a preponderance of evidence. In other words, He fully lays out His case before us. A study of the Scriptures will reveal that there are three things that God has presented in such a way that we must conclude that He has laid out a preponderance of evidence. First, Jesus was raised from the dead. Second, He is coming a second time. Third, He is coming to take the scepter of the Kingdom of Heaven to rule and reign. These three facts are unveiled in the Scriptures and reinforced over and over again, maybe not using the same words every time, but the thought is there. Every book in the New Testament is built upon this foundation. It is true that the epistles cover many teachings of the apostles, but if you search the Scriptures, you will discover that the heart of the matter is based on the return of the Lord and His Kingdom. It is based on the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was the view of the early church and it was their hope. Their hope was not so much based on "going to heaven" but on eagerly expecting the One who is coming from heaven (Php 3:20; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10).

Even a very cursory word search of the Scriptures centered on each of the three facts will yield a preponderance of evidence to support this view. In the New Testament, there are nearly 60 verses on Christ being raised from the dead, about 80 on His coming again and over 100 on His coming Kingdom. Most people would conclude that this is a preponderance of evidence. God's message to us is that His Son is coming again, the One whom He raised from the dead and who was witnessed by many, last of all Paul. When He comes, He is coming first as the Judge and then as the King. God has set His King! Hallelujah! This Jesus God Raised From The Dead

Christians know that Christ died for their sins and because of His death on the cross they now have forgiveness of their sins. This is true and essential for eternal salvation. However, do you realize that the Lord's death is never presented apart from His resurrection? In fact, salvation not only is dependent on His death but it is also dependent on Him being raised from the dead. His death and resurrection are inseparable components of the gospel of the grace of God. Why? Because Christ coming out of the grave was proof that His atoning death was acceptable to God, and as we will see, it is essential if anyone is to be raised on the last day. No sinner could have taken the Lord's place on the cross. Any man that would have tried to die for the sin of the world would have remained in the grave. In Corinth during Paul's day, some people were teaching that there is no resurrection of the dead. Paul hit this challenge head on and declared the gospel of grace to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). He unfolded all the components of the atoning work of Christ according to the Scriptures. This is an important point because Paul said that the Scriptures themselves give us the facts. Christ died for our sins; He was buried; He was raised on the third day. Now, notice that Paul added one very important proof that these events, in fact, did occur-He appeared! Christ first appeared to Peter; and after appearing to at least 582 people, He appeared to Paul last of all. Paul declared: "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain" (1 Corinthians 15:14). But Paul could declare that Christ was raised from the dead because Paul met his Lord on the road to Damascus as he was going to persecute those who were of the Way, who were the Body of Christ on earth. Christ, the Head of His Body on earth, called out from His glory, "Saul, Saul why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4). From that day forward Saul, who became Paul, could declare that the One whom he tried to destroy by persecuting His Body on earth was indeed alive. The One that the Scriptures call the Christ was raised from the dead. No man ever went into the grave and overcame death except the Man, the last Adam, the second Man (1 Corinthians 15:45; 1 Corinthians 15:47). As the Lord Jesus walked on earth and His face was set like flint toward Calvary, He told His disciples that He would be killed and be raised up on the third day (Matthew 16:21; Matthew 17:22-23; Luke 9:22; Luke 24:46-47). It is important to understand that the thought of resurrection was not new to the Jews. Many of them actually believed in a general resurrection of the dead, that a day would come when all the dead, the righteous and the unrighteous, would be raised and judged. We see this in Martha's answer to Jesus regarding the death of her brother Lazarus. "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day" (John 11:24). In other words, Martha knew that there would be a resurrection, but she and the others did not understand that there would be a resurrection not of the dead but a resurrection from the dead. Martha was not alone in this understanding because the disciples closest to the Lord were puzzled by His statement: The Son of Man should rise from the dead. When the three disciples heard Jesus say this as they were coming down from the mountain after the Lord's transfiguration, they were puzzled and questioned what He meant (Mark 9:9-10). This was a totally new idea for these Jewish disciples and they did not understand it at the time. In fact, they did not understand it until He actually appeared to them after He was raised (John 20:9; John 20:24-29). In the account of Lazarus' death, we discover that Jesus revealed the truth of the resurrection to Martha. Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26). His resurrection from the dead is revealed in this tremendous declaration: "I am the resurrection and the life." Because death could not hold Him in the grave and He was raised from the dead, He is able to give life to all who believe in Him.

Although a believer dies, he too will not be held by death because Christ is the first fruits of the resurrection and this life has been placed in every born-again child of God. Paul has given us the order of the resurrection of the dead which is Christ first, followed by those who are in Christ (1 Corinthians 15:21-23). This is the meaning of rising from the dead. Every dead person since Adam will not be raised in a general resurrection; however, a day (the last day) will come when no one will remain in the place of the dead associated with the earth we now live on (Revelation 20:11-15). [The old earth will pass away and a new earth will come in which there will be no more death and thus no one will be in the place of the dead during the eternal ages, apart from those who will be thrown into the eternal lake of fire (Revelation 21:1-4).] There is a selective order, and this order starts with Christ and continues with those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. Paul the beloved apostle has given us the understanding of this resurrection from the dead. But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of {the} archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17).

Many people look at all of these verses as referring to what is called the "rapture," but in fact these verses also include what precedes the "rapture" which is the resurrection of all those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. Once the dead have been raised, then those who have come out of the grave along with those who are alive (who are in Christ) on the earth when He comes will be taken up in the air to meet the Lord. Of course, the disciples did not know all of this at first; but the idea of the resurrection from the dead was a tremendous new revelation to them, for they had personally witnessed that the tomb was empty and Christ was alive. On the day of Pentecost, Peter declared to the masses: "This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses" (Acts 2:32).

They witnessed His appearing after His death. Even John, when he wrote the gospel account of the Lord's life, counted the number of times that He appeared. This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead (John 21:14). Thus, the disciples could declare that the One who was crucified, the Christ, lives!

Jesus being raised from the dead is the proof that He is the first fruits of a resurrection for those whose lives are hidden in Christ. He is the resurrection and the life, and it is this life that will raise all those who have believed on Him.

Today, it seems that the resurrection from the dead is taken for granted, but it is essential in our proper understanding of the Word of the Kingdom. It is a building block to our understanding. Why? Christ being the first fruits of the resurrection is our hope. Because He was raised from the dead and is seated on His Father's throne, we are assured that He is coming again. But even more than this, we are assured that He is coming to take the scepter of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Lord Himself revealed this fact to His disciples when He was transfigured on the mountain, which was a preview to the disciples of the coming Kingdom and Glory.

"For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds. Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." (Matthew 16:27-28)

After six days, on the seventh day, Jesus was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light (Matthew 17:1-2). Now, notice what the Lord told His disciples after they witnessed Him standing in the glory of His coming Kingdom. And as they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead." (Matthew 17:9)

Tell the vision to no one! What was the vision? The Son of Man coming in His Kingdom. But notice what the Lord said next. Tell no one of this glorious vision until you see the Son of Man risen from the dead. Do you see the greatness of these few words? First, the Son of Man, the King, had to die and be raised from the dead; and then at some point in the future, He must come in the glory of His Father and take the scepter of His Kingdom. In this one verse, we have the embryonic statement of the Word of the Kingdom-He died; He was raised from the dead; He is coming again; He is coming in His Kingdom and Glory.

Oh, hallelujah! This should bring excitement and joy to our hearts. The Second Coming Of Christ

Christ being raised from the dead is the promise that He is coming again, but let us not stop here; let us press on to see further proof in the Scriptures of our Lord's Second Coming. To some people this might seem so elementary that they wonder why there is a need even to mention it. The answer is very simple; there are some who teach that the Lord is not coming back a second time. Some even teach that He has already come a second time and many other times as well. Those who hold this view wrongly assert that Christ's appearing is an individual matter, that He appears to individuals throughout their lives. Others assert Christ comes when we die. And yet, some assert that Christ is not coming back in the flesh. John the beloved apostle warned that many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ is coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist (2 John 1:7). All of these teachings are a leavened, corrupted understanding of the Word of the Kingdom. As John wrote, those who hold such views are antichrist. This is how serious is this matter of the Second Coming. In very simple terms, we know that our Lord came the first time and we know that He has promised to come again which is a second time. The book of Hebrews clearly tells us that there is a second appearing. So Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without {reference to} sin, to those who eagerly await Him. (Hebrews 9:28) In understanding the Lord's return, it is important to understand that when He comes He first will be seen by His people in the air as the world will be asleep to His coming. Then following the Great Tribulation, He will be seen by Israel and those who have survived the great wrath of God as He literally steps foot on the earth once again (Zechariah 14:4). In other words, His coming will not be seen by all at first. He first will appear to His people who will be caught up in the clouds to meet Him in the air. This will be hidden from the world. Following the great day of His wrath (Revelation 6:17), He will appear to the inhabitants of the earth. When we read the Scriptures, we must understand the context to understand to which point in time it is referring. The Revelation In the Greek, there are at least five different words that are used in reference to the Lord's return. The

first word is apokalupsis, which means "to take off the cover, disclosure." The English translation is the word revelation. The book of Revelation is the Revelation of Jesus Christ or the "disclosure of, taking the cover off" Christ. The entire Revelation is the uncovering of Jesus Christ as the Judge, coming to judge the Church, Israel and the Gentile nations (James 5:9; Revelation 1:12-16); and as the King, coming to reign over this earth (Revelation 19:16). The Revelation unveils the beginning of the Lord's Day when He first stands as Judge and then is manifested as the King of kings when He rides out of heaven on a white horse and returns to earth for all to see Him (Revelation 19:11). The Revelation unveils the fact that Christ's coming is literal and every eye will see Him. Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen (Revelation 1:7). When the cover is fully taken off, all eyes will be glued on the One of whom God declared: "This is My Son. Hear Him!"

Now, both Paul and Peter used the word apokalupsis to speak to believers.

...So that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation [apokalupsis] of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:7-8{ea})

...That the proof of your faith, {being} more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation [apokalupsis] of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:7{ea})

Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober {in spirit,} fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation [apokalupsis] of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:13{ea})

These verses point to the Day of Christ when He returns for His people. We are to be eagerly awaiting, expecting fully His return; and our hope is to be fixed on the grace to be brought to us at His appearing. The next Greek word, which is used mostly by Paul, is ephaneia, which means "manifestation, appearing, brightness." At the end of his life, Paul wrote letters to Timothy and Titus. In both letters, he used this word in light of the Lord's return and the necessity for Christians to live godly, righteous lives until His appearing.

I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing [ephaneia] of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He will bring about at the proper time-He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords; who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him {be} honor and eternal dominion! Amen. (1 Timothy 6:13-16{ea})

...In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing [ephaneia]. (2 Timothy 4:8{ea}) For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing [ephaneia] of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus. (Titus 2:11-13{ea})

We are to be looking for the blessed hope and the manifestation or the shining forth of the glory of our Lord. What a glorious day that will be! The Rendering Apparent The third Greek word-which is used by Paul, Peter and John-is phaneroo which means "to render apparent." It is used three times and each time it is preceded by "when." To the apostles, it was not a question of if He will appear but when He will appear. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed [phaneroo], then you also will be revealed [phaneroo] with Him in glory. (Colossians 3:4{ea}) And when the Chief Shepherd appears [phaneroo], you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Peter 5:4{ea}) And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears [phaneroo], we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. (1 John 2:28{ea})

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears [phaneroo], we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. (1 John 3:2{ea})

Coming into glory, receiving crowns and being like Him only come about for believers when He comes. This does not come about when a Christian falls asleep in Jesus. It only comes about when He comes. This is why Christians are exhorted to abide in Him so that they will not be ashamed but will have confidence at His coming. The Near Presence The word coming used by John introduces the fourth Greek word parousia which means "being near, advent." Parousia is used in reference to the period of time that extends from the return of Christ when the Church is raptured to be with Him, followed by His revelation and manifestation to Israel and the nations following the Great Tribulation. The beginning of His parousia is a personal time for the Lord and His people. It has been described as the near presence of the Lord, for He will be hidden from the world in the clouds as He sets up His judgment seat to judge His Church (2 Corinthians 5:10). The first mention of the word parousia is found when the Lord was asked by His disciples about the sign of His coming and the end of the age (Matthew 24:3). The Lord answered their question not in reference to the Church but in reference to Israel and the world. First, His coming is mentioned as being like lightning, which is His physical manifestation to the world (Matthew 24:27). Then, His coming is compared to the days of Noah (Matthew 24:37; Matthew 24:39), which speaks of His near presence to the earth but not His physical manifestation to the world; thus the reference to days. It will extend over a period of time.

Paul used the word parousia most, for a total of seven times. In a verse that we have already looked at, Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the resurrection of Christ. Christ is the first fruits, and afterward those who are His will be resurrected at His coming, His parousia (1 Corinthians 15:23). To the Thessalonians, Paul presented the full range of the presence of the Lord. It is clear from these verses that Paul had one thing in view, and that was when the Lord comes to gather His people unto Himself. For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming [parousia]? (1 Thessalonians 2:19{ea})

...May the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also {do} for you; so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming [parousia] of our Lord Jesus with all His saints. (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13{ea}) For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming [parousia] of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. (1 Thessalonians 4:15{ea})

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming [parousia] of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 5:23{ea})

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming [parousia] of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him. (2 Thessalonians 2:1{ea}) The last verse deals with the end of the Great Tribulation when the Lord will come and literally bring an end to the lawless one, the antichrist, by His very appearance or, as some versions of the Bible translate, the brightness of His coming. In this verse, Paul used ephaneia and parousia in reference to the Lord's Second Coming. When our beloved Lord returns to this earth, His majestic glory will be manifested and He will sit on the throne of His glory (Matthew 16:27; Matthew 25:31; Revelation 19:11-16), judging all unrighteousness. In that day, the lawless one will not be able to stand against the glory of the Lord. Hallelujah! And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance [ephaneia, brightness] of His coming [parousia]. (2 Thessalonians 2:8{ea})

However, Paul was not alone in the use of parousia, for James and Peter used it in the same context. James wrote of waiting for the Lord's return like a farmer waiting for crops to come to harvest. Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming [parousia] of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming [parousia] of the Lord is at hand. (James 5:7-8{ea}) In recalling the day that he stood on the mountain with the Lord and saw Him transfigured, which pointed to the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom, Peter reminded the saints that he had made known to them the coming of the Lord. For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming [parousia] of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. (2 Peter 1:16{ea}) At the end of his life, Peter left a warning for the last days. Mockers will come, denying the return of the Lord. The evidence in the Scriptures is abundant and clear that the Lord is coming back, but there will be those who will deny what the Word says is a fact.

Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with {their} mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming [parousia]? For {ever} since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." (2 Peter 3:3-4{ea}) Where is the promise of His coming? It is in the Word of God. The Lord Himself made the promise and He is Faithful and True. He is coming! The Coming

Finally, the most common word used for coming is erchomai, which means "to come and go." It has many applications in the New Testament, but it is often used for His coming again in a literal and visible sense. A thorough review of all these Scriptures is not necessary; however, there are several parables spoken by the Lord that speak of His coming and clearly add another dimension to the evidence (Matthew 24:44; Matthew 24:46; Matthew 24:48; Matthew 25:6; Matthew 25:13; Matthew 25:19; Matthew 25:27; Mark 13:35-37; 43,45). The parable of the minas best sums up all these verses, for it deals with the faithfulness of the Lord's servants while He is gone.

He said therefore, "A certain nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and {then} return. And he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business {with this} until I come {back.} ... "And it came about that when he returned, after

receiving the kingdom, he ordered that these slaves, to whom he had given the money, be called to him in order that he might know what business they had done." ... 'Then why did you not put the money in the bank, and having come [erchomai], I would have collected it with interest?' (Luke 19:12-13; Luke 19:15; Luke 19:23{ea}) The Lord Jesus was speaking a parable about Himself. He was about to depart this life and return to the Father who would give Him the Kingdom. While He is gone, He has left His business on earth in the hands of His servants and commands them to do business until He comes back. When He returns, He will reward His servants for faithfulness for what they have done with His goods in His absence. This parable and others are clear presentations of His leaving and returning, which leads us into the third fact that is presented by a preponderance of evidence-the coming Kingdom and the reign of Christ. The Kingdom Is Preached

We know, without any doubt, that Christ is coming back a second time, but for what purpose? Yes, He is coming for His people, but why? What is Christ going to do for 1,000 years? To answer this question, let us ask some other questions. What was the view of our Lord when He came the first time? Some might say the cross, but that was only a means to bring about an end. It was the essential means, but it was not the end. Let us form the question differently. What was the message that the Lord preached when He came the first time? If we know His message, then we will know what His view was or what He saw that was set before Him after the cross. When Jesus walked on this earth, the Kingdom was in view and this is what He preached. He declared that He was sent by God for a purpose.

"I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose." (Luke 4:43) The Kingdom was the message that Jesus carried from city to city. Even after His death on the cross but before His final ascension to the throne, Jesus spoke of one thing: He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over {a period of} forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3).

After the Lord went to the cross and ascended back into heaven, His apostles continued preaching the Kingdom. Paul the apostle, who laid down his life to bring the good news to the Gentiles, had one central message. As his days on earth were quickly coming to an end, Paul spoke of one thing.

Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him. (Acts 28:30-31NKJ; also Acts 20:25; Acts 20:27) The Kingdom and things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ are one and the same gospel, for the Lord is the King of the coming Kingdom. Paul's last written word to his beloved son in the faith, Timothy, was the assurance that the Lord would deliver him (Paul) from every evil work and preserve him for His Heavenly Kingdom (2 Timothy 4:18). The writer of the book of Hebrews had the Kingdom in view. For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. (Hebrews 2:5NKJ) The world to come is the millennial reign of Christ.

James wrote of being rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom, which He promised to those who love Him (James 2:5). He exhorted the saints who were scattered abroad: "Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!" (James 5:8 b,9b NKJ). At the end of his life, Peter exhorted the saints to "be all the more diligent to make certain

about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal (age-lasting) kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you (2 Peter 1:10-11{ea}).

Jude wrote of the apostasy that had come into the church and has existed throughout the last 2,000 years. He exhorted the saints to contend for the faith, which refers to the coming Kingdom (see chapter 15). He declared that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied: "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all" (Jude 1:14-15 a NKJ). Enoch, the seventh from Adam, speaks of the seventh day that is coming, the Sabbath rest, the millennial Kingdom.

John, the apostle whom the Lord loved and who leaned on His breast, was caught up to the throne of God and saw the Kingdom in victory and the Victor triumphantly returning to this earth. He heard the loud voices in heaven declaring: "The kingdom of the world has become {the kingdom} of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever" (Revelation 11:15). But what does the Kingdom truly mean? The word kingdom in the Greek is *basileia*, which means "reign," "rule" or "sovereignty, royal power, dominion." Thus, the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ refers to the rule or reign of God's Son. The Kingdom is not some static term that implies some institutional bureaucracy with stodgy, unyielding people sitting at desks with rubber stamps processing paperwork. Never! The Kingdom speaks mightily of the dynamic, glorious reign of Christ. It speaks of the Reign of the Heavens.

He Must Reign When the Lord Jesus stood before the Gentile ruler Pilate, He made the good confession of the very purpose of His birth as a Man.

Pilate therefore entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You up to me; what have You done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." Pilate therefore said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say {correctly} that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." (John 18:33-37)

Jesus declared that He was a king and it was for this purpose that He was born. Not only is He a king but He is the King, for there will be only one King with a capital K. When He was born, it was declared: "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end" (Luke 1:32-33). A day will come when all of heaven will sound forth the triumphant declaration that His Kingdom has come. And the seventh angel sounded; and there arose loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become {the kingdom} of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever." And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, "We give Thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who art and who wast, because Thou hast taken Thy great power and hast begun to reign." (Revelation 11:15-17)

What is the purpose of His reign? Paul tells us that He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death (1 Corinthians 15:25-26). In other words, His reign is to take the kingdom of this world, which was brought into ruin, corruption and chaos, and restore it to glory, beauty and order. First, the kingdom of this world was brought into ruin by Satan and restored by God. Then it was brought into ruin a second time by Adam. There will be enemies of God's power and authority that will remain in this world even after the King ascends the throne. Sin will not run wild as it does today; nevertheless, sin will remain for there will be those who will be born on the earth during the millennial reign. The wages of sin is death and death will continue. "No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; for the child shall die one hundred years old, but the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed" (Isaiah 65:20NKJ). The day is coming when His reign will begin and it will continue for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:4-6) until He subdues all enemies, even death itself. Hallelujah! The Lord declared that the gates of Hades (death) shall not prevail (Matthew 16:18) and He will destroy these gates forever at the close of His Kingdom (Revelation 20:14). The Kingdom, the reign of Christ, is the central message of the prophetic Scriptures, and it is revealed in the Son of God's love. God's love is manifested in His Son who died for our sins, was buried, was raised from the dead and appeared to many. He is coming back a second time to take the scepter of the Kingdom. He is the Resurrection and the Life, our hope for the Kingdom and Glory. When He comes, He will raise up all those who are asleep in Jesus. Then He will catch up into the air those who are resurrected from the dead along with those who are alive and remain when He comes. This one event, the Second Coming of Christ, is our hope and expectation for it ushers in the reign of Christ. God's promises are true. His Son will come a second time for salvation.

"I am going away and coming back to you." (John 14:28NKJ)

Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:6)

## Part 5.1 - The Earth Became

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### The Earth Became

Having laid down some foundational principles of the Universal Kingdom of God and the essential facts of the coming Kingdom of the Son, we need to go back to the beginning of the creation of the heavens and the earth, for it is here that we begin to discover the structure laid down by God that explains His Divine purpose and plan. We could say that it is in the beginning that God has presented the skeleton or the structure to which He has attached or upon which He has built other truths.

God is not only the Creator of the heavens and the earth, but He is the very power and life in the history of the heavens and the earth. In other words, He just did not create and walk away from His creation to leave it on its own. Behind the history of this world and of the whole human race is a Sovereign God who sits upon His throne in heaven. The Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men (Daniel 4:17NKJ). The heavens do rule (Daniel 4:26ASV). In The Beginning God...

All things start with God. In fact, we can say that all things end with God as well. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, and He is everything in between. Absolutely nothing exists apart from God.

Scientists continue to speculate and theorize on how the universe began and when it began. Astronomers peer into the far reaches of the universe striving to understand the very beginning and origin of this vast universe in which our planet earth is located. But the Bible gives us the answer-In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. God is the builder of all things and He alone created this universe in which we live. It is His creation and He alone knows all the secrets of His creation, while man strives to gain understanding. In His wisdom, God has not revealed all the secrets of His universe to man. What He has revealed He has given to us in the prophetic Scriptures (Romans 16:26NKJ; 2 Peter 1:19). If we want answers to our questions, we must seek them in God's Word, the God-breathed Word (2 Timothy 3:16). According to His Word, God created the heavens (the entire universe) and the earth which resides in this universe. There is no reason to speculate on this matter. It is God's doing and His alone.

How did God create? The Word of God is very clear that He brought forth creation through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ who is God the Son.

"Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Thy hands." (Hebrews 1:10)

Make no mistake; Christ is God! Our Creator came in the flesh (flesh and blood) and He will come once again in the flesh [flesh and bones (Luke 24:39)]. This same Jesus who went up in a cloud is coming again and will return in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Acts 1:11; Matthew 24:30). In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was

God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made. (John 1:1-3ASV). In the beginning the Son who is the Word was with God. He spoke and creation came into being, and He is the One who holds all things together. He upholds all things by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3).

Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him. (1 Corinthians 8:6)

All things exist for the Father and all things exist through the Son. Thus, all of creation is from God, by God, for God and through God. The book of Genesis is called the book of beginnings. It is here that we not only discover the beginning of the earth and man, but also we discover God's principles that He laid down which govern all His actions in the history of this earth, even before man was created from the dust of the earth.

We need to start at the beginning to understand the history of the heavens and the earth, past, present and future.

Created To Be Inhabited To begin, let us turn to one of the oldest records in the history of man-the book of Job. Near the end of Job's afflictions, the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind.

"I will question you, and you shall answer Me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell {me,} if you have understanding, Who set its measurements, since you know? Or who stretched the line on it? On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone, When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38:3-7) Who was there when God in His magnificent, creative power brought forth this earth upon which we live? The Lord laid the foundations of the earth. Who has understanding of the day in which the Lord determined the measurements of the earth and stretched a line upon it? He laid the foundation of the earth and laid its cornerstone. What man can testify to this time in which the Lord stretched forth His mighty creative hand and formed this earth? No man can; for when God first created the heavens and the earth, man was still a thought hidden in the heart of God. As recorded in Job, however, there were witnesses of the Lord's creative power. When He stretched forth the line and laid the cornerstone of the earth, many witnesses sang for joy. When the Lord brought forth this new creation, the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy. Who are these morning stars, these sons of God? The Word reveals that angels are sons of God (Genesis 6:2; Genesis 6:4; Job 1:6; Job 2:1; Job 38:7). The morning stars and the sons of God who shouted for joy at the laying of the foundation of this earth are those created beings, the angels, that preceded man. Man was created for a little while lower than the angels (Psalms 8:5; Hebrews 2:7). In other words, angels preceded man in the order of God's creation, and angels are currently higher in position and rank in God's Kingdom. However, this order will change when God brings many sons unto glory (Hebrews 2:10) to reign with His Son in the coming millennial Kingdom of the Son. Because we now see Jesus crowned with glory and honor, a day is coming when man will be equal to angels in God's Kingdom (Luke 20:36). When God created this earth, it must have been a magnificent sight to behold. The angels could not withhold their shouts of joy as they saw the glory of the Lord shining forth in the heavens and the earth. It was perfect order and beauty. It was a place to be inhabited. For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens, (He is the God who formed the earth and made it, He established it and did not create it a waste place, but formed it to be inhabited). (Isaiah 45:18)

God is a God of order, not of chaos. God is light and when He speaks forth, His creative power brings forth life and order. He does not start with chaos and create order. Scientists try to prove that creation started in some primordial ooze that somehow grew from chaos into a highly specialized order. This is man's reasoning. In the natural world, there seems to be a universal principle that only God could have set forth-chaos never leads to greater order. Just consider a cultivated garden; once it is left on its own, what happens? It is overtaken by weeds and loses all sense of order and beauty. A garden will never grow on its own into a beautiful, cultivated garden. It takes man tilling the soil and caring for the garden for it to thrive. If order goes to chaos or ruin if let untended, then how can chaos or ruin ever be expected to produce order on its own?

Seven Hebrew words (ten English words; ten is the number of completion) are recorded in the beginning of the prophetic Word of God. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Seven is the number of divine perfection and refers to perfection of what is in view. In other words, when God created, He created with divine perfection. It was a complete and perfect work. He created the earth to be inhabited. It was not created to be a waste place. But The Earth Became...

However, Genesis 1:2 a reveals something that seems entirely contrary to God's creative power: And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep. Some (not all) scholars of the Hebrew language state that "and the earth was" could also be translated "but the earth became." Adding this thought to the meaning of the words which follow-formless, void, darkness and deep-gives a much different picture of the earth that in the beginning was created in divine perfection as a place of habitation. In fact, Genesis 1:2 a declares that the earth was just the opposite of a place to be inhabited. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. We do not know when He created the earth and the heavens associated with this earth. We do not know how long this earth has existed. Peter wrote that it was long ago (2 Peter 3:5). It could have been a very long time. But it appears that something happened to the earth between the time of Genesis 1:1-31 verses 1 and 2. In Genesis 1:2 a, the earth was (became) formless and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep. In other words, it was uninhabitable. To understand the condition of the earth as recorded in Genesis 1:2 a, it is necessary to look at the Hebrew meaning of formless (without form), void, darkness and deep. The Hebrew word for formless is tohuw which comes from another word which means "to lie waste; a worthless thing." Attached to this word is the sense of confusion, vanity and wilderness. In other words, the earth was in a vain, worthless condition. The Hebrew word for void is bohuv which comes from another word which means "to be empty" or "an indistinguishable ruin." In other words, the earth was an empty ruin. The Hebrew word for darkness is choshek, which means "the dark", or "something in misery, destruction, death, ignorance, sorrow, wickedness." The sun was no longer giving light to the earth and it was in misery. Thus, the earth was in misery or wickedness because there was darkness; the sun had ceased to give its light. The Hebrew word for deep is tehowm, which refers to "an abyss, as a surging mass of water." The waters on the face of the earth were not quiet and gentle but were raging.

Thus, when all these words are studied together, a picture is presented of the earth as a dark (without sunlight), worthless, wasted ruin with raging waters flowing over its surface. How could this be possible? God did not create the earth as a waste place but with a purpose to be inhabited (Isaiah 45:18). Surely the sons of God did not rejoice over the earth in this condition. The earth was in vanity and chaos. How did the earth fall into vanity? How did it become something that was

in chaos? The answers to these questions lie at the very heart of another question. Why was the serpent in the Garden to deceive Eve? The Fallen, Ruling Angel The most probable answer to these questions is given through the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel. In two far-reaching passages, a glimpse is given of something that occurred outside the time of human history and which marks the beginning of sin in the universe-the fall of one of God's ruling angels and the destruction of this earth which was first created in glorious beauty and order.

It appears that when God first created this earth and the angels shouted for joy, there was one angel who stood out from among all the other created angels. He is described as Lucifer, his description coming from the Hebrew word *helel* meaning "brightness." Some translations render this word "star of the morning," "bright star" or "morning star." In Ezekiel, Lucifer's glorious and splendid unfallen state is described. In Isaiah, his fall is depicted. Lucifer, who was probably a very beautiful angel (Ezekiel 28:12-15 a), began to exalt himself instead of the Creator. Unrighteousness was found in him (Ezekiel 28:15 b). His desire was to be like God and to extend the throne that was given to him until it reached the throne of God.

"How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'" (Isaiah 14:12-14NKJ) This "bright star" became God's adversary, Satan, the devil, the dragon, that serpent of old (Revelation 20:2) because he moved outside the bounds that God had given him. His throne or sphere of rule was most likely only over this earth (or possibly the galaxy in which the earth is suspended), but he rebelled against God along with a third of the angels under his charge (Revelation 12:4). Satan wanted to rule over all of God's creation. He had become corrupt in his own beauty and began to think of himself as greater than the Creator. Instead of keeping his eyes upon his God and Creator, he began to look at himself and exalt himself. "I will ascend into heaven (God's throne). I will exalt my throne (extend it beyond what God has given me). I will sit on the mount of the congregation (the place of God's rule over all the other angels). I will ascend above the heights of the clouds (be greater than all the other angels). I will be like the Most High (like God Himself)." The center of the heart of this once bright star was no longer God but "I." "You have said in your heart, 'I will.'" As we will see in subsequent chapters, this is the heart of fallen man as well.

Because of his rebellious, unrighteous heart, Satan's kingdom was judged by God; and the earth and the heavens associated with the earth (probably the galaxy in which earth is located), Satan's domain, were brought into ruin. Whenever there is rebellion against God, ruin must follow; for the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). "I looked on the earth, and behold, it was formless and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light" (Jeremiah 4:23). Thus, the earth was without form and void, and darkness covered the face of the deep. There were raging waters upon the face of the earth. It was in a state of death.

Actually, Peter, writing to refute the apostates who were denying the return of the Lord Jesus, has left us an explanation of the flood that judged this world in the very beginning before man was created. Peter wrote that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?" These scoffers will say that nothing has

changed since the beginning of creation. Peter responded to these scoffers by going back to the very beginning of the earth as recorded in Genesis 1:1-31. For {ever} since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God {the} heavens existed long ago and {the} earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. (2 Peter 3:4-6)

Essentially, Peter started at the very beginning of the earth (the beginning of creation) before man was created when the earth was first judged by water, and he proceeded to compare this with the very end of this earth when it will be judged or burned up by fire. In the beginning, both the heavens and the earth were involved. In the end, both the heavens and the earth will be involved. This is a very important point in understanding Peter's exhortation.

Peter said that it escaped their notice by the Word of God. What escaped their notice? They failed to see that the heavens existed long ago; the earth was formed out of water and by water; and it was destroyed by being flooded. Peter places these three facts in the very beginning when God first created (Genesis 1:1), when the earth was brought into ruin (Genesis 1:2 a) and when a ruined earth was restored (Genesis 1:2 b-2.3). The heavens and the earth were involved. This flooding does not refer to the time of Noah because in his day only the earth was affected. Peter was dealing with the beginning of the creation, not ten generations later.

Peter also brought to their attention that at the coming of the Day of God, the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat (2 Peter 3:12NKJ; Revelation 20:11; Revelation 21:1). In like fashion, God brought destruction upon His original, perfect creation-the heavens (sun ceased to give its light) and the earth (flooded). In Noah's time, the earth was not brought into total ruin. All of mankind was destroyed with the exception of eight people. When the flood subsided, the sun was shining, the plants came forth and man and the animals were once again able to live. In the judgment of Satan's kingdom, the heavens associated with this earth and the earth itself were brought into total chaos. The sun itself was not giving forth light. Nothing could live on this earth until God Himself spoke, "Let there be light." The Spirit of God hovered over this ruined earth and breathed life into something that had gone into death and darkness. Most likely, this was the result of Satan's rebellion.

It is interesting to note that when Satan is cast out of heaven and comes to the earth during the Great Tribulation, he will begin to persecute Israel, represented by the woman in Revelation 12:1-17. He will attempt to destroy the woman through a flood (Revelation 12:15-16). Satan is the father of lies, one who can appear as an angel of light, and he counterfeits all that God does. As his kingdom was once brought into ruin by flood, in like manner, he will attempt to destroy Israel by flood. Praise God; Satan is a defeated foe! In the restoration of the earth, God said each day was good, except one. The day in which He divided the waters, forming the firmament, which is called Heaven, He did not declare as good (Genesis 1:6-8). The Bible records: "And it was so" (Genesis 1:7 b). Why is this significant? Satan's domain is the air over this earth or the firmament Heaven (not where God resides). The Word of God tells us that he is the ruler of this world or the prince of the air. In other words, he rules from the firmament (or as Genesis records, the firmament Heaven), the space that envelopes this earth. Since Satan was still the prince of the air over this earth when God restored the ruined earth, it was not good in the sight of God. It was merely so.

Because of his rebellion, Satan was disqualified to rule over this earth, but someone else had to come along to take his throne. As stated previously, there seems to be a principle set forth by God that He does not replace an incumbent ruler until that one is removed and there is another to take his place. This is where man first entered the picture. In Genesis 1:3, God spoke light into this earth as He began a six-day work of restoration to restore a ruined earth, which resulted from the rebellion of the ruler of this world. On the sixth day, God created man in His own image and said, "Let them have dominion" (Genesis 1:26; Genesis 1:28). In other words, God gave man the charge to rule over the earth. Adam was created to take possession of this earth and to replace Satan as the prince (Genesis 1:26). But as the record states, Satan was in the Garden to deceive Eve: "You will be like God" (Genesis 3:5). This was Satan's desire when he rebelled against God: "I will be like God." If Satan could get Adam to rebel against God as he had rebelled, then he could retain his right over the earth. Adam had to be obedient to God's command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16-17). According to the Word, Adam followed Eve in eating of the tree and the first man lost the right to have dominion. Satan continued as the prince of the air or the firmament Heaven, and he continues even in our day (although with diminished power and authority).

It is important to understand that Satan is not some lost angel who is merely a thorn in the side of God and man. No; Satan is a ruler and he has a kingdom, not a fully functional kingdom as he had before he rebelled [only one-third of the original angels given to him rule with him today (Revelation 12:4)], but nevertheless he has a kingdom, a domain of darkness (Colossians 1:13). Satan had a throne when he rebelled against God (Isaiah 14:13), he has a throne today and he will have a throne when he is cast out of heaven to the earth right before Christ returns to this earth (Revelation 13:2). He is a disqualified ruler as far as God is concerned but God has not removed him from his seat of ruling. Satan continues to maintain a throne even according to the words of the One who now has all authority and power, the Lord Jesus Christ (Revelation 2:13).

It appears that some Christians have the wrong view that Satan's kingdom no longer exists and that Christ is now ruling over this earth as its King; in other words, the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ has come on this earth (Revelation 11:15). This day is coming very soon, but it is not here yet. Our Lord went away to receive a kingdom and will return (Luke 19:12). For the last 2,000 years, Christians have been awaiting His arrival (Php 3:20; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; Revelation 22:12; Revelation 22:20). Praise God; we do not have to wait much longer! The King of kings is coming!

However, until He comes, Christians are like David's followers who hid with him in the cave of Adullam (1 Samuel 22:1-2). We are to be strangers, sojourners and pilgrims on this earth (Hebrews 11:13NKJ; 1 Peter 2:11NKJ). Like David's band of men, we are in distress until our Anointed King comes. We are not to be content on this earth. We are under His rule today, for He is our Lord and our Captain, but we await His return when He takes the scepter of His Kingdom and begins His reign of righteousness and peace. There is no true reign of righteousness in this earth today. All the governments of the world, no matter how good they might appear to be, are failures when it comes to governing righteously. When Christ comes, this earth and its nations will know true righteousness. As Christians, our hope rests on the King and His Kingdom. However, as long as we dwell upon this earth, it is important to have a right understanding of the place that Satan now holds over this earth. The World Lies In The Power Of The Evil One

It is vital to see that an evil, sinister force is at work behind the scenes of this world system. The world system in which we live is driven by the domain of darkness. We must understand this fact even more so as we come to the very end of the age. Just because our Lord defeated every foe on the cross of Calvary does not mean that they have been removed from the scene of this world. Quite the contrary, they still are at work and they are becoming even more vile and sinister as the Day of the Lord approaches. It is time to wake up! It is time to be sober! Our focus must be on our beloved Lord Jesus and not on Satan, but it is instructive to know what the Word of God reveals to us about our adversary. To do this, let us briefly look at the history of Satan-past, present and future.

It already has been shown that Satan was a beautiful, ruling angel over this earth who became unrighteous when he began to look at his own beauty. In his heart, he desired to be like the Most High. In that day, he rebelled against God and his kingdom was brought into ruin. Consequently, this earth that we live on went into ruin. God began to restore this earth and created man to have dominion over this earth. Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden but the adversary was there as well. He tempted Eve to partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil against God's command to Adam (Genesis 3:1-5). Eve was deceived but Adam sinned because the command was given to him (1 Timothy 2:14). Because of Adam's disobedience, the dominion over the earth did not pass to Adam but instead remained with Satan. This is why Satan, the serpent, was in the Garden. He must have known that if he could cause Adam to rebel against God, then Adam could not take the reign over the earth and he (Satan) would continue to reign even though he was a disqualified ruler. It is as if a disqualified ruler could not replace another disqualified ruler.

We discover that Satan's activities are recorded again in what is thought to be the oldest book of the Bible, the book of Job. When Satan appeared before the Lord with the other sons of God, the ruling angels, Satan was asked by the Lord if he had considered his servant Job. God gave Satan permission to touch his family, his possessions and finally his own body (Job 1:6-12; Job 2:1-7). Job had entered into the trial of his life, a trial so severe that few people experience such torment. It is possible that down through history and even today, severe trials of the righteous might have been and are the result of such testing allowed by the Lord but worked through Satan. In other accounts in the Old Testament, we discover that Satan stood against Israel and caused David to sin by counting the people (1 Chronicles 21:1). In the book of Daniel, angels under Satan's rule were revealed as battling over certain regions of the heavenlies over the earth. These areas are associated with governments on earth (Daniel 10:11-13; Daniel 10:20-21). Finally, in Zechariah 3:1, Satan is shown standing in the presence of the Angel of the Lord opposing Joshua the high priest. The Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan!" Satan is an accuser of the brethren and will continue to accuse until he is finally cast out of the heavens and barred from access to the throne of God (Revelation 12:10). As the New Testament opens and the Son of God, taking on the form of man appears on the earth, Satan is also present. Following His baptism, the Lord Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting for forty days and nights, Jesus was hungry and the devil appeared to Him (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:2-13). The devil tempted Jesus three times, but the last temptation went to the heart of the matter.

Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory; and he said to Him, "All these things will I give You, if You fall down and worship

me." Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'" Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him. (Matthew 4:8-11) In the Scriptures, mountain generally refers to kingdom (Daniel 2:35-37). Satan took Jesus up to the mountain to show Him the kingdoms of the world and their glory. If Jesus had worshipped the devil, he would have given Jesus the kingdoms of the world. [Someone was preaching the gospel, using these verses, and when he came to this part he told his audience, "I don't know why Satan offered the kingdoms to Jesus when they were not his to give." This was a wrong understanding of the authority Satan holds over this earth.] Although he is the father of lies, there was some measure of light in what the devil was speaking. The kingdoms of this world are under his control. In the account given to us by Luke, Satan declared: "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me" (Luke 4:6NKJ). In other words, God placed him as ruler over the earth and Satan retained this rulership when Adam disobeyed God. Notice that Jesus did not dispute this claim but rather stood against the real purpose of the devil-to tempt the Son of God to acknowledge that he (Satan) was like the Most High. Jesus had enough of the devil and dismissed him: "Begone, Satan!"

During His walk on this earth, Jesus spoke of Satan's kingdom (Matthew 12:26; Mark 3:23; Mark 3:26; Luke 11:18). He revealed that Satan steals the Word of the Kingdom from the hearts of believers (Matthew 13:19; Mark 4:15; Luke 8:12). Jesus has warned that during His absence while He has gone away to receive a kingdom, the devil would sow bad seed amongst the good seed and the wheat and the tares would grow together until the final harvest is carried out by the Lord's angels (Matthew 13:39). Jesus revealed the purpose of the lake of fire-it is reserved for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). Further, Jesus revealed some of the workings of the devil-Satan planted a thought in the mind of Peter (Mark 8:33); he bound a daughter of Abraham with an illness for eighteen years (Luke 13:16); he entered Judas as he betrayed the Lord (Luke 22:3; John 13:2; John 13:27); and he asked the Lord for permission to sift Peter (Luke 22:31). The Lord Jesus Himself called Satan the father of lies (John 8:44) and the ruler of this world (John 12:31; John 14:30; John 16:11). But praise God, the ruler of this world had nothing in Jesus. Instead, He disarmed him on the cross of Calvary (Colossians 2:15). In fact, as Jesus said, "The ruler of this world is judged" (John 16:11).

Now, we might be tempted to believe that since Satan is a defeated foe he is no longer a threat, and therefore Christians are not in a spiritual battle with the adversary and his angels. We must be clear that this is not true. Paul the apostle called Satan the god of this age and the prince of the power of the air (2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2). In fact, because of the great revelations that he received, Paul was given a messenger (angel) of Satan to buffet him so that he would not exalt himself (2 Corinthians 12:7). John the apostle at the end of his life declared that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19). Peter the apostle at the end of his life warned that we must resist the devil for our adversary walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). Of all the apostles, Peter had firsthand knowledge of Satan's methods of attacking the saints. Peter had been given that great revelation from the Father of the Christ. He declared: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). But shortly after this blessed statement, Peter forbid the Lord from going to the cross. The Lord turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." (Matthew 16:23). Satan had suggested this thought to Peter and

he accepted it. Peter probably remembered this tactic of the enemy all the days of his life. We must resist the lies and the thoughts and the temptations of the devil.

Following the Lord's ascension to the throne of God, the New Testament record should serve as a reminder that Satan and his angels have continued to be very active throughout this earth. In fact, more is recorded about Satan's activities in the New Testament than in the Old Testament (Acts 5:3; Acts 10:38; Acts 13:10; Acts 26:18; Romans 16:20; 1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 Corinthians 7:5; 2 Corinthians 2:11; 2 Corinthians 4:4; 2 Corinthians 11:3; 2 Corinthians 11:14; 2 Corinthians 12:7; Ephesians 2:2; Ephesians 4:27; Ephesians 6:11-12; Colossians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:18; 1 Thessalonians 3:5; 2 Thessalonians 2:9; 1 Timothy 3:6-7; 1 Timothy 5:15; 2 Timothy 2:26; Hebrews 2:14; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9; 1 John 3:8; 1 John 3:10; 1 John 5:19; Jude 1:9; Revelation 2:9-10; Revelation 2:13; Revelation 2:24; Revelation 3:9; Revelation 12:9-10; Revelation 13:2; Revelation 20:2; Revelation 20:10). Of particular note is the fact that in the seven letters to the churches in the Revelation of Jesus Christ, Satan is mentioned in four of the seven letters. Later, when Israel comes into view, Satan also comes into sharp focus as he seeks to destroy Israel.

[Unfortunately, many people have come to accept a myth regarding Satan. He is often pictured as an ugly looking figure with a pitchfork who is ruling over a place called "hell." Let us not forget that he can disguise himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). The fact of the matter is that he is not ruling over hell but is a ruler over this earth who had the power of death until Christ overcame death (Hebrews 2:14-15). Christ has the keys of death and Hades (Revelation 1:18) and He alone has the power to release the dead from Hades, whether they are in the part of Hades for the lost or the part for the saved. Satan is the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2). It is true that he is a disqualified ruler; nevertheless, he remains a ruler until the true Prince of Peace comes. He is not ruling over what people call "hell," as if it is a place distinct from the earth. His future abode is the eternal fire, which has been prepared for him (the devil) and his angels (Matthew 25:41), which is the lake of fire and brimstone (Revelation 20:10). The lake of fire is Satan's hell that has been prepared for him and his angels. When he is cast into this fiery lake, he will not rule over all who are in this place, for it is a place of torment.]

What is to come of Satan? He will rule over this earth until a battle occurs in the heavenlies between Satan and his angels and Michael and his angels (Revelation 12:7-12). This battle will occur at the beginning of the Great Tribulation that will last for 3½ years. Satan will be thrown out of heaven and cast down to the earth with his throne no longer over the earth but on the earth. The accuser of the brethren will be cast out (Revelation 12:10). Satan will give his power, his throne and great authority to the beast (Revelation 13:2). During this time, the wrath of God will be poured out upon the earth bringing great destruction on all of mankind and the earth. Finally, God will bring the time to an end for if He does not, no one will survive.

Isaiah sums up this day. The earth reels to and fro like a drunkard, and it totters like a shack, for its transgression is heavy upon it, and it will fall, never to rise again. So it will happen in that day, that the LORD will punish the host of heaven, on high, and the kings of the earth, on earth. (Isaiah 24:20-21) In that great Day of Judgment, the entire heavenly host and all the kings of the earth that were led astray by the archenemy of God will stare at him and wonder how they could have been so deceived.

"Those who see you will gaze at you, they will ponder over you, {saying,} 'Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, who made the world like a wilderness and overthrew its cities, who did not allow his prisoners to {go} home?'" (Isaiah 14:16-17)

Then the heavens will open up and a white horse will appear. The One sitting upon the horse will be called Faithful and True. The Lord Jesus Himself will appear from heaven wearing many crowns. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords (Revelation 19:11-16). The Victor will arrive having taken the scepter of the Kingdom of Heaven. In that day, the salvation, and the power, and the Kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ will have come (Revelation 12:10). It is the day of the Kingdom of the Son; and the earth that became ruined will be restored to a beauty that man, apart from Adam, has never seen or experienced. It will be a day of glory for the glory of the Lord will fill the whole earth. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne (Psalms 97:2). He will rule with a rod of iron for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:6). With the appearing of the Victor, Satan will be chained and cast into the bottomless pit for 1,000 years (Isaiah 14:15; Revelation 20:1-3). At the end of the 1,000-year rule of Christ, Satan will be released to deceive the nations one last time (Revelation 20:7-8). Fire will come down from God out of heaven and devour all that follow Satan in a last failed attempt to rule. Finally, Satan will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone to be tormented day and night forever and ever (Revelation 20:9-10). This is the history of the fallen angel who began as a bright star and ended as a fallen, dark star. Hallelujah; he will deceive no longer!

## Part 6.1 - After Six Day..

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After Six Days...On The Seventh Day The Climax Of The Age The entire history of this world and man is moving toward one event. Some people believe that history has been molded entirely by the human race. It is as if man is the driving force of history. Some people look at past history in the light of today and believe the world has become a technological marvel of what man can achieve. Some people believe that there is no limit to what man can accomplish in the years ahead. Some people believe that the world is heading toward destruction. Still others believe it is heading toward a utopia where all the world's problems will be solved. In some ways, each thought has some element of truth; but none is the correct view of world history whether past, current or future.

Man might believe that he is in control of the destiny of this world, but he is not; God is. God alone is the true driving force of all of history. At times during world history, it might have seemed that God was an absent ruler. But even in the darkest of times, God has ruled in the kingdom of men because He has been moving toward one mighty climax of the age. In His longsuffering, He has been pressing on toward one goal. He has been working to culminate history in one tremendous event whether man knows it or not, whether man cooperates or not. This event is centered on one person, the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. God's Son will return to this earth one day very soon to take the scepter of the Kingdom of Heaven, that is, He is coming to personally and visibly rule over this earth. His Kingdom will be a Kingdom of righteousness and peace for He will rule with a rod of iron (Revelation 19:15). Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne (Psalms 97:2). In that day, all the enemies of God will be subjected to God's King; for He must rule until all His enemies have been put under His feet, until the last enemy, death, is destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:25-26). The Son of God will head up or sum up all things in heaven and on earth (Ephesians 1:10). All things will be gathered together in Him and He will fill all things with His life. Christ will be all and in all (Colossians 3:11). In that day, the Lord shall be King over all the earth. In that day, it shall be-"The Lord is one," and His name one (Zechariah 14:9). Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is coming and He is coming soon. The time is almost up! For this purpose, God has been longsuffering and working for nearly 6,000 years of world history. God's Son will sum up the history of this world and of man. When He comes to reign over this earth, He will take this earth from chaos to order, from war to peace, from unrighteousness to righteousness, from injustice to justice. At the end of His rule, a new heaven and a new earth will be brought forth and He and His Father will usher in the Day of God, the eternal ages to come, the beginning of an eighth day (1 Corinthians 15:27-28; 2 Peter 3:12). But the eternal ages are not the primary focus of the prophetic Scriptures. As revealed through the prophets, the Bible draws our attention to the age that is coming, the age of our King, the millennial reign of Christ, the Day of the Lord, the Lord's Day (Revelation 1:10; Revelation 20:4-5). It is the seventh day of world history that brings to a close the six days or 6,000 years of man, Man's Day. It is the day of rest for God and His people. It is the Reign of the Heavens.

What has God been doing in history? He has been working to restore ruined man and this earth which is in the bondage of corruption (Romans 8:21) in order to usher in the Day of His Son and bring many sons unto glory (Hebrews 2:10). He has been working to restore man to the very purpose for which He created man-to have dominion.

According to God's Word, He is coming and He will not delay (Hebrews 10:37). How long will it be until God sends His Son back to this earth to rule? God has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead (Acts 17:31).

We may not know exactly when our beloved Lord will return, but we can stand on God's Word that He will come, for the Father has assured us by raising His Son from the dead. Because He was raised from the dead, we can be absolutely 100% sure that the Righteous One is coming back to judge the world. A day has been appointed.

### God Is Precise

God's timing is perfect. He does not delay. In fact, God is very precise in what He does (see Revelation 9:15). Unfortunately, when we study the Scriptures, we read with our own understanding and begin to believe that God works in ways similar to fallen man. The result is that we fail to see that God works in a very fixed, precise, accurate and deliberate fashion.

Throughout the Scriptures, there are many numbers used for a variety of purposes. Some specific numbers are repeated often to reveal God's principles in dealing with man (e.g., six, seven, ten, twelve, forty). For example, one refers to unity or oneness; two refers to witness; three refers to divine perfection or completeness; five refers to human weakness and grace; six refers to man and incompleteness; seven refers to the perfection or completeness of that which is in view; eight refers to a new beginning, the beginning of a new series; ten refers to ordinal (an order or series of numbers) perfection or completion of that which is under discussion; twelve refers to governmental perfection or completeness; forty refers to a period of trial, testing, probation or chastisement.

Understanding God's meaning to numbers in the Scriptures is a key that will unlock many truths and clear up confusion. This is a particularly important matter in understanding God's timing and the completion of the work that He is doing to bring all things under subjection to His Son (Hebrews 1:13) and to bring in His Kingdom (Matthew 16:27-28; Matthew 17:1). To further understand God's purpose and plan, we must understand the principle He laid down in the very beginning of His Word. Numbers play a significant role in understanding God's restoration work and in them we discover His principle of restoration.

**Six Plus One-The History Of The Heavens And The Earth** In the book of Genesis, the book of beginnings, it is recorded that God took this earth which was in ruin and chaos because of the rebellion of Satan and restored it in six days. The Spirit of God hovered over the raging waters and breathed life into something that was in death and darkness. God spoke light into the earth and began a work of restoration. On the sixth day, He formed man, Adam, from the dust of the earth; He commanded man to have dominion over the earth. Man was created in the image and likeness of God to rule over God's earth under God's sovereignty (Genesis 1:26). When He finished the work of restoring this earth and creating man, God declared that it was very good (Genesis 1:31). God was very pleased and He rested on the seventh day.

Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made. This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens. (Genesis 2:1-4NKJ) This is the history of the heavens and the earth. God set the principle of restoration in the very beginning when He restored the earth the first time. He firmly established the pattern for the entire history of the earth, from the beginning to the end of its restoration. God restored a ruined earth, brought on by the rebellion of Satan, in six 24-hour days. On the seventh day, God rested. He set apart the seventh day and blessed it. In God's original restoration of this earth, we discover His unchanging principle in the history of this earth, both then and now. He restores in six days and He rests on the seventh. The Fall

Adam, as the federal head of the new creation, man, was to take dominion over the earth. He was created in the image and likeness of God; therefore, he had every ability to rule if only he had obeyed God and trusted in God alone. Unfortunately, Adam sinned and became disqualified to rule over the earth. He could not have dominion as God had intended. The best Adam could do was try to dominate in a world that was not under his dominion. He was sent forth from the Garden to till the land. A good example of this loss of power to rule is given to us through the animals. Adam named every animal that God brought before him. There was no fear on the part of the animals or of Adam. They were at peace together because Adam was created to rule over them. They had been given to Adam. After the fall of Adam this all changed with Noah and the flood. When he came out of the ark, Noah was given by God every moving thing as food but He put fear of man into every moving thing (Genesis 9:2). Man was no longer at peace with his world. He could no longer command or rule because he was not in dominion. Instead, he had to till the land and he had to hunt for his food. Just consider how the animals of the wild respond to man today. Except for some domesticated animals, those creatures in the wild (the bush) do not obey man but rather, at best, they act fearful toward man and, at worst, they would just as soon devour man. All man can do is try to dominate in a world that he has been disqualified from subduing. Since the flood, all that man can do is "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1). Man can no longer "rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Genesis 1:26). With Adam's sin, the entire human race began its decline into ruin and death took hold of man. Since man was created to have dominion over the earth, the earth also went into corruption. Paul describes it as the bondage of corruption or slavery to corruption (Romans 8:21). The whole creation groans in travail, awaiting the day that the sons of God are revealed and brought into glory. What a day that will be!

Thank God; He did not destroy man and start over with a new created being. Oh, there were times that God wanted to start over, particularly in the days of Noah. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. And the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them." (Genesis 6:6-7)

Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord and mankind was not completely blotted out, for eight people were saved during the time of judgment of the earth through the flood. God made a

promise: Never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh (Genesis 9:15). God used the water first to judge Satan and then man. The final judgment of Satan, man and the earth and the heavens associated with this earth will be by fire (2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 20:10; Revelation 20:14-15; Revelation 21:1).

### One Day Is As A Thousand Years

God's purpose and plan cannot and will not fail. Following Adam's fall, God began a new work of restoration centered on man and brought about through the Man, the Son of God, the last Adam. God's plan of restoration is based on His principle of restoration-six plus one; that is, six days of restoration work and a seventh day of rest. However, God's day is no longer a 24-hour day. In reference to the history of this earth, the Bible tells us that one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day (2 Peter 3:8). The order of the words in this verse is important because they refer to God's restoration work in the beginning before the fall of man and then after the fall. God's restoration started with a 24-hour day before the fall that became a 1,000-year day after the fall. God's day became a 1,000-year day. In other words, God restored a ruined earth in six 24-hour days; but when Adam fell in disobedience, God began a new work of restoration that will last six 1,000-year days. He restored the earth and brought forth man in six 24-hour days. Now, He is restoring man and the earth brought into corruption by man in six 1,000-year days. God has set 6,000 years to do this work. This age could be called Man's Day, for six is the number of man. To me it is for a very little thing that by you I may be judged, or by man's day, but not even myself do I judge. (1 Corinthians 4:3 YLT {ea}) In the very beginning, God left another proof of this principle of one day. When Adam was commanded not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he was told for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die (Genesis 2:17). We know that when Adam ate of the tree, his spirit went into death, his spiritual communion with God was broken and he was no longer clothed in the glory of God. He became naked. No man since Adam except the Man, Jesus, has ever walked in uninterrupted glory. But a fact that is often overlooked is that Methuselah lived 969 years (Genesis 5:27), the most years that any man has ever lived on the earth. Man has never lived a full day, a full 1,000-year day. If Adam had not sinned, man would have come into uninterrupted glory in the full day. One day is as a thousand and a thousand as one day. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

Praise God; there is a day coming when a glorified people will live the full 1,000-year day in the millennial reign of Christ. This day is the Age of the Kingdom and Glory. The fact that must catch our attention is that since Adam, nearly 6,000 years have passed. There cannot be much time left on God's clock. When the time is up, God will send forth His Son a second time, which will be the last. Hallelujah! The Day of Glory is coming. The Seventh Day-The Reign Of Christ A seventh day is coming, the Lord's Day, the Kingdom Age, when Christ will take the scepter of the Kingdom of Heaven and sit upon His throne. Nearly 2,000 years ago or 4,000 years from the time of Adam, God sent His Son to this earth; He took on the form of man and died for the sin of the world to redeem man back to God. Through Him, God reconciled all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven (Colossians 1:20). At Calvary, God's Son defeated all powers and principalities. God's Son is to inherit the nations and possess the earth. He is God's King.

"But as for me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain. I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to me, 'Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee. Ask of me, and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance, and the {very} ends of the earth as Thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, Thou shalt shatter them like earthenware.'" (Psalms 2:6-9) When Christ appears the second time, His presence on this earth will bring in the seventh day or the last 1,000 years of world history. This last day is the millennial reign of Christ.

All down through history, God has been working to culminate all things in the triumphant return of Messiah, Jesus, who is the King of kings and Lord of lords. The One who was despised, rejected, spit upon, marred as no man has been marred; who had a crown of thorns thrust upon His head, was then hung on a cross and crucified, and finally was raised from the dead to ascend to the throne of God is coming back a second time. This time He is coming in glory and power. He will be wearing many diadems or crowns (Revelation 19:12). He is the ruler of all things in heaven and on earth. In that day, He will end Man's Day and bring in His Day, the day when He rules in righteousness. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works" (Hebrews 4:4). There is a seventh day coming, for there remains a rest for the people of God (Hebrews 4:9). God's word is true and it shall come to pass whether man knows it or not, even if His people believe it or not.

God has given us His unchangeable principles in the Old Testament for they have been established with Israel in reference to the Sabbath and the Ten Commandments.

"Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; {in it} you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy." (Exodus 20:9-11)

"But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for {this} is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.'" (Exodus 31:13)

"It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased {from labor,} and was refreshed." (Exodus 31:17) The Sabbath is a sign between God and the sons of Israel. Why? Because God wants them to have a reminder continually before them not only because of the need to rest from labor today but because there is a day of rest to come. God was refreshed on the seventh day and He will be refreshed once again when His Son ushers in the seventh day.

Israel keeping the Sabbath is meant to be a sign between God and Israel; but it is also a sign to the whole unbelieving world as well, whether they realize it or not. Israel is a sign to the nations. The Lord Jesus spoke a parable about the fig tree (Matthew 24:32-35). When the fig tree, which is a symbol of Israel, puts forth leaves, the end of the age is very near. The nation of Israel (a remnant in unbelief) is back on the land and the leaves have come forth; the summer is near and the seventh day is coming. The seventh day will be a holy day as God's King sits upon His throne.

It is interesting that the Lord Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17). He is the fulfillment of all the Law, including the commandments. When He comes He will end the sixth day and bring in the seventh day. He will fulfill all the days determined by the Father. But why are Israel and the Sabbath a sign of the seventh day? Because it is God's dealings with Israel and the nations that will sum up Man's Day. The judgment of Israel will close out Man's Day. Most likely, the Church will not be included in God's dealings during the Great Tribulation. The last 3½ years of Man's Day are Jacob's trouble (Jeremiah 30:7; Matthew 24:15-28) which refers to Israel, not the Church. In fact, today Israel is a sign to the Church that the time is almost up. When the Church is taken up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air it will be a sign to Israel that the end is near for them. It should be noted that the Church has been given a sign of her own to remember the Lord's return, and that is the Lord's supper: For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes (1 Corinthians 11:26). Until He comes, the seventh day cannot come.

[There is much disagreement over when the Church will be taken up in the clouds. The different views include before the Tribulation, in the middle of the Tribulation (start of the Great Tribulation) and after the Great Tribulation but before the final wrath of God (pre-wrath). Regardless of the view we hold, we are exhorted to be watching and praying for we do not know the day and the hour of His coming.] In the Old Testament, God has given us types (shadows) of things to come that are the antitypes (the real things). For example, in writing about Noah being saved through water, Peter described this event as an antitype of the believer's baptism or immersion in water (1 Peter 3:21NKJ). In the record, we discover that the type of the coming seventh day was revealed when Moses went up on the mountain (which in the Scriptures refers to a kingdom) to meet the Lord and after six days God's glory appeared. The antitype is found in the account of the Lord Jesus going up on a mountain and being transfigured in the presence of Moses, Elijah and three disciples. The antitype reveals that after six days the Lord of Glory Himself will appear in His Kingdom. When Moses was commanded to go up to the mountain, it is recorded: Then Moses went up into the mountain, and a cloud covered the mountain. Now the glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. The sight of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel (Exodus 24:15-17NKJ).

After six days, on the seventh day, the glory of the Lord appeared to Moses and Moses received all the instructions for Israel to be a kingdom of priests unto God. The blood of the lamb had been applied, they were delivered from Egypt (the world) and they were on the brink of becoming God's chosen nation on earth to lead all the other nations (Deuteronomy 28:1; Deuteronomy 28:13). In other words, God's Kingdom was to be manifested on earth through Israel. However, as with Adam, the nation of Israel failed in their calling, never reaching the heights that God commanded through Moses. Moses is a type of Christ, the Deliverer. Moses brought Israel out of bondage in Egypt. When Christ comes, He will come as Israel's Deliverer coming out of Zion. "The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob" (Romans 11:26). In that day, they will be brought out of bondage in the world and returned to the land, forgiven for their transgressions, healed of their sickness and restored as the head of the nations. They will be God's people, bringing blessing to the redeemed Gentile nations of the world during the Kingdom Age. In the Gospel of Matthew, the antitype of the Kingdom and Glory coming on the seventh day

is revealed. When He walked this earth, the Lord Jesus took three of His disciples up on a high mountain and appeared to them as the Son of Man coming in glory and in His Kingdom.

"Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (Matthew 16:28; Matthew 17:1-5NKJ)

After six days, on the seventh day, what did the disciples see? They saw the King standing, transfigured in glory. They saw the Son of Man coming in glory on the seventh day. God's voice boomed out: "This is My Son!" It is God's Son who is coming to take the scepter of the Kingdom of Glory. When He comes, Christ will be like a consuming fire, just like when the glory of the Lord appeared as a consuming fire on the mountain with Moses. Christ will judge His people, the nation of Israel and the Gentile nations. All that is not of His life, that has not borne fruit for His Kingdom, will be consumed in the fire of judgment.

[Luke records the days differently from Matthew, which could lead one to discount the seventh day, but the Scriptures never contradict one another. Instead they present a fuller picture of the truth. Luke records that "some eight days after these sayings" (Luke 9:28). The key to understanding the difference in the six days verses the eight days is the time period to which each writer referred. Luke counted his days from the time of "these sayings," which started in Luke 9:18. Matthew counted his days starting at the end of these sayings. In other words, Jesus taught His disciples over a two-day period (Matthew 16:13-28; Luke 9:18-27). Matthew simply counted his days following these sayings, and Luke counted his days at the beginning of these sayings. Three is a very important number; in the prophetic Scriptures, relative to the coming of the Lord, the third day and the seventh day are one and the same. Thus, if we take Luke's account of two days for the sayings and consider what these sayings actually revealed, we will see that they all referred to the Christ going to the cross, building His Church and finally coming as the Son of Man in the glory of His Father, ushering in the Kingdom Age or the seventh day. Prophetically speaking, God has set aside two days or 2,000 years from the cross to glory. Using Luke's account of the days, we arrive at the same conclusion as Matthew-after two days, on the third day, the Kingdom comes.]

Even Jude left us a reminder of the seventh day that is coming when he wrote of Enoch who is a type of Christ's Church being removed from the earth before God pours out His wrath on an unbelieving world.

Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, "to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them." (Jude 1:14-15NKJ)

Enoch, the seventh generation from Adam, is very significant. Why? Throughout the Scriptures, seven is God's number of perfection. It means divine completion. As the seventh from Adam,

Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him (Genesis 5:24). He was taken away so that he did not see death (Hebrews 11:5). Enoch was removed from the earth alive before God poured out His judgment on a sinful, unrighteous world from which only Noah and his family were saved. But notice that Jude declared a prophesy from Enoch which is not recorded any other place in the Bible. Enoch prophesied of the Lord's coming to execute judgment. What is this judgment? It is the judgment of all, and it is associated with the return of the Lord. Judgment must begin at the house of God (1 Peter 4:17), so the Lord will judge His Church which is His Body (2 Corinthians 5:10) before He turns to Israel and the Gentile nations (Revelation 6:1-17; Revelation 7:1-17; Revelation 8:1-13; Revelation 9:1-21; Revelation 10:1-11; Revelation 11:1-19; Revelation 12:1-17; Revelation 13:1-18; Revelation 14:1-20; Revelation 15:1-8; Revelation 16:1-21; Revelation 17:1-18; Revelation 18:1-24; Revelation 19:1-21). As Enoch was removed from the earth, so will be the Lord's people who are alive when the Lord comes hidden in the clouds of glory. As the seventh from Adam, Enoch represents those redeemed by the blood of the Lamb who will be taken up in the air to be with the Lord-both those redeemed who are alive when He comes (like Enoch) and those redeemed who have fallen asleep in the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). At the end of the Great Tribulation and the great day of His wrath (Matthew 24:29; Revelation 6:15-17), the Lord Himself will descend from the clouds (Acts 1:11) and step foot on the earth for all eyes to see Him (Zechariah 14:4; Revelation 1:7). He will take the scepter of the Kingdom and the kingdom of the world will become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (Revelation 11:15). His reign of glory will begin and righteousness and peace will be upon the earth for the final age, the Age of the Kingdom of the Son, before eternity This is the history of the heavens and the earth-seven days; six days of man, Man's Day; and one day of the Lord, the Lord's Day. Seven thousand years will complete the history of the heavens and the earth as we know them. Following these days, a new, glorious day begins. It is the endless ages, the eternity of God. And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer {any} sea. (Revelation 21:1)

## Part 7.1 - On The Third Day

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On The Third Day As shown in the next chapter, God has divided man into three groups-the Gentiles, the Jews and the Church of God (1 Corinthians 10:32KSW). The 6,000 years of Man's Day have been divided into three periods of 2,000 years. The first period of the Gentiles in which God dealt with man as one people has been completed. The latter two periods are nearly completed, only lacking a few years at most for the Church and seven years for the Jews.

According to man's best calculations based on the lunar year, it appears that the 2,000-year period set aside by God for calling out of the Gentiles a people for Himself (Acts 15:14) is about to come to an end. We must recognize that there are limitations in how accurate any man can be in calculating the time since Adam; therefore, we must understand that calculations are estimates at best. However, God is not slow about His promises; when the time is up according to God's calendar, it is up. The Father has fixed the times (Matthew 24:36; Acts 1:7; 1 Thessalonians 5:1). The Kingdom of Heaven is drawing near.

Christians, whether asleep in Jesus or alive on earth when He comes, will be taken up into the air to meet Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:14-17); then He will sit upon His judgment seat (Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10); His people will receive rewards or suffer loss (Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:12-26; 1 Corinthians 3:14-15); Christ will receive His Bride (Revelation 19:9); He will deal with Israel and the Gentile nations-the wrath of the Lamb of God will be poured out (Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 6:1-17; Revelation 7:1-17; Revelation 8:1-13; Revelation 9:1-21; Revelation 10:1-11; Revelation 11:1-19; Revelation 12:1-17; Revelation 13:1-18; Revelation 14:1-20; Revelation 15:1-8; Revelation 16:1-21; Revelation 17:1-18; Revelation 18:1-24); and then finally He will step foot on the earth after being gone for 2,000 years (Zechariah 14:4). The Kingdom of the Son will come in that day!

There are no Scriptures that specifically identify two days or 2,000 years for the Christian period. This must be seen in the light of God's restoration of the nation of Israel. However, as has been shown, the Scriptures do indicate God's restoration principle of six plus one. One day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day (2 Peter 3:8). The Scriptures reveal that there are 6,000 years for Man's Day followed by 1,000 years for the reign of Christ.

It is interesting that there are those who deny that Christ will have a 1,000-year kingdom, but this is clearly revealed in the prophetic Scriptures. In Revelation, there are six references to a 1,000-year reign that follows the Great Tribulation (Revelation 20:2-7). Satan is bound for 1,000 years and then released at the end of the 1,000 years. Those who do not receive the mark of the beast and are killed will come to life and will reign for 1,000 years. The rest of the dead do not come to life until the 1,000 years are completed. Finally, those who have a part in the first resurrection will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for 1,000 years. It is difficult to understand how any rational thinking person can deny that this is a literal 1,000 years. There are mysteries in the Bible but this cannot be one of them.

## Israel-A Sign Of The Third Day

Actually, the Scriptures give the most proof of God's timing in relation to Israel, which makes sense because Israel is a sign to the nations (Isaiah 8:18). [The Church is called to be the salt of the earth and a light in the world (Matthew 5:13-16) but is never called to be a sign to the nations.] Israel has not completed the full two days or 2,000 years, for there are seven years remaining. But also notice that Israel has been set aside for two days or 2,000 years as well. These two days started at Calvary when they cut off Messiah in fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy, and have continued to our day as God has been calling out a people from the Gentiles who are the Christians. When the two days or 2,000 years for the Christians are completed, then God will resume the work of restoring Israel and their two days will come to a close (at the end of the Great Tribulation). Everything is moving toward the closing out of Man's Day and ushering in the Lord's Day that is the Kingdom Age. This is the seventh day that for Israel as well as for Christians is the third day, since two days have been set for each. It is only logical that after two days we must come into the third day. The third day is very important in our understanding of the prophetic Scriptures, for in reference to Israel the Word speaks of a second day followed by a third day. In terms of end-time prophecy, the days began when Messiah was crucified. Two 1,000-year days (2,000 years) must transpire before Messiah will come to usher in the Kingdom Age. Israel will return to the land and be completely restored in the third day that in terms of God's restoration timeline is actually the seventh day, the Kingdom Age. So when the third and seventh days are presented in reference to Israel, both days speak of the Messianic or Kingdom Age following Man's Day. [Note The Restoration chart at the end of this chapter.] The number three is a very significant number in the Scriptures. It is the number of divine perfection. Jonah, a type of Christ and Israel, was resurrected on the third day. Christ was raised on the third day, and in like fashion, Israel will be resurrected on the third day. [Also, those who have fallen asleep in Jesus will be resurrected from the dead on the third day.] The Scriptures give us a clear indication of the third day or the seventh day in reference to Israel. A sick nation healed on the third and seventh day. In the book of Numbers, God has laid down His principle of purification from sin based on the third and seventh days.

'He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean seven days. He shall purify himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day; then he will be clean. But if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean.' (Numbers 19:11-12NKJ) In Isaiah, Israel is described as sick: The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it (Isaiah 1:5-6NKJ). Israel is unclean today but will be cleansed on the third day and on the seventh day. This will be their day of purification. In other words, the third day and the seventh day are the same days. They follow the two days since Calvary when Israel rejected Messiah's offer of the Kingdom and they cut off their Messiah by crucifying Him. Since Calvary, Israel has been set aside and is unclean in the sight of God because of the nation's transgressions. A nation wounded for two days. The nation of Israel will remain wounded for two days (2,000 years) and then be revived and raised up on the third day.

Come, and let us return to the LORD; for He has torn, but He will heal us; he has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight. (Hosea 6:1-2)

Israel will remain wounded during the Christian period, but after these two days are completed the Lord will turn to Israel and they will be revived on the third day. The nation has been wounded because of their transgressions but will be raised up following her time of judgment during the Great Tribulation. Israel will be revived for the final 1,000-year period or the seventh day which is the Messianic or Kingdom Age, once again on the land as a theocratic nation with David, God's servant, as king over them (Ezekiel 37:24). The glory of the Lord will come upon Israel and God will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel again (Ezekiel 43:2-7). Messiah will return as the King of Israel, seated upon David's throne (Luke 1:32). A nation scattered amongst the nations for two days.

Jonah prophesied of Israel being cast into the sea for two days which speaks of the time in which Israel is scattered amongst the Gentile nations. [In the Scriptures, the sea refers to the Gentile nations.] Although many Jewish people are back on the Promised Land today, during the Great Tribulation, the nation will again be scattered amongst the nations. The day of their return to the land is yet to come. As Jonah was spit out of the belly of the fish on the third day (Jonah 1:17; Jonah 2:1-2; Jonah 2:9-10), so Israel will be spit out of the belly of the Gentile nations and return to the land. As God resurrected Jonah, so God will restore Israel. God will open the graves and breath upon the dry bones and the nation will be born (Ezekiel 37:1-28). This occurs after the Great Tribulation and completes the 2,000-year Jewish period during Man's Day. A nation blinded for two days.

Israel has been blinded for two days or 2,000 years but will see on the third day. When He was risen from the dead, the Lord Jesus walked along the road with some disciples who did not recognize Him. He was with them for two days, and beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. On the third day from when He was crucified, He broke bread with these disciples and their eyes were opened (Luke 24:13-21; Luke 24:30-32). So it will be with Israel. Blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. Then the Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; and He will take away their sins (Romans 11:25-27). A nation healed on the Sabbath, the seventh day.

During the days when He walked amongst the house of Israel, the Lord healed on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:9-13). Although they did not understand what He was doing because of hardened hearts, He was revealing to them that the nation was sick, but that He would one day heal the nation on the Sabbath to come, the seventh day of rest (Hebrews 4:4), the Messianic Era or the Kingdom Age. Can We Be Sure?

How can we be sure that we are at the end of the last days, the end of the 6,000 years of Man's Day or the end of the 2,000 years of the Christian period? One answer is based on the calendar itself. There cannot be much time left to complete a full 2 days since Calvary, based on the lunar year.

Some people say we cannot know the time. Unfortunately, it seems that many who say that we cannot know the day and the hour have little expectation of His imminent return. They might be the ones who say that the Lord will return but it cannot be for another 500 years or some other time period which places this glorious event completely outside the current generation. This sort of thinking is contrary to Scripture: For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will

come just like a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:2). How can He come like a thief if He is not expected for another 500 years? People who hold this position actually are saying in their hearts that they really do not want the Lord to come back right now. They are no different than the apostates who say, "Where is the promise of His coming?" (2 Peter 3:4). In one sense, it is true that we cannot know because no one knows the day and the hour (Matthew 24:36; ). However, through the Scriptures, we can and we should discern the times in which we live. The apostles wrote that we are in the last days. We are warned that as the return of the Lord approaches, there will be a falling away, an apostasy (2 Thessalonians 2:3; 2 Peter 2:1-22; Jude) and that the Word of the Kingdom will be leavened (Matthew 13:33). The Lord warned that the church at the end of the Christian period will be lukewarm-wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked (Revelation 3:16-17). In addition to there being a lukewarm church, the Lord also warned that at the end of the age the Word of the Kingdom will be a fully leavened word. We live in this day.

One very simple test of the times in which we live is to listen to what is preached in most of the pulpits today. Is the imminent return of the Lord being preached? Are the Lord's people being prepared to appear before the Judge? Is there an excitement, an eager waiting for the Lord to return? Is there a love for His appearing? The test is to ask Christians about their expectation of His return. A person who loves the Lord's appearing does not have to be prodded to share his or her heart on this matter. There will be an instantaneous response full of hope. With one who is eagerly awaiting the Lord, there is no doubt.

Another simple test is to ask questions about the Kingdom of Heaven to see if people understand the Word of the Kingdom. Most Christians today probably cannot explain what the term Word of the Kingdom even means. In a very short amount of time of questioning, it will become abundantly apparent that very few believers understand the Kingdom and those who know something of it most likely have a leavened (corrupted) understanding. Why? Because the Lord said that this would be the understanding of the church on earth at the end of the age.

He spoke another parable to them, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three pecks of meal, until it was all leavened." (Matthew 13:33) The lukewarm church and the leavened Word of the Kingdom go hand and hand. We live in this day.

We are not to be ignorant of the times in which we live. To those who are not watching and waiting for His return, He comes as a thief. But those who are watching and waiting can discern the times based on the Scriptures. Daniel knew the time based on reading Jeremiah (Daniel 9:2; Jeremiah 25:12). The Pharisees who rejected their Messiah had the same Scriptures at their disposal and the Scriptures clearly pointed to Jesus as their Messiah, and yet they were ignorant of the signs. "Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times" (Matthew 16:3NKJ). As He was headed to Calvary, Jesus was asked by His disciples about the sign of His coming and the end of the age. At the end of His answer to them, Jesus spoke a parable about the fig tree. In the Scriptures, the fig tree symbolizes the nation of Israel.

"Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; even so you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, {right} at the door. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." (Matthew 24:32-34)

Prior to giving this discourse, Jesus declared that the house of Israel was left desolate and He went out and departed from the temple (Matthew 23:38-39; Matthew 24:1). Israel had rejected their Messiah and He left them desolate. To the Lord, the fig tree, Israel, had died. The Lord took the offer of the kingdom away from Israel and gave it to a nation bearing the fruits of it (Matthew 21:43). And seeing a fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it but leaves, and said to it, "Let no fruit grow on you ever again." Immediately the fig tree withered away. (Matthew 21:19) The Lord has given us a sign of His imminent return and it is the nation of Israel. When we see the fig tree alive again in the land (putting forth leaves, but not bearing fruit), He is about to begin His descent from the throne. In 1948, Israel was recognized as a nation, back on the Promised Land; and in 1967, Jerusalem was regained and later was declared the capital of Israel. The nation is still a secular nation in unbelief and many Jews remain scattered throughout the world; however, the sign is on the land. The leaves have come forth from the withered fig tree. To the whole world, Israel was non-existent until 1948. The generation that sees this fig tree alive again will not pass away until He comes. [A generation can continue only for so many years. The generation that came out of World War II is nearing the end of their life span.] The final days of Man's Day have begun. The summer has come. The Tribulation is coming, followed by the seventh day. In other words, the King is coming! He is about to come through the doors of heaven. The use of the word summer in the Lord's parable of the fig tree is significant. Jeremiah reveals its significance.

"Harvest is past, summer is ended, and we are not saved." For the brokenness of the daughter of my people I am broken; I mourn, dismay has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has not the health of the daughter of my people been restored? (Jeremiah 8:20-22) A day is coming when the Lord will harvest His Church, removing His people from this earth. The resurrection and the rapture will occur at the end of the two days, on the third day for the Church. As Christ was raised from the dead and the nation of Israel will be raised from the place of death, so will those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. The summer will end and Israel will mourn: "We are not saved." The final seven years of her two days will come and Israel will go into Jacob's trouble.

Today, some of the orthodox Jews believe they must rebuild the Temple, for without the rebuilding of a third temple they believe there will be no peace for Israel or for the world. They also believe that the great conflict they are under today is the result of them not obeying God to maintain a temple, the priestly function and the animal sacrifices. They believe the Kingdom of God cannot come to them until the Third Temple is built. This heart cry of the Jew may be one of the reasons that will lead to the false peace with the antichrist. They will falsely believe that this covenant of peace will usher in the Kingdom of God, but it will be a covenant of death.

[There are two views regarding the rebuilding of a temple in Jerusalem. According to the Scriptures a temple must be built, but the question is who will build it. Some people believe that the antichrist himself will build it so that he can declare himself to be God. To those who hold this view it is believed that the secular nation of Israel will never agree to rebuild the Jewish Temple. On the other hand, many others believe that the Jews must rebuild the Jewish Temple and offer sacrifices. Whichever view is held there is one common denominator: A temple will be built and the antichrist will desecrate it when he places an abomination in it and declares himself to be God (Daniel 11:31-36; Daniel 12:11; Matthew 24:15-16).]

Today, the Jews are crying out for peace and the nations are seeking ways to bring peace to the Mideast. Unknowingly, the nations are awaiting a world ruler who will offer a false peace between Israel and her Arab neighbors. When this world ruler is revealed, then there are not many years remaining for Man's Day. It is very interesting that a recent newspaper reported: "An idea reportedly being considered by a key Saudi would offer Israel peace with the entire Arab world in exchange for an Israeli pullout from all the territory occupied in the 1967 war, including the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem." The headlines a few days later read: "Saudis offer Israel conditions for peace." This offer is being made by Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. This is not to imply that this Saudi crown prince is the antichrist (at least as far as we know today), but it is very instructive, for one day the headlines will declare that a world figure has brokered a lasting peace agreement with Israel and the Arab world. When this day comes, God's Son is near the earth.

[Later, the Arab nations met in Beirut, Lebanon to discuss the Saudi peace plan. The conference ended in confusion. Why? It was not according to God's time. Nothing will thwart God from ending Man's Day. The time has been set and, until then, man only can try in vain to bring about what God has purposed.] When this ominous day comes, there will be some form of peace on earth (Daniel 11:21-24) as the antichrist (1 John 2:18), the lawless one (2 Thessalonians 2:9), the beast (Revelation 13:1-7), gains power and authority. This peace will be shattered when a great battle occurs in heaven between Satan and his angels and Michael and his angels (Revelation 12:1-12). Satan and his angels will be overcome and cast down to earth. Then, Satan will give his throne and power to the antichrist, the beast. This demonized world ruler will enter the holy place and the abomination of desolation will come (Daniel 11:31; Daniel 12:11; Matthew 24:15). He will declare himself as high as the Commander of the host (Daniel 8:11). This will commence the Great Tribulation that will last for 3½ years. During this time, the world ruler will seek to destroy the Jews with a vengeance unseen since the days of Hitler. However, he will be no match for the Most High God who is in the midst of Israel. The wrath of God will be poured out on the earth with increasing intensity until the Son of Man, God's King, steps foot on the earth (Zechariah 14:4; Revelation 19:11-16). In that day, Israel will see Messiah and they shall be saved. Hallelujah! Do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. (2 Peter 3:8)

"But know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation'" (2 Peter 3:3-4).

Let us heed Peter's warning about the facts. For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay. But My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him. (Hebrews 10:37-38{ea})

## Part 8.1 - Gentiles, Jews, Church..

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### Gentiles, Jews, Church Of God The Three Divisions Of Man

According to the Scriptures, God has divided the human race into three groups-Gentiles, Jews, Church of God-and His restoration work has progressed along these lines. You might recall that three is the number of divine perfection or completion. God will complete His work in Man's Day amongst three groups of people. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul referenced this division which existed in his day and has continued to our day. Be becoming those who do not cause others to sin by your mode of life, giving no occasion of stumbling both to Jews and Gentiles and also the Church of God. (1 Corinthians 10:32KSW) In other words, there are Jews, Gentiles and the Church of God. [For this discussion the term Christian will be used interchangeably for the Church.] Today, all three groups exist amongst the population of the world and every person, without exception, is in one of the three groups. However, from an historical perspective, each group first appeared at different times and only in the last 2,000 years have all three groups existed together. God started with all of mankind viewed as one man from Adam; then He called out a people to Himself, first called Hebrews and then Jews; and finally, out from the Gentiles and the Jews, He has called the Church, which is the Body of Christ. Thus, from God's view, all of mankind started as one; then He divided man into two groups and finally into three groups of people. Each group came into being 2,000 years apart; so God has not only divided mankind into three groups, but He has done this in three 2,000-year intervals. Thus, Man's Day has been divided into three sets of 2,000-year periods. Once again, God's divine perfection is in view. The Bible uses the lunar year of 360 days and not the solar year of 365 days currently used in most parts of the world. When the lunar year is applied and certain other variables are taken into account, the periods of time are remarkably precise. Thus, from Adam to Abraham was 2,000 years. During this time many things happened, but there was no one distinct group of people until God called Abraham out of the land of the Chaldeans. During the first 2,000 years, God dealt with man as one. Everyone was simply a descendant of Adam, and after the flood all people descended from the line of Noah. When Abraham was called out, God began a new work by raising up a nation that would be a special, peculiar people to Him. They were called to be God's Kingdom of priests on earth (Exodus 19:6), a nation of first-born sons (Exodus 4:22) with God as their King. As will be shown, from Abraham to the completion of the restoration of Israel will be 2,000 years. When God's Son came to this earth, died and rose from the grave, a new work began as the Spirit of God began to call out a people, the Church of God, the Body of Christ. From Calvary to a specific time preceding the Tribulation, when the Body of Christ will be called out of this world to meet the Lord in the air, will be 2,000 years. The first period in which God dealt with man as one people has been completed. The latter two periods are nearly completed, only lacking a few years at most for the Church and seven years for the Jews.

Each group came into being to accomplish God's purpose and plan. However, each group did not cease to exist when the other came on the scene. Gentiles have continued and will continue to exist for the entire six days (6,000 years) of Man's Day. Hebrews (later called Jews) came on the

scene 4,000 years ago and have continued until this day, although God has set them (nation of Israel) aside for a time. Christians came on the scene nearly 2,000 years ago and will remain on earth until the Lord returns. People from all three groups will enter the Kingdom Age as a redeemed people with Israel and the Gentile nations on the earth and Christians in the heavenly places over the earth. (Note The Restoration chart at the end of the previous chapter.) Now, let us look at these three groups in a little more detail.

**TheGentiles-InAdam** For the first 2,000 years of man's history, God did not single out any one group of people, except Noah and his family. God dealt with mankind as one people, but interestingly, He also began to divide the people during this time.

Notable during this time was the fall of man; the judgment of the world through the flood; the rise and fall of Babel, resulting in the confusion of the languages and the scattering of man throughout the earth; and the beginning of cultures, which further divided man.

After the flood, God commanded Noah and his sons: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1). Instead of heeding God's word, Noah's descendants settled in the plain of Shinar, dwelt there and began to build themselves a city and a tower whose top was to be in heaven (Genesis 11:2-4). Their purpose was against God's word: "Let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:4). God looked down upon the situation and acted.

"Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth. (Genesis 11:7-9) From this point on, we discover that God separated man by land and language. The Gentiles became a separated people scattered throughout the earth. From these the coastland peoples of the Gentiles were separated into their lands, everyone according to his language, according to their families, into their nations. (Genesis 10:5NKJ)

It is recorded that in the days of Peleg, a descendant of Shem, the earth was divided (Genesis 10:25). It could be said that the Gentiles (or nations) represent a divided people. In fact, this is exactly what is seen in the world today. The nations, the tribes and the tongues of the world are all separated and divided. Since Babel, man has not been able to truly unite as one man, although man has tried and vainly continues to try. Confusion has remained for nearly 6,000 years. This day will end when the King of kings comes and the earth comes under the reign of the Son. This period of God dealing with man as one people continued for 2,000 years until God began a new work. However, the Gentiles have continued down through history even to this day. The Gentiles are like a great vast sea, a sea of people, from which God called forth the Hebrews and then later called and continues to call the Christians-those who are in Christ. Today, all unsaved Gentiles still remain in Adam, dead in their sins, instead of being in Christ, alive unto God (1 Corinthians 15:22).

**TheJews-UnderCovenant**

God began to reveal His new work when He divided the earth in the days of Peleg. This was an indication that He was raising up a new people who would come from the line of Shem. God works

in a very deliberate manner. He always begins to lay the foundation of His work well in advance of its manifestation. After the flood, Noah's first-born son, Shem, was singled out as the one through whom the Hebrews would come. "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem" (Genesis 9:26). In the tenth generation from Shem, God began to unfold His purpose and plan through a Hebrew. [Ten is the number of completion of that which is in view.] At 2,000 years from Adam, Abraham, the father of faith, appeared on the scene of world history. He was living in Ur of the Chaldeans when the God of glory appeared to him and called him to a new land to inherit it (Genesis 15:7; Acts 7:2-4). God then made a covenant with Abraham: "To your descendants I have given this land" (Genesis 15:18). God established an everlasting covenant with Abraham and his descendants that involved all the land of Canaan (Genesis 17:7-8). This covenant continued through Abraham's son Isaac (Genesis 17:19) and is a promise that God will fulfill in the Kingdom Age.

First, God covenanted the land to a people who would come from the loins of Isaac and his son Jacob. Then four hundred years later (Genesis 15:13), through Moses, God began to raise up Israel, a theocratic nation. He called them His own possession, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, a chosen people, a peculiar people, a treasured possession, a special treasure, the apple of His eye, a peculiar treasure, the elect (Exodus 19:5-6; Deuteronomy 7:6; Deuteronomy 14:1-2; Deuteronomy 26:17-19; Psalms 83:1-3; Psalms 135:3-4; Zechariah 2:8; Malachi 3:17; Matthew 24:22). In His heart, God desired a people that He could call "His people" that would be one with Him. Such a people would be the light of the world, revealing His glory in all His creation. They would lead all the nations. So from all of mankind, God chose the children of Israel to be His people, called out from among the Gentiles to be His own special people.

"Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel." (Exodus 19:5-6)

God made a covenant with Israel that separated them out from among the nations. God's laws and commandments were given to them. If by faith they had followed all that God had commanded them to do, then they would have been a blessing to all the nations and God would have been glorified.

"I made the whole household of Israel and the whole household of Judah cling to Me," declares the LORD, "that they might be for Me a people, for renown, for praise, and for glory; but they did not listen." (Jeremiah 13:11)

They were God's people, one nation with one tongue. However, history once again repeated itself-first the angels rebelled, then the first man rebelled, and next God's nation rebelled. The history of Israel is one of victory and of defeat, of great glory and of utter failure, of obedience and of great rebellion. The time came when God's holy nation had sinned so greatly that God had to judge them through an appointed time of seventy weeks or 490 years as prophetically revealed to Daniel. Because of their transgressions, a period of chastisement was appointed that must last seventy times seven or 490 years.

"Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal

up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy {place.} So you are to know and discern {that} from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince {there will be} seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end {will come} with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations {will come} one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate." (Daniel 9:24-27)

After a period of sixty-two weeks, Daniel prophesied that Messiah would be cut off (Daniel 9:26). In other words, Messiah would come to Israel and be killed 483 years from the time the decree went out to rebuild Jerusalem. In the fulfillment of prophecy, Messiah came and was crucified 483 years from the time of the decree to rebuild. From a prophetic view, it is also very important to know that Messiah was cut off 1,993 years from the time that God called out Abraham, which eventually led to the birth of the nation of Israel. This is significant because 483 is seven years short of the completion of the transgression, and 1,993 years is seven years short of a complete two days or 2,000 years. At this point, it is as if God stopped the clock at 1,993 years for Israel, seven years short of a complete 2,000 years, as He set them aside as a nation. In the history of Israel, this seven years will be the coming Tribulation that ends Man's Day.

Every Christian knows the meaning of Christ being crucified for the sin of the world, but our Lord's crucifixion has great significance to Israel as well. After nearly 2,000 years from Abraham, God sent His beloved Son to this earth, taking on the form of man. Jesus came to save the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:6; Matthew 15:24). Preceding Jesus was John the Baptist who came preaching repentance "for the kingdom of God is at hand." He was preparing the way for the appearing of Messiah, Israel's promised King. John baptized in order that Christ might be manifested to Israel (John 1:31). John's ministry only lasted six months and then he was removed from the scene and Jesus began to preach the same message to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Messiah offered Israel the Kingdom. He offered them the right to take the scepter of the Kingdom of Heaven and rule with Him over this earth. But the Jewish leaders rejected their Messiah and gave up the right of the nation of Israel to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Because they rejected the offer of the Kingdom and rejected their King, even demanding His crucifixion, the nation as co-laborers with God was set aside for a time.

However, the Lord made a covenant with David that his kingdom would be forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16). In Luke 1:31-33, we discover that this promise is fulfilled in Christ who has been given the throne of His father David. In other words, this throne is an earthly throne. Israel's earthly destiny cannot be changed for it is based on God's promise that cannot be broken. During the Messianic Kingdom, Israel will be restored to the land promised to Abraham. In the age of the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, Israel will again be God's people, the wife of Jehovah, and will lead the nations with Messiah on the throne of David. In that day, the Lord will raise up David himself to sit once again on the throne with Christ as King over David and all of Israel.

"Fear not, for you will not be put to shame; neither feel humiliated, for you will not be disgraced; but you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more. For your husband is your maker, whose name is the LORD of hosts; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, who is called the God of all the earth. For the LORD has called you, like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, even like a wife of {one's} youth when she is rejected," says your God. "For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In an outburst of anger I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting lovingkindness I will have compassion on you," says the LORD your Redeemer. (Isaiah 54:4-8)

'But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.' (Jeremiah 30:9)

"Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken." (Ezekiel 34:23-24)

Until that day, the nation of Israel has been set aside during the nearly 2,000 years since Calvary (Matthew 21:43; Matthew 23:37-39) while God visits the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name (Acts 15:14). Israel has been in rebellion against God but will be forgiven after 490 years or seventy times seven.

It is very interesting that the Lord Jesus prophetically pointed to this period of time in answer to a question raised by Peter.

Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves." (Matthew 18:21-23)

Jesus was declaring God's principle as it applies to Israel and the Kingdom of God. He will forgive them seventy times seven and then the Kingdom will come. Thus, seven years or one week remain to restore Israel. This week is the Tribulation when a world ruler, the antichrist, the lawless one, who also is called the man of sin or lawlessness and the son of perdition or destruction (2 Thessalonians 2:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:9) will arise who will enter into a false covenant of peace with Israel for 3½ years (Daniel 9:27; Revelation 11:2). During the first 3½ years, a temple will be built in Jerusalem. In the middle of the week (3½ years into the Tribulation), the lawless one will break the peace, declare himself to be God and desecrate the temple. It is called the abomination of desolation. Quoting Daniel, Jesus said: "Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)" (Matthew 24:15). At this point, God will bring Jacob's trouble upon Israel (Jeremiah 30:7) which will last another 3½ years. This is called the Great Tribulation (Revelation 7:14). When Jacob's trouble has been completed, the last seven years of transgression will have been completed, bringing an end to Israel's two days or 2,000 years of history during Man's Day. In that day, they will see Messiah.

Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen. (Revelation 1:7) Israel's mourning will be turned into joy as their sins are forgiven and the Lord gives them a new covenant.

"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them upon their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." (Hebrews 8:10-12)

Israel will be healed following Jacob's trouble and in the Kingdom Age will no longer be the tail but the head. They will be the head of the nations, for they will be above and not beneath (Deuteronomy 28:13). Through Israel, all the nations will be blessed (Genesis 22:18; Genesis 26:4; Isaiah 61:1-11; Isaiah 62:1-12; Jeremiah 30:1-24; Jeremiah 31:1-40; Zechariah 12:1-14; Zechariah 13:1-9; Zechariah 14:1-21; Acts 15:16; Romans 11:11-36). Finally, they will be the people that God called them to be. The nations of the world down through history, and more so today, have not realized and do not realize that their future is divinely linked to Israel. God's promise to Israel is joined with the land. Israel's destiny is to be married to the land.

It will no longer be said to you, "Forsaken," nor to your land will it any longer be said, "Desolate"; but you will be called, "My delight is in her," and your land, "Married"; for the LORD delights in you, and {to Him} your land will be married. (Isaiah 62:4)

There are many in the world who want to see Israel wiped off the face of the earth, but they are fighting against God and His divine purpose and plan. They will fail! As God brings Israel into Jacob's trouble, so will the nations of the earth suffer. As Israel suffers, so does the world. Why? Because God's blessing of the nations only comes through Israel. Peace amongst the nations only comes through Israel. All nations that stand against Israel during the Tribulation will be condemned.

"I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter judgment with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; they have also divided My land." (Joel 3:2NKJ)

Israel will be judged, followed by judgment of the nations (Matthew 25:31-46). Once the dead bones of Israel come alive (Ezekiel 37:1-28) and God's people are once again in possession of all the land promised to Abraham, then they will be the head of the nations and the redeemed Gentile nations that remain and are commended by the Lord will come into blessing as well (Matthew 25:33-40).

"The sons of foreigners shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister to you; for in My wrath I struck you, but in My favor I have had mercy on you. Therefore your gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day or night, that men may bring to you the wealth of the Gentiles, and their kings in procession. For the nation and kingdom which will not serve you shall perish, and those nations shall be utterly ruined. (Isaiah 60:10-12NKJ) But you shall be named the priests of the LORD, they shall call you the servants of our God. You shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory you shall boast. Instead of your shame you shall have double honor, and instead of confusion they shall rejoice in their portion. Therefore in their land they shall possess double; everlasting joy shall be theirs. (Isaiah 61:6-7NKJ)

There no longer will be any confusion. God confused the Gentiles at the tower of Babel, but in the Kingdom Age confusion will give way to rejoicing. All the peoples will know that it is God who rules

in the kingdoms of men and that He alone has been the driving force in the history of the world. The Gentiles will know that God has been central in the entire history of Israel. God has been behind all their afflictions and they never ceased being His people. In that day, the house of Israel will no longer be in confusion either for they shall know that "I am the Lord their God from that day forward" (Ezekiel 39:22NKJ).

God knows all things, and in His wisdom He has long-suffered to bring about the plan that He has purposed in His heart from before the foundation of the world. Through the history of Israel, we see that God will bring forth His Kingdom on earth and this will involve Israel and the Gentiles; but one issue remains. Who will occupy the place of ruling in the heavenly places in the Kingdom Age? Who will ascend the throne of the Kingdom of Heaven with Christ and reign with Him in the heavenly sphere of the Kingdom, the place now occupied by Satan and his fallen angels? Who will enter the Reign of the Heavens? This is where the Church of God or the Christian comes into the picture.

God's plan from the beginning has been to bring forth a new creation, something that would not fail, ever again, but would ascend to the heavenly throne to rule over the earth in righteousness and restore order to a corrupted earth. God did not give up on having man in dominion over this earth, but He needed a new man. Another way of stating this truth is that He needed a new nation, a heavenly nation, not an earthly one. But from where would this new man, this new nation come? The Jews forfeited this right. The Gentile nations were excluded because they were alienated from God, without hope in the world (Ephesians 2:12). If there were only two groups amongst mankind, then from where would the new man come? The answer is in Christ.

The Church Of God-In-Christ For nearly 2,000 years since Calvary, God has been calling unto Himself a people from the Gentiles and a remnant of the Jews (Acts 15:14; Romans 9:27; Romans 11:5) to build the Church of God (Matthew 16:18). What is the Church? In the Greek language, the word church is ekklesia, which comes from the word ek meaning "out of" and klesis meaning "calling." Thus, the word church means "calling out of" or "called out of." Christ died and rose from the grave to call out from the world a people unto Himself. But this calling out is more than a call out of the world; it is a call out of all things old, of all things associated with the Jew and the Gentile. This is an entirely new work of God and this work is in His Son, who has not failed and never will fail to bring about what God has purposed. This work must be entirely new because God has a tremendous purpose for the called-out ones, the ekklesia. It is a heavenly calling and purpose. The Church is destined for the throne! For this reason, the work that God is doing in the called-out ones is an entirely new work. A New Creation In Christ A Christian is no longer a Jew or a Gentile but an entirely new creation in Christ. But by His (God's) doing you are in Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:30). Can you grasp the significance of being in Christ? If you are in Christ, you have died to your old man, and your new life is now hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3). This is so tremendous that nothing like this has ever been done in the history of man. It is God's doing, not man's. Therefore, Paul wrote, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:31). Why? Because God has done a new thing.

Therefore if any man is in Christ, {he is} a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

"New things have come" should be translated as "he has become new." The verb tense in the original Greek points to something that has occurred in the past that exists in the present time as finished. This same verb tense is used in reference to the finished work of the cross (John 19:30) and the work of the Spirit in bringing forth eternal salvation (Ephesians 2:8). In other words, those in Christ have been given a positional stand in Christ based on the finished work of the cross. It is done and nothing can be done to add to it or to take it away. Once a believer is in Christ, he remains in Christ as a new creation. A Christian's eternal salvation and his positional stand in Christ are complete, just as complete as Christ's finished work at Calvary. In Christ, all old things have passed away. Through the Holy Spirit, a people are being called out from among the Jews and the Gentiles who are now neither Jew nor Gentile. If a person was a Jew before the Spirit placed him in Christ, then he is no longer a Jew. If a person was a Gentile before the Spirit placed him in Christ, then he is no longer a Gentile.

### One New Man

What does it mean to be no longer a Jew or Gentile? It means that the Christian is a new man, not just a group of people that have been called together retaining their original identity. When a person believes in Jesus and the finished work of the cross, he is placed in Christ in whom there is no distinction, neither Jew nor Gentile, but one new man, with an entirely new constitution. He has been brought into the last Adam, the second Man who is Christ. As a new creation in Christ, a believer has been brought into the one new man who is Christ. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both {groups into} one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall...that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, {thus} establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. (Ephesians 2:13-16) This is a very important distinction. This was a mystery that was in God's heart. When the nation of Israel was brought forth, all of mankind was divided into two people with a dividing wall that could not be penetrated. The Gentiles were excluded from the promises made to Israel. There was no hope for the Gentiles. But in Christ, God broke down the dividing wall and opened the door for both the Jew and the Gentile to come out and be partakers of better promises in Christ. All past distinctions, regardless of which group a person was in before, cease for those who are part of this new man in Christ. This new man is entirely new. And have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him-{a renewal} in which there is no {distinction between} Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. (Colossians 3:10-11) This new man is all of Christ; for Christ is all, and in all. The new man must be in the image and likeness of God to reign with Christ. Those who are in Christ are the ones who are being called out to ascend into the heavenly realm when the beloved Son of God comes.

### One Body

Each individual believer is a new creation, a new man, but he is not to be alone. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, this one new man is also one body. But it is more than just a gathering of people as a body; it is the very Body of Christ. It must have been quite a shock to Paul, a zealous Jew, when he learned that the Gentiles were called into one body as fellow members of the Body. But Paul wrote that this is true. The Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow

partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. (Ephesians 3:6) Even more amazing is the fact that this body is also the Body of Christ, with Christ as the Head. For even as the body is one and {yet} has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:12)

He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything. (Colossians 1:18; also Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:24).

Christ is the Head of the Body, the Church. In other words, the Body of Christ is made up of many new creations in Christ of which Christ is the Head. As the Head, it is Christ's responsibility to bring His Body into the heavenly realm.

"In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, {there} you may be also." (John 14:2-3)

What a tremendous promise that our Lord Jesus has given to His Church: "I will come again, and receive you to Myself." When He comes He will be in the air, and it is in the air over this earth that He will first receive His people, His Body. This body is destined to be the fulness of Christ, to be full of Christ that He will be all in all in His people. For it was the {Father's} good pleasure for all the fulness to dwell in Him. (Colossians 1:19) For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority. (Colossians 2:9-10) And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:22-23) In Him dwells all the fullness of God, and His Body is to be the full expression of God. A Holy Nation

Finally, this new creation, the one new man in Christ, the Body of Christ is called to be a new nation. Prior to Calvary, the Gentiles had no rights to the Kingdom of Heaven. They were excluded from entering the Kingdom. Israel was offered this right but they rejected it. They were to be fruitful but instead they were barren, and thus the Lord took the offer of the Kingdom from them. Upon their rejection, the Lord Jesus offered the Kingdom to another nation.

"Therefore I say to you [that is, Israel], the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it." (Matthew 21:43NKJ; also Luke 20:16) This new creation in Christ is the new nation that is to bear fruit. In writing to sojourners and pilgrims (1 Peter 1:1; 1 Peter 2:11) of like precious faith (2 Peter 1:1), Peter revealed the identity of this new nation. But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10NKJ) This holy nation is something entirely new. Prior to Calvary, Gentiles were not included as the people of God. They were living in darkness, not in the light of God. They had not received mercy. In other words, they were lost in the world. But because of the mercy of God, those called out from the Gentiles and the Jews are now a new people, God's people who proclaim His praises as His own special people. Not of This Realm

What is the Church, the ekklesia? The ekklesia is an entirely new creation, not earthly, but heavenly; not of this realm, but of His realm; not of the old nature but of His nature; not of the flesh but of the Spirit, not of Adam but of Christ. The ekklesia was birthed with one destiny, and that is to ascend the throne with Christ to rule over this earth during the Kingdom Age. The ekklesia is not to be attached to this earth but to the One who is returning from heaven very soon. The ekklesia is the Body of Christ. The ekklesia is a holy nation. When He was headed toward Calvary, the Lord Jesus prayed to His Father on behalf of His disciples and those who would follow and believe in Him.

"I have given them Thy word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil {one.}" (John 17:14-15) The Lord's disciples are in the world but they are not of it. Why? Because they are called out of it. The Lord told Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm" (John 18:36).

Unlike Israel and the Gentile nations, the destiny of the Church is not linked to any earthly land. The call to the Church, to all Christians is an upward call to the heavenly places in the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christians are to be partakers of the heavenly calling (Hebrews 3:1). They have the on-high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Php 3:14). Their calling is to an entirely different realm. This day has not come because our Lord and Savior has not returned. As Paul wrote, there is a hope laid up for Christians in heaven (Colossians 1:5). Paul was not referring to falling asleep in Jesus and going to heaven. It is the coming Kingdom of the Son that is the hope of every born-again child of God. Christians should be looking for His return to set up His Kingdom, not only on earth but also from the heavenly places. The Church is being called to reign with Christ from heaven during His Kingdom. This day is coming soon! When we look at the history of the three groups of people, it is interesting that the last group will be the first in God's end-time dealings. First, the Church of God will rise from this earth, be judged and the faithful in Christ will occupy positions of power and authority in the Kingdom of Heaven. Second, Israel will be judged, healed as a nation, restored to the land and occupy their place as the head of the nations in the Kingdom of God. Finally, the Gentile nations will be judged and those commended and redeemed will populate the earth during the Kingdom Age, being blessed through Israel.

"Thus the last shall be first, and the first last." (Matthew 20:16) The Lord is true to His word.

## Part 9.1 - ..Salvation Of The Spirit..

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The Salvation Of The Spirit-Eternal Life At this point, we need to turn exclusively to the third group-the Church of God-because it is this group that has been God's focus for the last two millennia and is being offered the Reign of the Heavens.

How does a person come into the Church of God? To ask the question another way, how do people become Christians? Do they join a church just like they would a club or an organization? Do they just decide that it makes sense, so they might as well go along with others who call themselves Christians? Do they find a place called a church and attend the meetings that are held there every Sunday and take on the name of the people that attend because they go there week after week? What makes a person a Christian? To quote a phrase used by many, how does a person "get saved"? Why does a person need to be saved? Does a person really need to be born again?

Obviously, there are many questions that could be asked, but these are enough to make the point. There are a lot of misunderstandings about this matter of salvation. We even could say that some misunderstandings are mere myths, not reality as presented in the Spirit-breathed Scriptures. It is a safe assumption that there is a fair amount of confusion over the matter of eternal salvation, just as there is confusion over the coming Kingdom. If eternal salvation is not properly understood, then the Kingdom, in turn, will be misunderstood, as well. We need to start with the right foundation for the whole structure to be strong and stable. In the last century, there have been cartoons depicting Peter standing at the pearly gates of heaven with a book in hand to see if a person can enter into heaven or not. If the person's name is not on the list, then he goes to "hell" where Satan is standing with his pitchfork with the unquenchable fire in the background. People might laugh at this and say this is not what they believe, but the fact of the matter is that many Christians are not too far from this thought in their belief. At times, people are told that if they believe, when they die, they will "go to heaven" and receive their reward for being a good person. If they don't believe, they will "go to hell." At other times, a sentimental gospel is preached that tells people (begs people) to let Jesus into their heart because He is outside the door of their heart, knocking to be let in. This is based on a Scripture that is spoken by the Lord to His own saved people who have fallen away from Him (Revelation 3:20). This word has nothing to do with the lost. He is outside the door of His church. Still others preach that if you don't live a good life, then you will lose your salvation and "go to hell," even though you have believed on Jesus. Others pervert the message by stating that you can live any type of life you want, even a life of sin, and you will "go to heaven" and receive a reward because you have believed on Jesus. Further, others lead people to believe on Jesus but then offer them no assurance of what happens to them when they die. Having believed on Jesus, they are led to believe that when they die, they are left hanging in some nebulous place that requires the living to pray for them so that they can get out. The message gets further complicated when entering the Kingdom and "going to heaven" are joined together as one event when a person dies. In addition, there are other distortions of the message of the Kingdom, such as the Kingdom of God's Son has come upon earth and Christ is

ruling over the earth today, or the Kingdom is within His people and we are to conquer the world for Christ so that He can come back. These are only a few of the many views held by Christians today. In fact, these few examples do not do justice to the confusion that exists in the presentation of the gospel today. For this reason, we must go back to the beginning and lay the foundation of eternal salvation so that we can move ahead to the more mature knowledge of the Kingdom or, as the Word of God calls it, the meat of the Word (1 Corinthians 3:2; Hebrews 5:12; Hebrews 5:14).  
The Gospel Of The Grace Of God

Paul the apostle declared that he testified solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24). It is this message, this good news that is to be preached to the lost, those who do not have eternal life and who are destined for an eternity outside the presence of God in the lake of fire that burns forever (Revelation 20:11-15). The gospel of the grace of God is the message that must be heard by the lost. What is the good news that the lost must hear? The message is so simple, and yet it seems that we have made it so complex. The heart of the message is to believe. The shortest and clearest gospel message recorded in the Bible was delivered by Paul and Silas while they were in prison in Philippi. At midnight, they were praying and singing hymns to God when suddenly there was a great earthquake that shook the foundations of the prison and opened all the jail doors. The keeper of the prison was taken by great fear that his prisoners had escaped, which would have meant death to him. When he saw that the prisoners were still in the jail cell, the jailer fell trembling before Paul and Silas and cried out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" The answer was: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:25-31NKJ).

Believe! As long as it is still today, this is the message to all the lost. What is lost mankind to believe?

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. (1 Corinthians 15:3-5)

God's Son, God Himself died for our sins, went into the grave, was resurrected, appeared to many as proof of His victory over death, ascended to the throne of heaven, and He is coming back from that throne to sit upon His own throne; and when He does, He will resurrect from among the dead all who have believed on Him. This is the simplicity of the gospel of the grace of God. The lost do not have to understand all the great depths of Christian truth. All they must do is simply believe on Jesus and what He accomplished on the cross. It is by grace: For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, {it is} the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9). When we believe on Jesus, we are saved by grace through faith. We are not saved because we did any work that could redeem us. On the contrary, we were dead in trespasses and could do nothing, absolutely nothing, to save ourselves. Even if we were placed on a cross to die for the sins of the world, it would not be acceptable to God because we could never be an acceptable sacrifice. We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

What is grace? It has been defined as "the unmerited favor of God," "that which God is able to do, completely apart from human merit" and "the enabling power of God." If we take part of the second definition and add it to the third, we come to a good definition of grace-"the enabling power of God, apart from human merit." It is God's power that enables us to believe, that enables us to run the

race of the faith and that will enable us to stand in the presence of the Son of Man when He comes. If in every place that the word grace is used in the Bible, it is substituted with the enabling power of God, apart from human merit, it will add further light to how tremendous is this grace. It is all of God.

Once we are saved, we need to understand what this grace has truly accomplished for us. It has nothing to do with us, what we can bring to God or what we can do for God. It is all about what God has done for us in and through His Son.

**Sin And Death** To fully understand this wonderful gospel of the grace of God, we need to go to the beginning of the Bible and the fall of man. God breathed life into the first man, Adam, placed him in the Garden of Eden and commanded: "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17). Unfortunately, Adam disobeyed God's command and ate from the forbidden tree. In that day, Adam brought his race into ruin as sin and death claimed dominion over man. The entire human race became sinners in the sight of God.

Some people cannot accept the thought that all born of Adam's race are sinners, but the word of God is very clear on this matter.

What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; All have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one." (Romans 3:9-12{ea}) ...For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.... (Romans 3:23{ea}) But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8{ea})

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.... (Romans 5:12{ea}) For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:19{ea}) For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all. (Romans 11:32{ea}) But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).... (Ephesians 2:4-5{ea})

These Scriptures should serve as ample proof that all of mankind are sinners in the sight of God. According to the Greek, a sinner is one who misses the mark, who does not share in the prize. When he sinned against God, Adam missed the mark and brought all of mankind into the same condition-all fall short of the glory of God. Man was shut out from intimate communion with God and was left to live according to the tree of knowledge, which simply represents man's will to choose good or evil. Instead of partaking of the tree of life and reigning forever in the glory of God, Adam and Eve came into shame and found themselves naked before God (Genesis 3:7-11). Through Adam, sin entered into the world, and along with sin came death, which spread to all men.

God's unchangeable principle is that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Sin, which is rebellion or disobedience to God's will, is likened to a work which requires a just wage (payment or compensation); when the work-sin-is performed, a wage-death-must be paid.

What is death? Man was created as spirit, soul and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Because of his sin, Adam's spirit went into an immediate place of death and he could no longer have intimate fellowship with God (Genesis 3:9-10). This is seen as Adam and Eve hid from God. Adam's soul entered into a kind of death because he could not partake of the tree of life (Genesis 3:22-24). Adam was left to choose good or evil, instead of trusting God to direct his path. Choosing evil leads to death of the soul (Romans 8:13). Finally, Adam's body began to decay, leading to a physical death (Genesis 5:5).

Some people seem to believe that one day man will be some bodiless, spirit-being floating amongst the clouds, but this cannot be so. Man is a special creation of God, created with a spirit, a soul and a body. As we will see in this chapter and the following two chapters, man's spirit, soul and body must be redeemed. It is the body which will be redeemed last when Christ comes and the dead in Christ are raised and, along with those who are alive and remain, are caught up to meet Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). When Adam sinned, all of mankind fell under a sentence of death. The proof of this is that every man and woman born on this earth dies; they physically die and their bodies go to the grave to return to dust. By God's command, this is what must transpire, for the work of sin must be compensated and the just compensation is death. Today, if there were no sin, there would be no death.

Now, when Adam fell, mankind faced a tremendous dilemma, and that dealt with sin itself. Once sin entered into the very fiber of man and became part of his nature, all of mankind came under the sentence of death, condemned to die. How could man overcome this sentence of death? There was only one way. Sin itself had to be taken away in order to overcome death, for man was captured in a body of death as a slave of sin (Romans 6:6). If sin is no longer operative, then death ceases, as well, because it is the payment for the work of sin. Take the work away and the wage is not required.

We could say that another work had to be done to take away sin, a work that paid all the wages of sin. According to God's principle revealed in the Garden, a sacrifice had to be offered to take away sin and redeem man: And the LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them (Genesis 3:21). God killed the first animal on the restored earth, shedding its blood and taking its skin to clothe Adam and Eve. An innocent animal was killed on their behalf to cover their shame of nakedness. In other words, God revealed that a substitute death and the shedding of blood were required to redeem man.

However, according to another principle of God, animal sacrifices only provide a temporary remedy for sin and cannot take away sin itself: For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Hebrews 10:4). This is seen throughout the history of Israel as they continually offered animal sacrifices. To take away the sin of man, the perfect sacrifice for sin had to come through man. But what fallen man could die for his own sins to redeem himself back to God? We could say that man had a debt to pay but no way to pay it. If this were possible, then Adam could have done it. It took someone who was a perfect sacrifice to die, one who was without sin. The work of salvation had to be done by a sinless, perfect sacrifice.

Paul the apostle saw this dilemma and God's answer as he cried out: Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:24-25). Praise God, the answer is through Jesus Christ our Lord. The sacrifice of the

first innocent animal pointed to a day 4,000 years later when God's Son took away the sin of the world through death on the cross. His innocent blood was shed to blot out sin and its result, death. Without shedding of blood there is no remission (forgiveness) (Hebrews 9:22NKJ). When I see the blood I will pass over you (not bring the sentence of death upon you) (Exodus 12:13). God's Son was sent to this earth to take away sin and remove the curse of death through the shedding of His own blood.

Behold, The Lamb Of God! When he saw Jesus coming to him, John the Baptist proclaimed: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Takes away can be likened to taking up the anchor of a ship and sailing away.

We see a type of this in the book of Leviticus, which revealed how Israel was to live daily before God. There we discover the principle of taking away sin through the scapegoat.

"But the goat on which the lot for the scapegoat fell, shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make atonement upon it, to send it into the wilderness as the scapegoat." (Leviticus 16:10)

"Then Aaron shall lay both of his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel, and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and he shall lay them on the head of the goat and send {it} away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who {stands} in readiness. And the goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a solitary land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness." (Leviticus 16:21-22)

Through Aaron, all the transgressions of the sons of Israel were placed on a goat which was released into the wilderness. In this way, the sins of the people were removed from them and sent into a solitary land. However, this did not remove the sin nature from the sons of Israel. They continued to sin, and year after year throughout their history, other scapegoats had to be selected to bear their iniquities. Praise God; the scapegoat was a type of something far greater that was to come-the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. (Hebrews 10:11-14)

Thousands of sacrifices for sin were offered for Israel but not one of them could take away sin, which in this verse, according to the Greek, means "to cast off an anchor." The Lamb of God was offered as a sacrifice for sin for all time. He cast off the anchor of sin which has held man in its grip since the fall in the Garden. Is this not what sin is to mankind? It is an anchor that moors man to death; sin entangles man and weighs him down, but the Lamb of God cut through all those cords and released man from the stranglehold of sin. But how did the Son of God, who was without sin (Hebrews 4:15), take away sin? He (God the Father) made Him (the Son of God) who knew no sin {to be} sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (in Christ) (2 Corinthians 5:21{ea}). The Lamb of God was sinless perfect but He became sin itself. It is beyond our comprehension how God Himself could become sin for us, but this is what the Word of God reveals. Jesus, as both God and Man, took all of man's sins [the entirety of man's sin for all of time and eternity (1 John 2:2), including the sin nature itself] as if He were the sinner and received the full wages of all the sin of the world. He took it all upon Himself and died, taking away the sin of the

world, so that one day, death itself will be no more (1 Corinthians 15:26; Revelation 20:14; Revelation 21:4). Hallelujah! This is good news! God accepted the sacrifice for sin. God's Son has the keys of Hades (the place of the dead) and of Death (Revelation 1:18NKJ). Although the bodies of those who believe in Him one day will go into the grave (unless He comes first), death will hold them only for a season. As it is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:54-55).

It is important to understand that there is another dimension of death beyond the physical death of man. Death has a much greater meaning in light of eternity, for ultimately death means separation from God. Today, unredeemed man is separated from God because his spirit is in a place of death. If he is in this condition when he dies a physical death, he will be separated forever from God's presence throughout the eternal ages. His abode for eternity will be the lake of fire that is reserved for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:11-15). However, today, the redeemed man is no longer separated from God because his spirit has been born again, he has a new life dwelling in him-eternal life-and he is able to communicate with God in the spirit. Eternal life is a present possession with a future promise of living in the presence of God throughout the eternal ages (Revelation 21:3). On the cross, Christ suffered the agony of being separated from His Father in heaven as He took on the sin of the world: "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying," Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). As the only begotten Son of God hung on the cross and became sin, God the Father turned His back on His beloved Son and crushed Him as the sacrifice for man's sin (Isaiah 53:5). The Son had never been separated from His Father and He cried out in agony. He was all alone! For those three hours, Christ suffered not only the horror of the effects of sin on One who knew no sin but also of the separation from God that unredeemed man will experience for eternity. This is the horror and agony of the lake of fire.

One Work-It Is Finished!

Having received the full measure of man's sin while He hung on the cross, the Lord Jesus said, "It is finished!" And He bowed His head, and gave up His spirit (John 19:30). What was finished? Christ had taken on all the sin of the world-the work was done-there was no more sin. He took it away. He drank the full cup of the curse of sin; every act of sin was poured out on Him to the point that He became sin itself. He experienced the sinner's death, separation from God; He released His spirit and He died a physical death.

Christ suffered death for us so that we do not have to face the eternal agony of being apart from God, but instead can stand before God as righteous. This is why Christ's death on the cross is a finished, fully completed work. The work of sin has been fully paid, and all that believe on Him are in Christ and possess the absolute and complete benefit of His finished work. He finished the work of sin and there are no more wages to be paid for sin for those who believe on Him and avail themselves of His priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary (Hebrews 2:17; Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 1.7-2.1-2). This is the good news! When a person believes on Jesus and His finished work, he passes from death (separation from God) to life (eternal presence with God).

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:24)

Believers will never have to face the judgment for which Christ paid the full price. This is confirmed by our Lord's words: "He who believes in Him (Jesus) is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18{ea}). Because judgment of sin was fully accomplished on the cross, if a person does not accept this judgment, he is already judged. In other words, as long as he remains in unbelief, not availing himself of Christ's work, he is judged and his future abode is the lake of fire. Once a person dies a physical death, there is no opportunity to change his position. The finished work of Christ is so important that it is worth restating. When Jesus, the perfect, sinless Lamb of God, went to the cross, taking on the sin of the world and dying as a substitute for all of mankind, He paid the full wages for the sin of man. As Paul wrote to the Colossians, God has forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; having nailed it to the cross (Colossians 2:14). It is as if God stamped the debt "paid in full." Jesus did all the work, having suffered once, never to suffer again (Hebrews 7:27). The work He did by dying on the cross was accepted by God and nothing can be added to this work or taken away from it. It is finished! (John 19:30). It is a finished work that all who believe on Jesus enter into the moment they believe. It is the gift of God, a love gift, not as a result of anyone's works, either before salvation or after salvation: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). It was a work of divine love and all the work was completed while we were yet sinners. Everything that stood against us receiving eternal life was canceled out. There is nothing, absolutely nothing, that anyone needs to do or can do to secure eternal life except believe on the finished work of Christ. In other words, Christ has done all the work for us. All we have to do is accept the work He did.

It is all by the grace of God. In writing to the Romans, Paul contrasted the work of Adam with the work of Christ. [See the chart at the end of the chapter.] Notice Paul's emphasis on grace and the free gift. But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. And the gift is not like {that which came} through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment {arose} from one {transgression} resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift {arose} from many transgressions resulting in justification. For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:15-17{ea})

It is all by God's grace and it is His free gift. Free means that we pay nothing, absolutely nothing for it. Why? Because God's Son received all the wages of sin! There are no more wages to be paid in reference to freeing man from sin. Those who are in Christ have been set free from the slavery of sin and they do not have to fear an eternal death for they have been brought into eternal life. But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. (Romans 6:22) As Christians, when we all appear before the Lord, not one of us will be able to boast that we did anything to secure our eternal salvation. When we believe, we receive eternal life with the unconditional promise of God that we will enter into the eternal presence of God in the Day of God (2 Peter 3:12). And the witness is this,

that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:11-13)

If a person believes, then he has eternal life because he has the Son. This is the gospel of the grace of God. The Son of God is our security of eternal salvation. Because of Jesus, all who believe on Him shall enter the eternal presence of God. This entrance is not based on our works, before we believed or after we believed, because it is based entirely on the one work that the Son of God accomplished on the cross of Calvary. We have been saved, not according to our own works or deeds (2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5). Further, once saved, there is no work to be done to keep eternal life because it always must remain and forever will remain a finished work; otherwise, the death of Christ was not finished, contrary to the inspired Word of God. Eternal life is so secure to those who believe that it cannot be lost, forfeited or stolen. This truly is good news!

**Born Again** When we are saved by the grace of God, when we have faith and believe, what is saved? This is a very important question that often leads to misunderstanding. It is not unusual to hear evangelists preaching to "save souls." But the soul is not what is saved first; it is the spirit. The spirit must be born again, that is, born of God. The Lord Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). John the apostle wrote: But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, {even} to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:12-13{ea}). Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God (1 John 5:1).

It is a rather sad commentary on the condition of things amongst those who say they believe. Many do not acknowledge that they are born again, and others seem to rebel from the thought, as if it is something too extreme. However, according to the Word of God, we must be born again.

So, what does it mean to be born again? As seen already, man was created with a spirit, soul and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23). However, when Adam disobeyed God's command in the Garden, he brought a spiritual death upon his race: You shall surely die! (Genesis 2:17). In that day, his spirit went into a death in the sense that he could no longer discern spiritual things nor communicate with God in the spirit (Genesis 3:9-11). God is spirit (John 4:24); and man, who was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26), was to be a spiritual man clothed in the glory of God. When he sinned, Adam lost the glory of God, he found himself naked and he was aware of his sin (Genesis 3:10-11); his spirit was no longer able to communicate with God; and having partaken of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, his soul began to govern or rule his actions. In that day, Adam's physical body also began to decay. No man born of Adam's race has ever lived the full day that God set for man. God intended man to live 1,000 years and then enter into eternal life and glory forever. As we have seen, with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day (2 Peter 3:8). Adam died at 930 years and Methuselah, the longest living human, died at 969 years (Genesis 5:5; Genesis 5:27). Thus, no man has ever lived a full day or 1,000 years; and for this reason, every man has fallen short of the glory of God. This is the natural man (1 Corinthians 2:14) and this man is lost, dead in his transgressions (Ephesians 2:5). He is a man of flesh, ruled by the passions and desires of the flesh.

It is the spirit that first must be saved in man. The Person of the Holy Spirit must breathe a new life into the man of flesh. The Lord Jesus said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). In other words, to be born again, we must be born of the Spirit; and this new birth comes about when we receive the Spirit of God. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians: Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God (1 Corinthians 2:12). Our spirit is where the Holy Spirit resides; and the new birth involves our spirit becoming one with God, the Holy Spirit bearing witness with our spirit (Romans 8:16). With the Spirit of God in residence in our spirit, God begins to communicate with us, teaching us, combining or comparing spiritual thoughts with spiritual words (1 Corinthians 2:13). In summary, when we believe on this finished work of Christ, our spirit, which was dead to God, is saved and comes alive to God in Christ (1 Corinthians 15:22; 1 Corinthians 15:45); we are born again; the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our spirit, breathing in us a new life (Acts 5:32; Romans 5:5; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 1 Thessalonians 4:8; 2 Timothy 1:14); we become a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17NKJ); we receive eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord as a free gift by grace (Romans 6:23; 1 John 5:20); and we are forever secure to enter into the eternal presence of God (John 3:16). To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity (2 Peter 3:18).

All of this is not based on our works but on the one work of the Son of God who died to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29). We will enter the eternal presence of God because the work done by the Son is a complete, finished work to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be taken away. This eternal life cannot be lost, forfeited or stolen. Thank God for eternal life!

Since Calvary, this matter of the security of eternal life has been a controversy; however, this book is based on the firm belief that no person, once having been accounted righteous before God because of faith in Christ (justified by faith), can ever return to his former state of unrighteousness before God. In other words, a saved person cannot revert back to being a lost person. In reference to Israel, the Bible tells us: Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition (1 Corinthians 10:11NKJ). As our example, we are shown that when Israel came out of Egypt, the entire nation was redeemed, having applied the blood on the door posts and the lintel. Once they came out, no redeemed person under Moses was ever permitted by God to go back to the place from which he was freed by the blood and power of God, not even those who later refused to obey God and enter Canaan (Numbers 14:26-37). The path through the Red Sea had long since been covered with water and the way back barred. Once out of Egypt, they could not go back. They missed the best part of their redemption, that is, entering the land of milk and honey; nevertheless, they could not reverse their redemption because the blood had been applied on their behalf. The same thing applies to those who have believed on Christ and have appropriated the blood of Christ which was shed on their behalf. On the other hand, as it will be stated in many ways throughout the chapters that follow, this book presents the firm belief that once a person is saved, the Kingdom of our Lord is set before the believer as a goal that must be sought through faithful service to the Lord, based on spiritual character and an active, living faith. A believer is to seek after the reward of the inheritance (Colossians 3:24) of the Kingdom by living a life that will be counted worthy to attain unto the Kingdom Age (Luke 20:35). As will be shown, some believers may not be counted worthy to receive reward and even may be excluded from a place of position or ruling in the millennial Kingdom. They will be shut out from reigning with Christ

for 1,000 years; however, they will enter the eternal presence of God in the Day of God. Eternal life is a guarantee based on the free gift, but reward in the Kingdom is a privilege that must be earned. The latter is the heart of this book, but first we must be clear on eternal salvation.

## Eternal Life

What is eternal life? When people hear of eternal life, the first thought is most likely of an eternal existence, immortality, never dying. Today, men die because they are mortal [that is, the body is mortal (1 Corinthians 15:42)]; but eternal life speaks of immortality, never having to face death again and living forever. With eternal life, we also think of eternity. In the English dictionary, eternity is defined as "continuance without end" or "time without beginning or end." In other words, there is no beginning or end. Our God is the Eternal God who lives outside of time. He has no beginning and He has no end. He is God! Man, on the other hand, lives in time and has a beginning; but actually, he was created to have no end. He was created to partake of the tree of life and reign with God forever (Genesis 3:22). A day is coming when those who overcome and enter the millennial reign of Christ will partake of the tree of life that has been kept from man since Adam's fall (Revelation 2:7). In one sense, eternity is what Jesus promised when He said: "Whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:24). "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life" (John 6:47). As people of Adam's fallen race, we are under a curse, a death sentence which locks us in time; but when we believe in God's remedy for the curse of death, we go from death to life and eternity opens up for us. This truly is good news!

However, eternal life is far more than a matter of existence and time. We often place the emphasis on the eternal aspect, but the emphasis should be on life. The difference between those who will be cast into the eternal lake of fire and those who will be in the eternal presence of God is life. The former will not have life but the latter will. Life is what is needed to exist in eternity with God. The good news is that eternal life is the very life of Christ, and this life has an entirely different quality from the life of man. When the Lord was about to perform his seventh miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead, He proclaimed: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:25-26). Jesus was not saying that He could raise people from the dead (although He most definitely could and did). He was saying that He is life itself. In Him is life and apart from Him no one has life. It is His very life that is the resurrection, for His life is a life that cannot be held in the grave. His promise to those who believe in Him is that He alone will raise them up on the last day ().

John, the beloved apostle, who was always looking, seeing, beholding, touching, declared the truth. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. (John 1:1-4{ea})

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life-and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us. (1 John 1:1-2{ea})

John touched the Word which is the Life and wrote that God's Son is the Word of Life. Everything in existence came into being by Him, for He is the Creator. It was His life that was breathed into all of creation. Take the Son out of the universe and all life will cease to exist. There is no other way to say it except that He is Life, and it is this life that is given to all who believe. John declared the witness of God. And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:11-13{ea}) The life is in the Son and we must believe in the Son to receive this eternal life. He has given us His promise. And this is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life (1 John 2:25{ea}). For those who do not have this life, there is no promise; they are lost and destined for the eternal lake of fire. There is no other way given to fallen man today but to believe in the name of the Son of God, who is the true God and eternal life. And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. (1 John 5:20{ea}) This verse is very important because John very clearly identifies the One who walked this earth and was named Jesus, God's Son, as the true God and eternal life. He is the Eternal Son, the One who dwells in eternity, but who entered time and came to this earth to rescue man and bring him back to the eternal presence of God. Hallelujah!

There is another very important point: This life is in every believer when they believe. This life is to abide or remain in us. John tells us so, but states it in the negative.

Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. (1 John 3:15{ea}) On the positive side, John wrote that eternal life is to abide in a believer. This life is an indestructible (Hebrews 7:16), incorruptible (1 Peter 1:19; 1 Peter 1:23NKJ), overcoming life (John 16:33; Hebrews 4:15). How can we not rejoice in the wonder of eternal life? It is a glorious promise that is ours the moment we believe.

Now, there is one more matter that will help us to understand the greatness of eternal life. The Greek language from which our English translations of the New Testament come does not contain a word for eternal. The Greeks thought of time in terms of ages, so that when they expressed eternity, as we know it in the English language, they used the phrase "ages of the ages." Because of this distinction, in the New Testament, there are times when the word eternal (or everlasting, depending on the translation) might mean the age to come, which would refer to the coming Kingdom Age. This must be determined by the context of the Scriptures surrounding the word eternal. In some of the literal Greek translations, instead of the word eternal, the term age-during or age-lasting is used. In other words, it may speak of the age to come or the Kingdom Age. For example, Paul, at the end of his life, wrote to Timothy, and it is very clear from Paul's letter that the Kingdom was in view. He wrote: "Be striving the good strife of the faith, be laying hold on the life age-during, to which also thou wast called, and didst profess the right profession before many witnesses" (1 Timothy 6:12YLT {ea}). What did Timothy profess? It was what the Lord professed about Himself. Christ is the King of kings and the Lord of lords (John 18:37; 1 Timothy 6:13-15). Other Scriptures that can be viewed in this same manner are Galatians 6:8 (sowing to the Spirit shall reap life age-during) and Titus 1:2; Titus 3:7 (hope of life age-during). When we join all these thoughts together, we receive a full picture of eternal life as presented in the Scriptures. Eternal life

is the life of the Son; and this life is a life for today and tomorrow (present possession which abides in us now), it is a life for the coming millennial Kingdom (life age-during) and it is a life for eternity (the ages of ages, the Day of Eternity). When we believe in God's Son, we are given eternal life which takes us through this life into the age to come and into eternity. This is the resurrection life, the life that is indestructible and incorruptible, the life that overcomes. It is the life that wins. It is the life that will raise us up in the resurrection. Can we ask for anything greater than eternal, age-during life? So Must The Son Of Man Be Lifted Up

Now, let us look at a gospel message unto eternal life. In this example, we will see the simplicity of the message of eternal salvation. In speaking to a Jewish leader named Nicodemus, Jesus used the story of Israel wandering in the wilderness after they miraculously were freed from bondage in Egypt. In telling this story, Jesus had Calvary in view.

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him." (John 3:14-17)

Jesus used the story of Moses lifting up the bronze serpent in the wilderness to point to what lay ahead-His being lifted up on the cross. The serpent being placed on the pole was set before Nicodemus as a type of Christ being placed on the cross.

Let us look more closely at this story of Moses and the bronze serpent as found in Numbers.

Then they set out from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient because of the journey. And the people spoke against God and Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food." (Numbers 21:4-5) In spite of all that God had done to deliver them from the hand of Pharaoh, the people of Israel became impatient and began speaking against God and Moses. They questioned His sovereign act of removing them from Egypt and even loathed the food that God provided each day. Not only did they loathe the food, but they called it miserable. They had previously rejected God's offer to them to enter the promised land and now they were accusing God and Moses of bringing them out to die. In 1 Corinthians 10:9, we are told that they tempted God and were destroyed by the serpents. In the Greek, this word tempted means that the Israelites tempted God "by going to the limit in trying Him out." They had passed a point to where God had to bring judgment upon them. They tried Him to the limit, and He sent poisonous "fiery serpents among the people." And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. (Numbers 21:6) The people went to Moses and acknowledged their sin. Moses interceded for them before the Lord. So the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us." And Moses interceded for the people. (Numbers 21:7) The Lord then gave Moses the cure for their affliction-the medicine to counteract the bite of the serpents.

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery {serpent,} and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he shall live." And Moses made a bronze

serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived. (Numbers 21:8-9)

All the Israelites had to do was look upon the bronze serpent set upon the pole. Bronze or brass in the Scriptures refers to judgment (Revelation 1:15). They were under judgment and there only was one way to come out of judgment-Look and you shall live and not die. The sin of the Israelites condemned them before the Lord. At this point, the Israelites could do nothing to save themselves except believe what they were told to do. Moses did the work of preparing the bronze serpent. There was nothing for them to do but look. Can you imagine an Israelite refusing to look at the bronze serpent? Just picture him being bitten by a poisonous fiery serpent. He is about to die. He is writhing on the ground in pain and anguish, knowing that death is imminent. Then the bronze serpent appears and he is told to look up at it and he shall live. What person would refuse to look? Well, a person full of pride might refuse to take such an offer. Or a person who is so convicted of his sinfulness might believe that he must do something to atone for his own sin; therefore, he might refuse to look. Another type of person who might refuse to look is one who does not see his true condition but rather lives in deception, thinking that he is a "good person" who is acceptable to God instead of seeing this thought is based on fallen man's standard. How many are like this today? Their pride will not allow them to be open to the truth. They have been deceived into thinking that they are a "good person" and that this is enough to commend them to God. If it were left up to us to define how we are to be saved, then all of the human race would be saved. Interestingly, there are some people who believe this. But it will not be and never will be! This account from Numbers is recounted in the book of John by the Lord Jesus to reveal the truth surrounding God's judgment upon sin and His way of salvation for fallen man. It points to Christ's finished work on Calvary. Since the time of Adam, fallen man has been under the sentence of death. Man is just as helpless as the Israelites were who had been bitten by the serpents. They were to die. This is the condition of all of the human race which was born of Adam. We all are under the sentence of death and we all are destined to die from our sins. The wages of sin is death. How can we be saved from this death? We need another to act on our behalf. In the story of the Israelites, the fiery serpent was responsible for their condition and the bronze serpent was brought forth as the remedy. This is the same situation for fallen man. A man (the first Adam, the first man) was responsible for the fallen condition of man. Another man (the last Adam, the second Man, Christ) brought the cure.

Also, Moses is a type of Christ. Moses performed all the work on behalf of the Israelites. They were told to look and live, based on the work that Moses did of preparing a bronze serpent on a pole. Likewise, Christ has performed all the work on behalf of man. He was prepared as the perfect sacrifice who was hung on a tree to die. He was lifted up for us.

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die. (John 12:32-33)

Now, the only thing that man can do is look to the One who hung on the cross, believe on Him and what He has done and live. In the wilderness, God judged sin in the camp of Israel. The bronze or brass serpent spoke of His judgment. When they looked upon the serpent, God was satisfied and the people were saved. When the Son of God was lifted up on the cross at Calvary, God judged sin and He was satisfied. Today, how are people saved? They are saved in the same way-Look

upon the One who died in your place and live. The Israelites could do nothing to save themselves except to look at the remedy that God had provided through Moses. Today, fallen man can do nothing to be saved except to look at the remedy that God has provided through His Son. The Israelites exercised faith in looking at the bronze serpent. Fallen man must exercise the same type of faith. Fallen man must look at Christ, believing on His finished work on the cross.

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:14-16)

Jesus, the Son of Man, was lifted up on our behalf and died for our sin. How must we be saved? Look unto Jesus and believe and you shall have eternal life.

"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved." (Acts 16:30-31) The message of the gospel of Christ is very simple. Believe on the finished work of another, the One who died in your place to redeem you back to God. He has done all the work to bring you into eternal salvation. You can do nothing to earn it and you can do nothing to receive it except believe on the One who was lifted up for you. He has done all the work to redeem man. When Jesus therefore had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And He bowed His head, and gave up His spirit. (John 19:30{ea})

There was nothing man could do then and there is nothing man can do now. It is finished! It is only after you believe that you can move on to become a disciple of Christ. Following the remedy of the bronze serpent, it is recorded: Now the sons of Israel moved out (Numbers 21:10). Likewise, we cannot move out until we are born again by believing on the One who died for us. Once we believe and have accepted God's remedy for us, we can begin to see His Kingdom and seek to enter into the coming Kingdom of God's Son.

Now, let us move out! We have a life to live today to prepare for a life in the coming Kingdom Age, followed by the eternal ages of glory.

## Part X.1 - The Salvation Of The Soul..

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The Salvation Of The Soul-Life Gained In the previous chapter, we saw how a person who is dead in sins and trespasses is saved by grace through faith, receiving eternal life. When a person believes on Jesus, he becomes part of the Body of Christ, which is the Church of God. However, this is only the beginning, because believers are called to walk in such a manner that they will be found worthy to enter into the Reign of the Heavens when Christ comes a second time to reign over this earth. A Christian is called to enter into and inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, and this comes about through the salvation of the soul, the subject of this chapter.

Man is made of spirit, soul and body and it is Paul the apostle who stated this fact very clearly: Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:23). It is at the parousia of the Lord (His coming) that the adopted sons of God will come into their full salvation. The spirit is saved when we first believe, and the body will be redeemed at the resurrection (discussed in the next chapter). However, the soul must be saved, as well; and this takes place while we are in the body, after we receive eternal life. There are three obstacles facing every disciple of Christ which must be overcome if he is to inherit the Kingdom-the world (1 John 5:4; James 4:4), the flesh (Romans 8:13; Colossians 3:5) and the devil (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9). It is the life laid down that overcomes these obstacles, and it is this life that does the good works that will be approved at the judgment seat of Christ. The salvation of the soul is vitally linked to overcoming; doing good works; entering the coming Kingdom of our Lord, the Reign of the Heavens; and receiving an inheritance in His Kingdom. The good works come from a life that has been laid down to follow the Lord. At the outset, it must be stated that the salvation of the soul might seem like a heavy, depressing topic to those who have never studied the Lord's teaching on this matter. After all, at the heart of it is the laying down of one's life, which is a dying to self. God's principle is out of death comes life (John 12:24). This might lead some to question: "Do you mean that I have to give up everything in my life? Do you mean that I am to live like a monk? Do you mean that I can never do what I want to do? Will I not have any joy?" The fact of the matter is that we will not know real righteousness, peace and joy in this age or in the age to come unless we lose our soul in this life. Our soul is in a battle with the fleshly lusts of our old nature (1 Peter 2:11). We can give in to these lusts and the pleasures of sin, which are always fleeting, but this will lead to spiritual death (Romans 8:13) and a gaining of our soul in this life. Consider Moses' perspective: By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin; considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward (Hebrews 11:24-26). Moses refused the best that the world had to offer him. Why? Because the world's best is the passing pleasures of sin. God's best is Christ and His reward, which are far greater than anything the world has to offer.

Every disciple of Christ is to taste the coming Kingdom by experiencing righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17); and this only comes as we die to our self, losing our

soul-life. In this dying, we will know true freedom. In the Garden of Eden when Adam rebelled against God's one command, it could be said that man lost his God-given identity. Man's spirit went into a place of death, losing spiritual communion and communication with God. The soul also died in a sense because it could not partake of the tree of life but instead relied on the tree of knowledge. This knowledge led to the moral corruption of man that is a form of death, for the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Instead of the life of God directing the soul through the spirit, the knowledge of good and evil became the soul's center. In that day, man was subjected to the yoke of slavery, having become a slave to sin. Thank God; at the cross of Calvary, the door was opened for man to be free from this yoke of slavery (John 8:31-32; Romans 6:6-7; Galatians 5:1).

Through the disobedience of the first man, we can see that the divine order of death is first the spirit, followed by the soul and then the body. Through the obedience of the second Man, the divine order of redemption follows the same pattern that is, first, the spirit, followed by the soul and then the body. Through the first man, we lost our God-given identity; but through the second Man, we gain our God-given identity. Through the first man, we lost our freedom; but through the second Man, we gain our freedom.

We are now faced with the question of how the soul is saved. To answer this question, we need to begin with an understanding of the soul. The Soul

Man was created with a soul and the soul represents who man is in the body. It is the center of self, which is expressed through the mind (thoughts), the emotions (feelings) and the will (action). It is through the action of the soul that we relate to and respond to other people and the world around us. As we interact with all these influences and experiences of life, we reason or form thoughts about them in our mind, we react to them through our emotions, and we act upon them through our will. However, throughout all of this reason, reaction and action, the center of fallen man is the self, and it is here that we discover the need for our soul to be saved. When Adam partook of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, his soul began to govern his life, instead of his spirit (Genesis 2:16-17; Genesis 3:11-13). Since that fatal day, the soul of the natural man has one primary goal-to satisfy self. Another way of stating this is that the center of the natural man's universe is man and not God who is the Creator of the universe. Everything is centered on what benefits the man. It is best summed up as "I," "me "and "my"-What I want; What is best for me; What is mine. This is the same rebellious heart that is in Satan-I will (Isaiah 14:13-14). In this condition, the soul is self-centered and focused on the pleasures, passions and desires of this world which lead to the lust of the flesh (James 1:14-15; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 2:16). It is earth-bound and not heaven-bound. It is I-centered and not God-centered. The soul is not inherently good or evil; however, the soul can live one of two ways-its own way or God's way. When Adam was created, his spirit was to govern his life. God is Spirit (John 4:24NKJ), and Adam was to remain in communication with God in the spirit. This relationship was to govern Adam's life. When Adam fell in disobedience to God's command, his spirit died and the spiritual communication was broken and Adam's soul began to govern his life (Genesis 2:17; Genesis 3:9-11). This is what the tree of the knowledge of good and evil represents. When he partook of this tree, Adam turned from God's will and rule over his life and began to live according to his own will and rule over his life. With man's spirit in a place of death, the soul became the center of the life of Adam's race, leading to either good or evil. This is the natural man, not the spiritual man (1 Corinthians 15:45-47). Paul summed up the natural man: A natural man does not accept the things

of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised (1 Corinthians 2:14). The problem that fallen man faces is that his soul is not set on the things of God and the things above (heavenly), only on the things of man and the things below (earthly). In this condition, man cannot and will not do the will of God. Once a person's spirit is born again, the soul of the person is to move from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. The reality is that when we first believe, this self-centeredness is still alive in us. However, we are to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29); and this means that our entire focus must become God-centered and more, specifically, Christ-centered. The Christ-centered life says: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the {life} which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20). "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Php 1:21). This new life knows that it has been raised up with Christ and keeps seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. This life sets its mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth, knowing that it has died and its life is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:1-3). This life enters into a personal and intimate love relationship with God. This is the Christ-centered life, the soul that is being saved.

Now, it is the Lord Jesus Himself who laid down this principle of the salvation of the soul.

#### Whoever Loses His Life

Starting in Matthew 16:13, the Lord began to unveil to His disciples the whole matter of the Kingdom. He started with a question to His disciples: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" When He used His title of the Son of Man, Jesus immediately was drawing attention to His Second Coming as the King. In prophesying of Christ being given dominion and glory and a kingdom, Daniel spoke of the Son of Man coming and having a kingdom that shall not be destroyed but shall be everlasting (Daniel 7:13-14). Further, the first mention of son of man in the Bible is found in Messianic Psalms 8:1-9, which is also referenced in Hebrews 2:6-8, which is a clear reference to Christ taking the scepter of the Kingdom (Hebrews 1:8). With the answer that He is the Christ (the Anointed One, which is also a Messianic title), the Son of the living God, Jesus established Himself as the coming King. He then continued to teach His disciples about His Church (first mention of this word), the keys of the Kingdom, His death on the cross as the way to bring in the Kingdom and a disciple losing his life as the way into the Kingdom (Matthew 16:15-27). Not only this, but after six days, on the seventh day, He took three of His disciples up on a mountain and He was transfigured in their presence and they saw a prophetic view of the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom and Glory (Matthew 16:28; Matthew 17:1-8) at the end of Man's Day (represented by the sixth day). The Lord's words on losing the soul are often overlooked in studying this account; however, they are vital in understanding this matter of the salvation of the soul. It is very significant that immediately after He laid down this principle, the Lord spoke of His coming in glory and rewards; and then He was transfigured, representing the manifestation of His Kingdom and Glory. What was the Lord teaching His disciples, then and now? A death to self must take place if a disciple is to come into the glory of His Kingdom. This is an inescapable fact!

Most translations of the account given in Matthew use the word life, which in the Greek is the word *psuche*, which means "soul." A better translation of the word life is soul-life, and it is best captured in the following translation.

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone is desiring to come after me, let him forget self and lose sight of his own interests, and let him pick up his cross and carry it, and let him be taking the same road with me that I travel, for whoever is desiring to save his soul-life shall ruin it, but whoever will pass a sentence of death upon his soul-life for my sake, shall find it. For what will a man be profited if he gain the whole world but forfeit his soul-life? Or, what shall a man give as an exchange for his soul-life? For the Son of Man is about to be coming in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall recompense to each one according to his manner of acting." (Matthew 16:24-27KSW)

Unfortunately, these verses often are ignored in Christian teaching. In fact, very few Christians know anything about the salvation of the soul because they have been taught that it is automatic when a person first believes. This is why evangelists incorrectly preach to "save souls." It is not automatic. Part of the difficulty comes when the spirit and the soul are viewed as one; however, as we saw at the beginning of the chapter, Paul clearly presented them as separate parts of man (1 Thessalonians 5:23). The salvation of the soul must be worked out, for this is the key to inheriting the Kingdom. Evangelists often use these verses to preach to the lost, but this is an incorrect use of these Scriptures for they refer to disciples and the Kingdom, not the lost and eternal life. Others teach that these words of our Lord are not relevant to Christians today because they were said before He went to the cross. If this were true, then practically all of the Lord's words would have to be ignored, as well. It is important to understand that the Lord's teaching on the soul was not forgotten or put on the shelf by His disciples, for they took up their Master's words and wrote of the salvation of the soul in their epistles. Others refuse to think that Christians must have a cross or suffering in their lives. All they want to consider are blessings and experiencing moves of the Spirit. Let us be clear that without suffering, there is no glory (Luke 24:26; Romans 8:17; 1 Peter 2:20-21; 1 Peter 4:14-16); and if there is no suffering, then what some call an experience of the Spirit may be an experience but from another kind of spirit or from the soul.

Now, what did the Lord teach? In one sense, the Lord was making a statement to His most immediate disciples. Practically all of His disciples were about to go the way of their Master, making the ultimate sacrifice by suffering a martyr's death for their testimony of Jesus. John the abiding apostle was the one exception of those who were standing there listening to the Lord (John 21:23). In the coming days of the Tribulation, in like fashion, multitudes will lose their lives because of their testimony (Revelation 7:9-17; Revelation 12:11). But what about today? Do our Lord's words only mean a physical death? Given the meaning of the soul, it is obvious that the Lord was laying down a much greater principle. He taught that our self-interests must be laid down or go to a place of death if we are to follow Him as His disciples. We are called to be disciples of the Kingdom (Matthew 13:52), and discipleship demands the losing of our soul-life if we are to inherit the Kingdom. The translation previously cited from Matthew clearly expresses the meaning of the Lord's words, which give four steps in the pursuit of the Kingdom.

### Come After Me

First, there must be a desire to follow the Lord Jesus after we believe on Him. It is a decision that we must make as a purposeful act of our will. In other words, we set our will to follow the Lord. When He spoke of following Him, the Lord was speaking to men who had already believed on Him (Thou art the Christ) and who had given up everything to follow Him (Matthew 19:27). The heart of

the matter was entering the Kingdom; therefore, the Lord was not giving a word to the lost. He was speaking to disciples to show them what they must do to remain His disciples and reach the goal of the Kingdom.

Baptism For example, in following the Lord, there is an act of the will which is vital to a disciple of Christ-something which is greatly misunderstood and neglected amongst many Christians-the believer's baptism. Many who say they believe in Jesus have been "christened" (usually sprinkled) as infants and they believe they are baptized. However, the Bible never presents baptism in this way. It is an immersion of a believer in water. It is a statement of faith, something that an infant does not possess.

Paul wrote: Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with {Him} in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also {in the likeness} of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with {Him,} that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin (Romans 6:3-7).

Baptism is a recognition on the part of believers of what transpired on the cross of Calvary, that is, our old self (self-centered life) was crucified with Christ. It is a declaration that we are not going to live according to the old way but according to the new way. We are going to walk in newness of life because we are free from the nature of sin that resides in fallen man. Thus, it should be seen quite clearly that the believer's baptism is an essential step to be taken (after receiving eternal salvation) and is a vital step in following the Lord. In fact, if we are not water baptized (immersed), then it is a good indication that we are not on the road to the Kingdom. The Lord said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). Being born of water speaks of the believer's baptism, without which we cannot enter the coming Kingdom.

### Forget About Your Self

Second, in our decision to follow Him, we determine to forget about or deny our "self," which means to lose sight of our own interests. A disciple has legitimate interests or needs to live in this world; however, the Lord has instructed us to lose sight of these things. Why? Because our Father knows what we need (Matthew 6:8). Instead, we are to dwell upon what is to come and pray to our heavenly Father, "Thy Kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10). We are heaven-bound and we must live with a view to the goal and prize set before us. The world eagerly seeks after the things that satisfy self, but a disciple must not live this way.

"And do not seek what you shall eat, and what you shall drink, and do not keep worrying. For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things. But seek for His kingdom, and these things shall be added to you. (Luke 12:29-31)

One who loses sight of his own interests is one who is a seeker of the Kingdom. God is a rewarder of those who seek Him (Hebrews 11:6) and the reward comes when the Kingdom comes. Until it comes, we are to trust God to take care of our needs. This a difficult lesson to learn, particularly in our modern world which has become increasingly complicated and demanding. Nevertheless, we

must seek God in these days, even more so as we see the Day approaching. In the Greek, this matter of denying self means "to deny utterly, to disown, to abstain" from self. Notice that the meaning is not merely to give up things; on the contrary, it is an utter denial, a disowning. These are strong words, but the Lord knows that this is what it takes to follow Him. Anything short of this will encumber the race of the faith. Why? Because He knows the nature of man, and that nature is to protect and defend self. The opposite of denying is saving which means "to protect" or "to deliver." This is what the Lord has done in saving us; however, it has the opposite effect when we try to save our soul-life. When we try to save our soul-life, we are protecting it; we are trying to preserve (deliver) it. In simple terms, we are trying to protect our own interests rather than taking up the interests of God. We want our rights over our life, not the rights of God over our life. A disciple must give up all effort to defend, protect or preserve self, even if it leads to physical death. The disciple must keep his eyes set on the One he is following and not on himself.

### Pick Up Your Cross And Carry It

Third, we are to pick up or take up our cross and carry it. The cross is a sign of self-denial, a sign of death to self. When we pick up our cross, we are saying that we are dead to our old ways, to our self-interests, even to the ways of the world. Paul spoke a similar word: But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world (Galatians 6:14).

Taking up our cross represents the Christ-centered life. However, it is not just something that we take up and lay down. We are to carry it as long as we are on the path following the Lord. In other words, the cross is something that we never put down but that we carry daily (Luke 9:23), even if it leads to martyrdom for the name of our Lord.

### Take The Same Road With Me

Fourth, we are to walk on the same path or road as our Lord. He walked through this life not having a place to lay His head (Matthew 8:20). There was nothing in the world that answered to His likeness and He could claim no attraction to this fallen world (John 14:30). This was not His realm (John 18:36). His path to the Kingdom and Glory was one of suffering by denying Himself and dying on a cross (Luke 24:26). He was a sojourner who passed through this foreign land and exited through the cross. This is the road of a disciple.

Having revealed the road that a disciple must travel, the Lord then proceeded to explain the meaning and purpose of denying self-whoever is desiring to save his soul-life shall ruin it (lose it), but whoever will pass a sentence of death upon his soul-life for my sake, shall find it. As we have seen, the word save means "to deliver" or "to protect." Simply stated, whoever chooses to deliver or protect his self-centered life (own interests) will end in ruin. In the Greek, the word for lose or ruin in the translation being quoted means "to destroy fully." In other words, the Lord was making a very strong statement about a disciple protecting his own interests. If our priority in life is to seek after our own interests, then how can we follow the Lord and pursue His interests? We cannot! It is like running a race with a heavy load strapped to our backs (Hebrews 12:1). In a very similar word, in reference to riches, the Lord told His disciples: "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to one, and despise the other" (Luke 16:13). It is no different with our soul. In fact, riches bring only temporary satisfaction to one who is

seeking to save his soul-life. If our soul is the master, then we will despise the Lord as our Master. The Lord continued with: For what will a man be profited if he gain the whole world but forfeit his soul-life? Or, what shall a man give as an exchange for his soul-life?

Forfeit means "to injure." In other words, we can seek after all that the world has to offer and bring great satisfaction to our soul, but this will lead only to injury of our soul-life. When we forfeit our soul-life, there is nothing that we can offer to save it. There is nothing for which we can exchange it.

John gave a similar warning about the world: Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and {also} its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever (1 John 2:15-17).

If a disciple of Christ desires to find his soul-life, then he must lay it down today. This is the heart of the Lord's exhortation. The way to find the soul-life, or as some translations state, to gain the soul-life is to deny this life. If we seek to satisfy all our passions and desires, seek to gain all that the world has to offer and do not pursue the things of God, then we will end in ruin.

Now, when does this ruin occur? When does one find his soul-life? The Lord Himself has left us the answer in the next verse: For the Son of Man is about to be coming in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall recompense to each according to his manner of acting. The ruin or the finding will occur when He comes to take the scepter of the Kingdom and recompense His people. The disciple who has followed his Master will receive reward for a life laid down, for this is the life that produces a profit for the Master. He will find his life in the Kingdom. Find it means that he will enter the joy of his Master in the Kingdom. The denial of self which yields a profit for the Lord will be rewarded with millennial glory which will bring great satisfaction and delight to his soul: "I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master" (Matthew 25:21). The Kingdom is to be a time of great joy to Christians. Paul said the Kingdom is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17), which speaks of a foretaste of the coming Kingdom. Today, those who are following the Lord on His path taste the powers of the age to come (Hebrews 6:5), but this is only a taste. In that day, righteousness, peace and joy will be experienced unhindered in their fullest expression. We have no idea what it will be like because we have never truly experienced it. Instead of weeping, there will be laughter. The way to this joy is through passing a sentence of death upon our soul-life for His sake, today. If we do this, then we shall find or gain our soul in the Kingdom. We can seek profit for our soul in this world; but it will lead only to ruin, to weeping and gnashing of teeth during the Kingdom Age (Matthew 22:13; Matthew 25:30). Gaining the whole world means that we allow our soul-life to be completely and fully satisfied in this life. If we go this path, it will not lead us into the joy of the coming Kingdom. We will forfeit all rights to share in the inheritance. It is like the prodigal son who chose to squander all that his father had given him. Fortunately, he humbled himself and returned to his father. Thank God; as long as it is still today, there is opportunity for any Christian who has been on the wrong path to deny self and follow the Lord. But the time is slipping away and a day will come when it will be too late. The choice is ours. We can satisfy our own interests in this life and gain our reward here; or we can deny our own interests in this life and gain the Lord's reward in the Heavenly

Kingdom. When the Reign of the Heavens comes, nothing more can be done to gain our soul-life in the Kingdom. It will be too late to deny self. What shall a man give in an exchange for his soul-life? In that day, there will be nothing that can be done to exchange a ruined soul-life. The person will have to suffer loss as long as the Lord determines. We are not told if it will last the entire 1,000 years of the Kingdom Age. However, the weeping will end one day. When eternity comes, God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away (Revelation 21:4NKJ). What mercy! The heart of the matter is that the disciples of Christ are to go from being self-centered to being Christ-centered. Taking up our cross is saying that it is no longer our will but the will of God. We choose to die daily to our desires and passions and to the attractions of the world. Once again, it is as Paul wrote: The world has been crucified to me, and I to the world (Galatians 6:14). This is the cross at work in a life. The choice is simple, but the path is often difficult because there are many temptations and trials along the way. It is a daily battle to overcome the world, the flesh and the devil. What profit would it be to us if we gained the whole world, that is, our soul was fully satisfied with all the world has to offer, and yet we lost the privilege of reigning in the Kingdom? Are we willing to give up a 1,000-year inheritance for a measly 50-80 years of satisfaction in this world? Moses wasn't willing (Hebrews 11:24-26). This is the message the Lord was teaching His disciples, and it is foundational to every Christian who sees the Kingdom and desires to run the race to receive the inheritance of the Kingdom. The Son of Man is going to come in His glory and recompense every man for his deeds (good or bad). The good deeds will result from a soul that was lost (died) in this life. The bad deeds will result from a soul that was gained in this life.

Soul, Take Your Ease The Lord reinforced this matter of gaining the soul in this life by telling a parable of a certain rich man who stored up his goods.

"The land of a certain rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' And he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years {to come;} take your ease, eat, drink {and} be merry.'" But God said to him, 'You fool! This {very} night your soul is required of you; and {now} who will own what you have prepared?' So is the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:16-21) This rich man was a fool in the sight of God. Why? He was very productive and had acquired many things. There is nothing inherently evil in having prosperity. What was evil was how his soul responded to all of his success. Notice where the rich man placed his emphasis and began his discussion. It was to himself: I. He began reasoning to himself, saying: I will do; I will tear down; I will build; I will say. But look where he turned. He spoke to his soul: "Soul, take your ease, eat, drink and be merry." In other words, this rich man had acquired many things that brought great satisfaction to his soul and he determined to give his soul all the satisfaction it desired.

He lived a life that satisfied his soul and its passions and desires. He was living according to the flesh, not the Spirit; and because of this, he was gaining his life only to lose it in the sight of God. He was coveting his possessions which was giving his soul all the earthly satisfaction it wanted. There was no suffering. In fact, his desire was to eat, drink and be merry. This is the motto of the soul that is being gained in this life. He was rich toward his soul but not rich toward God. His

treasures were on this earth and his mind was not set on the things above, where Christ is seated (Colossians 3:1-2). In the Day of Judgment, he will hear: "You fool! This very night your soul is required of you!" Truly I say to you, I do not know you. Cast out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Luke 12:20; also Matthew 22:13-14; Matthew 25:12; Matthew 25:30). When will the soul of such a one be required? At the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10). He will enter the millennial Kingdom with no reward, only loss (1 Corinthians 3:15). He will have gained the whole world only to forfeit his soul-life in the Kingdom. In other words, he will have no reward; he will not reign with Christ; he will suffer loss; he will have great regret and suffering during the Kingdom Age. He will have chosen the wide path to ruin, rather than the narrow path into the Kingdom (Matthew 7:13-14). He will be saved for eternity but left out of the intimate affairs of the Kingdom during the reign of Christ. This is a most serious matter.

**Calculating The Cost** The Lord gave another set of parables concerning discipleship and following after Him.

Now great multitudes were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and take counsel whether he is strong enough with ten thousand {men} to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks terms of peace. So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. (Luke 14:25-33; also Matthew 10:37-39; Mark 8:34)

Jesus started with the fundamental principle of being His disciple-hating even one's own life. This might seem to be a very harsh statement and one that is difficult to accept. After all, we are exhorted to love one another. How can we hate our father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and even our own lives? Once again, life is the same word as soul-life. The word hate is not a negative word as we think of it. In the Greek, the word has the meaning of "to love less." In other words, we are to love all these relations in our lives, even our own soul-life, less. But less than what? Less than the Lord. Our heart's affections are to be set upon the One whom we are following. In fact, we follow Him because we love Him: "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). His commandment is to follow Him. The Lord then spoke two parables. The first was about a man who wanted to build a tower. No one deciding to undertake such a task would start without first calculating the cost to build the tower so that it could be brought to completion. It would bring a ridicule to one to start the project and discover that all he could afford was to build a foundation. In the same fashion, Jesus was saying that anyone who determines in his heart to follow Him must know right from the start that the cost will be great and that cost is everything that the soul-life desires to bring satisfaction to itself. All believers start on the foundation of Christ, but how many will yield their lives to the Holy Spirit and build upon this foundation until they are a complete man in Christ (Colossians 1:28)? The second parable was

about a king going into battle with 10,000 men to fight against 20,000 men. As a king, he most likely had more than 10,000 men; however, he was unwilling to commit all that he possessed to defend himself and his people. He was willing to commit only a portion of his troops that were half as many as the enemy's. What point was the Lord making? We must commit our all to follow Him. We are engaged in a spiritual battle, and this requires that we give up all to the Lord: So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.

What is our most prized possession? It is our self-life. Don't be fooled into thinking otherwise. Are these words too difficult for you? Do they seem to be harsh, too demanding? But let us consider the path our Lord followed. It required His entire life to set us free from the slavery of sin (John 8:32-36; Romans 6:2-18). He paid the full price. He gave up His all so we could gain our freedom from sin and death. He laid down His soul-life by going to the cross, wearing a crown of thorns to gain the crown of glory (Hebrews 2:9). If we love Him, we must follow Him and He demands that we give Him our whole life. It demands that we lose our soul-life to gain it in His Kingdom. If we lose it today, we will reign with Him in His day. If we gain it today, we will not reign with Him in His day. The choice is ours. Does this mean that we become stoic, monkish people with no joy in our hearts? Does this mean that there is nothing in life that we will ever enjoy until He comes? Absolutely not! As stated previously, His Kingdom is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. We will not truly experience life as it should be until we yield to our loving Master and allow His life to live in us and out from us under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. A life laid down for the Master is a full life, a life that wins, a life that overcomes, a life that will enter into the Kingdom of the Son. It is an exciting life because the Lord will lead a life laid down into greater experiences of His life, into more intimate depths of His life. It won't be something static, but rather something dynamic and changing as we grow in the mature knowledge (see chapter 16) of the Lord and in ever-increasing depths of His love. A disciple is to be dead to the world and alive to God. This is what it takes to lose our soul-life today to gain it in the day of His Kingdom. Our works do not enter into eternal salvation, but they do enter into the matter of inheriting the Kingdom. There are good works for us to do, and these will be rewarded by us receiving positions of power and authority in the Kingdom. However, it is the soul-life that is laid down that does the work of God. Out from such a life come forth the good works which were created in Christ (Ephesians 2:10) to the glory of God. In other words, it is the soul-life that has been laid down in this life that produces the good works of Christ, bearing fruit (John 15:1-8), and it is this life which will receive the reward of the inheritance of the Kingdom (Colossians 3:24). It is the life lost today to be gained in the Kingdom. Gaining means reigning!

Paul, the beloved apostle, is a wonderful example of a life laid down. A time came when Paul set his sights on traveling to Asia to preach the gospel, but the Holy Spirit forbid it and in a vision he was told to go to Macedonia. What did Paul do? He went to Macedonia and the gospel was brought to Europe. Paul was a man given wholly unto the Lord, whose interests were the Lord's interests. He stated that he died daily (1 Corinthians 15:31); and through this death, many others were brought to the Lord and grew up in Christ, becoming a complete man in Christ. There is nothing greater than laying down one's life for the brethren. When you do, it requires you to lay down your all and to serve. The road may be difficult and there may be much sacrifice of your own desires, but seeing others grow in Christ and being encouraged to run the race as we see the Day approaching, produces a joy unspeakable and a peace that surpasses all understanding. This type

of heart was expressed by Paul to the Thessalonians: For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20). Paul was like his Master who saw the joy set before Him even in the midst of the cross and its shame (Hebrews 12:2).

Much can be written on this matter of the salvation of the soul, for it is a greatly neglected subject in Christian teaching. However, the Lord was not alone in speaking about the matter of the losing and gaining of the soul. Everything that the disciples later taught came from the embryonic words of their Teacher. As such, throughout the epistles, we discover the Lord's teaching on the soul presented in various ways by His disciples.

Paul was exercised over the souls of the believers in Corinth (2 Corinthians 12:15; 2 Corinthians 12:19-21; 2 Corinthians 13:5-10). He exhorted the Philippians to work out your salvation with fear and trembling (Php 2:12), which refers to the salvation of the soul. He also wrote to his beloved Timothy: For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus {and} with {it} eternal glory (2 Timothy 2:10). The salvation that is to be obtained with eternal glory speaks of the full salvation-spirit, soul and body-which will come when Christ comes from heaven to receive His people to Himself (1 Thessalonians 5:23). It is at this time that His people will enter into glory. To those who resided as aliens, Peter wrote of a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:5) and of obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls (1 Peter 1:9). The outcome of faith is received when Christ comes to reward His people. The salvation of the soul is the salvation to be revealed in the last time. Peter also exhorted the pilgrims of the Dispersion, the sojourners and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul (1 Peter 2:11NKJ). He wrote of purifying your souls in obeying the truth (1 Peter 1:22NKJ). Further, he reminded the pilgrims that they had been like wandering sheep but that they had returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of their souls (1 Peter 2:25NKJ). The writer of Hebrews reminded the brethren that we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul (Hebrews 10:39NKJ). The soul is described as having a hope, which in Hebrews refers to the coming Kingdom: This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a {hope} both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 6:19-20). The entire book of Hebrews is about the entrance into the coming Kingdom, the world or age to come (Hebrews 2:5).

James wrote to those dispersed abroad to receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls (James 1:21). He then proceeded to lay out the necessity that every child of God not only must be a hearer of the Word but also a doer of the Word. This is very similar to Peter's word on purifying the soul in obeying the truth. We must study the Word and allow the Holy Spirit to work it into our lives; and out from this, we are to act upon the Word. This requires a change in our character (to be like Christ), and it requires that we take up the good works, working out our faith. In reference to entering the Kingdom, we are justified by our works (James 2:24). But let us stress once again that this is not in reference to eternal life which is ours by grace through faith and based on the one finished work of Christ. Our works have nothing to do with our eternal salvation, but they have everything to do with the salvation of our soul and an abundant entrance into the Kingdom (Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:12-26; 2 Peter 1:10-11).

Thus, in these few examples, we can see that the soul was a major teaching of the apostles. We could say that it is one of the most critical issues that every born-again believer faces in running the race of the faith into the coming Kingdom.

## Sanctification

Another dimension of the salvation of the soul is to be found in the matter of sanctification. What is sanctification? Very simply, it is being set apart for a particular use, and in this case a believer is set apart for God. When we believe, our life is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3). In other words, we are set apart for God by being placed in Christ, who is our life (Colossians 3:4). This is an objective truth that cannot be altered for anyone who has believed on God's Son. Further, sanctification not only sets apart a believer unto God but also brings one into relationship with God. Being set apart for God means that we can have a personal relationship with Him. Another way of stating this is that we can commune or have fellowship with God. Why is this possible? Because a born-again believer is in Christ by God's own doing. What a tremendous truth! As Paul wrote: But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30). [In this verse, we can see the full salvation that is in Christ: righteousness-salvation of the spirit, sanctification-salvation of the soul, redemption-salvation of the body.] Because Christ is our sanctification, a believer is rightly called a saint or a sanctified one, one who is set apart for God. Another way of stating this is that a saint belongs to God. This is why Paul could write to the believers in Corinth-to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling (1 Corinthians 1:2)-even though many of them were not walking as spiritual men but as carnal Christians. They belonged to God because of the precious blood of the Lamb, not because of who they were or what they were doing. In other words, being called a saint is not something to which a believer must attain, as is held by some people. We do not attain to "sainthood." The Scriptures do not teach this. Just like imputed righteousness, sanctification is in Christ for all who are in Him. As such, sanctification is a work of the Holy Spirit as an outcome of believing, and rightly belongs in any discussion of the gospel of the grace of God and eternal salvation (Acts 26:18; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 2:11; Hebrews 10:10; Hebrews 10:14; Hebrews 10:29; Hebrews 13:12; 1 Peter 1:2).

However, just like righteousness goes beyond initial salvation, so does sanctification. Sanctification is a process that must be worked out in the life of a saint, just like righteousness must be practiced in the life of the righteous (1 John 2:29; 1 John 3:7). As Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: For this is the will of God, your sanctification; {that is,} that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5). God's will in setting apart a believer unto Himself is that the believer will be separated from all forms of evil, as well. As the Psalmist wrote: Hate evil, you who love the Lord (Psalms 97:10). At the end of his life, Paul wrote to Timothy: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness." Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if a man cleanses himself from these {things} he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work (2 Timothy 2:19-21). In other words, a sanctified life is a holy life, and it is this life that is useful to the Master in doing the good works which are in Christ (Ephesians 2:10). Sanctification demands a separation from all wickedness

and the development of holy character in the saint. A life wholly set apart for God is a holy life. It is a life set apart from the flesh, the world and the devil. A holy life is a life that is being conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). As Peter wrote: Like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all {your} behavior; because it is written, You shall be holy, for I am holy (1 Peter 1:15-16). Or as John wrote: Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope {fixed} on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure (1 John 3:2-3). This is the life that is useful to the Master. The Scriptures are full of exhortations about fleeing all that is evil and pursuing that which is related to holiness (e.g., 2 Corinthians 7:1; Galatians 5:16-25; 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:22; James 1:21; 1 Peter 2:11; 2 Peter 3:11; Jude 1:20-23).

However, let us be very clear that we cannot live a holy life apart from Christ. If we try to do it through our own strength and through a list of do's and don'ts, we will find ourselves in a never-ending cycle of success and failure. Only the Lord's life in us can live a holy life before God. We must yield to His life; and by grace, we will be wholly separated unto God, living a life of holiness and purity, doing every good work.

It should be noted that the words sanctification, saint, holy and pure are all from similar root words in the Greek. Depending on the context, they speak of the objective truth that, in Christ, every believer is sanctified, holy and pure in the sight of God because of Christ; but also they speak of the need for every blood-bought saint to become sanctified, holy and pure in his actions, words and thoughts. Believers are being called unto sonship in the coming Kingdom. As a son, they are called to share in His holiness (Hebrews 12:5-10), and this requires that a believer be made clean, holy and pure. Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). When will the pure in heart see God? When the Spirit completes the work of transforming many sons from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). In that day, God will bring many sons to glory (Hebrews 2:10). When is this day? It is at the coming of God's Son when He comes to take the scepter of the Kingdom of Heaven.

It is most instructive that the first mention in the Bible of the words sanctified and sanctify are found in reference to the seventh day of rest and the first-born offspring.

Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made. (Genesis 2:3)

"Sanctify to Me every first-born, the first offspring of every womb among the sons of Israel, both of man and beast; it belongs to Me." (Exodus 13:2)

Both verses speak loudly of the day that is coming. The Kingdom Age is the seventh day, the day of rest (Hebrews 4:4); and in that day, there will be many sons who will come unto glory and enter the Reign of the Heavens. The firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5) and the firstborn of all creation (Colossians 1:15) is God's only begotten Son, our Savior, Lord and King. Christ is the firstborn among many brethren who are called, justified and glorified (Romans 8:29-30). These firstborn are enrolled in heaven, awaiting the day in which they will come to the city of the living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22-23). Thus, sanctification is the way

to the coming Kingdom and Glory. In fact, it opens the door to the inheritance of the Kingdom (Acts 20:32; Acts 26:16-18).

Now, what does sanctification have to do with the salvation of the soul? They go hand in hand. As we deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow the Lord, in a very practical way we come into the sanctified life that is a life set apart to God. As we deny our self, our self-centered life, we begin to walk according to the Spirit, not according to the flesh (Romans 8:12-17; Galatians 5:16-25), being separated from that which is evil. We take up the works of Christ. As we walk in this way, we not only do the good works of Christ, but we are conformed to His image and transformed from glory to glory. We begin to live the sanctified, holy life, the life that will see God in the Kingdom of Heaven. This is all by the grace of God, which leads us into the last matter of the salvation of the soul.

Grace As he was about to depart his beloved brethren in Ephesus, Paul said: "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build {you} up and to give {you} the inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). Paul declared the truth about sanctification that we have reviewed, and that is, everyone born of God is sanctified by grace. However, notice that Paul also joined the word of His grace to receiving the inheritance (of the Kingdom). Being sanctified at the new birth does not guarantee the inheritance anymore than the salvation of the spirit alone guarantees it. We must become sanctified, just as we must save our soul by losing it. The key to all of this is grace.

We will not know the salvation of the soul apart from the grace of God. We are saved by grace through faith; however, we must not lose sight of the fact that grace does not stop when we are born again. In fact, according to Paul and the testimony of every saint who has gone on with the Lord to finish the race of the faith, when we first believe on Christ, we are introduced by faith into this grace. As Paul wrote to the Romans: Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God (Romans 5:1-2). We are to stand in this grace with a view to the glory which lies ahead. It can be stated with confidence that everyone who has finished the race has stood in this grace to the end.

Once our spirit is saved, we need grace for the salvation of our soul. In fact, we need abundant grace to die to our self. It is grace that brings us into the inheritance, into the Kingdom and Glory.

We touched upon grace in the previous chapter, but this matter is so important that some of it is worth repeating. What is grace? The Greek word *charis* means "acceptable; benefit; favor; good-will; gift; grace; lovingkindness; something that affords joy, pleasure, delight; sweetness; charm; loveliness." In the New Testament, grace is the word most commonly used for *charis* and is used over 120 times. After reviewing many of these verses, it would seem that a good definition of grace is: "the enabling power of God, apart from human merit." If every time we see the word grace we think of the enabling power of God, apart from human merit, we will come into a better understanding of how tremendous the grace of God is to the lost and the saved. In fact, grace is a necessity once we are saved. When we first believe, we know nothing about grace. It is God's lovingkindness that reaches down and touches our hearts to believe. However, once we believe, we must learn to take hold of the grace of God and the One who is grace. We must take hold of the Lord Jesus who is full of grace and truth (John 1:14). For of His fullness we have all received,

and grace upon grace (John 1:16).

Grace is so important in this matter of our soul that we need to look at this subject, recognizing that we only are touching upon it. The reader is encouraged to study grace in greater detail. A Greater Grace But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6)

James' epistle has been misunderstood down through church history. Some saints believed it did not belong in the inspired Scriptures. This controversy arose because of not rightly dividing the word of truth. Confusion arose when the salvation of the spirit (by grace through faith, with a view to eternal life) and the salvation of the soul (by the implanted word, with a view to reigning in the Kingdom of Heaven) were not rightly divided in studying the Word of God. James spoke of the salvation of the soul and offered no contradiction to eternal salvation. As emphasized previously, when we first believe by grace through faith, our spirit is saved for eternity. Once our spirit is saved, we must begin the process of saving our soul. Our soul is not automatically saved with our spirit. Our soul is saved as the greater grace is worked out in our life. Through a life-long process of daily denying ourselves (soul-life, self-life) and following the Lord, we receive as the outcome of our faith the salvation of our soul in the Day of Christ (1 Peter 1:9).

James 1:21 (NKJ) tells us to receive with meekness the implanted or rooted Word, which is able to save our souls. James 4:5 (NKJ) asks the question: Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously?" As we will see, the Word of God and the Holy Spirit are inseparable.

James was exhorting believers who were lusting in the flesh: You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. You spend on pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (James 4:1-4NKJ). Please understand that James was writing to believers, not the lost. Too often, the Lord's people take Scriptures and apply them to the lost when the Holy Spirit is speaking to the saved.

Believers of the tribes scattered abroad were living a carnal, worldly life. They were being overcome by their flesh and not living according to the Spirit. They were not receiving with meekness the implanted Word, which was able to save their souls. They were living a life that would lead to the death of their souls in the Day of Christ. With this in view, James exhorted them: Does the Scripture speak in vain? Are you reading the Word of God and allowing it to do its work in you? Are you hearing the living Word? Do you not think that the Holy Spirit who dwells in you is jealous for your soul? In other words, the Holy Spirit is jealous to save our souls through the Word of God. Do we read the Word of God, not expecting the Holy Spirit to work through it? Do we read it and not believe it? Do we read it and not become doers of the Word (James 1:22)? By grace we must cooperate with the Holy Spirit. It is God's enabling power that will lead us to do His Word, and out from that, to do His works which will bear fruit. We must flee the things of the old nature. We must lay aside all overflow of wickedness (James 1:21NKJ). There is a way back to God, and it is by grace. If we repent and turn back to God, allowing the Word to do its work and allowing the Holy Spirit to have His way within us, then God will give us greater grace. The Holy Spirit is jealous, and He calls out to God's people to turn aside from the world and all forms of evil and to humble themselves before God. He gives more grace, a greater grace to yield and continue to yield to the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the

humble. When He gives grace, it is to save our soul for the Day of Christ. Without grace and the implanted Word working in us through the power of the Holy Spirit, we will not receive the end of our faith-the salvation of our soul. Thank God, the Holy Spirit jealously desires our soul. By Grace I Am What I Am But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. (1 Corinthians 15:10)

Paul considered himself the least of the apostles because he persecuted the church before his eyes were opened to the truth. He could say that it was all grace that he not only was saved but was pressed into the service of the Lord to preach the Kingdom. He labored harder than all the apostles, but he took no credit for himself. It was by the grace of God that was with him. Of all the apostles, Paul's life was a testimony to the grace of God. He knew the daily grace to live for Christ and to be found worthy to enter the Kingdom and Glory. At the end of his life, he declared that he had fought the fight, finished the course and kept the faith (2 Timothy 4:7). The crown of righteousness is awaiting him in the Day of Christ. He had full assurance that the grace of God had done its work in his life and that the end of his faith would be the salvation of his soul. What a victory! What an example of the overcoming life!

Paul laid hold of the abundant grace to reign in life through the one Man, Jesus Christ. He knew it was not of his own doing, but he labored to work out the salvation of his soul (Php 2:12). He knew the grace that was in Christ (2 Timothy 2:1) that abounded to many (Romans 5:15-17). Even when he was afflicted by a messenger of Satan, Paul knew the all-sufficiency of the grace of God (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). By grace, Christ was formed in him (Galatians 4:19). By grace, Paul could say that it was "no longer I, but Christ" (Galatians 2:20). By grace, he knew the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death (Php 3:10). By grace, he pressed on toward the goal for the prize (Php 3:14). By grace, he endured light afflictions that were producing for him the exceeding and eternal weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:17). By grace, he was transformed from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). By grace, Paul walked worthy of the God who called him into His own Kingdom and Glory (1 Thessalonians 2:12). Hallelujah! What an example and encouragement we find in Paul's life. It was all grace.

Grace, Grace To It!

Then he answered and said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts. 'What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel {you will become} a plain; and he will bring forth the top stone with shouts of "Grace, grace to it!"'" Also the word of the LORD came to me saying, "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, and his hands will finish {it.} Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you." (Zechariah 4:6-9) When Zerubbabel was commissioned to rebuild the house of God for Israel, it is recorded that when the last stone, the top stone was put in place, the shout went up: "Grace, grace to it!" It was not rebuilt by the might or power of man, but by the Spirit.

Today, God is building His house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end (Hebrews 3:6NKJ). Oh, of all the people on the face of the earth, believers are the only ones who have any true hope. By grace, through the implanted Word and the work of the Holy Spirit, we will be conformed to the image of Christ. This is the way to hold

fast. This is the way to maintain our confidence so that in the Day of Christ we will be found worthy to enter into His Kingdom and Glory. This is our hope. By grace, we must press on toward the goal. We must allow the implanted Word to save our soul. By grace, we must be those who do not draw back to perdition but who believe to the saving of our soul (Hebrews 10:39NKJ). In writing to the pilgrims who were dispersed, Peter said, "Grace to you and peace be multiplied" (1 Peter 1:2 b NKJ). Peter had a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is leading to an inheritance incorruptible, reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God (grace in action) through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:3-5NKJ). It is a salvation that comes as the outcome of faith, and this is the salvation of the soul (1 Peter 1:9). It is very instructive that in referring to the salvation of the soul, Peter wrote that this was of importance to the prophets and that even the angels desire to look into this matter (1 Peter 1:10-12). What is instructive is that the prophets prophesied of the grace that would come, but notice what Peter wrote: Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober {in spirit,} fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:13).

Although we are saved by grace through faith, coming into the Reign of the Heavens will be based on grace as well. When we appear before the Lord in His Day, it will be grace that will enable us to stand in His presence. In that day, we will see the tremendous enabling power of God that saved us and kept us. As Jude wrote: To those who are the called, beloved (sanctified, NKJ) in God the Father, and kept (preserved, NKJ) for Jesus Christ (Jude 1:1).

It is grace in the beginning, grace along the way and grace at the end. It is all of grace. In the Day of Christ, the shout will be: "Grace, grace! God's grace!"

Losing today means reigning in His Day. By God's grace, let us lose our soul-life today to gain it in the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ. As we conclude, it seems appropriate to end as we started, with Paul's words of encouragement: Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

## Part X1.1 - Redemption Of The Body..

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### The Redemption Of The Body-The Resurrection

We have taken up the salvation of the spirit and the soul and this leaves the redemption of the body. A believer does not come into full salvation until the spirit, the soul and the body are saved. This day does not come upon death but when the Lord comes from heaven. Actually, nothing has to be done on the part of the believer for the redemption of the body. It will come in the resurrection and all of God's people are destined for the resurrection. In this chapter, we will take up this matter and join it with some other issues surrounding the death of a saint with the purpose of trying to clarify some matters pertaining to the destiny of believers. It is important to have a clear understanding of these matters to properly understand the Kingdom. The Destiny And The Goal Of The Believer The ultimate destiny of every born-again believer in Christ actually is not heaven but the joy of living in the presence of God forever and residing in the New Jerusalem, the Heavenly Jerusalem, which will be in the heavenly realm during the Kingdom Age (Hebrews 12:22; Hebrews 13:14; Revelation 2:7; Revelation 3:12) and which will come down out of heaven and reside on a new earth for the eternal ages (Revelation 21:2-3; Revelation 21:9-27; Revelation 22:1-5). Eternity is not about heaven but about the New Jerusalem and being in God's presence.

However, until the Day of Eternity, all born-again believers have a hope and a goal set before them. That goal is heaven, or more specifically, the heavenly places associated with this earth that are now occupied by the prince of the power of the air, Satan, along with the other fallen angels under his charge (Ephesians 2:2; Ephesians 6:12). When the Son of Man comes to this earth to rule, these rulers of the darkness of this age will be dethroned (Revelation 12:7-9; Revelation 20:1-3; Revelation 20:10) as God's King ascends the throne of the Heavenly Kingdom. When He comes and the disqualified rulers of this age are vanquished from the heavenly places once and for all, Christ will set up His throne in the heavenly places (in the New Jerusalem). In writing to the saints faithful in Christ, Paul said that we have been made to sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6NKJ). [The phrase heavenly places is not found in the original Greek; places has been inserted by the translators for readability. Heavenly means "above the sky"; therefore, we are seated above the sky in Christ.] This is the goal of every saint who is faithful in Christ. We must not forget that the most important part of this goal is to be with our beloved Lord Jesus, to be in His presence during His 1,000-year reign.

Peter encouraged the chosen who were scattered by writing to tell them that they were born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to {obtain} an inheritance {which is} imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:3-5{ea}). Paul encouraged the saints and faithful brethren in Colossae with the hope laid up for them in heaven, sharing in the inheritance of the saints in light, the Kingdom of God's beloved Son (Colossians 1:5; Colossians 1:12-13). At the end of his life, Paul could declare with full confidence: The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His

heavenly kingdom; to Him {be} the glory forever and ever (2 Timothy 4:18{ea}). He was looking for the Reign of the Heavens, for the heavens do rule (Daniel 4:26ASV). The hope of Peter and Paul was not earth-bound, but heaven-bound. Thus, the hope of every Christian must be to be taken up to heaven to rule with Christ in the heavenly places, to be seated in the heavenly places in Christ during His millennial reign. The question that arises when we see this truth is: When do believers go to heaven? The gospel of the grace of God is often preached to the lost telling them that when they believe in Jesus, they will go to heaven when they die. But this view is not born out of Scripture. Later, Scriptures will be looked at that deal with where a believer goes upon death, but first we need to answer the question of when a believer goes to heaven. The Scriptures are very clear that heaven comes into view only when the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ comes from heaven. The believers in Thessalonica were waiting for God's Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead (1 Thessalonians 1:10). Paul encouraged the believers in Philippi that our citizenship is in heaven, from which we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Php 3:20). If Christ does not come from heaven, then going to heaven does not come for His people. Further, if He does not come, then the Heavenly Kingdom [of righteousness, peace and joy (Romans 14:17)] does not come. The coming of the Lord and His Kingdom are inseparably joined to His people of the faith going to heaven. This is a tremendous and glorious event that occurs at the end of Man's Day, leading into the Kingdom Age. This day has not come yet, but it will come soon. The ResurrectionOfThe Dead The key to understanding when a believer goes to heaven is found in the resurrection, for Christ is the example of how everyone who follows Him will go to heaven. How did Christ escape this earth following His death? Through resurrection and ascension. However, the key is the resurrection; for without this, there would have been no ascension into heaven. In like manner, the believer's ascension into heaven can come only through resurrection-the spirit and the soul must be clothed in a heavenly body which is in the likeness of Christ.

[The only exception to the resurrection is that those who are alive and remain when He comes will be translated to heaven without seeing physical death (1 Thessalonians 4:17). One might wonder if this contradicts Hebrews 9:27 : And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this {comes} judgment. The seeming contradiction is easy to explain. When we believe on Jesus, we come into the death of Christ. As Paul wrote to the Romans: Our old man was crucified with Him; we died with Christ (Romans 6:6; Romans 6:8). Paul wrote to the Colossians that we have died and our life is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3). Thus, everyone who believes on Christ has died with Him, just as they now live with Him. On our behalf, Christ took the required judgment of sin and the appointment with death. When He died, we died. Again, this is a finished work. There is no contradiction for those who are alive, for all, whether dead in Christ or alive in Christ, were crucified with Him. Because of this, when He comes a second time, He will come apart from sin. In other words, He forever has dealt with our sins. When He came to this earth the first time and died, He took on the sin of the world, even becoming sin (2 Corinthians 5:21); but when He comes the second time, He will come to those who eagerly wait for Him without reference to sin. This truly is good news.] In type, we can trace the resurrection to Abraham and his son Isaac when the faith of Abraham was tested. God promised Abraham that he would have many descendants through Isaac, so by faith he placed his only begotten son on the altar. In that day, Abraham offered his son as a sacrifice, knowing that God would raise Isaac from the dead. By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten {son}, {it was he} to whom it was said, "In Isaac your

descendants shall be called." He considered that God is able to raise {men} even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type. (Hebrews 11:17-19)

God is able! This is the declaration of one who is walking by faith. Abraham saw that even if his only begotten son went into the grave, God was able to raise Isaac from the dead. Isaac is a type of Christ who came to die for the sin of the world and was raised from the dead. God received His only begotten Son back from the dead. So it is here that the seed was planted in the Word that a resurrection of the dead is not only possible for God but that it is imminent. Although our bodies might go into the ground, God is able to raise us up out of the grave; and He will do it to His glory.

Amongst the Jews, there was an understanding that one day there would be a resurrection of the dead. The prophet Daniel was told that there would be a resurrection of his people (the Hebrews) when many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake to everlasting life (Daniel 12:2). In reference to her brother Lazarus' death, Martha told Jesus that she knew that her brother would rise again in the resurrection on the last day (John 11:24). Amongst the Jewish elite in Jesus' day, the Sadducees proclaimed that there is no resurrection while the Pharisees acknowledged there is a resurrection (Acts 23:8). When Paul preached Jesus and the resurrection, it was considered a strange teaching to some (Acts 17:18-20). At the end of his life, Paul warned Timothy to beware of some who were overthrowing the faith of others by teaching that the resurrection is already past (2 Timothy 2:18NKJ).

Further, early in church history, there were believers who were questioning the resurrection. Paul was faced with this challenge amongst some of the Corinthian believers who said that there is no resurrection of the dead (1 Corinthians 15:12). In response to this controversy, Paul wrote the most comprehensive defense of the resurrection contained in the Scriptures, and it is all based on the resurrection of Christ. But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found {to be} false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. (1 Corinthians 15:13-18)

Paul painted the most dismal picture if Christ was not raised from the dead. If He was not raised, then we who say we believe really have no hope. Why? Because our hope is in the fact that Jesus' soul is not in Hades and His body is not in the tomb. Our hope is in His resurrection and ascension. All of the Christian faith rests on this fact. Take it away and we have no faith or hope on which to hold. We are to be pitied if His resurrection is not true. Praise God; Christ was resurrected, for He was seen by many, last of all by Paul when he was on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-9; 1 Corinthians 15:8). Paul declared with full confidence: But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep (1 Corinthians 15:20).

Death came by a man; but by the Man also came the resurrection of the dead, for in Christ all shall be made alive (1 Corinthians 15:21-22). He took on the form of a bondservant and was found in appearance as a man. He died on the cross as a man and now He is the first fruits of the resurrection. No man had ever died before and broken through the cords of death to rise and ascend to the throne of God, and no man has done this since His departure. The Son of Man had

to be first amongst the new creation. He is the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything (Colossians 1:18), to have the preeminence in all things (NKJ). He is the Head of a new race that will rise in the air in the resurrection, but there is an order and a timing to the resurrection. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming (1 Corinthians 15:23). This truly is exciting news. It is good news. To understand the resurrection, we need to understand what transpires at the resurrection of the dead and what it means to every believer who falls asleep in Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:20; 1 Thessalonians 4:14). The Redemption Of The Body When man was created from the dust of the earth and life was breathed into him (Genesis 2:7), he was created as a complete man with a spirit, soul and body, pure and free of defilement. We could say that man had all the potential of coming into the blissful state of incorruption (immortal, unending existence). The first man, Adam, was innocent, knowing no shame; but when Adam sinned, he found himself naked and in need of clothing to cover his shame (Genesis 3:10-11; Genesis 3:21). In that day, he brought death upon his race and corruption (decay, ruin) took hold of man's body. If Adam had obeyed God, he and all of his race would have lived in incorruption, partaking of the tree of life (Genesis 3:22-24) and reigning with God forever. Man's physical body would not have seen corruption (death), for man would have been a complete, spiritual man clothed in the glory of God forever. Unfortunately, from that day forward, the body of everyone born of Adam's race (all of us) was and is destined for the grave, to decay into dust. The earth became a coffin of death from which man could not escape. When the Lord Jesus was crucified, His body was placed in the tomb (grave); but according to the Scriptures: His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption (Acts 2:31NKJ). After three days, He arose from the grave, breaking the chains of death, bursting open the coffin that had a mighty grip on man. In His resurrection, Christ's soul was reunited with His incorruptible body. When He ascended back to His Father in heaven, He entered into glory, birthing the new creation in Christ. He is the Man in glory (Acts 7:55-56), the complete, perfect man-spirit, soul and body. The Creator Himself became the man that Adam was intended to become. However, He is greater than anything Adam could have become because Christ is both God and Man.

Adam was flesh and blood (and so is all of mankind); but according to Paul, flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:50). The blood is what energizes or gives life to the body (Leviticus 17:11), but the blood is corruptible. However, the second Man is flesh and bone (Luke 24:39), not a spirit but energized by the Spirit which is incorruptible. When the risen Lord appeared in the midst of His disciples, they became frightened, thinking He was a spirit. But the Lord spoke to them: "See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have" (Luke 24:39). He is the true spiritual Man and this Man has a glorified body. Praise God! The second Man is far superior to the first. To enter the Heavenly Kingdom, every believer must be like Christ, which means we must have an incorruptible, glorified body. We must be a complete man in Christ (Colossians 1:28)-spirit, soul and body-and this completeness only comes when He comes. When he wrote to the Philippians about eagerly waiting for the Savior who comes from heaven, Paul reminded them that it is the Lord Jesus Christ who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself (Php 3:20-21). This power comes at the resurrection and rapture into heaven. [The word rapture, which is commonly used by Christians, is not found in the Scriptures but is based on 1 Thessalonians 4:17 where Paul declared that we shall be "caught up." This phrase comes from the Greek word

harpazo which means "to seize" or "to take by force." In that glorious day, the Lord will seize His people into His presence. Perhaps a better term is "the seizing."]

Paul encouraged the Colossians: When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory (Colossians 3:4). To the Thessalonians who were being persecuted, Paul declared that when Christ comes in the glory of His power, He will be glorified in His saints on that day (2 Thessalonians 1:9-10). John, who was continually abiding in the truth, wrote: Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is (1 John 3:2). Jesus Himself said, "I AM the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25{ea}). It is His very life that will raise up His people. Our spirit is saved when we first believe. Our soul is to be saved while we are living in these bodies. We are exhorted to lose our soul-life to gain it in the Kingdom, and we do this by working out our salvation with fear and trembling (Php 2:12). But our bodies will be saved when He comes. In that day, we shall receive a house not made with hands (2 Corinthians 5:1-4). This is our hope. Paul explained the redemption of the body to the believers in Rome. Notice how he joined together suffering, glory, sonship, redemption of the body and hope—all essential matters for receiving an inheritance in the Kingdom. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. (Romans 8:18-19) And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for {our} adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. (Romans 8:23-25) For whom He foreknew, He also predestined {to become} conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Romans 8:29-30)

Paul started with suffering, for without suffering there is no glory. This was the path the Lord trod and it is the path of every true disciple of Christ. The sons of God are the ones who will be revealed in glory, and they are the ones who are destined for the throne to rule with Christ. As we have seen previously, only sons of God will rule in God's Kingdom, for sonship is rulership. As believers, we must receive the adoption as sons, which means that we must be placed as sons in the Kingdom. But notice that sonship is intimately joined with the redemption of the body. This is to be our hope. To be a son, we must have a redeemed body, one which is like our Lord's. If this is our hope, we are to persevere, eagerly waiting for that day. Oh, there will be many days of groaning in these earthly tents, but the day is coming when we will shed these limited bodies and take on a glorified body, conformed to the image of Christ: For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison (2 Corinthians 4:17). Whom God has predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, God shall also glorify. He will give us a heavenly body that is able to hold all the weight or the full measure of glory and enter into the Kingdom and Glory. Hallelujah!

There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable {body} it is raised an imperishable {body}, it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in

weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual {body.} So also it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living soul." The last Adam {became} a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. And just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. (1 Corinthians 15:41-49)

Today, our image is earthly; but the day is coming when we will bear the image of the heavenly, for our Lord is coming from heaven to take us to heaven. We are being offered the right to receive an inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven; and when we fall asleep in Jesus, we must await the resurrection to come into the glory of the Kingdom. This is to be the goal of every child of God who is being called into sonship. The ResurrectionFromThe Dead

Up to this point, we have been using the phrase the resurrection of the dead; however, the resurrection of believers is actually the resurrection from the dead. All the dead who are in the dust of the earth will be resurrected, but not all at the same time, on the same day. Paul said that there is an order to the resurrection, with Christ being the first fruits of the resurrection and then those who are His when He comes. When Jesus came down from the mount following His transfiguration in glory, He gave an order to the three disciples who were with Him not to relate to anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man should rise from the dead (Mark 9:9). The disciples were caught by this statement, for it was new to them: And they seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead might mean (Mark 9:10). Like many Jews, they thought that all the dead, the just and the unjust, would be resurrected at the same time on the last day (John 11:24). However, the Lord was presenting a new truth that could be understood only in the light of the new creation in Christ that was about to be birthed at Calvary. Not all the dead will be raised from the grave at one time. Only those who are the Lord's will be raised when He comes; they will be raised from the dead. This is the first resurrection, with a second resurrection to follow the millennial reign of Christ, which will bring the Kingdom Age to a close. The First Resurrection In the Revelation of Jesus Christ, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John wrote: Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years (Revelation 20:6). It is vital that we see that this statement is made at the dawn of the Kingdom Age. The Great Tribulation finally will have come to a close and the King of kings will have appeared in heaven on a white horse. In that day, He will ride to earth in all His regal splendor. His glory will fill the whole earth. What a glorious day that will be! He will come to this earth, having defeated all His enemies, even Satan, who will be bound and cast into the abyss for 1,000 years. However, during the events that are unveiled in the Revelation, multitudes of people will be killed, both the just and the unjust.

Praise God; there will be a multitude from all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues who will come out of the Great Tribulation, clothed with white robes, made white in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:9-17). Later, John described these ones again: And I saw, as it were, a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had come off victorious from the beast and from his image and from the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God (Revelation 15:2). These are the martyrs who will come out of the Great Tribulation for they overcame him

(Satan, the accuser of the brethren) because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death (Revelation 12:11). When He sits upon the cloud and thrusts forth His sickle to reap the earth, the Son of Man will send forth His angels to reap all those who will have died for His sake (Revelation 14:14-16). This will be the last trump of the first resurrection.

All that will have transpired during the seven-year Tribulation and the advent of the Kingdom is concluded by John's vision of these martyrs for Christ. And I {saw} the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. (Revelation 20:4-5) With the resurrection of the Great Tribulation martyrs, the first resurrection will have been completed. There will be no more resurrections until the end of the 1,000-year Kingdom Age.

Now, this poses a question: If these martyrs are part of the first resurrection and this obviously occurs at the end of the Great Tribulation, where are the saints who have died in Christ prior to the Tribulation? In the Revelation, we see the multitudes before the throne who come out of the Great Tribulation, but there is no mention of those who died in Christ before the last seven years of Man's Day. Why are they not in view in the Revelation, along with the martyrs? There only can be one answer. The Lord will have already resurrected those who have fallen asleep in Him.

[In the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the Church is seen in chapters 2 and 3, after which there is no reference to the Church until the very end (Revelation 22:16). It is not until the end of the Great Tribulation that a shout goes up from a great multitude, declaring: "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready" (Revelation 19:6-7). However, there is one other possible reference to the Bride of Christ. In Revelation 20:4, John saw two groups: And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I {saw} the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus. Apparently, John saw two groups who will reign with Christ for 1,000 years. The first group was sitting on thrones and judgment was given to them. Paul clearly tells us who they must be. He reminded the Corinthians: Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? (1 Corinthians 6:2-3). Who are the ones on the throne? The saints. Clearly, John saw the Bride of Christ on the throne and then He saw the ones who were beheaded during the Great Tribulation.]

All confusion is cleared up if we see that the first resurrection is made up of more than one resurrection. In fact, before the Kingdom comes, those who are Christ's when He comes will be resurrected; the two faithful witnesses will be resurrected (Revelation 11:7-12); and even Old Testament saints will be resurrected (Daniel 12:2). All of this must be part of the first resurrection because this resurrection pertains to those who will go into the Kingdom, whether occupying positions in the heavenly places or on the earth. All who will have no part in the Kingdom because they died without faith in Christ, will be raised in the last resurrection to appear before the Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11). They will be judged for their works, and if their names are not

recorded in the Book of Life, they will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. This is the second death (Revelation 20:12-14). [Many people assume that only the lost will appear at the Great White Throne, but we are not told that this is so. People will die during the Kingdom Age. Also, the Lord told those who had blasphemed the Holy Spirit that they would not be forgiven for that age nor the age to come (Matthew 12:32), which would mean that they would suffer for the remainder of Man's Day (this age) as well as during the Kingdom Age (the age to come). Does this imply that they will enter the eternal presence of God in the Day of Eternity? Most likely.]

However, as believers, our focus should not be on the second death but on the resurrection of those who are Christ's at His coming (1 Corinthians 15:23), and our need to overcome and be prepared to appear in the presence of the Son of Man. In the Greek, the word coming is *parousia* which means "being near," and it implies His near presence over a period of time. In other words, His coming is not a single event, but a period of time. When He comes, He will first come to the air over the earth. This is the beginning of His coming or *parousia*. We actually see proof of this when the Son of Man will sit upon a white cloud to reap the earth (Revelation 14:14). Obviously, at this point the Son of Man will be near the earth, in the air, but He will not be on the earth. However, even before this harvest, the Lord will arrive in the air to receive His people who have fallen asleep in Him, along with those who are alive and remain when He comes (again, the word *parousia*). Paul taught the Thessalonians about this resurrection and "the seizing" to follow. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming (*parousia*) of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of {the} archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17) This describes the resurrection from the dead and "the seizing" of these resurrected ones along with those who are alive on the earth at His *parousia*. Both groups will be translated into heaven. According to the Scriptures, this is when the believer "goes to heaven."

Having been given some evidence that the first resurrection is made up of more than one resurrection, some might object to this thought based on Paul's defense of the resurrection presented to the Corinthians.

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:51-52) The Thessalonians were told that the trumpet of God will sound and the dead shall rise. On the other hand, the Corinthians were told that at the last trumpet, the dead shall be raised. The question is whether this is one and the same trumpet call. Some people believe that they are one and the same, which leads them to believe that all the dead in Christ are raised all at once at the end of the Great Tribulation. But are they one and the same trump? Could there be a trumpet call for each group that is raised in the first resurrection? When the number of the martyrs is completed at the end of the Tribulation (Revelation 6:9-11), it would make sense that the last trumpet would sound and the last of the first resurrection would come forth. To the Thessalonians, Paul emphasized the order (the dead in Christ first must rise) and then "the seizing" (being caught up to the Lord) of the resurrected and those who are alive and remain when He comes. To the Corinthians, he emphasized the resurrection and "the change," going from corruption (perishable, mortality) to incorruption

(imperishable, immortality). Paul did not emphasize the order, although he clearly acknowledged that we all shall be changed (dead and alive in Christ).

If we look at the context of Paul's defense of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:1-58, it would appear that he was unfolding the entire matter of the resurrection in the light of the coming Kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:24-28; 1 Corinthians 15:50). It would make sense that Paul would include everyone who will be resurrected, even though he did not use John's term, the first resurrection. Paul included everyone when He said: But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming (1 Corinthians 15:23). All those who are Christ's at His coming is all encompassing, for it must include those who are His during His entire parousia, from the beginning to the end, including those who will become His during the Tribulation. This could explain why Paul wrote to the Corinthians that we shall all be changed, but to the Thessalonians he made no such assertion. He merely stated that we who are alive and those who sleep in Jesus. There was no use of the inclusive all. When he wrote to the Thessalonians of the resurrection and "the seizing," Paul had a very specific group in mind. These dear brethren were in persecution, overcoming their trials, and they were waiting for Christ to return. They were concerned that those who died in Christ would miss the Kingdom. Later, they themselves became fearful that they had missed it, as well, because some were telling them that the Day of the Lord had come, which would have meant that they had entered the Great Tribulation and had missed "the seizing" (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2). He had taught them that the Day of the Lord (Tribulation) only comes when the lawless one is revealed, so Paul wrote them a second letter to remind them of the order of events as he had taught them (2 Thessalonians 2:3-7). Given these thoughts, Paul's teaching concerning the resurrection and "the seizing" as presented to the Thessalonians, who are representative of all who are eagerly waiting for the Lord's return, must be the first of the first resurrection that occurs at the very beginning of the Lord's parousia. On the other hand, some of the Corinthians obviously were not waiting for the return of the Lord, since some were accepting this false teaching that there was no resurrection of the dead. There was no need to make a personal appeal to them, but rather to lay out the facts; and this is exactly what Paul did. Thus, it is just as feasible to conclude that Paul was including all that would be resurrected before the advent of the Kingdom. The mystery is that we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in the twinkling of an eye (1 Corinthians 15:51). [This does not refer to everyone going up at once, but to the thought that the change of corruption (mortality) to incorruption (immortality) will occur with great speed. Can you imagine that in one twinkling we are changed into glorified bodies?] When the last trumpet is sounded, the all will have been completed, for the parousia will have been completed as well, for Christ then will appear for all to see. The first resurrection will have been completed, and everyone who will enter the Kingdom Age will have been raised from the dead, along with those who are alive and remain. There is no more trumpet call when the complete number has been brought into the Kingdom.

Thus, the destiny of every born-again child of God is heaven, the day when the Savior comes from heaven and calls His own possession up in the air to be with Him. As we live in increasingly dark days, let us comfort one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

Christ's Present Ministry-High Priest

Having established when we go to heaven, we now can address the question: Where do the dead in Christ go when their bodies are placed in the grave? No place in the Scriptures are we told that the dead in Christ "go to heaven" when they die. As we have seen, those who are Christ's at His coming do go to heaven, but it is when the Lord comes from heaven, and with a shout, raises from the dead all those who died believing in Him. In fact, no man can go where the Lord is ministering today in light of Christ's present ministry.

Now the main point in what has been said {is this}: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary, and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. (Hebrews 8:1-2) Our Lord has entered the Most Holy Place once for all, and He stands to minister for His people (Hebrews 9:12). He is our High Priest who has passed through the heavens (Hebrews 4:14), and He now is ministering in the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf. He is our Advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1), the Paracletos, the One who comes alongside to help, the Intercessor: Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:25). This is the present ministry of our beloved Lord. Today, He is our High Priest, and soon He will come as our Judge and King.

We need to be clear that no man can be with Him in the heavenly sanctuary. "And no one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven, {even} the Son of Man" (John 3:13). Only the High Priest can enter the Most Holy Place. The fact of the matter is that the type given in the Old Testament forbids any man from being there while the High Priest is ministering: When he goes in to make atonement in the holy place, no one shall be in the tent of meeting until he comes out (Leviticus 16:17). As long as our High Priest is in the sanctuary, the Holy Place, no man can enter. This is His ministry alone in this day of grace.

He is the Son made perfect forever (Hebrews 7:28) who has entered heaven itself for us: For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a {mere} copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us (Hebrews 9:24). Notice that He appears for us, not with us. He is the glorified Man, and no man can enter into the presence of the Father in heaven without being clothed in glory. Today, we are clothed in mortal bodies, but a day will come when we will be clothed in immortal, glorified bodies in the likeness of our Lord (Romans 8:21; Php 3:21; 1 John 3:2): For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life (2 Corinthians 5:4). The mortal body that is our tent in this life must put on immortality, and this comes when Christ raises His people in glory at the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:42-57). In that day, His ministry in the sanctuary will have ended; Christ will come out of the sanctuary and begin His descent to the earth. Just the thought of this glorious day should bring joy to the heart of every child of God. At this point, it appears that the Scriptures exclude heaven, at least where the throne of God and the heavenly sanctuary are located, as the abode of the dead in Christ; but the question of where the dead in Christ go is still unresolved. So what do the Scriptures tell us? In answering this question, we must recognize that every question we might have regarding this homecoming event is not answered in the Scriptures. In His wisdom, God has not revealed all that transpires between death and the resurrection. The best that we can do is to search the Scriptures and see what information they yield to us.

Asleep And With The Lord When Stephen, the first martyr of the pilgrim church, was stoned to death, it is recorded that "he fell asleep" (Acts 7:60). Saul (later, Paul), the one who would later meet his Lord on the road to Damascus, stood and witnessed Stephen "falling asleep" for his testimony. It is Paul who described the dead in Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:16) as "fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20NKJ), "those who sleep in Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 4:14NKJ) and "those who are asleep" (1 Thessalonians 4:15NKJ). The word asleep has the meaning of "to put to sleep."

There is a wonderful thought attached to these words-Jesus puts to sleep His own people. What a wonderful thought! When our day of departure comes (if He does not come in the air first), it is our beloved Lord who puts us to sleep. It is like loving parents tucking their children into bed at night and kissing them good night. In the morning, they awake once again to the parents' loving care. This is as it will be with the death and resurrection of a saint.

What does asleep mean? It means that our mortal bodies are put to sleep, that is, they die. We need to be reminded that the spirit and soul do not die. It is the body which has to put on immortality. However, until that day, it is Paul who informs us that being absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord. In other words, our spirit and soul, which cannot die, must go to be with the Lord.

Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord-for we walk by faith, not by sight-we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. (2 Corinthians 5:6-9{ea})

We could say that Paul was torn between two worlds. On the one hand, he knew that there was still much work for him to do in dying daily for the church (1 Corinthians 15:31). Yet, on the other hand, he had one passion, and that was to be with his beloved Lord. To be at home with the Lord, he had to be absent from his mortal body. Absent from has the meaning of "emigrating" or "vacating." Paul desired to emigrate from this earthly life and this only comes by vacating the body through death. Death or falling asleep was not an end to Paul but a glorious presence with the Lord. Being at home with the Lord (some translations state "to be present with the Lord") has the meaning of "being in one's own country." This is the heart of a stranger and exile, along with all the saints who died in faith, for they desire a better {country} that is a heavenly one (Hebrews 11:13-16). When he was martyred, Paul did not enter that heavenly country; but he knew that his home was in the Lord, for He alone would preserve him for His Heavenly Kingdom. To the Philippians, Paul poured out his deepest passions for Christ. He lived for Christ. In fact, he saw his entire life in Christ. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if {I am} to live {on} in the flesh, this {will mean} fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both {directions,} having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for {that} is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. (Php 1:21-24{ea})

Death to Paul was not loss but gain, and his one passion was to depart this life and be with Christ. This should be the passion of every disciple of Christ. Many people continue to fear death after they are saved, and yet, the death of our physical body is the portal into the presence of the Lord. How much better it is to be with Christ! This does raise the question: How can it be that when believers die, they go to be with the Lord but they do not go to the throne in heaven which is where Christ is? The answer is simple. Our Lord is not limited by time and space as we are. After the

Lord was raised from the dead and before His final ascension to the throne, He appeared to His disciples, not by walking through doors but by simply appearing. He could make Himself visible or invisible at will. One minute He was in a place, and in the next instance He was in another place. Further, in speaking of His Church, the Lord said, "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst" (Matthew 18:20). In other words, He has made a promise to His people on earth that He will be in their midst when certain conditions are met. In like fashion, He can be where His people are when they have departed the body. Therefore, we can state with full assurance that wherever the departed dead in Christ go, the Lord will be there, for He will never leave His people nor forsake them.

Paradise And Hades As we continue our search of the Scriptures, we discover that in the Old Testament times, it was generally recognized that the dead went into the earth, into Sheol, which stood for the grave or the world of the dead. When Jacob learned of the disappearance of his son Joseph, he cried out: "Surely I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son" (Genesis 37:35). In another instance, Saul went to a woman who was a medium to ask her to raise up Samuel from the dead. In reporting to Saul, the woman said, "I see a divine being coming up out of the earth." They saw a form of an old man wrapped in a robe. Saul knew that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and did homage. Then Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" (1 Samuel 28:13-15). In this account, we are given a clear indication that the soul of the departed went into the earth, for Samuel had to come up.

Now, when we come to the New Testament, instead of the word Sheol (or grave), we find the word Hades used to describe the place of the dead. We also discover the words Paradise and Abraham's bosom. When the Lord was on the cross, one of the thieves that also was being crucified said to the Lord: "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:42-43). However, the Lord's words raise a question: Did He mean that the thief would be with Him on that day or on a future day? The translators of the Scriptures have placed the emphasis on the thief being with Christ on that day because of the placement of the comma (before today). If the Lord meant that on that particular day the thief would be with Him, then this means Paradise is where the Lord went on the day that He died. Let us look at this possibility first.

What happened on that dark day at Calvary? On the cross, at the end of those three dark hours [sixth hour to the ninth hour (Mark 15:33)], the Lord cried out with a loud voice: "Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit." And having said this, He breathed His last (Luke 23:46). As a man, Jesus released His human spirit to the Father. His broken body was then placed in the tomb (Luke 23:53). Solomon, who was given wisdom from God, wrote: The dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7). This is the path given to every man, and Jesus as the Man had to go this same way. But where did His soul go? It went into the depths of the earth for three days. He did not ascend to the throne immediately upon His death, for He had to spend three days in the earth. We see this in type with Jonah who spent three days in the fish's belly. Jonah cried: "Out of the belly of Sheol I cried"(Jonah 2:2NKJ). To the scribes and Pharisees who wanted to see a sign, Jesus responded: "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and {yet} no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:39-40). So

Jesus Himself has left the proof that He descended into the earth. Paul also confirms this fact in his letter to the Ephesians: (Now this {expression,} "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things) (Ephesians 4:9-10).

It is Peter who, quoting David on the day of Pentecost, explained the Lord's death and resurrection.

"For David says of Him, 'I was always beholding the Lord in my presence; for He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue exulted; moreover my flesh also will abide in hope; because Thou wilt not abandon my soul to hades, nor allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; Thou wilt make me full of gladness with Thy presence.'" "Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. And so, because he was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat {one} of his descendants upon his throne, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay. This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses." (Acts 2:25-32)

David spoke prophetically of a day that was to come many years after his death. He looked ahead and spoke of the Lord's death and resurrection. Peter confidently declared that David has not been resurrected (even after the Lord's resurrection) and that his soul and body are still in the earth. However, the Lord, whose soul descended into the earth, was not left in Hades nor was His body left in the tomb. He did not undergo decay. Why? Because He was resurrected. This Jesus God raised up again, and this was the way of departure for the Lord to ascend into heaven. Since Jesus is the first fruits of the resurrection, it only follows that His people must follow that same path. However, do the Scriptures bear this out through other examples? It appears they do, as seen in the first recorded death following the Lord's ascension. When Stephen was martyred, it is recorded that he called upon God: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." He fell asleep and then some devout men carried Stephen's body to his burial. The One who is at the right hand of God in glory put His servant Stephen to sleep (Acts 7:59-60). What comfort this should give all of the Lord's people. Whether a saint dies a violent or a peaceful death, the Lord Jesus is ever faithful to put His loved ones to sleep when His perfect time comes for them. However, the point that needs to be understood is that Stephen's spirit was released to the Lord and his body went into the grave. We can only assume that his soul followed the same course as His Lord's and it went to the place of the dead in Christ.

Based on this explanation, it appears that the dead in Christ go to a place under the earth in a compartment of Hades. It is possible that this place is called Paradise.

However, is Paradise the place where the dead in Christ, in fact, go? Earlier the question was raised if the Lord meant that the thief would be in Paradise in the future, not on that day. To study this question, we need to look at the other references to Paradise.

Paradise is mentioned three times in the New Testament. The first time has been reviewed already. The second place that it is mentioned is in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians.

I have known a man in Christ, fourteen years ago-whether in the body I have not known, whether out of the body I have not known, God hath known-such an one being caught away unto the third heaven; and I have known such a man-whether in the body, whether out of the body, I have not known, God hath known,-that he was caught away to the paradise, and heard unutterable sayings, that it is not possible for man to speak. (2 Corinthians 12:2-4YLT)

There are different interpretations of these verses, with some believing that the third heaven and the paradise are one and the same place. Others explain that they are two different events and places. If they are the same, then the paradise must be a future place of abode, for as we have seen, going to heaven is a future event. If they are different, then the paradise could be any place. The phrase caught away is *harpazo* which means "seized" and is the same word from which the word rapture is derived. This has led some to believe that this is a picture of the rapture; however, this conclusion cannot be made from this verse. According to the structure of the sentence, Paul gave no direction of his being caught away. This is further emphasized in that he did not know if he was in or out of the body. The rapture that Paul explained to the Thessalonians is in a resurrected body and it is up. Paul made no reference that his being caught away was like the rapture that will come when Christ comes. All we know from Paul is that in the paradise he heard things which a man is not permitted to speak. The third time that Paradise is mentioned is when the Lord Himself spoke to the angel of the church in Ephesus: "To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God" (Revelation 2:7). All the promises to those who overcome in Revelation 2:1-29; Revelation 3:1-22 are rewards in the millennial Kingdom; therefore, the Paradise of God, as spoken by the Lord, is a future reward, not a present promise for those who die in Christ.

Paradise means "park" or "an Eden, a place of future happiness." The Bible begins with the Garden of Eden which was a place of happiness; however, it turned into a place from which man was barred. At the end of the Bible, Eden appears once again as the New Jerusalem which is a place of great joy and happiness in the presence of God and to which man will have free access. It is the Paradise of God. When Paul saw Paradise, we can only conclude that his life was never the same, and this is as it should be with every born-again child of God. We haven't been caught away like Paul was, but our Lord has made a promise: "You shall be with Me in Paradise." "To him overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God."

Whether the thief is in Paradise today along with all the dead in Christ or whether Paradise is solely a future home awaiting God's people, the reader is left to discern under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. However, we do know that being with the Lord is a place of happiness, wherever it is.

Now, let us consider one more account given to us in the New Testament, and it is the story of Lazarus and the rich man.

#### Abraham's Bosom

Jesus stood in the midst of the Pharisees and spoke many things to them. On one occasion, He said: "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things, and they were scoffing at Him (Luke 16:13-14). Jesus responded with some comments about the Kingdom and divorce and then spoke

a parable about a rich man and a poor man named Lazarus. The rich man cared not for the poor man, who was placed at his gate, hungry and covered with sores: "Now it came about that the poor man died and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away, and Lazarus in his bosom" (Luke 16:22-23). The rich man was in a place in Hades which was separated from Lazarus by a great chasm that had been fixed (no one could cross between the two places) and which was in a lower place (he had to look up). He was in torment, a place of punishment until the Day of Judgment (2 Peter 2:9). On the other hand, Lazarus was being comforted in a place called Abraham's bosom.

We are not told where this place was but we are given a clear indication that it too was in the earth. The rich man begged Abraham to send Lazarus to his brothers to warn them lest they too would end in the place of torment. "But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them'" (Luke 16:29). This statement was included as an obvious reference to the Pharisees who loved money and who were listening to this parable, for they boasted that they had Moses [they sat in Moses' chair (Matthew 23:2)] and the Prophets; but they rejected Christ, of whom Moses and the Prophets spoke. The rich man continued to beg Abraham: "No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!" To this Abraham responded: "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:30-31).

Thus, we are not told directly where the place of rest was for Lazarus, but there is an indication that it was below, for it would have been necessary for Lazarus to be raised up. What we do know is that in view of the place of torment in Hades, it was a place of rest and comfort, it was in Abraham's bosom (those who died in faith, e.g., the saints recorded in Hebrews 11:1-40) and it was the angels who brought people to this place (notice that the rich man was buried with no reference to angels).

It should be added that this parable was spoken to the Jewish elite who had rejected the offer of the Kingdom of Heaven. In some ways, it is similar to a warning the Lord gave to the same class of Jews who would miss the millennial reign of their Messiah.

"There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth there when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being cast out. And they will come from east and west, and from north and south, and will recline {at the} table in the kingdom of God." (Luke 13:28-29)

Whether this parable applies to the dead in Christ today, we are not told; so again, we leave this thought for the reader to consider in the light of Scripture and under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

However, there is one more set of Scriptures that brings us closer to answering the question of where the dead in Christ go. It is found in the same Scriptures previously cited in Paul's defense of the resurrection.

## Part X1.2 - Redemption Of The Body ..

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(redemption of the Body - continued) The Gates Of Hades At the conclusion of his defense of the resurrection, Paul quoted Hosea 13:14 : "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades (death is used in other translations), where is your victory?"(1 Corinthians 15:55NKJ). Why would Paul conclude with this declaration if the Lord's people were not in Hades until the resurrection? It is through the resurrection that death is defeated. It was at the Lord's resurrection that death was defeated for man, and now death has no eternal hold on man. At the resurrection, the Lord's words to His disciples are fulfilled: "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it" (Matthew 16:18). The gates of Hades are not the powers and principalities in the unseen world as so many Christians believe. The general view is that the gates of Hades (the powers of darkness) will not prevail against the Church during her 2,000-year history. But there is another possibility that seems more likely. In one of his Psalms, David cried out to the Lord: Be gracious to me, O LORD; behold my affliction from those who hate me, Thou who dost lift me up from the gates of death; that I may tell of all Thy praises, that in the gates of the daughter of Zion I may rejoice in Thy salvation (Psalms 9:13-14{ea}; also note Isaiah 38:10). A gate is a door or an opening; and in this Psalm, David refers to the gates of death. Also, notice that David saw others gate in reference to Zion and salvation. When Zion comes into view, so does the Kingdom. David saw gates into the Kingdom and the day when Israel finally is delivered when Messiah comes and ushers in the Messianic Era. This is the day of their salvation. In light of David's use of the gates of death, the gates of Hades seem to refer to doors or openings into Hades; and doors are meant for one thing, either to allow people in or to keep people out. As Hades is the abode of the dead, the gates of Hades refer to the power of death to keep man under the earth once he dies (see Psalms 89:48). When the One who is the Resurrection and the Life declared that the gates of Hades would not prevail against His Church, He meant that He would overcome death, and one day, His Church would follow in His path and be released into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Romans 8:21). Oh, hallelujah! We will be set free at last. O Hades, where is your victory? Christ has the keys of death and Hades (Revelation 1:18), and He alone will release His people from the grave in the first resurrection. This is what the Lord meant when He declared that the gates of Hades would not prevail. At the last trump, all of His people will have been released through the gates and they will enter the gates of Zion, the Heavenly Kingdom. This all occurs when those who have died in Christ are raised from the dead. This is why Paul concluded his defense of the resurrection with this shout of victory. He was merely declaring what His beloved Lord had declared, except he helped to explain what the Lord meant. We must declare with Paul: But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57). For those who are born again as a new creation in Christ, the gates of Hades will not prevail. The Savior is coming and He will set His people free to enter into the glory of His Heavenly Kingdom, followed by eternity. Heaven is the destiny of those who believe, and the resurrection and being caught up in the air is the way of release into heaven. All who have this hope set in their hearts should join in the cry of the spirit of prophecy: "Come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20). O Lord, come! (1 Corinthians 16:22NKJ).

Well, after looking at all these Scriptures, where does this leave us in our understanding of the matter at hand? To summarize, the Word of God reveals to us that our salvation is not complete until the Lord comes from heaven. When He comes, He will raise the dead in Christ and will remove to heaven those raised up, along with those who are alive and remain at His parousia. Until that day, when His beloved people die, they fall asleep in Jesus, their spirits return to God, their bodies go into the grave and their souls go to the abode of the dead in Christ. Most likely this is a place of rest and comfort in a portion of Hades under the earth reserved for the Lord's people. Man was created from the earth, and to the earth he goes when he dies. However, the good news is that the gates of Hades shall not prevail against any of the Lord's people, for He has the keys of death and Hades. When He gives that great shout, "Come forth," like He did when He called Lazarus from the tomb, all the dead in Christ will be raised from the dead and they will rise in the air. The angels will have brought them to this place of rest, and they most likely will take them up in the air.

Without a doubt, there are still some unanswered questions in the mind of some readers, such as: Where are Enoch and Elijah today? (We are not told. All we know is that they went up. It is interesting that Elijah, who did not see physical death, and Moses, who did see death, were together on the mount when the Lord Jesus was transfigured in glory. They stood with Christ discussing His departure from the earth through the cross. Both appeared in such a fashion that the three disciples who were witnessing this tremendous event knew who they were.) Could there be a lower portion of heaven where the dead in Christ go? (Anything is possible with God; however, we simply are not given any indication. If there is, then at the resurrection the dead would have to descend from heaven to the earth, be reunited with their bodies and then be raised up again. Why would there be a need to give forth a shout to awaken them from the grave, for they would see all that is transpiring? This would create a rather strange scenario. Further, this is not seen any place in Scripture, particularly in the Lord's death and resurrection.) When He ascended, didn't the Lord lead captive a host of captives, meaning those who were in the grave (Ephesians 4:8)? (During the ancient days, when a victory was won and the enemy was captured, the enemy was stripped and paraded through the streets. Following this imagery, the captives could not be resurrected saints but rather the enemy that the Lord defeated. As Paul wrote: When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him (Colossians 2:15).) What happened when the tombs opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised (Matthew 27:51-52)? Didn't these saints ascend to heaven with the Lord? (We are not told. We know they were raised but no mention is made of their ascension to heaven. When the Lord made His final ascension, He was alone (Acts 1:9).) Didn't the Lord promise that He would go away and prepare a place (many dwellings, mansions) for His disciples, implying that when His people die they will go to heaven and occupy one of these places (John 14:1-4)? (The key to the Lord's words is found in verse 3: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, {there} you may be also." The Lord makes this promise in connection with His greater promise: "I will come again." Christ must come again for this to be fulfilled. His reference to dwellings or mansions is most likely a reference to the New Jerusalem that will be the place of residence for His people during the Kingdom Age. As the writer to the Hebrews reminds us: But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22). For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking {the city} which is to come (Hebrews 13:14).) What about the souls

under the altar (Revelation 6:9-10)? Where are they? (There are three areas mentioned in the Bible-in heaven, on the earth and under the earth. These souls, who are unclothed until given white robes, are most likely the dead martyrs from the beginning of the Tribulation who are in the place of the dead in Christ and awaiting their release. This adds weight to the thought that the soul descends into the earth, for they are "under.") In the final analysis, we must leave certain questions in the hands of the Lord and not try to put it all together, as if each piece belongs with the other. The point of all that has been presented is to lay a proper framework for understanding the future Kingdom. If we place all believers in heaven at death, as if they have come into the Reign of the Heavens, then we will not understand the true nature of the coming Kingdom of God's beloved Son. He must come for heaven to come into view. It is that simple. This is to be the hope of every Christian. However, until that day, if we die in Christ, we have the full assurance that we will be at home with our beloved Lord. It is far better to be with Christ (Php 1:23). This in itself should give us hope because we know that in the day of His parousia, He will raise us up to be with Him-spirit, soul and body. Our hope is in the resurrection and "the seizing," the Heavenly Kingdom that follows, and, ultimately, the Day of Eternity. Let us comfort one another with these words. The New Jerusalem

There is one final word regarding the destiny of believers. Very simply, our destiny is the New Jerusalem, whether we are referring to the Kingdom Age or the eternal ages. The difference between the two periods is where the city of God will reside-in heaven or on the new earth. As it has been shown, our immediate goal is heaven and, more specifically, the Heavenly Kingdom and the New Jerusalem which, most likely, will not be seen from the earth during the millennial reign of Christ. This is our millennial destiny. However, heaven is not our eternal destiny. Our destiny for the eternal ages is the New Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven, having the glory of God (Revelation 21:9-11) and which will be seen by all of creation. In the eternal ages, there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and residing on this new earth will be God's capital city of the universe. In the midst of this glorious city, which is also described as the Wife of the Lamb, there will be the throne of God and of the Lamb. The throne which is in heaven will come down to earth, and God and the Lamb will reign supreme over His creation from His holy city, the New Jerusalem. As it is written: For from of old they have not heard nor perceived by ear, neither has the eye seen a God besides Thee, who acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him (Isaiah 64:4). "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and {which} have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

We have very little comprehension of what glory will be like, but until that day, let us love God and let us wait for the One who is coming from heaven. That day is coming soon. It is the day of resurrection and "the seizing"-the redemption of our bodies. We do not know what we will be like but we know that we will be like Him. Let us encourage one another with this glorious thought as long as it is still today.

## Part X2.1 - My Beloved Son..

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My Beloved Son-Listen To Him! The Word of the Kingdom is the message of the Kingdom of the Son of God's love. This message only comes into sharp focus when we see God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the One who died for our sins, was buried, was raised from the dead and appeared to many, and who is coming back to take the scepter of the Kingdom of Heaven to reign over this earth. Before we continue with other aspects of the Kingdom, it is vital that we build upon this foundation which is truly none other than the Lord Jesus Himself. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11).

If we do not build on this foundation, then whatever truth we glean from the Word of God will be built on sand, and it will not stand in the trials and temptations of life or in the fire of judgment (1 Corinthians 3:13-15). The foundation must be seen as clearly as possible and kept ever in sight; otherwise as we proceed to see the Kingdom, we might be tempted to take our eyes off the foundation. We will lose sight of the King. The Scriptures proclaim that Christ is central, supreme and preeminent in all things. In this chapter, it will be shown that the Lord Jesus is the Son of Man; the Christ, the Son of the living God, and Messiah; the Rock; the King. All of these offices held by the Lord Jesus express aspects of His preeminence. Today, this truth is not apparent in an unrighteous world in rebellion against God, but it will be manifested fully in the coming Kingdom Age. God's Son will have the place of preeminence in the age to come; and today God declares: "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!" To be a disciple of the Kingdom we must have a listening ear. Listening to the Son today is vital to every Christian who desires to enter the Kingdom in the day that is coming, the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:8; Php 1:6; Php 1:10; Php 2:16; Hebrews 10:25). To be a son in the coming Kingdom we must listen to the Son in this day.

God Has Spoken The subject of the book of Hebrews is the world or the age to come, the Kingdom Age (Hebrews 2:5). However, the writer of this letter made it abundantly clear right from the start that the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the center of this age to come. In fact, without Christ there is no future Kingdom to discuss or to understand. Apart from Christ we have no future, no hope. Thank God; our God has spoken and He has spoken of one thing, His Son.

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in {His} Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high; having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they. (Hebrews 1:1-4)

Throughout the era of the Old Testament, God spoke through the prophets in many portions and in many ways. They spoke of what was to come; but no one person saw the complete picture, no one man touched upon all that was on God's heart. The Spirit only revealed bits and pieces of what was to come. In many respects, much of it was in mystery. The prophets spoke of Messiah, the King to come, but it was still an incomplete understanding of what was God's full purpose and

plan. It took the Son Himself to humble Himself and take on the form of man for God to reveal all that was hidden in His heart. God spoke all that was in His heart and He spoke it in His Son.

Actually, the original Greek text does not have the word His; it is simply stated that God spoke in Son. In other words, God has spoken in the Person of Son. In times past, the prophets were the mouth of God and He spoke through them, although they were vessels of many weaknesses. But in these last days, God came to this earth in the Person of Son and He spoke. Every word that proceeded from the mouth of Christ was of God for He is the exact representation of God, for all the fulness of Deity dwells in Him in bodily form (Colossians 1:19; Colossians 2:9). If we see the Son, we see God and His glory. The Son was (is) all God and all man, and unlike the prophets of old, no weakness was (is) found in Him (Hebrews 4:15).

If we hear the Son, we hear God. He upholds all things [or holds all things together (Colossians 1:17)] by the word of His power. His word is God's Word and it cannot be broken. When He speaks, it is the truth. His word stands and by it all things hold together.

God's voice boomed throughout creation when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist and when He was transfigured on the holy mountain; and it will boom once again when His Son sits upon His own throne.

"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." (Matthew 3:17)

"Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee" And again, "I will be a Father to Him and He shall be a Son to Me" (Hebrews 1:5) "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" (Matthew 17:5)

"Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy companions." (Hebrews 1:8-9)

God the Father has declared the summation of His purpose and plan-My Son. His Son is God the Son and He shall receive a Kingdom and His throne will last forever and ever. There shall be no end to the increase of His government (Isaiah 9:6-7).

God has spoken, and He says, "Listen to My Son!" This is more than hearing words; it is hearing words and understanding them. Listening is comprehending what is said and applying it in such a way that it is fruitful in one's life. It can be stated very emphatically that if we do not listen to Him, then we will miss His Kingdom. It is that simple. God spoke these words from heaven at the time of the Lord's transfiguration and the manifestation of the Kingdom of Glory. However, this tremendous event was at the conclusion of a period of time in which the Lord had been speaking to His disciples, teaching them about the Kingdom and revealing for the first time the new nation that was about to be birthed, the Church.

Beginning in Matthew 16:13 and ending with Matthew 17:9, the mystery of the Kingdom is unveiled. From the beginning to the end of this section, the coming Kingdom of our Lord is in view. It is both an exhortation to disciples of Christ as well as a prophetic word to he who has an ear to hear. The exhortation to Christians will be taken up in various ways in subsequent chapters. What must be seen at this point is Christ.

Starting with Matthew 16:13, we find reference to the Lord's coming dominion over the earth; and ending with Matthew 17:9, we find the Lord coming down from the mountain, having been transfigured as a manifestation of the coming Kingdom of Glory. The transfiguration was the conclusion of an eight-day period (Luke 9:28) in which the Lord revealed to His disciples the full gospel of grace and glory. For two days, He explained it to them; and then six days later, on the seventh day, His Kingdom of Glory was manifested. It was at this point that the Father declared: "This is My Son; listen to Him!" Why was this so important? First, God has only one King. The fact that Moses and Elijah stood on the mountain with the Lord had significance, but they were not to be the focus. Second, God has spoken in His Son. We don't need to chase after the words of man; we need to listen to what the Son says and come into the full, mature knowledge of the truth which is in Christ. Third, Jesus had spoken to His disciples for two days and they had not fully grasped what was said. They needed to hear Him (and so do we).

Now, what had Jesus spoken to them? The Son Of Man

Jesus had just warned His disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 16:6; Matthew 16:12). The leaven was the doctrine of these religious leaders that kept the people from entering into the Kingdom. They were blind leaders of the blind (Matthew 15:14). The people were blind because their leaders, who also were blind, were not teaching the proper message of the Kingdom. This also caused confusion amongst the people so that there was much questioning as to who Jesus was. In this context, Jesus asked His disciples the question: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" (Matthew 16:13). In using the title the Son of Man, the Lord was pointing to something very specific; and it was very significant because it laid down the foundation of what Jesus was going to teach His disciples over the next two days. After six days from when He finished His teaching, on the seventh day, He literally manifested to the eyes of His three closest disciples the very foundation that He laid with the title the Son of Man-His coming Kingdom of Glory. In other words, what He spoke He revealed.

According to the prophet Daniel, the Son of Man is directly linked with the Lord's coming dominion over the earth.

"I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and {men of every} language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed." (Daniel 7:13-14{ea}) This title is used eighty times in the four gospels and four additional times in the remainder of the New Testament (Acts 7:56; Hebrews 2:5-9; Revelation 1:13; Revelation 14:14). The meaning of things in the Bible is generally revealed by the principle of "first mention." In other words, the first place something is mentioned in the Bible will reveal a basic understanding of God's meaning. The son of man first appears in Psalms 8:1-9 and later is quoted in Hebrews 2:1-18. In both, reference is made to the world to come, which is the Kingdom Age, when the Lord Jesus will ascend the throne of the Kingdom of Heaven and sit on the throne of David. Interestingly, David first presents the phrase the son of man.

What is man, that Thou dost take thought of him? And the son of man, that Thou dost care for him? (Psalms 8:4) For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are

speaking. But one has testified somewhere, saying, "What is man, that Thou rememberest him? Or the son of man, that Thou art concerned about him?" (Hebrews 2:5-6) A careful reading of Psalms 8:1-9, specifically the first and the last verses, reveals that at the center of David's heart was the Lord, and His name and glory filling the earth.

O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth, who set Your glory above the heavens! ... O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth! (Psalms 8:1; Psalms 8:9NKJ) This proclamation is in reference to the coming day of His glory when the Lord Jesus returns to this earth in the glory of His Father. In that day, heaven and earth will be filled with His glory and His name will be above every name. The verses in between this proclamation speak of the son of man being crowned with glory and honor. The writer to the Hebrews took up Psalm 8 in reference to the coming Kingdom when many sons will be brought unto glory. We do not see this crowning yet; but we do see Jesus, because of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor. He is the Son of Man who will one day have many companions who will reign with Him over this earth as sons of God. In the New Testament, we find the title first mentioned in Matthew: And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air {have} nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Matthew 8:20). At first glance, it might appear that the verse in Matthew 8:1-34 has nothing to do with His Kingdom, but there is great significance to the Son of Man not having a place to lay His head. This is easily shown with the last mention of the Son of Man in the New Testament, where the Son of Man has a golden crown on His head: And I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud {was} one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head, and a sharp sickle in His hand (Revelation 14:14).

Thus, we see that in the first and last mentions of the Son of Man, there is reference to Christ's head. When He came here the first time, He came to a world that was not His realm. He said, "My kingdom is not of this realm" (John 18:36). Yet, He is the One who is to inherit the nations and possess the earth (Psalms 2:8). At the end of His earthly life, He wore a crown of thorns, thrust upon His head; and then He was crucified. However, His day is coming when He will wear a golden crown, which signifies divine, kingly power. Gold means deity. The Son of Man will wear many diadems, which means that He will be the ruler of the nations. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. He will be the King of the holy nation of the called-out ones in heaven. He will be the King of the nation of Israel upon the earth. He will be the ruler over all the nations of the earth. Thus, wherever this title, the Son of Man, appears in the Scriptures, it refers to His coming dominion over the earth. The Christ, The Son Of The Living God When the Lord Jesus asked the question, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" He established that the subject of His question dealt with His future reign as King. By revelation, Peter answered the Lord's question: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Jesus proclaimed that this was by revelation from the Father: "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17). What an amazing statement! Jesus was authenticating to Peter and the others that this answer was not of man but from heaven itself. His heavenly Father had spoken by revealing this truth to Peter. The revelation of the Christ is a clear reference to Messiah, the King of the Jews, who one day will sit upon the throne of David during the Messianic Era, the millennial Kingdom. Messiah also speaks of Jesus' lineage. He came from the line of Abraham and the seed of David, and as such He presented Himself to the nation of Israel as their Messiah. The Lord was acknowledging Israel as His people. According to Matthew

12:1-50, the leaders of Israel rejected their Messiah, even blaspheming the Holy Spirit. He came to offer them the Kingdom; but because of their rejection of the offer, He later announced that the Kingdom was to be taken from them and given to a new nation that was about to come on the scene (Matthew 21:43). The Rock was about to become a stone of stumbling, a rock of offense to Israel (1 Peter 2:8). As translated from the Hebrew, the Christ means "Anointed One." In the Old Testament, the prophets, the priests and the kings were anointed. As such, this answer of Peter's had far more meaning than Peter probably realized. Jesus was the Prophet who died for our sins (Luke 13:33). He is the High Priest who lives to intercede for those who come to God through Him (Hebrews 7:25-27). He is the future King who shall reign forever and ever (Revelation 11:15).

Although Jesus holds all these offices, Peter only saw the future King since the disciples had yet to understand that their Messiah had to die on the cross (Luke 18:34). Later, Peter was severely rebuked by the Lord for his failure to fully understand his own answer (Matthew 16:23).

Further, the Anointed One is the Son of God, which has a two-fold meaning. First, the revelation from the Father declared that the Son of Man and the Son of God are one and the same. The Son of Man reveals His coming rule and the Son of God reveals that He is God. He is both God and Man. He did not shed His Deity at birth, and He did not shed His humanity at the cross. Some people taught (and continue to teach) that the Lord Jesus was not truly man, that He merely posed as a man. This is not true. He is all God, the Son of God, and He is all Man, the second Man.

Second, the Son of God speaks of sonship; and sonship speaks of rulership. He is God's first-born Son, the first to be born of the new race (Colossians 1:18), the one new man. According to Jewish tradition, the rights of first-born sons included becoming ruler of the household under the father and for the father, being priest of the family and receiving a double portion of the father's estate. The firstborn was in line to receive the inheritance of the father. Jesus received all of these rights as the Son. So in these few words in Peter's response, we discover that Jesus is the Anointed One, the coming Messiah who will inherit this earth as the firstborn of the Father. As the Son of the living God, He will reign for the Father over the Kingdom of Heaven.

### I Will Build My Church

Having established that He is the Son of Man and the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus proceeded to mention for the first time the Church that was about to be born through Calvary.

"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it." (Matthew 16:18)

Matthew's gospel places the emphasis on Jesus as King. Of significance is the fact that only Matthew records any mention of the Church by the Lord. This reveals something of great importance to us because it intimately links the Kingdom and the Church. The rock is Christ Himself. He is the Rock! Israel stumbled over this Rock, but a new nation was about to come forth through the cross that is to be built upon the solid Rock of Christ. Israel as a whole nation was offered the Kingdom. But the new nation is to be "called out" from amongst the Jews and the Gentiles and is offered the opportunity to come into the Reign of the Heavens. The Son of Man; the Christ, the Son of the living God; the Rock will build His Church. In other words, He pointed to the near future when the Father would give Him a "called-out" people, the Church.

"All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day." () As shown in the previous chapter, all that have died since Adam have been placed in the grave and none can escape the grip of death for they are confined by the gates of Hades. These gates are a reference to the hold that death has on man.

Praise God; the Lord Jesus was declaring that death would no longer have dominion over man. The Rock upon which the Church is built is the Resurrection and the Life. It is this life that will overpower the gates of Hades and free His people from death. As Paul later wrote: "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:55-57). Christ is the first fruits from the dead. He is the Resurrection and the Life, and He will raise all those who are His at His coming (Luke 20:35-36; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17). The victory is our Lord Jesus Christ. The gates of Hades that confine man will no longer prevail. The Keys Of The Kingdom The Lord then gave the keys of the Kingdom to Peter and the other apostles who would become part of the foundation of the Church that is built upon the Rock.

"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:19)

Many people teach that the keys were for Peter to preach the gospel of eternal life to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles. However, the gospel of grace is not in view; the Kingdom of Heaven is in view, and this refers to the saved. It seems more plausible that this was something specific to the apostles, as written by John.

"If you forgive the sins of any, {their sins} have been forgiven them; if you retain the {sins} of any, they have been retained." (John 20:23) The Church is being offered the privilege of coming into the Reign of the Heavens; however, not all Christians will reign with Christ. In their day, the apostles had authority to turn sinning Christians over to Satan that they would be saved in the Day of the Lord Jesus. Paul dealt with the Corinthians in this manner because they were not properly dealing with the leaven in the local church (1 Corinthians 5:1-7). Today, the local church must deal with the leaven within her midst through binding and loosing (Matthew 18:15-19). Why is this so important? Because it deals with the salvation of the soul and the entrance into the coming Kingdom! Church discipline of a sinning Christian is to prevent others from going the same way and to lead the sinner to repentance (James 5:20; 2 Peter 3:9; Jude 1:22-23) that his soul would be saved in the Kingdom Age. Any believer who leads a life of habitual sin without true repentance (turning from the sinful life-style) is in grave danger of being disqualified from reigning in the Kingdom (Hebrews 10:26-31; Hebrews 12:15-17). It is for the sake of inheriting the Kingdom that sin must be dealt with in the believer. Thank God; there is a way through and that is through the blood of Christ.

He Began To Show His Disciples

Next, the Lord began to unfold the events of Calvary-that He would suffer at the hands of the Jewish leaders, be killed and be raised on the third day. From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid {it,} Lord! This shall never happen to You." But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." (Matthew 16:21-23) This was a shock to the disciples who were expecting a triumphant King to take the throne in their day. Peter, who had received that great revelation from the Father about the Son of God, had subsequently listened to the voice of Satan, not the voice of the Lord; and he rebuked the Lord for saying He was going to the cross. This led to one of the sternest rebukes from the Lord recorded in the New Testament.

If Peter had listened to the words of his Lord, he would have heard all that he needed to hear in order to understand what was to come. However, the concept that the Lord was laying down was so new to the disciples that they could not fully grasp it. How could their Lord be the King and yet die? Consequently, Peter missed the most important part of what the Lord spoke-"raised up on the third day." It was as if Peter, and most assuredly the other disciples, never heard these words. The Lord was declaring a truth that the world had never known-out of death comes life. In fact, without death, there would be no life. John recorded similar words from the Lord. And Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." (John 12:23-24) The grain of wheat must die to bear fruit. Jesus was revealing that the way to glory only comes through death. On the third day, life would spring forth from the grave. This life would not be an ordinary life. It would be an indestructible, eternal life; a life that man had never possessed but which was about to be given through the one Man who would die for the sin of the world. Only through this life is the glory of the Kingdom possible.

If Anyone Desires To Come After Me As presented in chapter 10, Jesus then proceeded to lay down the principle of entering His Kingdom in order to reign with Him. However, we must be abundantly clear that these verses refer to disciples, saved ones. It is error to assign these verses to the lost. A disciple is one who is saved. If we do not rightly divide the word of truth, we will be led into all sorts of error.

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." "For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it. For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:24-26)

Jesus revealed that the way into His Kingdom was the same way that He was about to go to receive the Kingdom. As He laid down His soul, so must every child of God who desires to enter His Kingdom in the day that is coming. "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." If we desire to come after Him into His Kingdom, we must deny our soul-life (self-life); take up our cross (die to all our own self-centered desires) and follow Him (a Christ-centered life), doing the will of God, even if it leads to literal death as a martyr. The soul must be denied today to be gained (saved) in the Kingdom. This is the way into His Kingdom. For The Son Of Man Is Going To Come Now, we come to the climax of all that Jesus was teaching His disciples. For the Son of Man is going to

come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds." (Matthew 16:27) Do you grasp the significance of these words? The Son of Man is going to come! It is an absolute statement of truth that cannot be broken. He is going to come. Jesus Himself proclaimed His return. He is going to return with His reward. He will recompense every man according to his deeds. His coming will be in glory, the glory of His Father. At this point, Jesus made the most amazing statement.

"Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." (Matthew 16:28)

Unfortunately, some people today teach that this means that His Kingdom came and remained right at that moment, but this is not at all what the Scriptures reveal. What Jesus did say was that some of His disciples were about to witness a foretaste of His Kingdom. [Also, this is a type of Christians who will not taste death because they will be alive and remain when the Lord comes to remove His people from this earth (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).] Six days after He made this statement, the Lord took three of the disciples up to a high mountain. Matthew records the details. And six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and brought them up to a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. And Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" And when the disciples heard {this,} they fell on their faces and were much afraid. And Jesus came to {them} and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, except Jesus Himself alone. (Matthew 17:1-8) On the mountain, it was so difficult for the disciples to grasp what was transpiring right before their eyes. The appearance of Jesus changed. It was not as if a light shined upon Him. This light came forth from within the Lord Himself. Here was proof that He is God. The glory that is His alone had been hidden from the eyes of man, but on this mountain His glory broke through for these three disciples to behold. It was a foretaste of the Kingdom of Glory. When he saw the glorified Lord standing with Moses and Elijah, Peter was so surprised by the sight that he did not know what to do, so he told the Lord that he would build a tabernacle for them. Peter didn't even realize what he was saying (Luke 9:33). For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified (Mark 9:6).

Peter, James and John were in great danger of taking this glorious sight and bringing it down to their level and making it an earthly thing. "It is a good thing for us to be here." No, it was not good for them if they remained there; it was a foretaste of that which is to come, but Jesus had to face the cross first. Jesus, Moses and Elijah were discussing the departure that Jesus was about to accomplish; death on a cruel cross would release Jesus from this earth (Luke 9:31). At this point, a bright cloud overshadowed them and God spoke: "This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him!" The three disciples were so struck with awe that they fell on their faces. It took the touch of Jesus to bring relief to them. When they opened their eyes, Jesus was found alone (Luke 9:36). God's Son is the only King; and God will not share His glory with anyone but His Son, not even Moses and Elijah. He alone was the One they were to see and the One they were to hear. It was as if God was saying: "You are not seeing who My Son is and you are not listening to Him. My Son is the

One you are to see. As great as Moses and Elijah were in My purpose and plan, don't look to them; don't seek their voices. They have already spoken and they spoke of My Son. Listen to Him! See Him!"

Why was it so important to listen to Jesus? God was directing His command to the disciples because their view of things was earthly. For those two days, Jesus had explained everything to them but they had to come into a revelation of it; and now they were eyewitnesses of all that the Lord had taught them. It was like they were being shown a movie of what was to come and they did not understand the great significance of what their eyes were seeing. They were missing the story line. What they saw was the summation of His teaching-He is the Son of Man; He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God; He is the Rock and He will build His Church that will be part of His coming Kingdom; He had to suffer death on a cross to depart this world and atone for the sins of the world; He is coming back and His Kingdom is the Kingdom of Glory. In these few days, Jesus had unfolded the full extent of the Word of the Kingdom; He even manifested it and the Father put His stamp of approval on it by declaring: "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" The Prophetic Word

Peter never forgot what he saw on that high mountain. At the end of his life, he wrote his second letter to those of like precious faith and he recounted the transfiguration to them. He was determined to be diligent to remind them so that they would remember after his decease. For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"-and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. And {so} we have the prophetic word {made} more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is {a matter} of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Peter 1:16-21)

It is obvious that Peter previously had explained to them the Lord's coming. He had made known the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He said that he and the other two disciples were eyewitnesses of His majesty. The Majestic Glory, the Father Himself had declared that Christ is the beloved Son. They heard the voice from heaven; it was no voice of man on earth, and they could testify that it was true. God Himself authenticated the truth about His Son. Now notice that Peter took this eyewitness account and declared that the prophetic Word is right; it is true. The Holy Spirit moved men of old to prophesy of what Peter, James and John saw. It was a confirmation to them of the prophetic Word; it was made more sure, and we must pay attention to the Word. We must heed the Word, for it is a lamp that shines in a dark world. It is a beacon that shines in the dark night. As a lamp shines in the darkness, we see Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of faith, piercing the darkness as He comes to this earth to usher in the dawn of the new day. Only the prophetic Word will reveal the truth to us and lead us in the days of darkness. It is to be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalms 119:105) until the new day comes, the Kingdom Age, when the Son of Man comes in His glory.

What is the prophetic Word? We have touched upon this more than once; however, it is so important that it is vital that this point be emphasized once again. When John the apostle saw the Revelation through angels, all he could do was fall down as dead. And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." (Revelation 19:10) The angel told John the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. But what is this spirit? If we know what the testimony of Jesus is, then we will know what is the spirit of prophecy. So what is the testimony? Jesus made the good confession before Pilate as the cross was set before Him.

Pilate therefore said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say {correctly} that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." (John 18:37)

Jesus' testimony is, "I am a King!" What does the prophetic Word reveal? Jesus is God's King and He is coming to take the scepter of His Kingdom. What is the spirit of prophecy? It is all that deals with the King and His Kingdom.

Supreme And Preeminent The prophetic Scriptures speak of God's Son. As the Son of Man; the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Rock; the King, He will head up all things in heaven and on earth (Ephesians 1:10). He is to have first place in all things. He is to have the supremacy in all things. He is to be preeminent in all things. Consider the way three translations of the Bible proclaim Christ in the same verse.

He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything. (Colossians 1:18NAS {ea}) And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. (Colossians 1:18NIV {ea}) And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. (Colossians 1:18NKJ {ea}) This is God's heart for His Son. He is to have first place in everything. He is the first Man to overcome death and be resurrected from the dead with an indestructible, eternal life. This places Him at the Head of a new race of people, the one new man in Christ, the Body of Christ, the Church. As first in all things, He is supreme and He is preeminent. Our Lord Jesus is not to be merely dominant in heaven and earth; He is to be preeminent. Dominant means that He is numbered along with many other things that have importance, but preeminent means that there is no one else in view but Him. Nothing compares with Him; nothing can compete with Him; nothing can shine brighter than Him; nothing has greater importance than Him; nothing is higher than Him; nothing is more supreme than Him. He is all, and He is in all. This is the meaning of preeminent. Not only is He preeminent, but He is central. Everything centers upon the One who created all things and who holds all things together. He upholds all things by the word of His power. Remove Christ from this universe and all of creation will cease to exist. Our very existence is in Him. He is the Life! There is no life beyond Him. When He speaks, the Father speaks of the Centrality and Preeminence of His beloved Son: Listen to Him! What does the Son say?

"For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds." (Matthew 16:27) Let us listen to the beloved Son

while it is still today! He is going to come!

## Part X3.1 - A Disciple Of The Kingdom

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A Disciple Of The Kingdom Of Heaven In the preceding chapters, we have established that the Kingdom is about God's Son, our beloved Lord Jesus Christ. We are to listen to Him, for He is preeminent and supreme. He is God's King. This is our foundation upon which everything else is built, for there is no other foundation but Christ. As we build upon this foundation, we need to be clear about our relationship with our beloved Lord and His coming Kingdom, specifically our calling as a disciple of Christ, a disciple of the Kingdom. The Son of Man is coming; and when He arrives, He will receive to Himself in a very personal encounter those who have been true disciples of His Kingdom. When He walked on this earth, the Lord Jesus Himself was God's disciple and sought for disciples. As we have seen, today God tells us to listen to His beloved Son. It is His path that His disciples are to follow, and He will lead them on this path to reign in His Kingdom, if they hear Him and obey Him: "Blessed are those who hear the word of God, and observe it" (Luke 11:28). This is the life of a disciple of the Kingdom.

Often, when He revealed truths about the Kingdom of Heaven, the Lord Jesus went up on a mountain with His disciples and taught them. We discover this when He went up on the mountain and spoke to His disciples on the entrance into the Kingdom (Matthew 5:1-48; Matthew 6:1-34; Matthew 7:1-29); when He summoned His twelve disciples to a mountain to send them out with the message of the Kingdom (Mark 3:13); when He took three of the disciples up on a high mountain and He was transfigured in the Glory of His coming Kingdom (Matthew 17:1-8); and when He sat on the Mount of Olives, speaking of the sign of His coming and the rewards of His Kingdom (Matthew 24:3-51; Matthew 25:1-46). In the Scriptures, the word mountain refers to kingdom (Daniel 2:35; Daniel 2:37; Daniel 2:39), with specific reference to the coming Kingdom of Heaven when Christ takes the scepter and rules.

Now, as He was about to ascend to His Father's throne following His resurrection, the Lord Jesus told His eleven disciples to proceed to a mountain in Galilee and wait for Him. They followed His order and He met them on the mountain, at which time He instructed them: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Here we discover the Kingdom in view and the Lord's desire for disciples. Interestingly, He did not say to go out and get everyone saved, as most people view these verses. He said to make disciples which means "pupils, learners." In other words, they were instructed to teach, making learners or pupils of Christ. The goal is not to get people saved but to make them disciples of the Lord. As the Lord commanded, disciples are to be taught all that He commanded (as contained in His written Word) with the purpose of obeying these commands: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). The Lord is after disciples of His Kingdom; and this thought is revealed in the parables of the Kingdom, as spoken by the Lord Jesus, which very clearly link the disciple to

the Kingdom.

Become A Disciple Of The Kingdom The Lord Jesus spoke seven parables revealing the Mysteries of the Kingdom (Matthew 13:1-50), and He concluded by describing one who is a disciple of the Kingdom of Heaven. And He said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old." (Matthew 13:52)

After speaking the mystery parables, the Lord asked His disciples if they understood them. When they acknowledged that they had understood, Jesus gave them one more instruction. He told them to be like scribes instructed concerning the Kingdom of Heaven. A scribe is a writer; so in a narrow sense, these words most likely applied to His first disciples who, after the Lord's departure through the cross, taught and recorded some of His words which are contained in the Bible. Their eyes of understanding were opened to the Scriptures in their possession, the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms (Luke 24:44) [the old treasure (Luke 24:27)], and to all that Jesus had taught them (the new treasure). However, a disciple of the Kingdom must be viewed in a much broader sense because all believers are called to be disciples and every disciple is called into the Kingdom. Further, all believers are to be like scribes who dig into the Word, being instructed in the Kingdom and learning in such a fashion that they become true disciples of the Kingdom of Heaven.

What was the instruction given at the beginning of these parables? It was the Word of the Kingdom (Matthew 13:19). Thus, in these few words, the Lord Jesus joined the Word of the Kingdom with the Kingdom of Heaven. A disciple of Christ is to be instructed in the Kingdom of Heaven, which is specific instruction in the Word of the Kingdom and all that this entails. Another way of stating this is that a disciple of Christ must be a disciple of the Kingdom of Heaven, and this requires an understanding of and an entering into the message of the Kingdom which is the Word of the Kingdom. The Word of the Kingdom which is the message surrounding the Kingdom of Heaven is the central message of the New Testament. No matter where one turns in the New Testament, the Word of the Kingdom is the foundational message. If disciples understand this message, they will have the proper foundation upon which to build as they study the Scriptures. There is no other message than this one that will unlock the Scriptures. On the other hand, if disciples do not understand this message, they will not possess the proper foundation and will remain in a sea of confusion and be open to every wind of doctrine.

It is vital to see this connection between a disciple and the Kingdom, and once we have this understanding, we need to see what it means to be a disciple. If we understand the road a disciple must trod (or walk), we will come into a further understanding of how every believer is to walk in this life and secure an abundant entrance into the coming Kingdom of our Lord. In fact, the first mention of the word disciple in the New Testament is found in Matthew 5:1, when Jesus sat down on the mountain with His disciples and taught them on the royal entrance into the Kingdom.

However, it is in the Old Testament that we discover the first indication of the walk of a disciple. The word disciple is first mentioned by the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 8:16; Isaiah 50:4). His second reference to this word speaks prophetically of the One who came as God's true disciple, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of disciples, that I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens {me} morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as

a disciple. The Lord GOD has opened My ear; and I was not disobedient, nor did I turn back. I gave My back to those who strike {me,} and My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting. For the Lord GOD helps me, therefore, I am not disgraced; therefore, I have set My face like flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. (Isaiah 50:4-7) As we review the walk of the disciple, we will draw upon these verses. A Disciple Is A Learner In the Hebrew language, a disciple is "one who learns, who is taught or is used." In the Greek, it means "a learner or a pupil." In other words, a disciple of Christ must be a learner. A learner is one who recognizes that he knows so little and that he must be taught. He is like a child: "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3-4). Anyone who believes he has arrived at some great level of learning and knowing is no longer a disciple. Can anyone say he is above his Master? "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master" (Matthew 10:24). In other words, a disciple cannot be greater than his Master. A believer in Christ must be at His feet, learning as His disciple. This is a life-long process. Who can fathom the ways of God? "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9). No one can person can fathom all of God's ways. We always must remain a disciple, a learner. In Isaiah's prophetic view of the Disciple, we discover this humility.

I gave My back to those who strike {me,} and My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting. For the Lord GOD helps me, therefore, I am not disgraced; therefore, I have set My face like flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. (Isaiah 50:6-7)

What humility and beauty we see in our Lord Jesus. He is God; but He emptied Himself, took the form of a bondservant and was made in the likeness of men (Php 2:7). Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered (Hebrews 5:8). He is the Son of God; and yet as Man, He learned as a disciple of His Father. In fact, the Son was totally dependent on His heavenly Father (John 5:19-20; John 5:30; John 8:28-29; John 8:42; John 12:49-50). Doing His Father's will, the Son set His face toward the cross and never uttered a complaint. He gave Himself up willingly, endured the shame of the cross (Hebrews 12:2) and suffered greatly that we might live. He learned obedience.

Today, He calls out to His disciples: "Learn from Me" (Matthew 11:29). We learn from Him as we daily seek Him, walk with Him and read His Word under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Learning means walking in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16; Galatians 5:25) in obedience to His Word. In this way, a disciple walks in Him (Colossians 2:6) and learns obedience. As a learner, a disciple is to be like the householder who takes things which are old-things that he had already understood-and adds to them things which are new-things that he had not seen before but which have become clear through a proper understanding of the Word. These are treasures to those who dig into the Word and understand it. It is the Word implanted in a disciple's heart, sown on good ground, from which come good works that bear fruit (Colossians 1:10) for reward in the Kingdom. To a disciple of Christ, the Word of God and, specifically, the Word of the Kingdom cannot be stressed enough. As the lovely, aged apostle, John wrote a letter to a sister in Christ, reminding her (and us) that we must abide (remain) in the teachings (doctrines) of Christ.

Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. (2 John 1:8-9)

Notice that John wrote of the full reward that must be a reference to the reward of the inheritance in the Kingdom (Colossians 3:24). It is of the utmost importance that a disciple of Christ abides in the Word of God, which is the teaching of Christ. How else can a disciple learn if he is not abiding in the Word? The importance of the Word of God cannot be overemphasized, but the question must be asked: For what purpose is the Word? Is it to give a disciple more knowledge; after all, isn't this what learning is all about? Knowledge, especially themature (epignosis) knowledge, is vital (see chapter 16). A disciple must possess it. Without doubt, a disciple must learn things of God; but there is far more to this matter of learning than gaining facts that are stored in the memory. Very simply, a disciple is to come into a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus, that is, to be in daily fellowship with Him, to know Him. To understand this further, let us turn to the first disciples called by Jesus when He was on this earth.

**They Were Uneducated And Untrained** When we consider the history of the early church, we are amazed at the power and authority that was manifested through a few men that the Lord Jesus had trained while He walked this earth. He had chosen them and disciplined them to Himself. They had lived in daily fellowship with Jesus (1 John 1:1-3). Often they did not understand His teachings or His ways, but they were so attracted to Him that they could not leave Him, for He had the words of eternal life (John 6:68). In fact, He is the Word of Life (1 John 1:1). The disciples were simple people of humble means. Several of them were fishermen, hard-working men who labored long hours to catch fish. They were not an educated group. They had not attended the great religious schools of the day. They worked with their hands to make a living. They had no great titles before their names and no list of degrees after their names. They did not claim to have started any great work or any great ministry. In the sight of the educated elite of their day, the Lord's disciples were nothing. But through these men, the Lord literally turned the known world upside down. When the Holy Spirit empowered them, they went forth in power and authority and led thousands to the Lord.

Paul, the apostle who at one time had sat in the seat of the elite as a Hebrew of Hebrews and a Pharisee, but who came to declare that it was all loss for the sake of Christ (Php 3:4-7), captured the heart of the matter in his letter to the Corinthians. For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God. (1 Corinthians 1:26-29)

Praise God; it is through the foolish and weak things of the world that He shames the wise and strong things of the world. The greatest strength for every disciple of Christ is not from education or titles that impress the world, but it comes from weakness and things that appear foolish to the wise world. When we are weak, we are strong in Christ. Why? Because we must trust in His life and His grace (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). In Acts 4:1-37, we find a very interesting story involving Peter, who was called of the Lord when he was casting nets, and John, who was called when he was mending nets. Being led by the Spirit, they were proclaiming the Kingdom and in Jesus the

resurrection from the dead. They knew the One who had walked with them for a few short years was no longer in the grave but was resurrected and was seated on His Father's throne in heaven. The manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit was living proof that He had ascended on high and was glorified. The promised Helper, the Holy Spirit, had come. They were living proof of this fact. Christ risen, exalted, glorified!

Many believed their message and the number came to be about five thousand. But this greatly disturbed the Jewish leaders. Peter and John were thrown in jail, and on the next day, they were placed in the center of all these leaders—the rulers, the elders, the scribes, the high priests, all those of high-priestly descent. In other words, those that they stood in the midst of were the highly educated religious leaders of the day. You might say that they all had graduated from seminary (or Bible school). They also all had the proper blood background, having been born into their priestly positions.

These two disciples of Christ stood in the midst of all these educated minds, being questioned about healing a man forty years old who had been lame from his mother's womb. Can you imagine the thoughts going through the Jewish leaders' heads? They had all this teaching, yet none of them had any power to heal another man. So they demanded to know by what power or in what name they had done this. Peter, full of Holy Spirit boldness, responded: Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this {name} this man stands here before you in good health. He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, {but} which became the very corner {stone.} And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:8-12).

What a testimony of the life of Christ! Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. He answered their question with great clarity. It was all done in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene. There is no other name under heaven given among men. Jesus! What a name! Peter and John stood with confidence in this name. As these two men stood, they were a testimony of a new way, a way that was not dependent on so-called religious education. They did not fit the mold of the Jewish leaders of the day. They stood outside of it and were a living testimony of the power and authority of God. Those that questioned them had an authority that came by their bloodline and their schooling, but these men had something else and it could not be challenged. It was a noteworthy fact that the miracle had taken place. No one could dispute the healing. When they saw the man who was once lame standing in their midst, they had nothing to say.

Peter and John were uneducated and untrained and yet they performed a miracle that no one could dispute. If they were not trained in the religious schools, they must have had some training some place. Where was it? What was the source of their power? The answer is found in the testimony of those who had no such power. There was one irrefutable fact that no one, not even the educated elite, could deny. One thing made these men stand out among all other men of their day. It is recorded that the Jewish elite began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.

Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and {began} to recognize them as having

been with Jesus. (Acts 4:13{ea}) Having Been With Jesus

Oh, do not doubt for a minute. They were schooled, but theirs was not like any school that existed. They were schooled in the school of Christ. What is the school of Christ? Being with Jesus! Isn't this marvelous? They had been with Jesus. He was their Teacher, their Master, their Helper. He taught them. He spoke to them the words that give life, some of the very same words that have been recorded for us in the New Testament. He trained them. They did not sit in a classroom with a blackboard. They were trained as they walked with Jesus through the days of His life. He walked with them, spoke to them, exhorted them, rebuked them, loved them, gave them examples, and many times left them confused and wondering. But through it all, they persevered and were taught. They were taught the Kingdom, and they proclaimed the Kingdom in power and with authority under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. This is the most glorious walk of a disciple-in daily fellowship with the Lord. They were in continual communion with their Lord.

We need to ask ourselves these questions: Where are we to be trained today? Are we to go to a seminary so that we can know the Word or how to minister the Word to edify and build up the Lord's people? Do we need to go to a school and receive a certificate, a degree, ordination papers, even a title to serve the Lord and His people? Do these things make a person spiritual? Is this what we are shown in the Bible? Quite the contrary! Those who sat in judgment of Peter and John had all the education they needed to discern the time. After all, they had in their possession all the prophetic Scriptures that spoke of Messiah. In fact, week after week, they read the Scriptures. Paul, who once sat with the Pharisees, stood in the synagogue as one sent by God, an apostle, and spoke to the men of Israel, declaring: "For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning Him" (Acts 13:27NKJ). The educated ones did not know the One of whom the Scriptures spoke. The voice of the prophets spoke of the One who stood in their midst, and yet they condemned Him. Their education did not lead them to life, to know Him but led them to yell "Crucify" to the One who is life.

Oh, we need to wake up to the truth. Education by itself does not make one spiritual nor does it make one a disciple. Having been with Jesus is what makes a disciple and leads a disciple on to spiritual growth and maturity. A piece of paper with a name on it will not do it. A title preceding one's name and a degree following it will not do it. This point cannot be emphasized enough to those who believe that the only way they can serve God is if they go to seminary or Bible school, or to those who believe that the only people that the brethren should listen to or be taught by are those who hold a degree.

There was a young man who was filled with the Spirit who had a burning in his heart for the Lord and who desired to preach. He went to a very well-known local preacher who had a doctorate degree from a seminary. The young man shared his heart with this well-known brother. Rather than encouraging him in the Lord in love, the preacher said to him, "You need to go to school and receive a degree." The implication is that one needs knowledge and a degree to be of use to the Lord. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies (1 Corinthians 8:1).

It is rather interesting that the apostles were never called "the apostle Paul" or "the apostle Peter." Today, because of the world's infiltration into the thinking of the church, we want to place a title before the name of a man. So we capitalize the word and say, "Apostle So-and-So" or "Pastor

So-and-So" or "Evangelist So-and-So." We see none of this in the heart of the early church. In fact, the emphasis was more on the fact that they belonged to Jesus.

Why does the church today place so much emphasis on something the New Testament does not emphasize? Why do we make these terms into great titles that men parade before the Lord's people? Today, men are not satisfied with these Biblical terms, so they have added extra titles like "Reverend" or "the Most Reverend." This may not be enough of a title, so they add on their educational degree, as well-"Reverend Doctor So-and-So." Others take on the title of "Pastor and Founder of Such-and-Such Church." Why is there such an emphasis on these various titles? Because it is a desire to exalt the man! It is man's way to be recognized. It is Phariseeism! Somehow, men within the church think that if they have a lofty title, people will look at them as a spiritual leader and give them respect. This is no different than the religious Pharisees that the Lord condemned (Matthew 6:1-18; Matthew 23:1-30; Luke 11:39-44). They were hypocrites! We can take on the loftiest titles in the world and be highly recognized in religious circles, but this is not being spiritual. We can stand in pulpits with puffed-up chests and give great orations, but this is not being spiritual. Being spiritual comes from knowing Jesus, because in knowing Him, we become like Him.

Today, we do not have the Lord personally walking on this earth to teach us as He did His first disciples. Their fellowship with the Lord was very personal and intimate, and John summed up their experience.

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life-and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us-what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:1-3)

However, notice that John wrote his short epistle, which is an extension of his Gospel, so that those reading it would have fellowship with the Father and with His Son. But how are we to have this fellowship today? It must start in one place only-at the feet of our beloved Lord. Our fellowship with Him starts in His presence and continues in His presence. Fellowship is a daily walk with our Lord. It is drawing near to Him-seeking Him, listening for His voice-and, most of all, allowing Him to love us and in turn loving Him. The Lord Jesus is always ready and willing to come into His people to have fellowship. Even the church of the Laodiceans who are lukewarm toward the Lord are beckoned to open the door and allow Him into their lives for fellowship: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20). "I will come into him" is the most intimate of fellowship with the One who died for our sin and now wants to live in us for a future glory. The school of Christ begins and continues in the presence of the Lord.

What is the purpose of fellowship? It is to know Jesus! By knowing our beloved Lord, we also come to know our heavenly Father. After all, this is the heart of our Lord, to know the Father: "And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (John 17:3). As we sit at His feet in His presence, we are to continue to have fellowship through the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. The school of Christ is a daily digging into the Word

of God, allowing the Spirit of truth to lead us into all truth, and obeying the will of God. It is in this way that a disciple's daily walk continues to grow into a deeper personal relationship with the Lord. It is like the disciples who walked on the road to Emmaus after the Lord's crucifixion. As they walked, discussing all the events of that dark day, Jesus appeared to them: And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures (Luke 24:27). They did not recognize Him as he spoke to their hearts. It is recorded that, at the end of the day, they urged Him: "Stay with us, for it is {getting} toward evening, and the day is now nearly over." And He went in to stay with them. And it came about that when He had reclined {at the table} with them, He took the bread and blessed {it,} and breaking {it,} He {began} giving {it} to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight. And they said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:29-32). What a wonderful encouragement to every disciple of Christ. While He was walking with these men and speaking to them about the Scriptures, their hearts were burning. Why? Because they were with Jesus and He was teaching them. They were walking in His presence and the Word was being unveiled. In fact, the One who is the Word walked with them. But also notice when it was that their eyes were opened to see their Master. It was when He broke bread. Breaking bread speaks of fellowship. When we are in fellowship with our Lord, our eyes are opened to see Him more clearly. This is the walk of a disciple.

Now, returning to this matter of education: If all we have is knowledge without relationship, then it is formal, head knowledge. It will be words without the power. This is not to say that people should not go to Bible school. It is good to learn; but if we are not walking with the Lord, then our education is of little value. For those who feel led (know that the Lord has called them in a specific way) to minister in a public way in the assembly, the power to minister to others must come from a personal walk, a personal relationship with their beloved Lord. This was what set the first disciples apart from everyone else in their day. We need the teachings (doctrines) of Christ, for they are indispensable to every disciple of Christ (2 John 1:9), but we also need to walk with our Lord in accordance with these teachings. Walking implies a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus, just as Adam, before the fall, walked in the Garden in the cool of the day with the Lord (Genesis 3:8). In Acts 4:20, it is recorded that Peter and John responded to the Jewish leaders: "We cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard." What had they seen? Jesus! Whom had they heard? Jesus! They were in the school of Christ. Their lives were changed by the presence of His life. They knew this change came from being with Him. They were men who were in relationship with their Lord.

Every disciple of Christ must be trained in the school of Christ. We must have a personal walk with the Lord, one in which we are open to His teaching, exhortation, rebuke, which all come from His love for us. A seminary cannot do this for us. All a seminary or Bible school can do is give knowledge of Him, but it will never lead us to know Him. Having been with Jesus, we know Him. Paul was a highly educated Jewish leader, having been taught in the great school of his day (Acts 22:3); but when he met the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus, he counted it as all loss for the sake of Christ (Php 3:7). His one passion in life was to know Christ, to gain Him and to be found in Him (Php 3:8-10). At the end of his life, Paul could declare that the Lord stood with him and strengthened him (2 Timothy 4:17). Paul had been with Jesus. This is the heart of a disciple of

Christ and one who is in the school of Christ.

### Filled With The Holy Spirit

Something already has been mentioned but is worth repeating. The vital need for every disciple is to be filled with the Holy Spirit, which comes through the Word of God. When Peter stood, he was filled with the Holy Spirit. In other accounts in the book of Acts, we find others filled, such as Stephen and Paul. Paul exhorted the Ephesians: "Be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). He also exhorted the Colossians: "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you" (Colossians 3:16). The Spirit and the Word are inseparable. A disciple cannot learn without the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit cannot teach without the Word. When Jesus walked with the disciples, He was their Helper, Comforter and Teacher who spoke the Word. Today, the Holy Spirit is our Helper and Comforter and Teacher who reveals the written Word. John tells us: And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him (1 John 2:27). The Holy Spirit abides in us. He is our Teacher. He is our anointing. But what is the key to this anointing and teaching? It is to abide in Christ. We must set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts (1 Peter 3:15) and make our home in Him as He makes His home in us. Our walk with Him must be a walk whereby we abide in Him and He in us. As we do, the Holy Spirit who dwells in us will teach us the things of Christ, will be our anointing to serve, and will lead us into greater depths of knowing and loving our beloved Lord. A certificate from a school will not fill us with the Holy Spirit. Only abiding in Christ and in His Word will fill us.

### Glorifying God

Finally, when the rulers were finished threatening Peter and John, they let them go because the people were glorifying God for what had happened. They bore fruit to God and this brought Him glory. Dear brethren, this is the calling of a disciple-to glorify our Lord and our God, not ourselves. The Holy Spirit came to glorify the Lord. If we are filled with the Spirit, then we must and will give the glory to God. If we take any glory for ourselves, we will receive our reward in this life and not in the coming Kingdom. As the Psalmist cried out, we too need to cry out: Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to Thy name give glory because of Thy lovingkindness, because of Thy truth (Psalms 115:1). To Thy name give the glory, not to our name. We are to be disciples of the Name that is above every other name. But not only this, we are to glorify our Father who is in heaven by bearing much fruit.

"By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and {so} prove to be My disciples." (John 15:8) A disciple is not a disciple in name only but one who proves that he is a disciple of Christ by bearing much fruit. Bearing fruit in this life is vital to receiving reward in the age to come. Fruit comes from having a listening ear to hear and understand the Word of the Kingdom. A Disciple Is A Listener

Returning to Isaiah's prophetic word, we discover that a disciple must be a listener if he is to be a learner. How can one learn if he does not listen? If one does not learn, how can he be a disciple of the Kingdom?

He awakens {me} morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple. The Lord GOD has opened My ear. (Isaiah 50:4 b-5a) When He walked this earth, Jesus continually was listening

for His Father's voice. He came to do His will and this required a listening ear. As prophetically revealed through Isaiah, while on earth, Jesus was awakened by His Father each day, morning by morning. He awoke with His ear to listen to His Father as a learner, and the Father was faithful to open His ear each day to hear. His listening ear kept Him on the road to the cross for the joy that was set before Him (Hebrews 12:2).

Likewise, to be a disciple, a believer must be a listener. A disciple must have an ear that listens for the Master's voice. The Lord Jesus gave very clear instruction in this matter.

"Everyone who comes to Me, and hears My words, and acts upon them, I will show you whom he is like." (Luke 6:47) But He answered and said to them, "My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it." (Luke 8:21)

There are many other Scriptures that instruct us to hear. In fact, throughout the book of Revelation, we are exhorted: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says."

Today, there are so many voices speaking persuasive but deceptive words, it is essential that we have the ears of a disciple. In speaking on the Mysteries of the Kingdom, the Lord Jesus warned: "Therefore take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him shall {more} be given; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him" (Luke 8:18).

How much more vital is it for us today to awaken each morning with the ear of a disciple? Let every man be swift to hear (James 1:19NKJ). We must pray to our Lord God that He would open our ear each day. We need to hear the voice of our Master and our good Shepherd. We need to be swift to hear Him. How will we know what to do? How will we know how to serve one another? We need a hearing ear. We must be listeners. But let us not forget that the hearing is directly linked to His Word which is the written Word of God. It is the Word that we are to read and allow the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, to teach us and to guide us into all the truth (John 16:13). It is the Word that saves our soul (James 1:21) and will lead us into the Heavenly Kingdom. However, one who desires to become a disciple of the Kingdom must hear a specific word, and it is the Word of the Kingdom: "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom" (Matthew 13:19). A listening ear hears the Word of the Kingdom and understands it in such a way so as to bear fruit, even much fruit.

"And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit, and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty." (Matthew 13:23)

However, it is not merely listening to words. It is taking the words, understanding them and receiving them in the heart. The heart must be the good soil.

"And the {seed} in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance." (Luke 8:15)

These few words sum up the path of the disciple of the Kingdom: hearing with the ear, planting in the heart, holding fast to what has been planted, watering it with the Word, persevering through the time of trial (drought, rain, wind) and bearing fruit to the glory of God. Bearing fruit to the glory of God proves that a believer is a son of the Kingdom who will be rewarded with the inheritance of the Kingdom and who will reign with Christ in the coming Kingdom as a son of God. And He

answered and said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, and the field is the world; and {as for} the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom." (Matthew 13:37-38)

"Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear." (Matthew 13:43{ea}) This is the key to becoming a disciple of the Kingdom of Heaven-an ear to hear, and an honest and good heart. How much more important is this matter of hearing as we see the Day approaching? A Disciple Is An Encourager A disciple is not only one who hears and learns but one who speaks with all graciousness. The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of disciples, that I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. (Isaiah 50:4) Was this not our Lord Jesus? After all, He was the One who came for the afflicted, the downtrodden, the sick, the blind, the lame. He called ones to come unto Him and He would give rest to weary souls. Is He not the One today who continues to give His people a word in season to encourage and lift up weary souls? He is the good Shepherd, and the Shepherd knows His sheep and knows what they need to hear. He is the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls (1 Peter 2:25NKJ). He sustains His people with His living Word. He is the Word of God, and what comes from His mouth to His weary ones is meant to sustain and keep them.

True disciples of Christ are encouragers as the Lord Jesus is an encourager. We need the tongue of disciples so that we can give a sustaining word to our weary brethren. With so many things happening in the world today and particularly amongst believers, there is a vital necessity for those who can give a sustaining word, an encouraging word to lift up the heart of a weary brother or sister. Encouragement comes through love and grace.

All of the Lord's people are called to be disciples. This is our calling. As disciples, we must be encouragers to others. Are you daily seeking the Lord, listening for His voice to give you a word for a brother or sister in the Lord or someone lost in the world that the Holy Spirit may bring into your path that day?

Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble. (Isaiah 35:3) Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing. (1 Thessalonians 5:11) But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:13)

We all are exhorted to encourage one another. This is one of the greatest needs of the day and one vital responsibility of every disciple. It is to be done day after day. In this way, the body is built up in love. The writer of the Hebrew letter has left us a word that is more relevant today than when it was first penned.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:23-25)

What is the confession of our hope? The Lord is coming again! How do we know? Because He is faithful! What are we to do? Stimulate one another to love and good deeds, encouraging one another as we meet together. But notice that the Holy Spirit added an extra admonition that would take on greater importance to disciples living in the last of the last days. We are exhorted to do these things all the more as we see the Day approaching or drawing near. It is significant that this

exhortation is to you, not to the collective we. In other words, every disciple of Christ has a responsibility in this matter of encouraging, more so as you see the Day approaching. This requires every disciple to be looking for the Day. What is the Day? It is the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ when He comes for His people and to judge this world. This is the Day in which He will take the scepter of the Kingdom and begin to rule over this earth. A disciple of the Kingdom is looking for the Day and encouraging all the more. A Disciple Is Not Disobedient

Referring once again to Isaiah, we discover that, prophetically speaking, the Lord Jesus was not disobedient to what He heard from the Father. There was a goal set before Him and nothing could cause Him to turn from this goal. The Lord GOD has opened My ear; and I was not disobedient, nor did I turn back. (Isaiah 50:5)

Throughout the book of John, we find the Lord Jesus stressed over and over again that He did nothing apart from the Father. He heard what the Father was saying and He obeyed. He was perfect in His obedience.

"I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." (John 5:30)

All true disciples of Christ know that they must follow in their Master's footsteps. How can a disciple do anything apart from the Lord?

"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing." (John 15:5) In other words, a disciple is one who obeys. But it is actually more than this. As our Lord said, "I was not disobedient." We find a very similar word from our brother Paul: "Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19).

Testifying before King Agrippa, Paul could say that he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision that was given to him on the road to Damascus. To the end of his life, Paul did not disobey what he saw and what he was called to do in preaching the Kingdom of God and proclaiming the whole purpose of God. As disciples, we too are called not to be disobedient to what we have seen and heard. It is through obedience that a disciple enters the coming Reign of the Heavens. A Disciple Takes Up His Cross

Obedience requires the cross to be worked in a disciple's life. The Lord's cross was uniquely His cross to bear. No man could bear the sin of the world except the Son, made perfect forever (Hebrews 7:28). But Jesus commanded all who desire to be His disciples to take up their cross. And He was saying to {them} all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." (Luke 9:23)

"If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." (Luke 14:26-27) "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." (Matthew 10:38)

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." (Matthew 16:24)

If a disciple is to be worthy of the Lord, then he must be willing to give up his own life, deny himself, take up his own cross and follow the Lord. For the disciple, the cross is a one-time act that continues every day of a disciple's life. It is a demand for a complete laying down of one's life to follow the One who is the one true love of the life of a disciple. Instead of a self-centered life, the disciple lives a Christ-centered life: For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain (Php 1:21). The cross means that the Lord Jesus is first in a disciple's love. All other loves take second place. It is a demand for a heart fully given to the Master: "So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions" (Luke 14:33).

Unfortunately, when the Lord Jesus walked on this earth, there were those who found His words too difficult and they no longer walked with Him.

"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him." (John 6:54-56)

Many therefore of His disciples, when they heard this said, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?" (John 6:60)

"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." (John 6:63) As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore. (John 6:66)

Why were these words so difficult? Because they demanded all of a disciple's life! A disciple is one who is consumed with a passion for his Lord and Savior. A disciple is one who can only live as he takes in the Lord's life. Jesus becomes his drink and food, his sustenance in this life. He cannot live without the Lord Jesus. As Paul said, It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me (Galatians 2:20 b). Nothing of this earth matters, for a disciple is seeking for that heavenly city where the throne of God and of the Lamb will reside forever (Revelation 22:3). When a disciple takes up his cross, he is leaving all the things of the world behind, pressing on toward the heavenly goal in Christ and never looking back (Luke 9:62; Php 3:13-14): "Nor did I turn back" (Isaiah 50:5). This is a true disciple of Christ. A Disciple Is A Lover

Finally, and most importantly, a disciple is to be a lover. Intimately joined to the cross is love, for love is expressed through the cross: For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16). Without love, there would have been no cross, for here we see the greatest expression of love the world has ever known or will ever know. The Lord expressed His love through the cross, and every disciple who takes up his cross is to express this same kind of love. Our Lord commands such love.

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35) The first and foremost requirement of a disciple is to love. This love comes from a love for our Lord: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). From this heart for the Lord goes forth love for brothers and sisters in Christ. If we love one another as Christ has commanded and in the way that He loved us (a life laid down), then the world will see the love of God manifested in "one another."

"Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and {that} your joy may be made full. This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:9-13)

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (1 John 3:16) A disciple must abide in Christ and abide in His love. In this way, the world will see that we are disciples of Christ, just as the early church pioneers were seen as Christians by unbelievers in Antioch (Acts 11:26). God is love and this is the very foundation of being a disciple. Disciples are to be vessels of His love and grace. Love and grace cannot be separated because our Lord Jesus is full of grace, for of His fulness we have all received, and grace upon grace (John 1:16). Love leads a disciple to continue in grace and to give grace to the brethren (Acts 13:43; Ephesians 4:29). This is the walk of a disciple of Christ, a disciple of the Kingdom of Heaven. If we trod the path of a true disciple, it will lead us into the coming Kingdom of our Lord, the Reign of the Heavens. In many respects, this is not an easy path to follow. There are many obstacles and hindrances. But we have been given the Word of God and the Holy Spirit who can lead us in the way in which we are to go. As we yield to the Person of the Holy Spirit, the life of the Lord Jesus will be formed in us (Galatians 4:19). Our Lord's life will lead us as a disciple. We will listen; we will learn; we will obey; we will die to self; we will encourage; and we will love as our Lord loves. By this all men will know that you are My disciples-a disciple of the Kingdom of Heaven!

## Part X4.1 - The Reign Of The Heavens

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Come Into The Reign Of The Heavens The Scriptures present many truths pertaining to the path that must be walked by a disciple of the Kingdom. With this in mind, seven Scriptures specifically refer to the disciple's entrance into the Reign of the Heavens. As recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, the Lord Jesus went up on a mountain and taught His disciples about the Kingdom; more specifically, He taught them about the principles of entering the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 5:1-48; Matthew 6:1-34; Matthew 7:1-29). Most likely, when people see the phrase the kingdom of heaven, they think of coming under the rule of Christ when He sets up His Kingdom over this earth in the coming age, and they think that only those who are saved will be under His rule. However, this cannot be the meaning of entering the Kingdom, for everyone, whether angels or men, in heaven and on the earth and under the earth, will be under the rule of Christ, whether they want to be or do not want to be. They will have no choice in the matter because God has set His King (Psalms 2:6; Hebrews 1:1-9).

Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Php 2:9-11) In that day, no matter who a person is or where a person is, he will be under the rule of Christ. All will bow their knee to Jesus Christ and confess that He is Lord. If a person is a Gentile, a Jew or a Christian, he will be under the rule of Christ. If a person is in outer darkness, he will be under the rule of Christ (Matthew 8:12; Matthew 22:13; Matthew 25:30). If a person is in the fire of Gehenna (Matthew 5:22; Matthew 5:29-30; Matthew 18:8-9), he will be under the rule of Christ. If a person remains in the grave awaiting the second death, he will be under the rule of Christ (Revelation 20:5). Even Satan, who will be bound and cast into the pit for 1,000 years, will be under the rule of Christ (Revelation 20:2-3). Why? Because in that day, the Lord shall be King over all the earth (Zechariah 14:9). All authority has been given to Him in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). He even holds the keys of death and Hades (Revelation 1:18). This authority is a reality to God today, but it has not been manifested in its fulness because the world continues to lie in the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19). In the day of His Kingdom, this authority will be manifested and it will be absolute. There will be only one Lord and one Name that will have absolute authority in heaven and on earth: For He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet (1 Corinthians 15:25). But even when all the enemies of God have been subdued, it is only the beginning of the endless ages: Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end (Isaiah 9:7NKJ). Of His reign there will be no end; or as one translation puts it, There is no frontier that He has not conquered (Luke 1:33). There will be nothing outside the sphere of His rule. He is Lord of all. He is the King!

However, if, in exhorting us to enter His Kingdom, the Lord merely meant that we are to come under His rule as everyone, whether they are lost or saved, will one day, then why would He exhort us to enter into His Kingdom? There must be a greater meaning attached to the Lord's words. He was calling His disciples when He was on earth and He is calling His disciples today

through His written Word to enter into His Kingdom, even to be worthy to enter His Kingdom. As emphasized previously, the answer to this question is found in understanding the meaning of the phrase the kingdom of heaven. Unfortunately, in translating the New Testament from the Greek to English, the meaning of words and phrases often are lost or diminished. The words can seem sort of static. The kingdom of heaven is one of those phrases that loses some of its original meaning, leaving people wondering what it really means. The kingdom of heaven is best translated as the reign of the heavens. The word reign implies some form of action, and the heavens implicates where the action is occurring. Perhaps it would be best to paraphrase this term as reigning in the heavenly places or reigning from the heavenly places.

It also has been shown that God has a principle in ruling over His places of dominion-the heavens do rule. In other words, the rule over any place in God's universe comes from the heavenly realm associated with that place of dominion. It is the heavens that rule over God's provinces such as earth. This principle did not change with the first advent of our Lord and it will not change with His Second Advent either. God's principles have been set and will not change.

Thus, when the Lord and His apostles exhort us to enter the Kingdom, we are being exhorted to be found worthy to rule or reign with Christ from the heavenly realm associated with this earth during His millennial Kingdom. It is not a question of being under His rule in that day; it is a question of being above and ruling with Christ in the heavenly places. We are exhorted to come into the Reign of the Heavens. So that we do not lose this perspective, the Reign of the Heavens will be used throughout this chapter in place of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Now, let us turn to the Scriptures for the specific references about entering the Reign of the Heavens. As we will see, these Scriptures are exhortations to Christians.

### Born Again And Born Of Water

First, we need to be clear that the Reign of the Heavens is not in view for the lost. Not until a person is saved is the Kingdom offered to an individual. Once a person is saved, then the Kingdom is to come into view and the Christian is to diligently seek to enter the Kingdom through a life of faithfulness and fruit-bearing. The Lord Jesus gave us the way to see and to enter the Kingdom.

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:3; John 3:5-6{ea}) The first step to the Kingdom is to be born again, to be born of the Spirit. We must become a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) and receive eternal life (John 3:16) as a free gift (Ephesians 2:5; Ephesians 2:8), based on the work of Christ who died once for all the sin of the world. The work of redemption is finished (John 19:30). There is no more work to be done to bring eternal life to the lost. All we must do is believe on the work that was done by Another (Christ) on our behalf (Acts 16:30-31). When we do believe, our eyes are to be opened to what lies ahead. There is a purpose for our creation and for our redemption and it is to reign, to have dominion (Genesis 1:26; Hebrews 2:6-8). Without the new birth, we cannot see nor can we enter into the Reign of the Heavens. The new creation in Christ is the beginning of a new view, and that is the Kingdom that is set before us. When we are

born again and see the Kingdom set before us, then we must be water baptized (believer's immersion in water) into Christ (Romans 6:3-6; Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21) and begin walking in the newness of life as we are led by the Holy Spirit. This is what "born of water and the Spirit" means. Thus, baptism is a very important step for the believer who wants to seriously and diligently seek after the Kingdom. In fact, water baptism of believers is essential to come into the Reign of the Heavens.

#### Unless Your Righteousness

It is fitting that the book of Matthew is the first book in the New Testament because it was written with one perspective—the Reign of the Heavens and its coming King. Much of what is contained in Matthew was spoken by Jesus to the nation of Israel. He came to save the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 15:24) by offering them the Reign of the Heavens. With their Messiah, the King of the Jews, standing in their midst, the leaders of Israel rejected not only the offer of the Kingdom but also the very King who was offering them the Kingdom. If they had received Him, Israel would have received the right to enter into the Reign of the Heavens and rule with their King from the heavenly realm. The offer of the Kingdom was taken from Israel and presented to a new nation (the one new man, the new creation in Christ) that is called to bear the fruit of the Kingdom (Matthew 21:43). The Lord Jesus turned His view from the Crown (reigning) to the Cross (dying for the sin of the world). Also, as recorded in Matthew 16:18, Jesus pointed ahead to the new creation, His Church, that only He will build. It is this new creation that is now being offered the Reign of the Heavens to rule from the heavenly realm.

However, the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable (Romans 11:29). In the Kingdom Age, Israel will be restored as a nation and reign on earth as the head of the nations with Christ seated upon the throne of David (Luke 1:32). God has made a covenant with Israel that they will possess the land. So, although they lost the right to reign in the heavenly realm of the Kingdom, they will reign but it will be in the earthly realm during the coming millennial Kingdom. They will be healed as a nation and their sins forgiven. They will see the One whom they crucified, mourn and repent for their transgressions (Zechariah 12:10-14; Revelation 1:7). In that day, Israel will be fully restored and the nations of the earth will be blessed through them (Jeremiah 33:6-26; Ezekiel 37:21-28; Ezekiel 39:21; Ezekiel 39:29).

Although much of Matthew was spoken to Israel, once they rejected the offer of the Kingdom, the words spoken by Jesus became applicable to the new nation that came forth from Calvary. Thus Matthew, with all its exhortation and encouragement, is written to Christians; and we must heed the words of our Lord regarding the Reign of the Heavens. If Israel could be disqualified for their unbelief, then Christians can be disqualified from entering the Kingdom in the Day of Christ. From Matthew 5:1-48 through 7, the Lord spoke to His disciples about entrance into the Kingdom as well as exclusion from the Kingdom. These chapters are often called the Sermon on the Mount, for the Lord sat on a mountain and taught His disciples with a view to the Kingdom. Matthew 5:20 could be called the summation of all that He taught. [Please keep in mind that the Sermon on the Mount is not to the lost but to the saved (to those who have applied the blood); and it is not in reference to eternal salvation but to entrance into or exclusion from reigning in the coming Kingdom.]

"For I say to you, that if your righteousness may not abound above that of the scribes and Pharisees, ye may not enter to the reign of the heavens." (Matthew 5:20YLT {ea}) The scribes and

the Pharisees had a righteousness derived from the Law. Paul, who was circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews and, as to the Law, was a Pharisee, stated that he was found blameless as to the righteousness which is in the Law (see Php 3:5-6). However, after his conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul's perspective on righteousness changed. Paul desired to be found in Christ, not having a righteousness of his own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith (Php 3:9). What the Law could not do, God has done in His Son. When we believe on the Lord Jesus, Christ becomes our righteousness before God. God no longer sees our filthy rags of unrighteousness but He sees His Son who is the Righteous One (Jeremiah 23:6 b; Acts 22:14; 1 John 2:1). By God's own doing we are placed in Christ who became for us wisdom from God-and righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30). We become the righteousness of God in Him (Romans 5:19; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Without the righteousness of Christ, no man can stand before God. The good news is that all who believe in Christ receive the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.

However, once a person is saved and receives the imputed righteousness of Christ (Romans 4:22-25), there is a necessity placed on the new creation to practice righteousness (1 John 2:29; 1 John 3:7; 1 John 3:10; Revelation 22:11). Paul wrote, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?" (1 Corinthians 6:9). Just as He is holy, we are to be holy (1 Peter 1:16). In like manner, He is righteous and we are to live righteously.

Now, the Pharisees had a righteousness before men, but this righteousness led them to be excluded from the Kingdom. They were right in their own eyes; but they were blind and they became the blind leading the blind and they all fell into a pit (Matthew 15:14). But we too are warned through the words of our Lord as He spoke through John to the church in Laodicea (which represents the church on earth when He returns).

'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and {that} the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eyesalve to anoint your eyes, that you may see.' (Revelation 3:17-18).

Nakedness and blindness go together. Blindness speaks of a self-righteousness: "We are all right. We have no needs. We are wealthy; our teaching is right; our methods are sound; our doctrines are all correct." Nakedness speaks of a lack of righteous acts. When Adam sinned, he found himself, along with Eve, naked (Genesis 3:10). When He receives His people in the air and sets up His judgment seat, the Lord, as God's Judge, will judge His people according to what they have done (2 Corinthians 5:10). Those who will be chosen out from the called will rise up to reign with Him as His Bride.

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright {and} clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. (Revelation 19:7-8) The Bride will be clothed with the wedding garment that is fine linen, the righteous acts of the saints. In other words, it is the righteous acts done while in the body that will commend and bring approval to a Christian in the Day of Judgment and the receiving of reward.

Why is righteousness so important? Because the Reign of the Heavens is the reign of righteousness (Isaiah 9:7; Matthew 5:10; Matthew 6:33; Romans 14:17). Thus, we not only need the imputed righteousness of Christ to enter the Kingdom but we also need the practical righteousness (right behavior) that will be rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ. This is the type of righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees.

### Enter By The Narrow Gate

"Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it." (Matthew 7:13-14)

There is an entrance into the Kingdom, but it is a narrow entrance. Again, we need to be reminded that this exhortation is not to the lost and the saved together, as if the lost go the wide way and the saved go the narrow way. The lost have no entrance into the Kingdom, so they are not in view. Many Christians probably prefer a broad, wide way into the Kingdom. After all, a broad way means that there is a lot of room to do what we want and not be held accountable for our actions. But the Scriptures are very clear that we will be held accountable and that there is a right way to enter the Kingdom and it is only through a narrow gate. In the Greek, the wide or broad way means that the way is like "an open square" or "a spacious place." In other words, it is wide open to go in any direction one desires. There are no constraints. The person can wander aimlessly in the spacious place with no restraint on what is done. On the other hand, the narrow way is surrounded by things that press the person into the Kingdom. There are restraints and conditions. There are spiritual battles, trials, tribulations and persecutions that press on the person. There are demands on the flesh to exercise self-control. In Luke, a parallel verse adds another dimension to this entrance.

"Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able." (Luke 13:24) The word strive comes from the Greek word agonizomai from which we get our English word agonize. It means that Christians are to strain every muscle of their being to enter the Kingdom. This narrow entrance is likened to a race to be won. We are to cast aside every weight and encumbrance that might hinder us from running the race of the faith and figuratively squeeze ourselves through this narrow gate. Anything that is of no value in running this race is to be cast aside so that we can press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Hebrews 12:1-2; Php 3:7-14).

Both Paul and Jude used the word agonizomai to encourage and exhort the saints to strive in this race or this good contest of the faith (1 Corinthians 9:25; 1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 4:7; Jude 1:3). There is a prize awaiting all that finish the race according to the rules (2 Timothy 2:5). It is like an athletic contest with a prize given to the winner. Christians are in such a contest. But every contest requires diligence and effort on the part of the participant. Christians cannot be lazy and slothful in their walk with the Lord. There must be a striving and a diligence on the part of every believer. In 2 Peter 1:5-11, we are exhorted to be diligent to build and add to our faith in such a way that we will have an abundant entrance into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Striving (agonizing), being pressed in on all sides is the only way that a Christian will enter the Kingdom. Our flesh must be pressed into obedience; our wills must be pressed into the will of God; our desires must be pressed into the desires of our Lord; our views must be pressed into a view of

the Kingdom and Glory. There is no other way.

### Obedience To The Will Of God

"Not everyone who is saying to me, 'Lord, lord,' shall come into the reign of the heavens; but he who is doing the will of my Father who is in the heavens." (Matthew 7:21YLT {ea})

Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" (Matthew 7:22-23)

Prior to His exhortation to enter by the narrow gate, the Lord warned the disciples to beware of false prophets (Matthew 7:15). He warned that they would be known by their fruits. Why would the Lord warn about false prophets at this point? Because false prophets (who are apostate Christians, ones who have fallen away from where they once stood) lead other Christians away from the narrow gate which leads into the Kingdom. They draw people to follow them through a false or leavened message pertaining to the Word of the Kingdom. In other words, they teach a false message of the Kingdom that bears bad fruit that brings no glory to God but causes others to bear bad fruit as well. They lead other Christians to fall away from the narrow way into the Kingdom and, in the end, not to enter it.

These apostates are like the Pharisees whom the Lord called hypocrites.

"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from men; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in." (Matthew 23:13)

They knew the way into the Kingdom, but they rejected the way and prevented the nation of Israel from entering, as well. Except for a remnant, the entire nation failed to enter into the Kingdom being offered by their Messiah. It is important to keep in mind that the scribes and Pharisees were within the nation. They were sons of the Kingdom (Matthew 8:12), and these sons caused the falling away. Throughout the history of Israel, there were false prophets and teachers who were Israelites. The greatest danger to Israel was from within. The greatest danger to the church today is from within!

Now, there is a common teaching that says that false prophets/teachers are lost and the way to tell if a person is saved is to look at their fruit, whether it is good or bad fruit. This is not what the Lord taught His disciples nor does He teach this to us either. According to the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:1-58, only believers can bear fruit. The lost are in no position to bear fruit, good or bad, because the Kingdom is not in view for them and fruit-bearing is in reference only to the Kingdom. The Word of the Kingdom is sown amongst Christians, and where they are sown (by the wayside, on stony places, amongst the thorns, on good ground) is based on whether they hear the Word, understand it and bear fruit. Of the four types of Christians, only one type bears fruit to the glory of God. They understand the Word of the Kingdom and are entering by the narrow gate. The apostate teaching of today is doing the very same thing. A false system is taught which says that fruit-bearing is a sign of eternal salvation. Eternal salvation is never based on works, for by grace you are saved through faith, that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9, also Romans 11:6). The false system says that all Christians bear

good fruit and the lost bear bad fruit. Ultimately, this thinking leads Christians from the truth that there will be Christians who will appear at the judgment seat of Christ and have no good works (fruit) to their account (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). Wrongly dividing the Word in this fashion leads people to be lazy and slothful in their Christian life (Matthew 7:13-14). They seek for the wide gate. The apostates bear fruit to their own glory and cause other Christians to fall away from the faith and bear no fruit. This is the basis for the Lord's warning. The Lord continued His warning to His disciples. He warned that Christians can do things in the name of the Lord but not be doing the will of the Lord. This is a most serious matter. Christians are being offered the reward of occupying positions of power and authority in the coming Kingdom but many in that day will be rejected. The Lord will say, "I never knew you; depart from Me."

It must be stated once again that this is not in reference to eternal salvation. Those rejected are not the lost. They are the saved because the Lord is warning in reference to entering His Kingdom. In addition, no one can say "Lord" apart from the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3). The lost do not have a revived spirit and cannot know the things of the Spirit. Jesus is not the Lord of the unsaved and they cannot so make the claim. Also, the way the Greek is worded in this verse indicates that those who say "Lord, Lord" expect the Lord to give them a positive answer. He gives them just the opposite of what they expect. The Lord truly will know those He rejects for He knows the hearts of all men (John 2:24-25). He will reject them as not knowing them in reference to their works. The works for which these Christians will be seeking approval will not have been done according to the will of God. Only those who do the will of His Father will be counted worthy to enter the Reign of the Heavens. This should cause all Christians to pause and meditate on their works.

Note that the Lord will acknowledge in that day that these individuals did prophesy, did cast out demons and did perform miracles, but they were not done according to the will of God. How can this be? There is only one other source of this type of power and it comes from the ruler of this world, Satan. Instead of being sons of the Kingdom, some Christians will become sons of disobedience, tares amongst the wheat (Matthew 13:38; Matthew 23:15; Ephesians 2:2; Ephesians 5:6; 1 John 3:8). They will perform signs and wonders as if it is of the Lord, but it is of the devil. The Lord has left us His word regarding the entrance into the Kingdom. It is by doing not only the will of the Father but doing the will of the Son as well. In Luke we find an equivalent verse to Matthew 7:24-27.

"And why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? "Everyone who comes to Me, and hears My words, and acts upon them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation upon the rock; and when a flood rose, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who has heard, and has not acted {accordingly,} is like a man who built a house upon the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great." (Luke 6:46-49)

It is not enough to give the Lord lip service by saying "Lord, Lord." We might think that if we call Him Lord then we are in a good place, as if His name is a "good luck charm." But no; the Lord warns us that we must hear His Word and we must act upon His Word. Lord means that He is in charge of our lives and that we are truly living under His authority and rule. If we do not act upon His Word, then we are like a foolish man who builds on sand. We are not under His Lordship. In

the Day of Judgment, all that we built and did in His name but not according to His will will be destroyed in the fire of judgment. It will collapse in a heap of ashes (1 Corinthians 3:13-15). We are to build according to the written Word of God. We are to hear Him in His Word and act upon what the Spirit reveals in the Scriptures. This is how we are to build in His name. God demands obedience to His will. There is no other way into the Kingdom. With Peter, we find a good example of such action outside the will of God. Peter had been given the revelation that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God; but when the Lord told the disciples that He was going to suffer and be killed, Peter rebuked Him. The Lord turned to Peter and said to him, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" (Matthew 16:23NKJ). There are some who teach that Satan himself was standing there, but this is not what the Word reveals. The Lord said these words to Peter. Why? Because he was speaking as a son of disobedience. If we do things in the name of the Lord and yet we are not doing the will of God, then we are disobedient. In that day, he will say, "Depart from Me," just as He rebuked Peter to get behind Him.

However, do not let this lead to despair. Just as Peter was restored when he denied the Lord, so Christians will be if they confess their sins to the great High Priest (Hebrews 7:25) and appropriate the blood for forgiveness of sins and cleansing from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Thank God for the precious blood of the Lamb which is incorruptible, imperishable (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Become Like A Child And Jesus having called near a child, did set him in the midst of them, and said, "Verily I say to you, if ye may not be turned and become as the children, ye may not enter into the reign of the heavens; whoever then may humble himself as this child, he is the greater in the reign of the heavens." (Matthew 18:2-4YLT {ea}; also Luke 18:17)

Matthew and Luke tell us that our entrance into the reign is by becoming like a child. First, we must be converted (saved by grace through faith), and then we must approach the Kingdom like a child. It is like starting over. We come out of the world and we must be taught the way to enter the Kingdom. While we were in the world we were taught the ways of the world and we lived by them, walking by sight. However, just because we are saved does not mean that these ways have been routed out of us. On the contrary, they are still in us and will influence us. If we continue in these old ways, we will not learn the abundant entrance into the Kingdom. We must learn to walk by faith, not by sight. A child has the innocence of faith. Children do not know very much, so they depend on adults to lead the way. Children are also humble; knowing very little, they must be taught every step of the way. We must humble ourselves before God, acknowledging our poverty and our great need.

Happy the poor in spirit-because theirs is the reign of the heavens (Matthew 5:3YLT {ea}).

We must be totally dependent on the Holy Spirit to lead us and guide us in such a way that we will come into the Reign of the Heavens. As Paul wrote, the Kingdom is in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17) who is our Comforter and Teacher. The Spirit is the One who is searching for the Bride of Christ that will come out from the Body of Christ. We must come under His leadership like a child and be taught. In this way, we will enter the Kingdom. If we are humbled in this day, we will be exalted in the Day of Christ and we will be offered positions of power and authority as the Bride of Christ in His Kingdom. As Peter wrote, Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time (1 Peter 5:6). Who will be the greater in that Day? It

will be those who are humbled in this day. God is not after the exalted men of today; He is after the humbled men, those who are as dependent on the Lord and the Holy Spirit as the Lord Jesus was dependent on the Father and the Spirit when He walked this earth.

Hard For A Rich Man To Enter And Jesus said to His disciples, "Verily I say to you, that hardly shall a rich man enter into the reign of the heavens; and again I say to you, it is easier for a camel through the eye of a needle to go, than for a rich man into enter the reign of God." (Matthew 19:23-24YLT {ea}) [This verse is an example of where the Reign of the Heavens (Kingdom of Heaven) and the Reign of God (Kingdom of God) are one and the same.] In Matthew 6:21, the Lord said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." The Lord used a rich man as an example of entering the Kingdom to reveal the truth that our hearts must be set on the Kingdom in order to enter into it. If our treasure is on this earth, then entering the Kingdom will be a very difficult, if not impossible, task. The Lord instructed the disciples: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33NKJ). Paul exhorted the saints: "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2NKJ). This is the way for the saved to enter the Kingdom. In his letter to Timothy, Paul warned of Christians whose hearts will fall away from the faith due to the temptations of riches. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang. But flee from these things, you man of God; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance {and} gentleness. (1 Timothy 6:9-11) To enter the Reign of the Heavens we must flee such things. James wrote to converted Jews who were scattered abroad. These Christians had become rich and they were acting unrighteously toward the poor; therefore, James exhorted them over their sin.

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, {and} which has been withheld by you, cries out {against you} and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and put to death the righteous {man;} he does not resist you. Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. (James 5:1-9)

Behold, the Lord is coming! The Judge is standing right at the door. He is coming to judge the lives of His people. It is in the last days that His people will be storing up their riches. Their hearts are set on the earth and the things that will rot and be consumed in the fire of judgment.

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor

rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal." (Matthew 6:19-20) The Reign of the Heavens is set before every child of God. We must lay aside every encumbrance today so that we will abundantly enter the reign in the Day of our Lord. We have a heavenly calling, for this is where our reward is and this is where our treasure is.

Through Many Tribulations And after they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and {saying,} "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:21-22NAS {ea}) "Through many tribulations it behoveth us to enter the Reign of God." (Acts 14:22YLT {ea})

Finally, Paul went through great hardship as he preached the Kingdom throughout the known world of his day. He suffered to the point of being stoned (probably to death) and being revived. Following this experience, he made this statement about entering the Kingdom. In the Greek, the word tribulation has the meaning of "pressure." In other words, through many pressures, we must enter the Kingdom. As we seek to enter the Kingdom, we will experience all sorts of pressures-on our flesh, on our souls, on our very lives. At times, we might wonder if we will make it into the Kingdom. Paul and the others who co-labored with him experienced all of these pressures firsthand, and because of this, they continually prayed for those whom they had taught.

After they preached the gospel in Derbe, Paul and Barnabas returned to areas that they had previously visited to strengthen the souls of the disciples and encourage them to continue in the faith. Continuing in the faith is directly related to entering the Kingdom of God. In fact, throughout the Scriptures, where the faith is used, it generally refers to the mature knowledge of the Lord and His coming Kingdom (see the next two chapters). This is why Paul and Barnabas encouraged the disciples that the Kingdom is something that must be entered and that to enter it there is a need to continue in the faith. In other words, do not give up your hope. The Kingdom is coming; but until it comes, there will be much challenge. We must endure through these times, keeping our eyes set on the goal and the prize that lie ahead. This is very similar to a word we have already reviewed: "Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able" (Luke 13:24). The word strive implies that we are pressed on all sides-our flesh, our wills, our desires, our views. This is what Paul and Barnabas impressed upon the disciples. Through much pressure, much striving, we must enter the Kingdom. Tribulation is a suffering. There is no other way, for this is the path that our Lord walked.

Suffering and glory go hand in hand, just as the Kingdom and Glory go hand in hand. Thus, we must go through many tribulations to enter the Kingdom of God. This is the glorious experience of all those who have gone before us (2 Thessalonians 1:3-10; Hebrews 11:1-40).

Let us strive to come into the Reign of the Heavens!

## Part X5.1 - The Faith

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**The Faith** As we have seen, Paul and Barnabas strengthened the souls of the disciples that they had taught by encouraging them to continue in the faith (Acts 14:21-22). Throughout the New Testament, the apostles wrote of a very specific type of faith, the faith, which speaks of the coming Kingdom of God. Believers are to hold to the fundamental truths that are the foundation of the Christian faith; however, the faith encompasses all that is contained in the Word of the Kingdom and entering into the Reign of the Heavens. We need to understand the faith and come into all that it stands for in order to continue in it. The faith is essential and vital to pressing on toward the goal for the prize (Php 3:14). However, to understand the faith, we need to start with the Way.

**The Way** In the early church, the believers were identified as belonging to the Way (Acts 9:2; Acts 19:9; Acts 19:23; Acts 22:4; Acts 24:14; Acts 24:22), even before they were actually called Christians (Acts 11:26) by the world in Antioch. Starting with Pentecost, the church was made up of believing Jews who were identified as the Way because they were following a different way from the rest of the nation of Israel. In fact, the Jewish leaders looked upon the Way as a heretical way (a sect) that needed to be destroyed.

There was a zealous young Jew named Saul who set out to destroy the Way. He sought out Christians, bound them and brought them to Jerusalem. It is recorded that he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison (Acts 8:3). He even stood by and watched as Stephen, a man full of the Holy Spirit, who was of the Way, was stoned to death (Acts 7:58-59; Acts 8:1).

Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. (Acts 9:1-2) As he was on the road to Damascus to search out Christians, seeking to destroy the Way, Saul met his match. On the road, he was blinded by a bright light from heaven and heard the Lord Jesus speak to him: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Saul was persecuting the Body of Christ which was on earth with the Head, the Lord Jesus, in heaven. On that day, Saul ceased being a persecutor of the Way, changed course and began to follow a different way. Saul became Paul the apostle, a bondservant of Jesus Christ.

It is important to understand what was the central message of the Way and whom the Way was trying to reach with this message. When He came to this earth, the Lord Jesus came to save the lost sheep of the house of Israel. His primary mission was to offer the Kingdom of Heaven to the nation of Israel. However, they rejected the offer and the nation was excluded from receiving the Kingdom, even though Messiah was standing in their midst. Instead of receiving Him, the Jewish leaders rejected Him; they accused Him of doing acts by the power of Satan, which was blasphemy against the Holy Spirit; and they concluded their rejection by demanding that He be crucified. Ultimately, because of their unbelief, they were cut off from the Kingdom. On the other hand, those of the Way believed the message of Messiah. They received the offer of the Kingdom.

Although the nation had rejected the offer, those of the Way continued to preach to the nation of Israel in hope of them accepting the message. They knew that Israel will be restored one day and that the Lord's return to this earth will be connected with their restoration. The Kingdom is the central message of the book of Acts, for it starts with the Lord Jesus speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3); and it ends with Paul under house arrest in Rome, preaching the Kingdom of God (Acts 28:16; Acts 28:30-31). At least in part, the Lord's message on the Kingdom pertained to Israel being restored at a much later time. As He was about to ascend to heaven, the disciples whom Jesus taught asked Him, "Lord, will You at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?" Jesus answered, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority" (Acts 1:6-7NKJ). There was a clear understanding that a day would come when the Kingdom would be restored to the nation of Israel that had rejected the offer of the Kingdom when their Messiah stood in their midst.

We must understand that the message was about the Kingdom, not about eternal salvation. In other words, those of the Way continued to offer the Kingdom to Israel, just as Jesus had offered it to them. After a time, it was evident that Israel was not going to accept the offer, so the offer was made to Christians who were mostly of Gentile background, although there was a remnant who were of Jewish background (Romans 11:5). At the end of Acts, Paul tried to reason with the Jews, but many would not listen. Finally, he declared: "For the heart of this people has become dull, and with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I should heal them. Let it be known to you therefore, that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen." [And when he had spoken these words, the Jews departed, having a great dispute among themselves.] (Acts 28:27-29). From then on, Paul took the message entrusted to him by the Lord to the Gentiles.

It is very important that we understand that the message Paul preached was more than eternal salvation; it was about the Kingdom. And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters, and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered. (Acts 28:30-31)

Once the lost were saved (Jews or Gentiles), the message to them turned from the gospel of the grace of God (eternal salvation) to the central message of the New Testament, the Kingdom of Heaven. Contrary to the method used in the church today (continual messages which relate to and expand upon the gospel of the grace of God), the early church preached to get people saved (eternal destiny) and then preached to them on the Kingdom (millennial Kingdom Age) to prepare them to enter into the coming Kingdom of their Lord and Savior. They lived with an expectation that the Lord truly was coming back at any time.

If there is one message that needs to be recovered today, it is this one message of the coming Kingdom. We need hearts prepared and longing for the return of our beloved Lord!

PreachingTheFaith And I was {still} unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy." And they were glorifying God because of me. (Galatians 1:22-24{ea}) In his epistles to the churches, Paul used a very specific term, that is, the faith. Saul who persecuted the Way became Paul who began to preach the faith (e.g., Romans 1:5NKJ; Ephesians 4:13; Php

1:27; Colossians 1:23; Colossians 2:7NKJ; 1 Timothy 3:9; 1 Timothy 3:13; 1 Timothy 6:10; 1 Timothy 6:12; 1 Timothy 6:21; 2 Timothy 3:8; 2 Timothy 4:7). As we will see, it was not just faith but the faith, a particular kind of faith associated with a specific message.

Now, many Christians probably view the faith as merely a set of fundamental doctrines held by most believers, such as the virgin birth, the atonement, justification by faith, etc. Some might call these doctrines the mainstream doctrines of most fundamental Christian churches which are readily accepted and widely taught and held in Christendom today. The faith does refer to a particular set of Biblical truths but not to the fundamental doctrines (which are correct and true) so widely taught and held. When faith is preceded by the article "the," it means that this is a particular type of faith. It has a specific meaning. It is more than believing in Jesus as Savior, resulting in eternal salvation. The faith is not separate from the gospel of the grace of God, for a Christian's new life begins at this point. However, the faith deals with growing up with a view to what is coming; with going from immaturity to maturity, from milk to meat.

It deals with the goal of our salvation, the purpose for God creating us and then saving us. It deals with God's eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus. It is a mystery revealed (1 Timothy 3:9). It is something of which we are to lay hold; for which we are to fight (2 Timothy 4:7), to strive (Php 1:27) and to contend (Jude 1:3). It is something which we are to enter (Acts 14:22; 2 Corinthians 13:5); it is something we can reject or deny (1 Timothy 1:19; 1 Timothy 5:8); it is something from which we can fall away, wander, fall or stray (1 Timothy 4:1; 1 Timothy 6:10; 1 Timothy 6:21). A search of the Scriptures using a Greek text will reveal that the term the faith is used at least fifty times. Unfortunately, some of the translators of the modern Bibles in use today dropped the from the faith.

Then, what is the faith? The faith was Paul's expression for the Way. Just as those of the Way were looking toward the coming Kingdom, so are those who hold the faith. Thus, the two expressions have the same thing in view—the coming Kingdom and all that is associated with the Kingdom. But it is more than merely accepting that the Lord Jesus will return one day. Many Christians, when questioned, acknowledge that He will return. The real issue is whether we are looking for and longing for the return of the Lord and living with a view to the coming Kingdom; holding fast to the faith; not being moved from the faith, even if the rest of the church has fallen away from the faith. Another way of explaining this is that the faith is firmly believing in the Word of the Kingdom and walking in a manner worthy of the God who calls us into His own Kingdom and Glory (1 Thessalonians 2:12). In other words, the faith is holding to a view of the King and His coming Kingdom and walking in a way that reflects this view. In the letter to the Hebrews, we discover an excellent example of saints of old who held to the faith by holding to a view of the heavenly city, even a better country, a heavenly one. By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign {land} dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised; therefore, also, there was born of one man, and him as good as dead at that, {as many descendants} as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and

having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that {country} from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better {country} that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:8-16{ea})

Those who are looking for what lies ahead are ones who are walking by faith and believing in God's future promises. Nothing, absolutely nothing, will distract one who sees himself as an alien (sojourner, pilgrim) on this earth. Why? Because he sees the goal that is set before him and he presses on toward this goal, and this goal is the millennial Kingdom of our Lord. This is what the faith is all about. Will He FindTheFaith When He Returns?

Paul was not alone in the use of the faith. In the book of Acts, Luke wrote of priests being obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7). Peter exhorted the sojourners and pilgrims to be steadfast in the faith (1 Peter 5:9NKJ). Jude exhorted the called ones to contend earnestly for the faith (Jude 1:3). But most importantly, the Lord Jesus used the term Himself.

"I say to you, that He will execute the justice to them quickly; but the Son of Man having come, shall He find the faith upon the earth?" (Luke 18:8YLT {ea}) [In many translations, the article "the" is left out; but in the original Greek text, it reads "the faith."] The Lord Jesus looked ahead to a time 2,000 years in the future and asked this question in reference to the faith. The Son of Man is His Messianic title, so it refers to His coming to take the scepter of the Kingdom of this world (Revelation 11:15). In other words, when He comes to sit upon His throne, will His people, the people of the Way, be holding to the faith? Will their way truly be different? Will they be holding fast to a particular belief? Will they be longing for and eagerly waiting for His appearing? Will they be living with a view toward His coming Kingdom? Will they have grown up to be placed as sons in His Kingdom and be found worthy to be His Bride to reign with Him? The manner in which the Greek is worded in this question demands a negative answer to the question. Jesus was saying that when He returns as the Son of Man, He will not find the faith being taught or held by most Christians. The leaven that the woman placed in the three measures of meal will have done its work completely by the time He returns. The teaching and understanding of the Word of the Kingdom will be leavened (Matthew 13:33). Although many might not state so outwardly, there will be many who in their hearts will be saying: "Where is the promise of His coming? My Master delays, so I will live as I want."

We are living in the last of the last days right before the return of our beloved Lord. Midnight is almost upon us when the judgment of the Church begins, followed by the judgment of Israel and the Gentile nations. The leaves of the fig tree have come out (rebirth of the nation of Israel) and this generation will not pass away until they see the Son of Man return (Matthew 24:32-35). The Son of Man will not be looking for a general faith in reference to holding a general belief in Him or holding to sound Biblical doctrine pertaining to the fundamentals. The Lord is coming back when the faith is not being held. This is not to imply in any manner that holding to the fundamentals is wrong. Quite the contrary; Christians must hold to the basic beliefs surrounding the gospel of grace. They are essential. But the Lord is after maturity in His people. Christians are not to remain babes in Christ but are to grow up and be readied for His Kingdom. There are Biblical truths that a

Christian must be taught that deal with themature knowledge of Christ; this leads the individual to live in such a manner that he will be counted worthy to enter the Kingdom and reign with Christ as His Bride. The Lord knew what was ahead for His people; and He knew that as His return approaches, there will be many Christians who will not be ready and waiting for His return. He will not find the faith amongst His people in the last days. Oh, in many respects, they might be holding on to correct Biblical doctrine, but are they truly holding to the faith in reference to His return and the coming Kingdom?

Now, some people might protest that the holding of the fundamentals is all that is needed. The fundamentals are good for babes in Christ; however, we are encouraged in the Word to grow up, to be spiritual men (1 Corinthians 3:1); to be partakers of solid food and not to remain on milk (1 Corinthians 3:2); to be complete in Christ (Colossians 1:28). Growing up pertains to the mature knowledge of the Word of God and this speaks loudly of the Reign of the Heavens. The writer to the Hebrews exhorted the brethren in Christ to grow up.

Concerning him we have much to say, and {it is} hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes {only} of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity. (Hebrews 5:11-14; Hebrews 6:1 a) The Hebrew letter was written as an exhortation, a warning to the holy brethren, the partakers of the heavenly calling (Hebrews 3:1). They were being warned not to neglect so great a salvation, which refers not to eternal salvation but to entering the age to come as one of the many sons who will be brought to glory (Hebrews 2:3; Hebrews 2:5). They were in great danger of not attaining the goal of the prize. They were being encouraged to press on to maturity for we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken (Hebrews 12:28), for here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking {the city} which is to come (Hebrews 13:14). The Lord is coming back for a people who are holding to the mature truth. He is coming for a mature bride, not a baby.

There is another most serious danger if we are holding to the fundamentals alone and not growing up with the meat of the Word. Most Christians know something of the Kingdom; however, it is often joined with the fundamentals. The problem is that the Word of the Kingdom can become so mixed and entangled with the fundamentals that the true message of the Kingdom is lost, even leavened or corrupted, resulting in a corruption of the fundamentals, as well. The fact of the matter is that this has occurred. For example, eternal salvation (a present possession, salvation of the spirit) is confused with inheriting the Kingdom (a future inheritance based on faithfulness, salvation of the soul). The result is that people are led to believe that they must work out their eternal salvation or else they will lose it. This is a most serious matter. The Scriptures warn that before the Lord returns, there will be a general apostasy in reference to the faith and this will lead to errors on many different fronts.

### Apostasy

Throughout the Scriptures, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, apostasy is a major issue. Even Israel faced apostasy from false prophets that rose from among the Israelites.

The early church was faced with false prophets and teachers; and we are warned that there will be a great falling away prior to the return of the Lord (Matthew 13:33; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; Revelation 3:14-18).

First, what does apostasy mean? The English word apostasy comes from two Greek words apo which means "from" and stasis which means "stand" or "standing." Putting the two words together, the Greek word apostasia is formed which means "standing away from." This implies that a person once stood on some particular ground and left that ground. Spiritually speaking, it means that a Christian moves away from a position once held. The person believed in some truth and turned from it to follow (and teach) something which is false. In Matthew 5:31-32, the Lord Jesus spoke about divorce. In the Greek, divorce comes from the same word apostasia (apostasion). In other words, divorce is "standing away from another person." A marriage is required for a divorce or a standing away to occur. In like manner, a person who stands away from the faith must have been associated with the faith in the first place; otherwise, the person would have nothing from which to fall away. The person must divorce himself from some previously held position or belief. A lost person is not on any ground from which to move, so the only people who can fall into apostasy are Christians. Only Christians can divorce themselves from the truth. We need to be absolutely clear on this point. When we speak of apostasy or the great falling away, we are speaking of something that occurs within Christendom and applies to Christians. The world has nothing to do with apostasy, for they are already on the wrong ground. In fact, the New Testament is filled with warnings to us today regarding this matter of apostasy. Let us begin with Paul, who for three years labored night and day with tears on behalf of the church in Ephesus. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. (Acts 20:29-31NKJ) The Holy Spirit must have revealed to Paul that, in spite of his best efforts, wolves would come in among them, not sparing the flock. Even worse, some of those that Paul had taught and who were standing before him were going to rise up, speaking perverse things (twisting, distorting the truth), drawing away the disciples to follow them. No wonder Paul continued to warn them night and day. He cried over them that they would be built up and come into the inheritance among all those who are sanctified (Acts 20:32). Paul did not shun to declare to them the whole counsel of God, starting with the gospel of the grace of God and proceeding to the Kingdom of God (Acts 20:24-27). Paul's exhortation was to watch (for the apostasy) and remember what he had taught (the faith). As he was about to depart this life, Paul wrote two letters to Timothy, his beloved son in the faith. Again, the Holy Spirit had expressly revealed to him that there would be apostasy in the latter times.

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons. (1 Timothy 4:1NKJ {ea}) The word depart comes from the Greek word apostasia. In other words, some Christians will fall away from the faith. How will this happen? They will be seduced by deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons. They will no longer listen to the truth of the gospel but will turn to that which is false. Oh, the doctrines may have some measure of light in them, but they have been twisted and perverted in some manner. Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14) who takes a little bit of truth and perverts it in subtle ways to lead the unsuspecting Christian into something that is dark. It may

sound good and even tickle the ear (2 Timothy 4:3), but don't be deceived; it is deception. In his day, Paul saw Christians falling away from the faith and he warned Timothy. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang. (1 Timothy 6:10{ea})

O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly {and} empty chatter {and} the opposing arguments of what is falsely called "knowledge"-which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith. Grace be with you. (1 Timothy 6:20-21{ea}) But avoid worldly {and} empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, {men} who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and thus they upset the faith of some. (2 Timothy 2:16-18{ea}) Even Peter, at the end of his life, warned of the apostasy. But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. (2 Peter 2:1-2NKJ)

These false teachers will introduce destructive heresies that will lead others to follow their destructive ways. Peter went on to exhort the saints that in the last days, these apostates will deny the coming of the Lord (2 Peter 3:3-4).

Let us be clear that apostasy began early in church history and will continue until the Lord returns. The Lord warned that leaven would come into the teaching of the church, specifically in reference to the Word of the Kingdom (Matthew 13:33), which also refers to the faith. Leaven does its best work when the temperature is lukewarm, which is the condition of the church of the Laodiceans which represents the church on earth at the return of the Lord (Revelation 3:15-16).

What are we to do in these last days? How are we to live and to deal with the apostasy?

Continue InTheFaith And after they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:21-22{ea})

These verses were reviewed briefly in the last chapter; however, they are so fundamental to our understanding of the faith that it is important to elaborate on them.

While in Lystra, Paul created quite a stir amongst the people. The Jews, who consistently pursued Paul, came and persuaded the multitudes to stone him. Paul was stoned, dragged out of the city and left, for they supposed him to be dead. The disciples gathered around him; Paul rose up; and he and Barnabas left for Derbe where they preached the gospel and made many disciples. What a testimony! After this, they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch and strengthened the souls of the disciples. Paul, along with those who worked with him, fought the good fight. They kept pressing on, not being derailed by the many challenges and persecutions that they faced. Paul literally faced death every day (2 Corinthians 11:23-28).

However, consider how Paul and the others encouraged the new disciples of Christ. They strengthened their souls by encouraging them to continue in the faith. The faith meant that there

was something in view, and it was the Kingdom. Please notice how Paul joined the faith with the Kingdom: "Encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying." What did Paul say to encourage them? He said that they would encounter much tribulation, but this was the only way to enter the Kingdom. Paul knew firsthand that there are many tribulations awaiting those who continue in the faith, but only through these many tribulations do we enter the Kingdom. Thus, Paul's view through the faith was the coming Kingdom. Notice how Paul was not encouraging the disciples to hold on to some basic set of doctrines. No; Paul's whole being was set on being found worthy of the Kingdom and Glory (our hope), and on running the race of life in such a way so as to enter the Kingdom in the Day of Christ. Has this word changed nearly two millennia later? Absolutely not! Anyone who sees the Kingdom and has set his heart on entering the Kingdom will testify that there are many tribulations that will come. Why? First of all, because our Lord Jesus has told us so: "In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). But He also encourages us: "Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful" (John 14:27). Second, because the battle that rages with the unseen realm of the powers of darkness is over who will rule in the heavenly places in the coming Kingdom. The Word of the Kingdom will be contested by the powers of darkness for anyone who is serious about attaining unto the coming Age of Glory. Continuing in the faith requires perseverance to reach the end and receive a crown, which always speaks of reigning in the coming Kingdom. James joins the two thoughts: Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which {the Lord} has promised to those who love Him (James 1:12). If you continue in the faith, firmly established and steadfast, then the Lord will present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach (Colossians 1:22-23). In these last days, we must encourage one another to continue in the faith and not be moved away from this faith by the many trials and tribulations that will be encountered by every child of God who has set his heart on entering the Kingdom.

#### Fight The Good Fight OfTheFaith

Paul saw the entrance into the Kingdom as a battle or a competition. In writing his letters, Paul used terms to describe fighting a battle or competing in a contest to win the prize. In each case, he encouraged others to keep pressing on toward the goal and to allow nothing, absolutely nothing to stop them from reaching the goal. This goal is directly related to the faith, which speaks of the coming Kingdom and receiving the reward or prize of entering into glory and reigning with Christ in His millennial Kingdom. Paul sought for the crown. In several places, Paul used the Greek word *agonizomai* which means "to labor fervently, to strive, to struggle, to fight" (1 Corinthians 9:25; Colossians 1:29; 1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 4:7). It is from this Greek word that we get our English word *agonize*.

Know ye not that they that run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? Even so run; that ye may attain. And every man that striveth in the games exerciseth self-control in all things. Now they (do it) to receive a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, as not uncertainly; so fight I, as not beating the air: but I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage: lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. (1 Corinthians 9:24-27ASV)

Paul saw himself in a race to be won with a crown awaiting him at the finish line. He was agonizing to run in such a way so as to attain to the goal and not be rejected or disqualified. He even buffeted his body like a boxer. He was contending as a boxer to bring his body into subjection to

do the will of God. He agonized to exercise self-control in all things. Paul did not run with uncertainty because he knew, without any doubt, that there was a prize, an incorruptible crown. He was not wasting his time, for he knew that God is a rewarder. At the end of his life, Paul encouraged Timothy to fight the good fight.

Fight the good fight of the faith, lay hold on the life eternal, whereunto thou wast called, and didst confess the good confession in the sight of many witnesses. (1 Timothy 6:12ASV {ea}) This verse is better translated: "Strive (agonizomai or agonize) in the good contest (agon which is the noun form of agonizomai) of the faith, lay hold on life for the age (to come)." In like fashion to what he wrote to the Corinthians, Paul saw himself in a contest that had to be fought and won, and this contest was in reference to the faith. Life eternal in this case refers to the life that is to come in the Kingdom Age. Thus, the faith, once again, is in reference to the millennial Kingdom. As his days drew to a close, Paul could testify that he had run the race and completed the course.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. (2 Timothy 4:7-8NKJ {ea})

These verses are very similar to 1 Timothy 6:12. Paul had agonized to win the good contest or fight. He testified that in spite of many trials, tribulations and persecutions, he had finished the race. He had kept the faith. In other words, he never lost sight of the finish line. He had done all that he needed to do to run the race so as to win and to receive the crown. Please note that the faith that Paul kept was in reference to the coming of the Lord on that Day, the day in which He will receive His people in the air and set up His judgment seat (2 Corinthians 5:10). The crown is in reference to reigning in the coming Kingdom when the Lord will reward His faithful servants with positions in the Kingdom. This is what the faith is all about.

Stand Firm InTheFaith Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. (1 Corinthians 16:13)

We must stand firm in the faith, no matter how many trials and tribulations we encounter. The goal that is set before every Christian is a goal that is worth fighting for. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-58, Paul unveiled great kingdom truths about Christ, His coming, the Kingdom of God and the resurrection of the saints. Paul presented the basis for the hope of every Christian-Christ who was raised from the dead. If He was not raised from the dead, then we have no hope. Praise God that the grave could not hold Him and He is now seated at the right hand of God the Father. "Death is swallowed up in victory." Hallelujah! The body is sown in dishonor, but it will be raised in glory. When will this occur? At the coming of our beloved Lord Jesus. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then {comes} the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. (1 Corinthians 15:22-26)

What a tremendous future is set before every Christian as an encouragement to run the race. As he concluded this letter to the Corinthians, Paul gave them this exhortation to be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Another way of stating this exhortation is: "Watch! Keep awake; do not sleep as the world sleeps. Stand fast with your feet firmly planted on the Word

and persevere through the trials and tribulations. Put on the whole armor of God. Stand firm in the faith, for He is coming and you do not know when because He comes suddenly. So be brave; act manly, as a soldier fighting in a battle or an athlete competing in a contest. Contend to win the fight and receive the incorruptible prize. Be strong; increase in your vigor so that you can reach the finish line."

Dear brethren, have you seen the glory that awaits us at the finish line? The Lord of Glory is standing at the finish line with His nail-scarred hands outstretched to receive us to Himself and to bring us into His Kingdom. But it takes holding to the faith, standing firm in the faith, contending for the faith. Let us not give up, but let us press on toward the goal. Be Steadfast InTheFaith

Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. (1 Peter 5:9NKJ {ea}) In both of Peter's epistles, the Kingdom is in view (1 Peter 1:3-5; 1 Peter 1:13; 1 Peter 4:17; 1 Peter 5:1; 1 Peter 5:4; 1 Peter 5:10; 2 Peter 1:10-11; 2 Peter 1:16-17; 2 Peter 3:3-12). At the end of his first epistle, Peter exhorted the saints to be sober in respect to the devil who is like a roaring lion who seeks to devour. He exhorted the pilgrims of the Dispersion to resist the devil and be steadfast in the faith. Why? Because he saw that through suffering and the fiery trials, we will enter into glory: But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory (age-lasting glory or glory to be revealed in the age to come, the Kingdom Age) by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 5:10-11NKJ).

Peter saw what lies ahead for Christians, and he was encouraging them (and us) to be steadfast or to be fixed on a purpose. What is the purpose? To enter the glory of Christ after a time of trial and suffering. When does this glory come? It comes when our Lord comes in the day of His Kingdom and Glory. Why are we exhorted to resist the devil? Because he is the ruler of this world system and is occupying the place of rulership in the heavenly places that is destined for the Bride of Christ to occupy in the Kingdom Age. The devil seeks to devour and disqualify Christians from ascending the throne with the Lord as His Bride. For this reason, Peter sets the Kingdom and Glory before us and encourages us to be steadfast in the faith. In these days of trials, our souls need to be strengthened and encouraged to keep the faith and to run the race of the faith.

Contend Earnestly ForTheFaith

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. (Jude 1:3{ea})

Jude, along with Paul, Peter, James, John and the writer of Hebrews, saw the great danger that Christians face as the day of our Lord's return nears. The message related to the Kingdom will be leavened and a general apostasy will exist in the Christian world. Early in church history, the leaven was planted in the teachings of the church. The book of Jude is about contending earnestly for the faith during the day of apostasy. When Jude began to write his letter, it seems that the Holy Spirit led him to change the subject matter of the letter from "the common salvation" (salvation by grace through faith that all Christians possess) to this matter of contending for the faith.

Jude saw the apostasy and it exercised his heart. As he began to write a letter to those who are called, loved and kept, he changed the theme of his letter. He made every effort to write to them

about their common salvation (the fundamentals) but felt the necessity to write to them appealing that they contend for the faith. In other words, it was more than the common beliefs of every Christian. It was about contending (agonizing, striving) for something that exceeds eternal salvation. What was Jude's view? It was the seventh day (vs. 14), the Lord's Day, the Kingdom Age. It was the day of His glory (vs. 24). The phrase "contend earnestly" comes from the Greek word epagonizomai which is an intense form of the word agonizomai. Jude exhorts us to earnestly strive or agonize for the faith. This is the same thought that Paul expressed-"striving in the good contest of the faith." This faith has been delivered to all the saints. In other words, the faith has been given to all Christians; and we are exhorted to keep it and not be persuaded by the doctrines of demons spoken through apostates. The faith is more than our common salvation; it is about running the race in such a way to reach the goal of the Kingdom and Glory. This is what has been delivered to Christians, and this is what is in view for those who contend earnestly for the faith and fight the good fight of the faith.

Dear brethren, the faith is so tremendous because it speaks of all that is coming when our beloved Lord Jesus returns in the air for His people. In that day, He will be looking for those who have contended earnestly for the faith. These are the ones who will enter the Reign of the Heavens.

What are we to do in these last days? We need the eyes of our heart opened to see how vital is the faith. Then we need to do as the Scriptures exhort-continue in the faith, fight the good fight of the faith, stand firm in the faith, be steadfast in the faith, and finally, contend earnestly for the faith!

Let us press on to maturity!

## Part X6.1 - Epignosis

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The Mature Knowledge-Epignosis As presented in the last chapter, the Scriptures speak of a particular aspect of faith-the faith-which encompasses all that is contained in the Word of the Kingdom and how to enter into the Reign of the Heavens. We are called to walk by faith, not by sight, and we walk by faith as we hold to the faith. Our Lord is coming and we have a tremendous hope set before us. It is the hope of entering into His Kingdom and reigning with Him in glory. In our search to further understand the Word of the Kingdom and the way into the Reign of the Heavens, we discover that there is a specific type of knowledge and a specific type of truth which refer to that blessed event when our Lord comes as the King of kings and His Kingdom is established.

John, the beloved and elderly apostle, wrote a personal letter to his beloved Gaius, whom he loved in truth (3 John 1:1): I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth (3 John 1:4NKJ). Just as we are to walk in the faith, we are to walk in the truth. In John's day, believers were being led away from the truth into many other things. As he wrote to Gaius, John brought to his attention a brother named Diotrephes who loved to have the preeminence among those in a local assembly (3 John 1:9NKJ). This is one of the sad commentaries of church history; down through the centuries, men have sought to be preeminent amongst God's people rather than lift up the Head of the Church, the Preeminent One, our Lord Jesus. Is it any different today?

It is the truth that sets men free from such tyranny, the tyranny of self-exaltation. In John's gospel, our Lord stated: "If you abide in My word, {then} you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32). The word abide means "to remain" or "to continue." Thus, the Lord was stating that if a true believer (John 8:30) is to become a true disciple, he must continue in His word. Where do we find the truth today? It is in the Word of God. It is here that we know the truth. As stressed throughout this book, there is no greater truth than the truth about God's King and His coming Kingdom. Coming into this truth truly sets one free. In the Scriptures, there are many facets of knowledge and truth. Upon knowledge and truth are built the doctrines that are held by Christians, and we must hold to the knowledge and the truth that God reveals to us in His Word. Without them, we have no foundation upon which to stand or to build. As with the faith, we discover that there is a particular type of knowledge and truth. There is the knowledge and the truth. In fact, there are five verses that contain the phrase the knowledge of the truth; these verses speak of a mature knowledge that is vital to every child of God who desires to grow up to be a son of the Kingdom. We must grow from babes in Christ who feed on milk to spiritual sons in Christ who feed on the meat of the Word. Understanding the mature knowledge will open up the Word of the Kingdom and unlock the Scriptures to all who are serious about coming into the Reign of the Heavens. To this end, the goal of this chapter is to reveal that the mature knowledge is the foundation of the epistles, and this foundation is the King and His coming Kingdom. This foundation is our hope and it is this hope upon which all prophetic Scripture is built.

The Knowledge

What is the knowledge? In the Bible, one of the Greek words for knowledge is gnosis, which simply means "knowledge," such as attaining basic understanding of facts and various things. Initial salvation is based on knowledge. As the Holy Spirit convicts the lost, they are to come into a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ. When the Spirit speaks to a heart, He enables the person to believe that Jesus is the Christ; and after a person is saved, this knowledge is to be manifested through him, as well.

"And this is eternal life, that they may know [ginosko-the root word from which gnosis is derived] Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." (John 17:3) To give to His people {the} knowledge [gnosis] of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins. (Luke 1:77) But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge [gnosis] of Him in every place. (2 Corinthians 2:14)

However, there is another Greek word used in the Scriptures which often is translated as knowledge, but the greater meaning is lost in the translation. The word is epignosis, which is an intensified form of gnosis. When the prefix epi is added to gnosis, it adds a greater dimension to the knowledge. It means "deeper, superior, after, above or beyond." Thus, epignosis is "deeper knowledge," "superior knowledge," "after knowledge" or "an above knowledge." A simple way of defining epignosis is that it is themature or full knowledge.

Epignosis is found only in the epistles and is used twenty times. Paul used it fifteen times, Peter used it four times and it is found once in the letter to the Hebrews (Romans 1:28; Romans 3:20; Romans 10:2; Ephesians 1:17; Ephesians 4:13, Php 1:9; Colossians 1:9-10; Colossians 2:2; Colossians 3:10; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Timothy 2:25; 2 Timothy 3:7; Titus 1:1; Philemon 1:6; Hebrews 10:26; 2 Peter 1:2-3; 2 Peter 1:8; 2 Peter 2:20). The Word of the Kingdom is the mature knowledge which is the central message of the Scriptures and which is expressed in various ways when the word epignosis is used. The mature knowledge is very much the same as the faith. We are to come into themature knowledge, just as we are to contend earnestly for the faith. Coming into the mature knowledge means that a person not only knows the truth or this superior knowledge but also appropriates it in his daily walk. In other words, the mature knowledge is the truth by which a Christian lives. The Christian is called to come into the mature knowledge, to live by it, to be absorbed by it, to be led by it and to overcome through it. It is the goal that sets the course for the life of the Lord's people as they sojourn to His coming Kingdom.

Some people might think that the Lord's return and His Kingdom are not for the mature, rather it is for the babes in Christ. However, the Scriptures are abundantly clear that the Second Coming of Christ and all that this means is theepignosis. The mature saints are looking for His return. They are watching and waiting for His return with eager expectation, and it is this hunger for the Lord that directs their lives each day.

## TheTruth

What is the truth? All truth of the Scripture is summed up in the One who is the Truth, our Lord Jesus Christ. However, there is a specific aspect of the truth that encompasses the central theme of the entire prophetic Scriptures. As our Lord Jesus was about to be crucified, Pilate asked Jesus, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus spoke of His Kingdom that is not of this world, to which Pilate replied, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered: "You say {correctly} that I am a king. For this

I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (John 18:37{ea}). Of what did Jesus bear witness? What was the truth? "I am a king. For this I have been born." Thus, one of the most fundamental aspects of the truth refers to the fact that Christ is the King. He is not only the King of the Jews but He is the King of the coming Kingdom of Heaven. When Christ came the first time, He was the King who wore a crown of thorns, suffering unto death on a cross. When He comes the second time, He will be the King who is crowned with many crowns, crowned with glory and honor. This is the truth.

Now, let us look at the Scriptures. The whole purpose of studying these Scriptures is to prove that the Word of the Kingdom is the mature knowledge. In fact, it is the structure upon which all the epistles are built. In other words, no matter what the overall theme is of the epistle, the Word of the Kingdom or the Kingdom of God's Son is the truth that supports the writing.

### TheKnowledge OfTheTruth

First, let us look at the phrase the knowledge of the truth, which is found in five places (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Timothy 2:25; 2 Timothy 3:7; Titus 1:1; Hebrews 10:26-27).

TheMatureKnowledge OfTheTruth In Timothy As he was nearing the end of his life on earth, Paul wrote two letters to his beloved Timothy, his true son in the faith. In his first letter, Paul exhorted: First of all, then, I urge that entreaties {and} prayers, petitions {and} thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge[epignosis]of the truth. For there is one God, {and} one mediator also between God and men, {the} man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:1-5{ea}). At first glance, we might see these verses as a command to pray for peace and for the gospel of the grace of God (eternal salvation, salvation of the spirit) to go forth. In other words, we need good government so that we can lead the lost to the Lord. Truly, Paul wanted to see the lost saved, but this was not Paul's driving motivation. He saw eternal salvation as the door into the Kingdom when Christ comes in the glory of His Father to sit upon the throne of the Kingdom of Heaven. Paul declared the whole purpose of God, testifying solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God and preaching the Kingdom (Acts 20:24-25). What is God's purpose? To call out a people from the Gentiles who will be co-heirs with His Son in reigning over this earth in the age to come (Acts 15:14).

Notice that Paul had a purpose in his exhortation for entreaties (supplications), prayers, petitions and thanksgivings (intercessions) to be made, and that was for believers to live a tranquil and quiet life (peaceable) in all godliness and dignity (reverence). What is good and acceptable in the sight of God? That believers live a godly and reverent life. The emphasis of Paul was on the believer, not the lost. As Paul wrote, God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. We need to underline this and. Eternal salvation is not the end; it is only the beginning. Once we are saved, we are exhorted to come into the knowledge of the truth; and this truth is centered on the one Man, Christ Jesus, who is the mediator between God and men. This knowledge is more than some basic facts; it is the mature knowledge of the Man Christ Jesus, and this knowledge deals with the coming reign of Christ. To prove this point, consider the foundation of Paul's two letters that he wrote to Timothy at the end of his life. What did he emphasize to Timothy? If we see his emphasis, we will see the foundation and we will see the

mature knowledge. In 1 Timothy, he wrote of the gospel of the glory of the blessed God [glory refers to the coming Kingdom (1.11 ASV)]; the mystery of the faith (3.9); that which is to come [the Kingdom Age (4.8; 6.19)]; striving (agonizing) or fighting the good fight of the faith, laying hold on the life of the age to come [the Kingdom Age (6.12 NKJ)]; making the good confession [Jesus is King! (John 18:37)]; keeping this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing [His Second Coming (6.14 NKJ)]. In 2 Timothy, he wrote of life and immortality (1.10); that Day [the return of the Lord (1.12,18)]; salvation and glory (2.10); reigning with Him [during His millennial reign (2.12)]; the resurrection and the faith (2.18); vessels of gold and silver, vessels of honor (2.20-21); judgment and His appearing and Kingdom (4.1); the crown of righteousness awaiting all who have loved His appearing [when He comes to Judge (4.8)]; and the Heavenly Kingdom which awaited Paul (4.18). This is the mature knowledge that Paul wanted to leave with Timothy. Yes, there were practical instructions given; but Paul never strayed from the goal of the Kingdom, and he was faithful to keep it before Timothy, as well. Why? Because it is the foundation of our hope! We need epignosis, the mature knowledge, the superior knowledge, the knowledge that comes after we receive the knowledge of eternal salvation. It is the gospel of the Glory of Christ, the Day of Christ that is coming.

Like the faith, the mature knowledge is something that we must lay hold of and not let go. But what did Paul see as he was about to depart this life? He saw believers falling away from the faith, and he saw some not able to come into it because of men who had a form of godliness but denied its power (2 Timothy 3:1-7). These men preyed upon weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the mature knowledge of the truth. Paul, along with Peter, James and Jude, warned of apostasy in the last days, believers falling away from where they once stood. In other words, they had fallen away from the mature knowledge. They were the ones who said, "Where is the promise of His coming?" (2 Peter 3:4).

Paul did not tell Timothy to discard those who were a problem. On the contrary, he counseled Timothy how to approach ones who were in opposition to the truth as he had taught it. And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge [epignosis] of the truth, and they may come to their senses {and escape} from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. (2 Timothy 2:24-26{ea})

What was Paul's heart in the matter? That those in opposition would be granted repentance leading to the mature, full knowledge of the truth. Obviously, these were Christians who had gone astray (fallen away from the faith), having fallen into the snare of the devil; or as Paul told Timothy; "They have turned aside to follow Satan" (1 Timothy 5:15). The mature knowledge is not for the lost, for they must start with the basic knowledge of Christ. Believers are the ones who are in danger of becoming ensnared by the devil (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9).

God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth; and once we come into it, we are encouraged and exhorted to remain in it. As the Lord Jesus said, "If you abide (continue) in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine." The Mature Knowledge Of The Truth In Titus

After his first imprisonment in Rome, Paul began to travel; and at some point in his journey, he visited the island of Crete. When he left the island, he left behind Titus, a true child in the common faith. Later, Paul wrote a personal letter to Titus, instructing him on some important matters. The letter to Titus along with the letters to Timothy represent Paul's last written words before he was martyred in Rome.

There was a problem in the church on the island of Crete. Paul instructed Titus to set in order or "to straighten further" the things that were lacking or that remained to be done (Titus 1:5). There were idle talkers and deceivers who were teaching things which they ought not. They were out for dishonest gain. Even one of their prophets said that "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." As people, the Cretans were ungodly people who were living for the lust of the flesh. They were impure, slanderers, thieves, hateful, contentious, divisive and many other things that are not unto godliness (Titus 1:10-16; Titus 2:3; Titus 2:10; Titus 2:12; Titus 3:3; Titus 3:9-11). It is clear that the believers in Crete were saved, but they were still living according to the old man, the lust of the flesh.

Paul left Titus in Crete to deal with this condition amongst God's people. In instructing Titus, Paul emphasized themature knowledge.

Paul, a bond-servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge [epignosis]of the truth which is according to godliness, in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago. (Titus 1:1-2{ea})

Paul was not writing about mere facts; he was writing about something that is mature. It is the mature knowledge of the truth. There are many truths unfolded in the Scriptures, but themature knowledge in regard to godliness and the hope of eternal life refers to the way into the Kingdom and the hope of the life of the age to come. Godliness is one of the qualities which is added to faith in securing the abundant entrance into the Kingdom (2 Peter 1:5-11). To fully understand what Paul meant when He wrote of the hope of eternal life, we need to understand the phrase eternal life as used in this letter. In the Greek language, there is no word for eternal as the English language uses the word. The Greek word used for eternal is *aiionios*, which refers to "a period of time," usually thought of as "an age." Therefore, to properly understand the use of this word eternal in the Scriptures, we must understand the context of its use. It may mean eternal in the usual sense of the English word, or it may refer to a specific age or period of time. In other words, we should not apply the word eternal the same way in all cases. We need to understand the word based on the context in which it is used. In most of the modern English-language Bibles, the word eternal is used; but in some translations that have attempted to retain as much as possible of the original Greek thought, we discover the use of the phrase age-lasting or age-during instead of the word eternal. In Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible, Titus 1:2; Titus 3:7 read "hope of life age-during" and "heirs we may become according to the hope of life age-during." In other words, Paul's hope was life in the age to come and the Reign of the Heavens. This hope sums up the very heart of Paul and all of his writings. For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus. (Titus 2:11-13)

Paul's foundation was the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior. It was as if Paul continually wrote: "Okay, now that you have eternal life, let me show you, let me reveal to you what lies ahead and the course that we must follow to get there. We need to press into this goal, into this heavenly calling, into this upward call. It is our blessed hope!" When we read Titus, we need to see that at the very center of the letter is this blessed hope. It is the mature knowledge of the truth that God promised long ages ago. This appearing occurs in association with the coming age when our Lord will take the scepter of the Kingdom of Heaven and reign. As a Christian, our hope is in relation to this day and our participation in His Kingdom and Glory. It is our hope to be partakers of Christ's glory. As Paul wrote to the Colossians: "When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory" (Colossians 3:4). Paul also encouraged the Thessalonians to walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own Kingdom and Glory (1 Thessalonians 2:12). A day is coming when the Lord Himself will be glorified in His saints (2 Thessalonians 1:10).

We not only have a hope but a blessed hope or a happy hope. In other words, what is set before us should bring joy to our hearts and a hunger to press on toward this day. It is our "happy" hope. It even is an anchor to our soul (Hebrews 6:19), which so easily gets upset by the trials of this life. When the times get too difficult for us, we need to rejoice because we have a blessed hope set before us. We will have momentary afflictions but they are light afflictions that are producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison (2 Corinthians 4:17-18). Nothing compares to the glory of Christ and His coming Kingdom. In Titus 3:7, after unfolding eternal salvation and being justified by His grace, Paul moved beyond our present possession and proceeded to our blessed hope—that we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life, the hope of life age-during. We only can be heirs if we are justified by grace; but once justified, we must see that we have an inheritance set before us and that inheritance has to do with the Kingdom of Heaven. James wrote of being heirs of the Kingdom which He promised to those who love Him (James 2:5). Notice that there is a condition to this inheritance, and it is love for our beloved Savior. Love never fails!

Thus, in Titus we have the thought of a hope for a life and an inheritance in an age to come. The age that Paul wrote of is the Kingdom Age which precedes the eternal ages or, as Peter called it, the Day of Eternity (2 Peter 3:18). Hope and inheritance are not used in reference to our eternal salvation, which is our present possession, but in reference to what lies before the endless ages. The blessed hope set before a Christian refers to the hope of entering into His Kingdom as one who has been a good and faithful steward in this life. The reward will be given to Christians for faithful service to Christ while He has been away receiving a kingdom, and it will be in relation to assuming governmental positions of reigning in the coming Kingdom of our Lord, of entering the Reign of the Heavens. This was Paul's gospel that he faithfully preached and what he himself fought for so diligently so that he would not be disqualified from receiving the reward (prize) of the Kingdom (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). This is the mature knowledge of the truth. The Mature Knowledge Of The Truth In Hebrews The central theme of the epistle to the Hebrew believers is given to us: For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking (Hebrews 2:5). In other words, the letter is about the world to come or the age to come which is the Kingdom Age. The first chapter of Hebrews clearly reveals the theme, and it is centered on the Son and His Kingdom. But of the Son {He says} "Thy throne, O God, is forever

and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom." (Hebrews 1:8)

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the writer gave six warnings to Christians about coming into the age to come (Hebrews 2:1-4; chp. 3 and 4; 6.1-2; 10.26-27; 12.14-17; 12.25-29). This age is spoken of as the seventh day, the day of rest (Hebrews 4:4), and a warning is given of the possibility of a Christian coming short of the promise of entering into this day (Hebrews 4:1). We are exhorted: "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 3:15; Hebrews 4:7). The fate of the nation of Israel when they rebelled against God and fell in the wilderness due to unbelief is placed before us as a warning that we too could fall in our sojourn on this earth. We are exhorted to hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of hope firm to the end (Hebrews 3:6), and to hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end (Hebrews 3:14). We are given great encouragement that today our Lord Jesus is our High Priest ministering in the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf. Because of His blood which is sprinkled on the mercy seat, He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:25).

All of this and much more speak of the mature knowledge. The writer even exhorted the Hebrews that they had fallen short of maturing in their knowledge because they had come to need milk and not solid food, which speaks of the mature knowledge (Hebrews 5:12). Adults require solid food; babies require milk. In chapter 10 of the Hebrew letter, we come to the fourth warning, and it is in reference to the mature knowledge of the truth. For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge[epignosis] of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. (Hebrews 10:26-27{ea}) In the verse before this warning and in the verses that follow, the writer tells us what is the mature knowledge of the truth.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging {one another} and all the more, as you see the day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:23-25) For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay. But My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul. (Hebrews 10:36-39)

These verses are filled with the mature knowledge. "Hold fast the confession of our hope" speaks of our blessed hope of the appearing of the glory of our Savior. The Day that is drawing near is the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is the same as the confession of our hope. Endurance is needed to run the race of the faith. If we endure, we shall reign with Him. "He who is coming, and will not delay" speaks for itself. Having faith to the preserving of the soul is the goal of our faith-the salvation of our soul that we will receive in the Day of our Lord if we lose our soul-life during our days on earth. The warning is directly related to the salvation of our soul. If we go on sinning willfully, not availing ourselves of the ministry of our High Priest on our behalf, we will lose our soul-life in the Kingdom Age and suffer great loss. [Losing the soul-life means that one will not enter into the joy of the Kingdom but will suffer in his soul (weeping and gnashing of teeth) over what he could have had. He lost the privilege of reigning with Christ.] But notice that this warning is

related to having received the mature knowledge of the truth. In other words, if after hearing and understanding the Word of the Kingdom, we continue in sin, not bringing it under the blood, then there will be a terrifying expectation of judgment. We all must appear at the judgment seat of Christ, and this occurs when the Lord comes for His people in the day of His Kingdom. Is there any doubt as to what is the mature knowledge of the truth? We are exhorted to come into it and to hold fast to it, and to live a life of faith and godliness. When we do sin, we must confess our sin to our High Priest who is merciful, faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us of all unrighteousness (Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 1:9). Thank God for our High Priest!

Now, as we continue to look at the mature knowledge, we will discover that it is presented differently in the remaining Scriptures, but the Word of the Kingdom can be seen closely aligned with the verses. The Mature Knowledge In Romans In the letter to the Romans, epignosis is used three times. In each case, the mature knowledge is used in reference to loss. These references are instructive as to what happens to those who do not come into it in the first place or do not hold the mature knowledge once received.

First, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. There were those who knew God but did not glorify Him as God and God gave them up to uncleanness. Why? Because they did not retain the mature knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind (Romans 1:28 NKJ). Once we come into the mature knowledge, it is something that we are to retain. If we fall away from it, our latter condition will be worse than the beginning (2 Peter 2:20).

Later in Romans, Paul wrote of the law and sin: Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the mature knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20 NKJ). Thus, the law brings one into the mature knowledge of God's view of sin. The mature knowledge of sin is good because it causes us to flee everything that is displeasing to God so that we will be counted worthy in the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ. Also, the mature knowledge of sin should cause us to hunger for the mature knowledge of Christ.

Finally in Romans 10:2, Paul spoke of Israel who had a zeal for God but not according to mature knowledge. This is a direct reference to the Kingdom. Israel was offered the Kingdom when their Messiah stood in their midst, but they rejected Him and suffered the loss of the Kingdom. Mature knowledge would have given them the right view of their Messiah, and the same mature knowledge will give us the right view of our Lord and His Kingdom.

The Mature Knowledge In Ephesians For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which {exists} among you, and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention {of you} in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge [epignosis] of Him. {I pray that} the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. (Ephesians 1:15-19 {ea}) As he was writing his letter to the Ephesians, Paul was so caught up with the Lord Jesus that it was as if he stopped and began to pray for the believers. He wanted the eyes of their heart to be enlightened. He wanted the Holy Spirit to give them a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the superior knowledge, the mature knowledge of Christ. This was no small request of Paul. The Ephesian believers were

already saved and were growing in the grace and love of Christ. They had faith in the Lord, and they loved one another as the Lord commanded. In other words, they were a good group of Christians. Anyone visiting them would have had to conclude that the Lord was in their midst. But this was not enough in Paul's eyes. They needed to grow more. They needed to come into a greater depth of knowledge of Christ. It was as if Paul was saying: "All right; you are saved and you are doing many right things as Christians, but now press on to maturity."

Paul prayed that they would see the hope of His calling. What is this? Hope is used many times in the New Testament, and it is used always in reference to the Lord's return and His coming Kingdom. It is not a hope for this life but for a new day that is coming when He will seize (rapture) His people to meet Him in the air. It will be the last day for His Body. Christ was raised from the dead, and He will raise all of His people who have fallen asleep in Him and those who remain and are alive on the earth when He comes. It is His calling. The Lord Jesus is calling a people to join Him in glory forever. These believers are the glory of His inheritance. In other words, when He has His beloved Bride standing in His presence, He will be glorified in her. She will be presented to Him, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing. She will be holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:27). She will be His glorious Bride.

Oh, we need to know the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. But for what purpose is this power? It is to conform us to His image. It is to make us like the Bridegroom in character, holiness and righteousness. He is the Resurrection and the Life, and He was raised with power according to the Spirit of holiness (Romans 1:4). The hope of His calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints and the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe all point to the mature knowledge, after knowledge, and our hope to qualify to occupy a position of rulership with Christ in His Kingdom and Glory. Paul prayed that the eyes of their heart would be opened to see how tremendous this call is and to walk worthy of the calling (Ephesians 4:1). For this reason, Paul exhorted the Ephesian saints to put off the old man and put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness; to walk in unity; to walk in love; to walk in light; to walk in wisdom (Ephesians 4:1-3; Ephesians 4:22-24; Ephesians 5:2; Ephesians 5:8; Ephesians 5:15). The Kingdom of God is righteousness in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17). Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:5)? Paul exhorted them not to walk in the ways of the sons of disobedience and not to be partakers with them (Ephesians 5:5-8).

We have an inheritance in the Kingdom of God, but we will not come into this inheritance unless we walk in a manner worthy of this tremendous calling.

Paul also spoke of the mature knowledge in reference to the Lord giving to the Church apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers (Ephesians 4:11) for the sole purpose of equipping the saints for the work of ministry and for the edifying of the Body of Christ until we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge (epignosis) of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ (Ephesians 4:12-13).

Here we discover that there is a goal in view-the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God. This is to be the goal of everyone who teaches the Lord's people. It is to bring the saints into the faith and into the mature knowledge of the Son that they will be prepared to enter the Kingdom Age. Within Paul's epistle, we discover seven things that must be taught to the Lord's people in regard to the

faith and the mature knowledge: the believer's position in Christ (1.3,20); the inheritance (1.11,18); the purpose of salvation (2.4-6); the fellowship of the mystery, God's eternal purpose (3.1-12); the need for maturity in the faith (4.11-16); the need for the filling of the Spirit (5.18-21); and the spiritual battle in which every believer is to be engaged, along with how to properly fight the good fight (6.10-18). But note what will happen if the teachers do not do as they are called. The brethren will be tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine. They will fall for the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting (Ephesians 4:14NKJ). What will be the result? They will not fight the spiritual warfare in which every Christian is to be engaged and they will be overcome by the powers of darkness (Ephesians 6:10-18). When the brethren are brought into the proper understanding of the faith and the mature knowledge of Christ, they will be properly equipped to fight the good fight of the faith and ultimately finish the course victoriously.

Why is there so much confusion in the church today? Why are so many of the Lord's people following after every wind of doctrine? Why are they being tossed to and fro with every new movement that comes along? Because the pastors-teachers have failed to present the mature knowledge to the brethren! The Mature Knowledge In Philippians

We see Paul's love in one of his most personal letters to the saints in Philippi. Paul was in chains for Christ, having been put under house arrest in Rome. But this did not stop him, for he received all who came to him and he preached the Kingdom of God and taught the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence (Acts 28:30-31).

Paul thanked God for the Philippians and made mention of them in his every prayer. He longed for them with the affection of Christ Jesus (Php 1:8). This affection was a deep inward affection and tender mercy. He continued by sharing his prayer for them: And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge [epignosis] and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God (Php 1:9-11{ea}).

If we could only capture the real heart of Paul in these words and come into them ourselves, it would transform our own lives. Paul was praying that their love, which was already strong, would abound still more and more. The word abound means "abundance" or "excess." In other words, he prayed that their love would be superabundant to overflowing. But this superabundant love was to be in relationship to real knowledge and discernment. The real knowledge Paul wrote of is epignosis or mature knowledge. If we could just be caught up in superabounding love, which comes from a mature knowledge of our beloved Lord Jesus! If we have a mature knowledge of Him, we must love because we are touched by His love for us: "I have loved you" (Revelation 3:9).

Later in his letter, Paul expressed the deep passion of his heart-to know Jesus. It was not just knowing of Him in facts and history but knowing Him personally, intimately, experientially. When we know Jesus in this way, we will abound in love. Paul was a living example of what real knowledge does in a person's life. It leads the believer to continually press on toward the goal (the Kingdom) for the prize (reigning in Glory) of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Php 3:14). But what was in view for Paul in reference to this real knowledge, this real mature knowledge? Paul encouraged the Philippians to "approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the Day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes

through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." What was in view for Paul? The Day of Christ, the day in which He returns to meet His people in the air. This day commences with the end of Man's Day that leads into the Lord's Day when He will sit upon the throne of the Kingdom of Heaven with His beloved Bride and upon the throne of David with His beloved nation of Israel.

Paul never lost sight of the coming Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. It drove Paul to run the race of the faith, even to buffet his body, making it his slave, lest he be disqualified to enter the Kingdom in that day (1 Corinthians 9:27). This is why he encouraged the saints; Paul's desire for them was that they would be found sincere and blameless in that Day. He wanted to see them live fruitful lives, righteous lives which only come through Jesus Christ. In this way, God would (and does) receive glory and praise.

Paul longed for that Day because he loved the One who is coming.

TheMatureKnowledge In Colossians In a very similar way as he did to the Ephesians, Paul unfolded the knowledge of the truth to the saints and faithful brethren in Colossae. In the Colossian letter, Paul used the word epignosis four times (Colossians 1:9-10; Colossians 2:2; Colossians 3:10).

Paul did not cease praying that they would be filled with themature knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding (Colossians 1:9). The will that Paul wrote of is not the everyday knowing of how one is to live, what one is to do and where one is to go. It is necessary for God's children to know what God's will is for their lives, but this was not Paul's prayer. He prayed that they would come into the mature knowledge of His will, which points beyond today to the day which is coming, the day in which God's will for man is restored. When God created man, He declared His will for man-to have dominion (Genesis 1:26); and this is summed up in the subject of this book-the Reigns of the Heavens.

Paul continued on in his letter by exhorting the Colossians to walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the mature knowledge of God (Colossians 1:10). Paul had great concern for those in Colossae and in Laodicea. He encouraged them to attain to all the riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the mature knowledge of the mystery of God, which is Christ Himself (Colossians 2:2). What is themature knowledge of the mystery? It is coming into the mature knowledge of Christ, who He is, what He has done and what He is bringing forth. It is coming into all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge which are in Christ. God is calling out for His Son a people from amongst the Gentiles and a remnant of the Jews who are a one new man in Christ. From this one new man will come the helpmate for God's Son, the Bride of Christ, the Queen who will reign with the King of kings during His millennial reign. Paul exhorted the brethren to "put on the new man who is renewed in mature knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek (Gentile) nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, salve nor free, but Christ is all and in all" (Colossians 3:10-11).

Throughout his letter to the saints in Colossae, Paul wrote with a view to the coming Kingdom, themature knowledge of Christ. Colossians is full of themature knowledge and we can only touch upon it. He wrote of the hope laid up for them in heaven and the gospel that is bearing fruit (Colossians 1:5-6). [The gospel in this case does not refer to eternal salvation but the gospel

associated with the mature knowledge, the gospel of the Glory of Christ.] When Israel rejected the offer of the Kingdom, the Lord said that the Kingdom of Heaven would be taken from Israel and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it (Matthew 21:43). The one new man in Christ is that nation, and the mature knowledge of Him is to bear fruit. Paul reminded them that the Father had qualified them to be (enabled them to become) partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light (Colossians 1:12). What is this inheritance? It is reigning in the Kingdom of His dearly-loved Son (Colossians 1:13 RFW).

Paul wrote of the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles. This mystery was hidden in all the past ages but was revealed through Paul. What is the mystery? Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). When does this glory come? It comes with the Kingdom, for He is the Lord and King of Glory (1 Corinthians 2:8; Psalms 24:7-10). When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory (Colossians 3:4). When does He appear? When He comes in His Kingdom and Glory. No wonder Paul exhorted the brethren not to let any one cheat them of their reward (Colossians 2:18). Our reward is to occupy a position of rulership in the Kingdom. We must seek those things that are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God (Colossians 3:1). One day He will ascend the throne of His Kingdom and call out a bride who will sit with Him upon His throne as He has sat upon His Father's throne (Revelation 3:21). Is there any doubt as to what is the mature, superior knowledge of Him? The Mature Knowledge In Philemon Finally, while he was under house arrest in Rome, Paul wrote a personal letter to a dear brother in Christ, Philemon.

I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers, hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints, that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment [epignosis] of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. (Philemon 1:4-6 NKJ {ea})

Paul heard of Philemon's love and faith toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints. This obviously brought joy to Paul's heart to know of a brother in Christ who loved the Lord and manifested this love toward others in the house of God. Paul was thankful because this was the same heart that Paul had toward the Lord and for all the saints. You could say that Paul and Philemon were kindred spirits in this regard.

It is evident that Paul was praying that Philemon's faith would be shared and become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing that was in Philemon, which is in Christ. In other words, the fruit that came from Philemon's life came from the life of Christ. This is how all Christians are to bear fruit because Christ is the Vine and we are the branches; we can do nothing apart from Him (John 15:5), but we can do all things through Him (Php 4:13).

Now, this word acknowledgment in the Greek is epignosis. This letter to Philemon actually sums up all the other references to the mature knowledge. Why? Because it brings this word epignosis to the very heart of the matter, and that is a personal, intimate relationship with Jesus. This relationship is in Christ Jesus. The mature knowledge of the good things (faith and love) in us is a reflection of a life that is hid in Christ. The mature knowledge of Christ is a personal knowing of Christ and this knowing leads to a life of love and faith.

Love and faith lead to fruitfulness in the true, mature knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and this will lead us into the abundant entrance into the Kingdom (2 Peter 1:5-11). Being fruitful is a kingdom matter (Matthew 21:43).

Love and faith are the fruit that God is after. They are the qualities that will lead us into the Kingdom. This is what Paul heard was in the life of Philemon and it led to a fruitful life. This is the mature knowledge-epignosis.

## Part X7.1 - ..Day Of Judgment

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### The Day Of Judgment

Coming into the Reign of the Heavens is a privilege and an honor for God's people who have been faithful in Christ Jesus while in the body and who have loved our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity (Ephesians 1:1; Ephesians 6:24NKJ). As we have seen, the Reign of the Heavens is something that a born-again child of God is to strive to enter. Believers are to be counted worthy of the Kingdom, and that means that they must follow a certain path in their lives, a path that ultimately will lead them to an abundant entrance into the coming Kingdom of the Son and to receive a full reward (2 Peter 1:10-11; 2 John 1:8). We are to continue in the faith, contending earnestly for the faith, and to walk in the truth, the mature knowledge of Christ and His Kingdom, for if we do, the reward is great. As Paul wrote: Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve (Colossians 3:24).

Understanding the reward of the inheritance is vital to our understanding of the Reign of the Heavens; however, to understand the matter of reward, we first must understand the matter of judgment. Who will be judged? When will they be judged? What is the general nature of judgment? For the Christian, the determination of reward or loss of reward comes forth from the judgment seat of Christ. The details related to what the Lord will be looking for in His people and the various outcomes of the judgment seat are taken up in the next chapter.

### God Is The Judge

God is the Judge and all judgment has been given to the Son of Man. The One who took away the sin of the world by dying on the cross is the One who will execute judgment according to every man's works.

"For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son" (John 5:22)

"For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is {the} Son of Man." (John 5:26-27)

It is hardly necessary to stress the point that God is the Judge and He will judge the living and the dead. God is no debtor to any man. He will justly compensate all for their work. When the Day of God comes, all accounts with man and even the angels (2 Peter 2:4) will have been settled and God will declare: "Behold, I am making all things new." "It is done" (Revelation 21:5-6). Thank God for such a great promise.

Even a very cursory search of the Scriptures will reveal that a righteous and holy God is not mocked (Galatians 6:7). He must judge and He will judge through His Son. This is a guarantee.

Abraham first called the Lord the Judge: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" (Genesis 18:25). Job spoke of the Lord as His Judge (Job 23:7). The Psalmists proclaimed: But God is the

Judge; He puts down one, and exalts another (Psalms 75:7). Rise up, O Judge of the earth; render recompense to the proud (Psalms 94:2). While he was preaching in the house of Cornelius, Peter testified that Christ has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42). Paul exhorted his beloved Timothy: I solemnly charge {you} in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season {and} out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction (2 Timothy 4:1-2). As his journey through life in the body was about to end, Paul declared that he had finished the race of the faith and that the crown of righteousness awaited him, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to him on that day (in reference to His appearing) (2 Timothy 4:7-8). The writer of the letter to the Hebrews declared: And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do (Hebrews 4:13). God is the Judge of all (Hebrews 12:23). James declared that the coming of the Lord is at hand and the Judge is standing right at the door (James 5:8-9). Jude declared the prophecy of Enoch: "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" (Jude 1:14-15 NKJ). Finally, the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ begins with a description of the Judge as He judges His Church (Revelation 1:12-16; Revelation 2:1-29; Revelation 3:1-22), followed by His judgment of Israel and the Gentile nations (Revelation 6:1-17; Revelation 7:1-17; Revelation 8:1-13; Revelation 9:1-21; Revelation 10:1-11; Revelation 11:1-19; Revelation 12:1-17; Revelation 13:1-18; Revelation 14:1-20; Revelation 15:1-8; Revelation 16:1-21; Revelation 17:1-18; Revelation 18:1-24; Revelation 19:1-21). The Judgment Of Sin-The Finished Work

Vital to our understanding of judgment is an understanding of God's unchangeable principle—a wage or a payment must be received for work performed. However, there is one work that has been judged already, a work that condemned mankind when Adam disobeyed God's command: "In the day that you eat from it (disobey My command) you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17{ea}). As presented in chapter 9, sin itself is a work. According to the Word of God, the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), which means that sin is likened to a work and the wage (payment or compensation) for this work is death. When he sinned against God, Adam brought sin and death upon the entire human race. Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned (Romans 5:12).

Thank God; at the cross of Calvary, the Lamb of God took away the sin of the world (John 1:29). God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, paid the full wages of sin when He died on the cross as a sinless, perfect sacrifice for the sin of the world, even being made sin itself (2 Corinthians 5:21). Consequently, the payment for the work of sin is finished. Therefore, there is no longer a judgment for sin and there is no longer a sentence of death upon those who believe on Jesus, God's remedy for the sinner.

Today, unredeemed man is separated from God because his spirit is in a place of death. If he is in this condition when he dies a physical death, he will be separated forever from God's presence throughout the eternal ages. His abode for eternity will be the lake of fire that is reserved for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:11-13). However, today, the redeemed man is no longer separated from God because his spirit has been born again, he has a new life—the

eternal life-dwelling in him, and he is able to communicate with God in the spirit. When a person believes on Jesus and His finished work, he passes from death (separation from God) to life (eternal presence with God).

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:24)

Believers will never have to face the judgment for which Christ paid the full price. This is confirmed by our Lord's words: "He who believes in Him (Jesus) is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). Because the judgment of sin was fully accomplished on the cross, if a person does not accept this judgment he is already judged. In other words, as long as he remains in unbelief, not availing himself of Christ's finished work, he is judged and his future abode is the lake of fire. Once a person dies a physical death, there is no opportunity to change his position.

We must have a clear understanding that the coming day of judgment is not for determining if a person has believed on Christ or not, or if a person is saved or lost, or if a person will "go to heaven" or "go to hell." In the Day of Judgment, this determination will not be made because, according to the Lord's own words, he who does not believe has been judged already. Man's place in eternity is based on what he has believed while in the body. An unbeliever cannot and will not be able to appear before the Judge and declare that he believes on Christ; he will not be judged on this basis for he has been judged already. It will be too late. The judgment for the work of sin is a past judgment; however, there is a day of judgment coming based on work of a different kind for every single human who ever walked this earth. The Jews believe that the just and the unjust (wicked) will be raised at the same time and judged accordingly-the just to eternal life and the unjust to eternal damnation. However, as previously shown in chapter 11, the saved and the lost are not raised at the same time. Likewise, they are not judged at the same time, either. God has set an order to His judgment of all men, and those who died in faith will be the first to be judged because they are the ones who will be placed in the Kingdom of His Son. The judgment of those of faith will occur separate and distinct from the judgment of the lost. The former will be judged at the end of Man's Day, preceding the Kingdom Age. The latter will be judged at the end of the Kingdom Age, preceding the eternal ages. We could say that there is a first judgment (Judgment Seat of Christ, or of God) and a second judgment (Great White Throne), separated by 1,000 years. The First Judgment

Just as there will be a first resurrection at the end of Man's Day, preceding the Kingdom Age, there will be a first judgment. Although the Scriptures do not call it a first judgment, it nevertheless is such, for it coincides with the resurrection of those who will be raised in the first resurrection. As the Scriptures state: The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection (Revelation 20:5). Further, just as there will be several resurrections that make up the first resurrection, there will be several judgments that make up the first judgment. All of these judgments are in reference to the millennial Kingdom, not the eternal ages, and as such, all of this must transpire before the commencement of the Kingdom Age. At the end of the 1,000-year reign of Christ, preceding the eternal ages, there will be a second resurrection of all the dead that were not part of the first resurrection, a second judgment and a second death.

There are three groups in the world [see chapter 8], and it is important to realize that within this first judgment, each will have their day of judgment. God operates in a very ordered and deliberate fashion and each group will be judged in their respective order. Peter wrote: For {it is} time for judgment to begin with the household of God (1 Peter 4:17). As such, the Church of God (Christians) will be judged first; followed by Israel, including the saints of old, such as those who are recorded in Hebrews 11:1-40 and finally the Gentile nations on the earth at the end of the Great Tribulation. The result of this judgment will determine what position a person will occupy in the Kingdom of God's Son and, depending on the group, placement will be in either the heavenly or the earthly portion of the Kingdom.

Another fact to keep in mind is that judgment will not be only for those who are raised from the dead but also for those who are alive and remain when the Lord comes. All three groups will have people on the earth when He comes. However, it must be noted that only the Gentile nations on the earth when the Son of Man steps foot on the earth will be judged. Lost Gentiles who are in the grave will not be raised and judged until the second resurrection after the Kingdom Age.

These are important points because Christians generally view God's work entirely from their own perspective, which is legitimate (to a degree). According to Paul's gospel, the manifold wisdom of God is made known through the Church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places (Ephesians 3:8-10). The Church has an unbelievable, on-high calling. However, God has a great purpose and plan, and He will work it out, not only through the Church but also through the Jews and the Gentiles. For this reason, there will be judgment for each group in relation to the Kingdom Age.

Now, let us begin with the first group that will be judged in the first judgment. The Judgment Of The Church Of God When the Lord Jesus returns to this earth, He will remove the Church, the Body of Christ, from the earth into the air. Those believers who have fallen asleep in Jesus will be raised from the dead, resurrected, and those believers who are alive and remain on the earth at His parousia will be caught up with the resurrected believers (1 Thessalonians 4:14-17). At this time, all of the Lord's people will be judged, and this will occur in the air, not on the earth. The on-high calling of the Church is heavenly; therefore, all things associated with her judgment will be in relation to the Heavenly Kingdom, as well. In the Scriptures, the judgment of the Church is referred to as taking place at the judgment seat of Christ. Paul was the one who wrote of the judgment seat of Christ; however, the apostles only taught what their Master had taught first. The principle of judgment is found in many of the Kingdom parables that the Lord Jesus spoke. The Kingdom divides (Matthew 10:34-39; Luke 12:51-53) and judgment will bring about the proper division of the Lord's people. [For more detail on these parables, the reader is referred to the author's book titled Watch!.] When The Master Returns To Settle Accounts With His Servants The Lord spoke two similar parables that most clearly depict the judgment of His people-the parable of the talents and the parable of the minas. Some people believe that when the Lord's people fall asleep in Jesus, they are judged and given rewards. However, according to these parables, this is not so. All of the Lord's people will be judged together when He comes to receive His Kingdom.

"For {it is} just like a man {about} to go on a journey, who called his own slaves, and entrusted his possessions to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey." (Matthew 25:14-15) "Now after a long

time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them." (Matthew 25:19)

He said therefore, "A certain nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and {then} return. And he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business {with this} until I come {back.}'" (Luke 19:12-13)

"And it came about that when he returned, after receiving the kingdom, he ordered that these slaves, to whom he had given the money, be called to him in order that he might know what business they had done." (Luke 19:15) The Master and Nobleman is the Lord and the slaves are His people, bondservants of Christ. There are three steps presented: the Master gives His goods to His servants and commands them to do business until He returns; He goes away to the throne of God (a distant country) to receive the Kingdom; He will return after receiving the Kingdom and will call His servants together at one time to give an account of what they have done in His long absence. This is exactly how it will occur at the end of Man's Day when the Son of Man returns to take the scepter of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is only when He returns after a long absence and receives the Kingdom that He will settle accounts, that is, make determinations about reward or loss of reward for work rendered. It is at this time that He will call all of His people to Himself and set up His judgment seat. This is in perfect harmony with the Lord's promise that His reward is with Him and it is given when He comes.

"For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds." (Matthew 16:27)

"Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward {is} with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done." (Revelation 22:12)

Reward is based on the determinations made at the judgment seat when He returns to take the scepter of the Kingdom of Heaven. All of His people will be called to Him in order to know what business they have done while in the body. The firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His" (2 Timothy 2:19); He will judge them according to their deeds or works. As discussed in the next chapter, the deeds are more about being than doing. Christ is looking for spiritual character in His people, and out from this character come forth good works that are pleasing to Him. Today, it seems that Christians have the order in reverse. They run around doing many things "in the name of the Lord," and yet, the spiritual character is missing. The Day Will Show It This is most clearly seen as we turn to Paul's writing on the judgment seat. Paul was having difficulties with the believers in Corinth and he wrote them several letters, two of which are found in the Bible. Some of the Corinthians, who were called to be saints, were living as carnal men rather than spiritual men (1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Corinthians 3:1NKJ), so Paul exhorted and encouraged them as a father, trying to get them to clean up their lives and live the Spirit-filled life and not the soul-filled, carnal life.

Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is {to be} revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Corinthians 3:12-15) The fire of judgment will test every man's (believer's) work; and if it is burned up, he will be saved (eternal life) but he will

suffer loss (loss in the Kingdom Age). The day will show it speaks of the Day of Judgment. Every man's work will pass through fire in that day, and if it survives, it means that it had the quality of Christ. It was of His character and it brought glory to Him. Was it of value to the Lord-gold, silver, precious stones-or was it of no value to the Lord-wood, hay, straw? What remains will result in reward. Can this matter be explained any clearer than Paul's words?

Whether Good Or Bad In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul continued to exhort and encourage them. He wrote of the gospel of the glory of Christ, the treasure in earthen vessels, the glorious hope of the resurrection, the eternal weight of glory that awaits all in the resurrection, the heavenly habitation which one day will clothe the believers, and the need to walk by faith, not by sight, until that Day. As long as we are at home in these physical bodies, we are absent from the Lord, so Paul groaned and was burdened that he would rather be absent from the body and present with the Lord. What a heart of love for the Master! Paul's sole desire was to shed his earthly tent and be with the Lord (2 Corinthians 4:1-18; 2 Corinthians 5:1-8). (Is this your desire, as well?) It is with this desire that Paul revealed the truth of the judgment seat of Christ.

Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences. (2 Corinthians 5:9-11)

Let us be very clear that Paul wrote these words to believers. In fact, the entire context surrounding these words deals with Christians, for only believers walk by faith and know the fear of the Lord. The lost have no faith and no fear of the Lord and are not in view in this portion of Scripture. The we are Christians.

Paul also mentioned the judgment seat in his letter to the believers in Rome. But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God. (Romans 14:10-12)

Although Paul used the term the judgment seat of God (rather than, of Christ), there is no conflict, for the Father has given all judgment to His Son (John 5:22) who is the Second Person of the Godhead. Also, please take note of the fact that Paul's emphasis was on character-do not regard your brother with contempt, for we shall give account of such behavior.

Through Paul's teaching on the judgment seat of Christ, we can draw several conclusions.

First, we ALL must appear before the judgment seat to give account of ourselves. This means that every Christian will be judged. For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge His people." It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:30-31).

Second, the judgment seat is a judicial seat from which determinations will be made. Some people believe that the judgment seat of Christ is comparable to Olympic races in which only prizes (crowns) are awarded. In other words, only prizes are awarded and there are no repercussions for

failure to finish the race or to run it according to the rules. Some liken it to an awards banquet. However, as presented in the Scriptures, the judgment seat is always judicial in nature, which means that determinations are made based on facts and which may or may not end in a positive manner for the one being judged. Both Jesus and Paul were forced to stand before unrighteous judgment seats to be unjustly accused and convicted (Matthew 27:19; John 19:13; Acts 18:12). Christ's judgment seat will manifest perfect righteousness.

Third, the judgment seat is based on what has been done. This phrase has done is from the Greek word *prasso*, which means "practice, or to perform repeatedly or habitually." In other words, what will be judged are not so much single acts but those things that were habitually done while in the body. The implication is: What was practiced daily in the life of the believer? Another way of stating this is: What kind of life was lived?

Fourth, the purpose is to give to each according to the deeds done while in the body. Once physical death or "the seizing" (rapture) comes, the time and opportunity will be up; there will be no more opportunity to do deeds. The dead in Christ await the resurrection followed by the judgment seat.

Fifth, the daily practice of the believer while in the body will be judged on whether it was good or bad. Contrary to common teaching on this subject, it is not a judgment where there are only good rewards merely because one is a Christian. It cannot be this way because Paul clearly stated good or bad. In other words, the bad will not be overlooked. Paul wrote that the bad we (Christians) might do in the body will be judged. In the Greek, the word translated bad is *phaulos*, which has the meaning of something foul, worthless, even something wicked or evil. Foul gives the sense of something that is rotten and stinks. Simply stated, they are objectionable because they stink and that which stinks has no value (worthless). It is similar to the condition of the lukewarm church of the Laodiceans whom the Lord will vomit out of His mouth (Revelation 3:16). Doing bad deeds and being lukewarm are worthless and undesirable.

Part of the leaven or corruption of the Word of the Kingdom comes in when Christians are taught that when they "go to heaven," they automatically will receive rewards because they are Christians. It is as if by definition Christians only do good. The Word is perverted further when it is taught that those who fall into the category of those doing wicked or evil works while in the body either have fallen out of eternal salvation or were not saved in the first place. This is impossible according to the Scriptures because the lost never appear before the judgment seat of Christ; they appear before the Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11) at the end of the Kingdom Age. Christians must guard themselves from the smelly, stinky deeds. As the writer of the Hebrews letter stated: And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do (Hebrews 4:13). Christians will have to give an account, for our Judge knows our deeds. Have Confidence In The Day Of Judgment-Abide In Love This leads us to the last description of the judgment of the Church given to us in the Scriptures. John the abiding apostle was caught up to the Day of the Lord (the Lord's Day) and his eyes were opened to some of the greatest revelation in all of Scripture. John heard a voice and turned, and when he turned to see who was speaking, he saw the Son of Man standing as the Judge in the midst of His Church. And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed

in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His breast with a golden girdle. And His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire; and His feet {were} like burnished bronze, when it has been caused to glow in a furnace, and His voice {was} like the sound of many waters. And in His right hand He held seven stars; and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. (Revelation 1:12-16)

John saw the Lord Jesus Christ dressed in all His regal splendor when He comes as the Son of Man and judges His Church. Everything about this description, from His head to His feet, speaks of judgment. The One who was marred more than any man (Isaiah 52:14), upon whose head was thrust a crown of thorns and through whose hands and feet were thrust nails to hold Him to the cross, stood in the midst of His prized possession which was purchased with His shed blood. He stood in the glory of His splendor and majesty. Here He is not seen as the High Priest ministering in the heavenly sanctuary (Hebrews 8:1-2). We should thank God for our High Priest who intercedes for us. His blood is sprinkled on the mercy seat and He is able to save all who come to God through Him (Hebrews 7:25). Today, if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father who is faithful and just to forgive all confessed sin (1 John 2:1; 1 John 1:9). However, a day is coming soon when His priestly work will be over and He will walk amongst His Church as the Judge who discerns the works of His people. To His seven churches, which represent the entirety of Church history, He says, "I know your works" (Revelation 2:2; Revelation 2:9; Revelation 2:13; Revelation 2:19; Revelation 3:1; Revelation 3:8; Revelation 3:15). The Judge knows the heart of His people; and in His righteousness, He will judge and reward.

Judgment will be a fearful event for some Christians, but it is John himself who gives us the encouragement, even the boldness to appear before the Lord at His judgment seat.

John, who was the disciple whom the Lord loved and who leaned on the breast of His Lord (John 13:23; John 13:25; John 21:20), could do only one thing as he saw who was speaking—he fell at His feet as a dead man. The breast upon which John had reclined was now girded with a golden girdle, a girdle of divine love. The love of John's life was robed not merely as a judge but as the compassionate, loving Judge. The breast speaks of the heart; and although He must judge in righteousness, He is the One who knows the heart of His people and who loves them with a love that surpasses knowledge (Romans 8:35-39; Ephesians 3:19). He is the Judge who will say, "I have loved you" (Revelation 3:9). He touched John with His love at the moment he most needed it. The Lord laid His right hand on John to raise him up. Oh, what love we see in this picture. Although He is the Judge, the Lord is the compassionate Savior who raises up His loved ones. The eyes that were like a flame of fire were also the same lovely eyes that looked down from the cross as Jesus spoke to the disciple whom He loved and who was grieving at the foot of the cross. To His mother, Jesus said, "Woman, behold your son!" To John the disciple, He said, "Behold, you mother!" From that hour, John took Mary into his own home (John 19:26-27). The eyes of flame discerned the love in John's heart and Jesus could entrust Mary into his care. This speaks of relationship and John was intimately related to his Lord. The judgment seat will be frightening to some; but to those who have loved the Lord and have known His love, it will be a judgment of love. John knew the secret of a disciple's walk with the Lord.

"Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love." (John 15:9-10{ea}) And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because He first loved us. (1 John 4:16-19{ea})

What was John's secret? It was abiding in His love! Abiding, which could be defined as "remaining in relationship," is vital to our understanding of the judgment seat of Christ. It is love that will allow us to stand in His presence. It is love that casts out all fear, even at the judgment seat. But we must abide in this love today. If we abide in Him and in His love in this life, then we will not shrink back at His coming and His judgment seat. If we have abided in His love, we will be counted worthy to stand in His presence and reign with Him. And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. (1 John 2:28) This was John's secret and it is to be ours, as well. Love will cause us to run to our one true love and not fear Him. He might have to raise us up with His right hand when we first see Him, but we can be assured that His gracious hand of love will touch all who have loved Him and have received His love. Let us abide in the One who is love. The Judgment Of Daniel's People The next group to be judged during the first judgment is the Jews, and it is Daniel who wrote of this fact. Daniel the prophet was given revelation of the end-times similar to John the apostle's revelation. In fact, the book of Daniel is essential to understanding the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, as well as Matthew 24:1-51. To Daniel, it was revealed that there would be an end-time resurrection of his people, the Hebrews (later called Jews).

"Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands {guard} over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace {and} everlasting contempt. And those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever." (Daniel 12:1-3) The first thing to be noted in these verses is that Michael is the angel who guards the nation of Israel. He is referred to as their angel. This is clearly seen in Revelation 12:1-17 when the woman (Israel) is about to give birth to a male-child [144,000 Jewish, virgin men who will be sealed on their foreheads (Revelation 7:3-8; Revelation 14:1-5) and who will preach the gospel of the Kingdom in all the world (Matthew 24:14)]. After the woman gives birth to a son, war breaks out in heaven between Michael and his angels and the dragon, Satan, and his angels (Revelation 12:1-9). Michael prevails and Satan is cast out of heaven, at which point he seeks to devour the woman as she flees into the wilderness (Revelation 12:6; Revelation 12:13-17). There she is protected for 1,260 days. Satan then will turn to her offspring who are scattered throughout the earth. The time of distress of which Daniel wrote is Jacob's distress (Jeremiah 30:7) which is the Great Tribulation that is coming upon the whole world and which will last for 3½ years. The tribulation of that day will be so great that it will seem like no one will survive; but for the sake of the elect (the Jewish people who are found written in the book), God

will shorten those days and His elect will be rescued (compare Daniel 12:1-3 with Matthew 24:4-22). At the end of the Great Tribulation, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light and the powers of the heavens will be shaken (Matthew 24:29). It is when all seems to be lost that Israel's Messiah, their Deliverer, will come from an opened heaven, shining in all His glory, and will step foot on this earth once again. It is at this time that Daniel's people who are recorded in the book will be resurrected and be judged along with Daniel's people who are alive and remain on the earth. Ezekiel prophesied of their judgment.

"And I shall bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out; and I shall bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I shall enter into judgment with you face to face. As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you," declares the Lord GOD. And I shall make you pass under the rod, and I shall bring you into the bond of the covenant; and I shall purge from you the rebels and those who transgress against Me; I shall bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they will not enter the land of Israel. Thus you will know that I am the LORD." (Ezekiel 20:34-38)

Israel will pass under the rod of judgment. When He came the first time, Messiah came to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:6; Matthew 15:24), not only to be their King but to be their Shepherd. When He comes the second time, Messiah will be the Shepherd of the sheep of Israel. He will gather them together from all over the earth and they will pass under the rod of the Shepherd (Psalms 23:4). All who are found worthy will dwell in the house of the Lord as He sits upon the throne of David (Luke 1:32). What a beautiful picture of redemptive love and mercy!

Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Now I shall restore the fortunes of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I shall be jealous for My holy name. And they shall forget their disgrace and all their treachery which they perpetrated against Me, when they live securely on their {own} land with no one to make them afraid. When I bring them back from the peoples and gather them from the lands of their enemies, then I shall be sanctified through them in the sight of the many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD their God because I made them go into exile among the nations, and then gathered them {again} to their own land; and I will leave none of them there any longer. And I will not hide My face from them any longer, for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel," declares the Lord GOD. (Ezekiel 39:25-29{ea}) In that day, Israel will be restored to the land and those who have been approved to enter the land will reign on the earth in the Kingdom of God's Son.

[A footnote needs to be added to this judgment. In Hebrews 11:1-40 a record has been left to us of the saints of old who died in faith without receiving the promises. They confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth, for they desired a better country, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them. The city is the Heavenly Jerusalem. In other words, some saints of old also will enter the Reign of the Heavens (in the heavenly places). {See Daniel 12:2-3; Matthew 8:10-12; Hebrews 11:1-39; Hebrews 12:18-29; Hebrews 13:14.}] The Judgment Of The Sheep And The Goats The last group to be judged at the end of Man's Day is the Gentile nations. At this point, the Lord Jesus will have taken the scepter and judged the Church of God and the Jews to determine who will reign in His Kingdom and what position of power and authority they will assume. His Bride will be seated in the

heavenly places, having taken up her position as His ruling Queen (Psalms 45:9). Israel will be on the land (married to it), ready to assume her role as the head of the nations. As He sits on His throne of glory, the Son of Man will turn to the third group of people on the earth, the Gentile nations, which He will divide as the sheep and the goats based on one type of work—the treatment of the elect.

"But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left." (Matthew 25:31-33)

"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" (Matthew 25:34)

"Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.'" (Matthew 25:41) The first thing that needs to be noted is that the nations, not the Church of God or the Jews, will be gathered before Him. Some people view this section of Scripture as a picture of the judgment of the saved (Christians) and the lost. This cannot be so because it is clearly the nations on the earth; and, as we have seen, the Church, which is to be judged in the air, will have been judged prior to this point, as well as Israel. The last group to be judged is the first group that God brought forth on the earth. God's principle is that the last shall be first, and the first shall be last (Matthew 20:16). The second thing that must be noted is that this judgment occurs after the Great Tribulation and the shaking of the heavens and the earth, a time in which over half the world population will die. The nations that remain are the ones that will have survived the wrath of the Lamb (Revelation 6:16-17). All those who will have died during this time and will not have been resurrected at the end of Man's Day will remain in the grave until the end of the Kingdom Age. They will be raised 1,000 years later to appear before the Great White Throne Judgment.

It is apparent that the Lord must judge all that are alive on the earth that are not counted amongst the Church and the Jews. The Kingdom of the Son is a kingdom of righteousness and justice (Psalms 33:5; Psalms 89:14; Psalms 97:2) and all lawlessness must be removed. In fact, we are told this in the parables of the mysteries of the Kingdom. In explaining the tares, the sons of disobedience (of the evil one), the Lord Jesus said, "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, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear" (Matthew 13:41-43).

During His reign, Christ will take the world from chaos to order, from unrighteousness to righteousness, from injustice to justice. He will put all things under His feet until He truly is all and in all (1 Corinthians 15:27; Colossians 3:11). He must purge His Kingdom of all that is not worthy.

It appears that judgment will be based on how the nations will have treated His elect (the Jews) during the Tribulation. This makes perfect sense because it is through Israel that the Gentile nations will be blessed (Genesis 22:18). Those who treated them kindly [gave them food, drink and clothing, cared for their sickness, and visited them in prison (Matthew 25:35-40)] will be

rewarded by inheriting (having a part in) the earthly portion of the Kingdom. Those who did not treat Israel in a kindly manner will be ordered to depart into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41-45). These nations will have chosen their lot with the devil during the Tribulation, so they will go to the devil's abode that he will occupy later. The Second Judgment-The Great White Throne

Finally, there is one last judgment to occur, and that is the Great White Throne Judgment which brings the Kingdom Age to an end and precedes the Day of God, the glorious eternal ages. Satan, who will have been bound in the abyss for the 1,000-year reign of Christ (Revelation 20:2-3), will be released to deceive the nations. His efforts will be futile and God will put an end to his deception. He will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone to be tormented day and night forever.

After Satan is cast into the lake of fire, the Great White Throne comes into view, and the rest of the dead who did not come to life in the first resurrection will be released from the place of the dead (Revelation 20:5). And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is {the book} of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one {of them} according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15{ea}) As revealed previously, according to the Lord's word, all the dead who die in unbelief will have been judged already. Their destiny will be the lake of fire. However, they will be judged for their deeds while in the body. Books will be opened that contain all their deeds and they will be judged based on the record. In the mercy of God, one last check of the Book of Life will confirm if any appearing at the Great White Throne will be saved for the eternal ages. The second resurrection and the second death will come and God will have settled all accounts. All the books will be balanced and the 7,000 years determined by God for the present earth and heaven will come to an end.

It is at this point that all things will be summed up in God's Son (Ephesians 1:10). All rule and all authority and power will have been put to an end (1 Corinthians 15:24). The last enemy of man, death, will be destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:26) when Death and Hades (the abode of the dead) will be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14). In that glorious day, God will be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28). God Himself shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be {any} death; there shall no longer be {any} mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away (Revelation 21:4). Hallelujah!

Judgment will be finished. All accounts will be settled, even for those who suffered loss during the Kingdom Age, for they will be restored. All that is not of Christ will have been purged by fire. Truly, all things will be new. The declaration of God will be: "It is done!" (Revelation 21:6).

Dear brethren, the judgment of God speaks of His love and mercy. All that is not of the life of Christ will be purged by fire, for our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). Why would we want to go into eternity carrying the many encumbrances and entanglements with which we suffer in this day? Thank God for the cleansing fire that will release us from all that has hindered us while in this

body of death (Romans 7:24NKJ). This is the love and mercy of God.

Judgment will be a fearful thing for those who reject God's answer for mankind-the Lamb who took away the sin of the world. However, for some Christians, the judgment seat of Christ also will be a fearful thing. The good news is that this does not have to be so for any Christian. Those who know the Lamb also must know that He is gentle and meek and His love continually woos them to follow Him. He is gentle and humble in heart (Matthew 11:28-30). The heart speaks of love. Those who are in love seek to please the object of their love. Is our beloved Lord Jesus the object of your love? He should be because you are the object of His love.

Let us love Him with sincerity and we will not fear the judgment seat of Christ, for love casts out all fear.

## Part X8.1 - Reward Of The Inheritance

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The Reward Of The Inheritance As presented in the last chapter, every Christian must appear before the judgment seat of Christ at the end of Man's Day when the Lord Jesus comes to take the scepter of the Kingdom and usher in the Kingdom Age. It is at this time that the Lord will review the lives of His people: "I know your deeds." Determinations made by the Judge will result in reward or loss of reward in His Kingdom (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). The judgment of the Lord's people will not be to determine who will enter into the eternal presence of God or who will be cast into the eternal lake of fire, for eternity with God is secured for all who believe. The judgment seat of Christ will be to determine who of His people will inherit the Kingdom to reign with Him as His Bride and Queen and who will be placed in lesser positions, even in outer darkness. As stressed throughout this book, the inheritance deals with a very specific period of time, the 1,000 years that precede the eternal ages; and judgment will answer some vital questions related to what place born-again Christians will hold, if any, during the reign of God's Son. Will they inherit the Kingdom or will they not inherit the Kingdom (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:24)? Will they be great in the Kingdom or the least in the Kingdom (Matthew 5:19)? Will they enter the wedding feast with Christ or will they find themselves outside the banquet hall in the place of darkness (Matthew 22:13; Matthew 25:10-12)? Will they be taken to His side as a companion, as part of His Bride, or will they be turned away from entering into this most intimate relationship (Matthew 24:40-43; Matthew 25:11-12)? Will they be clothed with the fine linen, the righteous acts of the saints, or will they be found naked (Matthew 22:9-14; Revelation 16:15; Revelation 19:8)? Will they be commended for faithfulness while He has been gone or will they be condemned for unfaithfulness (Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:12-27)? Will they be crowned or will they not be crowned (1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 2 Timothy 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:4; Revelation 2:10; Revelation 3:11)? Ultimately, will they reign with Christ or will they not reign (2 Timothy 2:12)?

These questions are not contrasting the saved and the lost, nor are they contrasting eternal salvation (being in the presence of God for eternity) and eternal damnation (being in the lake of fire for eternity). They are contrasting believers who will be found worthy of the Kingdom and Glory and believers who will not be found worthy. A Christian is exhorted to walk in a worthy manner (Ephesians 4:1; Php 1:27; Colossians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12) in order to be counted worthy to enter the coming millennial Kingdom of our Lord (Luke 20:34-36; 2 Thessalonians 1:4-5; 11-12; Hebrews 11:39-40; Revelation 3:4). If we walk worthy in this day, we will be counted worthy in His Day.

Every born-again child of God is called to receive the reward of the inheritance, which refers to entering the Reign of the Heavens when our Lord Jesus comes. Inheritance means "heirship." According to Paul's gospel, we are called to be fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with {Him} in order that we may also be glorified with {Him} (Romans 8:17). God's Son has been given the nations as His inheritance and when He comes He will rule over all the nations. It is in that day that He will ascend the throne of the Kingdom of Heaven and rule with those who have been

qualified as fellow heirs (co-heirs) with Him. They will sit upon His throne as He has sat upon His Father's throne (Revelation 3:21). Thus, the reward pertains to heirship in the coming Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (Revelation 11:15).

Now in undertaking this matter, we need to look more closely at the reward and answer some basic questions: When do we receive the reward? What must we do to earn the reward? What will cause us to lose the reward? However, before answering these questions, there is one vital principle that underlies the reward-God is a rewarder.

**God Is A Rewarder** The Word of God encourages us in this matter of reward; however, the emphasis is not on the reward but on the Giver of the reward. But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6NKJ {ea}) At the heart of this verse is pleasing God. Every disciple of Christ who is walking by faith should have one motive in his thoughts and actions-to please God. After all, this was the very heart of our Lord Jesus when He walked this earth. He is our example of a true disciple of the Kingdom and everything about a disciple starts with Him. "And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him" (John 8:29). Our Lord's whole purpose was to please His Father who was in heaven. He did nothing apart from the will of the Father and all His thoughts and actions were centered on what pleased Him. He entrusted Himself fully to the will of His heavenly Father.

One who seeks to please God is one who walks by faith. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God (Hebrews 11:5-6 a). Enoch, the seventh generation from Adam, a type of the Church being taken up at "the seizing," did not see death because he walked with God (Genesis 5:24); he walked by faith. This pleased God, which in the Greek means "to gratify entirely." When God's people believe in Him, trust in Him and daily walk with Him, they are pleasing to God; they "gratify entirely."

Although he saw physical death, Paul knew at the end of his life that he was pleasing to his Lord: I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day (2 Timothy 4:7-8). In the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul will shine brightly in the glory of the Lord. What was Paul's secret? Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord-for we walk by faith, not by sight-we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. (2 Corinthians 5:6-9). Paul's secret was to walk by faith with one ambition-to be pleasing to the Lord, which in this verse means "fully agreeable, acceptable." Paul lived his life continually trying to learn what was pleasing, fully agreeable or acceptable to the Lord (Ephesians 5:8 b-10). We can rejoice with Paul, for he did not fail in his walk. The good news is that every disciple who desires to grow up to be a son of the Kingdom can walk in the same path as Enoch and Paul.

However, there is more to this verse. A disciple who is walking by faith and pleasing God is one who is a seeker of God. The word seek in the Greek has the meaning of "to search out, investigate, crave." Those who diligently seek out God by faith, even crave for Him, will find Him

and He will reward them for their diligence. Enoch craved for God and he was not found. Paul craved for his Lord and his Lord stood with him throughout his running the race of the faith, his fighting of the good fight (2 Timothy 4:17). In reference to seeking wisdom, which refers to seeking Christ who is the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24), Solomon wrote: "I love those who love me; and those who diligently seek me will find me" (Proverbs 8:17).

Love is always at the heart of a true disciple of Christ. Love is a reciprocal relationship. We love, because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). I love those who love Me. True lovers must seek out the object of their love. Christ must be the love of the life of a disciple and He must be diligently sought. Once again, Solomon revealed this heart through the Shulamite maiden, the bride who sought for her bridegroom.

"On my bed night after night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him but did not find him. 'I must arise now and go about the city; in the streets and in the squares I must seek him whom my soul loves.' I sought him but did not find him. The watchmen who make the rounds in the city found me, {and I said,} 'Have you seen him whom my soul loves?' Scarcely had I left them when I found him whom my soul loves; I held on to him and would not let him go, until I had brought him to my mother's house, and into the room of her who conceived me." (Song of Solomon 3:1-4)

She is a type of the Bride of Christ who seeks for the one she loves. The Bride's heart is: I seek Him whom my soul loves. When He seems to be distant from her, as if He has withdrawn from her presence, she all the more diligently looks for Him. When she finds Him she clings to Him and won't let Him go. It is like Mary who stood weeping before the empty tomb where they had placed her Lord's crucified body. The resurrected Jesus spoke her name, and as she turned to see her loved one, all she could do was cling to Him. She did not want to let Him go ever again (John 20:16-17). Oh, that we would hear Him call our name and we would turn to see Him face to face. We would run and cling to Him, as well. This is the heart of a lover, of one who seeks after the object of her love.

One might wonder why this matter of love is being presented to introduce the reward. After all, isn't reward about doing things for God? Primarily, it is not. The matter of reward is a heart issue. God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him by faith, and those who diligently seek Him are lovers of God. If we miss this point, we will miss the way to reward. The truth of the matter is that we can approach this matter of reward with the wrong heart. We can approach it merely for what we will get out of it. In other words, we can seek reward selfishly. When we do, we are merely a hireling, one who is a worker for wages (John 10:12-13). Our Lord desires lovers, not hirelings.

Further, we must not reduce gaining rewards to some formula: "If I do something good in the name of the Lord, then I will receive reward." This is not right. The danger of discussing reward is the same danger that is encountered when discussing being justified by works—we will be tempted to go off and do something, anything that seems good to us according to our own standard. It most likely will result in us continually striving and thinking that we are not doing enough to earn the reward. This is a wrong type of striving. We must do what comes from the life of our Lord Jesus, not from our good intentions. Besides, it is more about being than about doing—being in love and being in life. Love and life go hand in hand. We cannot and must not separate the two. We must be before we do. We must be in love with our Lord and we must be living, breathing and walking in Him. We are to be an expression of His love and of His life. This is what pleases God. In fact, the

being is the real work that yields reward. God desires a people who are like His Son, through and through. Our Lord desires a Bride who is in His likeness, who answers to His heart. After all, we are members of His Body, of His flesh and of His bones, and we are to be one with Him (Ephesians 5:30-32NKJ). Being one with Him means that we are becoming more like Him in character; this is the work of the Holy Spirit, for the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Bearing this kind of fruit pleases our Lord, for this is His life expressed and this is what will be rewarded in the Day of Judgment. For those who are lovers and diligent seekers, the Day of Judgment will be a time of great rejoicing. All fear will be cast out, for there is no fear in love (1 John 4:18).

Now, with this essential foundation laid down, we can proceed to build upon it with what the Scriptures reveal about reward.

Reward-Wages For Work In the New Testament, the reward is presented as a wage for services rendered. Another way of stating this is that a work is performed and a reward or wage is paid. There are at least seven Greek words used to convey the thought of reward, wage or hire for service-apodidomi (Matthew 6:4; Matthew 6:6; Matthew 6:18; Matthew 16:27; 2 Timothy 4:14; Revelation 18:6); katabrabeuo ["rob of reward" (Colossians 2:18)]; antapodosia ["to give back in return" (Colossians 3:24)]; misthapodosia ["to give back wages" (Hebrews 2:2; Hebrews 10:35; Hebrews 11:26)]; axios (Luke 23:41); opsonion (Luke 3:14; Romans 6:23). The most common Greek word translated as reward or wage is misthos, which is used 29 times in the New Testament. [All of these Greek words are not taken up in this chapter but are presented for the reader's further study.]

Misthos means "pay for services rendered, whether good or bad." In other words, a person performs a certain work and receives wages for that work. The word may be used in a way that means there is no reward (Matthew 6:1-2; Matthew 6:5; Matthew 6:16; Acts 1:18; 2 Peter 2:13; Jude 1:11). It can refer to receiving a positive reward for service rendered (Matthew 5:12; Matthew 10:41-42; Mark 9,41; Luke 6:23; Luke 6:35; 1 Corinthians 3:14; 2 John 1:8; Revelation 11:18). It also carries a neutral sense of reward; one could be rewarded with wages commensurate with the work or could receive no wages or loss of wages (Matthew 5:46; 1 Corinthians 3:8; 1 Corinthians 3:15; Revelation 22:12). Finally, in several places, misthos is translated as wages (Matthew 20:8; Luke 10:7; Romans 4:4; 1 Corinthians 9:17-18; 1 Timothy 5:18; James 5:4; 2 Peter 2:15).

### "My Reward Is With Me"

It is the Lord Jesus Himself who lays down the principle of reward and who explains when and for what purpose reward is given. In fact, the Lord Jesus spoke the first and the last mentions of reward in the New Testament. In each case, the word misthos is used, and the work to be rewarded deals entirely with character (righteousness, godliness and love). The first mention is found when Jesus sat on a mountain with His disciples and taught them on the royal entrance into the Kingdom. In what are commonly called the Beatitudes, He began teaching on who the "blessed are." It is in the last "blessed" that Jesus taught on reward.

"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when {men} cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in

heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matthew 5:10-12{ea}; also Luke 6:22-23)

Jesus clearly linked reward with the Kingdom of Heaven and with the prophets of old who were persecuted for the difficult word that they were called to speak forth from the Lord. The prophets suffered greatly for the sake of righteousness. In like fashion, when Jesus spoke these words, His disciples were about to go out with His Word and suffer persecution at the hands of the Jews (Matthew 23:34) and the Gentiles. Later, Paul, the last apostle to see the risen Lord (1 Corinthians 15:8), wrote to his beloved Timothy reminding him of the suffering that will come to all who desire to live godly. But you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, {and} sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium {and} at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord delivered me! And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (2 Timothy 3:10-12)

Persecution will come to all believers who desire to live godly in Christ, and if they are persecuted, according to the word of the Lord, their reward in heaven will be great and theirs will be the Kingdom of Heaven. Living godly in Christ and suffering for the sake of righteousness are one and the same, for a godly life is a righteous life. Suffering persecution is not the only thing that will be rewarded; however, this is where the Lord began His teaching on this subject, probably because it was to be the path of the disciples who had personally walked with Him. After all, Jesus Himself was about to be persecuted by the same class of people that persecuted the prophets of old (Matthew 23:31-37). In another teaching, the Lord connected the reward with the coming Kingdom of Heaven.

"But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward [misthos] will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil {men.}" (Luke 6:35{ea})

It is not enough to love our brothers and sisters; we must love our enemies, showing mercy on all people. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" (Matthew 5:7). When do the merciful receive mercy? At the judgment seat: For judgment {will be} merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:13).

Loving our enemies is a work that will receive wages. In all things, we are to do good and expect nothing in return-no reward, no thanks, no congratulations. Why? Because our future reward will be great. But notice what the Lord added to the reward: You will be sons of the Most High. A child of God must grow up to be a son in order to rule in God's Kingdom. Sonship is heirship and heirship is rulership. We are called to be fellow heirs with Christ in His Kingdom (Romans 8:17; Romans 8:19).

Now, some people believe that reward will be given when they "die and go to heaven" because the Lord taught that your reward in heaven is great. As we have shown previously in this book, heaven comes into view when Christ comes from heaven, not at the time of death of one who is in Christ. By comparing Scriptures, it is easy to see that the reward only comes into view when Christ, the Son of Man, comes. The last mention of reward clearly states this fact.

"Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward {is} with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done." (Revelation 22:12{ea}) In other words, the reward is in heaven because Christ

is in heaven and reward is given when He comes from heaven a second time. This great event is at the end of Man's Day that ushers in the Kingdom Age. Jesus taught His disciples concerning this fact, as well.

Beginning in Matthew 16:13, Jesus began to teach His disciples over a two day period regarding who He is (the Son of Man, the Christ, the Son of the living God—all references to His Messianic Kingship), the Church, the Kingdom, His death and resurrection and the salvation of the soul. He concluded this teaching, declaring: "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds" (Matthew 16:27). The Greek word for recompense is *apodidomi*, which comes from *didomi* which means "to give" and *apo* which means "back." In other words, it means "to give back." It has the meaning of giving a wage for service. The Greek word for deeds is *praxis*, which has the meaning of "those things practiced habitually or repeatedly." Thus, when He comes, the Lord will reward His servants for the services they repeatedly practiced on His behalf.

All doubt about when the reward will be rendered to the Lord's people is resolved in the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

"The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward [misthos] Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth." (Revelation 11:18NKJ {ea}) A time will come at the end of Man's Day when the dead will be raised and the Lord will reward His bondservants. As shown previously, the resurrection of the dead at the end of this age will include those who will have died in Christ, those who will be martyred for Christ during the Tribulation and those who are called Daniel's people, which would include all the prophets of old (Daniel 12:1-3).

Thus, according to the Lord's teaching, the reward is His to give and He will give it when He comes to take the scepter of the Kingdom of Heaven. Today, His reward is in heaven because it is with Him, and it will be awarded in heaven when He seizes all of His people (Church of God) up to heaven at His parousia.

One final proof of when reward is given is found in Paul's last letter. To Timothy, Paul wrote: In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing (2 Timothy 4:8). According to Paul, that day is the Day of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:8; 1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 1:14; Php 1:6; Php 1:10; Php 2:16) which is the day of the appearing of the Son of Man. It is the Second Coming of Christ. This is when reward is given.

#### Kingdom Rewards Based On Works

Having established that according to the Scriptures the reward is with the Son of Man when He comes leads us to a question: What is the reward? The answer to this question is covered in a variety of ways in other chapters of this book and in the author's book titled *Watch!*; however, it is instructive to provide some overview of the reward. First, let us be clear that the reward is in reference to the coming Kingdom, the Reign of the Heavens, and not to eternity. Reward is never presented in the light of eternal salvation, a free gift based on the work of Christ. Reward is given based on our works after we have been saved, and these works do not (absolutely cannot) enter

into the finished work of Christ. Reward relates entirely to the millennial reign of Christ and who will be given places of power and authority in His Kingdom. Reward is to be gained or lost by the life that a child of God lives while in the body. This fact alone adds weight to the fact that reward is millennial in nature and not eternal. This point is so important to understanding this matter of reward and the Reign of the Heavens that it is worth repeating: A born-again child of God cannot receive or lose eternal salvation based on his works because eternal salvation is never based on man's works but on the one work of Christ on the cross. A believer can only lose reward or suffer loss during the Kingdom Age.

**Ruling Over Many Things And Over Cities** The Lord spoke two similar parables-the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) and the parable of the minas (Luke 19:12-27). As presented in the last chapter, the central theme of both parables is about a master going away for a long time to receive a kingdom and then return. He gives talents and minas to each of his servants and tells them to do business until he returns. A time comes when the master receives the kingdom. Upon his return, he calls his servants to himself and reviews what they had done or not done with his goods while he was gone.

"And it came about that when he returned, after receiving the kingdom, he ordered that these slaves, to whom he had given the money, be called to him in order that he might know what business they had done." (Luke 19:15) In each parable, two servants were faithful and one was unfaithful. To the faithful ones, the master declared: 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord'" (Matthew 25:21NKJ). "'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, be in authority over ten cities.'" "And the second came, saying, 'Your mina, master, has made five minas.'" "And he said to him also, 'And you are to be over five cities'" (Luke 19:17-19).

It is obvious that the master is the Lord Jesus. He departed this world through the cross and has been gone a long time, nearly 2,000 years. When He returns, He will take the scepter of the Kingdom and reward His people who have believed on Him while He has been gone. Further, reward is very much related to reigning in the Kingdom because it involves ruling over many things or ruling over cities, which implies governmental rule. Today, in the heavenly places, angels are ruling over cities on earth. The leaders of the nations may not be aware of it but this world has been subjected to angels (Hebrews 2:5) who are ruling in the heavens, for the heavens do rule (Daniel 4:26ASV). Unfortunately, some of these angels are part of Satan's domain of darkness (Ephesians 2:2; Ephesians 6:12). When these disqualified angels have been dethroned along with Satan (John 16:11), then those who have been faithful while the Lord has been gone will ascend to these heavenly places and rule over this earth as the angels have done during Man's Day. Of course, the rule today is unrighteous; but in the Lord's Day, it will be righteous, for the foundation of His throne is righteousness and justice (Psalms 89:14; Psalms 97:2).

Now, what are the talents and the minas? The talents represent gifts given by grace that are to be exercised by grace. It is the Lord who gives gifts to His people (Ephesians 4:8; Ephesians 4:11) and the grace to exercise the gifts (Romans 12:3-8). It is all of Christ and we are to exercise these gifts to His glory. Peter best sums up grace and gifts. Notice how it deals with laying down one's life for one another (serving one another). Once again, love is in view. As each one has received a {special} gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Whoever speaks, {let him speak,} as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, {let him do so} as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:10-11) The minas represent faith and works. Paul wrote to the Romans that God has allotted to each a measure of faith (Romans 12:3). Every child of God is given a measure of faith and is to exercise this faith through works. James is the one who clearly taught on faith and works. In writing to the twelve tribes, James had the Kingdom in view (James 1:12; James 2:5; James 5:7-9) and he exhorted them to exercise faith in view of the Kingdom. Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (James 2:17NKJ). But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works (James 2:18NKJ). But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? (James 2:20NKJ). You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only (James 2:24NKJ). This leads us back to the Scripture that without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Faith that yields the good works that are in Christ is what pleases God (Ephesians 2:10) and leads to reward in the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, to enter the Reign of the Heavens, we need to exercise the Lord's gifts by grace and we need to exercise our faith by works. When we do, the reward is great, for the reward is receiving positions of ruling in the Kingdom of God's Son. If we are approved to rule over cities then we will receive the prize, the crown (1 Corinthians 9:24-25).

[For a detailed discussion of the parables of the talents and the minas, see the author's book, Watch!, chapter 11.] The Crown To rule in the Kingdom, one has to be crowned. At the end of His life on earth, our Lord wore a crown of thorns (Matthew 27:29; John 19:2; John 19:5); but when He comes a second time, He will wear a golden crown of glory (Revelation 14:14; Hebrews 2:9). When the King of kings comes out of heaven riding on a white horse, He will be crowned not with one crown but with many crowns, for He is the King of all the nations (Revelation 19:12). What a glorious day that will be! The thought of our King riding to this earth in all His regal splendor should bring a shout of "Hallelujah" from our hearts. When He comes, He will have on His robe and on His thigh a name written: King of kings, and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16). In other words, the King will have many other kings and lords to administer the government of His Kingdom. There will be many places of honor and glory in the Kingdom of God's Son. He will have His Bride, the Queen, along with kings, lords and, most likely, many other positions. To serve in these capacities, we must be crowned, for this is why man was created. Thou hast crowned him with glory and honor, and hast appointed him over the works of Thy hands (Hebrews 2:7).

[See the next chapter for a review of the three crowns.] The Reward Of The Inheritance

Throughout the Scriptures, we find reference to reward and to the inheritance, both of which refer to the coming Kingdom. It is in his letter to the Colossians that Paul brings both reward and inheritance together in one phrase-the reward of the inheritance. As we will see, the reward is to inherit the Kingdom of God's Son. To properly understand this matter, first we need to look at the context of the Scriptures used concerning the reward of the inheritance. The church in Colossae, as well as the nearby church of the Laodiceans (Colossians 4:16), faced a great danger of falling away from the faith due to false teaching. There were some people in these areas who were preaching a false gospel that made Christ less than who He truly is. Some were placing Christ on a level with the angels. Others were mixing Judaism and Gnosticism. The result was that Christ was being brought down in stature rather than being lifted up. In response to this, Paul lifted up

Christ to the highest level that is His as God. Paul's letter is so full of Christ that we can hardly do justice to what was written; however, we need to at least touch upon the height of Paul's vision of Christ. Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, the Creator of all things, the Head of His Body, the Church, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence (Colossians 1:15-18NKJ). What a tremendous thought: Our Lord Jesus is preeminent. He is supreme and central in all things. Our Christ is all and in all, and God is summing up everything in heaven and on earth in His Son (Ephesians 1:10). The most amazing thing is that when we believe on Jesus, God places us in Christ and Christ in us, and He becomes our hope of glory: Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). The Creator is in you. The image of the invisible God is in you. The One who is preeminent in all things is in you. But there is more: For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete (Colossians 2:9-10). Do you see the greatness of this verse? The One who is all God is in you and you have been made complete in Him. You are full of Christ. All of the life of Christ that you need to run the race and reach the goal for the prize is in you. Have these truths sunk into your heart? Christ is in you! What a treasure has been placed in us (Colossians 2:3)! We don't need more of Christ; we need less of our ourselves so that His life will be fully manifested in us and through us. He must increase and we must decrease (John 3:30). We must allow the Spirit to break these earthen vessels so that this treasure is released (2 Corinthians 4:7-12) and we are conformed to His image (Romans 8:29). The One who is in you desires with a jealous passion to present you holy and blameless and above reproach in His sight (Colossians 1:22NKJ). We must be grounded and steadfast in this truth, not being moved away from the hope which is laid up for us in heaven (Colossians 1:5; Colossians 1:23) and not falling for false teaching that will cheat us of our reward (Colossians 2:8; Colossians 2:18). The hope is glory in the Kingdom of the Son of His love (Colossians 1:13). In unfolding this truth, Paul reminded the Colossians that they had died and their lives were hidden with Christ in God, and when Christ who is our life appears, they also will appear with Him in glory (Colossians 3:3-4). What a tremendous thought-to appear with Him in glory! On the basis of this most honored calling, Paul exhorted the brethren to put off all the things that are associated with the old nature and to put on all that is associated with the new man who is renewed in mature knowledge according to the image of Him who created him (Colossians 3:5-11; also Ephesians 4:22-24). And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. And beyond all these things {put on} love, which is the perfect bond of unity. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms {and} hymns {and} spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do in word or deed, {do} all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. (Colossians 3:12-17)

Notice that Paul encouraged the beloved brethren that whatever they did in word or deed, they were to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. Or to put it another way: Whatever you do in relation to one another (brethren), do it in the name of the Lord who is the Head of His Body, for if you love the Lord, you also must love His Body. Be at peace with one another. Allow the Word of God to work in your lives in such a way that it enriches one another through teaching, admonishment, spiritual songs and thankful singing. In today's modern church, when deeds are mentioned, many

believers immediately think of doing something for God, but the highest and greatest work is putting on love. The words and deeds of which Paul wrote were in reference to how we treat one another in the body, and this speaks loudly of the one work that brings pleasure to our Lord: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). To love is not only the command of our beloved Lord, but it also is the work; it is the first works (Revelation 2:4-5). All that we do in word and deed must come from love and express love. When we do, we are expressing the very life of Christ that dwells in us and the love that God has poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us (Romans 5:5). How can the Lord not reward those who love? He must and He will!

Paul continued his exhortation by describing how the indwelling word of Christ is to be manifested in the lives of wives, husbands, children, fathers and bondservants (Colossians 3:18-22). Each case deals with the relationship that comes from one who has put on the new man of love. For example, children are to obey their parents, for this is pleasing to the Lord. The bondservant is to obey his master in all things, not as a man-pleaser, but as one who is sincere in heart and who fears God.

It is within this context that Paul introduced the phrase the reward of the inheritance.

Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. (Colossians 3:23-25{ea})

Paul made this the most inclusive statement that he could: Whatever you do. In other words, everything that you do, do heartily, which in the Greek means "to do out from the soul." We are to give our entire soul-life to the Lord, which brings us back to the Lord's command to deny self (soul-life), take up our cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24). The cross working in our lives breaks us of all that we are in the natural, carnal man. As we are broken, more of the life of the Lord that dwells in us will be expressed in us and through us. Men might give us praise, money, respect, position and stature; but these are earthly and of no value in the coming Kingdom. Although we might have to work for men, it is the Lord Christ we serve in all that we do. There is no one else to please other than our Lord. With this thought, Paul also brought to light the fact of the judgment seat. Christ will judge without partiality. The wrongs that are done and not brought under the blood for cleansing and for forgiveness (1 John 1:9) will be judged. It is from the Lord, God's King, that we will receive the reward of the inheritance. With such a great on-high calling, we are to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please {Him} in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son (Colossians 1:10-13). Our walk with the Lord is to bear fruit in every good work. Everything we do unto the Lord is to bear fruit to the glory of God (John 15:8). Husbands, love your wives. Wives, be subject to (respect) your husbands. Children, obey your parents. Bondservants, obey your masters. The

elect of God love one another-put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; and bear with one another and forgive one another (Colossians 3:12-13NKJ). This is what brings glory to God. We are not to be seeking glory on this earth, for our glory will come when our Lord comes and seizes us up to heaven. In this day, let us increase in themature knowledge of God, being strengthened by His power so that we can finish the race of the faith. As the Lord told Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Weakness is brokenness, and brokenness releases the life of Christ. As we do these things, we are to be thankful to our Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance, the Kingdom of His beloved Son. The word qualified means "to enable"; the word share means "to have a portion in"; and the word inheritance means "heirship" or "a possession, a portion assigned to one." In other words, God has made the way or enabled us to have a portion in His Son's Kingdom as an heir or ruler. How has He done this? By placing Christ in us and us in Christ. God has made every provision on His part for us to come into the inheritance; however, as we will see, we can fail if we do not walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.

Throughout the Old Testament, the word inherit was used often in the phrase "to inherit the earth" or "the land." This phrase meant the possession of the Promised Land of Canaan and, especially, the final possession of the land under the reign of Messiah. The promise of the inheritance of the land was first given to Abraham: On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates" (Genesis 15:18). Later, the inheritance came into view again when Isaac blessed his son Jacob: "May God Almighty bless you, and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may be an assembly of peoples; and give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and your descendants with you, that you may inherit the land in which you are a stranger, which God gave to Abraham" (Genesis 28:3-4NKJ). Four hundred years later when Moses was called to deliver Israel out of Egypt, the Lord again reminded them of their calling to inherit the land (Exodus 23:30). Where this word is used in the New Testament, it generally refers to inheriting Messiah's Kingdom, whether the word kingdom is used or not. There is no phrase in the New testament that combines reward, inheritance and Kingdom together; however, it is Paul who used these words in such a fashion that leaves little doubt that the three go hand in hand. He wrote of not inheriting the Kingdom and the reward of the inheritance. In other words, we are to inherit the Kingdom and the reward of the inheritance is the Kingdom. Thus, we could say that we are seeking for the reward of the inheritance of the Kingdom; and within this reward, we discover that we are to receive crowns to rule over cities or many things and to live in the glory of the Kingdom. In other words, we are being called to share in (have a portion in) the Reign of the Heavens. This is the heart of the reward of the inheritance. The Flesh Shall Not Inherit The Word of God always sets the highest calling, the greatest hope before every child of God; however, the Word also presents warnings that the children of God could fail to achieve this on-high calling of the Kingdom Age (not the eternal ages). When it comes to inheriting the millennial Kingdom, we discover this principle in Paul's epistles. We have touched upon some of the aspects of the high calling; however, to provide a fuller perspective, we need to see what Paul taught regarding the danger of not inheriting the Kingdom. The giving of an inheritance generally is a family affair; the estate is divided amongst the heirs. In the Scriptures, the inheritance is for children who have grown up to be sons, in this case, sons of the Kingdom. Sons are the ones who will reign with Christ. God is bringing many sons to glory (Hebrews 2:10), many sons who will be crowned with glory and honor as God's Son has been

crowned (Hebrews 2:6-9). In fact, the judgment seat can be likened to a family affair and it deals with the family inheritance. In any house or family, there are those who are good children, who are obedient and faithful, and those who are bad children, who never seem to learn, always getting themselves into some trouble. There are even some family members who refuse any discipline and who disown their family. So it is in the family of God. There are vessels for honor and some for dishonor (2 Timothy 2:20). There are those who hold to the faith and those who fall away from the faith (Acts 14:21-22; 1 Corinthians 16:13; 1 Peter 5:9; Jude 1:3; 1 Timothy 1:18-20; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 1 Timothy 5:8). There are those who go on in the Lord and those who turn aside after Satan (1 Timothy 5:15NKJ). There are those who are faithful with the Master's goods while He has been gone to receive a kingdom and there are those who are unfaithful (Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:12-27). There are those who have not soiled their garments and have overcome and there are those who have soiled them and are overcome (Revelation 3:4). There are those who, after escaping the pollutions of the world, are again entangled in them and overcome (2 Peter 2:20NKJ). This reality cannot be avoided, for the Scriptures do not avoid it. We must not be lulled into thinking that those who are like the ones just mentioned (e.g., dishonorable, unfaithful, soiled) are not saved, for they most surely are God's people.

It has been stressed that spiritual character is very important in receiving the reward, and Paul clearly reveals this to us in his letters to the Corinthians, Galatians and Ephesians. The Corinthians were living as carnal men, not spiritual men (1 Corinthians 3:1NKJ). There were divisions and factions among them (1 Corinthians 3:3; 1 Corinthians 11:18-19NKJ); brothers in Christ were taking one another to man's court to allow the unrighteous to settle their disputes (1 Corinthians 6:1); they were getting drunk when they broke bread together at the Lord's supper (1 Corinthians 11:21-22); they even were tolerating gross sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 5:1).

Paul exhorted the saints to have nothing to do with any so-called brother who was covetous, an idolater, a reviler, a drunkard or a swindler (1 Corinthians 5:11-13). He was not referring to the lost but to the saved. He demanded that they remove such wicked ones from among them. Why? Because it was a leaven (corruption) in the church which would corrupt the whole if left unchecked (1 Corinthians 5:6-7).

It was in this context of carnal behavior, even behavior not named among the Gentiles, that Paul exhorted them: Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor {the} covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

One who practices unrighteous behavior will not inherit the Kingdom. We must be very clear that the Kingdom is never in view for the lost, only the saved; therefore, this exhortation is a warning to believers who are living carnal lives of such a nature that they act no differently than the lost in the world. No such person (saved person) will inherit the Kingdom of God (the Reign of God). Paul also made similar statements to the Galatians.

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)

We are called to walk by the Spirit and not carry out the desire of the flesh (Galatians 5:16) because anyone who practices the deeds of the flesh shall not inherit the Kingdom. Paul was very emphatic: "I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you." This is a warning to Christians, not to the lost, for the lost have no inheritance awaiting them. Thank God; Paul did not leave us on the side of failure but presented the way through to the inheritance. How are we to inherit the Kingdom? Through bearing the fruit of the Spirit. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-25)

All who believe are alive, born again by the Spirit; but there is a call to walk by the Spirit and this requires a daily step-by-step walk according to the leading of the Spirit. In this way, we will bear the fruit of the Spirit. But what does it mean to walk by the Spirit? It means to be an imitator of God, walking in love, for our God is love. Again, in writing about God's eternal purpose and all the blessings that Christians have in Christ, Paul, in the midst of his great epistle, was compelled to warn the Ephesians: But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and {there must be no} filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God (Ephesians 5:3-5).

Warnings like this are not in the apostle's epistles to remind the saved of the condition of the lost. No; they are warnings to the saved. When he wrote of the judgment seat of Christ, Paul warned that the "bad" will be judged which, as we have seen, means things that are smelly, foul, wicked or worthless. These warnings about not inheriting refer to the bad things that will be judged; and if they are the habit or the practice of a believer, then they will result in loss of the inheritance. This is what Paul taught. Who of us have not fallen into some of these things as presented in Paul's three epistles? It is a solemn warning. Thank God for the blood of Christ that cleanses us, but we must repent, turn away from all such behavior and not allow it to be our practice (or life-style). To the Corinthians, Paul wrote: Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Corinthians 7:1). Through the Galatian letter, Paul reminds us that if we belong to Christ, then the flesh with its passions and desires has been dealt with. We must stand on this truth and live in the victory of it. Paul was faithful to remind the Ephesians that the inheritance of the Kingdom will come by walking in love, in light and in wisdom; and this walk is by the Spirit (Ephesians 5:1-21). Those who live lives contrary to this walk of love risk losing their inheritance. We have the Spirit within us, but we must walk by the Spirit.

Every born-again child of God will be in the Kingdom in some fashion (Colossians 1:13), because when the King takes the scepter of the Kingdom, nothing will be outside His reign. The questions that face us are: Where will we be in the Kingdom? What position will we have in the Kingdom? Will we be part of the Bride of Christ who will reign with Christ? Will we be a subject of the Kingdom, being ruled over? Will we be cast into outer darkness during the wedding festivities (Matthew 22:13; Matthew 25:30)? Will we be assigned a place with the hypocrites or the unfaithful, just as if we were an unbeliever (Luke 12:46)? The answer to these questions determines whether we will be approved at the judgment seat to receive the reward of the inheritance of the Kingdom,

and this depends on the life we live while in the body.

Solomon wrote that the conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear (revere) God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything that is hidden, whether it is good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). Let us heed these words of wisdom. The Sons Of Zadok In the Old Testament, we are given a picture, possibly a type, of those who will inherit the Kingdom to reign with Christ and those who will not. Through the prophet Ezekiel, the Lord spoke of the abominations of the house of Israel and the day of judgment that is coming for the sons of Israel at the end of Man's Day. And the LORD said to me, "Son of man, mark well, see with your eyes, and hear with your ears all that I say to you concerning all the statutes of the house of the LORD and concerning all its laws; and mark well the entrance of the house, with all exits of the sanctuary. And you shall say to the rebellious ones, to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Enough of all your abominations, O house of Israel, when you brought in foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in My sanctuary to profane it, {even} My house, when you offered My food, the fat and the blood; for they made My covenant void-{this} in addition to all your abominations. And you have not kept charge of My holy things yourselves, but you have set {foreigners} to keep charge of My sanctuary." 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, of all the foreigners who are among the sons of Israel, shall enter My sanctuary.'" (Ezekiel 44:5-9) The behavior of the house of Israel was most grievous to the Lord. It was an abomination, which is something disgusting, even idolatrous. However, there was one class of people whom the Lord will hold accountable for such abominations in the Day of Judgment.

"But the Levites who went far from Me, when Israel went astray, who went astray from Me after their idols, shall bear the punishment for their iniquity. Yet they shall be ministers in My sanctuary, having oversight at the gates of the house and ministering in the house; they shall slaughter the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister to them. Because they ministered to them before their idols and became a stumbling block of iniquity to the house of Israel, therefore I have sworn against them," declares the Lord GOD, "that they shall bear the punishment for their iniquity. And they shall not come near to Me to serve as a priest to Me, nor come near to any of My holy things, to the things that are most holy; but they shall bear their shame and their abominations which they have committed. Yet I will appoint them to keep charge of the house, of all its service, and of all that shall be done in it." (Ezekiel 44:10-14)

Some of the Levites knew better but they did not follow the Lord. Instead, they went astray with the people and the Lord will hold them accountable for the iniquity of the house of Israel. The result is that they will not be allowed to minister to the Lord in His sanctuary in the millennial Kingdom. They will lose the right to come near Him as His priests. But notice that they are not fully excluded from serving, although they will lose the right to the most intimate part of service to the Lord. They will keep charge of the house but will not serve the Lord in His house. Actually, this is a prophetic view of some of the determinations that will be made when the house of Israel passes under the rod and is judged when Messiah comes to deliver them after the Great Tribulation. All of the house of Israel will be gathered together from throughout the earth and from the graves (Ezekiel 37:1-28; Matthew 24:31), but those who were rebellious will be excluded from entering into the inheritance, the land of promise.

"And I shall make you pass under the rod, and I shall bring you into the bond of the covenant; and I shall purge from you the rebels and those who transgress against Me; I shall bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they will not enter the land of Israel. Thus you will know that I am the LORD." (Ezekiel 20:37-38). In other words, the future judgment of the house of Israel will result in some being excluded from the inheritance and from serving the Lord in a most personal way. They will be in the Kingdom but they will not enjoy the benefit of those who had been obedient to the Lord. However, there is one class of people who will be rewarded for faithfulness to the Lord and who will serve Him in His sanctuary.

"But the Levitical priests, the sons of Zadok, who kept charge of My sanctuary when the sons of Israel went astray from Me, shall come near to Me to minister to Me; and they shall stand before Me to offer Me the fat and the blood," declares the Lord GOD. They shall enter My sanctuary; they shall come near to My table to minister to Me and keep My charge. And it shall be that when they enter at the gates of the inner court, they shall be clothed with linen garments; and wool shall not be on them while they are ministering in the gates of the inner court and in the house. Linen turbans shall be on their heads, and linen undergarments shall be on their loins; they shall not gird themselves with {anything which makes them} sweat." (Ezekiel 44:15-18) When the sons of Israel went astray, the sons of Zadok remained faithful to the Lord by keeping His sanctuary. In the Day of Judgment, they will be rewarded with a holy allotment set apart to the Lord. They will receive the inheritance that is most dear to the Lord, His sanctuary, the place of His presence.

"{It shall be} for the priests who are sanctified of the sons of Zadok, who have kept My charge, who did not go astray when the sons of Israel went astray, as the Levites went astray." (Ezekiel 48:11) The sons of Zadok were sanctified (holy, set apart unto the Lord), they kept His charge by not following the sons of Israel and they did not go astray from their duty as the other Levites had done. This is a type of what it will be like for the Church of God, as well. In the Day of Judgment, there will be those who will be rewarded for faithfulness and those who will suffer loss for unfaithfulness to the Lord (in character and in service). The unfaithful will be like the Levites who went astray. They will be in the Kingdom but they will not come into the highest calling of being closely and intimately related to the Lord. They will not be included as part of the Bride of Christ. Instead, they will be shut out of the wedding feast, cast outside in the place of darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:42; Matthew 13:50; Matthew 22:13; Matthew 24:51; Matthew 25:1-2; Matthew 25:30). Some people might be tempted to think that since they will enter the eternal ages, if they suffer loss or miss reigning during the Kingdom Age, it won't be so bad. Can anyone be so sure of that? To be sure, the Levites who went astray will have much regret, even though they will be in the Kingdom, for they will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

"And I say to you, that many shall come from east and west, and recline {at the table} with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 8:11-12)

Notice that the sons of the Kingdom (house of Israel) will have regret for losing the right to ascend the throne with Christ to rule over this earth in the heavenly realm. The Lord is the one who said that there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. To do this for 1,000 years is a mighty long time.

The weeping will come when believers who squandered their opportunity to reign see how much they lost by gaining their soul-life while they were in the body.

"For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it. For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds." (Matthew 16:25-27) On the other hand, there will be those brethren who gave up their soul-life and allowed the Lord to break them who will enter into the joy of their Lord. They will receive the reward of the inheritance of the Kingdom and reign with Christ in the most intimate way, as part of the Bride of Christ. Like the sons of Zadok, they will have a covering on their head; but instead of a turban, it will be a crown-crowned with glory and honor. Why will they receive the inheritance? Because they lived a sanctified life, a holy life set apart unto the Lord; in love, they kept the Lord's commands ["If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15)]; they did not stray from the truth but kept the faith. And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, {engaged} in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach-if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister. (Colossians 1:21-23{ea})

Dear brethren, the reward of the inheritance of the Kingdom is a tremendous reward. Some might be tempted to think that the eternal ages are all that matter. All who think this way need to be reminded of Paul's words to the carnal Christians in Corinth: "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and {which} have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). Who would want to miss out on what God has prepared for those who love Him? Who would want to miss being embraced in the lavish love of Christ for an entire millennium as a foretaste of the eternal bliss for God's people? Nothing on earth today can compare with what God has in store for His people when they ascend the throne with His Son to rule in the heavenly places during the coming age. It is utter foolishness for any born-again child of God to willingly squander such an opportunity. Of what value is it being a Christian if we are not living with the hope of entering into the joy of our Lord and one day soon seeing Him face to face and embracing the One who loves us with an immeasurable, unwavering love?

What is the secret to receiving the reward of the inheritance of the Kingdom? It is love! "I love those who love me; and those who diligently seek me will find me" (Proverbs 8:17). Like the Shulamite maiden, let us seek the One whom our soul loves. Let us seek our Lord Jesus, the coming Bridegroom, for the reward is great. The reward is to be wed to the Lord Jesus forever! There is no greater reward.

## Part X9.1 - The Three Crowns

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The Three Crowns The reward of the inheritance deals with receiving the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Php 3:14) which refers to the receiving of an imperishable crown (1 Corinthians 9:25). When the Son of Man, the King of kings, comes to this earth, He will be crowned with many diadems (Revelation 19:12) for He will rule over all the earth. In that day, He will have a people who will reign with Him during His millennial Kingdom, and they too must be crowned if they are to come into the Reign of the Heavens and rule with Him. Being crowned means reigning! That day will bring forth the fulfillment of God's Word, when man no longer will be lower than the angels.

"Thou hast made him for a little while lower than the angels; Thou hast crowned him with glory and honor, and hast appointed him over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet." (Hebrews 2:7-8) In the Scriptures, we are told that crowns are promised to Christians who endure to the end. In his last letter before he was martyred, Paul left his beloved Timothy a faithful statement: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him (2 Timothy 2:11-12 a). Every born-again child of God should know that when Christ died, we died with Him. Our old man was crucified with Him and the life we now live is a life hidden with Christ in God (Romans 6:1-9; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 3:3). But how many Christians realize that once they believe in Jesus they begin a race? This race is an endurance race that must be run either until the end of our Christian life in our earthly tent (body) or until the return of the Lord when He comes for those who have fallen asleep in Christ and for those who are in Christ who are alive and remain.

Until that glorious day, there are many trials that a Christian must face. Each trial is a testing of our faith that will approve us in the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ if we hold fast our confidence firm to the end (Hebrews 3:6; Hebrews 3:14). We, through much tribulation, enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). There are many trials and temptations on the way to the Kingdom that is coming, and we must endure to the end if we are to enter it in the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ and reign with Christ during His millennial reign. We are exhorted to continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast (Colossians 1:23). In the New Testament, the Greek word for crown is *stephanos*. To the Greeks, a *stephanos* was a mark of royal or exalted rank. It also was the wreath or garland which was given as a prize to victors in public games. Today, at the International Olympics, the winners are given gold, silver and bronze medals. However, in the ancient Greek Olympics, the winners were rewarded with wreaths or garlands. So we have two basic meanings, one associated with royalty and the other with victory in a competition. The Bible presents the crowns in the same way. A crown to a Christian means royalty, ruling with Christ in His Kingdom. It also means victory, being approved or commended for faithfully running and finishing the race of the faith. Another way of stating this thought is that if the Christian runs the race of the faith, completing the course according to the rules, then that person not only will be crowned as a victor in the race but also will be given royal honor as one who will reign with Christ. Thus, the crown is the result of a righteous and holy life lived while in the body and it represents a new vocation for the Christian in the coming

age. After all, when He returns, the Lord Jesus has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16{ea}). Who are these kings and lords? They are the ones who are found worthy to rule and reign with Christ. They are the ones wearing the crowns.

There are three crowns presented in the Scriptures. Some people say there are five; however upon closer examination, it would appear that three is the correct number. After all, three represents completion. All things that are complete are stamped with this number three. In fact, three represents divine perfection. For example, the Godhead is three-Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God's attributes are three-omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence. God is light, life and love. Three times the Seraphim cry, "Holy, Holy, Holy." The temple of God has an outer court, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. Christ rose from the dead on the third day. Israel will be revived on the third day. Man is spirit, soul and body. Time is past, present and future. This is a small sampling of the many "threes" found in the Scriptures.

We are not told whether the crowns are literally physical crowns. We do know that the Lord's twenty-four elders, who are most likely ruling angels, will cast their crowns before the throne, declaring the worthiness of the Lord (Revelation 4:10-11). These angels will give up their right to rule over this earth as the sons of God who will reign with Christ are revealed.

What is more important is what the crowns represent. Three crowns represent divine perfection in the life of a Christian. As we will see, all three crowns are intended for every son of God. Each crown is significant in what it represents; for without what they stand for, no man can stand before God. We need all three crowns for the coming Kingdom life. To appear in God's presence, we must have a new life, the God-breathed life of the Spirit (the Holy Spirit); we must have a new character, the righteousness of Christ (the Son); and we must have a new body with an entirely different nature to live in the heavenly realm, the glory of God (the Father). Notice that each crown is represented by each Person of the Godhead. Also, each crown represents Christ Himself. He is the Life. He is our Righteousness. He is our hope of glory, for we shall be as He is, the Man in glory.

Furthermore, the three crowns represent the fulfillment of God's purpose in creating man in the first place: Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule (Genesis 1:26). The crowns represent the very image and likeness of God, and they represent man being brought back to God's intended purpose-to rule. Being made in God's image and likeness speaks of God's life, God's righteousness and God's glory. With these three crowns, man once again will be able to live in the very presence of God and rule with Him. Hallelujah! How can we not get excited when we consider what our Lord Jesus has done for us? He alone has redeemed us back to the purpose for which we were created. Man was made to be in the likeness of God and to rule with God. The three crowns speak mightily of this marvelous act of grace. Man is to be crowned with glory and honor as Jesus Christ the Man is now crowned with glory and honor.

"What is man, that Thou rememberest him?" (Hebrews 2:6). Man is to be in the image and likeness of God and to be crowned like our Lord. This is why God has remembered man. Paul brings this fact into sharp focus in his letter to the Romans. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined {to become} conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among

many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Romans 8:29-30)

Every believer who will be placed (adopted) as a son of God must have the three crowns to reign with Christ. They are the three pillars of the age to come in the heavenly places. What man can live in the heavenly realm unless he is an entirely new creation; the new man created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24)? The old man can have nothing to do with the heavenly realm. What man can stand before a righteous and holy God without a perfect righteousness? What man can stand in the presence of the God of glory? What human body can withstand the weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:17)? We must be like our Lord to take on the eternal weight of glory. It is Christ in us, the hope of glory.

There is another reason for there being only three crowns, and that is discovered in the way the crowns are presented in the Greek language. Each crown is in the articulate, that is, it is preceded by the word the. Not only this, but also two of the three crowns are double articulate. There is the crown of the life and the crown of the righteousness. No other crowns are described in this fashion. The other articulate crown is the crown of unfading glory. In each case, however, the use of the word the makes the crown something special, unique, just like the faith is a unique aspect of faith.

TheCrown OfTheLife The letter by James begins with an exhortation to count it as all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. We are called to let patience have its perfect work, that we may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing (James 1:2-4). The entire Bible is a story of the trials of the Lord's people. We are never promised a life of glory on this earth, but we are promised a life of trial and temptation (John 16:33) which leads to a glory to come (Romans 5:1-5; Romans 8:16-21). Our reward is not in this day but in the day to come when our Lord comes with His reward. Until that day, we are called to endure the trials and temptations, to overcome them. Overcoming is the theme of the seven letters to the churches in Revelation 2:1-29; Revelation 3:1-22. Seven times, to each of the churches, Jesus, standing as the Judge of His people, said (and continues to say), "To him who overcomes." If we overcome the world, the flesh and the devil, we will be approved in the Day of our Lord Jesus.

Both our Lord Jesus and James speak to us of the crown of the life in reference to overcoming.

First, James wrote of being approved and receiving the crown of the life.

Happy the man who doth endure temptation, because, becoming approved, he shall receive the crown of the life, which the Lord did promise to those loving Him. (James 1:12YLT {ea})

We are exhorted to endure the temptations. This will approve us when the Lord stands as our Judge. But notice that there is a promise connected with this crown-to those loving Him. If we love Him, we will willingly do what He calls us to do. Jesus said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him" (John 14:23). When we love a person, we will do anything for that person. Likewise with the Lord-if we love Him, we will endure for Him. We will trust His life in us to lead us through every trial and temptation. We will hold fast to Him and not trust in ourselves. By grace, we will overcome through His life under the leading of the Holy Spirit. This love for the Lord will lead us to not love our life even unto death, if necessary. To the church in Smyrna, which was under intense persecution, the

Lord said, Become thou faithful unto death, and I will give to thee the crown of the life (Revelation 2:10YLT {ea}).

If we do not love our life and willingly lay it down for the Lord daily, even if it means physical death due to persecution for His name, then life awaits us. During the coming Great Tribulation, there will be many martyrs for the Lord. The crown of the life will be rewarded to them. Why? Because they will overcome the devil! They will be faithful unto death.

"And they did overcome him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life-unto death." (Revelation 12:11YLT {ea})

Today, our trials can take on many forms. In some parts of the world, many of our brethren are suffering persecution and facing imprisonment and possible death for the testimony of the Lord. May they take the grace of the Lord to endure. However, not all trials lead to physical death. In fact, for most Christians living in the Western world and in many other countries throughout the world, there is little outward persecution today. Maybe this day will come. If it does, who will be willing to endure to receive the crown of the life? In the absence of such persecution, there are many other trials that we are called to endure. Living in a rich country with many distractions and temptations of the world can be a severe trial which leads some Christians to not overcome and even to fall away from the faith (2 Timothy 3:1-9; 2 Timothy 4:10; James 5:1-6; 2 Peter 2:18-22). Rather than trusting God, they begin to trust in their riches. As the Psalmist wrote, "If riches increase, do not set your heart on them" (Psalms 62:10 b). Being poor can be a trial if the person allows it to be. But consider the wonderful encouragement James gives to the poor: Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? (James 2:5). The poor of the world are chosen to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom. Why? Because they love God! They walk by faith, trusting in their beloved Lord; and through this walk, they come to know Him intimately. They fall in love with Him and He keeps them. "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20). The heart of one who is seeking the crown of the life is one who is faithful to the end, loving the Lord.

### TheCrown OfTheRighteousness

It is Paul who presents to us the crown of the righteousness. There is no one more qualified to write of this crown. Before meeting the Lord of Glory on the road to Damascus, Paul was "the cream of the crop" when it came to Judaism and the Law. There was no one amongst the Pharisees that had better credentials than Paul. He was a zealous Jew who was working out his righteousness under the Law. He was blameless in this regard. But when Christ broke into his life, he saw that his righteousness was rubbish. There was only one righteousness that mattered and it was through faith in Christ (Php 3:3-9).

Paul's life was never the same after he met Christ as he, a zealous Hebrew of Hebrews, was going to persecute Christians. He entered a race that he called the race of the faith. He saw himself in a competition, competing for the wreath or crown just like in the Greek games. He saw himself as a soldier fighting and as an athlete competing (2 Timothy 2:3-5). As a soldier, he could not entangle himself with the affairs of this life. As an athlete, there were rules to the competition and he had to compete according to the rules. An athlete is not crowned unless he finishes the

race according to the rules (2 Timothy 2:5). When Paul wrote to the Philippians, he was not sure whether he would be crowned. Not that I have already obtained {it} or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of {it} yet; but one thing {I do}; forgetting what {lies} behind and reaching forward to what {lies} ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Php 3:12-14)

What was set before Paul? For what was he striving to lay hold? What was he stretching every muscle of his body to reach? For what was he pressing on? At the end of his life as he was chained in a dark, ugly dungeon in Rome, Paul wrote to his beloved son in the faith, Timothy. Paul declared that he knew that he had finished the course. He had fought the good fight. He had not entangled himself in the affairs of the world. He had competed according to the rules. The Lord must have revealed to Paul that he had won the crown of the righteousness. The good strife I have striven, the course I have finished, the faith I have kept, henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of the righteousness that the Lord-the Righteous Judge-shall give to me in that day, and not only to me, but also to all those loving His manifestation. (2 Timothy 4:7-8YLT {ea})

It was not his righteousness but the righteousness of the One that he loved, the Righteous Judge, the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul walked in Christ. It was not Paul's life but the life of Christ in him that lived.

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the {life} which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness {comes} through the Law, then Christ died needlessly." (Galatians 2:20-21)

It was all by grace. Paul knew the source, not only of his righteousness but also of any good works or righteous acts that came forth from his life. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10) Paul walked in Christ and walked in the good works. He was God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus. At the end of his life, the desire of Paul's heart was fulfilled: For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain (Php 1:21). His trials were over. He was about to gain Christ in death. Hallelujah! How can we read of Paul's life and not rejoice with him?

He has left us the example. Maybe we are not called to suffer as Paul suffered, but we can love the Lord as Paul loved Him. This is the key to the crown of the righteousness. It is loving His appearing. If we love the Lord, we will be looking for Him to return. How can we remain separated from the love of our life? Pray for His appearing, watch for His appearing, even endure for His appearing; and you will be crowned in that day. It is love that watches and endures to the end unto His appearing.

The Crown Of Unfading Glory At the manifestation of the chief Shepherd, ye shall receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Peter 5:4YLT {ea})

Peter the apostle is the one who wrote of the crown of unfading glory. Near the end of his first epistle, he encouraged the elders amongst the brethren. He wrote that he was a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed. Like Paul who had assurance of the crown of the righteousness, Peter also knew that the crown of glory

awaited him (1 Peter 5:1). Peter exhorted the elders to be faithful in shepherding, for if they were, they would receive the crown of glory. Peter knew that faithfully serving Christ in the Body of Christ would require suffering.

Now, many people write that this is the crown reserved for church leaders. However, this is not what the Word of God reveals to us. In fact, man was created to be crowned with glory. We are told this in the Old Testament and then it is repeated in the New Testament. Contextually, both passages deal with the purpose for man's creation.

Yet Thou hast made him a little lower than God, and dost crown him with glory and majesty!  
(Psalms 8:5)

Thou didst make him some little less than messengers, with glory and honour Thou didst crown him, and did set him over the works of Thy hands. (Hebrews 2:7YLT)

Man was created a little lower than the angels; but as the book of Hebrews reminds us, in the age to come, the world will not be subject to angels but to man, man who will be crowned with glory and honor (Hebrews 2:5). How do we know? Because today we see Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor; and because of Jesus' sufferings, God will bring many sons unto glory (Hebrews 2:9-10). Jesus will have many companions in His Kingdom. "Here am I and the children whom God has given Me" (Hebrews 2:13 b NKJ).

Given these passages, we cannot state that the crown of glory is reserved for a special class of people in the Body of Christ. We also know this from understanding the context of Peter's first letter. He wrote to the pilgrims of the Dispersion or the saints who resided as aliens and were scattered in Asia and the surrounding area. Peter was the apostle of hope, and like Paul, he wrote of the sufferings that Christians must endure in order to enter into glory. He wrote of the prophets who testified of the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow (1 Peter 1:11). He wrote of the sufferings that Christians would have if they lived the righteous life.

If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. (1 Peter 4:14)

Peter understood something about suffering. He had suffered in his soul when he denied the Lord three times. His suffering in that day was due to his unrighteousness. But in his latter days of following his beloved Master, Peter knew a different type of suffering that would ultimately lead him to be crucified for the testimony of Jesus.

He failed his Lord once, but Peter learned his lesson and could exhort the brethren to walk in the steps of their Lord. For you have been called for the purpose of suffering, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps. Suffering with patient endurance is commendable before God (1 Peter 2:20-21). We are called to walk in the steps of our Lord, and this will lead to suffering.

Paul wrote to the Romans that we will be fellow heirs with Christ in His Kingdom, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him (Romans 8:17). At the end of his life, Paul wrote that all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12).

Both Peter and Paul could speak from personal experience. Their exhortation to us today is that suffering leads to glory. There is no other way according to the Word of God. Christ suffered death and was crowned with glory and honor. His way into glory is our way into glory, and this way is set before every born-again child of God who will be placed as a son in the Kingdom of the Son.

Let us rejoice in the hope of glory. Let us be willing to suffer that we might enter into the Kingdom and Glory. This is the call to every Christian. Are you willing? There is the crown of unfading glory awaiting all that are willing.

Paul Went For The Gold To add further to our understanding of the crowns, it is instructive to look at one man's life. Of all the saints that are recorded in the Bible, there is one man who stands out amongst them all—Paul, the beloved apostle. There are very few men that we can look at today and say, "Follow that man." But we can look in the Word of God and find one man, apart from our Lord Jesus, of whom we could say, "Follow his example (not the man) for he was a living example of the Christ-life." In his letter to the Philippians, we discover that Paul had all three crowns in view although he did not mention them. Using an expression of today, we could say that Paul was "going for the gold."

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from {the} Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which {comes} from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Php 3:8-11)

Paul gave up everything, even the things that once had been of great value to a Hebrew of Hebrews. He counted all that he strove to attain for himself as rubbish in order to gain Christ. As a zealous Jew, he held his own righteousness in high esteem. It was a righteousness that came from the Law. But in the day that Christ broke into his life, he saw that his righteousness was but filthy rags and that there is no righteousness in any man, no matter how good he might appear to be, no matter how religious he is. Paul saw that his righteousness could only come through faith in Christ. True righteousness that is honored by God comes from God, and it is on the basis of faith in Christ, who is our righteousness. Paul saw that this righteousness came from gaining Christ, being found in Him and knowing Him. Paul was seeking after the crown of the righteousness that comes from faith in Christ. It was not Paul's righteousness; it was Christ's. To the Galatians, Paul wrote: For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness (Galatians 5:5). What was Paul's hope? It was to be crowned with the crown of the righteousness. As we have already seen, at the end of Paul's life, he had the assurance that he had won the crown of the righteousness. He had fought the good fight of the faith. Oh, that each of us would have this assurance in that day.

However, Paul did not stop at one crown. He was pursuing with his whole life the crown of the life. He sought to know Christ more intimately and the power of His resurrection. What is the power of His resurrection? The Lord Jesus declared: "I AM the resurrection and the life!" (John 11:25). The One who died and rose again is the life. He came that we might have life and might have it abundantly (John 10:10). There is no life apart from Him. As John wrote: The witness is this, that

God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life (1 John 5:11-12).

Paul knew that in Christ was the power of His resurrection. Whether Paul lived or died, the life that was in him was a life that overcomes in this life and one that cannot be held in the grave. It was the life of the One who rose from the grave. Paul had to have more of this life. He wanted all of Christ, that he would be filled with Christ. Even as Paul journeyed through many lands and suffered through many trials, even facing the threat of death every place he traveled, he knew that this resurrection life in him was keeping him. At the end of his life, Paul wrote Timothy: What persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord delivered me! (2 Timothy 3:11).

Peter wrote of the very same thing that Paul lived-a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to {obtain} an inheritance {which is} imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5) The crowns that Paul pursued were imperishable and undefiled. He knew they were reserved for him in heaven. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable" (1 Corinthians 9:25). Had Paul successfully competed in the race? Had Paul endured through the temptations? Was he approved at the end of his life? Did he love the Lord and love His appearing? Was he not poor, yet rich in faith? Did Paul lay down his life? Of course, the answer to these questions is yes. Paul finished the course. Paul had endured. He was approved at the end of his life. He loved the Lord with his whole heart and did not love his life even unto death, even death as a martyr. He was a man full of faith in a Lord who would safely deliver him into His Kingdom and Glory. We can rejoice that this dear brother who poured out his life for the church in his day, and even for us, completed the race and will receive the crown of the life. He has set the example for us to follow. Who is willing to follow in his steps, which were actually the steps of our beloved Lord Jesus? The crown of the life awaits all those who are willing.

Finally, Paul not only desired to know Him and the power of His resurrection, but also the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death. Paul had a mind to suffer for Christ: "I die daily" (1 Corinthians 15:31). He desired to enter the fellowship of His sufferings. Paul could not go on the cross as the Lord did for the sin of the world, but he could suffer for the church that she would grow up to the full measure of Christ. Christ died for the Church, and Paul was willing to be conformed to Christ's death for the sake of the Lord's people and the gospel that Paul was given to take to the Gentiles.

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions. (Colossians 1:24)

Apart from {such} external things, there is the daily pressure upon me {of} concern for all the churches. (2 Corinthians 11:28)

What a heart of love in this brother who entered the fellowship of His sufferings! He willingly suffered that others might live in the victory of Christ.

After he was stoned [probably to death (Acts 14:19-20)] and revived, Paul declared that through much tribulation we must enter the Kingdom. It is in the Kingdom Age that we come into glory.

Paul not only exulted in the hope of glory, but he also exulted in his tribulations, which would lead to a hope that does not disappoint.

Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:1-5) Paul reminds us that glory is set before every child of God, if indeed we suffer with Christ. The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with {Him} in order that we may also be glorified with {Him.} (Romans 8:16-17) This was the heart of the beloved Paul. He had a mind and a heart to suffer. It was his hope of glory. Paul was striving for the crown of unfading glory.

It is possible, based on Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, that our glory will be given in degrees based on how much suffering we have endured.

There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable {body}, it is raised an imperishable {body}. (1 Corinthians 15:41-42) The destiny of the Lord's people during the Kingdom Age is the heavenly realm. We are to rule from the heavenly places as the stars. In fact, the Bible refers to those who are ruling in the heavenly places as stars (Revelation 12:4; Revelation 12:9). But each star differs in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. May we be willing to suffer in this day that we will shine brightly in glory in the day that is coming. Is there any doubt that Paul will be one of the brightest stars in the Kingdom? Is there any doubt that Paul will receive all three crowns in that day? Paul was going for the gold, and in that day, he will receive the prize. To Paul, the crowns will be the very crowning of Christ in his life. May we be like Paul and seek after the gold which is nothing more than seeking to gain Christ, to know Christ and to be found in Christ in that day. He is our life, our righteousness and our glory. The prize we seek after is Christ Himself. The crowns will be the crowning of Christ in our life.

#### Love Will Crown Us In That Day

Finally, there is one thing that unites all the crowns, and that is love. The crown of the life is for those who love the Lord; the crown of the righteousness is for those who love His appearing; and the crown of unfading glory, although it has no direct reference to love, can only be sought by one who loves the Lord. It is love for the Lord Jesus that will lead a person to suffer in this day. Why? Because love suffers long, bears all things and endures all things (1 Corinthians 13:4; 1 Corinthians 13:7). In the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ when we all will appear before Him at His judgment seat, it will be love that will raise us up and crown us. John, the apostle whom the Lord loved, wrote: By this, love is perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of

judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. We love (Him-NKJ), because He first loved us (1 John 4:17-19).

Jesus loved us first. It is His love that has saved us and it is His love that will keep us. Love always starts with God. We are called today to let God love us and for us to love Him. There is no fear when two people are in love. Love is our assurance in the Day of Christ. Do you love Jesus? Do you love His appearing? Is your heart burning to see Him face to face, to be with Him, to be wed to Him for the next age and forever in the eternal ages? Oh, what bliss!

Let us love Him and obey Him. Let love be perfected in us that we may have confidence in the Day of Judgment. Let us be longing for and eagerly awaiting His coming. Let us return to first love. Let us return to Jesus, our one true love!

Love will crown us in the glorious Day of our Lord.

## Part XX.1 - The Bride..

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The Bride-The Wife Of The Lamb As we have seen, the Reign of the Heavens is about who will ascend the throne of the Kingdom of Heaven with Christ to rule and reign with Him. Who will be crowned with glory and honor? At Calvary, the one new man in Christ was birthed. At the Second Coming of Christ, the Bride of Christ will come forth and ascend the throne with Him. She will wear the crown of the life, the crown of the righteousness and the crown of glory. It is love that will crown her in that day. In the Scriptures, we discover that in the creation of man and the fashioning of woman from man, God forever established that His work is all about a love relationship-bridegroom and bride, husband and wife, king and queen. We might think that these relationships are the invention of man, but it is God who has established these things. Why? Because God is love and He has embarked upon a love relationship with His created beings. This relationship will not stop at the end of the seven days set aside for this earth but will continue into eternity. In fact, the coming millennial reign of God's Son is only the beginning of an endless love affair that will grow stronger and stronger in the endless ages. God's ultimate purpose and plan involves bringing man into the very heart of all that He desires to do throughout eternity, and this involves an intimate love relationship between God and man. God's heart is to bring man into the reign of His universe and for man to join Him in all that His creative power of love will bring forth in an ever-growing dimension. There is no end to the increase of His government and there is no end to His love.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul declared what was written: "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and {which} have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). In the immediate sense, this refers to the coming millennial Kingdom, but this is only the beginning point in an endless revelation or unveiling of what God has prepared for those who love Him. Things the likes of which we cannot imagine with our minds today will be manifested in eternity. It is like Paul who was caught away to Paradise and heard things unspeakable (2 Corinthians 12:4). What excitement this should bring to our hearts; what hope should strengthen our hearts; what love for God should flood our hearts. When we consider the glory of the eternal ages, it captivates our hearts; however, we must come back to earth, for we still have a 1,000-year Kingdom of Glory to come and this is the central theme of the prophetic Scriptures. Our hope is to be fixed on the coming of our Lord Jesus, for He is coming for a people to enter with Him into that most intimate of relationships, that of a bridegroom and a bride, a husband and a wife, a king and a queen. This matter of a bride for His Son is central in God's purpose and plan. When Adam was created, God commanded that man (represented by Adam) was to have dominion over the earth. However, God declared: It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for (corresponding to) him (Genesis 2:18). Adam needed a helpmate if he was to have dominion over the earth; so God put Adam to sleep, fashioned Eve, a woman, from Adam's body and presented Eve to Adam as his wife. We could say that Adam was to be the first king of this earth but he needed a queen if he was to rule. Unfortunately, Adam did not become king because of rebellion in the Garden. But it is here that

God laid down His unchanging principle that His Son must have a wife, a helpmate, a queen to rule with Him.

God's restoration work in Man's Day is leading to the marriage of the Lamb and a great wedding feast that will usher in the Kingdom of the Son of God's love (Revelation 19:7).

Throughout the Scriptures, we see evidence of the Bridegroom and the Bride. The Song of Solomon is about the Bridegroom's pursuit of His Bride. The Bridegroom speaks to His Bride: "How beautiful you are, my darling, how beautiful you are!" (Song of Solomon 4:1). When he came on the scene announcing the arrival of the Lamb of God, John the Baptist spoke of his joy over the Bridegroom: "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. And so this joy of mine has been made full" (John 3:29). Jesus spoke of Himself as the Bridegroom: And Jesus said to them, "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast" (Matthew 9:15). The Lord also spoke a parable about the Bridegroom coming: "But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet {him}'" (Matthew 25:6). We even see evidence of the coming wedding feast when Jesus performed his first miracle at a wedding feast (John 2:1-11).

Finally, when we come to the end of the Bible and the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the Bride comes into view. At the end of the Great Tribulation as the King of kings begins His descent to the earth, taking the scepter of the Kingdom, a shout of rejoicing will come forth from the voice of the great multitude in heaven. The Lord God, the Almighty will have begun His reign. And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude and as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright {and} clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. And he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God." (Revelation 19:6-9)

However, the Son of God will not be alone in His reign, for He will have a bride who has overcome and has made herself ready to sit upon His throne as He had sat upon His Father's throne (Revelation 3:21). The shout is not only for the arrival of the King but also for the marriage of the Bridegroom to His Bride who will sit upon His throne as His Queen.

There is another indication of this fact as recorded in Psalms 45:1-17, a prophetic song of love that overflows with a good theme-the coming King (Psalms 45:1).

Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Thy kingdom.... Kings' daughters are among Thy noble ladies; at Thy right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir. (Psalms 45:6; Psalms 45:9) When the King comes, He will have a queen at His right hand who will reign with Him. Her clothing will be inter-woven with gold (Psalms 45:13), the divine character of the One to whom she is betrothed. She will stand with Him in all of His glory. This is the view that the Scriptures present of God's desire to have a bride for His Son. We can see that the Bride of Christ is presented in the Scriptures from the beginning to the end. The Bible starts

with a wedding and ends with a wedding; therefore, the theme of the Bridegroom and the Bride is very significant in our understanding of the Word of the Kingdom and coming into the Reign of the Heavens. However, it is more than a theme, for it is an essential matter for all who are seeking the Kingdom and desiring to receive the inheritance of the Kingdom. Let us not forget that it is about a love relationship with the Creator of the universe. The Restoration Work Of The Holy Spirit With this overview, there are two questions that are relevant to our understanding of this matter of a bride and they involve the Holy Spirit. First, what has the Holy Spirit been doing since the beginning of the restoration of this earth and, subsequently, during the restoration of fallen man? Second, what has been the Holy Spirit's primary work since Calvary? It is the answer to the second question that will be taken up in this chapter, but let us begin with the first answer. In the book of beginnings, we discover the work of the Holy Spirit in the restoration of an earth that had fallen into ruin because of the rebellion of God's ruling angel, Satan. And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. (Genesis 1:2) The Person of the Holy Spirit is the agent of the Godhead who breathes life into that which is dead and in ruin; this has been His work and will continue to be His work throughout Man's Day. The work of restoration is accomplished by the Holy Spirit; and since the very beginning, this is the only way that life has come forth from death. The earth was in ruin and the Spirit hovered over the ruin and breathed life into it. In like fashion, fallen man is in a state of spiritual death and ruin, and it takes the Spirit to breathe new life into man who is dead in transgressions (Ephesians 2:5). However, this work did not start at Calvary; otherwise, no one prior to Calvary was saved, which is not true. This is a very important point, for we might be tempted to believe that the Spirit's work began at Pentecost. As we will see, He did start a new work at Pentecost but it was not the work of restoration. The fact that many were saved even before God's Son came to this earth is clearly seen in the Hebrew letter. Hebrews 11:1-40 speaks of all those who died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. Women received {back} their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection. And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised (Hebrews 11:13; Hebrews 11:35; Hebrews 11:39). These saints of old had faith; they believed God; they were looking for the same promises to which Christians are encouraged to look; they were looking for the heavenly city; they even were desiring the same resurrection from the dead. How did these saints of old come to have such faith? It only could be the result of the work of the Holy Spirit who breathed life into those who stood in faith, believing God's promises. For by it [faith] the men of old gained approval (Hebrews 11:2). As Christians, we look back at the cross of Calvary and see our eternal salvation. Unfortunately, we become very shortsighted in our view and think that only those who came after the cross have eternal salvation and everyone before the cross has something else. But the Scriptures never present this view. In our day, we look back at the cross; but in the days before the cross, the people of God looked forward toward the cross. Speaking to the Jews, Jesus said: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw {it} and was glad" (John 8:56). Further, we are told that Moses left the comfort of Egypt, for he looked for the reward and he endured as seeing Him who is invisible (Hebrews 11:26-27NKJ). He saw Christ and he followed Him forty years later as the nation of Israel was led through the wilderness (1 Corinthians 10:4).

It is as if Calvary stands outside of time and all time during Man's Day points to the cross. We are not told how much the saints of old understood nor how they knew what they knew, but the fact is that they had tremendous vision of what is to come. They did not have the Bible as we have it today and thus they might have had less knowledge of God's purpose and plan than we do; nevertheless, it is apparent that they had far more vision than many Christians do today who have unlimited access to God's completed Word. The point that must be understood is that the work of the Holy Spirit has continued uninterrupted since the beginning of the restoration of this ruined earth, prior to the creation of man. Thus, the Holy Spirit was involved from the beginning in the restoration of this earth, hovering over the raging waters, and He has continued this work of breathing life into fallen man for nearly 6,000 years. It is the work of grace, and all the saints that have gone before (Old Testament and New Testament) have been redeemed by grace through faith as the work of the Holy Spirit. In the coming age, there will be saints of old who will shine brightly in the Kingdom. The Holy Spirit's work in this regard has not changed and will not change as long as God has set the time for bringing the lost into eternal salvation. It was by grace through faith in the beginning and it will be by grace through faith until the end.

[We need to be reminded that salvation always is based on the blood. When Adam and Eve sinned, God killed an animal, shedding its blood as a type of what would occur 4,000 years later at Calvary (Genesis 3:21). When the nation of Israel was called out of Egypt as God's first-born son (Exodus 4:22), they had to appropriate the blood of the sacrificed lambs (Exodus 12:3-7), again as a type of what would occur 2,000 years later at Calvary. In our day, 2,000 years after Calvary, when a person believes and is saved by grace through faith, they too are appropriating the blood-the blood of the Lamb of God-and will not enter into the wrath of God unto eternal condemnation. God's unchanging principle is based on the blood: When I see the blood I will pass over you (Exodus 12:13).]

Now, having answered the first question, we must proceed to answer the second question, which will take up the remainder of this chapter. A Helpmate To Rule To begin, we need to return to this matter of a bride for Adam. When Adam was created and Eve was fashioned out of Adam's body, God said, "Let them have dominion." In other words, the word them means that God set down a principle right at the start that requires man and woman to have dominion together. Adam could not rule or have dominion over the earth apart from Eve. Adam was to be the king and Eve his queen. This is the principle God laid down which cannot be broken.

Satan, who was the ruling angel over the original, perfect earth, rebelled against God in wanting to be like the Most High (Isaiah 14:12-17; Ezekiel 28:14-19). His rebellion brought the territory (earth) of his kingdom into ruin. In Genesis 1:2 a, it is recorded that the earth became void. It was a dark (without sunlight), worthless, wasted ruin with raging waters flowing over its surface. God did not create the earth in vain but with a purpose to be inhabited (Isaiah 45:18NKJ).

Starting in Genesis 1:2 b, God began six days of work to restore the ruined earth with a purpose in mind. On the sixth day, He created man from the dust of the earth. God's purpose for man was to have dominion. God created man to rule the restored earth, taking the place of its fallen ruler, Satan. But Adam was not to rule alone, for his helpmate, Eve, was to rule with him. Without her, there could be no rulership over the earth; both had to rule together. To Adam, Eve was bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh (Genesis 2:23). Thus, rulership over this earth required (and still

does) a king and a queen. This is the principle God set forth when He restored this earth.

Once we understand this principle, the reason for Satan's successful attempt to deceive Eve becomes apparent. Satan knew the reason for the creation of man and he sought a way to bring about man's disqualification. If successful, Satan knew that he would continue to hold the scepter of the kingdom over this earth.

[It is most instructive to read the account of the Lord's temptation following His baptism. When Satan tempted the Lord Jesus in the wilderness, he offered Jesus the kingdoms of the world saying, "This has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish" (Luke 4:6NKJ). In other words, the rulership of this world was delivered to Satan by God and retained by Satan when Adam fell.]

Satan also knew that Adam could not rule without Eve, so he proceeded to tempt her into disobeying the command of God that was given to Adam. [Eve should have turned to Adam and consulted with him over the meaning of the command. Why? Because they were one flesh and in ruling they were to work together, not independently of one another. This is as it will be with Christ and His Bride. Think about it; Christ will not act independently from His Bride.] When Satan was successful in his deception, Adam followed Eve in partaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (1 Timothy 2:14). But why did he follow her? The answer is the same reason why our beloved Lord Jesus who knew no sin became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). Out of love, Jesus became sin to redeem a people to be His Bride. He became sin with a view of redeeming for Himself His Bride who was dead in sin and trespasses (Ephesians 2:5NKJ).

Adam is a type of Christ (Romans 5:14). He had to become a sinner to redeem Eve, his bride. There was no other way for Adam, for apart from her he could not rule. Likewise, apart from His Bride, the Lord Jesus cannot rule over this earth. He must have a queen if He is to be the King of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Son shall have a helpmate to reign with Him (Genesis 2:18). This is God's principle which cannot be broken and must be fulfilled.

Following Adam's fall, God sacrificed an animal and covered Adam's and Eve's shame (nakedness) with animal skin (Genesis 3:21). God redeemed them, but they were disqualified from replacing Satan as the ruler over this earth.

According to God's command: "In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17NKJ). In that day, their spiritual life with God went into a death. Not only did their spirit die but their physical bodies began to go into a death. Adam lived 930 years and died. He died seventy years short of God's day for with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day (2 Peter 3:8). God kept His promise: "In that day (a 1,000-year day)...you shall surely die."

Adam and Eve were barred from the tree of life which was present to give them the ability to rule and live forever (Genesis 3:22-24). When Eve was deceived, she was disqualified from eating of the tree of life and ruling with Adam forever. Adam could not partake of the tree of life and reign without her, so he partook of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil with a view of redeeming Eve so that they both could eat of the tree of life one day and fulfill God's purpose for the creation of man-to have dominion. This is all a type of what was to come through God's only begotten Son (Romans 5:14).

Man would have to wait 4,000 years until God's Son would come to this earth and die as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin (Hebrews 9:22NKJ). Through His perfect sacrifice, Christ has fulfilled the requirement to redeem His Bride for Himself. The Son has been waiting 2,000 years since Calvary to take the scepter of the Kingdom that was intended for Adam in the beginning. But why the long wait? This is what we want to look at more closely. Since Pentecost, the Holy Spirit has been searching for the Bride, the Queen who will rule with God's King. The Promise Of The Holy Spirit When the Lord Jesus ascended to the throne and was exalted to the right hand of God the Father, the promise of the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Body of Christ, the new creation in Christ.

"Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear." (Acts 2:33NKJ) When He came down from heaven to fill the 120 believers waiting in the upper room, the Holy Spirit came not to save them but to fill them. They were already saved at that time through a work of the Holy Spirit. They believed on the Lord and were obeying His command to wait. Thus, when the Spirit came as Christ was exalted, there was another reason for His coming. To understand the purpose, let us turn to the book of Genesis, chapters 21 through 25, for here we will see the type which points to the work of the Spirit today. The Types InGenesis 21:1-34;Genesis 22:1-24;Genesis 23:1-20;Genesis 24:1-67;Genesis 25:1-34 In these chapters, Abraham is a type of God the Father; Isaac is a type of God's Son; Abraham's oldest servant who was sent to find a bride for Isaac is a type of the Holy Spirit who has been sent to procure the Bride for the Son of God; Rebekah is a type of the Bride of Christ; Sarah and Keturah (Abraham's two wives) are types of Israel, the wife of Jehovah.

Type

Antitype

Abraham

God the Father

Sarah

Israel (before the wedding)

Isaac

The Son of God

Abraham's Oldest Servant

The Holy Spirit

Rebekah

The Bride of Christ

Keturah

Israel (after the wedding)

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. (Hebrews 11:17-19NKJ) From this passage in Hebrews, we discover that the events surrounding Isaac are in a "figurative sense." Actually, the Greek word for figurative sense is parable which means "a truth cast alongside a previously explained truth." Thus, if we understand the truths laid down regarding Isaac's life, including the persons and events surrounding his life, then we will come into a further understanding of God's work in the present dispensation.

Isaac is a type of Christ. He was conceived in a supernatural way since Sarah was old and barren. But God set the time for Isaac to be born and He gave life to what was barren. By comparison, the birth of Christ was supernatural, as well. Mary was a virgin and was found with child of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18NKJ).

Later, God commanded Abraham to offer his son Isaac for a burnt offering on a mountain in Moriah. So Abraham proceeded to the mountain and saw it three days later, on the third day (Genesis 22:4). When Abraham was commanded to offer his son, Isaac died in the eyes of Abraham; therefore, in a sense, Isaac was in a place of death to Abraham for those three days. Three days later, he would be resurrected (raised back up to life in respect to Abraham). On the mountain, he placed his son of promise on the altar, trusting God to provide the sacrifice. As his hand was raised to sacrifice his son, the Angel of the Lord called to him to stop. Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught in the thicket. Isaac, who was set to die, was spared through a substitute sacrifice, the ram which was slain in his place. By comparison, Isaac on the altar points to God the Father offering His only begotten Son on the cross to die a substitutionary death for fallen man. [Christ probably was offered up at the exact same place that Isaac was offered.] The Passover Lamb paid the penalty for sin. On the third day after His death, He arose from the dead, once again alive to the Father.

Following the offering of Isaac, Sarah, his mother, the wife of Abraham, died. This is a type of what happened to Israel following the death of their Messiah. As Isaac was offered and Sarah died, so was the Messiah offered and Israel was set aside, that is, put into a place of death for the next 2,000 years.

Come, and let us return to the LORD; for He has torn, but He will heal us; he has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight. (Hosea 6:1-2NKJ)

Israel was offered the Kingdom of Heaven by their Messiah but rejected the offer and crucified the One who made the offer. Israel has been wounded for 2 days (2,000 years) but will be revived on the third day (the coming Messianic Era, the seventh day of rest, the third day). In the type, Abraham is God the Father. Sarah the wife of Abraham is Israel the wife of Jehovah. Thus, in the antitype, Israel is set aside following the cross of Calvary. In Genesis 24:1-67, following the offering of Isaac and the death of Sarah, Abraham sent his oldest servant out to procure a bride for Isaac. In type, this points to the time after the death and resurrection of the Son of God and after Israel is set aside for rejecting the offer of the Kingdom and ultimately crucifying their Messiah. This time is the last 2,000 years or two days of Man's Day. The Servant Seeks For A Bride When

Abraham was old, well advanced in age, he called his oldest servant and made him promise: "Please, put your hand under my thigh, and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; but you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac" (Genesis 24:2-4NKJ). This servant was given the charge to go to Mesopotamia to the family of Abraham and take a wife for Isaac from his blood relatives. A wife could not be taken from the Canaanites. "Go to my country and my family" was the charge. As a type, the procurement of a bride for Abraham's son refers to the Holy Spirit who has been sent throughout the world to procure a wife for the Son. But it is vital that we see that the search is amongst the family, that is, God's family. The Canaanites represent the lost and the family of Abraham represents the saved, the house of God. In other words, the Holy Spirit is searching amongst the one new man in Christ, the Body of Christ to procure a bride for Christ.

We can see a further type in Adam and Eve. Eve was taken out of the body of Adam. She was not his entire body but a part of his body. When she was fashioned from one of his ribs, she was presented to him as his wife. The same picture is given to us regarding the Bride of Christ. She will come out of the Body of Christ. His entire Body will not be His Wife. The work of the Holy Spirit today is to search for and procure a bride for the Son, not from the lost of the world but from those who are saved and make up the Body of Christ. He is looking for those who are overcoming, who are running the race of the faith and who will finish the course. The oldest servant went out alone to search for the bride for Isaac, who remained at home with his father. Likewise, the Son of God remains with His Father, seated upon His throne, while the Spirit searches for the Bride. When the servant went out, he took with him ten camels with all of the master's goods. Ten in the Scriptures refers to completion. The Holy Spirit has gone forth with all the possessions of God, which can refer only to one thing-the Word of God. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, is the One who unveils to the hearts of the saved (not the lost) all the possessions of God. He proceeds forth from the Father (John 15:26); the world cannot receive Him (John 14:17), for He comes to guide the saved into all truth (John 16:13). This truth pertains to Christ (He witnesses of Christ) and all that concerns His return, His Kingdom and how to overcome to be His Bride. When the oldest servant went to Mesopotamia, he prayed to the Lord, asking for Divine favor in knowing whom the bride was to be.

Then he said, "O LORD God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day, and show kindness to my master Abraham. Behold, I stand here by the well of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. Now let it be that the young woman to whom I say, 'Please let down your pitcher that I may drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink'-let her be the one You have appointed for Your servant Isaac. And by this I will know that You have shown kindness to my master." (Genesis 24:12-14)

Before he had finished speaking to the Lord, it happened; Rebekah appeared at the well. She was from the family of Abraham, was a virgin and was able to draw water from the well (Genesis 24:15-16). All of these traits speak of Christians and the requirements to become the Bride of Christ. Again, the Bride must come from the family. All who are born-again are children of God who are awaiting adoption as first-born sons in the Kingdom.

Rebekah was a virgin, which speaks of those cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. In the New Testament, there are two instructive references to Christians as virgins.

First, Paul the apostle saw the saved as being betrothed to one Husband, Christ, and he jealously worked to present the saints to Christ as a chaste (perfect, clean, innocent) virgin. For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:2NKJ) This is the heart of the Holy Spirit who is searching for that chaste, pure virgin to present to Christ.

Second, the Lord Jesus spoke the parable of the ten virgins who are associated with the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 25:1-13). [Some people think these virgins refer to Israel, but this cannot be possible because, at the time of this parable, the offer of the Kingdom of Heaven had been taken from Israel due to their rejection of the offer. Also, the five foolish virgins do not refer to the lost because the lost are never considered virgins.] The ten virgins refer to those who are saved who are currently being offered the Kingdom. Again, ten refers to a number of completion. All ten virgins are called, but only five are chosen to enter into the wedding when the Bridegroom comes. We must be reminded of the Lord's exhortations: "For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14NKJ). "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14NKJ).

They all knew the Lord ("Lord, Lord, open up to us!") and they all went out together to meet the Bridegroom. All Christians will rise in the air together and stand before the judgment seat of Christ. From the called ones will come forth the ones who are called out (chosen) to rise to the throne as the Bride of Christ. The others are saved (eternal salvation) but will not be received as the Wife of Christ during His millennial reign.

What makes the difference between the wise and the foolish? The extra oil. They all have oil in their lamps. In the Scriptures, oil represents the Holy Spirit (Leviticus 8:10-12; Leviticus 21:12; 1 Samuel 10:1; 1 Samuel 10:6; 1 Samuel 16:13), which means that they all are new creations in Christ (born-again believers) and as such the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in them. The difference between the foolish and the wise virgins is that the wise virgins (Christians) possess an extra supply of oil. In other words, the wise ones are filled with the Holy Spirit.

What does being filled with the Spirit mean? Some Christians immediately relate filling to speaking in tongues and "flowing in the gifts." This is not what is spoken of as being filled. It has to do with receiving the implanted Word of God, which is able to save your souls (James 1:21). This also relates to the third quality of the bride as seen in Rebekah drawing water. Water refers to the Word of God; therefore, being filled with the Holy Spirit and the Word of God are related to one another. Without the Word, there is no filling. To prove this, we need to look at two related passages in Paul's epistles. Paul wrote to the Ephesians about being filled with the Holy Spirit and he wrote to the Colossians about the Word of Christ dwelling richly. By comparing the two verses and the text that follows each, the proper relationship between the Word of God and the Holy Spirit will be discovered as presented by Paul. The two are inseparable. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the

fear of God. (Ephesians 5:18-21NKJ)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Colossians 3:16NKJ) Be filled with the Holy Spirit and let the word of Christ dwell in you richly reveal that Christians filled with the Holy Spirit are the ones who allow the Word of God to dwell in their hearts in all wisdom. The same result follows in each case-speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing to the Lord in your heart. These Christians dwell in the Word of God (reading, understanding, acting upon it) in such a way that it is implanted in them under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. As James wrote: Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls (James 1:21NKJ). The Word is able to save our soul; but it must be implanted or rooted in us. This does not come by some mere understanding of some basic truths in the Scriptures. It comes from searching the Word of God and allowing the Holy Spirit to reveal the mature (epignosis) knowledge of Christ and His coming. The eyes of our heart are opened to see the goal of the Kingdom that is set before us, and we allow the Word to work actively in our lives through faith. It is to do its cutting work in our lives today so that we may gain our life in the Kingdom (Matthew 16:24-27) and receive the outcome of our faith, the salvation of our soul (1 Peter 1:9). The Holy Spirit has brought this into sharp focus in the letter to the Hebrews.

Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall through {following} the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. (Hebrews 4:11-13)

Thus, the wise virgins are full of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God which richly dwells in them unto the salvation of their souls. It is the active and living Word that prepares a heart to stand before the Judge. The wise virgins are ready to be received by their Bridegroom because they willingly lost their lives (soul, self-life) to gain them in the Age of the Kingdom. They are wise because the Word of God richly dwells in them in all wisdom. This wisdom, which is from above (not earthly), leads them to endure the trials and temptations of this life, producing patient endurance so that they will be perfect and complete, lacking nothing (James 1:2-4). In the Day of Christ, they will lack nothing and will be prepared to enter the wedding.

[For a more detailed explanation of the parable of the ten virgins, see the author's book titled Watch!, chapter 10, The Bridegroom Is Coming.]

Now, returning to the servant's search for the bride, we discover that he went with all the master's goods. He brought out jewelry of silver, jewelry of gold, and clothing, and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave precious things to her brother and to her mother (Genesis 24:53NKJ). The servant revealed all the wealth of the one to whom she would be married and he shared some of it with the whole household. This is the same picture we have today of the Holy Spirit who is revealing all the treasures of Christ and the age to come as found in the Word of God. The Holy Spirit is revealing to the Bride of Christ the inheritance that awaits her in the Son, and He reveals some of these things to Christians (of the household) who will not share in the inheritance as the Bride.

After seeing all the wealth of her future husband, Rebekah was ready to go but the family wanted her to delay. The servant was not to be denied doing what his master had called him to do, and in his timing. The Father has set the time for the presenting of the Bride to His Son and nothing will stop Him from bringing forth the Bride in His time (Acts 1:7; Mark 13:32-33). Will You Go?

Because of the persistence of the servant, the family called Rebekah and asked if she wanted to go. So they said, "We will call the young woman and ask her personally." Then they called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" And she said, "I will go." (Genesis 24:57-58NKJ) This question is an essential question to all Christians: "Will you go? Are you willing to lay down your life today and prepare yourself to be His Bride? Are you willing to come under the leadership of the Holy Spirit and allow the Word to dwell richly in you with all wisdom? Will you say, 'Yes, I will go!'" The invitation is going out to the Body of Christ, but who has an ear to hear?

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (Revelation 3:20-22) This is the voice of the Bridegroom calling forth to His Bride. It is His Bride who will ascend His throne in the day of His glory because she overcame the world, the flesh and the devil. The call is going out to "he who has an ear." Are you listening? Are you responding?

Next in Rebekah's journey to Isaac, she mounted the camel along with her maids who rode on the other camels (ten of them). All the maids and Rebekah went to meet Isaac, which once again signifies all Christians going to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Isaac left his home and went out to meditate in the field in the evening (Genesis 24:63). As he was in the field, he looked up and saw the camels coming. When Rebekah was told that Isaac was the man walking in the field, she took a veil and covered herself. Isaac then brought her into Sarah's tent and took Rebekah as his wife.

Christ will meet His Bride in the same way. He will come in the air and receive all of His people. Those who stand out amongst all Christians will be those who are clothed with the fine linen, which is the righteous acts of the saints (Revelation 19:8). As Rebekah wore the veil, they will be wearing the wedding garment. They are the ones who throughout their walk with the Lord said "Yes" to the Holy Spirit. It is at this point that the great multitude in heaven offer up their shout: "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready" (Revelation 19:6-7).

Let us yield to the Holy Spirit today and in our hearts purpose every day to be like Rebekah: "Yes, I will go!"

Now, before concluding this chapter, we need to touch upon the hearts of the Bridegroom and the Bride. The Heart Of The Bridegroom In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote of the relationship between a husband and wife and he compared this relationship to Christ and His Church. Paul wrote that the mystery is great. Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the Church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless. Christ nourishes and cherishes the Church because His people are

members of His Body. He has cleaved Himself to the Church, becoming one with her, just as a husband cleaves to his wife, becoming one flesh with her (Ephesians 5:25-32).

All of this speaks of the heart of the One who gave His life to redeem a bride for Himself. As John, the apostle who abided in the love of Christ, wrote: We love, because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). This is the heart of the Bridegroom. He loved first! It was His love that was poured out on Calvary and it is His love that will bring His Bride to His side. The Lord Jesus commanded that His disciples (all of us) love one another, even as He has loved us (John 13:34). The Lord has promised the "brotherly love" church at Philadelphia that those who stand against His people will be made to know that He has loved them (Revelation 3:9). No one can turn to John 17:1-26 and read the Lord's prayer to His Father as He was about to die on the cross without touching the depths of the love of Christ. The very conclusion of His prayer touches upon love.

"O righteous Father, although the world has not known Thee, yet I have known Thee; and these have known that Thou didst send Me; and I have made Thy name known to them, and will make it known; that the love wherewith Thou didst love Me may be in them, and I in them." (John 17:25-26) Paul's oft-quoted words to the Romans express the depths of the love of God and of Christ. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, "For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35-39) Is there anything that will stop God from bringing forth a bride for His Son? Is there anything that will stop the Holy Spirit from procuring a bride for the Son? Is there anything that will stop the Bridegroom from receiving His lovely Bride to His side? Absolutely nothing will stop God from fulfilling His purpose and plan. Love does not fail! The Heart Of The Bride

What should be the heart of the Bride as she waits for the love of her life? For those children of God who love the Lord and are longing for His appearing, there should be a growing attraction, hunger and desire to be in His presence. Are you hungry to be in His presence? Is there a sensing in you that this world is not your home? Are you a pilgrim, a sojourner like Abraham? Those who are being conformed to the image of God's Son to be His Bride should no longer be attracted to this earth. There should be a growing desire to meet Him in the air. "Come, Lord Jesus" is their cry! Is this your cry?

We are to be like the Shulamite maiden who declared: "Listen! My beloved! Behold, he is coming" (Song of Solomon 2:8). As their marriage deepened, the wife's heart was so caught up with her beloved that she said, "I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me" (Song of Solomon 7:10). After a while, she could wait no longer.

"Hurry, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices." (Song of Solomon 8:14) This is the cry of the Bride of Christ. "Hurry, my beloved! You have been gone too long and I must see You. I must embrace You. I must be with You. This earth has no more attraction for me. Come, my beloved!" The book of Revelation is the revealing of Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. As the Revelation

is unveiled, we are told: Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen."I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (Revelation 1:7-8). Our beloved Lord Jesus is calling out today: "Surely I am coming quickly" (Revelation 22:20NKJ). Do you hear His voice of love calling? Do you see His soon arrival? The cry of the longing, faithful Bride is: Come, Lord Jesus! Let it be so. Come, Lord Jesus! The heart of the Bridegroom and His future Bride is one heart, a heart to be together. When this day comes, it will be glory. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit will be fully satisfied.

O Lord, come! Maranatha!

## Part XX1.1 - Finding The Faith..

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FindingTheFaith When He Comes The heart of the Bride of Christ cries out for her lover. She cries out, "Come, Lord Jesus! Hurry, my Beloved!" This is to be the cry of the Lord's people; and throughout the two millennia since our Lord's going away to receive a kingdom, there have been saints who have maintained this heart until they shed their earthly tents-now absent from the body but present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8NKJ). In these last days immediately before our Lord returns, we are faced with a question that our Lord Jesus posed regarding the days that will precede His coming: "But the Son of Man having come, shall he find the faith upon the earth?" (Luke 18:8YLT). The answer to His question is that the Son of Man will not find the faith when He comes. As presented in chapter 15, the faith speaks of all that pertains to the Word of the Kingdom and coming into the Reign of the Heavens. Every Christian is exhorted to continue in the faith. In light of the judgment seat of Christ, Paul reminds us that we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7-11); those who do so are the ones who are continuing in the faith, pressing on toward the goal for the prize (Php 3:14), being prepared as a bride.

Dear brethren, we are nearing the end of Man's Day; the Kingdom has not come yet, but it is coming very soon. We have very little time left before the arrival of our Lord. Just the thought of this glorious event should bring joy to our hearts. Soon, the cry of the Bride will be answered, and He will appear. However, we must be ready to appear before His judgment seat. [For a detailed review of being prepared in the last days, the reader is encouraged to read the author's book titled Watch!.] This matter is extremely important to those who long to be His Bride, and for this reason, we must examine what the Lord meant by this question to see how we can avoid falling victim to the day in which we live. The Lord asked this question in conjunction with a series of teachings that He spoke in reference to the Kingdom of God (or, of Heaven) and, specifically, His Second Coming when He takes the scepter of the Kingdom. It was at the conclusion of a parable about a persistent widow that the Lord asked this question; however, the key to understanding the depth of the Lord's question is discovered in the entire context of what He taught before and after this parable (Luke 17:20-37; Luke 18:1-34). The entire dialogue needs to be understood to understand this question about the faith. To this end, we begin at Luke 17:20. When Will The Kingdom Come? The Lord Jesus began to speak to those that had gathered around Him and He focused on one issue raised by the Pharisees: When was the Kingdom of God coming? It is on this basis that He began to unfold many truths regarding the coming of the Son of Man.

Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here {it is!}' or, 'There {it is!}' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst." (Luke 17:20-21) The Pharisees were the elite of Israel and they asked the Lord questions, oftentimes not out of curiosity but to assail Him, seeking to catch Him in something that He might say, that they might accuse Him (Luke 11:53-54NKJ). But His answers, which were always the truth, exposed the hypocrisy in the hearts of His assailants. On this occasion, the Pharisees came to Jesus and asked about the coming of the Kingdom of God. The Jews were looking for a visible

manifestation of the Kingdom in which Messiah would set up His reign on earth and Israel would be the head of the nations, no longer under Gentile rule. Jesus answered them that the Kingdom does not come with observation (Luke 17:20NKJ). In other words, in their day, there would not be a visible manifestation of the Kingdom, as they were expecting. One day, when the Son of Man comes, the Kingdom will be with observation for all the world to see. In that day, there will be only one King and there will be no confusion as to who is in charge. When He comes, the Kingdom comes and is manifested as the reign of righteousness over this earth, for He is the King of Righteousness (Hebrews 6:5; Hebrews 7:1-2). This will be a visible, literal manifestation of the Reign of God. When the Lord declared, "For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst" (Luke 17:21), He was speaking to the Pharisees. Some translations state within you rather than in your midst, and this has led some to teach that Jesus meant that the Kingdom resided in them, in their hearts, and that it was present in some form of mystery. As we will see, this was not possible then, and it is not possible today. At that very moment in history, as Jesus, Messiah, the King of the Jews, stood amongst the lost sheep of the house of Israel, the Kingdom was present because their King was in their midst or within the house (standing in the midst of the house of Israel). The Lord was not referring to the Kingdom being in mystery in the very persons to whom He was speaking, the Pharisees. Why? First, there was no mystery about the One standing in their midst. All of the prophetic Scriptures foretold of His coming.

Second, the Pharisees were the very ones who had rejected the Kingdom (Matthew 12:22-45). Later, Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44); but in the comparable verses in Matthew, it is recorded: "Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you shall not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'" And Jesus came out from the temple (Matthew 23:38-39; Matthew 24:1). Jesus walked out of the house of Israel, the house He was in the midst of or within, and fulfilled the promise He previously had made: "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it" (Matthew 21:43).

Israel has been set aside for two days or 2,000 years. At the end of the Great Tribulation, Israel's Messiah once again will stand in their midst (Joel 2:27), their eyes will be opened to see Him, their sickness as a nation will be healed, their transgressions will be forgiven (Hosea 6:1-2) and, finally, they will be delivered into the literal Kingdom on earth as Messiah sits upon the throne of David (Luke 1:32-33).

Thus, for the Lord to mean that the Kingdom of God was residing within the person, namely, within the Pharisees, is totally out of context, for the Lord had removed the Kingdom from them due to their unbelief and sin against the Holy Spirit. Further, the Lord never stated nor implied that His Kingdom was ever to be in some mysterious form residing in a people for the 2,000 years of His absence. Some people teach that the Kingdom has come and is now in mystery within every Christian, based partly on the translations that state "within you" rather than "in your midst." This has led to the conclusion that the Kingdom today is within the Christian; therefore, the Kingdom has come already. This conclusion is contrary to the context of these Scriptures and all prophetic Scripture, as well.

It is true that Christ is to rule in the hearts of Christians, and to this extent, they are brought into the reign of Christ in this life; but the Kingdom of God, which is the literal and absolute reign of Christ

over all the affairs of this world, does not come until the Son of Man returns to this earth. There are mysteries of the Kingdom (Matthew 13:11); but these refer to the mystery that God is taking from among the Gentiles (and a remnant of Jews) a people for His name (Acts 15:14) who are a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17NKJ), a one new man in Christ (Ephesians 2:15), and who are to become the sons of the millennial Kingdom—a thought unheard of by the Jews. For the last 2,000 years, these sons have been hidden in the world amongst the tares (Matthew 13:24-30). The creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God (Romans 8:19). One day soon they will be raised from the dead and caught up in the air along with those who are alive and remain when He comes (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17); then the sons of God will be made known, and they shall shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father (Matthew 13:43). The Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven (the Reign of the Heavens) refers to a literal reign of Christ over this earth, and this does not come into view (or observation) until the Son of Man comes. Today, this world lies in the power of the evil one, not in the full manifestation of the power and authority of the Lord Jesus. The day will come when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Php 2:10-11). In that day, even Satan himself, as he is cast into the pit, will have to bend his knee and confess Jesus Christ is Lord. Oh, hallelujah! The Days Of The Son Of Man With this background, we can begin to understand what the Lord Jesus began to unfold to His disciples. From Luke 17:22-37; Luke 18:1-8, Jesus turned from the Pharisees and began to speak to His disciples specifically about His coming as the Son of Man. They would look for His coming but would not see it. It is significant that instead of referring to the day of His coming, the literal day in which He will step foot on the earth once again, He referred to the days of His coming, the days of the Son of Man; and He likened them to the days of Noah and the days of Lot.

"And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all." (Luke 17:26-27NKJ {ea}) By using days instead of day, it appears that the Lord was trying to draw their attention to the fact that there would come a period of time that would be representative of His coming which would precede the day when the Son of Man literally is revealed on the earth (Luke 17:30). The Lord has left us with a view of what the days of the Son of Man will look like. They will be like the days of Noah in which people ate, drank and married until the day Noah entered the ark. Noah, the man who found grace in the eyes of God because he was righteous, faithfully built the ark as the world around him went from bad to worse. Every intent of the thoughts of man's heart was evil continually (Genesis 6:5). No one was righteous in the sight of God and He regretted that He had made man in the first place. Fallen angels even had entered the daughters of men and produced offspring. This is how bad the situation had become on the earth. This condition continued until Noah completed the ark and he and his family entered it. In that day, they were delivered safely through the flood and brought into a new day on a refreshed earth, free from the abominable corruption. When Noah entered that ark, destruction came upon all the inhabitants of the earth who had been eating, drinking and marrying. In other words, during those years of Noah building the ark, their lives continued, as if they were in no danger from the wrath of God. They had no expectation that God was going to break into the history of man and forever change their lives. Their hearts were not for God and His righteousness but instead they were set on their own sinful pleasures. It was an abomination in the sight of God. The days of Lot did not look much better than the days of Noah.

"It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed." (Luke 17:28-30)

During the days of Lot, outwardly the things of life continued, but inwardly the heart of man was filled with wickedness. Righteous Lot (2 Peter 2:6-9) lived amongst the total depravity of man as men sought after men (Genesis 19:1-29). God looked down at Sodom and saw that it was full of moral filth and had to be destroyed. Two angels were sent to Sodom to remove Lot and his family before the city was destroyed. The angels said to Lot: "Escape for your life! Do not look behind you, and do not stay anywhere in the valley; escape to the mountains, lest you be swept away" (Genesis 19:17). In the Scriptures, mountains are a type of the Kingdom and the plains a type of the world. Another way of stating this is that Lot was commanded to escape the things of the world and flee to the things of God (the Kingdom). The warning from the Lord was very clear; however, not all that heard heeded the dire warning. The men who were to be married to Lot's daughters refused to leave, for they were most likely caught in the sin of that day, as well. They saw no danger in their actions. They thought the warning was a joke (Genesis 19:14), for their hearts had become hardened with the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:13). Only Lot, his wife and two daughters heeded the call to leave, but only after the angels took them by the hand and brought them outside the city. The Lord was merciful to Lot even though he wanted to linger despite knowing that great destruction was coming. Even then, Lot refused to head toward the mountains and begged to go to another city. It wasn't until he saw the total destruction of Sodom that he feared and went to the mountains and dwelt in a cave (Genesis 19:19-30). On the day Lot was removed from the city, God rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed all the inhabitants of the city.

### Remember Lot's Wife

Within the context of the days of Lot, the Lord Jesus gave a very direct warning to His disciples: "Remember Lot's wife!" (Luke 17:32). In other words, don't forget what happened to her; take heed to what happened for it can happen to you, as well. What happened to Lot's wife? Very simply, she looked back (Genesis 19:17; Genesis 19:26). To understand the significance of what happened, we need to start with Lot. First, Lot, as the head of the family, failed to heed the warning not to remain in the plains and to flee to the mountains. Instead, he bargained with the angels and he took his wife and daughters to another city in the plains, not to the mountains. It was when Lot became afraid and decided it was time to head toward the mountains that his wife looked back and turned into a pillar of salt. It was Lot's hesitation to flee that left his wife vulnerable to looking back. What is our lesson? Follow the Lord's orders to the letter. He desires obedience. Because of his hesitation, Lot lost his wife. Second, Lot's wife was disobedient in her fleeing and she looked back. But why did she look back? Most likely, she still had some attraction to the city, even though it was morally bankrupt. Her heart was in the plains and not in the mountains. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Luke 12:34). As a result of looking back, Lot's wife became a pillar of salt and lost her soul. In reference to Lot's wife, the Lord warned: "Whoever seeks to keep his life shall lose it, and whoever loses {his life} shall preserve it" (Luke 17:33). By now, the reader should recognize that these words of our Lord are similar to those discussed in chapter 10 regarding the salvation of the soul. The Lord's teaching on this matter begins with: "If anyone

wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life[soul-life] shall lose it; but whoever loses his life [soul-life] for My sake shall find it. For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul [soul-life]? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul [soul-life]?" (Matthew 16:24-26{ea}). Lot's wife failed on all counts and she failed to reach the mountains. She is a type of the Christian who will save his soul-life while in the body only to lose it in the Kingdom Age. The Lord's call to remember Lot's wife is a direct reference to entering His Kingdom and, to do this, a believer's soul must be saved.

It is interesting that the one who turned into a pillar of salt was a wife. She had every opportunity to continue as Lot's wife if they both had escaped to the mountains. But what did she do? She looked back at that which was contrary to the mountains that were set before her. She ignored the warnings and she had not set her heart on what was ahead. She was saved from the wrath of God being poured out on the city, but she did not make it to the mountains. This is the same thing that will happen to Christians who have the same heart as Lot's wife. They will be saved from the wrath of the Lamb, but they will not be allowed to enter into the Reign of the Heavens. They will have had all the potential of entering the Kingdom as part of the Bride of Christ, the Wife of the Lamb, but they will have squandered it by not holding to the faith, and worse, they will have continued in their fascination with the things of the earth. Their minds will have been set on the things on earth and not on the things above where Christ is. They will be saved from the wrath but will forfeit their soul-life during the Kingdom Age. They will have gained their soul-life only to lose it in the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a most serious matter.

We are living in the days of the Son of Man. We are warned not to set our hearts on the things of this world but to set our hearts on the one thing that is set before us, namely, the coming Kingdom. In speaking of the cost of discipleship, the Lord said, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). Lot's wife is our example of one who looks back and loses the right to reign in the Kingdom.

Paul exhorted the Colossians in a similar way: If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth (Colossians 3:1-2). We could re-phrase Paul's words as such: You are in Christ, the One who is coming from heaven. Set your mind on the coming Heavenly Kingdom and not on the world which lies in the power of the evil one. Look up for your Lord is coming.

We must understand that we are living in the days of the Son of Man, days which are like the days of Noah and the days of Lot. Why? Because the fig tree (Israel) has put forth leaves [is once again a nation in the Promised Land (Matthew 24:32)]. As recorded in Matthew, the Lord spoke the parable of the fig tree in the context of the coming of the Son of Man and the days of Noah. When the nation of Israel was once again on the land (which occurred in May, 1948), then, according to the Lord's words, the world either entered the days of the Son of Man or was already in those days. In either case, these are the days which will lead to the literal coming of the Son of Man, the day of the Son of Man.

Given the thought that we are in the days of the Son of Man, it is imperative that we understand what it means to look back. When we look back at this world instead of looking on toward the

Heavenly Kingdom, we are looking at a world that hates God (James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17), is in rebellion against God and has become a place of moral depravity. Just look around you and you do not have to look too far to see that this is true. Our major cities are cesspools of filth and moral decay. Looking back means that we have some hidden attraction to an unrighteous world; we are trying to keep one foot in the world and one foot heading toward the Kingdom. It will not work! We need both feet moving toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. We must forsake all that the world has to offer and pursue the abundant entrance into the Kingdom to receive the full reward of reigning with Christ. Lot's wife walked by sight, not by faith, and this is why she looked back. She had no goal set before her except what the plain (the world) had to offer. If she had seen what was ahead, she would not have looked back but would have walked by faith to the mountains with her family. We are warned not to follow her way to destruction. The Kingdom is set before us and we must set our eyes on what lies ahead and walk by faith, continuing in the faith until our King comes. Remember Lot's wife! The Parable Of The Persistent Widow

It is with this thought that we come to the parable of the persistent widow that ends with the question of whether the Son of Man will find the faith on the earth when He comes. Luke gives us the Lord's purpose of the parable: Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart (Luke 18:1). This parable was spoken to come alongside of or to add to what Jesus previously had spoken to His disciples about the days of the Son of Man. Jesus was telling His disciples, and us as well, what we are to do in these days. In other words, in the days of the Son of Man, which are like the days of Noah and the days of Lot, when our righteous souls are in torment over the unrighteous adversaries both without and within, there is a danger of losing heart; of becoming despaired over the conditions, maybe even fearing whether we will make it through to the end; of being overcome rather than overcoming. The answer to this dilemma is to pray so that we do not lose heart. However, the prayers have a very specific focus. The Lord used an unrighteous judge and a widow who demanded justice from her adversary as the example.

"There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.' "And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.'" (Luke 18:2-5NKJ) The widow was being tormented by her adversary, so she kept going to this unrighteous judge who did not fear God nor regard man. The judge realized that she was not going to go away but rather would continue to pursue him to the point of wearing him out, so he finally avenged her against her adversary. Then the Lord said: "Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily" (Luke 18:6-8 a NKJ).

If an unrighteous judge will do this, then how much more will God do it? The Lord Jesus, in so many words, said the same thing elsewhere.

"Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is

good to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:9-11)

It is our righteous soul that is to be crying out day and night to our righteous Judge who will deliver us from all our adversaries. This same cry of the heart is seen in David who faced many enemies. At the end of his life, he testified: It is God who avenges me (2 Samuel 22:48NKJ). As the sweet psalmist of Israel, David wrote: Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us (Psalms 62:8). Pouring out our hearts before God is an act of continuous, fervent, watchful prayer, day and night. Paul exhorted the Thessalonians to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and the Colossians to devote themselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful (Colossians 4:2NIV). How much more vital is it to pray as we near the end of Man's Day, especially as we see the Day of Christ approaching? Peter wrote: But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers (1 Peter 4:7NKJ). We are much closer to the end than when Peter wrote these words. How much more relevant is this exhortation 2,000 years later? Prayer is vital to all who are seeking to be counted worthy of the on-high calling (2 Thessalonians 1:11; Colossians 1:9-12) to enter the Reign of the Heavens that is coming very soon. In these last days, we must be watchful and this must be joined with prayer (Matthew 26:41; Mark 13:33NKJ; Luke 21:36NKJ). We watch so that we can see the adversaries, the dangers and the evils that surround us, tempt us and seek to destroy us (1 Peter 5:8-9). Watching must lead to praying all the more diligently in order to escape the evils that are in this earth today and will intensify as the Day approaches. Let us not forget that there is a host of adversaries in the heavenly places that are in battle against all who are holding to the faith and seeking to enter the heavenly places to rule and reign with Christ (Ephesians 6:10-20). In concluding his exhortation on withstanding the evil day (Ephesians 6:13), Paul encouraged the Ephesians to keep praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints (Ephesians 6:18NKJ). This is the heart of the persistent widow. "Shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily." The Lord bears long with His people, which means that He "patiently endures"; and He will avenge us speedily, which means "a brief space of time." For 2,000 years He has been bearing with His people, but this has been merely two days in the mind of God. Until the Son of Man comes, we are exhorted not to lose heart but to continue to come to our Lord, even as the persistent widow who wearied the judge, never ceasing to cry out for deliverance from an evil world full of adversaries. This is the faith for which the Lord is looking! It is believing and expecting the Lord to do it. The faith says that He will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His Heavenly Kingdom (2 Timothy 4:18). The faith speaks of the one thing that is essential to not losing heart and to approaching our Lord, and that is holding fast to our confidence that our God will avenge His people and that avenging will come when our Lord comes. This is one of the reasons why we are exhorted to continue in the faith (Acts 14:21-22), stand firm in the faith (1 Corinthians 16:13), be steadfast in the faith (1 Peter 5:9NKJ) and contend earnestly for the faith (Jude 1:3). This faith is believing in and holding to the return of the Son of Man and the coming of His Kingdom.

He Will Not FindTheFaith "But the Son of Man having come, shall He find the faith upon the earth?" (Luke 18:8YLT {ea}) In the Greek, the Lord's answer to the question is: "No; He will not find a people holding to the faith when He comes." In other words, many of His people will not be like the persistent widow but will have given up on pursuing the righteous Judge to deliver them.

Why? Because they will be like those who lived in the days of Noah and the days of Lot. They will be oblivious to the dangers that surround them. Instead, they will be living as if there are many days, even years, to follow, with their hope set on their treasures that are being stored up on earth. Some might be like Lot; when the angels come to remove them from this earth in the day of rapture, they will have to be seized by force to break them away from the earthly attractions. To some, the need for escape may be a joke and they will ignore all the signs around them. In short, their souls will not be exercised over righteousness. They will not hunger and thirst for righteousness, seeking to be satisfied; instead, the earth and what it has to offer will be their satisfaction, even their refuge. They will not be crying out for deliverance from their adversaries, for they will not see adversaries. In fact, many will be doing what is right in their own eyes. Their eyes will be set on the things of the plains.

It is shocking that recently there was a news article that declared there is a "spiritual awakening" in the United States. This statement was based on what are the two top-selling books. The first book is about there being no such thing as good and evil. This theme is so grotesque that it is almost unimaginable that it would be taken so seriously, but it is because we are living in a world where many are doing what is right in their own eyes. This is humanism, an age-old lie from Satan. This belief can lead only to moral depravity. The other best-selling book encourages Christians in how to receive blessings from God, as if we are to be seeking after blessings rather seeking the Blessor Himself. Besides, Christians have been blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). This is far greater than any blessing we ever will know on earth. Seeking blessing on earth sounds spiritual and may have some basis in Scripture, but what is the end result in the atmosphere of this self-indulgent world of today? Does it lead the Lord's people into an intimate relationship with their beloved Lord? Does it lead them to long for the coming Kingdom and to love the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ? Or does it lead His people to live with an earthly view; to live on the plains, seeking after the "good life"? Oh, they might not be into the grossly immoral things of the world, but their hearts are focused on this life and not on the coming of our beloved Lord. The sad truth is that a book like this could lead the Lord's people to hunger and thirst for blessing on earth and lead them away from a hunger and thirst for the righteousness that is coming. Either way—living unaffected by the unrighteousness all around; or living for today, seeking after the things (even blessings) of this earth instead of the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places that are set before us—the end result will be the same. There will be unpreparedness in the days of the Son of Man that are leading to the return of the Lord. Remember Lot's wife! The overall condition of the Christian world today is one of apostasy, lukewarmness and holding to a leavened, corrupted Word of the Kingdom. However, the Spirit is speaking: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Matthew 13:9NKJ). We are exhorted to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). We are not to be caught by surprise but rather are to be aware of the times and the season. We are in the season which is the days of the Son of Man. Let us be like Abraham who lived on the high places and sought for the city whose builder and architect is God (Hebrews 11:9-10). Let us persistently pursue the One who will deliver us safely into His Heavenly Kingdom. Let us continue in prayer so as not to lose heart. Let us pursue righteousness. Let us continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, not moved from the hope of the gospel of the glory of Christ. The Son of Man is coming! The Parable Of The Pharisee And The Tax-Gatherer

After speaking the parable of the persistent widow, the Lord Jesus spoke another parable. Luke tells us the reason: And He also told this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt (Luke 18:9). He used two types of people who went into the temple to pray-the religious elite, the Pharisee; and a tax-gatherer. Listen to the heart of the religious leader.

"The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, 'God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'" (Luke 18:11-12) The one who thought he was righteous viewed himself as better than everyone else. In his eyes, he was not like the others, even the tax-gatherer who entered the temple with him to pray. He then recounted some of the good things that he did, such as fasting and paying tithes.

Now, the tax-gatherer viewed himself totally opposite from the way the Pharisee viewed himself.

"But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'" (Luke 18:13)

What a heart of humility in this tax-gatherer who was disdained by the Pharisee. He could not even look up to heaven. He saw his true condition before God. The Lord Jesus saw the humility and said, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:14). In the days of the Son of Man, whom are we to trust? We are to trust in the One who is righteous, our Lord Jesus. We are sinners saved by grace through faith. This does not give us a license to look down upon others and think that we can trust in our own righteousness, as if we are something to behold. Never!

What is to be our hope in this day? For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith (Galatians 5:5NKJ). Our righteousness comes when the Righteous One comes. In the days of apostasy, lukewarmness and leaven, our cry must be the same: "Be merciful to me, a sinner saved by grace." As Paul told the Corinthians: "But by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Corinthians 15:10). Our God bears long with us and is merciful; He will be our merciful Judge at the judgment seat, so let us humble ourselves today that we will be exalted in that Day. Our Lord is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any of us should perish but that all of us should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9NKJ). This parable builds upon the parable of the persistent widow, for both parables deal with prayer in the last days, prayer that is pleasing to the Lord and which will bring us through to the end. The persistent widow and the tax-gatherer saw their total dependence on the Lord-one for deliverance from her adversary and the other for deliverance from his own self-righteousness. Both people saw their need.

We might be tempted to think that both people showed a lack of faith. After all, hasn't the Lord overcome all the adversaries and isn't He our righteousness? Wasn't the persistent widow actually being a nag to the judge? Wasn't the tax-gatherer showing a lack of faith? By the way, the tax-gatherer does not represent a lost person, for he was going into the temple to pray. He was a Jew who had applied the blood of the lamb just like the Pharisee, so he does not represent one who was lost. He had a true assessment of his condition before God. He needed God's mercy. The fact of the matter is that both people exemplified character that pleases God and that all of us

must have-we can do nothing without our Lord. God does not view persistence on our part as nagging or crying out for mercy on our part as a lack of faith. No; it is a sign of faith and an acknowledgment that we need our Lord. We must not leave our righteous Judge alone. The persistent widow and the tax-gatherer were alike in the Lord's view, and they both give us a proper view of how to pray in these last days.

King David, the man after God's heart, is a great example of one who knew the mercy of God. He was so transparent before God. Consider this small sampling of the words of his heart.

Remember, O LORD, Your tender mercies and Your lovingkindnesses, for they are from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; according to Your mercy remember me, for Your goodness' sake, O LORD. (Psalms 25:6-7NKJ) For Your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my iniquity, for it is great. (Psalms 25:11NKJ) Look on my affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins. (Psalms 25:18NKJ) But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever. I will praise You forever, because You have done it; and in the presence of Your saints I will wait on Your name, for it is good. (Psalms 52:8-9NKJ) This is the heart of a man who knew God and trusted in His mercy. Like the persistent widow, David never turned from the Lord but kept pursuing Him, even when he sinned against God. Like the tax-gatherer, David, as a sinner, cried out for mercy.

What is the prayer in the days of the Son of Man that we are to cry out to our Lord day and night? "Lord, deliver me! Save me from this wicked world of unrighteousness! It is tormenting my soul. Lord, it is only by Your grace that I am what I am. In me, there is no good thing. Have mercy on me, a sinner saved by grace! I hunger and thirst for righteousness! Apart from You, beloved Lord, I have no righteousness. You alone are my righteousness. Thank You that my life is now hidden with Christ in God; and when You are revealed, I will be revealed with You in glory. Come, Lord Jesus, and deliver me into Your Heavenly Kingdom!" This is a prayer of faith, which is holding fast to the faith. When He comes, will He find the faith in you? Let us continue in unceasing prayer with a view to His sudden return.

#### Receive The Kingdom As A Child

Now, following these parables, the Lord continued teaching His disciples through a child and a rich ruler, both of which deal with receiving and entering the Kingdom. This is significant because it adds more weight to the finding of the faith on earth when He comes. Clearly, entering His Kingdom was on the Lord's heart throughout the passages that we are reviewing, and this should leave little doubt that the faith primarily pertains to the Kingdom.

After speaking the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-gatherer, some people brought infants to Jesus that He might touch them. However, when the disciples saw this, they rebuked the people. In response to this, Jesus called His disciples to Himself and said: "Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it {at all} (Luke 18:16-17).

We would expect the Pharisees to rebuke those who brought the infants to Jesus, for they were the proud ones who had all the knowledge and religious stature amongst the people. But the disciples were the ones who did the rebuking. The ones who were the closest to Jesus, who heard all His teachings and were personally taught by Him, were in danger of being as proud as the

Pharisees. We could say that they were developing an attitude: We have arrived. In response to this arrogance, the Lord taught them ("I say to you") that as His disciples, they had to receive the Kingdom like a child if they were to enter it.

We need to make note that the Lord divided His teaching into two parts: receiving and entering. In other words, first they had to receive the Kingdom as a child, and only after doing this was the entrance to the Kingdom set before them. Through the children, Jesus was teaching that disciples of the Kingdom must receive the Kingdom like children who are dependent on their parents. The infants were brought to Jesus; they did not go to Him on their own. This speaks of dependence and faith.

Disciples are dependent on the Lord Himself and the Holy Spirit. In John's gospel, Jesus answered Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:3; John 3:5). The Lord taught Nicodemus on two truths: the need to be born again (saved) to see the Kingdom (only see, not enter), and the need to be baptized and led by the Spirit to enter the Kingdom (after seeing). Thus, He presented the process by which the Kingdom is set before a person. The lost must be saved (born again) before they even see the Kingdom. It is after believing (born again) that the reality of the Kingdom comes into view, but this is not enough to enter the Kingdom. There is a second step. The believer must be born of water.

Born of water speaks of being baptized and the Spirit speaks of being led by the Spirit, after one is born again. This is a two-step process, as well: First, being baptized in water (immersion in water of a believer), and second, following the Holy Spirit.

We discover the same thing in type with the nation of Israel when they were delivered out of Egypt (type of the world). Moses was called to deliver Israel out of Egypt (Christ came to deliver us out of the world). The blood was applied (they were saved; a type of the Christian applying the blood of the Lamb and being saved) and then they passed through the Red Sea (baptized into Moses; a type of the Christian's baptism into Christ). Once they were on the other side of the Red Sea, they followed the pillar of fire and the cloud to lead them on their wilderness journey (a type of the Spirit as the Christian is led through the journey of life). When Israel came out, they were children of God who were to go on to be sons of the Kingdom. As they went out, they were to go out by faith, believing God for all that He had promised, looking for their inheritance of the land. It is the same way with Christians today. We are children of God who are to walk by faith, believing God for all of His promises that are in Christ, looking for the heavenly land, the Kingdom of Heaven. As we walk by faith, we begin to grow up to be sons who will be qualified to enter the Kingdom.

Thus, through the children (infants), Jesus was teaching His disciples that they had to receive the Kingdom by faith—the simple, believing, trusting faith of a child. The Kingdom is not for the proud, the ones who trust in their own ability and their own self-righteousness, nor for the ones who walk by sight. A true disciple of the Kingdom recognizes that he knows so little about the Kingdom. He is a learner who is dependent on his Teacher. He must be led to the Kingdom by the Spirit, not by his flesh. If we live by the Spirit (born again), let us also walk by the Spirit (the wilderness journey) (Galatians 5:25{ea}). In this way, we will enter the Kingdom. The One Thing

After touching the children, Jesus was approached by a certain rich ruler who wanted to know how to inherit eternal life. The context of these verses is inheriting the Kingdom; therefore, eternal life in this case means life for the age, for the Kingdom Age. [In the Greek, eternal can mean either age or ages; therefore, the context must be understood to properly understand whether it means the eternal ages or a specific age, such as the coming Kingdom Age.] And a certain ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" ["what having done-shall I inherit life age-during? (Luke 18:18YLT)] And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments, 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honor your father and mother.'" And he said, "All these things I have kept from {my} youth." (Luke 18:18-21) This ruler was earnestly seeking entrance into the Kingdom and he had done all that was required of him under the commandments. He most likely saw himself as a good person, for he had kept all the commandments since his youth. We could say that he was a religious person, even a religious, rich person. By his question, he probably thought that all that was necessary was to do something good to add to what he had done already; he needed to do another good thing. Jesus went to the heart of man's idea of goodness and declared that no one is good except God. Being good does not lead one into the Kingdom. There was something in this man's life that hindered him inheriting the Kingdom. And when Jesus heard {this,} He said to him, "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess, and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But when he had heard these things, he became very sad; for he was extremely rich. And Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." (Luke 18:22-25)

What was the issue, the one thing? It was faith. To be sure, the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil (1 Timothy 6:10), but the one thing was not about money, per se. It was about walking by faith and, we could say, coming into and holding to the faith. An extremely rich person does not have to walk through life by faith. In the case of this man, he also was a ruler, which meant that he could order people to do what he wanted. So here was a religious, rich ruler who saw himself as a good person. Essentially, he had all that the world could offer and all his earthly needs were met. His soul was satisfied. Why should such a one walk by faith? This is why it was so difficult for this very rich ruler to enter the Kingdom. He had it all and he could not give it up. To such a one, the Lord's words apply: "For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26). This same heart was exposed by the Lord in another parable about a rich fool who had all the world's goods and who said to his soul: "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years {to come;} take your ease, eat, drink {and} be merry." "But God said to him, 'You fool! This {very} night your soul is required of you; and {now} who will own what you have prepared?' So is the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:19-21). In commanding His disciples to seek the Kingdom, Jesus told them: "Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves purses which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near, nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Be dressed in readiness, and {keep} your lamps alight" (Luke 12:33-35).

Walking by faith means that our heart is set on the Kingdom; our treasure is heavenly, not earthly. One whose treasure is on earth will not seek the Heavenly Kingdom and will not inherit it. The Lord knew the heart of the rich ruler. He was attached to the things of this earth and the only way he could become unattached to them was to sell all. It was a drastic measure for this man, but isn't denying self a drastic measure for all disciples of Christ?

James, who elaborated on his Master's teachings, wrote: Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world {to be} rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? (James 2:5). Why are the poor rich in faith? Because they have so little of what the world has to offer. They must trust in God for their daily provisions, unlike the rich. However, it is the rich in faith who will inherit the Kingdom.

Now, when Jesus spoke these words about the rich ruler, those who were listening wondered how anyone could be saved. And they who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" But He said, "The things impossible with men are possible with God." And Peter said, "Behold, we have left our own {homes,} and followed You." And He said to them, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life." (Luke 18:26-30)

Truly, all who were listening were not rich, most of all, the Lord's disciples. This question about being saved must be looked at in context and the context is inheriting the Kingdom which, as we have seen, can refer only to ones who are saved (born again). Therefore, we must view saved not as initial salvation but as the salvation of the soul and entering the Reign of the Heavens. This is made apparent by the Lord's closing words about the age to come and eternal life. The age to come is the Kingdom Age, and eternal life in this context is the life of the age (coming Kingdom) or life age-during (Greek rendering). All of this is in perfect harmony with what has been taken up in this chapter, along with other teachings of the Lord presented in this book.

Thus, the hindrance to the one thing of faith is not money, per se, but any thing that hinders a saint from pressing on toward the goal for the prize. Once again, we are brought to the Lord's word in regard to inheriting the Kingdom and receiving the reward: "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). If we do this, then all things are possible with God. Peter confirmed this thought when he stated to the Lord: Behold, we have left our own homes, and followed You. Jesus' encouraging word is that anyone who forsakes all to follow Him not only will receive much in this world [needs met (Luke 12:22-34)] but also will receive the salvation of his soul to enter into and inherit the Kingdom.

It all comes down to denying our soul-life, taking up our cross and following our Lord; and in doing so, we are walking by faith, not by sight. If we walk by faith, we are continuing in the faith. We will be like Abraham who by faith lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign {land}, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God (Hebrews 11:9-10). On The Third Day In concluding this portion of Scripture, we discover Jesus took aside His twelve disciples and explained to them that He was going to be crucified and rise from the dead on the third day.

"Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles, and will be

mocked and mistreated and spit upon, and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again." And they understood none of these things, and this saying was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said. (Luke 18:31-34)

All things written in the Scriptures as spoken through the prophets were about to be fulfilled. The prophets had foretold of the day in which Israel's Messiah would be crucified. However, like many of the elite rulers of Israel, the disciples had no understanding of what was staring them in the face. They did not comprehend what their Master had taught them. On the third day, He was going to rise from the dead.

Dear brethren, is it any different today? Do the Lord's people comprehend what the Lord Jesus and His disciples left us in the written Word of God, specifically, in the prophetic Scriptures? In recalling the day in which he and two other disciples were on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured in their sight as a picture of the coming Kingdom and Glory (Matthew 17:1-13), Peter wrote: And {so} we have the prophetic word {made} more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts (2 Peter 1:19). The prophetic word is the Word of the Kingdom. Peter was given a prophetic view of Christ coming in all His glory as the King, and he never forgot that day. It was given to Peter and the others after six days, on the seventh day. It was not only a prophetic view of the event but also of when it is going to occur, 2,000 years from Peter's day at the end of Man's Day of 6,000 years (6 days). On the third day, Jesus rose from the dead. In other words, after two days, on the third day, He arose. The two days (2,000 years) since His death and resurrection are almost over; the third day is coming. On the third day, when He comes, He will raise from among the dead those who are asleep in Jesus and seize them up in the air along with those in Christ who are alive and remain on the earth. This day is coming soon! Are you ready?

Today, there are many men speaking to the Lord's people who call themselves prophets, and people are listening to them as if they are true prophets. But are they? What are they prophesying? Is prophesying about events in people's lives, about events in the world, about the future without a view to the coming of Christ truly from God? We are living in the last days in which there will be great deception. It seems that much so-called prophecy today feeds the soul. It excites people with things of this earth leading them away from the truth of the prophetic Word of God. The result is people run to and fro listening for prophecy as if God is speaking forth countless prophetic words to entertain us. This is not God's way. God's people must wake up before it is too late. During the coming Tribulation, there will be many false Christs and false prophets who will deceive, if possible, even the elect (Matthew 24:24). We are not in that day yet, but even in his day, Peter warned: But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves (2 Peter 2:1).

We are living in days like the days of Noah and the days of Lot. There is much deception already in the Christian world and in a day of moral corruption. Moral corruption leads people into all sorts of deception.

Regarding the last days, Peter has left us a very specific warning in reference to the Lord's return: Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with {their} mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?" (2 Peter 3:3-4). The mockers

are among us now. Where are the men who are teaching the truth as revealed in the prophetic Scriptures? It does not matter if they are called prophets or not. (In fact, considering the fallen condition of the Christian world, it is probably better if they are not called anything but a disciple of Christ or a brother in Christ.) What matters is that the truth about the Word of the Kingdom and the soon coming of our beloved Lord is taught to the Lord's people to prepare them for the Day of Christ. They must be led to understand the faith and then to continue in the faith until the Lord comes to take the scepter of the Kingdom of Heaven. Many teachers will shrink back in shame at the judgment seat because of their utter failure to properly teach the Lord's people and lead them into all truth. And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now shall not God bring about justice for His elect, who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? I tell you that He will bring about justice for them speedily. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:6-8) The Lord has given us the answer to His question. He will not find the faith on the earth when He comes. Today, the majority of the Christian world is not listening to the truth: For the time will come [has come] when they will not endure sound doctrine; but {wanting} to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths (2 Timothy 4:3-4{ea}). This is the day in which we live. When the masses are not listening, what are we to do? First and foremost, we need to sit at the feet of our beloved Lord Jesus, wait on Him and listen for His still small voice (1 Kings 19:11-12). We are living in days when it is to he who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says. Do you have an ear to hear? Are you listening? Are you waiting? Are you holding to the faith? Do you see the Day approaching?

If your answer is yes to all of these questions, then your heart, as one who has the heart of the Bride of Christ, should be speaking forth, "Come, Lord Jesus!" May we hear the reply of our Beloved: "Yes, I am coming quickly. Hold fast what you have, in order that no one will take your crown" (Revelation 22:20; Revelation 3:11).

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

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