

WRITINGS OF ROBERT D LUGINBILL

by Robert D. Luginbill

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by Robert D. Luginbill, compiled for study and devotional reading.

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01.00 - Christology: the Study of Jesus Christ

Christology: the Study of Jesus Christ by Dr. Robert D. Luginbill The unique Person and work of the Word of God incarnate, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Everything in the heavens and on the earth was created by Him (Jesus Christ), things invisible as well as those visible – whether thrones, authorities, rulers or powers, everything was created through Him and for Him. And He Himself is before everything, and everything subsists in Him. Col. 1:16-17.

I. The Person of Jesus Christ

1. Jesus Christ is truly Divine
2. Jesus Christ is truly Human
3. Jesus Christ is truly Unique
4. The Names of Jesus Christ Reflect His Perfect Person and His Perfect Work
5. The Life of Jesus Christ

II. The Saving Work of Jesus Christ

1. Our Need for a Savior
2. The Substitutionary Death of Jesus Christ on our behalf.
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8. Justification
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10. Summary of the Work of Christ in Effecting Salvation

Introduction: Any study of this sort must of necessity fall short of absolute completeness, for the written word of God is in its every particular about the Living Word of God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The better one understands scripture and the completely integrated tapestry of fundamental truth which runs through its entire warp and woof, the more perspicuous this one essential truth becomes, that Jesus Christ is the reason for the Bible, and the Bible is all about Jesus Christ, the Word of God (John 1:1-14). The purpose of this study therefore must be limited

to explicating the major biblical themes contained in scripture regarding our Savior, His unique Person and His work of salvation on our behalf. For Jesus is the truth, the way and the life (John 14:6), and the fundamental essence of the testimony of the entire Bible is the divine revelation of Him, who He is and what He has done for us in giving up His very life for us (Revelation 19:10). All things were made through our Lord Jesus Christ and for Him (Colossians 1:15-18). He is thus the cornerstone of the entire plan of God for all of creature history (Ephesians 3:11). The salvation of all members of the human race who turn to God, as well as the victory over the devil (who had held human beings in his power) have been won through our Lord's sacrifice of Himself on our behalf and could not have been won in any other way (Colossians 2:14-15).

Therefore Jesus is our ultimate hope (Colossians 1:27), our highest love (Php 1:21), and the sole object of our faith (Acts 4:12). Jesus Christ is our life (Colossians 3:4). Only in Him do we have a full share in the resurrection to come and eternal life (1 Peter 1:3-4; cf. Titus 3:6-7), for He is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). Without Jesus we along with the entire human race would be lost, but in Him we have been delivered from the wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1:10). Without Jesus all of human history and our lives in particular would be essentially pointless and meaningless, but in Him we anticipate eternal life and great reward (Revelation 22:12). Without Jesus the world is a hard, cold, and bitter place, but in Him we rejoice with boundless joy, for as intimate and everlasting members of His Bride, the Church, we exist for Him (Romans 8:8-39; Ephesians 1:9-10; cf. 1 Corinthians 8:6; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:17-20; Hebrews 12:2), and will ever be with Him (John 14:3). Like all corrupt human flesh we are by nature of our physical birth creatures of wrath, condemned to die, but through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ we have been purchased from our sins and eagerly anticipate an eternity with our Master which will be glorious and exquisite beyond all earthly expression or comprehension (Revelation 21:1-27, Revelation 22:1-21; cf. John 14:1-3). Although we were His enemies, with nothing to recommend us and nothing to give Him, He gave His all for us on the cross (Romans 5:8-10). Thanks be to God for His indescribably wonderful gift of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, sacrificed on our behalf (2 Corinthians 9:15)!

01.01 - The Person of Jesus Christ

I. The Person of Jesus Christ

1. Jesus Christ is truly Divine
2. Jesus Christ is truly Human
3. Jesus Christ is truly Unique
4. The Names of Jesus Christ Reflect His Perfect Person and His Perfect Work
5. The Life of Jesus Christ

01.01.01 - Jesus Christ is truly Divine

I. The Person of Jesus Christ

1. Jesus Christ is truly Divine: Because our Lord had to become a true human being in order to die in our place, His genuine and undiminished deity has, as a consequence, sometimes been falsely and heretically denied. But this lack of faith on the part of some does not change the fact that Jesus is indeed God as well as man. The ultimate means of refutation for all heresies and heretics who would deny the divinity of Christ is, as always, the Bible. For any impartial observer is forced to admit that regardless of the opinions of those who think otherwise, scripture loudly proclaims the deity of Christ, so that to deny the deity of Christ is to ipso facto contradict the Bible: a. As God, Jesus is explicitly called God (cf. Isaiah 40:2; Romans 1:4; Matthew 22:41-46; Matthew 28:19; Luke 1:35; Luke 5:20-21; John 1:1-18; John 5:18; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Colossians 1:15-20; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:3): For a child is born to us, and a Son is given to us. Dominion shall rest on his shoulder, and His name will be called "He whose counsel is wondrous", "Mighty God", "the Father of Eternity", "the Prince of Prosperity". Isaiah 9:6.

"Behold, the virgin will conceive and will bear a Son, and they will call His Name 'Immanuel', which is translated 'God is with us'". Matthew 1:23.

For, [if I could save them thereby] I would wish myself to be accursed [and] separated from Christ on behalf my brethren according to the flesh who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption and the [shekinah] glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the [temple] rite and the promises who are [descendants of] the patriarchs and from whom is the Christ, as far as flesh[ly descent] is concerned, the [very] One who is God over all [things], blessed forever. Amen! Romans 9:3-5.

You too should have this attitude which Christ Jesus had. Since He already existed in the very form of God, equality with God was [certainly] not something He thought He had to grasp for. Yet in spite of this [co-equal divinity He already possessed], He deprived Himself of His status and took on the form of a slave, [and was] born in the likeness of men. He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even [His] death on [the] cross [for us all]. Php 2:5-8.

[W]e who are awaiting the blessed hope, namely the glorious and majestic appearance of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Titus 2:13. But to the Son [the Father says], "Your throne, O God, is forever, and the scepter of your Kingdom is the scepter of integrity". Hebrews 1:8.

Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have been allotted a faith of equal value to ours in the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:1. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us a mind-set for coming to know the truth. And we are in [the One who is] the Truth, even in [God's] Son Jesus Christ. This One is the true God and eternal life. 1 John 5:20.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." Revelation 22:13 (cf. Revelation 22:16) b. As God, Jesus is worshiped as God (cf. Zechariah 14:16-17; Matthew 2:2, Matthew 2:11; Matthew 14:33; Matthew 28:9, Matthew 28:17; John 12:41 compared to Isaiah 6:3; John 20:28; Hebrews 1:6; Revelation 14:7 compared to Colossians 1:13-16): And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. And it came to pass as He was blessing them that He disappeared from their [sight]. Then, having worshiped Him of their own accord, they returned to Jerusalem with great joy. Luke 24:50-52. And he (i. e., the blind man whose sight had been restored) said, "I believe, Lord", and he worshiped Him. John 9:38.

Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the Name that is above every name that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Php 2:9-11. And I looked and heard, as it were, the voice of many angels around the throne and [around] the [living] creatures and [around] the [twenty-four] elders, and their number was myriads upon myriads and thousands upon thousands, [and they were] saying in a loud voice, "The Lamb who has been slain is worthy to take the power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing and every created thing in heaven and on the earth and in the sea and everything in them." Then I heard them saying, "To the One who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb [be] the blessing and the honor and the glory and the power for ever and ever!" And the four living creatures were saying, "Amen!". And the [twenty-four] elders fell [down] and worshiped. Revelation 5:11-14. c. As the Creator, Jesus is God, for God created the world (Hebrews 1:2, Hebrews 1:10; cf. Genesis 1:1-31, Genesis 2:1-25):

Everything came into being through Him, (i. e., "The Word", Jesus Christ), and without Him, nothing has come into being which has in fact come into being. John 1:3.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through Him, and [yet] the world did not recognize Him. John 1:10.

He (i. e., Jesus Christ; cf. Colossians 1:13) is the exact image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. Everything in the heavens and on the earth was created by Him, things invisible as well as those visible – whether thrones, authorities, rulers or powers, everything was created through Him and for Him. And He Himself is before everything, and everything subsists in Him (cf. Hebrews 1:3). Colossians 1:15-17. But for us there is [but] one God, the Father from whom all things [have come into being] (i. e., the Father as architect of creation), and we [now live] for Him, and there is [but] one Lord, Jesus Christ through whom all things [have come into being] (i. e., the Son as agent of creation), and we [now live] through Him. 1 Corinthians 8:6. d. As One of the Trinity, Jesus is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Spirit (John 5:18; John 17:5):

Then Jesus came over and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me, so go and make all nations my followers by baptizing them [with the Spirit] into the Person (i. e., "name") of the Father and [into the Person] of the Son and [into the Person] of the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you." Matthew 28:18-20 a I and the Father are one. John 10:30. And now, glorify Me, Father, in your presence, with the [same] glory I possessed in your presence before the world existed. John 17:5.

There are different gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are different ministries, but the same Lord (i. e., Jesus Christ); and there are different results, but the same God who brings about all results in all cases. 1 Corinthians 12:4-6. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of (the [Father]) God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. 2 Corinthians 13:13.

There is one body and One Spirit – just as when you were called it was in one hope that you were called. There is One Lord (i. e., Jesus Christ), one faith, one baptism. There is One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. Ephesians 4:4-6.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who, though outcasts dispersed throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, were yet selected in the foreknowledge of God the Father, by means of the Holy Spirit's consecration, for the obedience in and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Grace and peace be multiplied unto you! 1 Peter 1:1-2.

John, to the seven churches which are in Asia [Minor]: Grace to you and peace from the One who is and was and is coming (i. e., the Father), and from the seven spirits (i. e., the Holy Spirit) which are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth. Revelation 1:4-5 a. e. Jesus is the one and only Son of God, a title which as it is used in scripture clearly demonstrates His deity (cf. Luke 9:35; Hebrews 5:5; 1 John 1:3; 1 John 5:20; 2 John 1:3):

Now once Jesus had been baptized, He immediately came up out of the water, and, behold, the heavens opened for Him, and He saw the Spirit of God coming down like a dove and lighting upon Him. And, behold, a voice from heaven was saying, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased". Matthew 3:16-17.

While [Peter] was still speaking, behold, a cloud suffused with light enveloped them, and, behold, a voice [issued forth] from the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him!" Matthew 17:5 (cf. 2 Peter 1:16-21) No one has ever seen God. God the one and only [Son] – the One who has always been at the Father's side – He has made Him known. John 1:18. For God loved the world so much that He gave [up] His one and only Son, [with the purpose] that everyone who believes in Him should not be lost [forever], but have eternal life [instead]. For God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him. The one who believes in Him is not being judged, but the one who does not believe has already been judged on the grounds that he has not put his faith in the Name (i. e., the Person) of God's one and only Son. John 3:16-18. For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, the One who was proclaimed among you through us, through myself and Silvanus (i. e., Silas) and Timothy, did not become "yes and no", but He became "yes!". For as many promises of God as there are, are "yes!" in Him (i. e., Jesus Christ). And through Him the "amen!" [is said] to God for [His] glory through us. 2 Corinthians 1:19-20. But when the fullness of time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those under the Law, in order that we might receive the adoption. And since you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, "Abba, Father!" Galatians 4:4-6. For to which of the angels did He ever say, "You are my Son. Today I have begotten you (Psalms 2:7)." And again, "I will be a Father to Him, and He will be my Son (2 Samuel 7:14)." But when He brings back the Firstborn into the world, He says, "And let all the angels of God worship Him! (Psalms 97:7 b)". And about the angels He says, "The One who makes His angels spirits, and His servants flames of fire (Psalms 104:4)." But of the

Son He says, “Your throne, O God, is from eternity to eternity, and rod of your kingdom is the rod of uprightness. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness. For this reason God your God has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions (Psalms 45:6-7)”. And, “From the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth, and the heavens are the works of your hands. They indeed will perish, but you remain. And they will grow old like a garment, and like a cloak you will roll them up, like a cloak, and they will [thus] be changed. But you are the same, and your years will not come to an end (Psalms 102:25-27).” And to which of the angels has He ever said, “Sit down at my right hand until I make your enemies the footstool of your feet (Psalms 110:1)?” Hebrews 1:5-13. In this God’s love has been revealed in us, that He sent His only Son into the world that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atonement for our sins. 1 John 4:9-10. And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: This is what the Son of God says, the One whose eyes are like a flame of fire and whose feet are like white-hot bronze. Revelation 2:18. f. Jesus is One with God the Father:

I and the Father are one. John 10:30. And I do not ask concerning these only [Father], but also concerning all of those who believe in Me through their word, so that all [of them] may be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I also am in You, so that they also themselves may be one in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. And I have given them the glory You have given Me, so that they may be one as We are one. John 17:20-22. g. As God, Jesus has been “face to face” with the Father since before time began or the world was created, departing from the Father’s presence and entering this world only to save us (John 6:62; John 17:24): The Word [Jesus Christ] existed at the very beginning, and there was reciprocity (i. e., “face to face” co-divinity) between the Word and God [the Father]. And the Word was God. This One both existed and enjoyed reciprocity (i. e., was “face to face”) with God from the very beginning (i. e., from before the beginning of creation). John 1:1-2. And the Word became flesh and tented among us. And we beheld His glory, a glory like that of a one and only Son from [the] Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14. No one has ever seen God. God the one and only [Son] – the One who has always been at the Father’s side (i. e., in heaven from eternity past) – He has made Him known. John 1:18. For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I have come forth from God. I came forth from [being with] the Father and have come into the world. I am leaving the world again and going back to the Father. John 16:27-28.

Jesus said these things and having lifted up His eyes to heaven said, “Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, so that your Son may glorify you, just as You gave Him power over all flesh, so that everything you have given Him might have eternal life. And this is the eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and [Him] whom you sent, Jesus Christ. I have glorified You on the earth, having completed the work you have given Me to do. And now glorify Me, Father, with your own glory, [that glory] which I had in your presence before the world existed.” John 17:1-5.

What we have seen from the beginning, what we have heard and seen with our eyes, what we have observed and touched with our hands – this is about the Word of life[, Jesus Christ]. And this life appeared, and we have seen [it], and we bear witness [to it], and we proclaim to you the eternal life which was in the presence of the Father and [then] appeared to us. 1 John 1:1-2. h. As God, Jesus claims, shares, and demonstrates the divine attributes of God (Matthew 28:18; John 1:48; John 10:31-39):

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. The one who comes to Me shall not hunger, and the one who believes in Me shall not thirst forever". John 6:35. And I am giving them eternal life, and they will not perish forevermore, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. John 10:28.

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me will live, even if he dies. And everyone who lives and believes in Me will surely not die forevermore." John 11:25-26.

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. John 14:6.
i. As God, Jesus is described as the "exact image of God" (Colossians 1:15; cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4):

[Jesus] is the [very] shining forth of [the Father's] glory, the precise image of His essence, the One who sustains the universe by His mighty Word . . . Hebrews 1:3 a j. As God, Jesus is eternal: But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, too small to be numbered among the clans of Judah, from you I will bring forth the One who is to rule over Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, even from the days of eternity. Micah 5:2.

Jesus Christ, yesterday and today the same, and unto the [end of] the ages. Hebrews 13:8. k. As the very Word of God, the embodiment of the message and truth from the Father, Jesus is God (Deuteronomy 18:18; John 8:55; John 14:10, John 14:24):

Grass withers. Flowers fade. But the Word of our God will stand forever. Isaiah 40:8. In the beginning, there was the Word. John 1:1 a For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he might instruct Him? But we possess the very mind of Christ (i. e. the Holy Spirit illuminating the scriptures which are Christ's very thinking). 1 Corinthians 2:16 (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:12-13) For God who said, "Let light shine forth from the darkness!", is He who has shone forth [His light] into our hearts to illuminate our knowledge of God's glory in the Person of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 4:6.

God, from antiquity having communicated to our fathers in the prophets at many times and in many ways, has in these last days communicated to us in a Son, [the One] whom He has appointed heir of all things, [the One] through whom He created the universe. He is the [very] shining forth of [the Father's] glory, the precise image of His essence, the One who sustains the universe by His mighty Word . . . Hebrews 1:1-3 a l. In accordance with the prophecies that God will judge the world, as God Jesus is the Judge, since all judgment has been handed over to Him:

I kept looking during my vision of that night, and behold – with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming up, and He approached the Ancient of Days (i. e., the Father) and they brought Him before Him. And to Him was given dominion and honor and a kingdom, so that all nations and peoples and tongues should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away, and His kingdom one which will not be destroyed. Daniel 7:13-14.

Then Jesus came over and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me." Matthew 28:18. For neither does the Father judge anyone, but he has given all judgment to the Son, in order that all may honor the Son as they honor the Father. John 5:22-23 a (cf. John 5:27)

[This examination of Romans 2:11-15 will take place] on the day when God will judge the secret things of men through Jesus Christ according to my gospel. Romans 2:16. May it never be [that God be considered unrighteous]! Otherwise, how will God judge the world? Romans 3:6. But you, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you also belittle your brother? For we will all stand

before God's tribunal as it is written: "As I live", says the Lord, "every knee will bow to Me, and every tongue will praise God" [Isaiah 45:23]. So then each of us will give an account to God concerning himself. Romans 14:10-12. For we must all stand before Christ's tribunal, so that each of us may receive recompense for what he has accomplished through this body, whether it be good or worthless. 2 Corinthians 5:10.

Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the Name that is above every name that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Php 2:9-11. In light of all of the above, whatever anyone may say, it is nonetheless dishonest to claim that scripture at least is not altogether clear on this subject. The Bible clearly proclaims the divinity of Jesus Christ regardless of any other false representations. Indeed, it is really not too much to say that the Bible in effect breathes forth the divinity of Jesus Christ at almost every breath, and that it is only by ignoring or diminishing its testimony that one can come to any different conclusion. Thus Jesus Christ is the great divider between those who are being saved and those who are perishing (Matthew 10:32 ff; 1 John 2:22). Unless one confesses "Jesus as Lord", which necessarily includes acknowledging His divinity and humanity, His whole person and His work on the cross, there can be no salvation (Romans 10:9). He is a true man but He is not only a man; He is also God, for "in Christ all the fullness of Deity lives in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9). Ultimately, no one who believes the Bible can doubt that Jesus is God, for this we even have from our Lord Himself: So the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and you have seen Abraham?!" And [Jesus] said to them, "Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham existed, I AM" (cf. Exodus 3:14). John 8:57-58 (cf. Luke 22:70; John 8:24; John 8:28)

01.01.02 - Jesus Christ is truly Human

2. Jesus Christ is truly Human: Perhaps the most profound wonder in universal history – of surpassing glory from the ages to the ages and rivaled only by His dying for our sins on the cross once He had become God in human form – is Jesus' taking on of true humanity in the first place, a necessary step in order to accomplish the Father's plan of redemption. In our present finite and limited condition and until we "know as we are known" (1 Corinthians 13:12), it is impossible even to begin to grasp the wonder and the glory, the graciousness and the mercifulness, the cost and the sacrifice involved in our Lord Jesus becoming a true human being.

You too should have this attitude which Christ Jesus had. Since He already existed in the very form of God, equality with God was [certainly] not something He thought He had to grasp for. Yet in spite of this [co-equal divinity He already possessed], He deprived Himself of His status and took on the form of a slave, [and was] born in the likeness of men. He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even [His] death on [the] cross [for us all]. Php 2:5-8.

Although we cannot this side of heaven truly understand the depths of it or truly appreciate what He gave up for us, yet we should never fail to willingly accept in faith the truth and reality of it, and to stand in thankful awe of all this glorious act of becoming a man as well as God implies. For the fact that God, our Lord Jesus Christ, has become in addition to deity a genuine, living, breathing human being has changed everything in the universe forevermore. For through the incarnation Jesus has in His now absolutely unique Person permanently wed undiminished deity to humanity. The implications of this truth are at once staggering and mind-boggling. When one considers the transcendent magnitude of the divine and contrasts it with the physical universe which is so pathetically puny and transitory by comparison, the news that God has now irreversibly joined Himself to this material universe in the Person of His one and only Son is breathtaking. While all of the implications are at present impossible to digest, at the very least we who have believed in the Son of God for salvation should never fail to appreciate that while God in His good pleasure could well have constructed a trillion times a trillion universes a trillion times larger and more complex than the one we presently inhabit without the slightest effort, He has in fact now through His Son irrevocably committed Himself to us. This is a truth which should never fail to humble and awe each and every one of us, and cause us to fall to our knees in praise and thanksgiving. For now that Jesus has become, in addition to God, one of us in every way only without sin, we can know of a certainty that we are no experiment or afterthought or one of many such developments, but that we instead have always been a part of His unchangeable purpose. We are absolutely unique because He, the unique one and only Son of God, has cast His lot with us and for us in this overwhelming, awe-inspiring and unchangeable way. a. Christ's taking on of true humanity was necessary in order to provide our salvation: Beyond all argument, everything in the plan of God ultimately comes down to Jesus Christ, and nothing in the plan of God can be disaggregated from Him and His sacrificial work on the cross for our salvation. That is why, for example, the "cross of Christ" can serve as an all encompassing symbol for the gospel (e. g., Matthew 10:38; Matthew 16:24; 1 Corinthians 1:17; Galatians 6:14; Ephesians 2:16; Colossians 2:14), the good news about

salvation and our eternal relationship with Jesus through faith on the basis of His gracious sacrifice (Ephesians 2:8-9). Simply put, for us who believe “Jesus is everything”, all that He is for us is intimately and inseparably tied up with His death for us on the cross:

[Jesus Christ] is the exact image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. Everything in the heavens and on the earth was created by Him, things invisible as well as those visible – whether thrones, authorities, rulers or powers, everything was created through Him and for Him. And He Himself is before everything, and everything subsists in Him. And He Himself is the Head of the Body[, that is,] the Church. [Even] He who is [its] Ruler, the Firstborn from the dead, [thus resurrected] to the purpose that He Himself might become the One who occupies the first place in all things. For it was [God’s] good pleasure for the fulfillment [of His plan] to reside entirely in [Christ], and so through Him to reconcile everything to Himself, having made peace through Him, through the blood of His cross, whether things on earth, or things in heaven. Colossians 1:15-20.

While the wonder and the glory of Jesus in His eternal capacity as God cannot be underestimated nor with our present limitations more than dimly understood, scripture is very clear about the fact that He had to take on true humanity in order to accomplish eternal salvation for us. God cannot suffer; God cannot die; God cannot become a sacrifice for sin or atone for sin or indeed in His perfect holiness have direct contact with sin. Only a human being, a perfect human being, could possibly fulfill the role of becoming our sin-bearer. As sinful human beings, absent intervention by God on our behalf, we were destined to face the “wrath to come” and the eternal damnation final judgment inevitably entailed. But the indescribably good news of the gospel is that Jesus incurred this judgment for us, bearing all of our sins in His own body on the cross. To accomplish this for us, He had to be a human being, and a perfect one at that, a genuine human spirit in a genuine human body, wherein He would bear the sins of the world on the cross (John 2:21; Romans 7:4; 1 Corinthians 11:27; cf. Matthew 27:50; Luke 23:46; John 19:30-42): And having taken the bread and blessed it, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body which is being given on your behalf. Be doing this to remember Me”. Luke 22:19 (cf. Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; John 6:51-59; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25) The cup of blessing which we bless – is it not fellowship in the blood of Christ? And the bread which we break – is it not fellowship in the body of Christ? For one bread, one body we many are, since we all partake of that One Bread. 1 Corinthians 10:16-17. For He Himself is our peace, for He has made both [Jews and gentiles] one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition, that is, the enmity between us, by discharging the Law of the commandments and its requirements in His [own] flesh, so that He might re-create the two into one new Man by making [this] peace, and might reconcile both in one Body to God through His cross, having by means of it abolished the enmity [between God and mankind]. Ephesians 2:14-16.

You were once alienated from God – your very thoughts were hostile towards Him and your deeds were evil. Yet God has now made peace with you through the death of Christ in His physical body so that you may stand before Him as holy, without blemish and free from accusation. Colossians 1:21-22. For in Him (i. e., Jesus Christ), dwells all of the fullness of deity in bodily form. Colossians 2:9.

Therefore since these children (i. e., of Hebrews 2:13) have a common heritage of flesh and blood, [Christ] too partook of these same [common elements] in a very similar fashion (i. e., not identical

only in that He was virgin born and so without sin), in order that through His death He might put an end to the one possessing the power of death, that is, the devil, and might reconcile those who were subject to being slaves their whole lives long by their fear of death. Hebrews 2:14-15

Unlike the [human] high priests, [Jesus] has no need of making sacrifice day by day, first on behalf of His own sins, and then for the sins of the people. For this [latter] He did once and for all when He offered Himself [as a sacrifice]. Hebrews 7:27.

Therefore as [Jesus Christ] was coming into the world (i. e., at His birth) He said, "You [Father] did not desire sacrifice or offering, but you have prepared a body for Me. In burnt offerings for sin you have taken no pleasure. At that time (i. e., His birth) He [Jesus Christ in His deity] said, 'Behold, I have arrived (i. e., been born) – in the scroll of a book it is written of Me – to do your will, O God'". Above when He speaks of sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings for sins [as things which] "You did not desire nor take pleasure therein", [these are the things] which are being offered according to the Law. [But] "Then", He has added, "Behold, I have arrived to do your will". [God the Father] is [thereby] taking away the first [covenant] in order to establish the second one, [and it is] by [His] will [in this matter] that you have been sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all. Hebrews 10:5-10.

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, in order that we might die to sins and live to righteousness. By His wound you are healed. 1 Peter 2:24. b. Christ's taking on of true humanity was necessary for victory over the devil: The one who is committing sin is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. For this reason the Son of God appeared, that He might put an end to the devil's deeds. 1 John 3:8. The cross and the crown are integrally related. Jesus had to endure the cross in order to win the Messiah's crown, and the crown was won on the basis of the cross.

[For by means of the cross, God] has stripped [demon] rulers and authorities [of their power] and subjected them to public humiliation, having triumphed over them in [Christ]. Colossians 2:15 (cf. Romans 16:20; Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 3:8 b) Our Lord's sacrificial death in a genuine human body on Calvary's hill for us all thus forms the necessary basis for His defeat and coming removal of the devil, and that ultimate victory (along with all the glories it entails for us) is no small part of the purpose of His victory on the cross.

Therefore since these children (i. e., of Hebrews 2:13) have a common heritage of flesh and blood, [Christ] too partook of these same [common elements] in a very similar fashion (i. e., not identical only in that He was virgin born and so without sin), in order that through His death He might put an end to the one possessing the power of death, that is, the devil, and might reconcile those who were subject to being slaves their whole lives long by their fear of death. Hebrews 2:14-15.

Evil had to be defeated at the cross in order for it to be removed from God's universe so that the eternity of the New Heavens and New Earth might begin, and only by Jesus' atoning for our sin could this blessed victory be won and reconciliation effected between God and those willing to turn to His mercy. For it was [God's] good pleasure for the fulfillment [of His plan] to reside entirely in [Christ], and so through Him to reconcile everything to Himself, having made peace through Him, through the blood of His cross, whether things on earth, or things in heaven. Colossians 1:19-20.

Satan's rebellion had set in motion the string of events that necessitated the creation of mankind, and, with our corporate fall in Adam, the necessity of the Last Adam's substitutionary death in our place as well. Only as a true human being could Jesus win the victory of the cross, and it is as a true human being that He will rule forever as a result of His ultimate victory over the devil when our Lord Jesus Christ returns in glory at the second advent (Revelation 11:15; cf. Hebrews 10:11-13).

These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, because He is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, and called, and elect – and faithful are those with Him. Revelation 17:14.

It is as a result of His victory and His descent to Hades and subsequent ascension into the presence of the Father in His resurrected and thoroughly genuine human body that we, the Body of Christ, share in that victory and the gifts and rewards that flow from it. And to each of us this grace has been given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. For it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive (i. e., He brought pre-cross believers to heaven). He gave gifts to men." Now [as to] this [phrase] "He ascended", what can it mean except that He had also [previously] descended into the lower reaches of the earth (i. e., Hades, from whence He brought the pre-cross believers to heaven)? The One who descended is also the One who ascended above all the heavens (i. e., into the third heaven, the place of the Father's residence), in order to fulfill all things (i. e., complete the victory won at the cross; cf. Psalms 110:1). Ephesians 4:7-10.

Although it is doubtful if the devil and his angels realized it, from the very moment of the incarnation, salvation was assured and Satan's defeat a certainty. Satan had corrupted a third of angelic kind through their desire to know the pleasures of having physical bodies, but Jesus took on a human body not for sensual experience but, after having experienced the sorrows of this world beyond measure, to suffer and die for us on the cross in order to save us (Isaiah 52:13-15, Isaiah 53:1-12). This is the great victory upon which our salvation and our adversary's dethronement depends, one which necessitated our Lord coming to earth in the flesh. The seventy returned and said with joy, "Lord, even the demons obey us in your Name!" And Jesus said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like a star". Luke 10:17-18.

Now the God of peace will quickly crush Satan under your feet. Romans 16:20.

[God the Father], who rescued us from the power of darkness and delivered us into the kingdom of His beloved Son. Colossians 1:13.

Now is the judgment of this world. Now will the prince of this world be driven out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to Myself. John 12:31-32 (cf. John 16:11) For since death [came] through a man, resurrection of the dead also [had to come] through a man. For just as in Adam, all die, so also in Christ, shall all be made alive. But each [will be resurrected] in his own echelon. Christ [is the] first-fruits (i. e., the initial person and echelon of resurrection). Next [will be] those belonging to Christ at His coming (i. e., all believers at the 2 Advent). Then the end [of human history – the resurrection of millennial believers], when He will hand the Kingdom over to the Father, after He has brought an end to all rule, all power, and all authority (i. e., hostile human and angelic control). For He must rule until He has placed all His enemies under His feet. 1 Corinthians 15:21-25 (cf. Psalms 110:1) c. Christ's taking on of true humanity was necessary for fulfilling God's prior promises and prophecies: In respect to the fulfillment of all of God's promises

to us it was also necessary for our Lord to take on true humanity. For indeed, all of God's promises to us are dependent upon the ultimate promise of salvation in Jesus Christ. For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcision for the sake of God's truth, that is, to confirm the promises (i. e., covenants) made to their ancestors – and also so that the gentiles might glorify God for His mercy (i. e., in providing salvation through Jesus). Romans 15:8-9 b As many promises of God as there are, in Him, [Jesus Christ, they are] “Yes!” So also through Him the “Amen!” [we say] to God results in [His] glory through us (i. e., our faith in His promises ratified in Christ). 2 Corinthians 1:20.

God's promises are abundant, and they never fail (Joshua 21:45; Romans 9:6; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 13:5-6), because our Lord has empowered them through His death for us as a true human being on the cross. For all of the promises of God are based upon what Jesus did for us: grace of every sort is a result of Christ's work on the cross (Romans 3:24; Romans 5:15-21; Ephesians 2:5-8; Titus 3:7; cf. John 1:16-17). Time would fail us if we attempted to relate here all of the promises of the Word of God (cf. John 21:25; Hebrews 11:32 ff.), for there is a promise on every page of the Bible. What concerns us here is how those promises, predictions, and prophecies of the Word relate to the incarnation of our Lord. Herein we may focus on three particular areas of promise that require the provision of a person who must of necessity be God as well as man, but true man nonetheless: 1) to fulfill the promise of a prophet greater than Moses whose words would be perfect in leading to salvation; 2) to fulfill the promise of a priest greater than any prior high priest, all of whom were all unable to do any more than represent the sacrifice which would cleanse us from our sins; 3) to fulfill the promise of a king who would rule forever, a son of David who would somehow be greater than David and be David's Lord as well. Only by Jesus Christ, true God come to earth by taking on true humanity, could these promises be fully realized, for each represents one of three critical aspects of God's plan of salvation, announced through prophecy, effected through priestly sacrifice, and realized in all its blessedness in the coming reign of the Messiah.

1) Jesus fulfills the promise of the Prophet to come, embodying in His Person the entire message of God's prophetic revelation of salvation (He is the Prophet):

“The Lord Your God will raise up from your midst, from among your brothers, a Prophet like me (i. e., the Lord Jesus Christ). You must give heed to Him, just as you requested from the Lord your God at Horeb (i. e., Sinai) on the day of your assembly [there], when you said, ‘May I not hear the voice of the Lord My God any longer, nor see this great fire lest I die!’ Then the Lord said to me, ‘They have done well in what they have said. I will raise up for them from the midst of their brothers a Prophet like you. And I will put My words in His mouth, and He will tell them everything I command Him. And it will come to pass that the person who does not listen to My words which He will speak in My Name, that I will require it of that person’ (i. e., hold him responsible for rejecting salvation).” Deuteronomy 18:15-19.

Philip found Nathaniel and said to him, “We have found the One whom Moses wrote about in the Law and [whom] the prophets [wrote about too], Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth.” John 1:45.

If you had believed Moses, you would have believed in Me. For He wrote about Me. John 5:46. So the people who saw the sign He had performed were saying, “This is truly the Prophet who is [prophesied to be] coming into the world.” John 6:14 (cf. Matthew 21:11; John 7:40) So repent and

turn back [to God] for the blotting out of your sins, so that times of refreshment may come from the Lord, and so that He may send to you the One acknowledged as the Christ [Messiah], [namely] Jesus, who must remain in heaven until the times of the restoration of all things of which God has spoken through the mouths of His holy prophets from of old. For Moses said, "The Lord God will raise up for you from among your brothers a Prophet like me". Acts 3:19-22 b (cf. Acts 7:37) The prophets spoke the Word of God, but Jesus is the Word of God and the fulfillment of this and all of the rest of God's promises prophesied in the scriptures.

2) Jesus fulfills the promise of the High Priest to come, along with all of the prophecies and rituals which taught and proclaimed the need for a "better sacrifice" (He is the High Priest in the order of Melchizedek): When He had accomplished the cleansing of [our] sins, He took His seat (i. e., beyond the veil) at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Hebrews 1:3 b For this reason He had to be like His brothers in every way, in order to become a merciful and faithful High Priest in the things relating to God in order to propitiate the sins of the people (i. e., through the sacrifice of Himself). Hebrews 2:17.

Since we have, therefore, a Great High Priest who has passed through the heavens (i. e., as through the veil), [even] Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our profession [of faith in Him]. Hebrews 4:14. And this hope [truly] is what "anchors" our lives, a secure and solid [anchor of hope] which penetrates [behind] the veil (i. e., the heavens) into the inner place (i. e., the heavenly holy of holies) where our vanguard, Jesus, has entered on our behalf, having become a High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 6:19-20.

Now the others who have become priests are [of necessity] many since they are prevented from remaining [in office] because of their mortality. But He, [Jesus Christ], because He abides forever, possesses the priesthood irrevocably. For this reason He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, since He lives forever making intercession for them. This is just the sort of High Priest we needed, holy, without fault, without imperfection, completely separated from sinners, and having ascended higher than the heavens [into God's presence]. Unlike the [human] high priests, [Jesus] has no need of making sacrifice day by day, first on behalf of His own sins, and then for the sins of the people. For this [latter] He did once and for all when He offered Himself [as a sacrifice]. Hebrews 7:23-27. The sum of what we have said is this: we have a High Priest of such [amazing] quality that He has [actually] taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of Majesty in heaven, a Minister of the holy things and of the true tabernacle which the Lord has pitched, not man. For every priest is appointed to present offerings and sacrifices. Wherefore it was necessary for Him also to have something to offer. Now if He were [ministering] on earth, He would not have been a priest, inasmuch as there are already those who present offerings according to the law [of Moses]. These minister in [what is a] copy and a shadow of the [actual] heavenly [tabernacle], just as command was given to Moses as he was about to complete the tabernacle. For He says, "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown to you on the mountain (i. e., Sinai)." Hebrews 8:1-5. But Christ has already arrived [in heaven] as [the true High] Priest of the good things to come, [having passed] through the [veil of the] greater and more perfect tabernacle, that is, the one which is not of this creation (i. e., through the heavens and into the third heaven). Nor was it through the blood of goats and bullocks, but through His own blood (i. e., His death) that He entered once and for all into the [heavenly] holy of holies, having wrought eternal redemption. Hebrews 9:11-12. For this reason (i. e., the inability of the blood of

animals to cleanse us from sin) it was necessary for the heavenly exemplars of these earthly representations to be cleansed with better sacrifices than these [earthly ones]. For Christ did not enter into a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one. Rather, He entered into heaven itself, so as to present Himself before God [the Father] on our behalf. Hebrews 9:23-24. A priest ministers to God, but only Jesus in His humanity could present Himself as the ultimate sacrificial offering and so fulfill the promise of the High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

3) Jesus fulfills the promise of the King and all of the prophecies of the messianic kingdom (He is the King): And the Lord declares to you that the Lord will produce a house for you. When your days are fulfilled and you sleep with your fathers, I will raise up your Seed after you, [One] who will come from your own loins, and I will establish His kingdom.

2 Samuel 7:11-12. And He said to me, "Thus says the Lord of Hosts: Behold a Man – 'Branch' is His name (i. e., the Messiah; cf. Isaiah 4:2; Isaiah 11:1; Isaiah 53:2; Zechariah 3:8). And He will branch out from His place and will build [up] the temple of the Lord. For it is He who will build [up] the temple of the Lord. And He will raise up [its] glory. And He will sit and rule [as King] upon His throne. And He will [also] be Priest upon His [kingly] throne. For there will be a [unity of] consultation between the two [offices]." Zechariah 6:12-13.

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is the One who has been born King of the Jews? For in the east [where we live] we saw His star, and we have come to worship Him." Matthew 2:1-2. And as soon as He was nearing the descent of the Mount of Olives the entire crowd of His disciples began to rejoice and praise God, saying, "Blessed is the One who is coming, the King [who is coming] in the Name of the Lord". Luke 19:37-38 b (cf. John 12:13) Nathaniel replied to Him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel!" John 1:49.

Then Pilate said to Him, "So you are a king then?" Jesus replied, "You say [rightly] that I am a King. For I have been born for this purpose, and have come into the world in order to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." John 18:37.

These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, because He is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, and called, and elect – and faithful are those with Him. Revelation 17:14. And He has a Name on His robe and on His thigh: King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Revelation 19:16.

Kings rules in God's stead, but only God's very own Son is qualified to be His Regent over the entire world when He returns in glory at the Second Advent. d. Christ's taking on of true humanity was necessary for Him to become our Mediator: For as God is One, so there is [only] One Mediator between God and Man, Christ Jesus in His humanity, who gave Himself as a ransom for all [mankind] . . . 1 Timothy 2:5-6 a The idea of a third party intervening to mediate a dispute between two estranged parties is one to which we can all relate. Thus the biblical concept of Christ the Mediator is inextricably linked to the doctrine of reconciliation, where by Christ intervenes to dissolve the barrier of enmity that separates God from sinful mankind (Ephesians 2:14-18; cf. Colossians 2:14). But there are three points in which the mediation accomplished by our Lord is vastly different from the resolution of most human conflicts. First, God and Man are nothing like equal parties, with mankind moreover being entirely at fault in this "dispute" so that the satisfaction

required for resolution must be directed toward God alone (i. e., we have no basis whatsoever for complaint against God, something Job would have done well to remember: Job 9:33). The role of Mediator between the King and His offending subjects can only be played by someone who is on a par with both the Father-King and His creature-subjects: only a Son (incarnate) can be sent on such a mission of reconciliation (cf. Matthew 21:33-40). Second, since the problem requiring resolution is the universal sinfulness of mankind, and, further, since mankind, flawed because of sin, has absolutely no way of paying off the least part of the debt for sin, the Mediator Himself had to be the one to provide satisfaction to the offended party if reconciliation were to occur. This our Lord did on our behalf when He was judged for all or our sins in the darkness on the cross. Thus, thirdly, in order to accomplish the payment of this “ransom”, Jesus had to become a true human being, since only a true human being, and one sinlessly perfect at that, could pay the price for all of humanity’s sins. It is by His work for us on the cross that Jesus has fulfilled His role of mediation, opening up the offer of reconciliation for every human being, an offer that is accepted through faith in the One who made the offer possible through His blood (Romans 5:10-11; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; Ephesians 2:16-17; Colossians 1:20-23). For it is by faith in His Son who died for us that we accept and receive God’s “peace offer” (Luke 2:14; John 14:27; Romans 5:10; Ephesians 2:12-14, Ephesians 2:17; Colossians 1:20; cf. Romans 5:1). e. Christ’s taking on of true humanity is proven by scripture: The Bible’s testimony as to this important teaching of Jesus’ advent in true human flesh is unmistakably clear. Despite heresies to the contrary, if we put our faith in scripture, we are left in no doubt as to the genuine humanity of our Lord, possessing a truly human body (Hebrews 10:5-10) and spirit (Matthew 27:50; Mark 2:8; Mark 8:12; Luke 23:46; John 11:33; John 13:21; John 19:30) just as all of us have (though in His case apart from sin).

You too should have this attitude which Christ Jesus had. Since He already existed in the very form of God, equality with God was [certainly] not something He thought He had to grasp for. Yet in spite of this [co-equal divinity He already possessed], He deprived Himself of His status and took on the form of a slave, [and was] born in the likeness of men. He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even [His] death on [the] cross [for us all]. Php 2:5-8.

1) This is shown by His genuinely physical birth: And all this has happened to fulfill what was said by the Lord through the prophet [Isaiah], saying, “Behold, the virgin will conceive and will give birth to a Son, and you shall call His Name ‘Immanuel’”, which translated means ‘God [is] with us’. Matthew 1:22-23. And the Word became flesh and tented among us, and we saw His glory, a glory like that of a father’s one and only child, full of grace and truth. John 1:14. And the angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid! For behold, I am giving you a message of great joy which will belong to all the people. ‘Today in David’s city a Savior has been born for you, [even Him] who is [the] Messiah (i. e., “Christ”) [the] Lord’”. Luke 2:10-11.

[The gospel] which is about [God’s] Son, the One who was born of the seed of David according to His flesh, and marked out as God’s Son by the power of the Spirit of Holiness through resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 1:3-4. For to which of the angels did He ever say, “You are my Son. Today I have given begotten you.”? Hebrews 1:5 a 2) This is shown by normal human experiences of His life and death: And having fasted for forty days and forty nights later (i. e., since being led into the wilderness by the Spirit), [Jesus] was hungry. Matthew 4:2. And [Jesus] Himself was in the stern [of the boat], sleeping on the cushion. Mark 4:38.

"But the Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say . . . Luke 7:34. And having taken [Jesus' body] down [from the cross], [Joseph] wrapped it in linen and placed Him in a tomb [which has been] carved out [of the rock] where no one had [ever] yet been lain. Luke 23:53. And Jacob's well was in that place. So Jesus, having become fatigued from the journey, accordingly sat down at the well. John 4:6.

Jesus wept. John 11:35. And next, [the soldiers] came to Jesus. [But] when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a lance, and there came forth immediately blood and water (i. e., "serum"). John 19:33-34.

3) This is shown even in His resurrection:

"Behold, my hands and my feet, [and see] that it is [really] me. Touch me and see that a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have". Luke 24:39.

Jesus thus not only is truly human, having become a genuine man in order to die for our sins on the cross, but He also knows precisely what we are going through in this world, having endured the worst of it and having drunk its tears by the bucket full (Isaiah 53:3), yet without sin: For we do not have a High Priest who is not able to sympathize with our weaknesses, since He too was put to the test in all things just as [we are], [only] without sin. Hebrews 4:15.

[Jesus our High Priest] who in the days of His flesh[ly life] (i. e., while He was on earth prior to the resurrection), having offered up prayers and petitions with powerful shouting and with tears to the One who was able to save Him from death, and having been hearkened to on account of His devoutness, although being [God's one and only] Son, nevertheless came to understand [firsthand in His humanity] from what He suffered [what] obedience to God [truly is] (i. e., what it takes for a human being to be obedient to God), and, once He was perfected (i. e., perfectly completed His course), became the source of eternal salvation for all who are obedient to Him (i. e., believers). Hebrews 5:7-9.

01.01.03 - Jesus Christ is truly Unique

3. Jesus Christ is truly Unique: At the end of these times (i. e., of Hebrews 1:1), God spoke to us by a Son, whom He appointed heir of everything, and through whom He [the Father] made the ages. Hebrews 1:2.

Here we see the uniqueness of our dear Lord unimpeded. He is God's one and only Son, a title that at once embraces all of the human and divine facets of His unique Person. And He is in His humanity the heir of all things as a result of His victory at the cross, having won the battle over Satan (Colossians 2:15; Revelation 5:5), having won the hand of His Bride, the Church (Ephesians 5:25), and having won eternal redemption for all mankind, all who are willing to accept it (Hebrews 9:12). And He is in His deity the One through whom the Father brought about the creation of the universe, space and time. In His unique Person, therefore, Jesus Christ, God incarnate, binds all things together, whether they be of this creation or transcend it. For it was [God's] good pleasure for the fulfillment [of His plan] to reside entirely in [Christ], and so through Him to reconcile everything to Himself, having made peace through Him, through the blood of His cross, whether things on earth, or things in heaven. Colossians 1:19-20.

Jesus is the unique "bridge" between all that is material and all that is immaterial, and one can scarcely comprehend or appreciate the graciousness of the Father in offering His own dear Son for this role or our Lord's incomparable and ineffable sacrifice in accepting it. Suffice it to say that through His becoming truly human forever at the same time that He remains divine in an undiminished way, Jesus has wed Himself and therefore has wed the divinity to save mankind forever, having poured out His life on the cross to accomplish this merciful deliverance of us all. Thus the fundamental transformation of what was before creation, what creation meant (because of what in the grace of God it was going to entail in terms of Jesus' sacrifice), and what now will endure to the ages of the ages is completely bound up in the unique Person and work of Jesus Christ, through whom we have become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), and because of Him God will forever, on that blessed day of days when time ends and eternity begins, make His abode with saved humanity forevermore (Revelation 21:3). For in Him (i. e., Jesus Christ), dwells all of the fullness of deity in bodily form. Colossians 2:9.

Here we see deity and humanity combined in an absolutely unique way. Jesus Christ is truly a man (since His incarnation: Php 2:6-11). Jesus Christ is also truly God (Colossians 2:2 Greek). Only by having a body could our Lord deliver us from our sins, because only in this way could God die for our sins. This is the mystery of the gospel (Colossians 2:2), the plan and power of God for saving sinful mankind (Romans 1:16). Therefore Jesus is the plan of God, the Cornerstone of all that God has purposed to accomplish (Matthew 21:42; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6-7; cf. Romans 5:6; Romans 8:29-30; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:17-20; Hebrews 9:26).

. . . . in all wisdom and understanding [God] has made known to us the mystery He has willed (according to His own benevolent purpose which He determined in [Christ]) for administering this [present] fulfillment of the epochs: namely the incorporation of all things in Christ, things in heaven,

and things on earth – Ephesians 1:8-10. As the ages were designed for our Lord Jesus Christ as well as through Him (Colossians 1:16-17), there is scarcely any respect in which the scriptures do not reflect this distinctive uniqueness of the One who saved us through His death. While it is thus not possible to comprehensively delineate every single way in which our Lord's uniqueness is essential to the plan of God, the mention here of a sample of some prominent areas in which that uniqueness is critical is appropriate: a. That uniqueness is shown by the fact that only by being God and man could Jesus be the Firstborn, the One who would earn the privileges of rulership, priesthood, and double portion (Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:18; Hebrews 1:6; Revelation 1:5; cf. section I. 5.f. 4.c below):

He is the exact image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. Colossians 1:15.

Since Jesus is the one and only Son of God (John 1:14; John 1:18; John 3:16, John 3:18; 1 John 4:9), His status of firstborn refers not to any order of birth but rather to the privileges that fall to the lot of the firstborn, namely, rulership (Daniel 7:13-14; Matthew 22:41-45; Matthew 28:18; Colossians 1:18; Hebrews 2:10; Hebrews 3:1-6; Revelation 2:27), priesthood (Hebrews 5:6; Hebrews 7:13-14), and double portion of inheritance (Revelation 19:9; cf. Deuteronomy 21:15-17). As with His priesthood and His Messiahship, Jesus' status of "firstborn" is a privilege earned through His sacrificing of Himself for us all on the cross, for He is the "firstborn from the dead" (Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5), indicating that it is His death for us that forms the basis for His receiving all of the rights and privileges of firstborn status (cf. Genesis 49:4; and Hebrews 12:16; where it is made clear that this privilege is based upon merit).

I will also appoint Him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.

Psalms 89:27 NIV

We have discussed above Jesus' rulership and priesthood, the first two benefits of firstborn status (and it a wondrous thing to contemplate that we, His Church, share in all of these by virtue of our sharing in His status of "firstborn": Hebrews 12:23). As to the third, the firstborn's double-portion of inheritance, in our Lord's case, this consists of His dearest possessions, the Bride (i. e., the Church consisting of all pre-second advent believers: Revelation 21:9; cf. Ephesians 5:22-33; Revelation 19:7-8; Revelation 21:2; Revelation 22:17), and "the Friends of the Bride (i. e., the equal number of millennial believers: Psalms 45:14-15; Revelation 19:9). Our Lord's uniqueness is thus pellucidly clear in His unprecedented rulership of the world which only the Messiah can attain (Matthew 22:41-45; Hebrews 3:1-6; Revelation 1:5-7; Revelation 5:4-5; Revelation 11:15), the eternal priesthood "according to the order of Melchizedek" which required the sacrifice which only God's Son could provide (Hebrews 7:26; cf. Hebrews 2:15-17), and in the fulfillment and possession of the Bride and her Friends, which only the God-Man will achieve (Romans 8:29; Hebrews 2:13). b. That uniqueness is shown by the fact that only by being God and man could Jesus be our Sin-bearer, the One who would pay the penalty for our sins on the cross (Matthew 16:21; Matthew 17:12; Mark 8:31; Mark 9:12; Luke 9:22; Luke 17:25; Luke 22:15; Luke 24:26, Luke 24:46; Acts 1:3; Acts 3:18; Acts 17:3; Acts 26:23; Romans 8:17; 2 Corinthians 1:5; Php 3:10; 1 Peter 4:1): My God, My God, why did You forsake Me? Psalms 22:1.

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with suffering. Like a person people hide their faces from, He was despised, and we did not hold Him of any account.

For He bore our sicknesses and He carried our weaknesses. And yet we considered Him as [the One who had been] punished, smitten and afflicted by God. But [in fact] He was made subject to torment on account of our transgressions, and He was crushed because of our collective guilt (lit., “guilts”). The punishment [required] for making peace [with God] on our behalf [fell] upon Him. Because of His wounding, we have been healed. Isaiah 53:3-5. But now we do see Jesus crowned with glory and honor on account of the death He suffered, even Him who became “a little lower than the angels” for a brief span so that by the grace of God He might taste death on behalf of us all. For it was fitting for [the Father] to make complete through sufferings Him on whose account all things exist and through whom all things exist, namely, the Captain of their salvation, even Him who has led many sons to glory, [our Lord Jesus Christ]. Hebrews 2:9-10. For because He has suffered, He is able to help those who are being tested, since He Himself was [also] put to the test. Hebrews 2:18. For we do not have a High Priest who is not able to sympathize with our weaknesses, since He too was put to the test in all things just as [we are], [only] without sin. Hebrews 4:15.

[Jesus our High Priest] who in the days of His flesh[ly life] (i. e., while He was on earth prior to the resurrection), having offered up prayers and petitions with powerful shouting and with tears to the One who was able to save Him from death, and having been hearkened to on account of His devoutness, although being [God’s one and only], nevertheless came to understand [firsthand] from what He suffered [what] obedience to God [truly is] (i. e., what it takes for a human being to be obedient to God), and, once He was perfected (i. e., perfectly completed His course), became the source of eternal salvation for all who are obedient to Him (i. e., believers). Hebrews 5:7-9.

Therefore Jesus also suffered outside of the gate, in order to sanctify the people through His blood (i. e., His death on the cross). Hebrews 13:12. For it is to this [sharing in the sufferings of Christ] that you have been called, for Christ also died on your behalf, leaving you an example so that you might follow in His footsteps: He committed no sin, nor was any guile found in His mouth. He did not return slander when He was slandered, did not threaten when He suffered, but entrusted Himself to the One who judges righteously. 1 Peter 2:21-23. But to the degree that you are [truly] participating in Christ’s sufferings, be joyful about it, so that at His glorious revelation, you may also rejoice with great gladness. 1 Peter 4:13. c. That uniqueness is shown by the fact that only by being God and man could Jesus be the Messiah, the One who fulfills the duties of the Father’s mission: At that time (i. e., His birth) He [Jesus Christ in His deity] said, ‘Behold, I have arrived (i. e., been born) – in the scroll of a book it is written of Me – to do your will, O God’”. Hebrews 10:7 (Psalms 40:7)

Jesus is the One whom the Father sent into the world to save it (Luke 2:25-35; John 3:16; John 3:34; John 7:18, John 7:28-31; John 17:18; Romans 8:3; Hebrews 3:1; 1 John 4:9-10; cf. Genesis 49:10; Isaiah 8:6; Zechariah 2:9, Zechariah 2:11; Zechariah 4:9; Zechariah 6:15), the Messiah (Hebrew: Meshiach, xywm), the One prophesied to come into the world and deliver it from sin by dying in its place (the cross: Isaiah 52:13-15, Isaiah 53:1-12), and to deliver it from evil by reigning over it in perfect righteousness (the crown: Psalms 2:1-12; Psalms 45:1-17; Psalms 72:1-20; Psalms 110:1-7). The Hebrew title Messiah, translated into Greek as “Christ” (Christos, Χριστ[ος]), means “Anointed One”, and reflects the Hebrew custom of demonstrating through an anointing with oil that a person had been officially commissioned into an extraordinary office (as in Samuel’s anointing of Saul: 1 Samuel 10:1; of David: 1 Samuel 16:13; or Moses’ anointing of Aaron: Exodus

28:41). In all such cases, this anointing with oil is symbolic and represents divine empowerment through the anointing of the Holy Spirit (Numbers 11:17-29; 1 Samuel 10:6, 1 Samuel 10:9-10; 1 Samuel 11:6; 1 Samuel 16:13). While never symbolically anointed with oil, Jesus was symbolically "anointed" with our sins (the meaning behind His unique water-baptism: cf. Mark 10:38-39; Luke 12:50), after which He immediately received a special and dramatic symbol (i. e., the Spirit descending upon Him in the form of dove) of the unction of the Holy Spirit He possessed from birth by virtue of His unique status as the Anointed One. His status of anointing is unique both in terms of its exceptional degree (Isaiah 11:2-3; John 3:34; cf. Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32), and also in that it demonstrates the Father's pleasure with Him in the undertaking of His earthly mission (Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22; cf. Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35; John 12:28). And it was essential for the Messiah, the Anointed One, to be both God and man to fulfill His mission because 1) only the God-man can be the sin-bearer who redeems mankind; 2) only the God-man can be the Father's regent to rule over redeemed mankind forever; and 3) only the God-man can mediate between the Father and sinful mankind as high-priest. Thus our Lord was Ruler, Redeemer, and Mediator by right of birth as the firstborn, won the right for us to share with Him in these offices by being our sin-bearer, and discharged (redeeming us at the cross), is discharging (mediating for us even now), and will discharge (ruling the world at His return) each of these offices in fulfillment of the Father's mission in His status as Messiah, with each accomplished in its proper time.

01.01.04 - The Names of Jesus Christ Reflect His Perfect Person and His Perfect Work

4. The Names of Jesus Christ reflect His perfect Person and His perfect Work: a. The Three Primary Names: “Lord Jesus Christ”:

1) Lord: This primary name is the Greek word *kyrios* (κύριος) which translates what is often called the “tetragrammaton”, that is, the unpointed four consonant Hebrew name “LORD” (YHWH; i. e., éääää) as explained at Exodus 3:13-15. Therefore this title is clearly expressive of Jesus’ divinity (Matthew 22:41-46; John 20:28; cf. Psalms 110:1).

2) Jesus: This primary name is a transliteration of the Hebrew name often vocalized “Joshua” (éääüò), meaning “The LORD saves”, and is the name which Joseph and Mary are instructed to use “because He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21; Luke 1:31). Therefore this name is clearly expressive of the work which our Lord accomplished on the cross in dying for the sins of the entire world. As such, it represents Him as both human and divine, since only God could remit our sins, and only a perfect human being could die for them (cf. Matthew 9:2-6; Mark 2:9-10; Luke 5:20-24; Luke 7:48-49).

3) Christ: This primary name is the Greek word *christos* (Χριστός) which translates the Hebrew name “Messiah” or “Anointed One” (meshicah: מָשִׁיחַ), thus referring to our Lord’s special commissioning by the Father as the unique One who will fulfill prophecy and accomplish salvation. Therefore this title is evocative of Jesus’ unique Person, the God-man, the very Son of God, who has been sent into the world to save it (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9-10; cf. Matthew 3:16-17; Acts 4:27; Hebrews 1:8-9). b. Other Names: This list makes no pretense at being complete. To make such an attempt would require a separate study of its own, and a lengthy one at that. For example, since Jesus is God, all of the various and sundry names, appellations and unique descriptions of God occurring in the Old Testament would need to be considered in such a study (e. g., El, Elohiym, Yah, El `Elyon, El Ro`i, El Shaddai, Jehovah-nissi, etc.), not to mention specifically Messianic passages which refer uniquely to Jesus and His coming millennial reign: For a child is born to us, and a Son is given to us. Dominion shall rest on his shoulder, and His name will be called “He whose counsel is wondrous”, “Mighty God”, “the Father of Eternity”, “the Prince of Prosperity”. Isaiah 9:6. In the New Testament as well, since Jesus is the revealed person of the Trinity and the focal point of all scripture, one finds innumerable descriptions of Him which, even if they fall short of being a “name” or “title” in some precise sense of those words, are certainly worthy of inclusion in any comprehensive treatment (as, for example, where He is called in Hebrews 3:1 “the Apostle . . . of our faith”, in Hebrews 2:10 the “Captain of their salvation”, and in Hebrews 12:2 “the originator and completer of our faith”), not to mention the various self-descriptions our Lord uses for Himself in His address to the seven churches of Revelation alone: To the angel of the church in Ephesus, write: “This is what the One who has the mastery over the seven stars (i. e., churches) in His right hand says, the One who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.” Revelation 2:1. And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: “This is what the One who is the first and last

says, He who died and came to life.” Revelation 2:8. And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: “This is what the One who has the sharp two-edged sword says.” Revelation 2:12. And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: “This is what the Son of God says, the One whose eyes are like a flame of fire and whose feet are like white-hot bronze.” Revelation 2:18. And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: “This is what the One who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars says.” Revelation 3:1. And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: “This is what the One who is holy and true says, the One who has the key of David, the One who opens and no one will lock, who locks and no one opens.” Revelation 3:7. And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: “This is what the Amen says, the reliable and truthful Witness, the origin of God’s creation. Revelation 3:14. In addition to the fact that a number of these names and titles are covered elsewhere in this study, since many such appellations only occur once or twice, or are largely expressive of doctrinal principles which will be explained elsewhere, and are also in any case deserving of a full-treatment best left to commentary on the specific verses in which they occur, the list which follows will restrict itself to some of the more common names and titles of our Lord. As this standard of exclusion and inclusion is necessarily subjective, the reader’s indulgence is requested for any and all cases of omission that may be deemed inappropriate.

1) Advocate: As the One who bought us by giving up His precious life for us through His death on the cross on our behalf, Jesus has earned the right to advocate on our behalf, interceding with the Father before the throne of grace (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25; cf. John 14:13-14). My children, I am writing these things to you so that you won’t sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate to [approach] the Father [on our behalf], Jesus Christ the righteous. 1 John 2:1.

2) Alpha and Omega: This title, used of our Lord at Revelation 22:13; is also used for the Father (i. e., at Revelation 1:8 and Revelation 21:6), a fact which constitutes no contradiction since Father and Son are “one” (John 10:30). Being the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet respectively, the name Alpha and Omega stresses the fact that Jesus is “the first and the last” (Revelation 1:17), the One who comprises all things from one end of the universe and from one end of eternity to the other (Colossians 1:16-19; Colossians 2:3, Colossians 2:9).

3) Arm of the Lord: As the second person of the Trinity, Jesus is the One who carries out the plan of God directly and personally (Luke 1:51): He is the One who made the universe (Jeremiah 27:5; Jeremiah 32:17; cf. Psalms 8:3), and He is the One who has saved us from eternal condemnation by personally coming into the world as a human being and dying in our place for our sins (Isaiah 53:1 in the context of Isaiah 53:1-12; cf. John 12:37-38). He will also be the One through whom the Father will retake direct control of the earth at the second advent (Psalms 98:1; Isaiah 30:30; Isaiah 40:10; Isaiah 51:5, Isaiah 51:9; Isaiah 52:10; Isaiah 59:16-20; Isaiah 63:5-6; cf. Isaiah 48:14-15; Ezekiel 20:33-34). As the instrument by which the Father carries out His plan, the title “Arm of the Lord” is very descriptive and appropriate (Psalms 89:13). It shows, moreover, how inextricably linked the purpose and the action of the Trinity are as three Persons sharing a single essence, especially visible in the redemption of the people of Israel from Egypt, an action highly symbolic of our redemption from death (cf. Deuteronomy 7:19; Deuteronomy 9:29; 2 Kings 17:36; Psalms 89:10; Psalms 136:10-15; Jeremiah 32:21; Acts 13:17; cf. Psalms 44:3). Where is He [the Father] who brought them (i. e, the Israelites) up from the [Red] Sea with the leaders of His people? Where is He [the Father] who set among them His Holy Spirit, who [also] made His Glorious Arm of power [Jesus Christ (cf. Hebrews 11:27)] to go [along with them] at Moses’ right

hand? Isaiah 63:11-12

4) Branch: This is essentially a Messianic title which identifies our Lord as the promised offspring of David destined to rule the world in righteousness (Isaiah 53:2; Jeremiah 23:5; Jeremiah 33:15; Zechariah 3:8; Zechariah 6:12; cf. Ezekiel 17:22 ff.; Romans 1:3; Revelation 5:5), unappreciated in His first advent (Isaiah 11:1), but glorious in His second coming (Isaiah 4:2). Since the title is primarily Messianic, we should understand it also to be connected to the use of the palm branch as a symbol of the victorious Messiah as implied in the festival of Sukkoth, our Lord's final first advent entry into Jerusalem (cf. Psalms 118:25-27 with Matthew 21:8-9; Mark 11:8-10; John 12:13; cf. Luke 19:37-38), and the martyrs with palm branches in hand at Revelation 7:9. Finally, it is also important to see this title as tying our Lord to the symbolism of the menorah, the seven branched lampstand which illuminated the Holy Place in the Tabernacle and Temple. Jesus is the light of the world and life itself (John 1:4; John 14:6). Since the menorah connects the coming Messiah with the original tree of life, it is likely that we are meant to see this symbolism of light and life shining through in the title "Branch" as well.

5) Bridegroom: Jesus is the Last Adam, and we, the Church, are, so to speak, His "Eve" (1 Corinthians 15:45; 2 Corinthians 11:2-3; cf. Romans 5:14). Jesus died for us, purchasing us from death with His blood, His sacrificial work in dying for our sins on the cross (1 Corinthians 15:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24). Having been purchased in this unique way (1 Peter 1:18-19), we belong to Him forever and will be "wedded" to Him as His Bride forever on His return (Matthew 9:15; Matthew 25:1-13; Mark 2:19; Luke 5:34; John 3:29; 2 Corinthians 11:2-3; Ephesians 1:22-23; Ephesians 5:22-33; Revelation 21:2-4, Revelation 21:9 ff.; Revelation 22:17; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:23).

"Let us rejoice and be jubilant, and let us give glory to [God], because the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His Bride has prepared herself. And it has been given her to wear a pure, resplendent [gown] of the finest material (now this fine material represents the righteous acts of His holy ones [believers])." And [the angel] said to me, "Write this down: Happy are those who have been called to the wedding of the Lamb". Revelation 19:7-9.

6) Builder: In the Trinity's assumed roles, the Father is the Architect of creation, and our Lord Jesus Christ is the Creator or Builder through whom all things come to have their being and in whom all things subsist (Colossians 1:16-17; John 1:3 see section I. 1.c above). We find a similar attribution in Hebrews applied to the Church of Jesus Christ, whose building we are: This One [Jesus Christ] is worthy of greater glory than Moses inasmuch as the One who builds the house has greater honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but God is the One who has built all things (i. e., creation). And while Moses was faithful as a servant in all of his house as a witness to the [truths] that would be spoken [in the future], Christ [was faithful] as a Son over His house – whose house we are, if indeed we hold fast to the hope [in which we] boast firm until the end. Hebrews 3:3-6.

7) Firstborn: [see section I. 3.a above]

8) Gift of God: This name needs little explanation. Without God the Father giving us the inestimable gift of His own dear Son to die in our place, instead of the eternal life we anticipate, we would have only judgment in prospect. And Jesus agreed to have Himself given over to be judged

in our place (Galatians 1:4; Ephesians 5:2, Ephesians 5:25; 1 Timothy 2:6; Titus 2:14; cf. Romans 3:24; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 4:7). Only because of the glorious gift of Him do we have eternal life.

Thanks be to God for His inestimable gift! 2 Corinthians 9:15. But the offense [of the former, Adam] is not at all like the favor [of the Latter, Christ]. For though it is true that the human race is perishing on account of the offense of that one man [Adam], how much more has the grace of God and His gracious Gift of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to this same human race! Indeed, the Gift is not at all like [the universal death that came] through [that] one person who sinned. For [in the former case] the [divine] judgment [that resulted] from one [person led] to [universal] condemnation, but the [divine] favor [based upon the sacrifice of the One has led] to the accomplishment of [universal] justification in response to many offenses. For though it is true that on account of the offense of the one death reigned through that one (i. e., by Adam passing down his sin to his progeny), how much more will those who receive this abundance of grace, even this Gift of righteousness [through justification] rule in [eternal] life through [the sacrifice of] the One, Jesus Christ! Romans 5:15-17. For you have been saved by (God's) grace through faith (in Christ); and this did not come from you – it is God's gift. Nor did it come from what you have done, lest anyone should boast. Ephesians 2:8-9.

9) Head of the Body, the Church: The Church is often referred to in the New Testament as “the Body of Christ” (e. g., 1 Corinthians 12:12), of which our Lord Jesus is “the Head” (1 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Corinthians 12:21; Ephesians 4:15-16; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 1:18; Colossians 2:10, Colossians 2:19). This name stresses the intimate connection between Jesus and those He loves, being so close to Him as to be just as indistinguishable from Him as the head is from the body. And [the Father] subordinated all things under [Christ's] feet and gave Him [as] Head over all things in the Church which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills up all things in all ways. Ephesians 1:22-23.

10) High Priest after the Order of Melchizedek: [see section I. 2.c. 2 above]

11) The Holy One of God: This title, one used of Christ even by the demons (in Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34), identifies Jesus as the one and only specially sanctified One ordained by the Father (cf. Psalms 16:10; Isaiah 5:19 with Isaiah 6:1 compared to John 12:41), and sent into the world by Him to save the world through faith in Him (cf. Luke 1:35; Acts 4:27; 1 John 4:9-10; Revelation 3:7).

Then Jesus said to the twelve, “You don't wish to leave too, do you?” Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God”. John 6:67-69.

12) Immanuel: This name, meaning “God is with us”, demonstrates that Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of the virgin birth of the Messiah, who is in every way “God with us” (Isaiah 7:14; cf. Isaiah 8:8): And all this has happened to fulfill what was said by the Lord through the prophet [Isaiah], saying, “Behold, the virgin will conceive and will give birth to a Son, and you shall call His Name ‘Immanuel’”, which translated means ‘God [is] with us’. Matthew 1:22-23.

13) Judge: In anticipation of His sacrifice and victory on the cross (Luke 10:22; John 3:35; John 17:2; cf. Matthew 9:6; Mark 2:10; Luke 5:24), and as a result of that sacrifice and victory (Ephesians 1:22-23; Php 2:8-11), all authority has been handed over to Jesus Christ (Matthew

28:18; cf. Daniel 7:13-14; 1 Corinthians 15:27). He is therefore “the Judge”, both of the Church in time and in eternity (Romans 14:10-12; 2 Timothy 4:8; cf. James 4:12; Revelation 2:5-6; Revelation 3:1-3, Revelation 3:19-20), and, at the last judgment, of all mankind, saved or unsaved (Acts 10:42; Romans 2:16; 2 Timothy 4:1; 1 Peter 4:5).

Brothers, do not grumble against one another so that you may not be judged [for it]. Behold, the Judge [Jesus Christ] is standing in front of the door (i. e., His return and our final judgment are imminent)! James 5:9. For we must all stand before Christ’s tribunal, so that each of us may receive recompense for what he has accomplished through this body, whether it be good or worthless. 2 Corinthians 5:10.

14) King of Kings and Lord of Lords: As in the case of “Alpha and Omega” this title found at Revelation 19:16 for our Lord is also used of the Father (1 Timothy 6:14-16). Variations on this title occur rather frequently in scripture (e. g., Deuteronomy 10:17; Psalms 136:2-3; Daniel 2:47; Revelation 17:14), a title which emphasizes the totality of our Lord’s authority over all human and angelic authority as He returns to rule the world with a “rod of iron” (Psalms 2:9; Revelation 2:27; Revelation 12:5; Revelation 19:15; cf. Psalms 2:1-12; Psalms 110:1-2; Php 2:9-11).

15) The Lamb of God: The title “Lamb of God” reminds us of the Old Testament sacrifices regarding sin (which all speak of our Lord’s death on the cross), and calls attention to Jesus as the only perfect substitute and sacrifice for our sins, a “lamb without blemish” (1 Peter 1:19; cf. Isaiah 53:7) who took away “the sins of the world” (John 1:29). Jesus, of course, offered up His life, not literally His blood (cf. Hebrews 8:3 : “something to offer”). For “the blood of Christ” is a symbol of Jesus’ sacrifice just as “the Lamb of God” is a title symbolic of His sacrifice in being judged for our sins in the darkness on the cross (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24). This title figures prominently in the book of Revelation because it is through His sacrificial death on our behalf that He has won the right to rule the world (Revelation 5:6, Revelation 5:8; Revelation 5:12-13; Revelation 6:16; Revelation 7:9-10, Revelation 7:14; Revelation 12:11; Revelation 13:8; Revelation 14:1, Revelation 14:4, Revelation 14:10; Revelation 15:3; Revelation 17:14; Revelation 19:7, Revelation 19:9; Revelation 21:9, Revelation 21:14; Revelation 21:22-23, Revelation 21:27; Revelation 22:1, Revelation 22:3).

16) The Last Adam: Through the first Adam, sin entered the world, but through the Last Adam, grace for salvation has been made available for all who believe in Him (Romans 5:12-14; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22; cf. Genesis 3:15; Galatians 3:19). For Jesus is “a life-giving spirit” for all who place their trust in Him for eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:45). Thus the name “Last Adam” not only calls attention to our Lord’s true humanity, but also to the fact that through His own sacrificial death on our behalf He has solved the universal problem plaguing humanity ever since Adam’s fall, namely, the problem of sin and resultant death. For only through faith in the Last Adam, will we live forever and avoid the common heritage of our race of eternal death following spiritual and physical death. Jesus Christ, the Last Adam, is the One who has taken away the curse upon the first Adam and upon us his progeny, and made it possible for us to reenter Eden, not a temporary, worldly Eden, but the New Jerusalem where we shall live with Him forever (cf. Revelation 22:1-5).

17) Life: As our Creator and Savior, the giver of life and the only One in whom we have eternal life, Jesus Christ is Life itself, the very source of the life we enjoy now and shall forever enjoy in union with Him (John 5:26; John 6:33-35, John 6:48, John 6:51; Acts 3:15; Romans 5:10; Romans 8:2; 2

Corinthians 4:10-11; 1 John 5:11 cf. Deuteronomy 30:20 b; Psalms 36:9; Jeremiah 10:10; 1 Thessalonians 1:9). Because He gave Himself unto death for our sakes, we have life eternal in Him, having been born again through the Spirit by obedience to the gospel of life in Jesus Christ (Matthew 19:28; John 1:13; John 3:3-8; 1 Corinthians 4:15; Galatians 4:29; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 12:9; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:3, 1 Peter 1:23; 1 John 2:29; 1 John 3:9; 1 John 4:7; 1 John 5:1, 1 John 5:4; 1 John 5:18).

Everything came into being through Him, [Jesus Christ], and without Him, nothing has come into being which has in fact come into being. In Him was life, and this life was the light of men. John 1:3-4.

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me will live, even if he dies. And everyone who lives and believes in Me will surely not die forevermore." John 11:25-26 a I am the way: the truth and the life. John 14:6. For you are already dead, and your [eternal] life has been hidden away with Christ in God. When Christ – your [eternal] life – is revealed, then you too (i. e., with your new eternal life) will be revealed in glory with Him. Colossians 3:3-4.

What we have seen from the beginning, what we have heard and seen with our eyes, what we have observed and touched with our hands – this is about the Word of life[, Jesus Christ]. And the Life appeared, and we have seen and testify to and proclaim to you the Eternal Life who was face to face with the Father and appeared to us. 1 John 1:1-2. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given to us a means of thinking to know the truth. And we are in the Truth, in His Son Jesus Christ. This One (i. e., Jesus Christ) is the true God and Life Eternal. 1 John 5:20.

It is I, the First and the Last, even the Living One. And although I died, behold, I am alive forever and ever! Indeed, I possess the keys to death and Hades. Revelation 1:17-18.

18) Light: As God, Jesus is light (1 John 1:5 cf. James 1:17; Revelation 22:5). Light is a very important biblical symbol because it stands for life, for holiness, and for truth, and does so in a way to which we human beings can easily and thoroughly relate (cf. John 3:19-21). When the devil rebelled, darkness, which had previously had no part in God's creation, came into being. In contrast to darkness which symbolizes death, evil, and the absence of truth, Jesus is the Light (Matthew 4:16; Luke 2:32; Acts 26:13; 1 John 2:8; Revelation 21:23), because He is the holy One (Mark 1:24; Luke 1:35; Luke 4:34; John 6:69; Acts 4:27; Revelation 3:7; compare John 12:40-41 with Isaiah 6:1-10), and He is truth itself and life itself (John 8:12; John 9:5; John 12:46). In Him was life, and this life was the light of men. And this light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not quenched it. John 1:4-5. In Jesus, the true Light (John 1:9), as "children of light" (John 12:36; Ephesians 5:8; cf. Luke 16:8; Matthew 5:14), we enter the kingdom of light and exit the kingdom of darkness (Colossians 1:12-13; cf. Acts 26:18), having put our faith in the life-giving truth of the One who came into a world of darkness to bring us safely into the light of eternal life (1 Peter 2:9; cf. Acts 26:23).

I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. John 8:12 b I have come into the world as a light, in order that everyone who believes in Me may not abide in darkness. John 12:46.

19) Lord of Hosts: As with the titles "Alpha and Omega" and "King of Kings and Lord of Lords", "Lord of Hosts" is also a designation which may be applied to both the Father and the Son. For

while at times this title seems clearly to represent the Father (Isaiah 9:7; Zechariah 6:12-13), at other times we see it clearly referring to our Lord Jesus Christ as the Father's visible representative (Zechariah 2:8-9). At John 12:41; for example, John attributes to Jesus Isaiah's vision of the Lord surrounded by the Seraphs who cry out "holy, holy, holy" (Isaiah 6:1-13). Along with being Head of the Church (Ephesians 1:22; Ephesians 4:15; Colossians 1:18), the Lord Jesus Christ is also Head (and Creator) of all angelic kind (Ephesians 1:21; Colossians 1:15-20; Colossians 2:10; Hebrews 1:1-4), and this title emphasizes our Lord's status as Commander in Chief of the angelic armies ("host" being a translation of the Hebrew *tsabnah*, *abj*, "army"; cf. Psalms 84:3; Isaiah 6:5; Amos 5:14-16; Zechariah 1:3-17).

I saw the Lord sitting on his throne with all the host of heaven standing around him on his right and his left. 1 Kings 22:19 NIV 20) Mediator: [see section I. 2.d above] 21) Messiah: [see section I. 3.c above]

22) Mystery: Jesus Christ is the linchpin of human history on which everything depends, but the full reality of this was concealed before His first advent (cf. 1 Peter 1:10-12), a "mystery" before the cross, but revealed after the cross (Ephesians 1:9-10; Ephesians 3:9-10; Colossians 1:26-27). For although predictions of the coming Messiah are frequent in the Old Testament, the exact nature of the Messiah (i. e., that He would be human and divine), and the exact manner of His coming (i. e., that He would come twice, first as the Servant to expiate sin, second as the King to eradicate evil), were shrouded in mystery until Jesus came in the flesh. The mystery of God's solution to sin, and all of the other mysteries about which scripture speaks (the mystery of the Church preeminently: Ephesians 3:1-11; Ephesians 5:25-32), are all revealed in the face of Jesus Christ come in the flesh, having died for us on the cross for our redemption, and having been resurrected on the third day for our justification (cf. Romans 4:25).

I want you to know what a great struggle I am engaging in on your behalf and on behalf of those in Laodicea and [on behalf of] as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, [struggling] that your hearts may be encouraged, being strengthened by love and [led] into all the [spiritual] wealth which confident understanding [of the truth brings], [led, that is,] into the full acknowledgment (i. e., epignosis, "knowledge made real through faith") of the mystery of God the Father, [namely] Christ, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. Colossians 2:1-3.

23) The Prophet: [see section I. 2.c. 1 above]

24) Rock: Jesus is the bedrock of all creation, the Founder and Foundation of the universe and of our salvation. The tangible qualities of solidity and dependability inherent in the name "Rock" are obvious, and our Lord is the one and only Rock upon which a secure foundation for eternity can be built (Matthew 7:24-27; Luke 6:47-49). The frequency with which this particular title and metaphor is used in scripture of God in general and of Jesus in particular highlights its importance (cf. Exodus 17:6; Numbers 20:8; Deuteronomy 32:4-37; 1 Samuel 2:2; 2 Samuel 23:3; Psalms 18:2, Psalms 18:46; Psalms 19:14; Psalms 144:1; Isaiah 8:14; Isaiah 17:10; Isaiah 44:8; Isaiah 51:1; Matthew 7:24; Habakkuk 1:12). We must understand that everything depends and rests upon Jesus Christ. He is the Rock upon which the Church is founded (Matthew 16:18), and, individually, He is the Cornerstone of our existence, of our faith, and of all our hopes. The Stone which the builders rejected has become the Cornerstone. Psalms 118:22. And in the days of those kings (i. e., in the end times), the God of Heaven will establish a Kingdom which will not be destroyed

forever. Nor will that kingdom be surrendered to another people. It will crush and put an end to all those other kingdoms, but this [Kingdom] will endure forever. And in that you saw that a Stone was cut out without [human] hands from the [living] Rock [of a mountain] and that it crushed the iron and the bronze and the clay and the silver and the gold [of the statue], the Great God has made known to the king what will happen after this [in the future] (i. e., when Christ crushes the kingdom of antichrist). Daniel 2:44-45 a And I tell you that you are Peter [the little rock] (petr-os), and upon this [mighty] Rock (petr-a, i. e., upon Christ Himself; cf. 1 Corinthians 3:11) I shall build My Church (cf. Daniel 2:44-45), and the gates (i. e., the fortified defenses) of Hades (i. e., the devil's kingdom) will not [be able to] resist it. Matthew 16:18.

Thus it has been written: "Behold, I am placing in Zion a Stone of stumbling and a Rock of tripping up. But he who puts his faith in Him will not be put to shame." Romans 9:33 (Isaiah 28:16; cf. Isaiah 8:13-15) For no one can lay [any] other foundation (i. e., for salvation, spiritual growth and production) [other] than the One which has [already] been laid, namely, Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 3:11. And all of them (i. e., the Exodus generation) drank the same spiritual drink (i. e., divinely provided water). For all of them drank from the spiritual[ly significant] Rock which followed them – for that Rock was Christ. 1 Corinthians 10:4.

[It is Jesus] to whom you have come, a Living Stone, rejected by men, but with God elect and highly honored. 1 Peter 2:4.

25) Savior: In Greek, "Savior" is the word *soter* (σωτῆρ, cf. Soteriology), a word whose root means "safe" and whose Latin adjectival equivalent is *salvus* (cf. "salvation"). The key idea in the agent noun "Savior" is "He who makes safe/delivers". This Greek word (found at, e. g., Luke 2:11; John 4:42; Titus 3:6) is thus a nominal equivalent to what we find where the English word "Savior" is used in the Hebrew Old Testament (found at, e. g., Psalms 106:21; Isaiah 60:16; Isaiah 63:8; Hosea 13:4) to translate the word *moshia'*, (i. e., the hiphil participle of *yasha'*, עֻשׂוֹ). All this is a roundabout way of saying that the name "Jesus" (also transliterated from the hiphil of *yasha'*, עֻשׂוֹ) and the word "Savior", while completely different in English, are nearly identical in their ultimate derivation. For "Jesus" means "He will save" in Hebrew, while the Hebrew participle translated "Savior" in the English versions of the Old Testament (and represented by the Greek *soter*, σωτῆρ in the Greek New Testament and also translated "Savior") means "One who saves". The main difference is that while "Jesus" is a prophetic name, "Savior" attributes the ability to save directly to our Lord. Jesus is the One who has saved us from the lake of fire, from eternal death and condemnation, and who has opened the gate to eternal life for all willing to enter by faith in Him. In Jesus we have been saved from our sins and their eternal consequences, rescued from death by His sacrificial life and atoning death in our place. A greater act of salvation and a greater Savior are truly unimaginable.

26) The Servant of God: This title for our Lord demonstrates the height and the depth and breadth of the love God has for us, for it focuses upon our Lord's self-accepted humiliation in coming into this world as a genuine human being, without glory, to drink to His fill the tears of this world and to suffer for us in our place, even to His death for us on the cross, that we might not die but live forever with Him (Isaiah 49:3-11; Isaiah 52:13-15, Isaiah 53:1-12; Romans 15:8-9).

You too should have this attitude which Christ Jesus had. Since He already existed in the very form of God, equality with God was [certainly] not something He thought He had to grasp for. Yet

in spite of this [co-equal divinity He already possessed], He deprived Himself of His status and took on the form of a slave, [and was] born in the likeness of men. He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even [His] death on [the] cross [for us all]. Php 2:5-8.

Behold my Servant – I will support Him. My chosen One – my soul (i. e., heart) takes pleasure in Him. I have placed my Spirit upon Him. He will bring forth justice for the nations. He will not cry out nor will He lift up His voice in the street. He will not shatter a reed [which is already] crushed (i. e., He will be merciful to the faint of spirit), nor will He extinguish a smouldering wick (i. e., He will encourage the weak of faith). [But] He will bring forth justice in truth. He will not lose His ardor, nor will He proceed too hastily until He establishes justice on the earth. And in His teaching the islands will put their hope. Thus says God the Lord, who creates the skies and stretches them out, who fashions the earth and its produce, who gives breath to the people upon it, even a spirit to those who walk upon it. I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, and shall take You by the hand, and guard You, and appoint You a covenant for the nations and a light for the gentiles, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring forth the prisoner from the dungeon, and those who dwell in darkness from their place of captivity (i. e., physical and spiritual redemption). Isaiah 42:1-7.

27) The Good Shepherd: We are all like sheep who have gone astray (Psalms 119:176; 1 Peter 2:25), but our God has mercifully gone out of His way to bring us back to Himself through the Good Shepherd He has appointed to care for us and guide us. The powerful image conveyed by the picture of the Shepherd who guards and guides us is ubiquitous in the scriptures, conveying the truth that our Lord is our merciful protector and provider, ever present to comfort and take care of us (Genesis 48:15; Psalms 28:9; Psalms 80:1; Ecclesiastes 12:11; Jeremiah 31:10; Jeremiah 49:19; Jeremiah 50:44; Ezekiel 34:23; Ezekiel 37:24; Zechariah 13:7; Matthew 2:6; Matthew 25:32; Matthew 26:31; Mark 14:27; John 10:2-16; 1 Peter 5:2-4), even to point of laying down His life in our behalf (John 10:11).

“[Joseph’s] bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed limber, because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel.” Genesis 49:24 NIV The Lord is the One shepherding me. Therefore I will not be lacking [anything I need]. Psalms 23:1.

See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flocks like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young. Isaiah 40:10-11 NIV But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, too small to be numbered among the clans of Judah, from you I will bring forth the One who is to rule over Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, even from the days of eternity. For He will give them over until the time when she who is about to give birth gives birth (i. e., His mother, Mary: the first advent), and the rest of His brothers return to the sons of Israel (i. e., Jewish repentance at the second advent). Then He (i. e., the Messiah) will arise and will shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the Name of the Lord His God. And they will dwell [in peace], for then He will be great to the ends of the earth. And He will be their peace. Micah 5:2-5 I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sake of the sheep. John 10:11. And the God of peace, the One who led up from the dead the Great Shepherd of the sheep in the blood of the eternal covenant, our Lord Jesus, will fit you out with every good thing in order that you may do His will, [even] as He produces in us what is well-pleasing through Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory forever and ever.

Amen! Hebrews 13:20-21. For you were once like sheep going astray, but you have now turned back to the Shepherd and Overseer of your lives. 1 Peter 2:25.

“Because the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and will lead them to fountains of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” Revelation 7:17.

28) The Son of David: Jesus is David’s literal “son” as a direct descendant through the mother of His humanity (Luke’s genealogy: Luke 3:23-38), and legal heir as a direct descendant through His step-father Joseph (Matthew’s genealogy: Matthew 1:1-17). Jesus is also the prophetic “greater Son” of David, the Messiah, the promised coming King who would provide the ultimate fulfillment of the promises made to David by the Lord, the “Davidic Covenant” (Psalms 89:13-37). In His capacity of “Son of David”, Jesus is David’s “seed” (Romans 1:3) and the “Lion” of the tribe of Judah, and “the root of David” (Revelation 5:5; cf. “Branch” above #4).

“The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.” 2 Samuel 7:11-13 NIV

29) The Son of God: This title bespeaks our Lord’s divinity [see section I. 1.2 above, “Jesus is the one and only Son of God”]. The title “Son of God” also expresses Jesus’ unique role in human history of being the Trinity’s visible Person, the One sent into the world to rescue and redeem sinful mankind, and to win the victory of the cross whereby eternal life and the eternal kingdom to come are provided for all who believe.

30) The Son of Man: This title harkens back to Genesis 3:15 and protoevangelium, the first promise of the gospel in the prophecy of the coming Seed who would crush the devil’s head. Jesus is that Seed (Galatians 3:16-19; cf. Luke 1:55; Acts 3:25; Romans 4:13-18), the “Last Adam” (Romans 5:12-14; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, 1 Corinthians 15:45; cf. Galatians 3:19), and the title is a clear indication of His perfect and genuine humanity (Mark 8:31), coming into the flesh in Adam’s line. The specific name under consideration here, “The Son of Man”, marks out Christ as the Seed and the unique “Son” (as opposed to all other human beings). As such, the title is clearly prophetic of the Messiah (as was clearly recognized by our Lord’s contemporaries when He used this title for Himself (John 9:35-38)).

I kept looking during my vision of that night, and behold – with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming up, and He approached the Ancient of Days (i. e., the Father) and they brought Him before Him. And to Him was given dominion and honor and a kingdom, so that all nations and peoples and tongues should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away, and His kingdom one which will not be destroyed. Daniel 7:13-14. And [God the Father] has given Him[, Jesus Christ,] authority to render judgment [on the world] because He is [the] Son of Man. John 5:27.

31) The Truth: Jesus not only speaks the truth, He is the truth:

I am the Way: the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. John 14:6. As this verse makes clear, Jesus is the only real truth worth knowing (cf. Hebrews 13:8), and all that is genuinely true is at its core fundamentally subordinate to Him who is the ultimate and

all-encompassing truth. For this reason, Jesus Christ and His words are ubiquitously and regularly described in terms of truth (Matthew 14:33; Matthew 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 4:25; Luke 12:44; Luke 21:3; John 1:17; John 4:42; John 6:14, John 6:32, John 6:55; John 7:40; John 8:16, John 8:40; John 8:45; John 15:1; John 16:7; John 18:37; 1 John 2:8; 1 John 5:20; Revelation 3:7, Revelation 3:14; Revelation 19:11): The true Light which illuminates every human being was coming into the world. John 1:9. And the Word became flesh and tented among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of a one and only Son of His Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14. For the Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. John 1:17.

32) The Vine: This highly descriptive image teaches us about our organic connection to our dear Lord Jesus from the point we first put our faith in Him (cf. Psalms 80:8-11). We live in Him and He lives in us so long as we continue to walk in faith.

I am the true vine and my Father is the vine-dresser. Every branch [that is] in Me which does not bear fruit He removes, and every branch which does bear fruit He prunes so that it might bear more fruit. You have already been pruned because of the Word I have spoken to you. Stay part of Me, and I will [stay] part of you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it remains part of the vine, so you too cannot [bear true fruit] unless you stay part of Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in Him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in Me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. John 15:1-6.

33) The Way: Jesus is the only “way” to get to God. In fact, He is the Way:

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

Comparing salvation to physical progress along a route is common in scripture (e. g., Psalms 84:5-7; Psalms 118:9-27; Psalms 119:176; Matthew 7:13-14; Matthew 21:32; Matthew 22:16; Mark 12:14; Luke 13:24-25; John 14:4; Acts 9:2; Acts 19:9. Acts 19:23; Acts 22:4; Acts 24:22). But what all of these travel metaphors have in common is the gospel: only through Jesus Christ can we approach God (Ephesians 2:14-18; Ephesians 4:7-10; Colossians 2:13-15; Hebrews 9:24). He is Gate through which those who are truly His sheep enter (John 10:7-9). He is the only true Door which leads not to death but to eternal life (Revelation 3:21; Revelation 4:1). Only through Him, and in Him, and by following Him where He has gone (Hebrews 6:19-20; cf. Hebrews 2:10 [Greek]; Hebrews 12:2), can we too enter into the heavenly holy of holies for fellowship eternal with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit forevermore (Matthew 27:51; Luke 23:43; Hebrews 10:19-20).

34) Word of God: Jesus Christ is the living Word of God: The Word [Jesus Christ] existed at the very beginning, and there was reciprocity (i. e., co-divinity) between the Word and God [the Father]. And the Word was God. John 1:1.

What this means is that there is absolutely no discrepancy or disparity between Jesus and the Father, or between Jesus and any of the “words of God”. For He is the embodiment of the truth, God’s Word, and is the Truth, manifest in God’s written Word. For this reason, the ministry of the Spirit to believers is described by our Lord as one where the Spirit will “take what is mine and will make it known to you” (John 16:15), and by Paul as the very “mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16). To know Jesus is know the Word of God; to know the Word of God is to know Jesus Christ (John 5:39; cf. John 1:1-14; Hebrews 1:1-4; 1 John 1:1-4; Revelation 1:2). Praise God for that blessed

day of days to come when we shall “know, even as we are known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). And He was clothed in a cloak splattered with blood, and His Name stands [forever]: “The Word of God”. Revelation 19:13.

01.01.05 - The Life of Jesus Christ

5. The Life of Jesus Christ a. Introduction:

Jesus is God, a co-equal, co-eternal, con-substantial member of the Trinity. Jesus is also the Word of God, the Mind of Christ, God's entire revelation meant for us in this life contained in the completed canon of scripture and revealed to us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:16). Therefore it is important to point out at the commencement of this section that by "the life of Christ" we are concerned not primarily with the deity of Jesus Christ but with His humanity as it was foreshadowed in the Old Testament and became a reality with His incarnation in the form of a genuine human being in the New Testament. Few subjects in scripture are more important than attention to our Savior's life, because it is only through Him, through faith and faithful following of Him, that we realize the promise of eternal life. And Jesus' life is, among many other things, the ultimate exemplar for all Christians (Matthew 8:22; Matthew 9:9; Matthew 10:38; Matthew 11:29; Matthew 16:24; Matthew 19:21; Mark 1:17; Luke 9:23; John 1:43; John 13:15; John 21:19-22; Ephesians 4:15; Php 2:5; Hebrews 6:20; 1 Peter 2:21-25; Revelation 14:4). Jesus is, after all, the archetypical perfect human being who did God's will to the full without fail, and in this way was qualified to bear our sins on the cross: For just as through the disobedience of the [first] man[, Adam,] the human race found itself sinful, so through the obedience of the One[, Jesus Christ,] the human race will find itself [accounted as] righteous (i. e., justified), [through faith in Him]. Romans 5:19. b. Old Testament Appearances of Jesus Christ:

Jesus Christ is the revealed member of the Trinity. As such, just as He is the One who is revealed in the flesh from the incarnation onward, He is also the One who manifests the Person and presence of God to believers before the incarnation (cf. Hebrews 1:1-2). Old Testament appearances of God are often termed "Theophanies", whereas those Old Testament appearances which can clearly be shown to be of Jesus are called "Christophanies". Much of what we now know about the Trinity was purposely veiled during Old Testament times for a variety of reasons, however, as the following passage shows, many such appearances of God in the Old Testament which one might assume on a casual reading are of the Father were, in fact, of Jesus Christ representing the Father:

Even though He had performed so many [miraculous] signs in their presence, they did not believe in Him, in order that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the Arm of the Lord been revealed?" For this reason they were not able to believe, because [as] Isaiah also says, "He has blinded their eyes and disabled their heart so that they might not see with their eyes and understand in their heart and turn and I would heal them." These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory (i. e., "holy, holy, holy" in Isaiah 6:1-3) and spoke about Him (i. e., in Isaiah 6:1-10 since this second quote is from Isaiah 6:10). John 12:37-41.

Perhaps the most common Christophany is the appearance of "the angel of the Lord", where the word "angel" is used to express a manifestation of Christ rather than an angelic creature per se.

This can be clearly seen, for example, in passages such as Exodus 14:19 where the angel is called “the angel of God”, or Judges 2:1-5 where the angel speaks of “My covenant”, or Zechariah 1:20 where the angel of the Lord who has been speaking with Zechariah is described as “the Lord”. Without indications to the contrary we should generally understand appearances of God in the Old Testament, as in the case of the “Lord God” speaking with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden in Genesis 3:1-24, to be Christophanies, that is, appearances of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father’s representative and the revealed member of the Trinity. Jesus has always been the Savior of the world, and His centrality to God’s plan of salvation was just as crucial in the Old as it is in the New Testament economy, despite the fact that before our Lord took on true humanity and was thus revealed in the flesh many of the particulars of salvation were obscured from view (Luke 24:25-27; Acts 2:23; Acts 3:18; Acts 7:52; Acts 17:3; Acts 26:23; Ephesians 3:5, Ephesians 3:9; 1 Peter 1:11, 1 Peter 1:20; cf. Romans 3:25-26). c. Old Testament Typology: In addition to the Old Testament appearances discussed immediately above, the coming of our Lord, His incarnation, and His work for us on the cross were foreshadowed in a variety of ways in Old Testament times. Jesus has, in fact, always been the heart and soul of prophecy (Revelation 19:10), the message of God as the Word of God (John 1:1-3).

God, from antiquity having communicated to our fathers in the prophets at many times and in many ways, has in these last days communicated to us in a Son, [the One] whom He has appointed heir of all things, [the One] through whom He created the universe. He is the shining forth of [the Father’s] glory, the precise image of His essence, the One who sustains the universe by His mighty Word . . .

Hebrews 1:1-3 In addition to specific scriptures and prophecies which taught about or foreshadowed the Messiah and His two advents (see section I. 5.d immediately below), the coming of the Messiah and the sufferings of the Christ were also taught via what we call “typology”, that is, symbolic representations of the Person and the work of Jesus, occurring occasionally in the lives of special individuals (e. g, the kingship of David and of Solomon being symbolically applicable to the millennial reign of Christ; cf. Zechariah 3:8-10), and ubiquitous in the symbols behind the paraphernalia and practice of the Mosaic Law, especially where sacrifices are concerned (as these always relate to our Lord’s death on the cross for our sins). One instance in which both of these two sorts of typology come together is the sacrifice of Isaac, where Isaac represents or “is a type of” Christ, being sacrificed for our sins (where Isaac’s impending physical death through the shedding of his physical blood on the altar represents Christ’s spiritual death in dying for our sins in the darkness as He is judged for them in our place on the cross):

Then Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on [the back of] Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. And the two of them went [up Mount Moriah (i. e., the future place of Jerusalem)] together. And Isaac said to Abraham his father, “Father.” And Abraham replied, “Yes, my son.” And [Isaac] said, “Look, here is the fire and wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” And Abraham replied, “God will provide for Himself (lit., “see for Himself”) the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And [so] the two of them went [up] together. Genesis 22:6-8.

Later in this passage, Abraham is stopped by the angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ, from actually sacrificing Isaac. But the dramatic and poignant story in these verses of the father

about to sacrifice his one and only son gives us some small idea of the sacrifice the Father actually did make in giving over unto death His one and only beloved Son on our behalf, something at once so terrible and marvelous that it could not even be contemplated were it not absolutely essential to secure the salvation of all of His other children. By Faith Abraham offered up Isaac when he was tested, and was on the point of offering up [in sacrifice] his one and only son, the one who [about whom he] had received the promises, about whom it had been said, "In Isaac shall your seed be called", [for Abraham was] reckoning that God was able to raise [him] from the dead, whence (i. e., from the dead) he did receive [Isaac] back even metaphorically (i. e., Isaac was as good as dead but God delivered him through the substitute of the ram, a type of Jesus Christ). Hebrews 11:17-19. For in the sequel, as Hebrews recalls, after preventing the sacrifice of Isaac, the Lord provides a ram for Abraham to sacrifice in Isaac's stead (Genesis 22:13-14), and here we have a very clear picture of Jesus, the Lamb of God, being sacrificed in Isaac's place (and in the place of all mankind for the sins of all mankind). For this reason it is said "On the mountain of the Lord (i. e., Mt. Moriah, the same exact place as the future Jerusalem where our Lord died for us) [God] will provide" (Genesis 22:14). This same essential symbolism, namely, of an animal shedding its physical blood representing Christ being judged and dying for our sins, is behind all animal sacrifice in the Bible (cf. Judges 13:19-20), from the sacrifice of righteous Abel (Genesis 4:1-26; Hebrews 11:1-40), to the millennial sacrifices which will memorialize Jesus' work for us on the cross (e. g., Ezekiel 40:1-49, Ezekiel 41:1-26, Ezekiel 42:1-20, Ezekiel 43:1-27, Ezekiel 44:1-31, Ezekiel 45:1-25, Ezekiel 46:1-24, Ezekiel 47:1-23, Ezekiel 48:1-35). The Old Testament is, in fact, replete with types to such a degree that it would require several additional books to exhaust the study. To take but a few prominent examples which are overtly referenced as types in the New Testament, the tree of life in the Garden is a picture of our Lord who died on Calvary's tree to give us life (cf. Romans 11:11-24); Noah's ark is a picture of Christ in whom we are saved (cf. 1 Peter 3:18-22); Jonah in the whale presents a picture of our Lord's resurrection (cf. Matthew 12:39-41); Melchizedek is a type of Christ as we have already seen (Hebrews 7:11-17). And these and similar types are all notwithstanding the voluminous typology of everything related to the Tabernacle, its furniture, its sacrifices, and all of the other aspects of the Law (Romans 15:4; cf. Romans 10:6-7; 1 Corinthians 9:9-10; 1 Timothy 5:18). d. Old Testament Prophecies:

It is fair to say that the great majority of Old Testament prophecies about our Lord coming in the flesh are focused on His Messiahship and therefore at the very least include His second advent in their purview. For this reason, the first advent of Jesus Christ as distinct from the second was a matter of some mystery, even to the inspired writers who penned the words given by God which do in fact predict the first advent: The prophets diligently investigated and inquired about this salvation, when they prophesied about this grace [that was to come] to you. For they were eager to discover the precise time the Spirit of Christ within them was signifying as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. For it was revealed to them that in prophesying these things, they were not so much serving themselves as they were you – and these same things have now been proclaimed to you through those who gave you the gospel through the Holy Spirit, sent from heaven – even angels want to look into these things. 1 Peter 1:10-12. Not unrelated to this issue of our Lord's coming to die on the cross before He comes to take up the crown of world rulership is the fact and necessity of His becoming a genuine human being in order to be able to die in our place. The need to take on true humanity might possibly be

argued as not theoretically necessary for a glorious appearance of God's Messiah to rule the world, but our Lord most certainly could not die for our sins without a human body in which to bear them (1 Peter 2:24; 1 Peter 4:1; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 9:26-28). This is the "stumbling block" which many Jews and the "folly" which many gentiles have been unable to accept to their eternal harm (1 Corinthians 1:23; Matthew 21:42 cf. Psalms 118:22-23). But of the fact that the Messiah would be a true human being (as emphasized in His first advent) at the same time as He is truly God (seen so clearly in His second advent) our Lord Himself made abundantly clear: As the Pharisees were gathering together, Jesus put a question to them, saying "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They answered Him, "David's son." Then He said to them, "Well then, how can David, speaking in the Spirit, call Him Lord? For he says, The Lord said to My Lord, 'Sit down at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.' [Psalms 110:1] So if David calls Him Lord, how is He his Son?" And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare to question Him any longer from that day forward.

Matthew 22:41-46.

Indisputably, if the Messiah is literally a "son" of David, then He must be a human being, while if He is "Lord", as David calls Him in Psalms 110:1 which Jesus quotes, then He must be God as well. Both elements of our Lord's unique nature, divine and human, are essential for the accomplishment of God's plan to redeem humanity and restore eternal peace to the universe. For the rulership of the world on the part of the Messiah depends upon His prior removal of the problem of sin, that is, His victory over death on the cross which opens the way for the devil's removal and for our redemption and salvation. That the Messiah's suffering – something which is of course impossible without the fact of His possession of true humanity – is taught in the Old Testament, is put beyond all question by, for example, by Isaiah in Isaiah 52:1-13, Isaiah 53:1-12 (of which this excerpt will suffice here to make the point): For He bore our sicknesses and He carried our weaknesses. And yet we considered Him as [the One who had been] punished, smitten and afflicted by God. But [in fact] He was made subject to torment on account of our transgressions, and He was crushed because of our collective guilt (lit., "guilts"). The punishment [required] for making peace [with God] on our behalf [fell] upon Him. Because of His wounding, we have been healed. We have all gone astray like sheep. Each of us has turned to his own way. And the Lord caused the guilt of us all to strike Him. Though He was oppressed and afflicted, like a lamb led to slaughter He did not open His mouth, and like a ewe before her shearers He did not open His mouth. By repressive judgment He was taken away, and who gave any thought to His posterity? For He was cut off from the land of the living. He was punished for the transgression of my people. And they assigned Him a grave with the wicked (pl.) and with a rich [man] in His deaths (sic). Not for any violence that He had done. Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. For it was the Lord's good pleasure (i. e., "will") to crush Him, to subject Him to torment. But though you make His life a guilt offering, He will see His seed, He will lengthen His days, and the good pleasure (i. e., "will") of the Lord will prosper in His hand. [Released] from the trouble [inflicted] upon His life, He will [again] see [the light of life] and be satisfied (i. e., in resurrection). My righteous Servant will provide righteousness for the great [of heart] (i. e., believers) through the[ir] acknowledgment of Him, and He Himself will carry their guilt (lit., "guilts"). Therefore I will allot to Him [the plunder] among [His] many [brothers], and He will apportion plunder to the mighty [among them]. Because He lay bare His life unto death, and was dealt with as transgressors [are], so that He bore the sin

of the many, and substituted [Himself] for the transgressors. Isaiah 53:4-12.

Indeed, the entire message of the gospel and the necessity for the Christ to suffer on behalf of the sins of the world was taught in various ways throughout the Old Testament, even if that message was reluctantly received and insufficiently understood before the cross. Our Lord Jesus Himself makes this very point to the disciples on the road to Emmaus (cf. Luke 24:25-27; Acts 2:23; Acts 3:18; Acts 7:52; Acts 10:37; Acts 17:3; Acts 26:23; Ephesians 3:5, Ephesians 3:9; 1 Peter 1:11, 1 Peter 1:20):

Then He Himself said to them “O you ignorant men, and slow to believe all the things which the prophets spoke. Wasn’t it necessary for the Christ to suffer these things [first], and [then] come into His glory?” And taking His start with Moses and all of the prophets, He thoroughly explained to them the things [written] about Himself in all the scriptures. Luke 24:25-27. For the sake of illustration, a few more of the more well-known passages prophesying the coming of the Messiah are included below, but an all-inclusive treatment would require its own separate study nearly as voluminous as in the case of Old Testament typology (cf. John 21:25).

1) His incarnation foretold: For a Star will march forth from Jacob, and a [Ruler’s] scepter [will arise] from Israel. Numbers 24:17 b (Matthew 2:1-13; cf. Genesis 49:8-12; Deuteronomy 33:7; Luke 1:78; Revelation 12:5)

You have taken no pleasure in sacrifices and offerings, [but instead] You have pierced My ears (i. e., “given Me a body and marked Me as a voluntary Servant”; cf. Exodus 21:5-6; Deuteronomy 15:16-17). You have not asked for burnt offerings or sin offerings. [But] then I said, behold, I have come [into the world (i. e., as the true sacrifice)]. In the scroll of the Book it has been written about Me. It is My good pleasure to do what pleases You, My God. For your Law is in My inmost parts.

Psalms 40:6-8 (cf. Hebrews 10:5-10)

Therefore the Lord will Himself give you a sign. Behold, the virgin will conceive and will give birth to a Son, and you shall call His Name “Immanuel” (i. e., “God is with us”). Isaiah 7:14 (Matthew 1:23) For a child is born to us, and a Son is given to us. Dominion shall rest on his shoulder, and His name will be called “He whose counsel is wondrous”, “Mighty God”, “the Father of Eternity”, “the Prince of Prosperity”. To His dominion and its prosperity there will be no limit or end. He will establish it and lay its foundation on David’s throne and over his kingdom, in justice and righteousness, now and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this. Isaiah 9:6-7. But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, too small to be numbered among the clans of Judah, from you I will bring forth the One who is to rule over Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, even from the days of eternity. Micah 5:2.

2) His suffering foretold:

“And I shall place hostility between you and the woman, that is, between your seed and her Seed. He will attack you head-on, but you will attack Him from behind” (lit., “crush His heel”, a reference to the cross). Genesis 3:15.

[Like] many bulls they have encircled Me. [Like] strong bulls from Bashan they have surrounded Me. They open their mouths against Me [like] roaring lions about to pounce on their prey. I am poured out like water, and all My bones are being stretched apart. My heart has become like wax.

It is melting inside of Me. My strength is evaporating like a broken piece of pottery, and My tongue is sticking to the roof of My mouth [with thirst]. For You (cf. Psalms 22:1-2) have set Me ablaze in the dust of death. For they have surrounded Me [like] dogs. [This] congregation of evil-doers has encompassed Me. They have pierced My hands and My feet. I can count all My bones. [While] they look on and stare at Me, they are dividing up My clothes for themselves, and for My garments they are casting lots. Psalms 22:12-18. For they mixed gall with what they gave Me to eat, and for My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink. Psalms 69:21 (Matthew 27:34, Matthew 27:48; Mark 15:23, Mark 15:36; Luke 23:36; John 19:29)

Thus says to the Lord, "To Him who despised His own life, to Him who became an abomination to His own nation, to the Servant of rulers – kings will rise up when they see You, even high officials will bow down [before You], on account of the Lord who is faithful, even the Holy One of Israel, for He has chosen You. Isaiah 49:7.

Marshal your troops, O city of troops, for a siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel's ruler on the cheek with a rod. Micah 5:1 NIV (Luke 22:63; John 18:22) 3) His resurrection foretold: For You will not abandon My soul (i. e., "life") to hell (lit., sheol). You will not give your Holy One over to see decay. Psalms 16:10 (cf. Acts 2:31; Acts 13:35)

[The Lord] will restore us, [Israel], after two days (i. e., after the Church age), and will raise us up on the third day (i. e., the Millennium), that we may live in His presence (i. e., with the Messiah, who personifies this prophecy in His resurrection on the third day). Hosea 6:2 (cf. Luke 24:46; 1 Corinthians 15:4) 4) His second advent foretold:

Why are the nations forming into a mob and the peoples [of the earth] grumbling idly. The kings of the earth are assembling and its princes are gathering together – against the Lord and His Anointed One, [saying] "Let us pull off Their chains, and cast Their cords from us!" Psalms 2:1-3. But as for Me, I have anointed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain. Psalms 2:6. The Lord said to My Lord, "Sit down at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." Psalms 110:1. And He said, "It is too small a thing for you to be My servant, to establish the tribes of Jacob and to restore the sanctified ones of Israel. Therefore I have appointed you as a Light for the nations, to be My [instrument of] salvation to the ends of the earth. Isaiah 49:6. In those days and at that time, I will make a Branch of righteousness sprout forth for David, and He will accomplish justice and righteousness on the earth. Jeremiah 33:15.

Thus says the Lord: I will return to Zion and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And Jerusalem will be called "the City of Truth", and "the Mountain of the Lord, the Mountain of Holiness". Zechariah 8:3.

Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion. Shout [for joy], daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, your King will come to you. Righteous and victorious He is; humble and riding on a donkey, even on a colt, a donkey's foal. Zechariah 9:9. And the Lord will be king over all the earth. On that day the Lord will be the only One and His Name the only Name. Zechariah 14:9. When we combine the Christophanies or appearances of our Lord in the Old Testament with the ubiquitous typology which teaches about His Person and His work, and with the specific prophecies of His Messiahship, incarnation, suffering, resurrection and second advent, we see clearly that Jesus Christ has been the true message of scripture since the very beginning of the Bible.

“We have found the One about whom Moses wrote in the Law and all the prophets as well, Jesus, the son of Joseph, the One from Nazareth!” John 1:45. By faith, Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, and chose instead to suffer maltreatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin, because he considered the reproach [suffered on behalf] of Christ greater riches than the treasure vaults of Egypt. For he was looking to his reward. Hebrews 11:24-26. e. The Hypostatic Union and Kenosis:

Since the point of His birth, Jesus Christ, who has always been true God, has also become a true human being. The proper, orthodox understanding of the fact that Christ now possesses both of these natures, divine and human, without any diminution of the quality or quantity of either, and is yet a single, absolutely unique Person, is often called in theology “the hypostatic union”. The first word in this somewhat unhelpful phrase is taken from Hebrews 1:3 where our Lord’s unique Person composed of two natures, human and divine, is described as “the [very] shining forth of [the Father’s] glory, the precise image of His essence”. In this verse, “essence” is the Greek word hypostasis from which the adjective “hypostatic” is derived. In Hebrews 1:3; since Jesus is the “shining forth of the glory” of God, He is God and possessed of the identical essence which the Father and the Spirit share. As a true human being, however, Jesus is the “precise image” (Greek character, χαρακτ[ε]ρ) of that essence, and by this is meant that our Lord’s humanity is a perfect mirror or representation of that divine essence (the Greek word character meaning the exact stamp or impression of a minted coin, for example). Thus Hebrews 1:3 teaches that between the divinity of Christ and the humanity of Christ there is complete harmony and integrity with no rift of personality whatsoever in the One undivided Person of Jesus Christ despite the fact that He now possesses two natures, human and divine. While somewhat technical, this description is nevertheless important, since failures to accept various parts of this complex truth have resulted in many deadly heresies, past and present (and no doubt to come in the future as well). However, it does go without saying that this is a somewhat difficult concept for mere human beings to grasp, since in truth we are incapable of fully comprehending God’s divine nature and what it really means (let alone being able to understand except in general terms the wonder of the combination of the two natures in the Person of Christ). What we should at least appreciate at the very outset here, however, is the marvelous truth that by wedding Himself to the human race in such a personal and irrevocable manner, our Lord has given us the clearest and most convincing proof that we are special to Him in ways that we can scarcely begin to fathom.

While the fact of Jesus’ divinity, humanity, and uniqueness in combining the two natures since the incarnation may be relatively easier to understand now that He has been glorified (see for example the description of Him as He appeared to John at Revelation 1:12-20), it remains to discuss what scripture has to say about the manner in which these two natures coexisted during His first advent. For while from the resurrection forward there is no limitation, compartmentalization, or separation of His divine and human nature, it is the case that, during His first advent, our Lord had to suffer in the same fashion as we do (and indeed far beyond, not only in every other aspect of His earthly life but especially when He was judged for our sins on the cross). This self-imposed limitation of deity in respect to the support given to His humanity is known in theology as kenosis, another Greek word taken this time from Paul’s discussion in his letter to the Philippians of the subject of our Lord’s sacrificial life:

You too should have this attitude which Christ Jesus had. Since He already existed in the very form of God, equality with God was [certainly] not something He thought He had to grasp for. Yet in spite of this [co-equal divinity He already possessed], He deprived Himself of His status and took on the form of a slave, [and was] born in the likeness of men. He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even [His] death on [the] cross [for us all]. Php 2:5-8. The word translated “deprived” above is the Greek verb kenoo (κενῶ), “to make void”, from which our technical term kenosis is derived. This deprivation, as the next verse makes clear, involved great humiliation for our sakes, even to the point of our Lord’s sacrificial death for us on the cross. Clearly, the suffering and abuse Jesus took for us throughout His life, accelerating through His extensive thirty year preparation, His ministry “against such opposition by sinners against Himself” (Hebrews 12:3; cf. Jude 1:15), the gauntlet He ran for us even to get to the cross, and the death He died to sin for us in the darkness on the cross, would have been incompatible with His deity apart from the self-imposed limitation of its function on behalf His humanity, a condition which, as mentioned above, is traditionally called kenosis. As can be seen from the preliminary discussion above, kenosis is essentially a set of “ground rules” wherein Jesus voluntarily refrained from using His deity to help His humanity during the first advent in accordance with the Father’s will (John 4:34; John 5:30; John 6:38).

1) The reason why Christ’s kenosis was necessary: Being perfectly just, God could not as God forgive the sins of mankind unless they were appropriately paid for. And only a perfect human being would be able to pay the price for sin and have that payment be acceptable to God’s perfect justice. Jesus is that unique, perfect sacrifice, the “Lamb without spot or blemish” (1 Peter 1:19), a reference to the symbolism of the Old Testament sacrifices wherein no animal with a defect was acceptable as an offering to the Lord (e. g., Exodus 29:1; Deuteronomy 17:1; Malachi 1:6-14). In the analogy, the perfect body of the animal represents the fact that Jesus was a perfect and perfectly acceptable substitute for us, qualified in every way to be our sin-bearer. Part of this perfection rested in the fact that, unlike all of the rest of us, He lacked a sin nature, and, unlike all of the rest of us, He never committed a single personal sin (subjects about which we shall have more to say below). But in addition to preserving the perfection of His body, our Lord was also required to demonstrate and preserve the perfection of His human spirit as well, and that required complete integrity in the exercise of His human free will from the moment of physical birth to the moment of physical death.

There is a principle of leadership which proclaims that a commander should never require more of his men than he himself would be willing to do in their place. Never has this principle been carried out more completely or more faithfully than in the case of our Lord Jesus, “the Captain” of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10), who not only lived a perfect life of selfless sacrifice far beyond anything we are capable of imagining, but who even more amazingly died on the cross for all of our sinful failures. But without kenosis, it would have been impossible for our Lord’s human free will to be put to the extreme and honestly unimaginable tests He had to endure (all of which He accepted and passed in perfect fashion). That is because with the help of His deity they would not have been tests at all. And without kenosis, it would have been impossible for our Lord to die on the cross at all, because on the one hand He would not have been able to die physically (since deity cannot die), and because He could not have come into contact with our sins in order to die for them on the other (since deity can have no contact with sin). In short, without kenosis, there would have been

little point to the incarnation in the first place. In order to be an acceptable substitute for us, our Lord would have to do more than “merely” refrain from sin: He would have to exercise His human free will in this world just as we do, but do so in an absolutely perfect way; then, having done so throughout His life, He would have to go to the cross for us, suffer and die for us, all from that same, genuinely human free will. So while it is common in theological treatments of this sort to concentrate on our Lord’s sinless life, it was His perfect, daily response to the Father in carrying out all the positive actions that were required of Him that was arguably something which required far greater effort than “merely” avoiding the negative ones. This is unquestionably true when it comes the most difficult exercise of free will any human being has ever dreamed of attempting, namely, our Lord’s obedient willingness to go to His death for us on the cross, a sacrifice which Jesus had to agree to undertake every step of the way, a decision which was challenged every step of the way, and an incomparably blessed wonder that cannot be compared to any other event in the history of the universe. Indeed, our Lord’s free will acceptance of God’s judgment for our sins is history, the cornerstone event upon which everything else depends (whether or not we fully appreciate at present the extent to which this is true). Simply put, our Lord took on true humanity for a purpose, namely, to carry out the Father’s plan of salvation, and since the carrying out of that plan was impossible without Jesus’ humbling of Himself as the Servant of God, kenosis, the temporary state of living in humiliation without the glory He possessed from before the world was created (John 10:30), was necessary for us to be saved (Isaiah 49:7; Isaiah 52:1-13, Isaiah 53:1-12; Luke 22:27; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Php 2:5-11).

“Just so the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, even to give His life as a ransom in behalf [of the lives] of many”. Matthew 20:28. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that although He was rich (i. e., divine), He made Himself poor (i. e., human and under the restraints of kenosis), in order that you might become rich (i. e., have eternal life) through His impoverishment (i. e., humble life and death on the cross for us all). 2 Corinthians 8:9. For what the Law could not accomplish (i. e., solving the sin problem) because it was weak on account of [its dependence on sinful human] flesh, God [did accomplish]: having sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for the purpose of [expiating] sin, [God] rendered summary judgment on [all] sin in [Christ’s] flesh. Romans 8:3.

One important result of our Lord’s incarnation and of His walking through this world in the complete humiliation of kenosis is that He has personal experience of what it is like to be a human being, and of what it takes to do the will of God in this world. For it was fitting for [the Father] to make complete through sufferings Him on whose account all things exist and through whom all things exist, namely, the Captain of their salvation, even Him who has led many sons to glory, [our Lord Jesus Christ]. For the One who sanctifies and those who are sanctified belong to One [Father], and for this reason [Christ] is not ashamed to call them His brothers, as He says: I will proclaim Your name to My brothers. In the midst of the assembly I shall praise you and elsewhere, I [too] shall put My confidence in Him (i. e., the Father) and elsewhere, Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me. Therefore since “these children” (i. e., believers given to Christ by God: Hebrews 2:13) have a common heritage of flesh and blood, [Christ] too partook of these same [common elements] in a very similar fashion (i. e., not identical only in that He was virgin born and so without sin), in order that through His death He might put an end to the one possessing the power of death, that is, the devil, and might reconcile those who were subject to being slaves their

whole lives long by their fear of death. For it is certainly not angels He is giving aid to, but He is giving aid to the seed of Abraham (i. e., believing humanity). For this reason, it was essential for Him to be like His brothers in every respect, in order for Him to be a merciful and faithful priest (i. e., go-between) in matters concerning God so that He could expiate (i. e., “cover”) the sins of the people. For because He has suffered, He is able to help those who are being tested, since He Himself was [also] put to the test. Hebrews 2:10-18. For we do not have a high-priest who is unable to identify with our weaknesses, but One who was tested in every way in a similar fashion [to us] – [but] without sin. Hebrews 4:15.

Now of course Jesus is God in His own right, and in His humanity He perfectly fulfilled the will of the Father for His life in every single respect (e. g., Isaiah 42:19; John 10:30). And it must also never be forgotten that the “testing” He underwent was in every way and on every level far more intense than we can even conceive, right down to the gauntlet of the cross and of His death on our behalf (things the like of which we will never be called upon to endure). But in all that He was called to do, Jesus did it perfectly in perfect response to the Father’s will. Jesus’ earthly life was thus also an example to us of what we ought to do as well: always putting the Father’s will, the Father’s plan, ahead of personal plans, desires, and weaknesses. Naturally, we will never come close to duplicating what our Lord accomplished in exercising perfect Human will from His humanity without the help of His deity (an area of temptation with which we are not even able to identify), but we can and should emulate Him to the best of our ability.

2) The role of Christ’s divine nature during the period of kenosis: In Matthew’s account of Jesus’ arrest, there is a passage which reveals much about the nature of the voluntary restriction by our Lord of the use of His deity. After Peter in his misguided zeal struck with a sword one of those who had come to arrest Jesus, Matthew tells us that our Lord said, “Do you assume that I am not able to entreat my Father, and that He will not immediately bring more than twelve legions of angels to my aid?” (Matthew 26:53). Though God in His own right, even in this extreme situation our Lord demonstrates deference to the Father, maintaining His attitude of humble obedience in the carrying out of the Father’s plan. Jesus did not actually make this hypothetical request (to which He gives voice only for the benefit of Peter and the other disciples), yet we see clearly from the emphatic nature of His words that He was in absolutely no doubt that as God’s Son, co-equal, co-eternal, and consubstantial with the Father, the request would certainly have been granted, had He decided to make it. Given our perfect Lord’s absolute surety about this amazing potential deliverance, we can ascertain that the only thing standing between Jesus’ humanity and the full use of His deity on behalf of that humanity was at all times during the first advent the righteous exercise of His human free will alone responding to the plan and the mission on which He had been sent. We may therefore further discern that the “barrier” between the two natures which we are calling kenosis was not something imposed “from above” by His deity. Rather it was a conscious limitation undertaken by His humanity in consonance with His deity, a fact which makes our Lord’s successful completion of His life without violating the restrictions of kenosis all the more amazing (for which of us if possessed of any remotely similar “power” could realistically be expected to refrain from using it?). Jesus knew full well that He was God, yet He did not “access” His divine nature on behalf of His human nature in violation of the principle discussed above, for to do so would essentially have invalidated the acceptability of His sacrifice on our behalf. Therefore our Lord’s humiliation for our sake involved far more than perfect separation from sin or even

perfect use of His human free will in all the ways with which we are familiar: it also involved perfect self-restraint in voluntarily refraining from using His deity day by day, moment by moment, test by test.

Seen from the point of view of His divine essence, kenosis means that, until His glorification, by becoming human Jesus took on a material existence and eschewed the use of His omnipotence in that material humanity. By becoming human Jesus subjected Himself to time and eschewed the use of His omniscience in that humanity. And by becoming human Jesus limited Himself to finite space and eschewed His omnipresence in that humanity. The cost to Him and the difficulty of the human life thus undertaken can scarcely be appropriately described, let alone even marginally appreciated. Suffice it so say that Jesus' love for us knows no bounds. As to what these limitations meant in the playing out of His thirty three years on earth, we shall limit ourselves to two examples which are instructive in demonstrating the boundaries within which this restriction on the exercise of His deity operated. In His temptation in the desert, Satan dared our Lord to turn stones into bread (Matthew 4:3). Now Jesus was extremely hungry, having just fasted for forty days (Matthew 4:2). From the context, it would appear that the fast and ordeal to which He had been led by the Spirit (Matthew 4:1) had ended or was on the point of ending. Furthermore, eating is legitimate in any case, and would certainly be so and be all the more necessary at the conclusion of a lengthy and difficult fast of this sort. And Jesus could indeed have called upon His deity to do what the devil suggested. We know from our Lord's words and actions here, however, that to do so would have been wrong. For He was clearly not authorized to use His deity to aid His humanity even under these abnormally stressful and trying circumstances. In all such instances, our Lord endured far beyond the point where you or I would no doubt have given in. And He did so because "man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). In other words, God the Father's will was paramount to our Lord, and He never violated the restrictions which He was charged to observe. Throughout His earthly life, He suffered in the same way in which we must do – save of course for the fact that what He endured and suffered even before the gauntlet that led up to the cross is beyond our ken, even without figuring in the strain of knowing He was God and yet refraining from making use of His divinity. A second incident illustrative of the boundaries imposed by kenosis is found in Luke 4:16-30, the story of His rejection at the hands of his countrymen in Nazareth. After our Lord upbraided them for their unbelief (Luke 4:23-27), they became enraged and dragged Him off to the cliff upon which the town was built in order to throw Him down to His death (Luke 4:29). But Jesus "passed through the midst of them and went His way" (Luke 4:30). This certainly implies the use of supernatural power, and the distinction between this situation and that of Matthew chapter four could not be more clear. In the first instance, Jesus would have been making His own lot easier when it was not absolutely necessary. But in this case, had our Lord allowed the crowd to throw Him down the cliff, the prophecies of the manner of the Messiah's death would be negated – as would our eternal salvation.

We see then this basic principle at work throughout the first advent, namely, of our Lord using the power and gifts given to Him only in accordance with the Father's will in order to advance the Father's plan of salvation (for example, all of His miracles, healing, and raising of the dead in fulfillment of the scriptures), but refraining from the use of His divinity in any way whatsoever when it came to the possibility of relieving His own inconvenience, need, fatigue, toil or suffering – all the

way to and through the ultimate suffering of the crucifixion and His death in the darkness on the cross for us all. Thus our Lord is permitted to turn water into wine for the benefit of others and a sign to His disciples, but not to turn stones into bread for His own benefit. He may walk on the water as a sign to others and in the furtherance of the Father's plan (delayed by necessary work and prayer, and now catching up to the disciples), but He still walks. He can overturn the incredibly heavy tables in the temple with superhuman strength to fulfill the prophecies, but He offers no defense whatsoever to those who come to arrest Him in Gethsemane. He can disappear through crowds to maintain His life to be sacrificed at the proper time, but He does not seek to avoid the cross.

3) Kenosis and the cross: Our Lord Jesus Christ "came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15), and this overarching purpose of saving us by His death for us on the cross constituted the single most important act of His human free will in response to the Father's divine will.

Therefore as [Jesus Christ] was coming into the world (i. e., at His birth) He said, "You [Father] did not desire sacrifice or offering, but you have prepared a body for Me. In burnt offering and sin offerings You took no pleasure". At that time (i. e., His birth) He [Jesus Christ in His deity] said, "Behold, I have arrived (i. e., been born) – in the scroll of a book it is written of Me – to do your will, O God". Above when He speaks of, "sacrifices and offerings" and [says] "burnt offering and sin offerings You did not desire" – which are things offered through the Law's prescription – then He has stated, "Behold, I have arrived to do your will". He removes the first [covenant] in order to establish the second. It is by this [free] will [act of Jesus in dying for our sins] that we have been sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once and for all. Hebrews 10:5-10.

While every single decision our Lord made from His humanity during His first advent was perfectly responsive to God the Father, without His willingness to go to the cross and die for our sins in our place we would still be lost. The difficulty of this decision and the incredible load it placed upon our Lord may be seen from two sayings of Jesus, both uttered and both recorded for our benefit rather than for His (a fact often poorly understood even in orthodox Christian circles). These are 1) His prayer in the garden of Gethsemane on the night He was betrayed, and 2) His quotation of Psalms 22:1 just before He breathed out His Spirit. In Gethsemane, Jesus prays that the "cup of the cross" might be taken away "if it be Thy will" (Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:35-36; Luke 22:41-42; John 12:27). Now our Lord knew very well what the Father's will was, that it was in fact "for this very hour and purpose" that He came into to the world at all (John 12:27 cf. John 3:16). Therefore this prayer, far from being an indication of any doubt or second thoughts on our Lord's part, was prayed and recorded entirely for our benefit, that we might understand on at least some superficial level what an immense thing it was to anticipate and then follow through on the Father's will to die for the sins of the world on the cross.

Secondly, when He had accomplished our eternal redemption through His blood, that is, through the bearing of our sins in the darkness on the cross, our Lord said, "My God, My God, why did you forsake Me?" (Psalms 22:1). This is also most definitely not a statement of confusion or discouragement – far from it! Our Lord quoted Psalms 22:1 just before He gave up His human spirit for our benefit, in order that we might know that He of His own free will in His humanity had voluntarily given Himself over to be forsaken and to be judged in the darkness for our sins in order that we might have eternal life. For our Lord knew very well why it was that He had to be forsaken

and judged by His loving Father: in order that we might have eternal life.

Therefore these two statements of our Lord immediately before and after His suffering for our sins, though often misunderstood, are in reality clear and deliberate proclamations of the fact that Jesus did what He did entirely of His own genuinely human free will in perfect responsiveness to the will of His Father and ours in order that we might be saved through His righteous act of sacrificing Himself on our behalf. From this we can see that our Lord's human free will was precisely the same as ours – except that He used it perfectly and in perfect response to His Father's will. In terms of our subject of kenosis here, then, we may say that in His humanity Jesus' will was completely consistent with the will of His divine nature and with the Father's will, but that in His humanity He had to make these perfect decisions at every step along the way throughout His perfect life. This completely correct decision-making on the part of His humanity is often termed "impeccability" (lit., "an inability to sin"). However, that particular term suffers from two flaws: 1) emphasizing the negative (i. e., not sinning) rather than the much more important positive (i. e., the necessity to keep doing all that was required, moment by moment, day by day, no matter how difficult – and in light of the difficulty of going to the cross, this makes the avoidance of sin pale by comparison), and 2) the false implication that our Lord was unable to make bad decisions had He chosen to do so: while it is certainly true that our Lord's success was never in doubt because of who He is, it is nevertheless a mistake to suggest that His human free will was different from ours in any way, or that His perfect record of good decisions from that human free will was not difficult in the extreme. Indeed, it is precisely because His humanity was genuine in every way that His suffering was likewise entirely genuine, and it is precisely because He was tested and tempted just as we are that He can sympathize with us perfectly as someone who has actually gone through the very crucible we are now negotiating (yet without sin, and to a degree beyond what we can even imagine, culminating in the cross):

He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even [His] death on [the] cross [for us all]. Php 2:8. For in subordinating the world to him, He left nothing that was not subordinate to him. However, we do not now yet see the world in subordination to him. But now we do see Jesus crowned with glory and honor on account of the death He suffered, even Him who became "a little lower than the angels" for a brief span so that by the grace of God He might taste death on behalf of us all. For it was fitting for [the Father] to make complete through sufferings Him on whose account all things exist and through whom all things exist, namely, the Captain of their salvation, even Him who has led many sons to glory, [our Lord Jesus Christ]. Hebrews 2:8-10. For we do not have a high-priest who is unable to identify with our weaknesses, but One who was tested in every way in a similar fashion [to us] – [but] without sin. Hebrews 4:15. f. The Incarnation and Virgin Birth:

1) The nature of the incarnation: Our Lord's taking upon Himself of true humanity and thus becoming a genuine human being as well as undiminished deity is often called "the incarnation", a word based upon the Latin *caro / carnis* meaning "flesh" (because Jesus came into the world "in the flesh"). As we have already pointed out, our Lord's irreversible wedding of Himself to our kind in this way, God that He is, was in and of itself a stupendous event, especially when one considers what that event necessarily entailed, namely, His fulfilling of His mission and the Father's will by dying for our sins. From the point of the incarnation onward, Jesus is both God and Man, the unique God-Man, undiminished deity and true humanity in One perfect Person forever. Scripture

calls this time the “conjunction of the Ages” (Hebrews 9:26; cf. Romans 5:6; Galatians 4:4; 1 Timothy 2:6; Titus 1:3; Hebrews 1:1-2; 1 Peter 1:20), and so it is, for Jesus’ physical birth marks the postponement of the Jewish Age (cf. Matthew 11:12; Mark 1:15; Luke 12:49 ff.), while His death, resurrection and ascension to heaven signal the imminent commencement of the Church Age (Acts 1:4-5; cf. Matthew 27:51; Mark 7:27; John 2:4; John 7:8; Hebrews 9:10).

2) The conception of Jesus’ physical body and the fact of the virgin birth: Both Jesus’ conception and His birth were absolutely unique in the history of the world. While Adam and Eve were made directly by God, Jesus is the only human being who has or will ever be conceived by the agency of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. Both of these facets of our Lord’s incarnation need to be considered in their own right, and it is significant that the first prophecy to address the issue directly mentions both aspects of our Lord’s entrance into the world as a true human being:

Therefore the Lord will Himself give you a sign. Behold, the virgin will conceive and will give birth to a Son, and you shall call His Name “Immanuel” (i. e., “God is with us”). Isaiah 7:14.

“Behold, the virgin will conceive and will bear a Son, and they will call His Name ‘Immanuel’, which is translated ‘God is with us’”. Matthew 1:23.

Without divine agency, virgin conception is, of course, an impossibility. Mary was therefore not rebuked for her questioning of the angel on this point (Luke 1:34), whereas Zechariah was (since in his case, the miracle was not only precedented but also fell within normal human parameters: compare Luke 1:18-20 with Genesis 18:10-14). Unlike any other human being before or since, the engendering of our Lord’s human body came about not through the agency of any created thing, not through any man or any angel, but through the Creator Himself, specifically, the Holy Spirit.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ happened in this way. While His mother, Mary, was engaged to Joseph, [and] before the two of them had come together [as man and wife], she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. Matthew 1:18.

“Joseph, son of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For that which has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit”. Matthew 1:20 b

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. For this very reason that which is going to be born [of you] will be called holy, [the] Son of God”. Luke 1:35. As can be adduced from all three of these quotes, while the conception of our Lord’s human body was supernatural, as in the case of all human beings it is His birth rather than His conception which marks the beginning of His human life, the beginning, in His unique case, of the incarnation. And the Word became flesh and tented among us. And we beheld His glory, a glory like that of a one and only Son from [the] Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14.

(6) For a child is born to us, and a Son is given to us. Isaiah 9:6 a For You are the One who cut Me out of the womb. You are the One who made Me trust in You on my mother’s breasts. I was cast upon (i. e., made to rely upon) You from the womb (i. e., immediately after birth). [Since the moment I came] from out of the womb You have been my God. Psalms 22:9-10.

Therefore as [Jesus Christ] was coming into the world (i. e., at His birth) He said, “You [Father] did not desire sacrifice or offering, but you have prepared a body for Me”. Hebrews 10:5. At that time (i. e., His birth) He [Jesus Christ in His deity] said, “Behold, I have arrived (i. e., been born) – in the

scroll of a book it is written of Me – to do your will, O God”. Hebrews 10:7.

You have taken no pleasure in sacrifices and offerings, [but instead] You have pierced My ears (i. e., “given Me a body and marked Me as a voluntary Servant”; cf. Exodus 21:5-6; Deuteronomy 15:16-17). You have not asked for burnt offerings or sin offerings. [But] then I said, behold, I have come [into the world (i. e., as the true sacrifice)]. In the scroll of the Book it has been written about Me. It is My good pleasure to do what pleases You, My God. For your Law is in My inmost parts. Psalms 40:6-8 (cf. Hebrews 10:5-10)

3) The Necessity for the Virgin Birth: In addition to the need for fulfilling the prophecies discussed above, it no doubt goes without saying that the virgin conception described in quotations above (Luke 1:35 in particular) along with the virgin birth that followed was also the only way for God to become man, for our eternal Lord Jesus Christ to take on a genuine human body and share in the flesh and blood we all possess. Since His coming into the world was absolutely necessary for us to be saved, this is certainly the primary reason that necessitated His conception and birth take place in this miraculous way. But there is a secondary reason as well, which, if not as primarily critical, would in and of itself likewise necessitate Jesus being virgin born: only a pure and sinless Jesus Christ would be qualified to bear our sins and so atone for them on the cross (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22-24; Hebrews 2:14-18; Hebrews 4:15; Hebrews 7:26; 1 John 3:5 cf. Isaiah 53:9). Without a human father (Hebrews 1:1-14, Hebrews 2:1-18; cf. John 19:34-35; 1 John 5:6-8), the potential problem of the passing down of the sin nature through the line of Adam could be and was thus avoided. Indeed, since the sin nature is universally passed down from Adam through the male line, a virgin birth was the only way in which our Lord could be at the same time truly and completely human, and yet be born without a sin nature. For Jesus’ mother, Mary, an exceptional woman of exceptional spirituality, was nevertheless human and thus possessed a sin nature as we all do. It was Adam who “brought sin into the world” by sinning in cognizance. Even though Eve too had sinned, she did so in ignorance. Since it was Adam who thus caused “death to spread to all mankind”, not Eve, the sin nature is passed down through the male line, not the female line: So just as through one man sin came into the world and, through sin, death, and thus (i. e., Adam physically passing on his sin nature resulting in universal spiritual death) death spread to all mankind – for [obviously] everyone sins, . . .Romans 5:12.

Thus, by being Virgin-born, Jesus did not receive the transmission of a sin nature in the manner of the rest of Adam’s progeny.

4) The birth of Christ: a) The birth of Christ Prophesied: We have already seen (in section I. 5.d. 1 above) that the historical birth of Christ was prophesied extensively in the Old Testament.

Therefore the Lord will Himself give you a sign. Behold, the virgin will conceive and will give birth to a Son, and you shall call His Name “Immanuel” (i. e., “God is with us”). Isaiah 7:14 (Matthew 1:23) b) The date of the birth of Christ: To begin with, we know from Luke 3:1 that John began baptizing “during the fifteenth imperial year of Tiberius” (i. e., from August 19th of A. D. 28 to August 18th of A. D. 29). Since Luke states that Jesus was “about thirty” at the commencement of His public ministry (Luke 3:23), an event that post-dates the time when John began baptizing, there can be little doubt that the birth of Christ is to be fixed ca. 1-2 B. C. To place Christ’s birthday any earlier would make Him “twenty-something”, not “about thirty”. Moreover, this phrase is best taken (and arguably can only be properly taken, especially given Luke’s penchant for precision: cf.

the precise dating of John's ministry at Luke 3:23) to mean that while Christ had not yet reached His thirtieth birthday, He was very close to doing so, that is, He was 29 and set to turn thirty that same calendar year. If we accept December as Christ's birth-month, therefore, He will then have been born in 2 B. C. (only one year earlier than supposed by the Christo-centric calendar we now use, established by Dionysius Exiguus ca. 525 A. D. at the behest of Pope John I). It is impossible within the scope of this study to detail all of the chronological details and arguments connected with Christ's birth, but the 2 B. C. date, in addition to being based on the only two clear chronological references in the gospel (i. e., Luke 3:1 and Luke 3:23), is also recommended by three other important factors. First, it allows for a three year ministry of Christ (as required by the chronological details of John's gospel). Secondly, it allows for a crucifixion date of 33 A. D., by far the most likely date when independently derived. And, thirdly, it squares most precisely with the universal census mentioned by Luke (Luke 2:1-3). As to the census, the first two points that need to be clarified here are that the universal census described in Luke 2:1-3 is not the census of Quirinius, and, secondly, that Luke does not in fact equate the two. That Quirinius, Roman governor of Syria from ca. AD. 6 to 11, held a census in A. D. 6-7 is well established (cf. Josephus, B. J. 2.118; 2.433; 7.253; A. J. 18.4-10; 18.23-25; 20.102). It is therefore unfortunate that English versions of the Bible inevitably mis-translate Luke's Greek to make these two separate censuses appear to be one and the same. Properly translated, Luke 2:2 states that "this was a census which occurred prior to Quirinius' governorship of Syria".

It was important for Luke to point out the distinction between the census that took place at Christ's birth and the one held later by Quirinius. For, being seven years more recent and also more notable on account of the armed resistance it engendered, Quirinius' census would have been easily confused by his readers with the earlier one he describes at Luke 2:2 (a confusion which, ironically, modern interpreters have almost universally failed to avoid in any case). The Roman Empire was a triumph of bureaucratic organization as well as military might. Not surprisingly, accurate census data (especially as it related to taxation) was essential for its administrative and financial operation. In his *res gestae*, the synopsis of his most prestigious accomplishments, Augustus devotes considerable space to his work in census matters (CIL v. 3, in loc., para. 8). Secular historians have been (unreasonably, in my view) skeptical about extrapolating a regular, empire-wide census from Augustus' remarks cited above. Indeed, Augustus' census of Roman citizens in 9/8 B. C. is paralleled by evidence for a census taking place in the Roman province of Egypt at the same time. This Egyptian census cycle is known to us primarily from papyrological records, and that fact is significant, for papyrus has generally only survived from antiquity in places with extremely arid climates (i. e., conditions which did not obtain in most of the rest of the Empire). Mundane records such as official census returns are not likely candidates for preservation in climates where heroic efforts were historically necessary to safeguard important literary texts. In other words, there is much we simply will never know, because the documentation has not survived. But when we add to the 9/8 B. C. and 6/7 A. D. censuses the further fact of a 13/14 A. D. census under Augustus and Tiberius, the pattern of a seven year cycle emerges, and 2/1 B. C. is the only gap within this otherwise repetitive cycle. Rather than a slap-dash approach, it seems more in keeping with his penchant for careful organization that Augustus would have begun the systematic application of Roman census procedures (cited in his *res gestae* above) not just to certain provinces, but to all territories under Roman sway, exactly as the biblical record indicates: And it came about in those days that a decree went out from Augustus Caesar to conduct a

census of the entire civilized world (i. e., the whole Roman empire). Luke 2:1.

One of the characteristics of Roman provincial census procedures which seems to be indicated by our admittedly incomplete data on the topic is that results are recorded for the year preceding the year of recording. The census process thus covered roughly two calendar years, with the first year being the year of record and the second the year of recording. But unlike in the U. S. today where we file income tax by April the 15th of the year following the year being officially recorded, under the Roman system the census was a “snapshot” of assessable wealth and legal status, taken (and officially registered) during the first year, thus giving the imperial administration a further year to verify, validate, correct if necessary, and record the information submitted by all residents of the province in question. That, at least, is what the surviving evidence strongly suggests. And coupling this last fact with the likelihood that Joseph and Mary journeyed to Bethlehem to fulfill the legal requirements of the universal census of 2/1 B. C., we would come again to the proposition stated above that Christ was born in 2 B. C., the year of registration (as opposed to 1 B. C., the year of official recording).

c) The place of the birth of Christ: Our Lord’s nativity in Bethlehem fulfilled the prophecies about the coming Son of David, offering tangible proof of His Messiahship from the instant of His unique birth (cf. Isaiah 9:1-2; Matthew 2:23; Matthew 4:14-16): But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, too small to be numbered among the clans of Judah, from you I will bring forth the One who is to rule over Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, even from the days of eternity. Micah 5:2. Being born in Bethlehem also has to do with the important issue of demonstrating and validating our Lord’s inheritance and claim to the throne as the greater Son of David who was prophesied to come and “rule over Israel” (cf. the importance of our sharing in an eternal inheritance through Him: Romans 8:17; Galatians 3:29; Ephesians 1:11-18; Ephesians 3:6; Colossians 1:12; Colossians 3:24; Titus 3:7; Hebrews 6:17; Hebrews 9:15; Hebrews 11:9; 1 Peter 1:4; 1 Peter 3:7; James 5:2; Revelation 21:7). Bethlehem is of course David’s city, and our Lord’s physical line (through Mary) and legal line (through Joseph) both go back to David and were both therefore intimately connected with Bethlehem as the geographic focus of the earthly inheritance of David’s progeny. Being born in Bethlehem was thus a prerequisite for anyone claiming a share in the Davidic line, especially for anyone who claimed to be the Messiah (cf. Matthew 2:5; John 7:42). Additionally, the name Bethlehem means “house of bread”, and this fact is certainly also meant to be prophetically significant since Jesus, the true Messiah, is “the Bread of Life” through the partaking of whom by faith we have eternal life (cf. John 6:32-58). As we have already seen, the genealogies in Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38 serve slightly different purposes, with Matthew’s genealogy giving Jesus’ legal line (through His “step-father”, Joseph), and Luke giving Jesus’ blood line (traced from Mary all the way back to Adam in order to demonstrate beyond any question Jesus’ true humanity). Both lines go back to David through the royal family of Israel, making both Mary (Jesus’ blood line) and Joseph (Jesus’ line of inheritance) regal in every respect. This also means that Mary and Joseph were distantly related, though not nearly so closely as to provide any grounds for objection. This detail was in fact something that recommended the match since it kept any inheritance within the clan (a not uncommon thing in arranged marriages before and since). Moreover, since they were each of the line and lineage of David, both Mary and Joseph would have had their “official inheritance” in Bethlehem and its environs, a fact important both for Jewish genealogical recording (especially in the royal and priestly lines, cf. Ezra 2:62), and also for Roman administrative purposes. As discussed above, Rome carried out a regular sequence of the census in the provinces (every seven years – the one

at Jesus' birth being the first "world-wide" one, though they had been held in some provinces before this), and in each such case there was first a "year of enrollment" wherein each individual had to register his/her property in his/her official place of residence. This, of course, was a much more crucial thing in that day and age than it is today, for citizenship and civil rights were tied to localities for non-Roman citizens (so that this would be analogous today to U. S. citizens having to return to their original home states every so often to maintain their rights and pay their taxes). Although we do not know anything specific about Mary's immediate family, it is well to note that the Law required women who were heirs to the ancestral inheritance in their own right for want of male siblings to marry within their tribe and within their immediate clan (Numbers 36:6-9). So it may very well be that Mary as well as Joseph were each heirs to their own ancestral inheritances, giving our Lord in this instance (as well as other; cf. section I. 3.a above) a "double portion" symbolic of His unique humanity. Furthermore, if Mary no less than Joseph had reason to register for the census in Bethlehem, it would explain why Joseph felt it necessary to take her along, even though her pregnancy was by that time very far advanced. In any case, all of these events worked together to bring about our Lord's birth in Bethlehem, the city of David, according to the prophecies. d) The timing of the birth of Christ: Scripture is clear that Christ's coming into the world occurred at exactly the right time, the precise time, in fact, that God had ordained since before the world began. Indeed, God has constructed history's true timetable entirely around Jesus Christ who is the pivot of God's plan and the central Person of history when correctly understood from the divine point of view.

[Jesus, whose coming was] foreordained before the creation of the world, but who appeared [in the flesh] at the end of times because of us (i. e., for our salvation). 1 Peter 1:20.

God, from antiquity having communicated to our fathers in the prophets at many times and in many ways, has in these last days communicated to us in a Son, [the One] whom He has appointed heir of all things, [the One] through whom He created the universe. Hebrews 1:1-2.

1. Jesus came when "the right time was at hand": Mark 1:15.

2. Jesus came at the "proper time": Romans 5:6.

3. Jesus came in the "fullness of time": Galatians 4:4.

4. Jesus came when "the times had reached their fulfillment": Ephesians 1:10.

5. Jesus came at the very "conjunction of the ages": Hebrews 9:26. e) The events surrounding the birth of Christ: The coming of the Messiah did not occur with the fanfare with which His arrival was expected by the religious community of that day. Instead of being announced to the reputed leaders of Judaism, Jesus' coming was announced to shepherds at night, as light shining out of darkness (Isaiah 9:1-7; Luke 1:78-79), and good news being preached to the lowly (Isaiah 61:1; Luke 1:52). Instead of being revealed to His countrymen, His coming was made known to foreigners, believers who followed God's word instead of the traditions of mere men (Matthew 15:9; Mark 7:7), and who used the things of this world to worship the Savior rather than worshiping the things of this world (Matthew 23:1-36). And instead of coming in resplendent glory, Jesus came as a true, as yet unglorified human being through physical birth (Hebrews 2:14-17; Hebrews 4:14-16), coming into this world in order to die for us (Hebrews 10:5-10).

1. The proclamation to the shepherds:

Now there were shepherds in that area who were camping out and keeping watches through the night to tend their flock. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone all around them [so that they] were very frightened. And the angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid. For, behold, I proclaim good news to you [of] a great [occasion for] joy which will belong to your entire people. Today there has been born for you a Savior. [Even He] who is Messiah (i. e., Christ), Lord – in the city of David. And this will be your sign [that the One you find is truly Him]: You will find a [newly] swaddled baby lying in a feeding trough”. And immediately there was with the angel a multitude of [the] heavenly army [of elect angels], [all] praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest [heavens]! And [also] on [the] earth [let there be] peace among men of [His] good pleasure (i. e., “men with whom He is well pleased = believers)”. And it came about as the angels left them for heaven that the shepherds were talking with each other. “Let’s go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us”. And they hurried and went, and they found Mary and Joseph, and the baby [who was] lying in a feeding trough. And when they saw [these things], they let [everyone] know about what had been told them concerning this child. And everyone who heard was amazed at what was told them by the shepherds. And Mary remembered these words of theirs, [and was] meditating on them in her heart. And the shepherds returned [to their flocks], glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen [which turned out] exactly like it had been told to them. Luke 2:8-20. In the manner of His famous ancestor king David whom God prepared to lead His people Israel through the experience of faithfulness in shepherding, Jesus is the Good Shepherd of the sheep (John 10:14), and our Lord uses this same analogy to show Peter and all “pastors” after him what is really important in leading the Church of Christ: feeding the flock and caring for their safety through the Word of God (John 21:15-19; cf. Luke 10:38-42). As is obvious from their positive response, these shepherds to whom the angels proclaimed the coming of the Messiah were clearly believers who were awaiting the “hope of Israel” (cf. Acts 28:20). Rather than being heralded in Jerusalem to the assembled multitude and rulers of the people, our Lord is announced instead to a group of men who would never enter the thoughts of the rulers, priests, Sadducees, Pharisees, and other powerful individuals of Judea. But these faithful believers prove obedient to the angelic proclamation, and do not take umbrage at the fact that the Messiah has been born as a lowly human baby in most inglorious circumstances (as the worldly “persons of repute” would most certainly have done, and in fact did throughout our Lord’s first advent).

2. The babe in the manger (Luke 2:4-20): In the place where Joseph and Mary stayed in Bethlehem, there was no crib in which to lay our newly born Lord. For this reason, they used a feed trough instead, that is, a movable wooden tray deep enough to hold animal feed, normally employed in a barn, but used here in place of a normal crib. This was the “sign” to the shepherds that the baby they found in Bethlehem was indeed the Messiah – not the fact that He was “swaddled”, that is, bound up in the wrap normally used to dress newborn infants in that day and age, but the fact that He, the Lord of the world, the One who created everything and who holds everything together by His powerful Word, was to be found lying in something so far from elegant that it was worthy of note and comment. This sign was a clear indication of the kenosis or humbling which coming into this world, becoming a true, unglorified human being, and taking on the form of a servant would entail for the Son of God. It was symbolic and representative of the human life He

would lead: not a life of privilege, luxury, and appreciation for who He was and what He was about to do for all mankind, but instead a life characterized by humility, by privation, and by experience of the most outrageous ingratitude.

Given the many popular misconceptions about this particular aspect of our Lord's birth, a few further words of explanation are in order here. The notion that Jesus was born in a barn and that this is where Joseph and Mary had to stay because "there were no rooms at the inn" is, while very popular today, entirely based upon a misunderstanding of what the original text means in Greek as the following translations demonstrate: And [Mary] gave birth to her Son, her first born, and she wrapped Him up, and she lay Him down in a feed-trough (Greek *phatne*, φάτηνη), because they did not have a[other suitable] place [to put Him] at the inn. Luke 2:7. And the [shepherds] hastened to come, and they found Mary and Joseph and the baby [Jesus] who (singular) was lying in the feed trough (i. e., the one explained in Luke 2:7 – this is the sign they were looking for). Luke 2:16. The Greek word translated "place" (*topos*, τόπος) may be only translated as "room" in the sense of "area" or "space" and does not have the meaning here of a "room" in a house (or inn) as, for example, the King James version seems to imply. Secondly, the word translated feed-trough above (Greek *phatne*, φάτηνη), refers to just that, a relatively small oblong wooden box used for feeding cattle, and it is highly doubtful whether it can ever mean anything else. The KJV actually allows for understanding the passage as translated above (i. e., in English, a "manger" may mean a feed-trough as well as an entire barn), but once extrapolated from a misunderstanding of the KJV's English, the "barn-manger" story has acquired an unfortunate cultural momentum of its own, unfortunate because the false focus on the "barn" and its putative menagerie of animals takes away from what we are supposed to concentrate on, namely, the fact that the sign of humiliation here belonged to and was meant to be focused upon our Lord alone – it did not extend to His parents or, still less, to the location. The feed-trough crib was a sign of His Messiahship, and a symbol of the life of humility and humiliation that He would endure on our behalf. It was, moreover, a sign and symbol of the momentous nature of the gift our heavenly Father was giving to the world by offering up His one and only Son on our behalf. The Lord of life, Maker and Sustainer of the universe, glorious God forever, was born to die. He came into this world in a dirty wooden box resembling a coffin and left it (before His resurrection) nailed to a rugged wooden cross, having died in our place that we might not die but instead have life eternal with Him.

3. Jesus' dedication and presentation in the temple (Luke 2:21-38): Our Lord was circumcised on the eighth day after His birth in keeping with the sign of the covenant given to Abraham (Luke 2:21; cf. Genesis 17:1-27; Leviticus 12:3; John 7:22; Acts 7:8; Galatians 3:17), and given the name Jesus in accord with the directions of the angel to Joseph and to Mary individually (cf. Matthew 1:21, Matthew 1:25; Luke 1:31). After the forty days of separation and purification mandated for women upon the birth of a first born son were completed (Luke 2:22, Luke 2:39; cf. Leviticus 12:1-4), the family made the short journey from Bethlehem to Jerusalem in order to present the required sin offering for Mary (Leviticus 12:6-8; cf. Leviticus 5:7, Leviticus 5:11), as well as to present Jesus in the temple in order to consecrate Him to the Lord (Luke 2:23; cf. Exodus 13:2; Numbers 3:13; Numbers 8:17), without doubt also paying the redemption price required of all first born males, "five shekels of silver" (Exodus 13:11-15; Exodus 34:20; Numbers 3:13, Numbers 3:44-48; Numbers 18:14-16). Joseph and Mary fulfilled all of these details carefully, and given this scrupulous approach, we can certainly conclude from the fact that the sin offering they provided for

Mary was the inexpensive alternative to a lamb, namely, “a pair of doves or two young pigeons” (Luke 2:23), that 1) they were not of people of great means, and 2) the Magi had not yet come and presented Jesus with their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. As it would turn out, these gifts would be very needful to support the family during their flight to Egypt.

Finally, the presentation of our Lord in the temple also provided an opportunity for two further witnesses to His Messiahship in the words of Simeon (Luke 2:29-32, also known as the *nunc dimittis*), who had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Christ (Luke 2:26; cf. Luke 2:30 : “my eyes have [now] seen Your salvation”), and in the words of the prophetess Anna, which, while not recorded verbatim, were directed to all those who were “looking forward to the redemption of Israel”, a feat that only the Messiah could accomplish (Luke 2:38).

4. The star and the Magi (Matthew 2:1-18):

Following our Lord’s presentation in the temple, Joseph and Mary, along with our Lord Jesus, returned to “their city” of Nazareth (Luke 2:39). Then, though we are not told specifically why, the family returned again to Bethlehem shortly thereafter. They may have received divine direction to do so, or they may have concluded on their own that the city of David, the ancestral town of both Mary and Joseph, was the proper place for the Messiah to be raised. In any case, the hypothesis that their brief return to Nazareth after Jesus’ presentation in the temple was for the purpose of closing down their household there and collecting up their possessions for the move has much to recommend it: in Matthew 2:11; the Magi find them in a “house” rather than in an “inn”, and we may glean from this that the family had secured what they may have hoped would be a permanent residence in Bethlehem after traveling south this second time (also implied by Joseph’s first inclination to take up residence in Judea rather than in Nazareth after the return from Egypt, a fact that suggests that he had intended to return to the new household already in place in Bethlehem). It was at this time that the Magi arrived, following the star which portended the birth of the Messiah, the Light of the world.

Because of the compassionate mercies of our God, through which the rising [Light] from on high will visit us, to shine upon those in darkness and dwelling in the shadow of death, to make straight [paths for] our feet in the way of peace. Luke 1:78-79 (cf. Isaiah 9:2; Malachi 4:2)

Jesus is the Light of the world (see section I. 4.b. 18 above). Throughout the Bible, light is a powerful metaphor, especially when contrasted with darkness. Light is good (Genesis 1:3); light is truth (John 3:21); light is life (John 1:4). Darkness is the absence of all these things, and it was into the darkness of this world that Jesus, the true Light, did come. Thus the star of light that heralds His birth, shining in the darkness, is a fitting symbol for our Lord’s first advent. He alone is life and light, clearly visible in the darkness around us, drawing all who are willing to come to His light.

I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, and shall take You by the hand, and guard You, and appoint You a covenant for the nations and a Light for the gentiles, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring forth the prisoner from the dungeon, and those who dwell in darkness from their place of captivity (i. e., physical and spiritual redemption). Isaiah 42:6-7. In Him was life, and this life was the light of men. And this light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not quenched it. John 1:4-5 (cf. John 8:12; John 12:46) For God who said, “Let light shine forth from the darkness!”, is He who has shone forth [His light] into our hearts to illuminate our knowledge of God’s glory in

the Person of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 4:6. The true Light which illuminates every human being was coming into the world. John 1:9.

Sadly, however, though He came to give light to the entire world, only a handful are willing to open their eyes and see the Light of truth. The star of Bethlehem was visible far and wide throughout Judea, yet it was left to a small number of foreigners to recognize it for what it was, the sign of the Messiah. Thus the star shining in the darkness and leading the way to the Messiah, to salvation through faith in the true Light of the world is an apt metaphor for the fact that although Jesus came to His own, His own were, by and large, not willing to receive Him.

He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him. John 1:11. This is the [basis for] judgment, that the light came into the world, and that men loved darkness rather than light. John 3:19. The Magi (a Persian word from which our “magic” is derived through Greek) are traditionally known as the “wise men”. That these gentiles were believers who were waiting for the kingdom of God is evident from their actions:

They come from a long distance on a difficult trip (Matthew 2:1-2).

God guides them on their journey (Matthew 2:1-2, Matthew 2:9-10; Matthew 2:12).

They bestow extremely expensive gifts on the Messiah (Matthew 2:11).

They “worship” Jesus when they find Him in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:2, Matthew 2:11).

They respond obediently to the dream given by God which warned them not to return to Herod (Matthew 2:12). The status of the wise men as believers may also be seen from the means by which they knew to come and had been motivated to come at all, namely, through the diligent searching of the scriptures:

[The wise men] were saying, “Where is the One who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him”. Matthew 2:2. For a Star will march forth from Jacob, and a [Ruler’s] scepter [will arise] from Israel. Numbers 24:17 b (Matthew 2:1-13; cf. Genesis 49:8-12; Deuteronomy 33:7; Luke 1:78; Revelation 12:5)

Given that in Matthew 2:1 the wise men are said to have come “from the east”, and given the fact that they know the scriptures and prophecies about the Messiah and respond to them so wholeheartedly and enthusiastically, it seems certain that these Magi are successors to the guild of wise men of whom Daniel was put in charge and over whom he unquestionably exerted considerable influence during his long tenure as their head (Daniel 2:48). At the time of Christ, moreover, Babylon, while no longer an important political capital, was still a center of such “higher learning”. While we would certainly not wish to accord all who claimed the title “Magician” at that time the truly blessed appellation of “believer”, this small group of gentile men, dedicated to the scriptures, were rewarded for their faith in the truth, and were used of God in this extraordinary way, being privileged not only to experience the fulfillment of the prophecy they had long studied even to the extent of seeing the Messiah with their own eyes, but also to be allowed to contribute to God’s plan so significantly in the giving of the expensive gifts of “gold, myrrh, and frankincense”, with the gold representing Jesus’ deity (as is often the case in symbolism of the temple, gold being rare, precious, and glorious), the myrrh (a costly substance used in making incense and in the process of embalming) representing His humanity taken on in order to die for us, and the sweet

savor of the frankincense representing the acceptability of His sacrifice (cf. the “sweet savor” of the Levitical offerings representing Christ’s work: Ephesians 5:2; cf. Hebrews 1:3). These valuable treasures almost certainly funded the escape of our Lord and His family to Egypt and supported them while they were there. As to the star itself, it is wrong to think of this object as a “star” in the sense that modern astronomy defines stars, or even as an asteroid or a comet. The description of this luminous object’s behavior in Matthew makes it very clear that it is not to be identified with any such phenomenon and that we will search in vain for any secular evidence of its appearance, ancient or modern. This particular “star” has as its purpose not only the fulfillment of the prophecy in Numbers 24:17 (quoted above) heralding the advent of the Messiah, but also the directing of the Magi to Bethlehem. For this particular “star” actually guides the wise men to the place of Christ’s birth – indeed it directs them to the very house in which He and Mary and Joseph were staying (Matthew 2:9-10). The star appeared at Christ’s birth, fulfilled the prophecy, brought the Magi to Judea, and led them to Jesus – and then apparently disappeared, its purpose having been accomplished. This was entirely a supernatural event, foreordained and meticulously directed by God, not a predictable or otherwise recognizable astronomical event of the sort that can either be explained or rationalized by science. This was a miracle of the highest order.

5. The flight to Egypt and the second return to Nazareth:

Divine intervention in the form of another angelic warning (Matthew 2:13-15) prompted the family’s rapid departure from their new home in Bethlehem to seek refuge in a part of the empire not under Herod’s control, namely, Egypt (a Roman province at this time). The fact that Joseph who had received the dream obeyed that very night is ample evidence of his responsiveness to the Lord. Such rapidity of response would be difficult for most if not all of us, having just made several long, overland round trips under what were no doubt very difficult circumstances, with Mary pregnant on the first leg, a very young child in tow on the second, and loaded down with all of the household possessions they could carry on the third. Having just now settled in to a new home after all of that, it would certainly be understandable if Joseph had been tempted to delay a few days, at least to get organized for the trip and to make arrangements for his new home during his absence – but he fled with his family that very night in complete and humble obedience to the Lord. From this and from Joseph’s earlier considerate treatment of Mary we may glean that our Lord Jesus was given two exceptionally God-fearing and spiritually mature individuals to rear Him.

Herod’s command to destroy all of the male in Bethlehem who were “two years old and under” (Matthew 2:16) is a further indication that the visit of the Magi did not occur immediately after Jesus’ birth as the visit of the shepherds had. For it was certainly Herod’s understanding after his conversation with them that the initial appearance of the star had occurred at some time in the past, thus necessitating the murder of many young boys who were clearly not newborns. Wherever specifically in the east the Magi had come from, it is virtually certain that their journey and their preparations for it must have taken many months at least.

Following Herod’s death, Joseph was once again told in a dream by an angel of the Lord to return to “the land of Israel”. According to his by now familiar pattern of obedience, he did so, intending to take up residence now at last in the family’s new homestead in Bethlehem of Judea (Matthew 2:22). En route, however, he discovered that Herod’s son Archelaus was the new ruler in Judea (not at all a certainty before the fact as the popular expectation may well have been that the

Romans would dispense with the Herodian dynasty entirely after Herod's demise). As a result, Joseph apparently decided on his own that it would be more prudent to head for Nazareth instead, and this spiritually laudable decision was graciously confirmed for him by a third dream (Matthew 2:19-23), thus relieving him of any nagging feelings that abandoning the little they now had out of reach in Bethlehem might have been a mistake. Nazareth thus becomes the place where Jesus grows up (cf. John 2:1). And herein we also see the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah about light coming out of the darkness (i. e., the secular north country: Isaiah 9:1-2 – completed with the beginning and the end of Jesus' earthly ministry: cf. Matthew 4:14-16; Matthew 28:7), as well as the prophecy of Jesus being a "Nazarene" (Matthew 2:23). The people who were walking in darkness have seen a Great Light. [And for] those dwelling in a land of the shadow of death, a Light has shone upon them. Isaiah 9:2. g. Early Life and Preparation for Ministry: The only gospel that even deals with our Lord's life before the time when He was on the point of commencing His ministry at about age thirty is the gospel of Luke, and even here we have only the account of His Passover in Jerusalem at the age of twelve, framed with two general statements which characterize His formative years on the one hand and His years of further preparation on the other. This fact alone should impress upon us the burden our Lord took on for us. For though He is both God and man from the point of virgin birth, the Savior of the world, yet for thirty years He walked through this world in complete obscurity and anonymity, preparing for the ministry of ministries which would end in His sacrifice of Himself for the sins of that world. And the child grew up and was being strengthened [by being] filled up with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him. And His parents went every year to Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up according to the custom of the feast, but when they had completed their days [there] and as they were returning, Jesus, their young son, remained behind in Jerusalem, and His parents did not realize it. But since they assumed that He was in the traveling party, they went a day's journey before they began to search for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for Him. After three days, they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were amazed at His insight and His replies. And when His parents saw Him, they were astounded, and His mother said to Him, "Child, why have you treated us this way? Look, your father and I have been searching for you anxiously!" And He said to them, "Why were you looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's things?" And they did not understand this statement which He spoke to them. And He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them. And His mother was pondering all these things in her heart. And Jesus [continued to] make progress in His wisdom and His stature and in grace with God and with men. Luke 2:40-52. This passage, though rather short considering it contains by far the bulk of our information about our Lord's life until the commencement of His ministry at about age thirty, is very revealing. For one thing, we see immediately the load and the difficulty that our Lord had to bear just in terms of His normal family life. He was God and the Son of God, and His answer to His parents indicates that without any doubt He was fully aware of these facts. And yet, since in order to be qualified to be our sin-bearer He had to live an absolutely perfect life, free from the slightest tinge of sin (a feat truly beyond our comprehension which He did indeed accomplish), our Lord had to be the perfect son, even as He had to prepare to fulfill the obligations of the Son perfectly. This meant obeying His parents when they were right – and when they were wrong. As Jesus perfectly negotiated the mundane hours,

days, weeks, months and years until He came upon the scene to fulfill the ministry of ministries many years later, we can say without question that He never did wrong, either by omission or commission, and thus was never in the wrong. However, people being the imperfect creatures that they are, there must have been countless occasions whereupon He had to endure the faulty conclusions, impressions, and applications of others with whom He necessarily had to interact, and, until His majority, interact with in an obedient and submissive way – even on those numerous occasions where He was in the right and they were in the wrong. This would have been difficult enough for anyone to bear, but considering that He was aware of His status as the Son of God, and that He had to prepare with every spare moment and ounce of energy for what was to come, what for the rest of us would constitute mere “daily” life must have been for Him a gauntlet which intensified with every step forward. We often fail to appreciate the sacrifice that becoming a human being and enduring with perfect patience the years of waiting must have entailed for our Lord, even as He had to take maximum advantage of every opportunity to prepare for what would be the most incomparably difficult three and half year experience any human being would ever know culminating in the passion and the cross, especially since, being God, His existence before the incarnation was blessed to an infinite degree: For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. 2 Corinthians 8:9 NIV

Although our Lord’s parents, Mary His mother and Joseph His stepfather clearly did not entirely “get it” as this story shows, yet our Lord “got it” and yielded to them on this and without a doubt on many other occasions as well, maintaining perfect obedience in spite of ignorance, lack of appreciation, and downright opposition to His necessary course of spiritual growth (Luke 2:40). But before we are too hard on Mary and Joseph it is well to reflect that Jesus had the best possible parents, and we would be most unlikely to do as well. For we all say that we “know” that Jesus is our life, and say that we believe in the resurrection and eternal rewards as far more important than anything this earthly life has to offer, and yet we have a tendency to live life as if such were not the case. Mary and Joseph had seen the demonstrations of Jesus’ Messiahship at His virgin birth and had undoubtedly seen many other amazing things since, but even though on some level they believed (Luke 2:51; cf. Luke 2:19), it is safe to say that, like His future disciples, even daily contact with the One who had come into the world to save it was insufficient to melt through our human preoccupation with the world, given that Jesus’ refulgent deity was shielded from their view (cf. Mark 6:52; Mark 8:17). This too would be part of the daily challenge our Lord would have to face throughout His earthly life (cf. Matthew 17:17; Mark 9:19; Luke 9:41).

It is also of great significance that our Lord, whose understanding of the Word was clearly light-years ahead of the most exalted scholars in Jerusalem by the time He was only twelve years old, still had to undergo a further 18 years of preparation before beginning His ministry of ministries. Such was the importance of the task He faced, such the magnitude of the degree of preparation necessary to successfully negotiate the crucible ahead. As discussed above, scripture makes it very clear that in His humanity Jesus was not exempted from any of the normal trials, temptations, or obligations that confront us all (cf. Isaiah 52:13-15, Isaiah 53:1-12; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Php 2:5-8; Hebrews 2:5-18; Hebrews 4:15; Hebrews 5:7-10). Without question this means that in that aspect of human life which is indeed the most important (though the least appreciated as such by humanity in generally), namely, spiritual growth, spiritually maturity and the deep and in

His case perfect understanding of all the wisdom and counsel of God revealed to man was not offered up to our Lord on a silver platter. He had to learn truth and grow spiritually just as we do, only He actually did so in a perfect way and to a perfect degree. Spiritual growth is a process of seeking, learning, believing, and applying the truth of God's Word (in deliberate thinking, speaking, and active behavior), and it is a measure of just what it would take to emulate our Lord's accomplishment of becoming perfectly spiritually mature, having attained an absolutely complete and flawless understanding of the entire revealed truth of scripture, that it took Him nearly thirty years to do so (including the preparation necessary for His ministry, on which see below). For our Lord never involved Himself in any sinful waste of time. More to the point, He was thoroughly dedicated to the purpose for which He had come, for which He had been sent into the world, and love for the Father ruled His every thought and action. Accomplishment of the essential personal preparation of attaining complete spiritual maturity was thus for Him "job one", and a task moreover that had to be completed by just the right time. Our Lord Jesus Christ did not have a minute to lose or a moment to spare, and He set Himself to the task of growing up spiritually from His earliest days, having gained a measure of insight few of us could ever hope to achieve by the time He was only twelve years old. That some eighteen additional years of concentrated "graduate study" were required before He would commence the most sublime ministrations of God to man only goes to show how difficult in truth those final three and a half years were for Him (whether we fully appreciate that fact or not). So it is a fair and indeed an important question to ask, "just how did Jesus grow?", especially since it is clear that His level of spiritual maturity at age twelve surpassed that of most if not all believers who have ever lived. The principle of kenosis (see section I. 5.e above) means that He did not have any sort of "unfair advantage" but had to grow up spiritually in precisely the same way as we all do. What advantages He did have as the Son of God, devoid of a sin nature and empowered to an unlimited degree by the Spirit from the moment of His birth, and as a prophet in His own right, were more than balanced by the extraordinary satanic opposition He faced throughout His earthly life, and the incredible difficulty of the mission on which He had been sent for the salvation of us all. For it was His challenge not only to grow up spiritually in a perfect way while living a perfect and sinless life of complete dedication to the Father, but also to conduct the perfect pre-cross ministry, run the most horrific gauntlet of opposition to get to the cross, and then bear the sins of the world while hanging there in the darkness between heaven and earth.

It was prophesied about John the baptist, Jesus' herald, that he would be "filled with the Holy Spirit from out of his mother's womb" (i. e., from the moment of life at birth; Luke 1:15). And we may be sure that this was the case for the Messiah he heralded as well (Micah 3:8; cf. Matthew 3:11, Matthew 3:16; Matthew 4:1; Matthew 12:28, Matthew 12:31-32; Mark 1:8-12; Mark 3:29; Luke 3:16, Luke 3:22; Luke 4:1, Luke 4:14; Luke 4:18; Luke 11:13; Luke 12:10; John 1:32-33; John 7:39; John 14:26; John 15:26; John 16:15). And the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon Him (i. e., the Messiah), the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. Isaiah 11:2. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations." Matthew 12:17-18 NIV For the One God sent speaks the words of God. For the Father does not give [Him] the Spirit in a sparing way. He loves the Son and has given everything into His hand. John 3:34-35 (cf. John 6:63) And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a

Lamb standing [there, looking] as if He had been slain, with seven horns and seven eyes (which are the seven spirits of God sent out into the entire earth). Revelation 5:6. As we are told at John 7:39; the universal baptism of the Spirit was a gift from the Father to the victorious Son, and was thus not poured out upon all believers until after the cross, beginning on the day of the first post-cross Pentecost. But our Lord possessed the Spirit “without measure” (John 3:34), being filled from the moment of His birth – precisely as we believers all are now as well from the moment of our new birth (for the descent of the Spirit upon our Lord in visibly “bodily” fashion as a demonstration of His Messiahship see section I. 5.h. below). Thus our Lord’s astounding spiritual growth was not due to anything to which He had some unique or secret access. We too have the Spirit given in an unlimited way, for He now dwells in all of us as well (Romans 8:9; 2 Timothy 1:14), and as a result we possess the very “mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16; i. e., the indwelling of the Spirit illuminating the truth of scripture, all of which is accessible to us if we are willing to pursue it). The difference is that our Lord Jesus made perfect use of this wonderful Helper to learn and to grow and to live in precisely the way the Father desired, doing so perfectly at all times. For in Jesus Christ alone this unlimited portion of the Spirit met with perfect responsiveness. The passages in Luke commenting upon His childhood both make reference to the mechanics of the process of Jesus’ Spirit-empowered spiritual growth. Luke 2:40 tells us that He “grew and was strengthened by being filled up with wisdom”, demonstrating perspicuously the fundamental principle of spiritual growth: learning, believing, and applying the truth of the Word of God (true wisdom). Luke 2:52 further states that Jesus grew “in wisdom” and (consequently) in “grace/favor with God and men”, showing us the result of this consistent process of spiritual growth: God’s legitimate pleasure in those who respond to Him. For while God’s grace is astounding and truly unlimited, it is clear from this and other passages that it is possible to “grow” in that grace, to experience an increase in grace (James 4:6; 2 Peter 3:18; cf. Acts 6:8; Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 1 Corinthians 16:23; 2 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 9:8, 2 Corinthians 9:14; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Galatians 1:3; Galatians 5:4; Ephesians 1:2; Ephesians 4:7; Ephesians 6:24; Php 1:2; Php 4:23; Colossians 1:2; Colossians 4:18; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; 1 Timothy 1:2, 1 Timothy 1:14; 1 Timothy 6:21; 2 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 2:1; 2 Timothy 4:22; Titus 1:4; Titus 3:15; Philemon 1:3; Hebrews 4:16; Hebrews 12:15; Hebrews 13:25; 1 Peter 1:2; 1 Peter 5:5; 2 Peter 1:2; 2 John 1:3; Revelation 1:5; Revelation 22:21). And the means to the increase in God’s favor, God’s pleasure with us, is shown here by example on the part of the One who accomplished just such a “growth in grace” to a degree never to be matched before or since. It is important to note that God’s favor is not manifest in terms of overwhelming material prosperity in this instance (and if not in the case of the perfect response of His own Son, then we too would be wise not to look for God’s favor in purely material terms). But one important result seen here to flow from Jesus prodigious spiritual growth is that He also grew in grace concomitantly with men as well as with God: when we do what God wants us to do, we not only gain favor in His eyes, but He also gives us favor in the eyes of all with whom we have to do, even our enemies (Proverbs 16:7). Who has believed our report? And to whom has the Arm of the Lord (i. e., the Messiah) been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a suckling plant, like a root [springing up] from dry ground. Isaiah 53:1-2 a

Every plant sprung from seed must grow in the natural way, from small to large, and without passing any step of growth along on the road to maturation as it pushes up against the resistance of the soil towards the light, drawing strength and size from that light. Our Lord would later repeat

this image in the parable of the Sower wherein He told us how to grow, to provide good soil for our seed of faith, to grow apace, to rise above the weeds of this life, ever stretching outward and upward towards the light of the truth of the Word of God. And as the prophecy about Him in Isaiah above makes clear, He had already accomplished this very process Himself when He taught this lesson, and had done so to a perfect degree – in spite of the fact that in His case the earth was dry, an image which is meant to convey in a very vivid way the deprivation and the resistance with which the Messiah would have to cope even as He was accomplishing His historically exceptional course of spiritual growth. The Lord God has given Me a tongue of those who have been [fully] instructed [in the truth], that I may know the right words [of truth] to encourage (lit., “re-string” them like an unstrung bow) the weary. He arouses His Word [within Me]. [And] every morning He awakens Me. He awakens My ear[s] to listen like [the ears of] those who have been [fully] instructed [in the truth]. The Lord God has opened My ear[s], and I have not refused [instruction] (lit., “rebelled” against it). I have not turned away [nor gone] backward. Isaiah 50:4-5.

Herein we see the Messiah’s approach of complete dedication to the process of learning the Word of God. Jesus’ spiritual growth was an every day commitment, engaged in the very first thing in the morning every morning precisely because it was His top priority. If this was true of our Lord, should we not adopt a similar approach as best we can? And there is something else of importance to note in these verses as well. When it says that our Lord Jesus “did not refuse” and “did not turn back”, it should remind us that spiritual growth is often not an entirely easy process. Despite the fact that the Word of God is the sweetest thing on earth, it still takes discipline and fortitude to take it in consistently, and that is doubly so whenever our good application of consistency in this regard is challenged, whenever we are under pressures of various sorts that have a tendency to knock us off of our “game”, and especially whenever the Word touches a nerve, perhaps finding fault in an area where we have issues with our present or past behavior (whether of commission or of omission) or for whatever reason find some truth difficult to accept or to face. The Word of God challenges us all, reproves us all, refines us all like the flames of a crucible. Staying with it, continuing to “take the heat” day in and day out, not merely listening, but learning, believing, and applying what we know to be true, takes a deep level of dedication to God. Not only did our Lord never shrink or sink back (as is often the case with us where frequently we find ourselves taking three steps forward and two back), but He pressed forward each and every day regardless of circumstances, pressures, and opposition (often preferring His communion with the Father to His necessary sleep: cf. Matthew 26:36-46; Luke 6:12-13; Hebrews 5:7-9), and in so doing showed us the way toward the high upward calling of drawing closer to God, pleasing Him, and becoming fit to do what it is He has called us to do. When the time came to take up the most difficult ministry in the history of the world, our Lord Jesus was ready. We see in all of Jesus’ words in the gospels the truth of the statement quoted above that He knew “the right words [of truth] to encourage the weary”. And because of His dedicated pattern of growth, when the time came He was ready for the gauntlet that led to the cross and even for what came after: the bearing and expiation of the sins of all humanity, the pivot point of all history and the means of our eternal life. Nor should we imagine that Jesus’ spiritual growth was limited to this important daily regimen, for we know that He spent much additional time in prayer, fasting and scripture reading. And not only that, of all who have ever lived, we may be assured that our Lord perfected the technique of “walking with God” better than anyone else (Enoch, Genesis 5:22-23, included). This day by day, moment by moment “Sabbath” depended upon a deep and in Jesus’ case undoubtedly perfect knowledge of the

scriptures as they existed in His day (i. e., the entire Old Testament canon). We know, for example, that when He was tempted by Satan, He replied to all three of the devil's ploys with precise and precisely appropriate quotes from the book of Deuteronomy (cf. Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13).

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of mockers. But the teaching (Torah) of the Lord is his delight, and in His teaching (Torah) he meditates day and night. Psalms 1:1-2.

I have kept the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be moved. Psalms 16:8.

We cannot know all the details but His conduct in the synagogue suggests that He made maximum use of the availability of the scriptures in Nazareth (cf. Luke 4:16-20), and He must have been ever present and ever listening with intent concentration whenever the scriptures were read until He possessed them in His human heart forever. Further, we may expect that in His day to day conduct, Jesus' mind was never idle but that He kept His heart ever focused on the truths of the Word and the Word itself. Many passages of Old Testament scripture reflect the Messiah's experiences, and one in particular, Psalms 119:1-176, sets the tone for His course of spiritual growth as a young man (cf. Psalms 119:161 with John 15:25), for example . . . beth How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.

I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands.

I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Praise be to you, O Lord; teach me your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth.

I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.

I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways.

I delight in your decrees;

I will not neglect your word. heth You are my portion, O Lord;

I have promised to obey your words.

I have sought your face with all my heart; be gracious to me according to your promise.

I have considered my ways and have turned my steps to your statutes.

I will hasten and not delay to obey your commands.

Though the wicked bind me with ropes, I will not forget your law. At midnight I rise to give you thanks for your righteous laws.

I am a friend to all who fear you, to all who follow your precepts. The earth is filled with your love, O Lord; teach me your decrees.

Psalms 119:9-16 & Psalms 119:57-64 (beth and heth stanzas) NIV As a result of this complete dedication and unswervingly righteous approach, though He had no extensive formal education, Jesus Christ was better versed in the Bible by the time He began His earthly ministry than anyone else who had ever lived, in fact, He was perfectly versed in it. This confounded His adversaries who were at a loss to explain His complete command of scripture which far exceeded their own, even in the case of the “professional” ministers and scholars (John 7:15 cf. Matthew 13:54-56; Mark 6:3). It also explains what it means when we are told that He taught “with authority” (Matthew 7:28-29; Mark 1:22-27; Luke 4:32-36). Possessing a perfect a knowledge and a perfect understanding of the Bible and what it really meant, and being taught by the Spirit, Jesus, a prophet in His own right, the Prophet in fact (Deuteronomy 18:15 with John 1:25; Acts 3:22-23), could say without hesitation or doubt or reflection that everything He taught was truly from God.

“My teaching is not My own, but belongs to Him who sent Me.” John 7:16.

Although truly God and in full knowledge of that salient fact (John 5:18; John 14:9; John 17:5), our Lord, who had humbled Himself to take on true humanity, also humbled Himself continually during His years of preparation, learning truth as we all must, through observation of the world (cf. John 2:25 for our Lord’s perspicacity regarding human nature), diligent study of the scriptures, humble attention to direct prophetic revelation, and a dedicated approach of applying the truth He had learned and believed in a systematic way. If we wish to draw closer to God, we cannot ask for a better example than our Lord of the best way, indeed, the only way to proceed.

You adulterously unfaithful people! Don’t you know that friendship with the world means hostility toward God? Whoever wants to be a friend of the world establishes himself as an enemy of God. Or do you imagine that the scripture says (i. e., paraphrasing Galatians 5:16-21) to no purpose that the Spirit which dwells in us sets its desire against [this sort of selfish] envy (i. e., selfish ambition and jealousy of others through wrongful concentration on the world as the essential sin in context; cf. James 4:1-3). For He gives grace [which is] greater [than these things you desire]. That is why it says, “God opposes the arrogant, but gives grace to the humble”. Therefore subordinate yourselves to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Get closer to God, and He will get closer to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and sanctify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and grieve and mourn. Let your laughter turn to grief, and your joy to humiliation. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you. James 4:4-10. h. The Formal Inauguration of His Ministry:

1) The Baptism of John: But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” Luke 1:13-17 NIV The purpose of John’s ministry as seen very clearly from the passage above was to prepare the hearts of His countrymen for the Messiah’s imminent arrival (cf. Malachi 3:1; Luke 1:76-77). John is the King’s herald; Jesus is the King Himself. Without any question, therefore, the purpose for Jesus’ baptism was entirely different from that of the baptism

of those in Israel who chose to repent at John's proclamation of the Kingdom. They were sinners; Jesus is sinless. They were waiting for the King; Jesus is the King. They were helpless without Him; He was their help – and is ours today as well. Thus we can well understand John's reluctance to baptize Jesus (Matthew 3:14), while our Lord's response "Allow [this] now. For it is appropriate for us [to act] in this way in order to fulfill all righteousness" calls for some comment. As John correctly discerned, Jesus did not have to be baptized, for there was certainly no need for Him to indicate any repentance, since He was sinless. Jesus' baptism is unique and demonstrates His acceptance of the cross. For after others had gone down into the water to symbolically wash away their sins, our Lord went down into the same water to symbolically die for those sins, so that His baptism represents His satisfying of the Father's righteous requirements of salvation = "fulfilling all [God the Father's] righteousness" (i. e., His righteous requirements that had to be met in order for salvation to be made available to mankind, namely, the propitiation of all of our sins by the blood of Christ, His work on the cross in dying [spiritually] in our place). Jesus' coming up out of the water (a picture of His resurrection just as going under is a picture of His spiritual death on our behalf) is accompanied by the visible coming of the Holy Spirit as an indication both of the fact that He is the Messiah (and indwelt with the Spirit from birth as we have seen), but also as a picture of the gift of the Spirit which He would be given to give in turn to us after His glorification (John 7:39).

2) The Temptation in the Wilderness: Rather than preparation per se, our Lord's forty day trial in the wilderness was more to demonstrate that He was in fact completely prepared to take on the ministry of ministries which, after increasingly intense opposition in its own right, would lead through even more intense trials to the cross where Jesus would bear the sins of the world. Of this we can be sure: this was not the first time that Jesus Christ had been led to spend extensive time in fasting and prayer apart from other people. Isolation and fasting, while extremely difficult for most of us to endure except for very limited periods of time, do have the potential of opening a person up to God, His voice and His will – when they are done for the right motives. There are many, and the Pharisees constitute an excellent example (cf. Matthew 6:16-18; Luke 18:12), who engage in this sort of behavior totally apart from God and in order to appear pious rather than to seek God in truth. Our Lord, quite to the contrary, was led into the wilderness by God the Holy Spirit (Matthew 4:1; Mark 1:12; Luke 4:1), and we can be assured that while we know of this event after the fact (through the revelation by the same Spirit), none of His contemporaries had any idea that this particular trial was taking place (just as was the case in all of the no doubt extremely numerous trials He had undergone in His nearly thirty years of preparation), so that His motives were entirely pure: not the seeking of human admiration, but the willingness to respond to the Father even under the most trying and difficult circumstances. The forty days of this trial on our Lord's part are, moreover, deliberately parallel to the forty days spent by Moses (a biblical type of Christ) on Mt. Sinai during his receiving of the Law. On Moses' receiving of the second set of tablets (on account of his breaking of the first set in response to the people's rebelliousness in worshiping the golden calf) he also is said to have fasted for forty days (Exodus 34:28; cf. Exodus 24:18; Deuteronomy 9:9). In Moses case, we are not told that he was hungry (as was the case with our Lord at the conclusion of this time: Matthew 4:2; Luke 4:2; cf. Matthew 4:11; Mark 1:13), and the context strongly suggests that Moses was supernaturally provided for during this special time of communion with the Lord. Thus while Moses does represent a foreshadowing of the Messiah's experience, the critical point of comparison is not the period of the fast. For Moses'

experience looks forward to the time when we shall have no need of food whatsoever in our eternal fellowship with Jesus, while our Lord's forty day fast demonstrates the exceptional degree to which He was prepared to suffer in order to carry out the Father's will. Rather, the true, critical point of comparison is between the commencement of Moses' ministry and that of Jesus' ministry, the latter of which would inaugurate a New Covenant through Jesus' suffering and dying for the sins of the world which would replace the Old Covenant mediated by Moses (which could only foreshadow this wonderful reality which was yet to come just as Moses as a type of Christ could only represent the Messiah, but the Messiah Himself, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, would have to come in the flesh in order for salvation to be provided in fact). These forty days of privation also serve to set the tone for the public ministry and further life of our Savior, for He would know nothing but ever increasing opposition and suffering from this point forward. Just as the "scapegoat" which was released into the wilderness symbolically bore the sins of the people (Leviticus 16:8-26), so our Lord Jesus would "suffer outside the camp", bearing the sins of the world (Hebrews 13:11-12), and this forty day period of genuine physical affliction (fasting and along with the extreme discomfort of exposure to the elements, insects, wild animals [cf. Mark 1:13], and the like without anything more than the clothes He wore) is symbolic of and indeed looks forward by way of anticipation to His act of supreme sacrifice, the bearing and expiating of the sins of the world in the darkness of those final three hours on the cross (not to mention the ostracism from traditional religious society that His ministry would entail). The three specific temptations attempted on our Lord by the devil have been covered in detail before in respect to Satan's overall methodology. What concerns us here is the meaning and significance of the devil's threefold attempt to throw our Lord off stride. What we should notice first of all is that after forty days of such intense privation, our Lord's responses were beyond all question reflective of His true inner heart. Some of us might put up a bold front in the face of such an intense and diabolical assault if well-rested, well-fed and otherwise under no particular pressure. It is another thing entirely to resist Satan's appeals when ill, or in danger, or in trouble, or in want (as Job's experience shows us very well, i. e., the case of a man as perfect and righteous as mortal man could be, yet eventually worn down by pressure of a similarly unique sort). In order to endure trials even approaching this extreme type, the Word of God has to be so deeply ingrained in a person's heart that instead of being a factor in the inner person it dominates the entire inner life. This was certainly the case for our Savior, who, when refined like gold in the crucible, merely reflected the exquisite quality of what was truly inside. It is also not to be overlooked that the specific form in which this shining forth of the perfection of His inner-self flawlessly developed from His youth came out as direct quotation of the scriptures, a fact which should remind us of the critical importance of the Bible in everything we do or aspire to do as Christians, followers of Jesus Christ: the Word of God is our spiritual life-blood just as it was for Him who is our Model in all things. As we have seen in the past (see the references in the previous note), the three temptations directed at our Lord by the devil, the temptation to put self-will over God's will (stones to bread), to reverse roles with God substituting our will for His (jump), and to put personal ambition over God's authority (kingdoms of the world), are all met by our Lord Jesus with Bible verses which expose the subtleties with which Satan has attempted to cloud the issue in each case. In regard to the first temptation, the context of our Lord's first response, Deuteronomy 8:3, "not by bread alone", is that of the testing of Israel by the Lord in the desert, who Himself had deliberately and for good reason "made them hungry", "to humble you and test you so as to know what was in your hearts, whether

or not you would obey His commands” (Deuteronomy 8:2). This privation was followed – after they failed the test – by the gracious and supernatural provision of manna. In regard to the second temptation, the context of our Lord’s second response, Deuteronomy 6:16, “don’t put the Lord your God to the test”, is the comparison which completes the verse “like you did at Massah” in the desert, the place where the people tested God by demanding of His spokesman, Moses, that they be provided water, and were on the point of stoning him, asking “Is the Lord among us or not” (Exodus 17:1-7). Thus the demand for water was a “testing of God”, reversing roles with Him. For it is He who tests us, not the other way around (cf. Psalms 91:1-16, quoted by the devil, where the true context is that of our Lord being our dwelling place; only then will “He give His angels charge” to protect us, i. e., when we are trusting Him rather than testing Him). In regard to the third temptation, the context of our Lord’s third response, Deuteronomy 6:13, “Him only shall you serve”, is that of the Lord being the One who brought the people out of slavery into the desert. He is not to be forgotten but remembered as the only One who can truly give us anything of value. He is the One who prospers us if we prosper at all (cf. 1 Samuel 2:7; Psalms 75:7). There is also a level on which all of these temptations were more severe in the case of our Lord than they could ever be for us. For, being God as well as a true man, Jesus really could turn stones into bread; He really would have been rescued by the angels were He to have jumped; and He really was entitled to the rulership of the entire world. But in all these things, through perfect understanding and flawless application of the truth of the Word of God, He who is the Living Word acquiesced to the Father’s authority, the Father’s will, and the Father’s glory in carrying out His plan for the 1 Advent in all things and in all ways and at all times. Thus these three temptations serve to show as well the categories of humility perfectly adhered to by our Lord throughout His time here on earth prior to the cross and His subsequent glorification.

Israel had spent 40 years wandering in the desert, one year for every day their scouts spent reconnoitering the promised land (Numbers 14:34). They failed the test of trusting in God in the wilderness (repeatedly), but our Lord Jesus Christ, though He must have been down to His very last reserves of strength after forty days of fasting in this hostile environment, demonstrated perspicuously what had been and would continue to be His pattern of behavior until the very end, namely, the complete degree to which He relied on the Father in all things, from His necessary needs, to the confidence of His faith, to the plan for His life. In each thing and in everything, He put the truth first, and there was not a sliver of daylight between His perfect understanding of that truth and His flawless execution of it. These forty days and the testing by Satan which followed demonstrated beyond any doubt that our Lord was more than ready to put the Father’s will in place of His own will during His ordeal in the desert of this world with all the forces of evil arrayed against Him, culminating in His death on the cross for all mankind. i. The Course of His Ministry: Short of a complete exegesis of the four gospels, it is impossible in this context to do more than give a short synopsis of the ministry of ministries undertaken and successfully completed by our Lord Jesus. What we can say here is that His teachings preserved in the gospels are consistent with, reflective of, and reflected by all of the truth found elsewhere in scripture whether in the Old Testament or in the New. Further, His miracles demonstrate His status and His authority as the Messiah, the Son of God. Lastly, His deeds over the course of His ministry reveal the love, the sacrifice, and the commitment of the One willing to be sent into this corrupt world in order to do the Father’s will for the good of us all, an incomparable task wherein He died to save us all from our sins. As to the (possibly disappointing) brevity of this section, on the one hand, the contents of the gospels are (or

should be) well-known to all Christians, while on the other hand many if not most of the incidents, parables, and discourses of our Lord require detailed exegesis in their own right (so that a brief consideration of them here would be of little value). We shall thus have to content ourselves with an overview of some of the major issues of Jesus' three and half year ministry before moving on to His "passion" (that is, the gauntlet He had to run to get to the cross), the crucifixion itself, and the events which followed.

1) Obstacles to Jesus' Ministry: Apart from the thirty years of struggle necessary to prepare for it and the forsaking of any sort of normal life (we should not underestimate, for example, the sacrifice of refraining from marriage and the hope of any physical progeny), our Lord's pre-cross ministry entailed the constant negotiation of a number of serious hurdles most of which are unique to His experience (certainly in intensity if not altogether in type). The list given here is not meant to be exhaustive – we can only hope to have a dim idea of what Jesus endured by coming into this world for us, living the perfect life, and ministering the perfect ministry (let alone what He went through before and most particularly on the cross as He bore our sins). a) Physical Obstacles: Traveling all over the territories of Galilee and Judea for three and a half years, all the while ministering intensely in the teaching of the Word and the demonstration of its power through healing and the performance of other miracles involved a level of physical effort and exertion, and of mental and emotional fatigue that cannot be easily comprehended merely by reading the gospels in the comfort of one's easy chair. No matter how much of the burden His disciples and supporters were willing or able to bear, of necessity the lion's share of that burden fell upon Jesus as the One doing the teaching, the healing, and the managing of the ministry on every important level. The loneliness and the pressure of command, the energy necessary to teach and minister, and the effort required to keep a careful eye on every facet of His ministry had to be wearing and wearying beyond what any other person in the history of the world was capable of enduring, and that is especially true when we add the caveat that Jesus did it all perfectly at every point, on every occasion, day after day, year after year, without the slightest slip or oversight or mistake in planning, teaching or general execution. And at the same time, of course, our Lord had to prepare constantly during every spare moment for the concentrated teaching that was the hallmark of His ministry. Thus, however difficult His early life of preparation, Jesus' public ministry involved an exponential increase in the level of difficulty. We catch a glimpse of the stress and strain it entailed both physically and emotionally as Jesus calls those years "My trials" (Luke 22:28), a characterization which does much to explain the tremendous demands made upon Him during that time, especially in terms of the [potentially and ultimately] violent opposition He constantly encountered from the hostile religious establishment (e. g., Matthew 12:14; Mark 3:6; Luke 6:11; John 5:18; John 7:1, John 7:19, John 7:30, John 7:32, John 7:44; John 10:39; John 11:53):

Since then we too [like the believers of Hebrews 11:1-40] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and run with endurance the race set before us, turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despite, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Keep in mind all the terrible opposition He endured against Himself at the hands of sinful men, so as not to grow sick at heart and give up. Hebrews 12:1-3. b) Psychological Pressures: In addition to being divine, our Lord was (and is) a perfect human being – but He was even so a true human being

during all of His years here on earth, and that meant He had, in addition to a physical body that experienced fatigue, genuine human emotions that experienced the entire range of what we feel, albeit without sin. Our Lord learned early on how to control His feelings and how to interpret (in terms of the truth of the Word of God) the events which affected them. This does not mean, however, that He did not experience emotional pain, for He certainly did (and at times He expressed it righteously; e. g., Matthew 17:17; Luke 22:48; etc.). Therefore we should not in any way imagine that life was somehow unreal for our Lord, that He didn't know the pressures of the heart that full often bear down upon us much more heavily than any physical pressure ever could. Indeed, the emotional pressures with which He had to deal were not only more intense than the ones we have to confront; in many instances they were unique to Him. The pressure of dealing with severe disrespect although being the Son of God: Who has believed our report? And to whom has the Arm of the Lord (i. e., the Messiah) been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a suckling plant, like a root [springing up] from dry ground. He had no [particular] handsomeness that we should take note of Him, no [obvious] charisma that we should be taken with Him. [On the contrary,] He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with suffering. Like a person people hide their faces from, He was despised, and we did not hold Him of any account. Isaiah 53:1-3. The gospels of course are replete with examples of this pressure. Jesus, who might have punished His enemies severely on many occasions, consistently and perfectly bore up under the completely unwarranted disdain with which He constantly had to contend. Indeed, on one occasion when His disciples asked to bring about what they felt to be a just retaliation for an exceptional slight, He roundly rebuked them (Luke 9:51-55). Although fully recognizing His truly exalted status, Jesus walked through this world in complete humility, refusing to react to the opinions or expectations of others, and taking into account only what the Father thought (where we would be almost certain to react; compare Mark 15:5 with Psalms 39:1-3). In this our Lord showed us by example what it really means to "not be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of your thinking" (Romans 12:2). The pressure of coping with poor response to His ministry: On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. John 6:60-66 NIV

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, she who kills the prophets and stones those sent to her. How many times I wanted to gather your children together like a bird [gathers] her own chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" Luke 13:34. As can be seen from these and many other like passages, while our Lord expresses honest disapproval of all failure to accept the truth, He never allowed Himself to get overly or unreasonable frustrated with negative response (of which there was much; cf. Psalms 118:22; Isaiah 49:4), nor was He ever carried away by the superficial and transient positive responses His ministry often engendered (cf. Luke 11:27-28; John 6:15). For thousands would sing "Hosanna" in His Name, only to turn away very soon thereafter and demand His crucifixion (compare John 12:37 with Acts 1:15). Jesus knew well what was truly in man (John 2:25), and never allowed human responsiveness or lack thereof to affect His following of the

course His Father had laid out for Him. The anticipation of the cross: And having taken along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee (i. e., James and John), He began to be distressed and sorely troubled. Then He said to them, “My heart is filled with distress to the point of death.” Matthew 26:37-38 a (cf. Mark 14:33-34) This verse records the crushing anxiety bearing down on our Lord hours before His arrest and crucifixion, but the burden of anticipation of the cross – the bearing of the sins of the world in the darkness more than the trials and crucifixion itself – was one which He had to bear His entire life. And while we may not properly understand the pressure this coming crucible exerted upon Him daily (since after all we can only dimly appreciate what it took and what it entailed to be judged for sins of the world), the fact is that scripture records this aspect of our Lord’s first advent as significant (cf. Mark 10:38; Matthew 16:21; Luke 9:22, Luke 9:44; Luke 13:32-33; Luke 17:25; Luke 18:31-34; John 12:27).

I came to cast a fire upon the earth, and how I wish that it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo [first], and how I am pressed until it be completed! Luke 12:49-50 The challenge of self-restraint:

Then Jesus replied and said, “O you unbelieving and perverse generation! How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you?” Matthew 17:17. This passage is exceptional because it is one of the few places where our Lord gives vent to legitimate and righteous indignation. Yet, as in the case of His legitimate, necessary, and mild reproofs to His earthly mother (Luke 2:49; John 2:4 cf. Luke 11:27-28), this correct assessment of the situation is followed by gracious and miraculous intervention, true testimonies to the incredible patience of our Lord, who on innumerable occasions had ample reason to react adversely. Unlike the rest of us, however, our Lord’s testing in this area of self-restraint was indeed unique. For not only would the temptation to angry reaction and summary action in response be understandable in His case (since He was and is perfect, and as a result was always dealing with others being “in the wrong”), but also He was capable of commanding the powers of God to redress any injustice, slight, offense or attack that might come His way. This sort of behavior was not in the Fathers plan for the first advent (cf. Luke 9:51-55; the second will be quite another matter), but since Jesus had the power at His finger-tips, restraining Himself on this score moment by moment day by day throughout His entire earthly life was an accomplishment indeed (for which of us if invested with such power could refrain completely from self-vindication for even a single day?).

After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself. John 6:14-15 NIV

Akin to the need to show perfect self-restraint in regard to rendering judgment was the similar necessity not to be swept up in the popular enthusiasm which came His way as a result of His miracles. Even Herod desired to see Him because “he hoped to see him perform some miracle” (Luke 23:8). Rather than craving celebrity as the rest of the human race does almost without exception, our Lord eschewed it as the passage above shows, and went to great lengths to avoid it as far as He possibly could (Matthew 8:4; Matthew 9:30-31; Matthew 12:16; Matthew 14:13-14; Mark 1:43-45; Mark 3:20; Mark 8:26; Mark 9:30; Luke 4:42-44; Luke 5:15-16, Luke 5:19). For Jesus knew full well that the approbation of human beings is about as stable as the wind; He was looking not for human approval but to please His heavenly Father (e. g., Matthew 26:42; Luke

11:2; John 4:34; John 5:30; John 6:38).

Behold my Servant – I will support Him. My chosen One – my soul (i. e., heart) takes pleasure in Him. I have placed my Spirit upon Him. He will bring forth justice for the nations. He will not cry out nor will He lift up His voice in the street. Isaiah 42:1-2. c) Supernatural Assaults: Though little recorded outside of the temptation in the wilderness (treated above), and the devil's role in orchestrating Judas' betrayal (covered below), the intensity of demon opposition in the case of our Lord (and no doubt countervailing action by elect angels), must have been the most intense in world history. In short, our Lord Jesus met with stiff resistance in every good thing He did – and everything He did was good. When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

Luke 4:13 NIV

2) The Teaching Ministry of Jesus Christ: The first thing to note about the three and half year public ministry of our Lord is that Jesus was always teaching. His life was a perfect model to all who cared to notice then and still is for all who care to read about Him today. Everything He did and said, whether set in a formal teaching venue or not, was perfectly considered in order to communicate God's truth in a flawless fashion. a) Organization and Logistics: As hinted at above, our Lord probably prepared for this ministry on the home-front on the one hand by taking steps to ensure Mary's well-being, and on the other the family business was no doubt set on a stable footing sufficient for the following three and a half years. By way of contrast, our Lord's "organization for combat" in personal terms is striking. For it would seem that other than the sandals on His feet and the clothes on His back, He had very little if anything to bring to this ministry in a material way. Spiritually, however, He carried more precious possessions in His heart than anyone before or since, for He had put the Word of God first in His life at all times, and was now thoroughly prepared to minister it in the unique and glorious way that scripture records, becoming the Father's "Light to the world", and revealing the one true way of salvation. There is certainly a lesson for us in this, for the world assumes that without significant (or even prodigious) logistical support, most efforts of ministry ought not even be attempted. Jesus put the objective first, and let His heavenly Father and ours take care of the details. Of course it should go without saying that, for such an approach to be successful, both an extremely close walk with God (so that there is no doubt about what His will really is), and a high level of personal spiritual maturity are absolutely essential. This approach of traveling extremely light demonstrates a level of reliance upon God reminiscent of the Exodus when the children of Israel were commanded to leave Egypt in haste, an event memorialized in the Passover command to eat that meal "with your cloaktucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste" (Exodus 12:11 NIV); and this indeed is same the attitude of mind that all followers of Jesus Christ ought to have, prepared to serve and follow Him apart from worldly hindrances "with your feet shod in the readiness [to serve] the gospel of peace" (Ephesians 6:15). It also demonstrates that even with exceptional support from God, we are not meant to ignore earthly realities entirely, as if they didn't exist (i. e., even the payment of the temple tax required Peter to "work" after a fashion, doing what he knew how to do best in fishing for it: Matthew 17:27). The disciples had a common purse (which Judas kept, John 12:6 and which was used to buy necessities such as the requirements of the Passover: John 13:29), indicating that the ministry was supported by others (most of whom were apparently women: Luke 8:3; Luke 10:38-40; John 11:1-57), who generously gave of their

resources. We have suggested above that our Lord “saved up” for this ministry, and we probably see an example of this in the colt provided for His triumphant entry into Jerusalem on “Palm Sunday” (i. e., our Lord had no doubt provided for this necessity ahead of time in order to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9; cf. Matthew 21:1-7). Even the 70 who are sent out with deliberately negligible resources (Matthew 10:9; Mark 6:8; Luke 10:4) are told to rely on the provision of those to whom they will minister (a situation which would change rather dramatically during apostolic times: cf. Luke 22:35-36). Thus we see in our Lord’s ministry the proper balance we are to maintain during our own walk through this world: utilizing the means of this world without being subject to them, and in all things putting complete faith in the One who provides them, our heavenly Father.

b) Plan and Purposes: The very plan of God for us all, of course, can be summed up in Jesus Christ. We exist for Him and He cast His lot with us, becoming a human being and dying for our sins on the cross. Therefore on the most important level, the purpose for His ministry is as obvious as the plan behind it, namely, the offering of the Savior of the world to the world in order to save the world. But our Lord could have come in glory, and glory so blinding that denying who and what He was and is would have been an impossible feat for any mortal human being to accomplish. Instead, like the parables with which He often taught, our Lord’s personal truth and glory was shielded to a very great degree, so great in fact that although He was and is the Son of God, it was (and still is) possible for human beings to ignore that fact and even to deny it. More than that, the reality of Him, who He really is, is still masked today behind the noise and fury of this present decaying world to such an extent that only those who choose to seek for the truth of Him find it, responding to invitations God has placed at every turning point in our lives, but which are nonetheless very easy to pass by without response if the heart is not willing. For this reason during His earthly ministry, Jesus came not in power but in weakness, not in wealth but in poverty, not in glory but in humility. Clearly, His coming and His teaching were signs, truth whispered in the ears of all like a still, small voice, leading those willing to listen to eternal life, but allowing those who had no wish to do so to disdain Him and His message entirely. It is ever thus. Jesus could have come as the King, but He came as the servant, and the reason, the purpose behind this critical part of the plan of God, was to separate the wheat from the chaff, just as is the case today. Human history, God’s plan and purpose for the human race, is all about choice, all about free will exercised in faith, and, specifically, all about separating those who truly do want God from those who in truth do not. From the standpoint of the things which appeal to the world, our Lord and His ministry had nothing to recommend them. He was not attractive in the way celebrities usually are (Isaiah 53:2). He did not use persuasive arguments to win over the crowd (Luke 11:27-32), but instead told them truths which His listeners often found difficult or impossible to accept (John 6:60). He offered neither economic nor political nor social solutions or relief (Luke 19:11; John 6:26). In short, to hear Jesus Christ and follow Him required, demanded a very definite and definitive choosing of the invisible kingdom of God over all other earthly concerns. That has always been the choice that confronts every human being, and never was it made more clear than during our Lord’s ministry. For on the one hand no one after seeing the prophecies about Him fulfilled so completely, after seeing the miracles He accomplished so dramatically, after hearing the words of truth that poured forth from Him so penetratingly, could seriously doubt that this was the Messiah, God’s own Son. On the other hand, the commitment He demanded, the sinfulness He exposed, and the dismissal of worldly concerns He required ran against the grain of everything the world taught to be true then as now. As no ministry before or since, Jesus’ earthly ministry, like the entire

Word of God, which Word He is, was a touchstone which immediately and unswervingly proved the quality of every heart, separating the silver from the dross, and making the choice of choices clear: "Follow Me" (John 10:27; John 12:26; John 21:19, John 21:22; cf. Matthew 4:19; Matthew 8:22; Matthew 9:9; Matthew 10:38; Matthew 16:24; Matthew 19:21; Mark 1:17; Mark 2:13; Mark 8:34; Mark 10:21; Luke 5:27; Luke 9:23, Luke 9:59; Luke 14:27; Luke 18:22; John 1:43; Romans 15:5; 1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Peter 2:21; Revelation 14:4). Do not think that I have come to hurl peace upon the earth. I have not come to hurl peace upon the earth but a sword (of divisiveness). For I have come to divide . . . 'a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies will be the members of his own household'. Whoever loves his father or mother above Me is not worthy of Me, and whoever loves his son or daughter above Me is not worthy of Me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever has found his life will lose it, and the one who has lost his life for My sake will find it. Matthew 10:34-39.

Jesus Christ came to earth at precisely the right time, at the "conjunction of the ages" (Hebrews 9:26; cf. Romans 5:6). His life and death, His person and His work, His ministry and His cross are the very pivot around which human history actually turns, for they are and He is "the plan of God". In His three and a half year earthly ministry, the Word of truth Himself confronted the entire cosmos, the devil and his world system, along with the worldly power structure of His day, political and religious, head-on. In Jesus Christ, mankind saw the offer of the Messiah, God in the flesh not as imagined in self-serving human fantasy, but as He actually was and is, the power of God, the grace of God, the love of God. The heavenly kingdom of God which Jesus preached was not the worldly kingdom of earthly power and glory most men either expected or desired. Given the chance and the ability to reject Him, most did so in a clear and emphatic way as the willing crucifixion of the Messiah demonstrates so perspicuously. Thus, in the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, we see the plan and purpose of God fulfilled but also encapsulated. For never was the choice of God's kingdom or the devil's more pellucidly presented than in the offer of the Son Himself to the world. With very few exceptions, the world rejected Him decisively, even though He had come into the world to save it entirely, and, at the end of these precious few years, He died on the cross to make that salvation a reality available to all mankind. Jesus' ministry therefore demonstrates the nature of the choice that faces everyone: face the truth and yield to, gratefully accepting the mercy of God in Jesus Christ through faith, or ignore or reject it, hardening the heart to serve Satan instead. For Jesus Christ is the plan of God; He is the New Covenant which was promised in the Old and replaces the Old by fulfilling it in every way through the true sacrifice, His own death on the cross for all sin. Jesus Christ is God offering Himself to us, providing us with eternal life without cost to us but at the dearest possible cost to Himself, the death of His one and only Son on our behalf. In Jesus Christ's earthly ministry, therefore, we see most clearly this offer of eternal life being placed before those who ought by rights to have appreciated it the most and understood it the best, and, even so, most chose to harden their hearts against Him and the truth of His words. Yet for those few who did turn to Him and for all those who turn to Him today, the purpose and plan of His ministry is ever being fulfilled, the demonstration of the true power and wealth and glory of God in opening up the life-gate to the invisible kingdom of heaven for all who choose to enter it.

He came to what was rightfully His, but those who were His did not receive Him. But as many as accepted Him, to them He gave the power to become children of God, [that is,] to those who put their faith in His Person, [even those] who were not [born] of blood, or fleshly desire, or human will, but [who] were born of God (i. e., “born again”). John 1:11-13. c) Procedures and Reception: Although the procedures our Lord employed for broadcasting the offer of eternal life through faith in His Person and work were designed to reach the entire nation of Israel, even so as mentioned above the response was far from universally positive, and the faith of most of those who did respond positively at first, like the seed sown on the rocks, withered away at the first sign of trouble. But the one thing that Jesus’ generation could definitely not say is “we never heard the message”. The personal ministry of Jesus Christ served to present the Messiah to the nation and to offer Israel their king – on God’s terms (rather than in terms of human expectations). One of the things the perfect presentation of the perfect ministry of the perfect Son of God makes clear is that the issue of salvation for humanity has nothing to do with God’s provision of the message. He provides for all who seek Him, and perfectly so. The Israelites of Jesus’ day were yearning for a Messiah, and were in fact offered the Messiah, the message of His kingdom being delivered personally and in a dramatic and perfect way. But even so, few were willing to respond to God on God’s terms and accept Him. No other period of history, no other series of events related by scripture, documents so clearly how the hardness of the human heart is a matter of free will choice, pure and simple, and how that God’s provision of salvation and the information about it, the gospel, has therefore been perfect and perfectly designed in the case of every human being who has ever lived. For God knows what everyone truly thinks in their heart, and how everyone will respond to the truth. Even the provision of the Truth Himself in this awesome way did not result in salvation for those determined to reject God and follow their own course instead.

“I am not insane, most excellent Festus,” Paul replied. “What I am saying is true and reasonable. The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner.” Acts 26:25-26 NIV Our Lord Jesus made Himself and the message of the Kingdom available to the Jewish people far and wide. He taught in their synagogues where they gathered on the Sabbath day (Matthew 4:23; Matthew 9:35; Matthew 12:9; Matthew 13:54; Mark 1:21, Mark 1:39; Mark 3:1; Mark 6:2; Luke 4:15, Luke 4:44; Luke 6:6; Luke 13:10; John 6:59), He taught in the temple and made Himself and His message available during the major festivals when Jews from throughout Judea, Galilee, and the entire world came to worship at Jerusalem (Matthew 26:55; Mark 14:49; Luke 19:47; Luke 21:37; Luke 22:53; John 18:20 cf. Matthew 21:14, Matthew 21:23; Mark 12:35; Luke 20:1; John 7:14; John 7:28). He taught in the cities and towns (Matthew 11:21-23; Luke 10:13-15), taught on the lakeshore (Matthew 13:2; Mark 4:1; Luke 5:3) and by the river Jordan (John 10:40-42; cf. Mark 10:1; Luke 3:3; John 3:22-26), taught inside and outside (Mark 6:56; cf. Mark 2:1-4), taught even in the wilderness whenever and wherever the people gathered (Matthew 4:25, Matthew 5:1-2; Mark 6:32-34; Luke 9:10-11; cf. Matthew 14:13-14; Matthew 15:29-32; Mark 8:1-4). He filled up the countryside and the city streets with the words of God’s truth, and through the spectacular nature of His ministry, the unmistakable power of both His words and His miracles, in those few short years He made the truth available to all who were in any way willing to hear it or even to give it a brief consideration, as well as to those who chose to reject it out of hand. For our Lord did not restrict Himself to a single area or a single venue or a single method: He traveled and strove and labored to the end of His strength to make the good news of the Kingdom of God available to all:

And when it was day, he departed and went into a desert place: and the people sought him, and came unto him, and stayed him, that he should not depart from them. But he said, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea. Luke 4:42-44 KJV As the Messiah, the One sent to the nation Israel to fulfill the promise of her coming King (and the prophecy of His rejection at her hands), His ministry was primarily one of offering the Kingdom of God to His fellow countrymen. But in spite of this, wherever worthy gentiles were to be found, that is, those who "thirsted for righteousness" and the truth of eternal life, our Lord made sure through the guidance of the Spirit that they too were not denied, as can be seen from the cases of . . . The man of Gadarene possessed by the legion of demons (Matthew 8:28 ff.; Mark 5:1 ff.; Luke 8:26 ff.), the only one in his area willing to come to Christ (Matthew 8:34; Mark 5:17; Luke 8:37).

The Syro-Phoenician woman whose daughter was demon-possessed, to our knowledge the only person in her vicinity who responded to our Lord (Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30). The centurion whose faith exceeded that of anyone in Israel (Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10). The village of Samaritans whose faith response put Jewish towns to shame (compare John 4:4-42 with Matthew 11:21-23). A few words also need to be said about the specific procedures adopted by our Lord in the conduct of His unique ministry. First, from the early days (though not from the very start; compare Matthew 4:12 with Matthew 4:18-20 and Matthew 9:9), He was attended by disciples. These came in at least three groups: 1) the twelve selected by our Lord (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:2-11; Luke 6:12-16; John 1:35-42); 2) the seventy selected by our Lord (Luke 10:1 ff.); 3) other seriously committed believers who were "called" to follow Him with some degree of consistency and dedication (Matthew 8:18-22; Luke 9:57-62; cf. Matthew 5:1). These last were not members of the official inner circle, but are to be distinguished from the crowds who showed up to hear Him and to benefit from His miracles on any given day. The possession of a cadre of disciples was certainly not an unprecedented thing for a prophet (cf. John: Matthew 9:14; and Elijah: 2 Kings 2:1-25), so that we should not be surprised to see them attending the Prophet. However, while it is certainly true that part of the reason for the selection of the two innermost groups had to do with ministry as in the sending out of the 12 (Matthew 10:1 ff.) and the 70 (Luke 10:1 ff.), our Lord's choice of all of these individuals was for their benefit and the later benefit of the Church as a whole (rather than to provide administrative or logistical support for Himself). Simply put, Peter, James, John and the rest, named and unnamed, benefitted greatly from their close association with our Lord (although less than they should have but undoubtedly more than we would have), and through their constant attendance upon Him, hearing His every word and observing His every deed, were being prepared for the apostolic ministries they would in a few short years shoulder themselves. For the Church is built upon the Rock, Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:18), and He personally trained the twelve apostles and these other early "pillars" who, in company with the Old Testament prophets, embraced the Cornerstone and provided the rest of the foundation for the Church of Jesus Christ. So then, you are no longer strangers and hangers-on, but you are fellow citizens and fellow members of the household of God, established upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Himself the cornerstone, in whom the entire structure is in the process of being riveted together and is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you too are being built up into a dwelling place of God by the Spirit. Ephesians 2:19-22. As would also be the case with the apostles, the synagogues throughout Judea and Galilee were an important venue for our Lord's propagation of the good news of the coming

kingdom of God and the salvation that was about to be provided to all through faith in Himself (Matthew 4:23; Matthew 9:35; Matthew 12:9; Matthew 13:54; Mark 1:21, Mark 1:39; Mark 3:1; Mark 6:2; Luke 4:15, Luke 4:44; Luke 6:6; Luke 13:10; John 6:59). Since these “places of coming together” (the meaning of the Greek word) were to be found in every major community, with, as is the case with so many churches and denominations in our present day, no distinction made between the people of God (i. e., whether Pharisee, Sadducee, Essene etc., except of course for the distinction still operative at that time between Jew and gentile), it was imperative for the message to be disseminated in these formal local assemblies as much as it was necessary to do so during the major collective assemblies in Jerusalem. For by proclaiming the truth of salvation in local and national gatherings, and in settings formal and informal, all excuse was removed: no one alive and of age during Jesus’ day will be able to say at the judgment “but I didn’t know”. In contrast to present day Jewish practice and in great distinction to that of almost all Christian churches, the synagogues of Jesus’ day offered a prime opportunity for addressing the local body of Israel whose custom it was to gather twice every Sabbath (and often at least once during the week as well), but without the presence of any formal teaching or sermonizing (apart from the regular reading of the Law and the Prophets). As Schürer remarks, “Strangely enough, [in the synagogues of Jesus’ day] no one was nominated to conduct worship proper: the reading of the Scriptures, preaching and public prayer were still performed by the members of the congregation themselves, which accounts for Jesus (and Paul) being able to speak in various synagogues . . .” Thus, unlike today, it was possible for our Lord and later for His apostles to make at least an initial presentation of the truth without prior vetting of their message by the ruler or elders of the congregation. So while later rejection was possible (and typical), no claim could be made of a lack of information.

[Jesus] taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” Luke 4:15-21 NIV Our Lord was of course unique in every way, and one of the ways He gained a hearing outside of the formal assembly of the synagogue for His unique ministry was through His performing of miracles. Jesus’ raising of the dead, His curing of leprosy, His expulsion of all manner of demons, His restoring of sight to the blind, His multiplication of the loaves and the flesh, His turning of the water into wine – the world would not be able to contain the books which could be written about all the wonders He wrought (John 21:25)! Yet the performance of such exceptional miracles was for Him problematic. For Jesus did not seek His own glory but the glory of the One who sent Him (John 7:18; John 8:50, John 8:54). He did not do miracles to call attention to Himself, but only to gain a hearing for Word of God, and in His perfection kept Himself from all arrogance and pride that might attend such marvelous gifts were you or I in possession of them. Thus His only desire in accomplishing these miraculous works of healing and the like was the furtherance of the Father’s plan, giving authority to the message of the Kingdom with which He had been entrusted (Matthew 13:58; Mark 1:39). Therefore the celebrity and enthusiasm which

inevitably tended to accompany these dramatic happenings had a great potential downside as well (as when those who had eaten of the miraculously multiplied bread and fish wanted to make Him king by force: John 6:15), so that on more than one occasion our Lord instructed beneficiaries of His miracles not to bruit abroad the wonders He had performed, precisely so that over-ebullient false enthusiasm might not hamper His true purpose (cf. Luke 8:56). Even so, we see clearly enough in the stark contrast between the loud shouts of “Hosanna!” when He entered Jerusalem before that last Passover and the roars of “Crucify him!” a few days later the true value of celebrity-induced enthusiasm. Our Lord understood this only too well (cf. John 2:25), and there is certainly a lesson to be learned from this for all who minister the Word of God: it is the Word received in the heart which is important; all superficial expressions of response no matter how enthusiastic are likely to be as ephemeral as the morning mist. d) Actions Reactions: Because He was unwilling to compromise the truth in any way – indeed, He is the Truth – it was inevitable that our Lord’s ministry was not going to produce a reaction in those who had long ago rejected the truth for the sake of their own positions, whether secular or religious (and often a violent one at that, Psalms 119:161 with John 15:25; Psalms 35:19; Psalms 69:4; cf. Isaiah 52:1-13, Isaiah 53:1-12; John 8:59). For our Lord’s ministry of undiluted truth threatened those comfortable positions by stripping away their patina of false authority and exposing their hypocrisy on every hand. Challenged as to their true motivations, shown up to be false and dissembling, it was little wonder that, like all of the false prophets who had preceded them, these “wicked husbandmen” would soon seek to destroy the source of that challenge (Matthew 21:33-41; Mark 12:1-9; Luke 20:9-16). For our Lord’s authority came from the Father, but the religious establishment of His day had become so completely divorced from the truth that their only authority was a pseudo-authority based entirely upon the positions they held and the legalistic traditions they maintained, traditions which obscured the spiritual realities which the Law was intended to teach (cf. Matthew 23:1-26). Our Lord cut straight to the heart of this particular point when challenged as to His authority by asking His accusers about their position on John the baptist’s ministry, thus forcing them to plead ignorance rather than admit the truth: they were not at all concerned with God, only with their own positions (Matthew 21:25; Mark 11:30; Luke 20:4). In fact, to anyone with a solid understanding of the scriptures based upon the truth, our Lord’s authority was plain to see. The miracles He did substantiated that authority completely (cf. John 10:25-38), and everything He taught is paralleled in and by the Old Testament scriptures (e. g., compare Matthew 5:5 with Zephaniah 3:12). It is worth considering for a moment just how brilliant Our Lord’s perfect teaching was. He was kind while at the same time completely straight-forward and honest. He always found a way to say what was right yet without at the same time casting “pearls before swine” (cf. Proverbs 23:9). He had a perfect way of piercing the heart of every listener without making the issue unnecessarily personal (or having others take it that way). As in the example of the Matthew 21:23-37 passages referenced above, our Lord’s words always cut right to the quick, and in just a few words, Jesus was ever able to unveil people’s true motivations. This was true because in everything He said, He always kept to the main issue at hand, namely, of the need for turning to God and following Him (through following the One He had sent). In facing the Person of Jesus Christ come in the flesh and in hearing His perfect words supported by undeniable miracles, all of His contemporaries were made to face the issue of life and death with crystal clarity, for He made that choice unmistakably clear in each and every case without any possibility of an honest mistake. This perfect standard of teaching required complete honesty on the part of the Practitioner (and does much to explain why

His simple words are so much more powerful and so indescribably different than those of anyone else). To accomplish this perfect presentation of the truth of the Word required a complete rejection of flattery or any personal agenda (Matthew 22:15-22; Luke 11:27; John 6:15); it allowed for no bitterness or for hurt feelings even when these were warranted through foolish rejection of the truth and self-serving invective, slander and mis-characterization of what our Lord was doing for us all and was about to do on the cross. It required a complete rejection of and mastery over the sorts of temptations to which the rest of us would inevitably fall prey, desire for personal honor and glory, desire for positive responses and the avoidance of negative ones, and the urge to retaliate when wronged, slandered and bitterly opposed (especially galling in His case since there was not a trace of legitimacy to support anything but humble appreciation and awe). Jesus had infinitely more claim to a worshipful response from everyone than anyone else before or since, and yet He had to repudiate His natural feelings when this was not forthcoming and persevere in a completely professional way despite such unprecedented “opposition by sinners against Himself” (Hebrews 12:3). Our Lord’s unique ministry required, in the face of the unique reactions it engendered, perfect humility, wisdom, and self-control in order to deliver what He did, the absolute truth about the righteousness of God and how to attain it through faith in Himself.

e) Form and Content of Jesus’ Teaching: Jesus is the Logos, the living Word of God in Person (John 1:1-14). Further, the content of God’s truth is called in scripture “the mind of Christ” (ministered by the Holy Spirit: 1 Corinthians 2:16). So while “red-letter” editions of the Bible which highlight Jesus’ “own” words have their place, we should not be misled by them so as to forget that at every word of scripture, every “jot and tittle”, is – as originally penned – the precise message God intended the world to have about Jesus Christ, through Jesus Christ, and for Jesus Christ. For Jesus Christ is the Word, and all the words of scripture are His. As indicated above, there is no teaching of Jesus from the gospels which is not paralleled in the Old Testament (e. g., compare 1 Kings 8:59 with Matthew 6:11 and Luke 11:3) and in the New Testament epistles (e. g., compare John 17:17 with Ephesians 4:24). While all three of these major topical divisions of scripture have their own unique ways of expressing things, the content of the truth they express is completely consistent in every way. There is, it is true, a general trend a general trend in scripture toward progressive revelation, so that, for example, what we know about the end times from Daniel is greatly expanded in our Lord’s “Olivet Discourse” (Matthew 24:1-51, Matthew 25:1-46; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 21:1-38), and then even more so by the book of Revelation (that is, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ”). But this expansion is one of detail only, not one of essential truth: Daniel, our Lord, and John teach precisely the same things in every respect (when these passages are correctly understood); it is only that through God’s plan of expanding revelation over time we are given to know more details in each successive wave of the unveiling that truth. Thus Jesus didn’t “change” anything; rather He fulfilled everything, and everything is fulfilled in Him: Do not assume that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets: I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For what I say to you is the truth: Until heaven and earth pass away, not one iota or one serif will pass away from the Law – until everything has come to pass (i. e., the shadows of the Law fulfilled on the cross). Matthew 5:18. For Christ is the fulfillment (lit., “end”) of the Law, resulting in righteousness for everyone who believes [in Him]. Romans 10:4. So whether it be the Law which foreshadowed Christ, the teachings of Jesus, the incarnate Word, or the detailed exposition of the truth ministered through the Spirit in the rest of the New Testament (cf. John 14:26; John 15:26; John 16:13-15), the message is one message, unified, indivisible, unchanging, and complete, the words of God

Himself which witness to the Word Himself, the audible proclamation of the truth and the only means by which men can know the truth. The Lord God has given Me a tongue of those who have been [fully] instructed [in the truth], that I may know the right words [of truth] to encourage the weary . He arouses His Word [within Me]. [And] every morning He awakens Me. He awakens My ear[s] to listen like [the ears of] those who have been [fully] instructed [in the truth]. The Lord God has opened My ear[s], and I have not refused [instruction]. I have not turned away [nor gone] backward. Isaiah 50:4-5.

“My teaching is not My own, but belongs to Him who sent Me.” John 7:16.

“I am telling you what I have seen in My Father’s presence. So you also do what you have heard from the Father!” They answered and said to Him, “Our father is Abraham.” Jesus said to them: “If you were children of Abraham, you would be doing the things Abraham [did]. But as things actually stand, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth which I have heard from God. John 8:38-40 a

He who believes in Me does not believe in Me, but in He who sent Me. And he who sees Me, sees the One who sent Me. I have come into the world as a light, in order that everyone who believes in Me may not abide in darkness. But if anyone hears My words and does not hold on to them, I do not condemn him. For I did not come to condemn the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me and does not receive my words has someone who judges him. The Word which I spoke, that [is what] will judge him on the last day. For I did not speak of my own accord, but the One who sent Me, the Father Himself gave Me instruction as to what I should say and what I will [yet] speak. And I know that His instruction is eternal life. Therefore, as to the things which I speak, just as the Father has spoken to Me, that is how I speak. John 12:44-50.

“For the words You gave Me, [Father,] I have given to them, and they received them and have come to know truly that I came from you, and they have believed that You sent Me.” John 17:8. j. The Last Passover: The final year of our Lord’s three and a half year ministry is often referred to as “the year of opposition”, since it was between the penultimate and final Passovers that our Lord experienced a noticeable intensification of hostility from the Judean political and religious ruling classes (i. e., the Sadducees and the Pharisees). It should be noted that John was put to death by Herod just before that penultimate Passover (John 11:55 ff.), and that this event was one important factor in the increased resistance to our Lord. For during his lifetime, even while in prison for its final two years), John’s “celebrity” served to run a sort of “interference” on behalf of our Lord (Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2-3; Luke 7:27), giving Jesus a freedom of action he would not have had otherwise (since, without the “cover” John provided, He and His ministry would have been the sole focus of the ire of the religious establishment toward the spiritual revival then underway). A second major factor in the intensification of the resistance was the intensified nature of our Lord’s ministry. It is no accident that the bulk of the content of the gospels deals with this final year (i. e., roughly speaking, everything from Matthew 10:1-42, Mark 5:1-43, Luke 9:1-62 and John 6:1-71 forward), and it is in this final year that the most dramatic miracles take place (i. e., the feeding of the five and the four thousand, walking on the water, the transfiguration, the healing of the man born blind, the raising of Lazarus), and that the widest and most obvious evangelism takes place on the part of Jesus’ disciples (i. e., the sending out of the twelve [at its inception]: Matthew 9:35-11; Mark 6:6-13; Luke 9:1-6; and of the seventy: Luke 10:1-20). This period of the

most intense and growing resistance in the face of the most dramatic miracles and teaching on the part of our Lord and his disciples serves to demonstrate the implacable hostility of the world (in ultimate service to the present ruler of the world, Satan) towards the truth: the clearer the truth is made, the more threatening the source of truth is seen to be. Moreover, the amazing events of that final year brought home vividly the truth of Jesus' proclamation that "the Kingdom of God is near!", a kingdom of light which is destined to sweep away the kingdom of darkness to which our Lord's opponents had given their allegiance, and whose defeat they fearfully understood meant the loss of their exalted positions (cf. the parable of the tenants: Matthew 21:33-44; Mark 12:1-11; Luke 20:9-18; cf. Matthew 27:18; Mark 15:10; Luke 13:17): The Feeding of the 5000 and the 4000 (Matthew 14:15-21; Mark 6:35-44; Luke 9:12-17; John 6:4-13; and Matthew 15:32-38; Mark 8:1-9 respectively): The King's power to provide for His subjects demonstrated.

Walking on the Water (Matthew 14:24-33; Mark 6:45-52; John 6:16-21): The King's power over time and space demonstrated. The Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36): The glory of the King and His Kingdom prefigured. The Sending of the 70 (Luke 10:1-24): The Kingdom Proclaimed as Imminent; the 12 proclaimed and showed its power; this is a "far and wide" proclamation (prefiguring Revelation 14:6) that takes away the argument "we never heard" (cf. Romans 10:18-21). The Healing of the Man Born Blind (John 9:1-41): The King's revelation of the truth for all willing to see demonstrated. The Raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-16): The King's power over life and death demonstrated; His power to grant eternal life in place of eternal death prefigured. The scriptural treatment of the final week before the crucifixion begins with Mary's anointing of Jesus in Bethany (i. e., the "six days" of John 12:1), and nearly everything that transpires serves to demonstrate ahead of time the essential truth of which Jesus has been attempting to forewarn His disciples throughout this final phase of His first advent (e. g., Matthew 16:21-26; Matthew 17:22-23; Matthew 20:17-19; Mark 8:31-37; Mark 9:30-32; Mark 10:32-33; Luke 9:22-25, Luke 9:43-45; Luke 18:31-34), namely, that the Messiah had to come twice, a second time to reign in glory (as all were expecting Jesus to do now in short order), but a first time as well, in order to die for the sins of the world and purchase a "people for Himself" to share His kingly reign forever (Revelation 5:9; cf. Revelation 1:5-6).

1) The anointing at Bethany: The first of these events was Jesus' anointing by Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus (similar to but to be distinguished from an earlier occurrence related at Luke 7:36 ff.). As Jesus Himself tells us, this was very significant not only because it prefigured His death and burial (i. e., anointed head and foot as in burial preparations: Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8; cf. the holy anointing oil: Exodus 30:22-33), but because it demonstrated that while none of His disciples seemed to understand, at least Mary did realize full well that our Lord was about to give His life on our behalf, so that "wherever in the entire world this good news [of the Kingdom] is proclaimed, what this woman has done shall also be mentioned to remind of her [faith]" (Matthew 26:13; cf. Mark 14:9). This incident and the outrage it initially caused among the disciples (because of the "waste" of money involved) we may take to be the "final straw" for Judas who realized great personal monetary loss from the anointing (helping himself to the common purse as he often did: John 12:4-6). For the nard employed was of such high quality that it was actually liquid (and thus would have fetched a princely price).

2) The triumphal entry (Matthew 21:1-17; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:29-44; John 12:12-19): On that glorious future day of days, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the King of Kings and Lord of

Lords, will enter Jerusalem from the east in glory, mounted on a heavenly white charger, spattered with the blood of His enemies just dispatched at the battle of Armageddon (Revelation 19:11-13). On the previous day being considered here, only hours before He would pour out His life's blood for the sins of the world (the symbol which encapsulates Jesus' spiritual death in the darkness to atone for the sins of all mankind), our Lord rode into Jerusalem in humility, mounted on a donkey colt with an adult animal in tow, the pair of animals symbolizing both the purpose of this present advent as being different from the expectations of the populace, and also that it would be followed in the future by the advent of glory the people anticipated and yearned for then. In the symbolism here, our Lord's being mounted on the colt indicates that the cross comes first since a young and untrained animal would be unsuitable for battle (i. e., for Armageddon), but is on the contrary symbolic of purity and innocence recalling our Lord's sinlessness and suitability for sacrifice on behalf of the sins of the world. The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his. He (i. e., Judah, and thus the Messiah) will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine (2 Adv.; cf. Revelation 19:13-15), his robes in the blood of grapes (1 Adv.; cf. Revelation 7:15 with Luke 22:20). Genesis 49:10-11 NIV

Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion. Shout [for joy], daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, your King will come to you. Righteous and victorious He is (2 Adv.); humble and riding on a donkey, even on a colt, a donkey's foal (1 Adv.). Zechariah 9:9. As our Lord made His way down the descent from the Mount of Olives into the Kidron valley and towards Jerusalem, the populace, many of whom would soon be calling for His crucifixion, turned out to see the prophet they hoped might be the conquering Messiah (cf. Matthew 21:11), strewing palm branches in His path (symbolic of the Millennial Kingdom Messiah would bring), and singing a victory Psalm which indeed spoke of Him, but missing entirely the symbolism even therein which spoke of the necessity for the Messiah first to suffer and die for the sins of the world.

[Messiah speaks:] "Open for Me the gates of righteousness (i. e., the eastern gate of Jerusalem and the gate of the temple facing east)! I shall enter by them and praise the Lord. This is the Lord's gate. The righteous will enter by it (i. e., through Christ; cf. John 10:1-9). I shall praise You although You humbled Me (i. e., 1 Advent sufferings), for You have brought me deliverance (i. e., the victories of resurrection and Armageddon)." [The chorus of celebrants responds:] "The Stone which the builders rejected has become the Cornerstone! This has come from the Lord, and it is wondrous to our eyes! This is the Day which the Lord has made (i. e., the 2 Advent)! Let us rejoice and delight ourselves in it! Yes, Lord, deliver us we pray (hoshi'ah na' = hosanna!) [from the Tribulation]. Yes, Lord, bless us with prosperity (i. e., the blessings of the Millennial Kingdom)! Blessed be the One (i. e., the Messiah) who is coming in the Name of the Lord! We greet you all (i. e., the Messiah and His retinue) from the house of the Lord! The Lord is God! And He has caused His Light to shine upon us! Bind up the Sacrifice with ropes to the horns of the altar (i. e., the inaugural memorial sacrifice of the Millennial Kingdom meant to remind of the cross)." Psalms 118:19-27.

Immediately upon entering Jerusalem that first day, our Lord went up to the temple mount and swept the court of the gentiles clean of the commercial enterprises that had turned the worship of God into a human system of monetary transactions, exactly as He had also done at the beginning of His earthly ministry (Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-48; cf. John 2:13-22). This

is a striking foreshadowing of what will happen in the Millennium (cf. Zechariah 14:21; Daniel 12:10), and therefore another prophetic sign of Jesus' Messiahship.

While they were coming back into the city from Bethany on the second day, our Lord approached a fig tree beside the road in search of fruit, but, finding none, He cursed the tree which withered soon thereafter (Mark 11:13-14, Mark 11:19-25; Matthew 21:18-22). The symbolism of this miracle is most important, for the tree represents Israel and her lack of productivity (cf. Micah 7:1). At the very time she should have been welcoming the Messiah with open arms and putting before His feet the fruits of her spiritual labors, she was in fact bereft of all truly godly works, and was about to crucify the One who had come to deliver her from her sins. This demonstrative sign also has ramifications for every believer's spiritual life as well, for while production for the Lord is the normal and expected result of spiritual growth, a complete lack of production is usually associated with apostasy (John 15:1-17; Hebrews 6:7-8).

Another symbolically important event we should note here which took place during those final days in Jerusalem was the request from certain Greeks to meet with Jesus and our Lord's response, that "unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains alone by itself; but if it does die, it produces much fruit" (John 12:20-32). Now that His prophetic ministry to the Jewish people was complete, our Lord had His face "set like flint" (Isaiah 50:7; cf. Luke 9:51) to last through the gauntlet of abuse ahead in order to fulfill the critical objective and primary purpose of His time on earth, namely, His bearing the sins of the entire world on the cross. In the manner of the grain of wheat in His illustration, Jesus' death would produce abundant "fruit" in the streaming into the family of God people of all nations (which these curious Greeks represent).

3) The Olivet Discourse: This is the name by which our Lord's extensive teachings about "the things to come" to His disciples on the Mount of Olives in response to their question about the timing of the coming of the Kingdom is commonly known (Matthew 24:1-51, Matthew 25:1-46; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 21:5-36). It is important to note that since "the Spirit was not yet given" (John 7:39), many essential details of eschatology would have to wait until after Pentecost (John 16:12-15; and compare the description given at pre-unction Acts 1:7 with the later statements in 1 Thessalonians 5:1 and 1 John 2:20). Nevertheless, on the cusp of His departure, our Lord gave the disciples much critical information about the end times and the need for believers to stay focused on the eternal realities in order to safely negotiate the Tribulation of that future day. These same truths, moreover, would prove to be essential for enduring the days of personal tribulation ahead for all His disciples during the two millennia of the Church Age to come on the other side of His passion and resurrection. Indeed, the disciples themselves would have need of remembering and applying them carefully in only a few short hours.

4) Judas and the Sanhedrin's Plot to Kill Jesus: Just as thirty three years earlier Herod had attempted to have Jesus killed on account of the threat he perceived to his own dynasty by a genuine "King of the Jews", so also those in positions of power in Judea's political and religious establishment had long been concerned by the "threat" posed to their status by our Lord and His ministry (Matthew 21:46; Matthew 26:4; Mark 12:12; Mark 14:1; Luke 20:19; John 7:30; John 7:44; John 10:39). Their thinking is best summed up by the report John gives us of the council held just prior to our Lord's triumphal entry, where the priests, Pharisees and Sadducees equate themselves with "the nation":

Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. “What are we accomplishing?” they asked. “Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, “You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.” John 11:47-50 NIV

Shortly following this conference, orders were given for informers to be cultivated in order that Jesus might be arrested “on the sly” in order to avoid any confrontation with the crowd (John 11:57: cf. Matthew 26:4; Mark 14:1). This explains why they were so “delighted” when Judas responded to the appeal (Mark 14:11; Luke 22:5). For, once armed with “inside information” about our Lord’s whereabouts and habits when not surrounded by the crowds, they were confident of arresting Him without instigating a possible insurrection.

What Judas’ original motivations were we can only speculate. Part of his motivation was certainly financial, seeking to make a profit out of this new phenomenon in the manner of Balaam (John 12:6 cf. 2 Peter 2:15). In part he may also have been attracted to the excitement and the clearly miraculous nature of Jesus’ ministry. But without any question Judas was deep into apostasy and open to all manner of satanic influence – otherwise he would not have betrayed the Lord of life (1 Corinthians 2:8), and otherwise he never would have been open to possession by the devil himself (Luke 22:3; John 13:27). Therefore we may be sure that Satan had his hand on Judas from the beginning, seeking to place an infiltrator into our Lord’s midst (and fulfilling a prophecy in the process: John 13:18). Judas had never believed in Jesus as our Lord knew only too well (cf. John 6:64; John 6:70; John 13:18), but the other disciples apparently suspected him least of all as we can surely discern from the fact that he does not even come under suspicion even after our Lord gives John and Peter such a clear sign in the dipping of the sop (John 13:26-28), and then essentially names him in response to his question “Is it I?": “You have said [yourself]” (Matthew 26:23-25). We may take from this that Judas put on a much more pious and respectable appearance than any of the other twelve, and it is often the case that those with the most intense corruption within have taken the greatest care to “whitewash” the outside of the tomb (as in the case of the scribes and Pharisees: Matthew 23:27).

5) The Last Supper: The final Passover the night our Lord was betrayed also did much to foreshadow both His impending sacrifice on our behalf and the significant changes His victory on the cross would effect in God’s administration of His grace and His plans for His Church on earth. Passover, of course, is the premier ritual of the Old Covenant, and our Lord’s transformation of it into the one legitimate ritual of the Church Age known to us as “communion” or the “Lord’s supper” demonstrates in a most vivid and concentrated way the change of covenants which the cross was about to produce. Partaking of the Passover lamb is clearly symbolic of belief in the Lamb of God. But while this and all of the other Old Covenant rituals which made use of animal sacrifice foreshadowed the death of the Messiah for the sins of the world, Jesus’ transforming of Passover into communion transforms the shadows of ritual into a partaking of the soon to be completed reality of salvation. For by eating the bread, His body, we express our faith in His Person – who He is, the God-man, undiminished deity and true humanity in one person forever. And by drinking the wine we express our faith in His work – what He has done for us, dying for the sins of the world and washing all our transgressions away by that death on the cross in Calvary’s darkness. Thus

by partaking of “communion”, we demonstrate our faith in the “oneness” we have with Jesus Christ on the basis of what He did for us and what only He could have done for us as the perfect Messiah. This new ritual therefore proclaims in a brilliantly simple way the essence of the difference between the two covenants. For while both the old and the new are essentially promises from God made to all who would seek Him, the old made use of shadows which looked forward to a future reality whose exact details of fulfillment were not entirely yet made clear (1 Peter 1:10-12; cf. Job 17:3). But the new is completely open and perspicuous, being founded upon a reality that is already eternally set in place – indeed, the cross is the reality of human history, for it is the ultimate purpose and the power of all that God has ever done or will ever do in this creation (cf. Romans 1:16-17). The cross is “the good news”, because through it we have eternal life, not merely a promise from God of future deliverance (as wonderful as that was), but the proclamation from God of His satisfaction with the Person and work of His Son, through faith in whom we possess that deliverance even now as we wait for our salvation “to be revealed” (1 Peter 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1). By giving the disciples this tangible sign of the salvation He was about to accomplish and the eternal fellowship that was about to be theirs then and is our now through faith in Him – demonstrated to the world each time we “eat of the bread and drink of the cup” – Jesus illuminated all that had gone before, and explained the new and wondrous reality of the “better promises” of the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:6), better because they are based upon the actual sacrifice of Christ rather than its anticipation. It is precisely because Christ has now actually and historically paid the price for sin that Spirit could be “given” (Jn. 7:39), resulting in all the marvelous Church Age gifts, the explosion of the family of God to the gentiles, and the revelation of all the precious new truths of scripture embodied in the New Testament. For [on this matter] I received [directly] from the Lord what I passed on to you, namely that on the night on which He was betrayed He took bread, and having blessed it He broke it and said, “This is my body which is [offered up] on your behalf. Keep on doing this in order to remember Me.” And in the same way [after eating] He took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant [made] by my blood. Keep on doing this as often as you drink [it] in order to remember Me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup (i. e., partake of communion), you are proclaiming the Lord’s death [on our behalf] until He returns. 1 Corinthians 11:23-25 (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20; cf. John 6:51-59) When they had finished, Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn and went out into the night toward the Mount of Olives and Gethsemane (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26). There in the garden our Lord offered up His last prayers of preparation before the ordeal of ordeals He was about to endure. The details of these prayers as recorded in John 17:1-26 show that our Lord was most concerned about His disciples – and about us who would one day be so as well (John 17:6-26). The shorter versions preserved by the synoptic writers are often misunderstood. Jesus’ request for the “cup” of the cross (cf. Matthew 20:22; Mark 10:38) to be taken away “if it be thy will” is made for our benefit, not for His. Peter’s previous protestations (Matthew 16:22-23; Mark 8:32-33) and many heresies since necessitated that our Lord make very clear that this cup could not be taken away – not if we were to be saved. The unmistakable distress our Lord demonstrates is also for our benefit and should be carefully contrasted with the remarkable coolness under pressure He demonstrated throughout the trials and the torture that preceded the crucifixion. For our Lord Jesus was anticipating the death He was about to die for sin (Romans 6:10) in the darkness on the cross, a weight of suffering we cannot even begin to comprehend or imagine, and one which made the sufferings He would endure prior to the redemption about to be achieved by this spiritual death light affliction in

comparison. This is the message of the Gethsemane prayers, namely, to show us the necessity of Him going through what He was about to go through if we were to have eternal life, and to emphasize that it was His death for sin that would be the truly impossible task He was about to make possible. k. The Trials of Christ: When He had finished praying for the third time, Jesus came again to Peter, James and John, found them sleeping, and woke them up, for He knew full well that the time had come (John 18:4 cf. Matthew 26:36-47; Mark 14:40-43; Luke 22:46-47). Led by Judas to whom the chief priests and Pharisees had detailed them (John 18:3), a large multitude of Jewish irregular troops (Matthew 26:47; Mark 14:43; Luke 22:47), and an entire cohort of Roman soldiers (a unit whose regular T. O. and E. complement was 600 soldiers), all armed with torches and weapons, came upon our Lord and His small group of disciples, whereupon Judas identified our Lord as the object of this illegal raid by greeting Him as “master” and embracing Him (Matthew 26:49; Mark 14:45; Luke 22:48; and cf. 2 Samuel 20:9). In the middle of the night and in darkness, set upon by overwhelming hostile forces with malicious intent, we can only imagine what fear may have risen in the hearts of our Lord’s companions. But in what then occurred, Jesus demonstrated through His perfect walk with the Father that He was beyond intimidation. He possessed true “four o’clock in the morning courage” founded upon unshakeable faith as can be seen from every aspect of His handling of this crisis, and there can be no surer demonstration that the pressure our Lord felt as demonstrated for our benefit in the Gethsemane prayers had to do with bearing our sins alone. Since as followers of Jesus we truly have nothing to fear from man (Psalms 56:4; Psalms 118:6), beyond all doubt the Son of God did not, and our Lord’s responses to all of the events of that night and indeed to all of the events that preceded His judgment in the darkness of Calvary on our behalf show this most perspicuously. God’s will would be done and no human being or group of human beings were going to be able to thwart Him.

Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, “Who is it you want?” “Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “I am He,” Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, “I am He,” they drew back and fell to the ground. John 18:4-6 NIV With that, one of Jesus’ companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. “Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?” Matthew 26:51-54 (cf. John 18:11) NIV

Despite the impending burden of the cross and the death for the sins of the world He was about to endure, our Lord’s actions and comments above reveal His complete confidence in who He was, the Son of God Himself. The mere mention of His deity caused the entire groups of attackers to fall before Him, and but a word from Him was necessary to summon an irresistible angelic force to His aid. But our Lord was determined to die on our behalf, and nothing in this world could dissuade Him from accomplishing the Father’s will to our great and eternal benefit. When our Lord had said these things, the flush of mis-directed bravery exhibited by Peter in taking up the sword ebbed away, and the disciples reacted with predictable and prophesied panic (Matthew 26:31; Mark 14:27; cf. Zechariah 13:7), leaving our Lord to be arrested and dragged away, an eventuality He did not resist (Isaiah 53:7-8). At that time Jesus said to the crowd, “Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets

might be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples deserted him and fled. Matthew 26:55-56 NIV (cf. Mark 14:48-52; Luke 22:52-53)

"It is written: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors' (Isaiah 53:12); and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment." Luke 22:37 NIV

The Seven Trials of Christ: In biblical symbolism, while seven is the number of perfection and thus the number of God (e. g., the seventh day, the Millennium, and the seven Edens), six is the number of Man (i. e., created on the sixth day and being incomplete without the addition of the One, Jesus Christ). It is thus no accident that our Lord was made to undergo six trials at the hands of human beings before being judged in the darkness on the cross by the Father in our place. In each of these trials, Jesus was irrefutably innocent but nonetheless condemned, the perfect Lamb of sacrifice without spot or blemish being condemned to death as a substitute for our sins. And in each of the trials conducted by human agency, our Lord was not only condemned but also abused physically and mentally. Nonetheless, though we would be hard-pressed to endure any one such of these six trials, for our Lord they were but a prelude designed to demonstrate His mettle and His perfection before the trial of trials began on the cross itself. This gauntlet of abuse, unprecedented in human history and never to be remotely duplicated, constitutes the final prophesied humiliation of the Messiah. The suffering and humiliation of our Lord Jesus is a recurrent theme in Old Testament prophecy, and an unmistakable one at that (cf. Isaiah 52:1-13, Isaiah 53:1-12), even though, because it was so “uncomfortable”, it was rejected by Jesus’ contemporaries as they rejected Jesus Himself, an outcome which was itself part of His suffering and humiliation (Psalms 22:6; Psalms 118:22; Isaiah 53:3; Mark 9:12; 1 Peter 2:4). Thus the portions of scripture which prophesy this were later occasionally obscured deliberately as in the case of the incorrect traditional vocalization of Psalms 118:21 (covered in fn. #66 above under “Triumphal Entry”). We have already discussed the betrayal of our Lord (prophesied: “my companion, my close friend” Psalms 55:13-14; cf. Psalms 41:9), His abandonment by the disciples (prophesied: “strike the shepherd”: Zechariah 13:7; and see below on Peter’s three denials), and are about to consider the trials our Lord would have to endure which in terms of process and outcome could not have been further removed from any notion of basic justice (prophesied: “they hated Me without cause”: John 15:25 cf. Psalms 35:19; Psalms 69:4; Isaiah 52:13, Isaiah 53:1-12). All of these things contributed greatly to the suffering or “passion” of our Lord to a degree that is easy to miss when merely reading about them in the comfort of our homes. Being betrayed unto death by someone you have cared about and sought to help for years is no small matter, nor is being abandoned and denied by your entire inner circle of closest companions in your hour of greatest need.

Finally, before coming to the crucifixion itself, the six trials of Christ were unquestionably a heavy load beyond anything any of us could ever hope to bear – and especially beyond anything we could hope to bear up under with perfectly sanctified behavior in the manner of our Lord. For beyond the physical suffering, the beating and the scourging, and beyond the mental anguish from the slander, blasphemy, spitting and mocking, the very fact of being condemned by a judicial proceeding, being found to be a wicked person, a lawbreaker and someone to be shunned by any decent citizen, to be set upon by an angry crowd maligning you and calling for your death, are terrible things to have to suffer, especially if completely untrue, unfair and unjust. For any of the rest of us, complete innocence in any matter is problematic, sinners that we are, but no one was ever more completely and demonstrably innocent of all wrong doing or of even of the appearance

of it than was our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet He was condemned six times, rejected even from the consideration of clemency in favor of a genuine criminal (Barabas) by those He had come to save.

We probably will never be able to appreciate fully the emotional suffering of our Lord in all that He endured before the cross, in addition to the physical suffering to which He was subjected throughout those final hours before Golgotha, forced also to bear up under the temptation to indulge in extreme bitterness and anger, rejected, abandoned and abused by everyone as He was. When we add to this His mental anticipation of dying for the sins of the world, a consideration which His prayers in the garden of Gethsemane demonstrate as being out of all proportion to any of these other considerations to the point where they are not even mentioned therein (i. e., His death for sin on the cross is the “cup” to which He refers; see above under “The Last Supper”). Nevertheless, as we consider this part of our Lord’s “passion”, it is absolutely critical for us who call ourselves Christians to understand that all these things which Christ suffered before the cross and which constitute His prophesied humiliation did not expiate our sins. It was the judgment of our Lord Jesus in the darkness on the cross which washed those sins away, and not the unimaginable physical and emotional sufferings that preceded the cross, the event which, from the proper divine point of view, is history.

Why, then, did Jesus have to go through this gauntlet of gauntlets even to get to the cross where He bore our sins “in His body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:24)? Without question all of this preliminary suffering fulfilled a whole host of Old Testament prophecies (cf. Acts 13:27-29). And without question the devil did all that he possibly could to prevent Jesus from reaching the cross in a manner acceptable to the Father and as an acceptable Substitute for our sins, for that was where the victory in the unseen conflict raging around us was finally and definitively won with eternal results (John 16:33; Romans 14:9-10; Ephesians 1:19-23; Php 2:9-11; Colossians 2:15; Revelation 5:5-14; cf. Ephesians 4:8-10). What we can also say, moreover, is that our Lord’s resolute and unwavering negotiation of this final gauntlet serves to provide a vivid demonstration of His boundless love for us, and for the entire world.

Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. John 13:1 KJV For God loved the world so much that He gave [up] His only Son, [with the purpose] that everyone who believes in Him should not be lost [forever], but have eternal life [instead]. John 3:16. But short of Satan’s physical prevention of our Lord (something he was clearly not allowed to do), nothing could stop Him from carrying out the Father’s will to the end, no matter how hard, how painful, how emotionally or physically searing it proved to be, and not even when what lay beyond the gauntlet of pain and humiliation was something so incredibly impossible and horrifying that we are incapable of even dimly understanding it this side of heaven – standing judgment and dying for our sins, and for those of the entire world. In this as in everything important, Jesus is our role model, and just as He did, so we too are to carry our cross and do whatever God puts in front of us. But we can rest assured that whatever this may be it will never approach what Jesus went through, and that on the other side of whatever gauntlet we may face, even if martyrdom be our lot in the midst of the Great Tribulation to come, rather than undergoing anything like the ultimate sacrifice made by our Lord, we instead will be liberated from any further suffering and find ourselves standing before Him there in the third heaven with a “well done” for following Him and His example, “sharing the sufferings of Christ” (1 Peter 4:13; cf.

Romans 8:17; 2 Corinthians 1:5; Php 3:10; Colossians 1:24).

Behold, My Servant will embrace the truth. He will arise on high, be lifted up, and be greatly exalted, to a proportional degree that many had [previously] been appalled at Him. For His appearance had been marred beyond human [likeness], and His form more than [that of any] other man. As a result, He shall sprinkle [with salvation] many gentile [nation]s. Kings will shut their mouths at [the sight of] Him. For those [gentiles] who had not been told shall see, and those [gentiles] who had not understood shall hear. [But] who has believed our report? And to whom has the Arm of the Lord (i. e., the Messiah) been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a suckling plant, like a root [springing up] from dry ground. He had no [particular] handsomeness that we should take note of Him, no [obvious] charisma that we should be taken with Him. [On the contrary,] He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with suffering. Like a person people hide their faces from, He was despised, and we did not hold Him of any account. For He took away our torments, and He shouldered our weaknesses. And yet we considered Him as [the One who had been] punished, smitten and afflicted by God. But [in fact] He was made subject to torment on account of our transgressions, and He was crushed because of our collective guilt (lit., “guilts”). The punishment [required] for making peace [with God] on our behalf [fell] upon Him. Because of His wounding, we have been healed. We have all gone astray like sheep. Each of us has turned to his own way. And the Lord caused the guilt of us all to strike Him. Though He was oppressed and afflicted, like a lamb led to slaughter He did not open His mouth, and like a ewe before her shearers He did not open His mouth. By repressive judgment He was taken away, and who gave any thought to His posterity? For He was cut off from the land of the living. He was punished for the transgression of my people. And they assigned Him a grave with the wicked (pl.) and with a rich [man] in His deaths (sic). Not for any violence that He had done. Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. For it was the Lord’s good pleasure (i. e., “will”) to crush Him, to subject Him to torment. But though you make His life a guilt offering, He will see His seed, He will lengthen His days, and the good pleasure (i. e., “will”) of the Lord will prosper in His hand. [Released] from the trouble [inflicted] upon His life, He will [again] see [the light of life] and be satisfied (i. e., in resurrection). My righteous Servant will provide righteousness for the great [of heart] (i. e., believers) through the[ir] acknowledgment of Him, and He Himself will shoulder their guilt (lit., “guilts”). Therefore I will allot the great [of heart] to Him [as His portion of the plunder], and He will apportion plunder to the[se same] mighty [of heart]. Because He bared His life to death and was numbered with the transgressors, thereby He took away the sin of the great [of heart] and substituted [Himself] for the transgressors. Isaiah 52:13-15, Isaiah 53:1-12.

I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. Isaiah 50:6-7 KJV
My God, My God, why did You forsake Me? [Why were You so] far from saving Me, [so far] from [answering] the words I roared forth? Psalms 22:1. But I am a worm, not a man, the reproach of mankind and One rejected by the people. All who see Me, mock Me. They open wide their mouths. They shake their heads [at Me]. “He relies on God. Let Him rescue Him! Let Him deliver Him, if He takes pleasure in Him” (cf. Matthew 27:39-43; Mark 15:27-32; Luke 23:35-37). For You are the One who cut Me out of the womb. You are the One who made Me trust in You on my mother’s breasts. I was cast upon (i. e., made to rely upon) You from the womb (i. e., immediately after

birth). [Since the moment I came] from out of the womb You have been my God. Be not far from Me, for trouble is near, for there is no one [else] to help [Me]. [Like] many bulls they have encircled Me. [Like] strong bulls from Bashan they have surrounded Me. They open their mouths against Me [like] roaring lions about to pounce on their prey. I am poured out like water, and all My bones are being stretched apart. My heart has become like wax. It is melting inside of Me. My strength is evaporating like a broken piece of pottery, and My tongue is sticking to the roof of My mouth [with thirst]. For You (cf. Psalms 22:1-2) have set Me ablaze in the dust of death. For they have surrounded Me [like] dogs. [This] congregation of evil-doers has encompassed Me. They have pierced My hands and My feet. I can count all My bones. [While] they look on and stare at Me, they are dividing up My clothes for themselves, and for My garments they are casting lots. But You, Lord, be not far off! O My God, hurry to My help! Deliver My life from the sword, My precious [life] from the power of [these] dog[s]! Save Me from the mouth of the lion! Answer Me from amid the horns of these wild oxen! Psalms 22:6-21.

Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me. Psalms 41:9 NIV

If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God. Psalms 55:12-14 NIV For they mixed gall with what they gave Me to eat, and for My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink. Psalms 69:21 (cf. Psalms 69:19-21; Matthew 27:34, Matthew 27:48; Mark 15:23, Mark 15:36; Luke 23:36; John 19:29)

Remember, Lord, how your servant has been mocked, how I bear in my heart the taunts of all the nations, the taunts with which your enemies have mocked, O Lord, with which they have mocked every step of your anointed one. Psalms 89:50-51 NIV The Stone which the builders rejected has become the Cornerstone. Psalms 118:22. For they have struck on the cheek with a rod the Judge of Israel. Micah 5:1 b In addition to the beating, spitting, mocking, lying, cursing, betrayal, rejection and all of the other things He had to endure, it should be noted as well that besides being a particularly painful form of execution, the fact that our Lord was crucified (as opposed to being stoned to death or beheaded), constituted a part of His humiliation as well. For there was a certain amount of shame involved in this type of death (cf. Hebrews 12:2), since it proclaimed the person in question as being “under a curse” (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13).

He made Him who had no [personal] experience of sinning [to be] sin (i. e., a sin offering) for us, so that we might have God’s righteousness in Him. 2 Corinthians 5:21.

. . . [Moses] considered the reproach [suffered on behalf] of Christ greater riches than the treasure vaults of Egypt. For he was looking to his reward. Hebrews 11:26.

Since then we too [like the believers of Hebrews 11:1-40] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and run with endurance the race set before us, turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despise, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Keep in mind all the terrible opposition He endured against Himself at the hands of sinful men, so as not to

grow sick at heart and give up. Hebrews 12:1-3. So let us go outside the camp to Him, bearing His reproach. Hebrews 13:13.

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, in order that we might die to sins and live to righteousness. By His wound you are healed. 1 Peter 2:24. But before the ultimate trial of the crucifixion itself and the death for sin He would die on our behalf in the darkness while hung on the cross, our Lord, though completely innocent, would be made to undergo six prior trials at the hands of sinful human beings, and be abused, rejected and condemned by mere men for whom He was about to die.

1) The Trial before Annas (John 18:12-24): In our Lord's day the high-priesthood had become a largely political office. Annas, though no longer holding the office, was Caiaphas' father-in-law and the apparent power behind the throne, so it was to him that our Lord was first brought after being arrested in the garden of Gethsemane. Under intense interrogation, Jesus refused to answer questions about His disciples and remained unintimidated in spite of physical abuse (cf. John 18:21-23 with Isaiah 50:8-9).

2) The Trial before Caiaphas (Matthew 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65): From comparing the accounts of John and Matthew, it seems likely that Annas' residence shared an inner courtyard with the official residence of the high priest. As in the first interrogation, this trial must have taken place on the portico of the residence, for Peter is able to observe its progress, and our Lord is able to see Peter immediately after his third denial (Luke 22:61). While the first trial seems to have been focused upon gathering intelligence in order to round up all of our Lord's followers, this second trial seems to have served a probouleutic function, having the purpose of concocting an appropriate charge for a death penalty at once acceptable to and persuasive for the Roman governor. None of the witnesses interviewed provided anything convincing, however, and it was only when our Lord affirmed His status as the Messiah under direct questioning that His accusers became satisfied that they had enough evidence to convict Him. In the process of this trial, Jesus was spit upon, slapped, beaten, blindfolded, and mocked.

3) The Trial before the Sanhedrin (Matthew 27:1; Mark 15:1 a; Luke 22:66-71; cf. John 18:28): While the first two trials took place in close geographic proximity, probably just before dawn our Lord was marched to the council house where the Jewish senate or Sanhedrin met. All four of the gospels indicate that this third trial, coming very shortly after the second and, with Peter's denials sandwiched in between them, that it took place at day break. The purpose of this trial before the most politically powerful individuals in Jerusalem and Judea (outside of the Roman governor and his staff) was merely to place a formal "rubber stamp" on the charge prepared by the high priest. The details of this trial are recorded only in Luke and the only accusation about which our Lord is asked is the same one which caused Caiaphas to rend his garments: And they all said, "Are you the Son of God then?" And He said to them, "Yes I am." Luke 22:70 NASB The outcome of this apparently very short trial was a rapid sentence of condemnation, after which our Lord was led, bound, to the praetorium or headquarters of the Roman governor (Matthew 27:2).

4) The Trial before Pilate: First Phase (Matthew 27:11-14; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-5; John 18:28-38): Bringing our Lord before Pilate was necessary inasmuch as that in Judea, being a Roman protectorate, the power of capital punishment was reserved for the Roman governor (John 18:31). That was the sole purpose of the change of venue. For inasmuch as the rulers of Israel

had determined that Jesus should die, the only thing left was effecting this decision, and that required persuading the Roman governor to acquiesce in their sentence of death. For this purpose, the priests, elders, scribes and Pharisees were willing to resort to any sort of falsity, and were clearly irritated that they had to provide any sort of rationale for a decision they had already reached (“If this man were not doing wrong, we would not have handed him over to you”; John 18:30). Luke records a threefold indictment in response to Pilate’s demand for a reason to execute Jesus:

“We discovered this man [1] misleading our people and [2] preventing [us from] paying taxes to Caesar and [3] saying that he is Messiah, [that is,] king”. Luke 23:2 b The idea that they had only just now “come upon” our Lord acting in a criminal way is designed to prejudice the entire proceeding (by removing any suspicion of jealousy for one thing). “Misleading the people” is an entirely generic charge and meant to give Pilate a reason to agree in case he might be inclined to give them a blank check without further ado. “Preventing the paying of taxes” is, of course, a complete canard, for the command of our Lord to “render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and unto God what is God’s” had unquestionably become very well known. Resentment over the paying of tax to gentile occupiers and conspiring to avoid and resist such taxation was actually a crime of which these men were likely to have been guilty themselves. This second charge did, however, furnish Pilate with an appropriate rationale for granting an execution in case he were inclined to do so but not without at least a fig leaf of respectability. Finally, almost as an afterthought, they include the charge upon which the Sanhedrin had actually agreed: Jesus claimed to be the Messiah. This was blasphemy in their unbelieving eyes, and they add the word “king” by way of explanation, no doubt because they knew very well that any claim of kingship as an alternative to Caesar, and especially one which claimed a divine mandate, was likely to be viewed as a traitorous threat by the Roman administration. They did not, however, count on Pilate’s seeing through and dismissing the first two charges out of hand and concentrating on the third.

“Are you the king of the Jews?” Matthew 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3; John 18:33.

“You say [so].” Matthew 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3; John 18:37.

Only John records Jesus’ more extended explanation. He is indeed a king, but His kingdom is not of this world. He has come to testify to the truth, not to replace any earthly rule (at this time). Pilate’s infamous answer, “What is truth” (John 18:38), indicates that he understood quite clearly that our Lord was not instigating any sort of earthly rebellion. As a result, Pilate’s first and just verdict was an easy one for him to render:

“I find no guilt in this man.” Luke 23:4 (cf. John 18:38) But this verdict was met with a vigorous appeal by the accusers against the acquitted. Contrary to every standard of justice, Pilate allowed this verbal onslaught to continue for some time and was “amazed” that our Lord did not respond to any further charges (Matthew 27:14; Mark 15:5): Jesus had cooperated with all the prior legal process to which He had been subjected despite its overwhelming unfairness. But having been officially acquitted, He was not longer bound by any standard of justice no matter how perverse to answer further, thus giving Pilate no further avenue of approach (despite his attempt to elicit one: “Don’t you hear what terrible things they are accusing you of?”; Matthew 27:13; Mark 15:4). This explains why Pilate seized on the fact that Jesus’ ministry had begun in Galilee as soon as he was apprised of that fact (Luke 23:5-7).

5) The Trial before Herod (Luke 23:8-12): Sending our Lord to Herod must have seemed to Pilate a perfect solution. It was a marvelous way of passing the responsibility off. Herod's father, Herod "the great", had, after all, ruled Judea as king under a Roman protectorate which had only been dissolved upon his death (following the malfeasance of the eldest son, Herod Archelaus), and we may well imagine that this other son also had some hopes of regaining his father's position. If anyone was likely to take offense at someone else proclaiming themselves "king", it was surely Herod. Herod's father had attempted to kill Jesus, and had killed the male children of Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1-19), while his son, the present Herod (Antipas), had executed our Lord's herald, John the baptist (Matthew 14:3-12; Mark 6:17-30; Luke 9:9). Thus, sending Jesus to Herod was far from a benign act, and that fact was surely not lost on our Lord. But while Herod was pleased to be provided with this entertainment and questioned our Lord at length (to no effect, since our Lord did not respond to this illegal proceeding), he apparently had no desire and no intention of becoming involved in any legal process. After subjecting Jesus to more abuse, he sent Him back to Pilate.

6) The Trial before Pilate: Second Phase (Matthew 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:13-25; John 18:39-40, John 19:1-16): Pilate interpreted Herod's return of our Lord to him as ratification of his own previous acquittal (Luke 23:15). Upon that return, Pilate made several further attempts to prevent our Lord's crucifixion. There are no doubt several reasons for this, but we need not attribute any deep respect for justice on his part as one of them (cf. John 18:38 : "What is truth?"). The witness of our Lord and the power of His presence caused the Roman governor some serious foreboding (cf., John 19:7-12), and it is also likely that his wife's warning to him not to have anything to do with our Lord had been the source of some further unease (Matthew 27:19). But Pilate is also likely to have been motivated to spare Jesus out of 1) his desire not to lose this "contest of wills" between himself and the Jewish authorities, and 2) a further desire to avoid becoming implicated in any way in what he clearly saw as a political murder – not out of a sense of justice but rather out of a desire to stay above the fray of Jewish party politics in order not to alienate any faction unnecessarily (i. e., he recognized that Jesus had been arrested "out of envy": Matthew 27:18; Mark 15:10; this also explains why he literally "washed his hands" of the matter after being unable to convince the crowd otherwise: Matthew 27:24-25). When his attempt to proclaim Jesus innocent based upon his own and upon Herod's examination failed to persuade, in order to relieve himself of this situation which was growing increasingly tense Pilate tried to find an acceptable alternative to crucifixion, first by making use of his politically astute custom of releasing some well-known prisoner every Passover. But the crowd, egged on by the chief priests and the elders, shouted for Barabbas instead (Matthew 27:20; Mark 15:11). He also tried humiliation and abuse, having our Lord beaten and whipped further and ridiculed by the soldiers (Matthew 27:27-30; Mark 15:16-19; John 19:2-3), then presenting Him to the crowd dressed in purple but wearing a crown of thorns (symbolic, though unbeknownst to Pilate, of the curse He was about to be made for the sake of the whole world: cf. Genesis 3:18), and providing the comic introduction himself: "Look, here's the man [now]!" (John 19:5). When this overture too was refused, and when a further interview with our Lord provided no insights or help to his dilemma ("Don't you know that I have the authority to release you and the authority to crucify you?" – "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 NASB), Pilate finally delivered Jesus over to crucifixion when the people under the guidance of their Jewish leaders played their ace trump: "If you release this man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar"

(John 19:12 NASB). Pilate, the ultimate political pragmatist, knew that he had been beaten at this point. Failing to give our Lord over to the people and their will would now be very costly for him (even though it was certainly within his power), and he was unwilling to suffer any possible disadvantage (whether in terms of an immediate riot, future instability, or a possible charge of malfeasance lodged with Caesar) just for Jesus' sake. However, wishing to make it crystal clear that he was only acquiescing in a decision of their making, he first washed his hands to demonstrate his "innocence" (cf. Deuteronomy 21:6), and the people responded: "His blood be on us and our children!" (Matthew 27:25 NASB). Then, to leave no doubt, and to gain some political capital from this defeat, Pilate referred to Jesus as their "King", questioning whether or not they really wanted to crucify their own king, until they responded "We don't have a king – except Caesar" (John 19:15). Having made the best of a bad situation (from his spiritually blind point of view), Pilate "handed Jesus over to their will" to be crucified (Luke 23:25; cf. Matthew 27:26; Mark 15:15; John 19:16). I. The Crucifixion:

1) The Events of the Crucifixion:

Ridiculed, rejected, beaten and scourged, our Lord who by this time was nearing the end of His physical strength (but not of His moral resolve) was made to take up His own cross and carry it to the place of execution, "Golgotha", a Hebrew name meaning "skull". John tells us that on the initial leg of the journey Jesus was carrying His cross Himself (John 19:17). Having received enough physical abuse over the course of the preceding night and morning to kill most lesser men, our Lord was apparently unable to move fast enough to suit the Roman soldiers taking Him to the place of death, and so they "drafted" Simon of Cyrene, father of Alexander and Rufus (cf. Romans 16:13) in order to carry the cross for Him the remainder of the way (Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26). As the procession made its way along, with two criminals also slated for crucifixion in the column (Luke 23:32), our Lord at one point turned to the large crowd which was following to address the women who were beating their breasts and lamenting Him:

Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, "Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!" Then "they will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!'" For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry? Luke 23:28-31. The second quote from Hosea 10:8 is a prophecy of the response of the wicked and unregenerate to the return of Messiah at His second advent. With this quote and with these words our Lord shifts the focus of the mourners from His circumstances to their own spiritual danger. Within a few decades (A. D. 68), Jerusalem would be completely destroyed by the Romans without doubt on account of her overall unwillingness to accept her Messiah. No amount of mourning for Jesus' crucifixion would be able to save Jerusalem from her fate, nor would this mourning save any of the crowd who were also unwilling to believe in Jesus, accepting Him as the Messiah, the one and only Son of God who was about to die for their sins and for the sins of the entire world. When they arrived at Golgotha, our Lord was offered wine mixed with some sort of additive to deaden the pain. Mark calls it "myrrh" and Matthew calls it "gall". Both terms are somewhat generic in Greek (i. e., admissible of a wide variety of bitter, aromatic substances). Matthew's choice of the word "gall" is clearly intended to emphasize the fulfillment of part of the prophecy from Psalms 69:21, "They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst" (where the Hebrew word ro'sh [translated here "gall"] actually refers to a specific bitter herb, "wormwood",

but is often used metaphorically for things producing noxious effects). Mark's use of "myrrh" makes this event more understandable for his Roman audience and also demonstrates for us the reason behind Jesus' refusal to drink it: certain types of myrrh were considered to have sedative properties, and our Lord, though without question by now terribly thirsty after this horrendous ordeal, was yet unwilling to drink anything that would in any way compromise His free will decision to take on the sins of the world – He had to be fully conscious when He bore our sins for the sacrifice to count. As in all the events of this gauntlet He ran for us even to get to the cross, everything He did, He did for us – that we might have eternal life. When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. Matthew 27:35 NIV And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get. Mark 15:24 NIV When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left. Luke 23:33 NIV Here they crucified him, and with him two others – one on each side and Jesus in the middle. John 19:18 NIV

What has always struck this author about the actual description of the act of nailing our Lord to the cross is that seems almost to be glossed over by the gospel writers, especially in comparison to the prominence it has been given in Christian art, literature and music over the millennia. I believe that this fact alone should serve to indicate to us that it is not the physical death our Lord which is to be emphasized in considering His sacrifice on our behalf. After all, as we shall see below, Jesus died physically by voluntarily exhaling His spirit, not from exposure or shock or trauma or any loss of blood. He lay down His own physical life once His work on the cross in dying spiritually for us had been accomplished. That "work", that [spiritual] death, was to be judged in our place, to stand judgment for the sins of the world that the world might be saved through faith in Him. For they have surrounded Me [like] dogs. [This] congregation of evil-doers has encompassed Me. They have pierced My hands and My feet. I can count all My bones. [While] they look on and stare at Me, they are dividing up My clothes for themselves, and for My garments they are casting lots. Psalms 22:16-18. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Isaiah 53:5 NIV And I will pour out on the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem a Spirit of grace and repentance. For they will look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they will grieve for Him like the grieving for an only son, and they will [weep] bitterly for Him like the bitter [weeping] for a firstborn son. Zechariah 12:10. And just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up (i. e., on the cross for all to view as the object of faith for forgiveness of sins; cf. Numbers 21:4-9), in order that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life. For God loved the world so much that He gave [up] His only Son, [with the purpose] that everyone who believes in Him should not be lost [forever], but have eternal life [instead]. John 3:14-16.

Behold! He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the peoples of the earth will grieve on account of Him. Revelation 1:7. The usual punishment for Roman citizens found guilty of capital crimes was beheading (cf. the fasces, the bundle of rods bound around an ax, carried by Roman lictors), a far less cruel and less painful form of execution than being crucified, and one which was over with much more quickly as well. But crucifixion was meant to send a message to all who witnessed it of the horrible retribution which awaited those who opposed Roman authority. It was thus no accident that crucifixion by design entailed in most

cases a very painful death from shock, exposure, and dehydration in a process which could last several days. This explains both Pilate's surprise at Jesus' "rapid" death (Mark 15:44), and also why the Roman soldiers had to break the legs of the two criminals crucified at Jesus' right and left so that they might be removed before the Sabbath began (John 19:33). Deprived of the ability to adjust their positions on the cross by means of their legs, suffocation would soon result (and shock, of course, would be greatly increased thus hastening the process). But, according to the prophecy, "not one bone" of our Lord's body was broken in His death on our behalf (Psalms 34:20; John 19:36 cf. Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12). The soldiers passed Him by after determining by piercing His side that He was already dead – He had already given up His spirit, His work of atonement already having been completed during the preceding three hours of darkness on the cross. To inhabitants of the Roman world, therefore, the cross was a sign and symbol of disgrace, reproach, and death, and in particular a very painful, public, and shameful death. Moreover this was particularly true for Jews, since hanging a person (on a tree [or cross]) is indicative of that person being "under a curse" (Deuteronomy 21:23; cf. Joshua 8:29; Joshua 10:26; 2 Samuel 4:12; Galatians 3:13). This should remind us, we who embrace the name "Christian", just what our Lord was saying to us when He told us to "pick up our cross" and follow Him (Matthew 10:38; Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; Luke 14:27). For as His example makes clear, this is not a command to endure mere minor or temporary "inconvenience", but rather it is a call to a life that foreswears the world and all that is in it, embracing instead the suffering and the reproach of Christ for the sake of pleasing the One who did for us what we could never do for ourselves: expiate the justice of God by dying for our sins on the cross, thus opening the door for our eternal life with Him. By faith, Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and chose instead to suffer maltreatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin, because he considered the reproach [suffered on behalf] of Christ greater riches than the treasure vaults of Egypt. For he was looking to his reward. Hebrews 11:24-26.

Since then we too [like the believers of Hebrews 11:1-40] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and run with endurance the race set before us, turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despite, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:1-2.

Therefore Jesus too, in order that He might sanctify the people through His own blood (i. e., His death on the cross), suffered outside the gate (i. e., separated from fellowship). So then let us go out to Him outside of the camp (i. e., likewise choosing God over the world), bearing His reproach. Hebrews 13:12-13.

Even as He was lifted up on the cross, His hands and feet pierced by the nails that held Him there, for all his disciples who by now should have been capable of seeing through the veil of time to the glories beyond, this vision of suffering and reproach should yet have called to mind that day then soon to come when our Lord now lifted up in worldly shame would be lifted up in resurrection to ascend to heaven and be seated in glory at the Father's right hand; and it should now call to mind that day now soon to come when our Lord's sign of the cross will appear in the heavens to the entire world, with Moses and Elijah, only recently martyred themselves, taking their places of honor at our Lord's right and left hands (Matthew 24:29-30; cf. Revelation 11:7-14).

After our Lord was nailed to His cross and lifted up on Golgotha, the gospels record several events which took place before the supernatural darkness descended upon Calvary at about mid-day:

1. The dividing up of His clothing: This was of course another fulfillment of prophecy regarding the suffering of the Messiah (Psalms 22:18; John 19:24), and we should note that it can have been no small part of the psychological torment that was crucifixion for the subject to have to watch while all his earthly possessions were parceled out even while he was yet alive. Yet as our Lord told us we must do (Luke 14:33; cf. Matthew 19:29; Mark 10:29-30; Luke 18:29-30), so He had from the first put no stock in the things of this world, possessing only the bare essentials necessary to function effectively in the ministry to which He had been called (Matthew 8:20; Luke 9:58). This does not mean that we have been called to lives of abject poverty or that we should divest ourselves of all that we have beyond what is necessary to sustain life, but our Lord's example does provide for us the perfect standard: the things of this world had no power over Him whatsoever, so that this act of cruelty could not dissuade Him from His objective in the slightest. So we also, no matter whether we find ourselves, as Paul says, "in want or in plenty" (Php 4:12), should consider whatever we have to be gifts from God for the purpose of doing His will, being ever ready to part with them if necessary for the sake of Jesus Christ (cf. Php 3:7-8).

2. The Inscription on the cross: Matthew and Mark both describe Pilate's inscription as the "charge" for which our Lord was crucified, and there is deliberate divine irony in the fact that, officially speaking, Christ was ordered to be crucified for admitting under questioning to be what in fact He most surely was and is: "the King of the Jews" (Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; cf. Matthew 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:2-3). In Christian iconography, the letters INRI are often employed as an acrostic for Pilate's inscription which was actually written in triplicate, in "Hebrew, Latin and Greek" (John 19:20). These letters represent a probable reconstruction of the Latin inscription based upon John's Greek version: Iesus Nazoraius Rex Iudaeorum ("Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews"). The lead inscription was in Hebrew as the language spoken in Jerusalem (not "Aramaic" as some versions, notably the NIV, erroneously translate the Greek word *Hebraisti*), with Latin second, being the official language of state authority. Greek was also used since anyone likely to be in Jerusalem yet not conversant with Hebrew or Latin would almost certainly know enough Greek, the lingua franca of the entire eastern Mediterranean world, to read and understand these words. Thus Pilate's description of Jesus as "king" was accessible to all who came to witness Jesus' crucifixion. Further, the placard on which it was written, whose words are similarly described in all four gospels (Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19), was posted on our Lord's cross plainly visible to all, and on that account occasioned complaint from the chief priests who tried to no avail to have Pilate change the wording, objecting to the statement proclaiming that here was "the king of the Jews". Pilate refused to do so, replying "what I have written, I have written" (John 19:22), allowing this truth they found so uncomfortable to remain in place.

3. Jesus is mocked from the cross (Matthew 27:39-44; Mark 15:29-32; Luke 23:35-39): The scorn which the crowd in general and the chief priests and scribes in particular heaped upon our Lord as He hung on the cross – about to stand judgment for their sins and ours – was prophesied in scripture both generally (cf. especially Psalms 22:7) and specifically. In the latter category, we see the chief priests and scribes actually quoting Psalms 22:1-31 to chastise Him, using the very prophetic words which foretold of this suffering of the Messiah and now serve to condemn their

blind, self-righteous behavior:

“Roll (i. e., “commit”) [Yourself] to the Lord. Let Him rescue Him. Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him.” Psalms 22:8. In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” Matthew 27:41-43 NIV

One final thing to notice about this verbal abuse which our Lord sustained from all sides, the height of ingratitude from those He had come to save and for whom He was about to die, is that Jesus most certainly could have come down from the cross and made them all eat these horrible words. He could have changed His mind. He did not have to die for the sins of the world. He did it for us out a love so deep it can never be plumbed. And it is a mark of His great courage and that great love that though we turned away and though they taunted Him so violently, yet He chose to stay on the cross in order to provide eternal redemption even for those who mocked Him.

4. The two robbers: Along with our Lord, two robbers had likewise been led away to Calvary in our Lord’s execution procession (Luke 23:32-33) and were crucified, one on His right and one on His left (Matthew 27:38; Mark 15:27-28; Luke 23:33). This also fulfilled in part a prophecy to which Jesus Himself had referred, namely, that the Messiah should be “numbered with transgressors” (Luke 22:37). The Greek words employed to describe these men, *lestes* in Matthew and Mark, and *kakourgos* in Luke, indicate that far from being petty criminals, these men were professional felons of the most violent sort, highway robbers and/or home invaders guilty of terrible crimes. At first, they joined in with the rest, reproaching Jesus in His innocence, but after a time, no doubt impressed by the fortitude and courage shown by our Lord and stricken in what conscience he still had left, one of these thieves had a change of heart. He ceased his own mockery, rebuked his compatriot, and appealed to our Lord for mercy.

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!” But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus answered him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” Luke 23:39-43 NIV Our Lord’s reply, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with Me in paradise”, crystallizes for all who are willing to hear it the utter vanity of this world on the one hand, and the extreme of importance of the real reason we are in it on the other. For this man had led a life of which anyone would look back and be ashamed – yet he will be in heaven with us all as a brother in Jesus for all eternity simply for repenting of his folly and placing his faith in the Lord who was about to die for him. Whereas the vast majority of those watching, though they were admired in the eyes of the world and had led lives that may have been fairly honorable, will be cast into the lake of fire forever, simply because they refused to accept God’s gracious gift of salvation in the person of His beloved Son.

5. Jesus’ instructions to John about Mary:

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby,

he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. John 19:25-27 NIV

These verses clearly demonstrate that even in the midst of such pain and torment, on the point of dying for the sins of the world, our Lord nevertheless carried out every earthly responsibility perfectly as well, making provision here from the cross for the mother of His humanity. As Mary's sister was standing by, however, and considering that in addition to her extended family (cf. Luke 1:39-45), Mary had a rather large number of other children herself (cf. Matthew 13:56; Matthew 28:10; Mark 3:31; Luke 8:19; John 2:12; John 7:3; Acts 1:14; 1 Corinthians 9:5; Galatians 1:19; Jude 1:1), some explanation of why our Lord made this particular assignment is necessary. As the elder brother, the care of His sole remaining parent was indeed our Lord's responsibility, and one which He was apparently unwilling to leave to others to decide in His stead. In terms of worldly priorities, it is not unreasonable to say that most of us would have put family first in such situations (on the principle that "blood is thicker than water"). Or we might consider the material aspects and entrust our loved one to whomever could best provide. John was not family. John was poor (and no doubt poorer than Jesus' brothers, for John had been unemployed in the worldly sense for the past three years, living off donations along with Jesus and the other twelve: cf. Luke 8:3). But our Lord was clearly more concerned with His mother's spiritual welfare than with either family considerations or economic concerns (for letting His brothers take care of her would have been better on both of these other two counts). Jesus was concerned that His mother continue in an environment of faith, and by this action clearly demonstrates that her eternal life and spiritual growth were of far more importance to Him than her physical circumstances and financial security. As with all of the other events of the cross, this is a serious lesson for us: if we really love someone, we should live by Jesus' example here and put their spiritual welfare ahead of all other considerations. For even if we see to it that they are happy, healthy, and know no financial want, if they are suffering spiritually as a result of our focus on these other issues – far subordinate in God's eyes to maintaining healthy faith, growing in the truth, and drawing closer to Him and His Son – then we have made a poor bargain indeed.

Since as we have seen none of the disciples really grasped the reality or the gravity of our Lord's impending death before the fact, it would have been somewhat imprudent of our Lord to entrust this responsibility to John (or anyone else, for that matter) before now. John was, as it says here, "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (cf. also John 13:23; John 20:2; John 21:7, John 21:20). Since our Lord's judgment was perfect, this means that John's spiritual priorities were admirable even in comparison to the other disciples, for the qualities which attracted our Lord to John must have been primarily spiritual. As such, John seems to have been the best choice and indeed the perfect choice to look after Mary.

6. The interpolation "Father forgive them" is not a part of scripture: Possibly one of the most famous and most frequently translated passages which reputed to be biblical but are not is "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." This half verse, occurring in some manuscripts in the text of Luke in Luke 23:34, is without question not a part of the Bible, but rather is a later addition put there by some scribe to fill out the gospel story (for motives discussed below). Whether the issue is viewed from a linguistic, textual, historical or theological perspective, on all counts the passage is manifestly a forgery.

1) Linguistic evidence: Luke 23:33 ends with “there they crucified Him and the lawbreakers, one on His right and one on His left . . .”, while Luke 23:34, following the interpolation, completes this thought with “and dividing up His clothes they cast lots for them.” Even in most English versions (at least where not too much trouble has been taken to “airbrush” the problems with this awkward insertion) the text as modified does not ring true. In the Greek, the startling change of subject then immediate return to the narrative arouses immediate concerns about the text. This interjection (and in the Greek, the verb is in the imperfect tense meaning that Jesus “kept saying” this throughout) does not accord with Luke’s narrative style where chains of events are seldom interrupted and where statements, especially important statements, are usually given some introduction and followed by some commentary or explanation or description of reaction. Were Luke to have written this at the end of Luke 23:34 instead of at its beginning, the placement would have been less jarring, but it seems clear that the interpolator decided on this point for the insertion since he was wishing to put these words into Jesus’ mouth directly after the act of nailing our Lord to the cross (and we have already discussed the fact that the scriptures do not in fact go into great detail about that actual act – precisely because it was His death for sin in the darkness, not the physical suffering of being nailed to the cross, which is the basis for our salvation). Even so, the words “and the lawbreakers, one on His right and one on His left” split up the act of Jesus’ crucifixion from this statement (a fact that makes the placement of this non-scriptural addition seem even more clumsy). While on their own, these facts might not be decisive, they do serve to raise suspicion about the passage for all who are reading the text closely, and especially for those reading it in Greek.

2) Textual Evidence: Possibly the most decisive evidence against considering this half-verse as part of the Bible is the fact that it does not occur in some of the best and earliest manuscripts of the New Testament. Not only does the contemporaneous corrector of Sinaiticus, the best of the ancient manuscripts, correct the faulty inclusion in that ms. by expunging it, but it does not occur in the first place in some of the other major and most important witnesses (e. g., Vaticanus, D, W, Theta, and finally the Bodmer papyrus, a witness that pre-dates almost all other witnesses, being generally assigned to circa 250-290 A. D.). As a result, all the best critical editions of the Greek New Testament mark the passage as spurious. According to the canons of textual criticism, one of the main issues one should consider in cases of this sort is how likely inclusion or exclusion would be if the passage were original or not. Given how famous this passage is, how pithy, and how eminently quotable (it is perhaps the most quoted “verse” in the NT), no good reason can be suggested for why any copyist should wish to leave it out, nor can any reasonable theory be proffered for how such an otherwise famous passage might have been accidentally overlooked. Thus, the absence of the passage in some of the best and earliest witnesses constitutes overwhelming proof of its lack of authenticity, for the only way for it to have been missing in these early manuscripts is if it was not originally part of the genuine text (but only added after the penning of these early witnesses).

3) Historical Evidence: While a rationale for a scribe to exclude this passage do not come readily to hand, the reasons why someone might want to insert such a passage or defend it once inserted are obvious. For example, as any diligent reader of scripture is fully aware, as he was being stoned Stephen proclaimed “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” (Acts 7:60 NIV). Putting aside the obvious distinction that Stephen was not the Messiah about to die for the sins of the

world, it is yet easy to see how a person with a superficial understanding of the nature of our Lord's death for sin on our behalf might find the lack of a similar statement of blanket forgiveness troubling, and might wish to rectify the perceived "problem" (which is in reality no problem at all; see the following point) by means of this interpolation. The fact that all of the major modern English versions print this passage even though their policy elsewhere is to include only what is clearly in the original Greek text shows that this is not merely an ancient prejudice (and by now, of course, there is also a great emotional attachment to this verse on behalf of many). Had the interpolater merely reproduced Stephen's words or some form thereof, the fact of his fraud would have been immediately and glaringly obvious. While he avoided this potential evidence against his crime, happily for us he did not make the passage up out of whole cloth: this half verse is in fact taken from an early Church historian by the name of Hegisippus (whose work now survives only in fragments, existing in Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History). We find this quotation in Eusebius' second book, discussing the martyrdom of James:

"So they went up and threw down the just man, and said to each other, 'Let us stone James the Just.' And they began to stone him, for he was not killed by the fall; but he turned and knelt down and said, 'I entreat thee, Lord God our Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'" Eusebius 2.23.16. The words in bold above are not merely similar sounding. In the Greek, they are identical to the text found in Luke. Since nothing in Eusebius' text suggests any correspondence with any similar statement of our Lord (and given how famous the Luke passage was to become, some sort of acknowledgment of such an exact quotation which this would then be would have been necessary), we can safely say that the interpolater drew his words either from Hegisippus directly or from Eusebius derivatively. Given the flexibility of Greek syntax, accident, and word order, the odds against this being a coincidence are astronomical.

4) Theological Evidence: While Stephen's prayer in Acts chapter seven was as appropriate as it was magnanimous, Jesus was offering Himself for the sins of the world (something neither Stephen nor any of the rest of us could ever even contemplate doing). As such, the acceptance of Him and His work, His person and His death on the cross for the forgiveness of those sins, is the issue of human life. Of course the Father and of course our Lord desire the forgiveness and salvation of all: the Father sacrificed His Son and the Son died in our place precisely so that such forgiveness might be made available to all. But to offer such a statement as contained in this interpolation is to send the message that forgiveness requires no repentance; that salvation is possible absent faith on the part of the saved. Nothing could be further from the truth. While Jesus could and did die for the sins of the world, the one thing He could not and did not do was to die for the unbelief of the world. Unbelief is the one "unpardonable sin" for which forgiveness is impossible, and for our Lord Jesus Christ to have exonerated unbelief in any way by such words would have had repercussions throughout the entire plan of God which are unfathomable (and impossible because, ultimately, such blanket forgiveness would in effect compromise the righteousness of God, something that can never be). No follower of Jesus can fail to understand and appreciate God's boundless mercy and the fact that the forgiveness of our sins is based entirely upon our Lord's work on the cross in dying for them. Jesus could and did forgive sins – "the Son of man has the authority on earth to forgive sins" (Luke 5:24). But though He was soon to die for the sins of all, He did not forgive everyone's sins (John 8:24; John 9:41), only the sins of those who turned to Him in faith (Matthew 9:2; Luke 7:48; cf. John 20:23). For Jesus to have

granted blanket forgiveness, even to those who firmly rejected Him and always would (like most of those who stood around His cross mocking Him), would have been to eliminate the need for faith in salvation, to compromise the righteousness of God which demands satisfaction for sin through appropriating the work of Christ through faith, and essentially to render the cross pointless. For if a person could be forgiven without accepting what Jesus did for us upon it, then the sacrifice itself would have been unnecessary. This false passage eliminates the issue of free will in time exercised through faith, and the whole rationale for the creation of the human race in the first place. The fact that this insertion is so widely quoted, and very often by those who have little understanding of either the scriptures or of the true nature of the sacrifice of our Lord, is extremely revealing. For our Lord died that we might be saved by accepting His work through faith, not that the world might reject Him and be saved in spite of their decision to renounce God and His gift. The gate to eternal life was about to be opened by Jesus Christ our Lord through His spiritual death expiating the sins of the entire world so that the whole world might be saved by this gracious act through faith in it and in Him. The last thing our Lord was going to do just before the darkness descended upon Golgotha was to send a message which in effect pronounced both His sacrifice and our response unnecessary.

2) The Spiritual Death of Jesus Christ:

1) The Supernatural Darkness: Just as the Passover lamb, that poignant type of Jesus Christ sacrificed for us, was commanded to be slaughtered “between the evenings (pl.)”, (i. e., at a time neither clearly day nor night: Exodus 12:6; Exodus 29:39-41), so our Lord’s death on behalf of all mankind was destined to be accompanied by an analogous, yet supernatural, darkness. Scripture tells us that at “about the sixth hour” (i. e., around mid-day), darkness descended upon Golgotha, and that this darkness lasted “until about the ninth hour” (Matthew 27:45-54; Mark 15:33-39; Luke 23:44-49), with Luke adding the important detail that “the sun gave out” (literally “eclipsed”). It was during this supernatural “blackout” that our Lord bore the sins of the world and stood judgment for them, being spiritually put to death in our place and for our sins (see section II. 5 below, “Spiritual Death”). That the darkness was indeed supernatural (and that therefore no useful purpose is to be served by any attempt to correlate first century natural eclipses to this event) can be seen from the duration of the darkness: three full hours. In this we see a telling parallel between the judgment of the sins of the world in darkness and the other instances of supernatural darkness which attend significant divine judgments, with the extremely important exception of course that Christ bore this judgment on our behalf, and that it is through His being judged in our place that the gate of eternal life has been opened for all who believe in Him and accept His work in dying for our sins.

2) The Blood of Christ: While the subject of the “blood of Christ” and Jesus’ spiritual death for us on the cross is covered respectively in sections II. 4 and II. 5 below, a few things need to be pointed out here. As is obvious from the fact that He breathed out His own spirit to end His physical life, our Lord Jesus Christ did not bleed to death (Matthew 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46; John 19:30 see below, section I. 5.I. 3). Also apparent from His final statements on the cross after the darkness lifted (covered in detail in the next point below), is the truth that our Lord’s death for sin was completed before He gave up His spirit. Taken together, this unquestionably means that the efficacious and atoning work of our Lord in dying for our sins consists in what He endured in the darkness for us while still physically alive. So while Jesus’ physical sufferings on our account visible to all before the darkness descended on Golgotha were immense and beyond true

appreciation, the intensity of the sufferings He endured under that darkness in paying the penalty for the sins of the world, dying spiritually in a way we cannot even adequately conjecture, must exceed those preliminary sufferings to an incalculable degree. For you know that it was not with perishable things [like] silver or gold that you were ransomed from the futile manner of life passed down to you by your ancestors, but [you were redeemed] with precious blood, like that of a lamb without spot or blemish, [that is, by the blood] of Christ. 1 Peter 1:18-19. The “blood of Christ” is the coin with which we are redeemed, but this is a sanctified analogy. Jesus is not literally a lamb, and likewise we are not redeemed by His physical blood. Rather, Jesus is the Father’s sacrifice, represented by the lamb, and the image of physical blood represents something even more precious than our Lord’s physical death – it represents His spiritual death, the death He died in the darkness on the cross, paying the penalty for the sins of the entire world. For what He died, He died to sin, once and for all, and what He lives, He lives to God. Romans 6:10.

He made Him who had no [personal] experience of sinning [to be] sin (i. e., a sin offering) for us, so that we might have (lit., “become”) God’s righteousness in Him. 2 Corinthians 5:21.

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, in order that we might die to sins and live to righteousness. By His wound you are healed. 1 Peter 2:24.

3) Our Lord’s Final Statements of Completion:

After [all] this (i. e., His physical suffering and His spiritual death for the sins of the world), since Jesus knew that everything had now been accomplished in order for the [prophecy of salvation found in] scripture to be fulfilled, He said, “I am thirsty”. Now a jar of wine-vinegar lay there, so they placed a sponge full of the wine-vinegar on a hyssop [stalk] and brought it to His mouth. So when He had taken the wine-vinegar, Jesus said, “It (i. e., salvation) has [now] been accomplished!”, and having thrown back His head, He gave up His spirit. John 19:28-30. The Greek verb behind the second highlighted portion of text above, *teleo* (τετέλεσται in the perfect tense as conjugated in context), corresponds to the identical form in John 19:28 (πέντα τετέλεσται) and along with it refers to the completion of the goal of Christ’s first advent. This statement is in fact a paraphrase of the final stanza of the Messianic Psalms 22:31 : “He has done it!”. We have already seen how this Psalm prophetically foreshadows much of our Lord’s suffering on the cross (e. g., the mocking of the crowds in Psalms 22:7-8, His “pierced hands and feet” in Psalms 22:16, the “casting of lots” for His clothes in Psalms 22:18, and the vivid poetic description of His suffering throughout). But not only does our Lord paraphrase the end of this psalm; He also directly quotes its beginning, so that this emphatic proclamation, “It has now been accomplished!”, is the direct answer to the question posed by the previous quote: “My God, my God, why did You forsake Me?” (Psalms 22:1; cf. Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34; see below). For the latter actually explains the former: the Father had to forsake the Son, give Him over to judgment for the sins of the world, in order for salvation to be “accomplished”. The fact that Jesus Himself while still physically alive declares salvation accomplished (and His suffering and forsaking a necessary precondition for it), demonstrates ipso facto that this accomplishment of our redemption had already taken place before our Lord exhaled His spirit to give up His physical life. Thus, Jesus’ victory on the cross consists in the spiritual death He died for our sins in the darkness (for He was still physically alive so as to be able to make this proclamation: “it has now been accomplished”), and not in His subsequent physical death. Far from being some sort of desperate plea of doubt from the cross (as it is sometimes

blasphemously portrayed), the words “Why did You forsake Me?” are meant to show precisely the opposite. For the “forsaking” is now in the past (“why did You forsake Me?”), while Jesus’ successful completion of the Father’s mission and victory over sin is now an accomplished reality (τετέλεισται: “It has now been accomplished!”).

He was handed over (i. e., forsaken) on account of our transgressions (i. e., to redeem us from sin), and was raised up on account of our justification (i. e., so that we too could be raised, having been justified by His death). Romans 4:25.

Jesus’ drinking of the wine-vinegar is also a fulfillment of prophecy which likewise signals the accomplishment of the Messiah’s mission: For they mixed gall with what they gave Me to eat, and for My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink. Psalms 69:21 (Matthew 27:34, Matthew 27:48; Mark 15:23, Mark 15:36; Luke 23:36; John 19:29) He will drink from a brook beside the way; therefore he will lift up his head. Psalms 110:7 NIV The first quotation, covered above, relates two events; one at the beginning of the ordeal when Jesus refused the gall, and the other at its successful completion where our Lord’s request for and acceptance of the wine-vinegar bespeaks victory, a short refreshment after the accomplishment of the salvation of the world. The second passage likewise comes from a very well-known Messianic Psalm, one which (as is often the case in Old Testament prophecy as we have seen many times in the past) conflates the two advents. Psalms 110:1-7 is primarily a victory Psalm, celebrating the Messiah’s accomplishment of salvation in His first advent and anticipating His return as Ruler of the world in the second. This final verse can be read to refer to the refreshment of Messiah’s troops after the battle of Armageddon, but in our present context applies to Jesus Himself at the completion of His own mission during the first advent. Therefore this act of drinking on our Lord’s part has as its primary goal to call attention through the fulfillment of the prophecy to the fact that the true “battle” was now over, and that He had been victorious in the accomplishment of salvation through His death for sins on our behalf. This is also the significance of our Lord “lifting up His head” preparatory to exhaling His spirit as recorded in John 19:30; that is, here we have the fulfillment of the other prophecy in Psalms 110:7 in the raising up of His head after drinking. Both fulfillments underscore the fact that salvation has already been accomplished at this point.

Lastly, our Lord’s final statement from the cross, His quotation of Psalms 31:5, “Father, into your hands I commit My spirit” (Luke 23:46), also demonstrates the successful completion of His mission. For it is the Father who commissioned Him (see section I. 3.c above), and here we see our Lord voluntarily returning to Him as these words portend – something He would never had done had that mission not been perfectly and completely fulfilled. Jesus had the power to lay down His life and to take it up again (John 10:18), not arbitrarily, but after accomplishing the monumental task He had been given to do in dying for the sins of the world. That this quotation likewise speaks to salvation as an already accomplished fact at this point is made clear by the second stanza of this verse, not spoken by our Lord but well-known to all readers of the Psalms: “You have redeemed Me, O Lord, God of truth”. Jesus’ death to redeem us from sin was now an accomplished fact, and our redemption vouchsafed before He gave up His spirit.

3) The Physical Death and Burial of Jesus Christ:

Then Jesus shouted out again in a loud voice and sent forth His spirit. Matthew 27:50.

Then Jesus gave forth a great shout and exhaled. Mark 15:37. And having shouted loudly, Jesus said, "Father, into your hands I commit My spirit". And having said this, He exhaled. Luke 23:46. So when He had taken the wine-vinegar, Jesus said, "It (i. e., salvation) has [now] been accomplished!", and having thrown back His head, He gave up His spirit. John 19:28-30. Our Lord was here on earth to fulfill a particular mission: after teaching us the truth, to die for our sins in our place on the cross. Once that mission had been fulfilled, Jesus deliberately left this life of His own volition. With salvation now an accomplished fact, staying on the cross any longer served no useful purpose. For the rest of us, taking into our own hands the decision to leave this world is a horrendous act of rebellion against the will of God. Human life begins when at birth God imparts the human spirit, and it ends when the spirit returns to the One who gave it (no matter what secular science may believe), and no one has the right to infringe on God's prerogative in this respect. But our Lord, uniquely in all of human history, had been given the right and the ability to lay down His life once His work was accomplished (John 10:18). Just as the darkness which had covered Golgotha for three long hours while Jesus bore the sins of the world was an exceptional and incontrovertible miracle, so also the very manner in which our Lord died was in itself a miraculous sign which demonstrated that He was indeed who He claimed to be, the very Son of God. This fact is testified to by the Roman centurion, a combat veteran who had seen many men die before (for this rank was only achieved through meritorious service over many years): And when the centurion who was standing opposite Him (i. e., being in charge of the detail) saw the manner in which [Jesus] exhaled [His spirit and so expired], he said, "Truly, this man was God's son!" Mark 15:39 (cf. Matthew 27:54; Luke 23:47) So remarkable was the way in which our Lord left this life, that even this hardened veteran soldier was so impressed that he came to believe the reports about Jesus at which he had no doubt hitherto scoffed. Other miracles accompanied Jesus' departure from life as well, all of which were meant to demonstrate His divinity and the fundamental change in all things which our Lord's victory on the cross entailed (e. g., Psalms 110:1; Ephesians 1:10; Ephesians 4:7-10; Colossians 1:13, Colossians 1:20; Colossians 2:13-15; Hebrews 2:14-15; 1 Peter 3:22; 1 John 3:8 and see section I. 5.o below, "The Session of Christ").

He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even [His] death on [the] cross [for us all]. Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the Name that is above every name that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Php 2:9-11.

1) The Earthquake: Earthquakes are the essential divine exclamation point (cf. 1 Kings 19:11-12; Acts 4:31), and very frequently employed by God to demonstrate the beginning of a new period in history (e. g., Isaiah 29:6; Matthew 28:2; Hebrews 12:26-29; Revelation 8:5; Revelation 11:13, Revelation 11:19). An earthquake occurred after Christ released His spirit which "split the rocks asunder" as Matthew tells us (Matthew 27:51), thus dramatically setting the Father's seal of approval on the work of His Son who is the Word of God.

"Is not my word like fire," declares the Lord, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?" Jeremiah 23:29 NIV

2) The Splitting of the Veil of the Temple: As with the earthquake (or perhaps even more so since the divine source is even harder to deny in this case), the supernatural splitting of the veil in the

temple which separated the holy place from the inner sanctum of the holy of holies was a sign from God Himself (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). This sign, moreover, demonstrated the fundamental change of universal realities in a very graphic way. For the holy of holies represents symbolically the third heaven and the presence of God Himself, so that the splitting of the veil symbolizes the end of the unavoidable enmity between man and God because of sin, and the access mankind now has to God through the blood of Jesus Christ and by body of Jesus Christ (see below, section II. 9, "Reconciliation"). But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings – external regulations applying until the time of the new order. When Christ came as High Priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.

Hebrews 9:7-12 NIV

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence in this entrance of ours into the [heavenly] holy of holies by the blood of Jesus, an entryway through the [heavenly] veil [of separation] which is new (lit., "newly slain") and alive and which He has consecrated for us, that is, [through the sacrifice] of His flesh (cf. Hebrews 10:10, Hebrews 10:18) . . . Hebrews 10:19-20.

3) The Resuscitation of the Dead: The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people. Matthew 27:52-53. In the manner of Lazarus, these individuals were restored to life, but to the life we all now lead. That is to say, they were temporarily resuscitated rather than being eternally resurrected, and Matthew is careful to distinguish in the passage above their status from that of our truly resurrected Lord. Nonetheless, this is an astounding miracle, and one clearly meant to call attention to the life-giving properties of the victory our Lord had just won. For through His death for our sins, we have been given eternal life through faith in Him (John 3:16; 1 John 5:11). The treatment of our Lord's body after death also fulfilled several Old Testament prophecies demonstrating beyond question His true status as the Messiah. It was pierced by the soldier's lance with the result that "blood and water" came out (John 19:34 see section II. 4 below, "The Blood of Christ"), a sign according to most medical authorities that He had been physically dead for some time when this action occurred. Indeed, it was because He was clearly and demonstrably physically dead that the Roman soldiers did not break His legs to hasten His death (as they did in the case of the two crucified with Him: John 19:31-37).

These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken" (Psalms 34:20; cf. Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12), and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced" (Zechariah 12:10; cf. Revelation 1:7). John 19:36-37 NIV

Joseph of Arimathea (a rich man: Matthew 27:57) and Nicodemus requested and were granted leave of Pilate to take down Jesus' body and bury it. This they did, binding it in linen wrappings with approximately sixty pounds of myrrh and aloes (which would have cost an enormous sum), and placing it in the garden near Golgotha in an impressive "new tomb in which no one had ever [previously] been placed" (John 19:38-41; Matthew 27:57-60; Mark 15:43-46; Luke 23:50-53), thus fulfilling Isaiah's prophecies about the burial of the Suffering Servant, a clear indication of divine approval following the horrendous abuse and judicial murder prophesied to precede Messiah's death.

Though He was oppressed and afflicted, like a lamb led to slaughter He did not open His mouth, and like a ewe before her shearers He did not open His mouth. By repressive judgment He was taken away, and who gave any thought to His posterity? For He was cut off from the land of the living. He was punished for the transgression of my people. And they assigned Him a grave with the wicked (pl.) and with a rich [man] in His deaths (sic). Isaiah 53:7-9.

He lay bare His life unto death, and was dealt with as transgressors [are], so that He bore the sin of the many, and substituted [Himself] for the transgressors. Isaiah 53:12 b The rejection of the Messiah was now complete. He had come to His own, but His own refused to accept Him (John 1:11). And yet as the Messiah He was precisely who and what the Law and the Prophets had prophesied (Luke 22:37; Luke 24:44; John 5:39; John 5:46), and He was precisely who and what Israel had asked the Lord for: an intermediary between themselves and the burning holiness of God Almighty: The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die." The Lord said to me: "What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. Deuteronomy 18:15-19 NIV m. The Descent of our Lord into Paradise: As He hung on the cross, our Lord replied to the thief who rebuked his fellow, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). This "paradise", also referred to as "Abraham's Bosom" in the report of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31), is one of the three "compartments" of the netherworld or Sheol (שְׁאוֹל), as it is called in the Old Testament, or Hades (ᾍδης), the name it bears in the New Testament. Paradise, the place of the departed righteous prior to Jesus' ascension, is to be distinguished from the other two subterranean compartments, "Torments" (the place of the unsaved dead: Luke 16:28, Luke 16:23), and "Tartarus" also known as "the Abyss" (the place of confinement for fallen angels who have violated God's ground rules for the present conflict: Luke 8:31; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6; Revelation 9:1-11; Revelation 20:1-3). Any of these three places, while technically distinct and inviolably separated from one another (cf. Luke 16:26), may be referred to in scripture by the more general names of Sheol or Hades. Additionally, these two words are also sometimes rendered "hell" or "the grave" in English versions of the Bible, and this helps to explain the occurrence of the phraseology in the Apostles' Creed, "He descended into hell". However, paradise in particular rather than Sheol-Hades in general is meant, that is, the place of all saved believers prior to their transfer to the third heaven in the wake of our Lord's ascension following His victory at the cross, and it is to this place of blessing that Jesus' human spirit descended to await His resurrection on the following Sunday. This is the place

referred to by our Lord when He said, “today you will be with Me in Paradise”. Our Lord’s brief sojourn wherein He doubtless proclaimed His victory to all of our brothers and sisters awaiting His arrival (and their imminent transfer to the third heaven) is also mentioned by the apostle Peter.

It was also by means of the Spirit that [Christ] visited the [angelic] spirits in prison (i. e., in the Abyss), and proclaimed [His victory]. [These are the angels who] were disobedient in the days of Noah at the time when God patiently waited (i. e., delayed judgment) while the ark was being built. 1 Peter 3:19-20 a The word translated “proclaimed” above (and famously rendered “preached” by the KJV) is the Greek word *kerusso*. This verb is a back-formation of the noun *keryx*, or “herald”, that sacrosanct Greek official, carrying a special wand identifying his status, who was immune from being killed or imprisoned as he treated with the opposite side in any sort of official negotiation or communication (similar in a way to ambassadors with immunity today, but taken rather more seriously by the ancient Greeks). Rather than “preach” in the sense it is used in contemporary Christianity, this verb really means “giving the King’s message as His royal ambassador” (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:20), and that is precisely what our Lord did vis-à-vis the incarcerated fallen angels in Tartarus (or “the Abyss”). At some point during the three days our Lord spent in paradise He made this proclamation of His victory. As in the case of the physical separation of Torments from Paradise (i. e., the “great chasm fixed” between the two: Luke 16:26), we may safely assume that Tartarus as well is fully isolated from the other two compartments (cf. the descriptions of it elsewhere in scripture: Luke 8:31; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6; Revelation 9:1-11; Revelation 20:1-3). Thus, our Lord’s communication with these demons had to occur in exactly the manner in which Peter describes it, namely, “by means of the Spirit[’s power]”. This proclamation of His victory confirmed the success of His mission and the imminency of His reign. It was also an indication of the coming superiority of us His followers over the angels (1 Corinthians 6:3; Hebrews 2:5). While we are given no additional details of either the manner of the journey or the specifics of the message, we can say that this notice of victory was a message of doom for these followers of Satan, since the prevention of the cross was the devil’s one [vain] hope of evading ultimate judgment. And to each of us this grace has been given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. For it says, “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive (i. e., He brought pre-cross believers from paradise below the earth to heaven). He gave gifts to men.” Now [as to] this [phrase] “He ascended”, what can it mean except that He had also [previously] descended into the lower reaches of the earth (i. e., paradise in Hades, from whence He brought the pre-cross believers to heaven)? The One who descended is also the One who ascended above all the heavens (i. e., into the third heaven, the place of the Father’s residence), in order to fulfill all things (i. e., complete the victory won at the cross; cf. Psalms 110:1). Ephesians 4:7-10.

[Jesus Christ], who appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the [Holy] Spirit, appeared to angels, was preached among the nations, was believed upon in the world, was taken up in glory. 1 Timothy 3:16. n. The Resurrection: For I entrusted to you as of primary importance what I had also received, [namely] that Christ died on behalf of our sins according to the scriptures. And that He was buried and that He rose on the third day according to the scriptures. 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

1) The Three Days: At Luke 24:21; the two disciples on the road to Emmaus report “this [i. e., Sunday, the day of our Lord’s resurrection; cf. Luke 24:13 : these things happen “the same day” as our Lord’s resurrection] is the third day since these things happened”. Greek and Hebrew both use an inclusive system of counting, so that the three days mentioned must without question be Friday

[the day of the crucifixion], Saturday, and Sunday [the present day in context]. This is confirmed by our Lord Himself in His first post-resurrection appearance to the assembled disciples when He says “Thus it has been written that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day” (Luke 24:46). The phraseology is important for the question of establishing that the “three days” were in fact the Friday, Saturday, and Sunday of Easter week, and do not include a Thursday (let alone a Wednesday) as some interpretations would have it. For such a circumstance would require something like “after three days”, whereas “on the third day” makes the inclusive count of Friday, Saturday, and Sunday unavoidable. In this author’s opinion, Thursday (and Wednesday) schemes for the chronology preceding the resurrection are largely motivated by a desire to see Christ’s prophecy of “three days and three nights in the grave” (Matthew 12:40) fulfilled in a way they find acceptable. However, this is to impose our present cultural norms on Greek and Hebrew expression – contemporary audiences would have no problem understanding that a part of a day-night combination equals the entire segment for prophetic purposes. On the other hand, proponents of adding another day (or more) to the clear testimony of scripture have also to reckon with the fact that since Christ rose at first light on Sunday but gave up His spirit at mid-afternoon, no approach can yield “precisely” three days and three nights. While from our modern western perspective a longer duration than a precise 3/3 seems acceptable but a shorter one does not, from the ancient perspective things are exactly the reverse, so that had our Lord been crucified on Thursday, the phrases “this is the third day” (in Luke 24:21) and “on the third day” (in Luke 24:46) would be seen as technically incorrect, and violently so. When the two witnesses are killed by antichrist and their bodies left exposed to public view during the Tribulation’s first half, scripture is very careful to say that this condition persisted for “three and a half days” (Revelation 11:9, Revelation 11:11), a turn of phrase that seems a bit odd until one factors in the ancient perspective: more than a full three days must be noted, while a part of each segment may count for the whole.

Due to the prevalence of the false Thursday (and Wednesday) view, some additional scriptures need to be added here for consideration:

1) Mark 15:42 calls the day of our Lord’s crucifixion the prosabbaton or “pre-Sabbath”, indicating that it was a normal Friday.

2) Luke 23:54-55 compared with Luke 24:1 gives us the chronological sequence for the crucifixion to the resurrection of, first, paraskeue, (i. e., the “day of preparation” for the Sabbath, namely, Friday’s daylight hours; second, “the Sabbath”, Saturday; and third, “the first day of the week” (Sunday), with no discernible gap given between the three days, and thus with the only reasonable way to read Luke’s sequence for the three days being as “Friday, Saturday, Sunday”.

3) Matthew 27:62-66, Matthew 28:1 has Matthew using the definite article (“the”) with the word paraskeue, indicating that the day of our Lord’s crucifixion was indeed the day of preparation, namely, the normal pre-Sabbath time of preparation or paraskeue, that is, the daylight hours of Friday. The three days in the grave are very important to fulfill our Lord’s prophecies concerning His physical death (e. g., Matthew 12:40; Matthew 16:21; Matthew 17:23; Matthew 20:19; Matthew 26:61; Luke 9:22; Luke 13:22; John 2:19 cf. Genesis 22:4 with Luke 24:46), but also to demonstrate the reality of that death. Along with the blood and water that fell from His body after it was pierced by the Roman soldier’s lance (John 19:34), the details of His body’s preparation for

burial and its laying in the tomb, the rolling of the stone in front of the tomb, and the sealing of that tomb with a guard stationed at its mouth (Matthew 27:62-66), this chronology shows emphatically and decisively that our Lord Jesus was physically dead beyond any question or shadow of a doubt, and that therefore His rising from the dead was an irrefutable miracle – indeed, it is the Rock upon which we base all of our future hope.

2) The Meaning of the Resurrection: Besides confirming the prophecies of His coming resurrection (Psalms 16:10; Acts 2:24-31; Acts 13:30-38), and His status as Heir of the Kingdom (Acts 5:30-31; Acts 10:40-43; Acts 17:31; Romans 1:4; 1 Peter 1:21), it is not too much to say that our Lord's resurrection (in company with the cross which precedes it) is human history, for with our Lord Jesus' rising from the dead, we have been given God's unmistakable seal that the life gate for all who follow Him in regeneration has now been opened up. Further, while the cross was necessary to wipe away the impediment of sin which kept us from God and eternal life, the resurrection is equally necessary in order actually to authorize the process of transforming us for that eternal life.

He was handed over (i. e., forsaken) on account of our transgressions (i. e., to redeem us from sin), and was raised up on account of our justification (i. e., so that we too could be raised, having been justified by His death). Romans 4:25.

Now if we are proclaiming about Christ that He has risen from the dead, [and we are], how is that some of you say that there is no resurrection from the dead? For if there is no resurrection from the dead, then Christ has not risen either. And if Christ has not risen, then our message is pointless and your faith is pointless too. For [in that hypothetical case] we are revealed as false witnesses against God because we have borne witness against God that He raised Christ whom He did not raise – if the dead really are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then neither has Christ risen. And if Christ has not risen, then your faith is vain. [For if that were the case] you are still in your sins. 1 Corinthians 15:12-17. As these passages indicate, there had to be a resurrection of Christ in order for there also to be an ascension to the Father and a formal acknowledgment of the efficacy and acceptability of our Lord's work of propitiation on our behalf (indicated by His session at the Father's right hand). Resurrection is the Father's seal set upon our Lord's work on the cross, and was necessary in order for us to be justified through faith in Him and thus receive all the blessings of salvation (Ephesians 1:19-23; cf. Acts 2:34-36; Romans 1:4; 1 Corinthians 6:14; Php 3:10; Colossians 2:12). Thus, the resurrection both confirms the effectiveness of our Lord's sacrifice on our behalf (Php 3:10; 1 Peter 1:3; 1 Peter 3:21), and also forms the basis for us to share in that resurrection (Romans 6:5; Romans 8:11, Romans 8:34-35; Romans 10:9; 1 Corinthians 6:14; 1 Corinthians 15:21; 2 Corinthians 4:14; 2 Corinthians 5:15; Colossians 2:12). For since death [came] through a man, resurrection of the dead also [had to come] through a man. For just as in Adam, all die, so also in Christ, shall all be made alive. 1 Corinthians 15:21-22.

3) The Nature of the Resurrection: Just as Jesus is first in all things in this creation (Colossians 1:15-20), so He is our forerunner in resurrection as well (cf. Hebrews 2:10; Hebrews 6:20; Hebrews 12:2). But each [will be resurrected] in his own echelon. Christ [is the] first-fruits. Next [will be] those belonging to Christ at His coming (i. e., the Church at the 2 Advent).

1 Corinthians 15:23.

However, prior to being witnesses of the fact, the disciples were not entirely clear about just what it meant to rise from the dead (Mark 9:10, Mark 9:32; cf. John 16:19). That is certainly understandable since no one in human or angelic history had ever seen an example of resurrection before. The miracles which Christ performed in raising the dead during His earthly ministry (e. g., the synagogue ruler's daughter, the widow of Nain's son, Lazarus) were not strictly speaking examples of resurrection, for each of these individuals has long since once again died physically and passed from this life. These unique cases we have elsewhere called "resuscitation", since each individual was restored to life in their original, earthly body. But resurrection is a permanent condition.

Now somebody will no doubt say, "In what manner do the dead rise? And with what sort of body do they come back?" Use a little common sense! When you plant a seed, it doesn't "come back to life" unless the seed itself is first destroyed, does it? And what you put in the ground is not the actual plant which later sprouts, but an "empty shell", so to speak, of the wheat or of whatever you are planting. God then transforms this seed into a plant in accordance with His creative plan, giving each specific seed its own unique structure. [As it is with seeds and plants, the same is true of animate bodies.] For in an analogous way, not all bodies are the same. Obviously, the bodies of men are different from the bodies of cattle, the bodies of birds are different from the bodies of fish, and, just as obviously, bodies capable of dwelling in heaven are different from the bodies we occupy here on earth. Moreover the splendor of our heavenly bodies will transcend that of our earthly ones. [Nor should we imagine that all heavenly bodies will possess the same degree of splendor.] After all, the radiance of the sun and of the moon and of stars is different in each case, and even the stars differ amongst themselves in glory. So it is with the resurrection of the dead. The body sown is corruptible, the one raised incorruptible. The body sown is dishonorable, the one raised glorious. The body sown is weak, the one raised powerful. The body sown is suited to physical life, the one raised to spiritual life. If there is a physical body (and there patently is), then there is also a spiritual one. For as it has been written that "Adam, the first man, became a physical being, possessing life", so Christ, the last Adam, became a spiritual being, bestowing life. However it is not the spiritual body, but the physical body which comes first, and the spiritual body follows. The first man was earthly, being taken from the ground. The second Man is heavenly. And as was the earthly man, so also are we of the earth. And as is the heavenly Man, so also shall we be when we too take on heavenly form. For just as we have born the image of the earthly man, so also shall we bear the image of the heavenly Man. 1 Corinthians 15:35-49.

While this is not the place to discuss our own resurrection in detail, we should at least point that scripture is very clear about the fact that our Lord Jesus is the pattern for our resurrection as described above by Paul, so that we shall have a glorious eternal body exactly like that of our now resurrected Lord. For if we have been joined together with Him in respect to the likeness of His death [– and we have by being spiritually baptized into Him (Romans 6:3) –], then we certainly will be [joined together with Him in the likeness] of His resurrection also.

Romans 6:5. For our [true] citizenship has a heavenly existence, and it is from there that we expectantly await our Savior, Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform this humble body of ours into one that matches His glorious body through His powerful ability to subordinate everything to Himself. Php 3:20-21. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose [from the dead (and we most certainly do)], [then we should also believe that] in the same way also God will lead [forth in

resurrection] those who have fallen asleep through [faith in] Jesus with Him [when He returns]. 1 Thessalonians 4:14.

Beloved, we are already the children of God, but what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We know that when He is revealed [in glory], we will be like Him, that we shall see Him exactly like He is. 1 John 3:2. And while during His post-resurrection appearances our Lord appeared in a “not yet glorified” state (since the full revelation of His glory had to follow His ascension to heaven and session at the Father’s right hand; compare John 7:39 with Acts 9:1-6; Acts 22:6-11; Acts 26:12-18; Revelation 1:12-18), yet we may glean many things about our own future state in resurrection from the descriptions of our Lord’s resurrection (for we “we shall be like Him”, and since our earthly body will be transformed into “one that matches His glorious body”).

1) The Resurrection Body is no longer Subject to Death: The resurrection is often described in terms of eternal life (John 6:40 cf. Matthew 25:46; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; John 3:15-16; John 5:24; John 10:28; Romans 2:7; Romans 6:23; Galatians 6:8; Titus 1:2; 1 John 1:2; 1 John 2:25), and we see this principle of immortality from Jesus’ resurrection:

Now if we have died with Christ, [and we have] (i. e., by being “in Him” through the Spirit’s baptism, Romans 6:1-4), we believe that shall live [eternally] together with Him, knowing that Christ, now that He has been raised from the dead, is no longer mortal; death no longer has any power over Him. Romans 6:8-9 (cf. Hebrews 7:16)

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me will live, even if he dies. And everyone who lives and believes in Me will surely not die forevermore.” John 11:25-26.

2) The Resurrection Body is Truly Human, only not Subject to Suffering and Pain: In resurrection we will be truly “who we are” only without sin, and will enjoy all the good and decent things of the body only in freedom from want and from tears forever after (Revelation 7:17; Revelation 21:4; cf. Isaiah 25:8; Isaiah 35:10; Isaiah 65:17; 1 Corinthians 15:54-58; Hebrews 2:14; Revelation 2:7, Revelation 2:11; Revelation 2:17, Revelation 2:26-28; Revelation 3:4-5, Revelation 3:12-13, Revelation 3:21; Revelation 20:5; Revelation 21:27; Revelation 22:3-6, Revelation 22:14). This principle is clear from the case of our Lord’s resurrection wherein Jesus was recognizable as Himself and behaved as Himself with no diminishment of personality in any way (Luke 24:31; John 20:16; John 20:20, John 20:26-28; John 21:12). Christ’s transformed body is solid and tangible (Matthew 28:9; Luke 24:39; John 20:17; John 20:27), and capable of the entire range of normal human activities (Matthew 28:10, Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:15, Luke 24:43; John 21:13-15).

3) The Resurrection Body will have New Capabilities: As is clear from our miraculous return with our Lord to earth “in clouds” after the resurrection, we too will enjoy all the additional benefits of the eternal body that is a large part of our hope as the means whereby we shall enjoy our eternal inheritance. As is clear from our Lord’s post-resurrection appearances, the resurrection body possesses super-material capabilities without at the same sacrificing material advantages, being capable of negotiating material space at will (cf. Matthew 28:1-3; Luke 24:31, Luke 24:36; John 20:19; Acts 1:9-10). As Thomas and Gundry point out, the angels removed the stone from the tomb not “to let Jesus out”, but rather to let others see that He was no longer there. In our cases, perhaps the most sublime benefit will be, in addition to the sweet fellowship we shall be able to enjoy with our Lord forever, the blessing of finally “knowing even as we are known”, when we shall

be at last “face to face” with Him for all eternity (1 Corinthians 13:12).

4) The Chronology of the Resurrection:

“We are witnesses of everything [Jesus] did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” Acts 10:39-43 NIV

Having exhaled His spirit on the cross on the Friday before the Passover, Jesus rose from the dead on the following Sunday, and proceeded to appear over the next forty days – not to everyone – but to worthy witnesses among those who had previously believed. In my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. Acts 1:1-3 NIV

“But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.” Acts 13:30-31 NIV
For I entrusted to you as of primary importance what I had also received, [namely] that Christ died on behalf of our sins according to (i. e., in fulfillment of) the scriptures, and that He was buried and that rose on the third day according to the scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas (i. e., Peter), then to the twelve, then He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, of whom the majority abide [in life] until now, though some have fallen asleep (i. e., have died). Next He appeared to James (i. e., His earthly half-brother), then to all the apostles, and last of all, as if to the [one left out due to having been a] miscarriage (i. e., at the time of Christ’s earthly ministry), He appeared also to me. 1 Corinthians 15:3-8. When that first Easter Sunday dawned, our Lord was resurrected from the dead by the power of God (Romans 1:4; 1 Corinthians 6:14; 2 Corinthians 13:4; Ephesians 1:18-23; Php 3:10; Colossians 2:12; Hebrews 7:16; cf. Revelation 20:6). That is to say, His human body now dead since Friday afternoon was transformed into in a new, eternal body incapable of decay, and His human spirit was placed back within it in a fashion comparable to God’s in-breathing of the spirit into every human body at the point of birth. From this point forward, Christ in His humanity became alive forevermore, so that the Messiah in accordance with the prophecy recorded in Psalms 16:1-11 “never saw decay” (Psalms 16:10; cf. Acts 2:27, Acts 2:31; Acts 13:35). After neatly folding up His grave clothes (John 20:5-6; an indication not only of the resurrection, but also of our Lord’s pattern of careful diligence in all things and proof of the wonderful fact that He is and we will be “the same person” after resurrection), our Lord simply walked out the carefully sealed and guarded tomb (Matthew 27:62-66), apparently without even being visible to the sentries.

Jesus’ rising and departure from the tomb were divinely punctuated, as was His death, by a mighty earthquake, as an angel refulgent in appearance rolled away the stone to reveal the place where Jesus’ body had lain (Matthew 28:2). The angel’s appearance terrified the guards (Matthew 28:3-4), and understandably so, to the point where they play no further role in the story (other than

reporting these miraculous events later to the Sanhedrin: Matthew 28:11-15). When the women who had attended Jesus during His earthly ministry came to the tomb to anoint His body, though they had been concerned about how to roll back the entry-stone, they found the tomb already opened up and entered. It was then this angel explained to the women who had come that our Lord was not there because He had “risen from the dead” (Matthew 28:6-7; cf. Mark 16:6; Luke 24:5-7).

1) To Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18): The importance of the women who accompanied Jesus throughout His earthly ministry and who supported Him and His disciples logistically (i. e., through monetary and domestic means, not to mention the encouragement and moral support of their presence) should not be underestimated even if it is not generally appreciated (cf. Luke 8:2-3). We can see something of the key role these women played from their appearance at the empty tomb early that first Easter Sunday. The list of women mentioned as going to the tomb in order to care for Jesus’ body includes Mary Magdalene (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:10), “the other Mary” (Matthew 28:1; cf. Matthew 27:61), who is probably Mary the mother of James (Mark 16:1; Luke 24:20; and apparently also “of Joses”, cf. Mark 15:40, Mark 15:47), Salome (Mark 16:1), Joanna (Luke 24:10), and “the other women” (Luke 24:10). These last may have included the women mentioned by Luke at Luke 23:55 “who had come with Jesus from Galilee” (cf. Luke 23:41), a group which no doubt included the women who had actively supported the ministry (Luke 8:2-3), and who stood by Him at the cross (Matthew 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41; Luke 23:49; John 19:25).

Preeminent within this group, even in respect to those mentioned by name as watching and waiting at the crucifixion, namely, Mary, Jesus’ mother (John 19:25), her sister (John 19:25), Mary the wife of Clopas (who may have been Mary’s sister: John 19:25), Mary the mother of James the lesser and Joseph (Matthew 27:56; or Joses: Mark 15:40), Salome, the mother of the disciples James and John (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40; cf. Luke 24:10), is Mary Magdalene. That is so for several important reasons. For Mary Magdalene was the first person to whom our Lord appeared after resurrection, and that is no small honor.

Contemporary scholarly opinion discounts the view of earlier times that saw Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany (sister of Martha and Lazarus) as the same person, but there in fact good reasons for equating the two. We should begin by reiterating a point made above about Mary of Bethany, namely that she is more than likely also the woman described in Luke chapter seven who poured myrrh on Jesus’ feet after first washing them with her tears (Luke 7:36-50). For Mary is definitely identified as the woman who performs a similar action six days before the crucifixion (and distinguished from the early anointing both by the lack of tears and the anointing of Jesus’ head as well in anticipation of burial), demonstrating in the second instance that there was at least one person who had listened to Jesus’ words to the effect that He was about to be put to death (Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8). As was said earlier, the uniqueness of these acts, the considerable expense they involved (which of necessity would preclude the vast majority of Jewish women from consideration), and the fact that both take place in the house of Simon (Luke 7:40 compared with Matthew 26:6; Mark 14:3), are good evidence that we are dealing with the same person. Further, the fact that Mary had access to Simon’s house (John 12:2-3) explains how this “sinful women” could enter freely and wash Jesus’ feet without so much as a reproach in Luke’s description.

Immediately after reporting this story in chapter seven, Luke in chapter eight gives us an account of the women who followed Jesus and the disciples during their ministry, supporting it through their personal efforts and finances.

After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means. Luke 8:1-3 NIV The Greek phraseology which introduces this paragraph (Καταγενητο εν τω καθεξῆς) deliberately links the anointing with this description of Jesus' travels and the women who attended Him, and Luke seems to be signaling thereby that the woman in chapter seven is included in the list in chapter eight (only without being named out of deference to her identification as a "sinful woman"). In this list, Mary Magdalene is the first named, and also the one delivered from the greatest demonic attack. The demon possession described above is only possible in the case of unbelievers, and generally follows a rejection of God and His will (often as a result of extreme sinfulness). As in the case of the Gadarene demoniac, however, Mary turned to God and embraced the offer of salvation wholeheartedly, being appropriately more grateful than most others precisely because she had been forgiven so much (Luke 7:40-49). The anointing of Luke chapter seven was Mary's first public expression of her gratitude following the deliverance from demon control which must have taken place earlier, and as with the Samaritan leper, she returned to give glory to God in this most dramatic and memorable way, indicating the depth of her gratitude and completeness of her conversion. Henceforth she would devote her life and her resources to Jesus' ministry (compare the support given by the sisters from Bethany and their similarly greater than average resources: Luke 10:38-42; John 11:9; John 12:2-6; Mary's delight in the Lord and His Word: Luke 10:39-42, and our Lord's love for the three siblings: John 11:5; John 11:35). The picture we are given of Mary Magdalene's faith and faithfulness at the crucifixion (standing by the cross), burial (watching to see where He was buried), and resurrection of our Lord (buying spices – resources again – and going first, leaving last), is in complete accord with that of Mary of Bethany. In each case we have to do with a woman who had made serious mistakes in her youth, had eagerly embraced the offer of eternal life Jesus preached, and had become an exceptional believer as a result, demonstrating by deeds of faith and selflessness her love for our Lord and for His mission in dying for us on the cross.

I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her. Matthew 26:13 NIV (cf. Mark 16:9; John 12:7)

Mary's willingness to believe and so to understand both the necessity of our Lord's death and the reality of His resurrection (as evidenced by her behavior below) results not only in the kudos above, but the honor of being the first to see Jesus in resurrection, no small distinction as she is in this unique in the entire Church. It is for this reason that we have the name which has in truth been at the root of the reluctance of so many commentators to see this Mary as Martha's and Lazarus' sister, for most take it for granted that the name "Magdalene" is a gentilic adjective, referring to a town in Galilee. However, as may be seen from other Greek adjectives, it is certainly possible that the entire ending -ene is a suffix. This would make the Aramaic word magdal (Hebrew migdol), meaning "tower", the root of this adjective (rather than the hypothetical town names usually

proposed). As such, this title for Mary is not a gentilic describing her place of birth or city (she was in fact from Bethany), but rather an honorific (explaining why she was “called” Magdalene: Luke 8:2), bestowed upon her for the stalwartness of her faith displayed before, during, and after the crucifixion when she stood firm “like a tower” when many others gave in to despair. Mary’s conduct and this resulting honor should be both an example and an encouragement to us all, as we remember that the Lord will bestow names upon us all in eternity, based upon our response to Him here in this life (Revelation 2:17; Isaiah 65:15; cf. Isaiah 62:2 b; Revelation 3:12). This resilience of faith was the result of her actually listening to what the Lord had to say and believing it, then as now the “best part” of our life on this earth (Luke 10:42), and the only formula for spiritual growth and success.

Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:19 NIV

We may now consider the circumstances of precisely how it was that Mary came to see Jesus risen from the dead. The three synoptic gospels report that the inner circle of faithful women had made a point of observing where Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus put the body of our Lord after taking it down from the cross (Matthew 27:61; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55-56), with Matthew and Mark specifically identifying and giving first mention to Mary Magdalene (along with “the other Mary”, Mary the mother of Joses) in so doing. All four gospels record the coming of the women to the tomb on the Sabbath with the intention of anointing Jesus’ body according to Jewish practice (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1-2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1), with Mary again receiving first mention not only in Matthew and Mark, but also in John. John’s description is particularly important in reconstructing the events of that first Easter morning as he gives us details that are only summarized by the other accounts:

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!” John 20:1-2 NIV

While the other women also come to the tomb, Mary was unwilling to wait for daybreak. Scripture does not say for certain, but we may infer from her being the first to arrive not only her great love but also some hope that she would find Jesus alive based on a small amount of faith in His words about rising from the dead – small only in relative terms (cf. John 20:9 NASB of the eleven: “For as yet they did not understand the Scripture that He must rise again from the dead”), for she was apparently the only one who clung to the possibility, a mustard-seed modicum of faith even so capable of moving mountains. It is no doubt just for this reason that our Lord honored her with the first resurrection appearance, just as she was honored with the assurance of her act of anointing Him ever being part of the gospel story. For the gospel is only beneficial to those who believe as Mary did. As verse two of John twenty quoted above shows, the specific events of that morning need to be disaggregated to get a clear picture of what took place next. Mary was first to the tomb, leaving for it before day broke, but arriving just after dawn shortly after our Lord had risen when she saw that the stone had been rolled away. The other Mary and then the other women arrived shortly thereafter and entered the tomb (where the angels informed them of Jesus resurrection

and instructed them to carry the news to the apostles). But Mary had already gone, having discerned from outside of the opened tomb without entering (cf. John 20:11 where she is still reluctant to enter) that Jesus' body was no longer there. Just as she was unwilling to await the other women in going to the tomb, she must have departed before their entry and the subsequent appearance of the angels. This explains her report to the apostles "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" (whereas the other women, arriving later, gave the apostles the angels' report). As Peter and John raced to the tomb in response to Mary's words, the other women already at the site ventured to enter the tomb, received the good news of the resurrection from the angels, and immediately sought out the apostles to convey the message as instructed. At some point on their way, they were met by our risen Lord (see the section immediately below) – but not before Jesus appeared to Mary. For she must have returned to the tomb again, arriving after John and Peter had already come and gone, and not encountering them or the other women on the way. When she arrived, through her tears she too saw the angels, sitting at the place where Jesus' head and feet had been. And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'" John 20:13-17.

While the other women receive directly and are told to give to the apostles indirectly a lesson reminding them of Jesus' teaching on the resurrection (Matthew 28:6-7; Mark 16:6-7; Luke 24:5-8; because they still as yet failed to understand what our Lord had repeatedly told them: John 20:9), Mary alone does not receive any such reminder, for she had been hoping for this blessed event all along. What she does receive is an explanation of what is about to happen: the joy she feels must be restrained, because our Lord was only going to be with her and His other disciples for a short time before ascending to the Father to await the day of His victorious Second Advent return. But these words of truth are given to her by our Lord Himself to the one person whose faith had put her in the right place and the right frame of mind to receive them.

2) To the Other Women (Matthew 28:9-10): Following His appearance to Mary, our Lord appeared to the other women who had already been instructed by the angels to return and report to the apostles (Matthew 28:9-10; and this appearance seems to have followed their doing so: cf. Luke 24:11 with Matthew 28:8). It is significant that our Lord's second resurrection appearance is also made exclusively to these women who had also come to the tomb even though Jesus was dead, an indication of their love, hope, and faith. The disciples to whom they report, on the other hand, considered their words "nonsense" (Luke 24:11; with the exception of Peter and John who had already raced to the tomb), even though in this second appearance our Lord had Himself commanded the woman to report to the disciples and to reinforce the instruction to them from the angels to meet Him at the prearranged location in Galilee (Matthew 28:10; cf. Matthew 28:7; Mark 16:7).

3) To Peter (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5): After receiving from the women the angels' report about Jesus' resurrection, these things "seemed like madness" to the rest of the disciples, but Peter and John had raced to the empty tomb as soon as they had heard Mary declare that it was empty (John 20:3-10). John outran Peter, but Peter in his boldness to know the truth entered the tomb and saw the Lord's grave clothes, after which John also entered, and the two of them "went to their own homes" (John 20:10). It was probably at this time or after arriving home that our Lord appeared to Peter (compare 1 Corinthians 15:5 with Luke 24:34). It is significant that Peter, who had most visibly denied the Lord, was the first of the remaining eleven disciples to recover his faith and his hope (seconded by John), and no doubt for this reason rated the first appearance of our Lord to any man (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:4-5).

4) To the Two on the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32): Cleopas, possibly Clopas, about whom we know little in either case (see above), and one other man (probably not one of the eleven: cf. Luke 24:36 ff.) were met by our risen Lord while journeying that same day to the village of Emmaus. However, our Lord deliberately concealed His identity from them, and the point of our being given this information seems in large part to demonstrate the as yet skeptical state of all the male believers in spite of the detailed and emphatic testimony of many of the woman who had been part of the ministry for years (cf. Luke 24:22-24) – without first hand experience of the resurrection, they remained reluctant to believe. Our Lord's response to their continued doubt is to pronounce it foolishness and slowness of heart (Luke 24:25), and to instruct them from the scriptures – something He had done repeatedly before His crucifixion – about the necessity for the suffering and the resurrection of the Christ (Luke 24:26-27). Later, He does reveal Himself to be Jesus as He breaks bread, then disappears (Luke 24:30-32), and finally they believe once they have seen with their own eyes.

5) To the Ten and Others (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-25; 1 Corinthians 15:5 b): Cleopas and his companion immediately returned to the disciples in Jerusalem and found all ten with the exception of Thomas assembled there with certain unnamed others (Luke 24:33), now being ready to accept their testimony because they had by this point already heard and believed Peter report of the Lord's appearance to him (Luke 24:33-35; cf. John 20:24-26), in addition to Mary Magdalene's testimony (John 20:18), as well as that of the other women (implied by Matthew 28:10). While the two were in the process of giving the details, Jesus appeared, entering directly into their company even though "the doors had been secured" (John 20:19). While this miraculous appearance demonstrated the power of His newly resurrected body, His eating of the fish (Luke 24:41-43) and the other proofs He gave them that this body was "tangible" (Luke 24:39-40; John 20:20) demonstrated beyond any question or doubt that it was really He Himself, that He was really alive – resurrected from the dead with a body that was now capable of so much more than the first one, and incapable of ever experiencing death again.

It was at this time that our Lord, in order to facilitate the important teaching ministry to the eleven (Matthew 28:16-19; Luke 24:44-49; John 20:21-23, John 20:30; John 21:15-23, John 21:25; Acts 1:2-8), which He would fulfill during these forty some days before His ascension (Acts 1:3), bestowed upon them a special unction of the Holy Spirit (John 20:22 cf. Exodus 31:3, Exodus 35:1-35; Numbers 11:17, Numbers 11:25-26; Numbers 27:18; Deuteronomy 34:9; 1 Samuel 10:6; etc.). This was a temporary unction which would soon be replaced by the even better indwelling of the Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-8; i. e., the "baptism" of the Spirit given to all the assembled

believers at Pentecost, and since the early days of the apostolic age to all believers at the point of faith in Christ: Romans 8:9; cf. Ephesians 4:5; 2 Timothy 2:1). It is for this very reason that our Lord gave very specific instructions on this occasion (Luke 24:49) to the effect that the evangelizing of the nations was not to begin until the giving of the Holy Spirit. This is the thrust of the command to “remain” in the city in Luke 24:49; and should not be taken to apply to their upcoming trip to Galilee in the meantime. Compare Luke 24:52 where we are told that “they stayed continually at the temple, praising God”; coupled with Acts 1:1-9; one might get the impression that there was no trip to Galilee at all (but the other gospels show clearly that there was). Although in his summary of events Luke has passed over that part of the post-resurrection appearances, he has included the essential teaching our Lord left to the apostles, focusing on the commission to evangelize in Luke 24:45-49, and on Jesus’ final message about the Holy Spirit in Acts 1:1-9. In this respect Luke’s testimony is identical to that of Matthew’s “Great Commission”, when rightly understood (i. e., the command/commission is to evangelize the world, a process which leads through salvation to the baptism of the Spirit; and to teach the truth of the Word, whereby disciples, faithful followers of Christ, are “made”; see point 8 immediately below).

6) To the Eleven in Jerusalem (John 20:26-31): This appearance, similar to the previous one, is “the second time” that Jesus comes to His disciples (as implied by John 21:14). Thomas, who famously would not believe unless he too received the same tangible proof of our Lord’s resurrection, is given just that by our Lord. When Thomas finally does express his belief, our Lord pronounces as blessed “those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29). John tells us that this appearance took place “eight days later” (John 20:26), so that we may safely assume that the disciples as yet had still not obeyed our Lord’s command to meet Him in Galilee.

7) To the Seven at the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-23): For the eleven to depart Jerusalem for Galilee directly after the crucifixion seems to have been what our Lord had planned all along, with even the specific place of rendezvous having been previously designated: But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee. Matthew 26:32 NIV But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee. Mark 14:28 NIV But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’ Mark 16:7 (cf. Matthew 28:7) NIV

Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” Matthew 28:10 NIV But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. Matthew 28:16 NASB

Ideally then, assuming perfect responsiveness, we may surmise that the disciples should have and would have listened to everything Jesus said about the necessity of His impending death, and about the reality of His resurrection destined to follow on the third day after His crucifixion; that they should have and would have departed for Galilee immediately to meet with the Lord at the appointed place, the designated mountain in Galilee. Even now, however, after waiting at least the additional eight days described above, though they did eventually go to Galilee, it was apparently to their homes in the area of sea of Galilee that they went first (John 21:1 cf. Matthew 4:18-22). For John tells us that Jesus’ appearance to them here as related in chapter twenty one was “the third time” that Jesus showed Himself to them all (John 21:14), and further, that only seven of them were together in that place: “Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples” (John 21:2 NIV). In this appearance, in

addition to demonstrating yet again the real, physical nature of His new body, our Lord impresses upon Peter as the leader of the eleven the necessity for them all to “feed my sheep” (John 21:15-17), that is, to provide the Body of Christ with nutritious spiritual food on a consistent and regular basis, with “eating” then being a picture of faith in the truth being taught (Matthew 24:45; Luke 12:42; Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 3:2; 1 Timothy 4:6; Hebrews 5:12-14; 1 Peter 2:2; 1 Peter 5:2; cf. Matthew 14:16; Mark 6:37; Luke 9:13; Jude 1:12).

8) To the Eleven on the Mountain in Galilee (Matthew 28:16-20): But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. Matthew 28:16 NASB

Matthew’s narrative, after a digression which relates the report of the guards at the tomb to the Jewish authorities (Matthew 28:11-15), jumps directly to the verse above from Jesus’ appearance to the other women and His message for the disciples to “to leave for Galilee, for there they shall see Me” (Matthew 28:10). Following the appearance at the Sea of Galilee in John chapter twenty one, then, alleleven finally gathered together on “the mountain which Jesus had designated” (Matthew 28:16). And when they saw Him, they worshiped [Him], but some [of them still] had doubts. Then Jesus came over and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, so go and make all nations my followers by baptizing them into the Person (lit., “Name”) of the Father and [into the Person] of the Son and [into the Person] of the Holy Spirit, [and] by teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you all the days until the end of the age.” Matthew 28:17-20.

While our Lord taught the disciples something at each appearance, as Galilee, and particularly the prearranged rendezvous on the mountain, had been the place He had purposed for this, it is no surprise that in this passage we see what is perhaps the most detailed example of His post-resurrection teaching (albeit given to us here in very brief synopsis; cf. John 20:30; Acts 20:35; Acts 1:3). It is instructive to note that although by this time all of the disciples had seen our Lord at least twice (i. e., all but Thomas were present at the first appearance, all eleven at the second, and Thomas was among those listed in John 21:1-25 appearance), yet we are told that even so some of them “had doubts”, so difficult was the concept and idea of resurrection for this first group of believers, even though they were blessed to be first-hand witnesses to it. Even today, of course, with the detailed testimony of the Bible and the universal indwelling of the Spirit, it is this author’s observation that the literal, bodily resurrection remains a stumbling block for many Christians – and that is tragic thing. For the resurrection is our hope, the hope of eternal life which cannot be separated from Jesus’ resurrection and our own (1 Corinthians 15:12-17). This is the point of “primary importance” which has been “entrusted to us” as Christians (1 Corinthians 15:1). For if our hope in Christ extends only to this life, then we are indeed “to be pitied above all others” (1 Corinthians 15:19). The hope of the resurrection is found in nearly every chapter in the New Testament (e. g., Romans 5:2; Romans 8:25; 1 Corinthians 13:13; Galatians 5:5; Ephesians 1:18; Colossians 1:23, Colossians 1:27; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:16; 1 Timothy 1:1; 1 Timothy 4:10; Titus 1:2; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 3:6; Hebrews 6:18; Hebrews 7:19; Hebrews 11:1; 1 Peter 1:3, 1 Peter 1:13; 1 Peter 3:15; 1 John 3:3), and it is not too much to say that this hope is the proper, primary focus of the Christian life. Therefore we are truly blessed to possess so many proofs our Lord’s rising from the dead in definite, bodily form, with a body no longer subject to death, but fit for eternal life. The doubts expressed by some disciples on this occasion form a counterpoint to the coming of the Holy Spirit after which all of the

disciples/apostles would display a zeal, courage and unbending faith that is remarkable to anyone who compares their behavior in the gospels to their deeds in "The Acts of the Apostles". Therefore it is entirely understandable in this synopsis we are given by Matthew of the content of Jesus' teaching at this time that the ministry of the Spirit figures large, even if that fact is often misunderstood. Three main points of our Lord's teaching are recorded here. First, that the message of salvation, the gospel or "good news" about our Lord Jesus' conquest of death (whereby He has won "all authority") and the resurrection which is now available to all who put their faith in Him and follow Him, is now to be carried beyond Israel and made available to "all nations". Secondly, Jesus relates the means by which these "marching orders" (often called "The Great Commission") are to be accomplished. And thirdly, an important reassurance aimed not only at the doubters among the apostles but given also for the benefit of all who might have similar doubts in the future: we may not be able to see our Lord at present, but if we take Him at His Word given to us here, He is indeed "with us", and more than that, "in us" to the end, even if we abide until the day of His return, the Second Advent "at the end of the age", when all believers who remain alive will be "caught up together to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:17) in a living resurrection wherein our present bodies will be instantly swallowed up in eternal life. On that day [of the coming of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 14:15-19)] you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you. John 14:23 (cf. Romans 8:10; 2 Corinthians 13:5; Ephesians 3:17; Colossians 1:27) The Spirit, of course, had "not yet been given, because Christ had not yet been glorified" by being seated at the right hand of the Father (John 7:39), and the doubts of some of the disciples are a clear indication that the temporary unction given them by our Lord did not alleviate all obstacles to their receiving the truth to the degree that the actual indwelling presence of the Spirit later would (John 20:22 cf. Acts 2:1-44; Acts 4:13). And it is to this gift that our Lord refers in His second instruction, not to water baptism. For John baptized with water but Christ "will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:3 cf. Acts 1:5; Acts 11:16) – this is the "one baptism" of the Church (Ephesians 4:5), and the baptism to which Jesus here refers by instructing the disciples/apostles to "baptize them into the Person" of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit: this entering of the believer into union or "oneness" with the Trinity cannot be accomplished by any ritual; it can only be accomplished supernaturally, by the Spirit of God, and now occurs at the point of faith in Christ (Acts 10:43-44; cf. Romans 8:9; 2 Timothy 2:1). Thus "baptizing" refers to the mediation of the gospel message whereby we are saved and entered into the Christ by Spirit baptism (and the Father and Spirit) to become one with Him (and with Them), and pairs up perfectly with "teaching", which properly has as its object those who have now become believers. Herein, therefore, we do indeed have the "Great Commission" not only to the disciples/apostles but to the whole Church, the essential task of all believers throughout this present age put forward in synoptic form: to work for the salvation of all, and for the spiritual growth of all who believe.

9) To the Five Hundred (1 Corinthians 15:6): We know of this "mass" appearance only from 1 Corinthians 15:6; and it most likely took place in Jerusalem. That is because after private teaching to the disciples/apostles in Galilee, later we find our Lord appearing to them in Jerusalem and instructing them not to leave until the promise of the Holy Spirit is given (for Jerusalem was where this was set to take place: Acts 1:4-5; Acts 2:1-4). As late as circa A. D. 55, over twenty years later, Paul reports that most of these believers who saw our Lord on this occasion were still alive, and it is clear from this fact and from the use to which Paul puts it in context that this rather large

number of witnesses giving their testimony over such a relatively long period of time was an important factor in confirming the reality and the truth of the resurrection for many early believers who had not seen Jesus' resurrection personally.

10) Other Post-Galilee Appearances: There are two other passages which imply some further appearances by our Lord during the forty days of His time on earth following the resurrection and before the ascension which may not be specifically delineated in the other accounts. As John's description of the appearance to the seven at the Sea of Galilee is "the third time" (John 21:14), and as the meeting on the mountain and a return to Jerusalem followed shortly thereafter, these other appearances probably took place in the time period after the apostles' return to await the coming of the Spirit:

After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. Acts 1:3 NIV

"But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people." Acts 13:30-31 NIV

11) James (1 Corinthians 15:7): Paul tells us that Jesus also appeared His half-brother James, and this appearance also most likely dates to the post-Galilee period (as Paul's sequence suggests: 1 Corinthians 15:7). While none of our Lord's siblings believed in Him before the resurrection (John 7:5 cf. Psalms 69:8; Mark 3:21), a major change of heart took place thereafter (cf. also Jude 1:1), with James' conversion either occasioning (or occasioned by) this appearance from Jesus Himself. As the later leader of the Jerusalem Church (Acts 12:17; Acts 15:13; Acts 21:18; Galatians 1:19; Galatians 2:9; James 1:1), it was also no doubt important for Him to have this special distinction, both for purposes of his own faith, and also as a measure of authority comparable to that of the eleven apostles (all of whom saw our Lord on more than one occasion).

12) The Disciples at the Ascension (Acts 1:1-9): The first account I produced [for you], O Theophilus, dealt with all the things which Jesus did and taught from the beginning, until the day when Jesus was taken up [into heaven], having given instructions to those apostles whom He had selected through the Holy Spirit. To these [apostles] He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by means of much convincing evidence, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and telling them the things of the Kingdom of God. And gathering them together [Jesus] commanded [the disciples] not to depart from Jerusalem, but to await the promise of the Father (i. e., the Holy Spirit) "which you heard about from Me. For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Spirit not many days from now". So when they had come together (i. e., for the last time), they were asking Him, "Lord, are you about to restore the kingdom to Israel at this time?" And He said to them, "It is not for you to decide the times and occasions which the Father has ordained on His own authority (i. e., the Second Advent et al. will happen on His time-table, not yours). But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth". And having said these things, He was lifted up while they looked on, and a cloud obscured Him from their sight. Acts 1:1-9. This passage written by Luke is not to be confused with the end of the gospel of Luke. There are clearly similarities between the last meeting the apostles had with our Lord after their return from Galilee (quoted here immediately above) and the first collective meeting on the

night of the first Easter Sunday (Luke 24:36-53). The portion of the text in Luke 24:51 which says “and He was taken up into heaven” is not a part of the original text but a later addition, added no doubt in an attempt to homogenize the end of Luke with the beginning of Acts (i. e., making Luke end with the ascension just as Acts begins with it). But as we saw above, these are two separate meetings, the former occurring on Easter night before the trip to Galilee, the latter occurring some forty days later on the day of the ascension. The special focus our Lord places on the baptism of the Spirit, and especially His contrasting of Spirit baptism with the water baptism of John, should be noted carefully (particularly as many churches continue to baptize with water as if these verses meant little or nothing). The passage above constitutes the final post-resurrection appearance of our Lord before His “glorification” (cf. John 7:39), for it concludes with His ascension (followed immediately by His session at the right hand of the Father in heaven: Psalms 110:1 ff.; see section 5.o directly below).

13) To Paul (Acts 9:1-19; Acts 22:3-16; Acts 26:9-18; 1 Corinthians 9:1; 1 Corinthians 15:8), and to John (Revelation 1:10-20):

Am I not an apostle? Have I not see Jesus our Lord? 1 Corinthians 9:1.

Actually “seeing” the Lord in resurrection and thereby being a witness to the resurrection was an essential prerequisite for the office of apostle (Acts 26:16; cf. Acts 22:15), of whom there are and will only ever be twelve (cf. Revelation 21:14). Paul saw the Lord “in glory” (Acts 9:3; Acts 22:6, Acts 22:11; Acts 26:13), as did John on Patmos (Revelation 1:12-17), so that these post-ascension appearances are significantly different from the prior ones, and demonstrate the magnificence and the magnitude of the glorification that took place when our Lord ascended in the presence of the Father. o. The Ascension and Session of Christ:

1) The Ascension: The “ascension” refers to our Lord’s literal journey from earth into the presence of God the Father in the third heaven (where He now resides): And having said these things (i. e., the contents of Acts 1:3-8), He was lifted up while they looked on, and a cloud obscured Him from their sight. And while [the disciples] were [yet] looking on intently as [Jesus] was traveling into heaven, behold, two men took their stand beside them, dressed in white, and they said, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing here looking up into heaven? This [same] Jesus who was [just now] taken up [there] into heaven [and] away from you will return in the very same way in which you saw Him traveling into heaven.” Acts 1:9-11. In addition to this sole description in the Bible of the actual event itself given from the viewpoint of earthly observers, there are many passages of scripture which refer to our Lord’s literal, bodily ascending from earth into the presence of the Father in the third heaven – a thing which would clearly have been impossible without the resurrection body (Acts 2:33-36; Acts 5:31; Ephesians 4:7-10; Php 2:9; 1 Timothy 3:16; cf. John 3:13; John 6:62; Hebrews 6:19-20):

Therefore since we have a Great High Priest who has passed through the heavens (i. e., into the presence of the Father), Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast to our conviction. Hebrews 4:14.

[Jesus Christ], who, having traveled to heaven, is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him. 1 Peter 3:22.

2) The Session of Christ: The formal acceptance of our Lord Jesus Christ into the presence of the Father, and God the Father’s offer to our Lord Jesus, immediately accepted, to take His place

beside Him at His right hand on the throne is referenced throughout the New Testament (Romans 8:34; Ephesians 1:20; Ephesians 2:6; Ephesians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3, Hebrews 1:13; Hebrews 8:1-2; Hebrews 10:12; Hebrews 12:2). The Lord said to My Lord, "Sit down at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." Psalms 110:1.

Jesus had applied the prophetic anticipation of the session in the verse above to Himself to demonstrate to His unbelieving contemporaries that David, writing under the ministry of the Spirit, understood full well that the Messiah, the son of David, would yet also be his (i. e., David's) "Lord", something only possible if the Messiah is also God (Matthew 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42). As this verse and the remainder of Psalms 22:1-31 make clear, this is a pronouncement from the Father to the Son at the point of His first formal appearance before the throne of God, an event which took place immediately after Jesus had ascended into the Father's presence in the third heaven, namely, the invitation "to be seated" at God's "right hand", the position of honor (1 Kings 2:19; Matthew 20:21-23; cf. Matthew 25:33-34; Matthew 26:64).

[Jesus] is the shining forth of [the Father's] glory, the precise image of His essence, the One who sustains the universe by His mighty Word. When He had accomplished the cleansing of [our] sins, He took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Hebrews 1:3. This verse complements Psalms 110:1; describing our Lord as having responded immediately to His Father's offer by taking His seat beside God in the throne room of heaven (i. e., this depicts the actual session of Christ). And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing [there, looking] as if He had been slain, with seven horns and seven eyes (which are the seven spirits of God sent out into the entire earth). And He came and took [the scroll] from the right hand of the One sitting on the throne. Revelation 5:6-7.

"They (i. e., the tribulational martyrs) will neither hunger nor thirst again, nor will the sun beat down upon them nor any burning [heat], because the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and will lead them to fountains of living water [lit., "fountains of waters of life"], and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes". Revelation 7:16-17. The time our Lord Jesus Christ's session at the Father's right hand is soon coming to an end. Psalms 110:1 marks the conclusion of the period of session as being "until I [begin to] make your enemies a footstool for your feet". The expansion of this translation is both permissible and necessary, for we know full well from many other scriptures that our Lord will not await the conquest of Armageddon before returning to earth, but will be the Father's primary Agent of that future victory. In the verses above our Lord Jesus Christ, is symbolically depicted as the Lamb of God, having arisen from His two thousand year session and on the point of beginning the process and the period of His return whereby all His enemies will indeed be laid prostrate at His feet (i. e., the scroll is the book of Revelation which when opened begins the Tribulation, the final period in world history before our Lord's return and millennial rule). Until that glorious day, the final "Day of the Lord", Jesus is literally seated with the Father, at the right hand of the Father, sharing the throne. For the third heaven is only God's temporary residence (to which He removed from the earth at the commencement of Satan's rebellion). It is His "battle headquarters" from which He is in the process of suppressing the devil's revolt. And the throne itself, modeled by the ark of the covenant, is in actuality God's "battle chariot" (a fact which explains its unique appearance and its unique functions; cf. 1 Chronicles 28:18; Psalms 132:7; Ezekiel 1:4-28; Ezekiel 10:9-22; Daniel 7:9; Habakkuk 3:3-15). The joint presence of the Father and Son in/on this chariot-throne is thus a

symbol of imminent victory over God's enemies soon to be achieved at the Second Advent when Christ returns and establishes His own throne on the earth (cf. the ark's appearance in Revelation 11:19; a passage which presages the Second Advent).

I kept looking until thrones were set down and the Ancient of Days (i. e., the Father) took His seat. His attire was white as snow, as was the hair of His head, [white] like the purest wool. His throne was aflame with fire, and its wheels were a blazing fire. A river of fire was flowing, and it poured forth from before Him. Thousands upon thousands were ministering to Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him. The court was seated and the books were opened. Meanwhile, I kept looking on account of the sound of the arrogant words which the horn (i. e., antichrist) was speaking. I kept looking until he was killed and his body destroyed and given over to the burning fire. As for the remaining beasts, their dominions were taken away, but an extension of life was given to them for an appointed time and season. I kept looking during my vision of that night, and behold – with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming up, and He approached the Ancient of Days (i. e., the Father) and they brought Him before Him. And to Him was given dominion and honor and a kingdom, so that all nations and peoples and tongues should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away, and His kingdom one which will not be destroyed. Daniel 7:9-14. The offer of session (i. e., "Sit down") marks the formal acceptance by the Father of the Son and of His work, something which was in truth never in doubt, but something which in the interest of strict divine justice has been withheld until this point (cf. John 7:39; Romans 3:25-26).

I shall relate the Lord's decree. He said to Me, "You are My Son. Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me and I shall give You the nations as Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth as your possession." Psalms 2:7-8. This verse likewise describes the official divine stamp of approval placed by the Father on the work of the Son at the time of His presentation before the throne of God for the first time. The phrase translated above "Today I have begotten You", in the context of the session means, essentially, "Today I have pronounced You My own", for we are to understand these words, in addition to their prophetic application at Christ's birth (cf. Hebrews 1:5; Hebrews 5:5), their further application here in the sense of the Father's formal acknowledgment of the Son and His work (cf. Acts 13:32-33). The possession of the nations and of the entire world refers to our Lord's millennial kingdom, the inheritance He will claim as soon as the Church age has run its course. For Jesus' successful completion of the Father's plan for the first advent is the turning point of all human history, conquering the devil's rebellion (see below) and delivering mankind from sin, and the session of Christ is His official and formal acceptance and recognition by the Father of this victory and as such opens the way for all the blessings to come.

Since then we too [like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and run with endurance the race set before us, turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despise, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:1-2.

Moreover, in Acts 2:36 Peter tells us that in recognition of our Lord Jesus' victory at the cross, the Father has "appointed Him Lord and Christ" (cf. Acts 5:31), that is "the Lord anointed (to rule the

world)”, signaling not only Christ’s replacement of Satan as ruler of the world, but His acceptance of the regency of the world as the Father’s representative. The session of Jesus Christ is thus the formal dividing point between the forward-looking pre-cross economy and the current situation which has the cross as its retrospective. With the victory of the cross complete and formally acknowledged, the Messiah receives His glorification, with all the benefits and results of His history-changing accomplishment now either placed into immediate effect or rendered prophetically imminent – for us as well as for Him.

1) Glorification: As God, divine glory is an intimate and irremovable characteristic of our Lord Jesus Christ’s divinity (Isaiah 40:5 compared with John 12:41). He has always possessed infinite divine glory and always will. The Word [Jesus Christ] existed at the very beginning, and there was reciprocity between the Word and God [the Father]. This One both existed and enjoyed reciprocity with God from the very beginning. Everything came into being through Him, and without Him, nothing has come into being which has in fact come into being. John 1:1-3.

Therefore the glorification in question here pertains to His humanity. Before the victory of the cross and its formal acknowledgment in the presence of the Father resulting in Christ being seated with Him on His throne, this divine glory had been masked. For on the one hand Jesus had to experience life in a humbled and non-glorified, normal human state in order to save us from our sins by dying for us on the cross (i. e., the principle of kenosis; see section I. 5.e above), and on the other hand glorification for His humanity is described in scripture as the manifestation of the Father’s approval of all our Lord Jesus did, most especially in dying for us on the cross, so that the overt and visible glorification of His humanity had necessarily to follow His earthly mission.

Therefore, when [Judas] was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him. John 13:31-32 KJV

“And now glorify Me, Father, with your own glory, [that glory] which I had in your presence before the world existed.” John 17:5 (cf. John 12:28) The first and most visible aspect of this glorification, the unveiling or revealing of the glory in His humanity which Christ possessed in His deity since before creation, is His new appearance. For even after the resurrection when Jesus appeared to the disciples, His appearance was not uniquely glorious. However in all cases after His ascension and session, our Lord manifests His divine glory bodily (Matthew 16:27; Matthew 17:2; Matthew 24:30; Matthew 25:31; Mark 8:38; Mark 9:2-8, Mark 9:29-31; Mark 13:26; Luke 9:26; Luke 21:27; 1 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 1:3; Hebrews 2:9; 1 Peter 4:13).

About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Hebrew, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” Then I asked, “Who are you, Lord?” “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” the Lord replied. Acts 26:13-15 (cf. Acts 9:3-4; Acts 22:6-8) So I turned around to see [the source of] the voice that was speaking to me, and when I had turned around, I saw seven golden lampstands. And in the middle of the lampstands was what looked like a man, dressed in a long robe with a golden belt tied around His waist. And His head and his hair were as white as wool or as snow, and His eyes were like a fiery flame, and His feet were like white-hot bronze when super-heated in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. And He held seven stars in His right hand, and out of His

mouth came a sharp two-edged sword. And His face shone like the sun in its glory. Revelation 1:12-16. The opposite side of the coin to visible glorification manifest in His personal appearance is His status as Heir to all things, for in Psalms 2:7-8 after the Father formally acknowledges the Son “You are My Son”, He then says “Ask of Me and I shall give You the nations as Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth as your possession”. Jesus’ rulership of the world, already won at the cross and prophetically imminent, carries with it the glory of His Name which represents His person, along with every legitimate title of highest authority.

Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the Name that is above every name that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Php 2:9-11. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written: “King of Kings and Lord of Lords”. Revelation 19:16.

John, to the seven churches which are in Asia [Minor]: Grace to you and peace from the One who is and was and is coming (i. e., the Father), and from the seven spirits (i. e., the Holy Spirit) which are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth. Revelation 1:4-5. Which [divine power] He (i. e., the Father) exercised in Christ by having raised Him from the dead and having seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly [places] far above every other rulership or authority or power or lordship and [far above] every other name which may be mentioned not only in this age but also in the age to come. And He (i. e., the Father) subordinated all things under [Christ’s] feet and gave Him [as] Head over all things in the Church which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills up all things in all ways. Ephesians 1:20-23. As we see from these verses, a key part of the glory and authority which Christ has won and been given extending over everyone and everything in the universe (cf. Hebrews 1:6; Ephesians 3:10-11; 1 Peter 3:22) is His unique status as Head of the Church. For this is His “Body” (1 Corinthians 12:27; cf. Matthew 26:26; Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 1:22-23; Ephesians 3:6; Ephesians 4:4; Colossians 1:18; Colossians 3:15), His “Bride” (Ephesians 5:31-32), the “joy that was set before Him” as He anticipated the fiery ordeal of the cross (John 15:13; Ephesians 5:25-27; Hebrews 12:2) – we are the “prize” for which He strove, and an important part of the glorification He now enjoys. This aspect of His glorification could only come to Him in His humanity after He had won us for Himself through His death for us on the cross (Matthew 20:28; Galatians 1:4; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:2).

He is the exact image of the unseen God, the First-Born of all creation (i. e., preeminent in the universe). Everything in the heavens and on the earth was created by Him (Jesus Christ), things invisible as well as those visible – whether thrones, authorities, rulers or powers, everything was created through Him and for Him. And He Himself is before everything, and everything subsists in Him. And He Himself is the Head of the Body, the Church. He is the Origin, the First-Born from the dead (i. e., preeminent in the resurrection). For it was [God’s] good pleasure for the fulfillment [of His plan] to reside entirely in [Christ], and so through Him to reconcile everything to Himself, having made peace through Him, through the blood of His cross, whether things on earth, or things in heaven. Colossians 1:15-20. As a result of the baptism of the Spirit with whom every believer is now baptized at the point of faith in Christ (Romans 8:9; 1 Timothy 2:1), we are made “one with Him” (1 Corinthians 1:30; 1 Corinthians 15:22; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 1:13; Ephesians 2:6, Ephesians 2:10; Colossians 1:27; Hebrews 3:14), and this unity with Christ will

become a visible and exquisitely wonderful experiential reality when He “marries” the Church at the resurrection on His second advent return to earth (Revelation 19:7-9; cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

2) Victory: And I began to cry much, because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look inside of it. And one of the elders was saying to me, “Don’t cry! Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, He has won the victory [so as to be worthy] to open the scroll and to undo its seals.” Revelation 5:4-5. The victory proclaimed here is the victory of the cross, for it is by His successful completion of the Father’s mission to die for our sins that our Lord has defeated the devil and won for all time the Name, the glory, and honor that are His as the First-Born. It is our Lord’s victory at the cross which has established His supreme authority in all things and over all things, that is confirmed in His session at the Father’s right hand (Matthew 28:18; Luke 10:17-18; John 14:2-3; John 16:11; Acts 2:32-36; Acts 5:30-31; Romans 16:20; 1 Corinthians 15:21-25; Ephesians 1:20-23; Ephesians 3:10-11; Ephesians 4:7-10; Php 2:9-11; Colossians 1:13-20; Colossians 2:14-15; Hebrews 2:14-15; 1 Peter 3:22; 1 John 3:8; Revelation 1:18; Revelation 17:14), having rescued us through His death on our behalf.

Now is the judgment of this world. Now will the prince of this world be driven out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to Myself. John 12:31-32.

[For by means of the cross, God] has stripped [demon] rulers and authorities [of their power] and subjected them to public humiliation, having triumphed over them in [Christ]. Colossians 2:15.

Therefore since these children have a common heritage of flesh and blood, [Christ] too partook of these same [common elements] in a very similar fashion (i. e., not identical only in that He was virgin born and so without sin), in order that through His death He might put an end to the one possessing the power of death, that is, the devil, and might reconcile [to Himself] those who were subject to being slaves their whole lives long by their fear of death. Hebrews 2:14-15.

Thus Christ’s victory over sin is intimately connected with His victory over the devil who first led mankind into sin. Not only does the cross make salvation universally available to all human beings in spite of sin, but it also closes the book on Satan’s rebellion, refuting in the court of human history for all time the devil’s calumnies against the Justice of God (cf. 1 Timothy 3:16; 1 Peter 1:12).

God [did this] so that [His] enigmatically intricate wisdom might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms through the agency of the Church, according to His plan for the ages (i. e., history) which He has implemented in [the person of] Christ Jesus our Lord. Ephesians 3:10-11.

[And at His session (Hebrews 1:3), Jesus] became [manifestly] superior to the angels to the degree that He received as [a part of] His inheritance a Name so much more glorious than theirs. For to which of the angels did He ever say, “You are my Son. Today I have begotten you (Psalms 2:7).” And again, “I will be a Father to Him, and He will be my Son (2 Samuel 7:14).” But when He brings back the Firstborn into the world, He says, “And let all the angels of God worship Him! (Psalms 97:7 b)”. Hebrews 1:4-6.

[Jesus Christ], who, having traveled to heaven, is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him. 1 Peter 3:22.

3) The Transfer of Believers from the Subterranean Paradise to the Third Heaven: One ineffably marvelous result of our Lord's victory on the cross and its results in the unseen conflict that rages beyond our vision was the prophesied "liberation of the captives" (Psalms 146:7; Isaiah 14:17; Isaiah 42:7; Isaiah 49:9; Isaiah 61:1; Matthew 12:29; cf. 1 Peter 3:18-22), the release from Hades (that is, from the "Paradise" to which our Lord also descended in His physical death: Luke 23:43; see section I. 5.m. above) of all departed saints who believed prior to the cross. These could not be admitted into the presence of God in His perfect holiness until their sins had actually been propitiated by Jesus' sacrifice (Romans 3:25). But by His entrance into the true Holy of Holies and the acceptance of His sacrifice officially recognized by the offer of session, Jesus our High Priest has split the veil of the heavenly temple on high so that believers may now enter into the presence of God (Hebrews 4:14-16; Hebrews 6:19-20; Hebrews 7:26; Hebrews 8:1; Hebrews 9:8, Hebrews 9:11-28; Hebrews 10:19-20; cf. Matthew 27:51), with all those believers who had died prior to the cross having been led to heaven by Him in triumph at the time of His ascension (Psalms 68:18; Ephesians 4:8; cf. Psalms 68:24-27; John 14:2-3; Colossians 2:15; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Revelation 1:18). And to each of us this grace has been given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. For it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive (i. e., He brought pre-cross believers to heaven). He gave gifts to men." Now [as to] this [phrase] "He ascended", what can it mean except that He had also [previously] descended into the lower reaches of the earth (i. e., to Hades, from whence He brought the pre-cross believers to heaven)? The One who descended is also the One who ascended above all the heavens (i. e., into the third heaven, the place of the Father's residence), in order to fulfill all things (i. e., to complete the victory won at the cross; cf. Psalms 110:1). Ephesians 4:7-10.

Although the devil "wouldn't let the captives go home" (Isaiah 14:17 b), our Lord "took the captives captive", releasing them from Hades-paradise and leading them as His triumphant victory train directly into the presence of the Father in the third heaven. As a result, all who have died in the Lord from that point forward have gone directly to heaven as well (compare John 14:2-3 with 2 Corinthians 5:8; cf. Revelation 6:9-11; Revelation 7:9-17).

4) The Sending of the Holy Spirit: And gathering them together [Jesus] commanded [the disciples] not to depart from Jerusalem, but to await the promise of the Father (i. e., the Holy Spirit) "which you heard about from Me. For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Spirit not many days from now". Acts 1:4-5. For the Spirit was not yet [being poured out in Spirit baptism], because Jesus had not yet been glorified. John 7:39 b

I will ask the Father, and He will give you another comforter to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive, for it neither sees Him, nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He abides with you, and will be in you. John 14:16-17. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. John 14:26 NIV But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. John 16:7 NIV

God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now

see and hear. Acts 2:32-33 NIV The benefit and blessing of the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit is an inestimably sublime blessing and empowerment in its own right, and also the basis of many other additional benefits and blessings which combine to make this age of the Church unique (Ephesians 1:3; cf. Isaiah 48:16). As can be seen from the verses above, the success of our Lord's earthly mission and His session in heaven on high along with the glorification which it entailed were essential prerequisites for the actual carrying out of the promise to send the Spirit. Not that the Holy Spirit had not always had a critical role in the plan of God – indeed He always has (and that subject will require an entire installment of this presence series to develop: part 5, "Pneumatology"). The Spirit has always been "with" believers, but since the first Pentecost of the Church and the subsequent universal baptism of the Spirit at the point of faith in Christ, all believers of this present age are blessed to have the Spirit literally indwelling them (Romans 8:9; cf. 1 Corinthians 2:16; Ephesians 4:5; 2 Timothy 2:1), and it is through our Spirit baptism that we are rendered "one" with Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:5; cf. Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:3; Acts 1:5; Acts 11:15-17). Or do you not realize that as many of us as have been baptized [by the Spirit] into Christ have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through this baptism [of the Spirit] into His death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the Glory of the Father, so also we might walk in newness of life. For if we have been joined together with Him in respect to the likeness of His death [– and we have by being spiritually baptized into Him –], then we certainly will be [joined together with Him in the likeness] of His resurrection also. Romans 6:3-5. For you are all sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ. For as many of you as have been baptized [by the Spirit] into Christ, have put on Christ [like a garment]. There is no longer Jew nor Greek, nor slave nor free, nor male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:26-28.

5) Rewards:

"The one who wins the victory, I will grant him to sit with Me on my throne just as I also have won the victory and have taken my seat with My Father on His throne."

Revelation 3:21. As the verse above states so clearly, our Lord's victory at the cross verified by His session is also the basis for our sharing in that victory through our own "victory of faith" (1 John 5:4). And to the one who wins the victory and gives heed to My works until the end, I will give to him authority over the nations. And he will shepherd them with an iron rod and crush them like vessels of clay, just as I have received [the authority] from My Father. Revelation 2:26-27. Our Lord's status as Ruler over the entire created world demonstrated by His session in sharing the very throne of God the Father likewise becomes the basis for our sharing in that rule as a part of the reward won in this life through our service to Him. Rewards form an integral part of the Christian hope (Hebrews 11:6, Hebrews 11:24-26; cf. Isaiah 40:10; Isaiah 62:11; Matthew 6:19-21; Matthew 10:40-42; Matthew 25:21-23, Matthew 25:34-36; Luke 19:17; 1 Corinthians 3:8-15; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 1 Corinthians 15:58; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Galatians 6:9; Ephesians 2:6-7; Ephesians 6:8; Colossians 3:24; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 1 Peter 1:7; 2 John 1:8; Revelation 20:4-6; Revelation 22:12), for it is with these rewards that our resurrection bodies will be decorated in a way that glorifies our Lord Jesus forever (1 Corinthians 9:25; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:40-42; Php 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:4; Revelation 2:10; Revelation 3:5, Revelation 3:11-12; Revelation 19:8), and it is through our Lord Jesus Christ's victory confirmed by His session that these rewards are made available as we share in the "plunder" of that victory (cf. Luke 11:22;

Ephesians 4:7-8).

Therefore I will allot to Him [the plunder] among [His] many [brothers], and He will apportion plunder to the mighty [among them]. Isaiah 53:12 a

6) Access and Intercession: One of the most encouraging and presently active blessings to result from the entrance of our Lord into the third heaven and His session of the Father's throne is the dual privilege of access we now enjoy for our prayers directly to both the Father and the Son (John 14:13-14) as they preside on the heavenly throne (cf. Romans 5:1-2 a; 1 Peter 3:18) . . . For through Him [Jesus Christ] we both [Jews and gentiles] have access to the Father by one Spirit. Ephesians 2:18. Being in Him [Jesus Christ] and having confidence through our faith in Him we possess this access [to the Father] and freedom to speak [to Him]. Ephesians 3:12. So let us approach with confident free speech to the throne of grace [of the Father] that we might receive [His] mercy and gain [His] favor for timely help. Hebrews 4:16.

. . . while at the same time benefitting from the intercessory prayer that our Lord in His capacity as High Priest is constantly offering on our behalf (1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 7:24-25; cf. Job 16:20-21; Isaiah 53:12 b; Hebrews 4:14; Hebrews 6:19-20; Hebrews 9:11-12, Hebrews 9:24), augmented by the intercessory prayers of the Spirit: Who will [dare to] bring charges against God's elect? God is the One who is pronouncing [us] justified. Who is he that condemns [us]? Christ Jesus is the One who died [condemned in our place], and the One, moreover, who was raised from the dead [for us], who is [seated] at the right hand of God, who is also making petitions on our behalf. Romans 8:33-34. My children, I am writing these things to you so that you won't sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate to [approach] the Father [on our behalf], Jesus Christ the righteous. 1 John 2:1. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. Romans 8:26-27 NIV

7) Things to Come: Presently, our Lord is seated with the Father "until the time when I [begin to] make your enemies the footstool for your feet" (Psalms 110:1). That "time", also known as the end times, will begin with the Tribulation at the end of the two thousand year long Church Age. Jesus' session has made those events certainly future (Psalms 110:1-7; Hebrews 1:13; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:7-8; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10; Titus 2:13; James 5:8), and thus His eventual assumption of the de facto rulership of the world awaits only the completion of the Church, His Bride. So repent and turn back [to God] for the blotting out of your sins, so that times of revival may come from the Lord, and so that He may send to you the One acknowledged as the Christ [Messiah], [namely] Jesus, who must remain in heaven (lit., "whom heaven must receive") until the times of the restoration of all things of which God has spoken through the mouths of His holy prophets from of old. Acts 3:19-21. a) The Second Advent and Armageddon: At the conclusion of the Tribulation, just as antichrist stands poised to destroy the Jewish people concentrated in Jerusalem, our Lord Jesus Christ will be "revealed" (Luke 17:30; 1 Corinthians 1:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:7, 1 Peter 1:13; 1 Peter 4:13; Revelation 1:1; cf. Romans 8:19; 1 Peter 1:5), returning in glory with all of us, His newly resurrected saints (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; Revelation 19:11-16). The sign of the Son of Man, the cross, will appear in the sky visible worldwide (Matthew 24:30), and "every eye will see Him" (Revelation 1:7). Unbelieving Israel will

repent (Zechariah 12:10-14), so that thus “all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:25-27; cf. Isaiah 59:20-21). The armies of the beast will be destroyed (Revelation 19:15-21), he and the false prophet will be summarily deposited in the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20; cf. Isaiah 24:21-22), and the devil and his angels will be sequestered in the Abyss (Revelation 20:1-3). b) The Millennial Kingdom: After dispensing divine justice in a series of judgments which will begin His thousand year reign, our Lord will commence His millennial rule seated now in the temple at Jerusalem as the rightful Heir and prophesied Messiah-King (Revelation 11:15). His millennial reign will bring peace, abundance and prosperity the likes of which the world and human kind has not seen since the garden of Eden. The Church, resurrected and rewarded (Romans 2:16; 1 Corinthians 4:5), will share in that glorious rule (Matthew 25:19-23; Luke 22:28; 1 Corinthians 6:3; Romans 8:17; 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 1:6; Revelation 2:26-27; Revelation 3:21; Revelation 20:4-6). But despite a thousand years of perfect justice, perfect administration, prosperity and freedom of want, when the devil is released at the end of this period of bliss, the majority of mankind will quickly flock to Satan’s standards and rebel against the Son of God (Revelation 20:7-10), proving once and for all that rejection of God and His truth has nothing whatsoever to do with environmental issues. c) The Last Judgment: At the end of the Millennium, following our Lord’s rapid and final dispatch of the devil and those most recently seduced into opposing Him (the Gog-Magog rebellion), the final phase of the resurrection will occur with all those who put their faith in Christ from the Second Advent forward now resurrected to eternal life (Daniel 12:2-3; Matthew 25:34-40; 1 Corinthians 15:24), and all those from Cain to the end of time who have rejected the Lord resurrected to face Him at the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:41-46; Revelation 20:11-15). As the One to whom all judgment has been entrusted, it is Jesus Christ who will sit in judgment over all those who have rejected Him.

Just as the Father raises the dead and brings them to life, so the Son brings to life whomever He wishes. And neither does the Father judge anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, in order that all may honor the Son as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. Truly, truly I say to you, that the one who hears My Word and believes in the One who sent Me has eternal life and does not enter into judgment but has passed from death into life. Truly, truly I say to you that an hour is coming, and is now [imminent] when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear it will come to life. For just as the Father has life in Himself, so He has given to the Son to have life in Himself. And He has given authority to Him to render judgment, because He is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this [statement], that an hour will come in which all those in their tombs will hear His voice. For they shall come forth – those who have done what is good to a resurrection of life (i. e., those who have faithfully followed Jesus Christ), but those who have done what is worthless to a resurrection of judgment. John 5:21-29. d) New Jerusalem and the Eternal State: Immediately after disposing of all who willfully rejected Him in history (men and angels both; cf. Matthew 25:41), the Lord will create for us the New Heavens and the New Earth (Isaiah 35:1-10; Isaiah 65:17; Isaiah 66:22; 2 Peter 2:10-13; Revelation 21:1, Revelation 21:5), a pristine universe “where righteousness [alone] will dwell” (2 Peter 3:12), and the New Jerusalem will descend from heaven to the earth as the habitation of the Church of Jesus Christ forevermore (Revelation 21:9; cf. John 14:2-3). In this blessed place our Lord will share the throne with our heavenly Father and we shall enjoy glorious and ineffably blissful fellowship with them and with each other for all eternity. For this reason (i. e., of salvation through faith) they (i. e., the saints) are before the throne of God and serve Him day

and night in His temple. And the One who sits upon the throne will pitch His tabernacle over them. They will neither hunger nor thirst again, nor will the sun beat down upon them nor any burning [heat], because the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and will lead them to fountains of living water (lit., “fountains of waters of life”), and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Revelation 7:15-17.

01.02 - The Saving Work of Jesus Christ

II. The Saving Work of Jesus Christ

1. Our Need for a Savior
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01.02.01 - Our Need for a Savior

II. The Saving Work of Jesus Christ

1. Our Need for a Savior: As delineated in part 3B of this series, Hamartiology: the Biblical Study of Sin, section I. 1.1.1, “Spiritual Death”, scripture is crystal clear about the fact that each and every human being since the fall of Adam and Eve has been born into sin with the result that they commit sin, a circumstance which, from the standpoint of eternity, places us all in an absolutely hopeless situation of impending judgment and condemnation apart from God’s help.

Now the Lord saw that Man’s evil had spread abundantly on the earth – indeed, the underlying intent of all his innermost thoughts was invariably evil. Genesis 6:5.

What is Man that he could be pure (i. e., innocent), or that one born of woman could be righteous? Job 15:14.

If You, O Lord, kept a close watch on [our] iniquities, then who, O Lord, could stand? Psalms 130:3. For there is no man on earth who is [so] righteous that he [always] does what is good and [never] sins. Ecclesiastes 7:20.

[Jesus] went on: “What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’ For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean.’ “ Mark 7:20-23 NIV

God’s wrath is being revealed (i. e., dispensed) from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness – on men who suppress the truth in their unrighteousness. Romans 1:18. For all sin and fall short of God’s glory. Romans 3:23. So just as through one man (i. e., Adam) sin came into the world and, through sin, death, and thus (i. e., Adam physically passing on his sin nature) death spread to all mankind – for [obviously] everyone sins (i. e., universal sinning proves universal spiritual death), . . . Romans 5:12. But now it is no longer I [who] does it (i. e., commits sin), but the sin dwelling in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me – that is, in my flesh. For to will what is good lies in my power, but to carry it out does not. For I do not do the good I want to, but the evil I do not want to do, this is what I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who am doing it but the sin dwelling in me. So in respect to the Law I find that, even as I wish to do good, evil has me in its power. For I delight in the Law of God in my inner person. But I perceive a different law [at work] in my bodily members, waging war against the Law in my mind and taking me prisoner – [a prisoner to] this law of sin that dwells in my body. Wretched man that I am! Who will save me from this body of death? Romans 7:17-24. And you [too were once spiritually] dead in the transgressions and sins in which you then lived your life, after the fashion of this temporal world, after the pattern of the ruler who holds sway in the air [around us (i. e., the devil)], that spirit who is now at work in those who have chosen disobedience. In company with these we too all conducted our lives in the lusts of our flesh (i. e., sin nature), carrying out the will of our flesh and its desires. For we were [all thus] children of wrath by nature just like the rest [of the human race].

Ephesians 2:1-3. So put to death your [bodily] members which are of the earth, [for it is they that produce] sexual sinning, impurity, passion, evil lusting, and greed, which is [effectively the same thing as] idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon those who are [wilfully] disobedient. You too once walked in these ways when your life was defined by them [as unbelievers]. Colossians 3:5-7. And inasmuch as it is ordained for mankind to die once (i. e., the first, "physical" death), and after this [face] judgment (i. e., "the second death"; cf. Revelation 2:11; Revelation 20:6, Revelation 20:14-15) . . . Hebrews 9:27. In short, we are spiritually dead at birth, being "children of wrath" with only the expectation of divine judgment and the execution of condemnation absent some miraculous intervention far beyond our power and ability to effect for ourselves. And that is precisely what God has done for us in Jesus Christ!

Because God has not appointed us for wrath, but for [taking] possession of [our] salvation (i. e., for resurrection) through our Lord Jesus Christ, the One who died on our behalf, that, whether we stay awake or sleep (i. e., pass on to heaven), we shall live together with Him. 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10.

Salvation, that is, deliverance from eternal condemnation on the one hand and the provision of eternal life instead on the other, has been effected for us in our hopelessness through the most astounding event in world history, so monumental in fact that it is world history from the proper, divine point of view, namely, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ unto death in our place and on our behalf.

01.02.02 - The Substitutionary Death of Jesus Christ on our behalf

2. The Substitutionary Death of Jesus Christ on our behalf: In broad terms, since God's perfect justice demands satisfaction for all sin, and since we human beings are without any means of providing that satisfaction short of suffering eternal condemnation, God Himself in His inexpressibly great mercy and kindness provided us with a substitute, His own dear Son our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. For this reason while salvation has been made available to all mankind through Jesus' death on our behalf, absent the acceptance of His Person and work by faith, the sure and certain prospect of condemnation remains. For God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him. The one who believes in Him is not being judged, but the one who does not believe has already been judged on the grounds that he has not put his faith in the Name (i. e., the Person) of God's only Son. John 3:17-18.

He who believes in the Son has life. He who does not have the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on Him. John 3:36.

Jesus died in our place, and we most certainly did need Him to do so, for there was absolutely nothing that we could have done to avoid eternal condemnation otherwise. We were faced with a debt we could not pay, a debt moreover that had to be paid because of God's perfect character. Only the perfect Son of God was qualified to pay this debt, and that is exactly what our Savior did for us, dying on the cross for us, atoning for our sins, that we might not be condemned but instead live forever with Him (Romans 5:19; Romans 6:10; Romans 8:3; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 2:14-16; Ephesians 5:25; Hebrews 2:10-18). This is My blood of the covenant which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins concerning many people. Matthew 26:28.

God made Him a means of atonement [achieved] by His blood [and claimed] through faith, to give proof of His justice in leaving unpunished in divine forbearance [all] previously committed sins, so as to prove His justice in the present, namely, so that He would be [shown to be] just [in this] and [justified] in justifying the one who has faith in Jesus. Romans 3:25-26. For not only did Christ die for us while we were helpless – He even did so at the critical time, [dying] on our behalf, ungodly though we were. For scarcely will someone die on behalf of a righteous person; and perhaps someone might also risk death on behalf of a good person. But God commends His love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:6-8. For I entrusted to you as of primary importance what I had also received, [namely] that Christ died on behalf of our sins according to (i. e., in fulfillment of) the scriptures. 1 Corinthians 15:3.

He made Him who had no [personal] experience of sinning [to be] sin (i. e., a sin offering) for us, so that we might have (lit., "become") God's righteousness in Him. 2 Corinthians 5:21.

[Jesus Christ], who gave Himself on behalf of our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age according to the will of our God and Father. Galatians 1:4. And I no longer live myself, but Christ lives in me. And that which I now do live in the flesh, I live in faith for the Son of God, the One who loved me and who gave Himself up on my behalf. Galatians 2:20. And walk in love, just

as also Christ loved you and gave Himself up as sacrifice and offering for a sweet smell to God. Ephesians 5:2.

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, in order that we might die to sins and live to righteousness. By His wound you are healed. 1 Peter 2:24.

[Jesus Christ] who gave Himself on our behalf to redeem us from all lawlessness (i. e., sin; cf. 1 John 3:4) and to cleanse for Himself a people [to be His] own unique possession, zealous for good works. Titus 2:14.

01.02.03 - Unlimited Atonement

3. Unlimited Atonement: It is God's desire that all people be saved (Ezekiel 18:23; Matthew 18:14; John 12:47; Acts 17:27; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; 2 Peter 3:9; cf. Lamentations 3:33), and it was precisely to accomplish this mission of salvation that He sent His one and only beloved Son into the world – to save the world. For God loved the world so much that He gave [up] His only Son, [with the purpose] that everyone who believes in Him should not be lost [forever], but have eternal life [instead]. For God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him. John 3:16-17. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 1 John 4:14.

It should therefore come as no surprise that our Lord died for all, that all might be saved. And indeed, Jesus died for all people, for every human being who has ever drawn breath. And He Himself is the atonement for our sins, and not just for ours, but also for the entire world. 1 John 2:2.

Thus His sacrifice on the cross was entirely effective, expiating the penalty for sin for all mankind. Therefore, because of Christ's work on the cross, salvation is available to everyone with no exceptions.

[God] has erased the charge against us along with its bill of particulars (i. e., the record of our personal sins). This stood against us, but He removed it [as an obstacle] between us by nailing it to the cross. Colossians 2:14.

Christ's sacrifice is the cornerstone of the plan of God (Psalms 118:22; Isaiah 8:13-15; Isaiah 28:16; Daniel 2:34-45; Matthew 16:18; 1 Corinthians 10:4; 1 Peter 2:4-8). All of history as it actually unfolds according to the eternal decrees of God is predicated upon the cross (Ephesians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:17-20; 2 Timothy 1:9-10; cf. Matthew 21:42; Romans 5:6; Romans 8:29-30; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 2:20-22; 1 Peter 2:6-8; Hebrews 9:26), and every scripture in the written word is ultimately focused upon the work of Him who is the Living Word of God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (John 5:39 cf. John 1:1-14; Hebrews 1:1-4; 1 John 1:1-4; Revelation 1:2; Revelation 19:13). In His eternal plan, therefore, decreed before the foundation of the universe before the creation of angels or men, God foreknew creature free will as exercised in faith or in the corresponding rejection of Him on the part of many that this provision of free will would entail. In His incalculable mercy and wisdom, our God provided a solution for the death and loss that such creature rebellion would produce (seen initially in Satan's rebellion and then in the fall of man), namely, the redemption of fallen mankind through the blood of His very own Son, to be received by all who would accept His Person and His work. The resolution to the problem of our death on account of sin is Jesus' death for our sin (Romans 6:10), ultimately resulting in the defeat of that last and most terrifying enemy, death itself, which will be swallowed up in life for all who believe (Isaiah 25:7-8; 1 Corinthians 15:26, 1 Corinthians 15:54-57; Hebrews 2:14). The cross of Jesus Christ has eliminated for all mankind the impossible problem of sin, even in the case of all sins committed before our Lord's death undertaken on behalf of the world: For all sin and fall short of

God's glory, [but we are all] justified without cost by His grace through the redemption (lit., "ransoming" from sin) which is in Christ Jesus. God made Him a means of atonement [achieved] by His blood [and claimed] through faith, to give proof of His justice in leaving unpunished in divine forbearance [all] previously committed sins, so as to prove His justice in the present, namely, so that He would be [shown to be] just [in this] and [justified] in justifying the one who has faith in Jesus. Romans 3:23-26. The passage above very plainly refers to all sins committed before the historical crucifixion of our Lord (Romans 3:25), and corresponds directly to the critical fact with which the passage begins: all sin, therefore all stand in need of atonement. This universality of Christ's sacrifice, His death for all the sins committed in world history, past, present and future, is taught in a number of scriptures (2 Corinthians 5:19; 1 Timothy 2:4-6; 1 John 2:2): On the next day, [John] saw Jesus coming towards him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, the One who takes away the sin of the world". John 1:29. But if anyone hears My words and does not hold on to them, I do not condemn him. For I did not come to condemn the world but to save the world. John 12:47. For it is the love of Christ that constrains us, having brought us to this conclusion: One died for [us] all; so then we all have died [in Him]. And He died on behalf of all so that those who are [now] alive might no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised [from the dead]. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15. But now we do see Jesus crowned with glory and honor on account of the death He suffered, even Him who became "a little lower than the angels" for a brief span so that by the grace of God He might taste death on behalf of us all. Hebrews 2:9.

Unlike the [human] high priests, [Jesus] has no need of making sacrifice day by day, first on behalf of His own sins, and then for the sins of the people. For this [latter] He did once and for all when He offered Himself [as a sacrifice]. Hebrews 7:27. And you know that that One appeared to take away our sins, and sin is not in Him. 1 John 3:5.

It is because Jesus died for all sins that no further sacrifice for sins is necessary (Hebrews 10:15-18). Universal atonement, however, does not mean universal acceptance of the atonement on the part of the human race. The fact that Christ died for all, does not mean that all accept His sacrifice, putting their faith in Him and His work for eternal life. Universal atonement does mean that Jesus has taken away sin as a barrier to salvation (see below, section II. 9, "Reconciliation"). Universal atonement does not mean that mankind universally accepts the offer of forgiveness of sin and deliverance from sin that is universally available through faith in Jesus Christ. For this is the blood of my covenant which is poured out concerning many for the forgiveness of sins. Matthew 26:28 (Mark 14:24; cf. Luke 22:20)

Deliverance from sin and death is available to all, but not all embrace it. The failure of some to accept who Jesus is and what He did in dying for our sins does not invalidate the atonement of the cross either generally or individually, but it does render that atonement of no practical benefit for those who reject it. For by refusing to accept what God has done in taking away our sins through the sacrifice of His one and only Son, a person must necessarily stand before God on his own merits instead. Jesus is the Savior of all mankind, but only those who accept, believe, and follow Him gain the benefits of the salvation God offers to all in Him. For this reason we toil and strive, for we have put our hope in the Living God who is the Savior of all men, especially believers. 1 Timothy 4:10. The one who believes in Him is not being judged, but the one who does not believe has already been judged on the grounds that he has not put his faith in the Name (i. e., the Person) of God's only Son. John 3:18. When He [the Holy Spirit] comes, He will call the world to

account regarding sin, and righteousness, and judgment:

– regarding sin, because they do not believe in Me.

– regarding righteousness, because I am going to my Father and you are not going to be seeing Me any longer.

– regarding judgment, because the ruler of this world has now been judged. John 16:8-11. The last two passages above make it abundantly clear that failure to receive the benefits of the atonement of the cross are a result of personal choice, the choice not to believe in Jesus. This is the one sin for which our Lord could not die, the sin of refusing to accept His sacrifice for our sins. God stands ready to forgive all other sins as impediments to salvation, except the sin of denying the truth of Jesus Christ. Calling God “a liar” when He sacrificed His one and only Son to die on our behalf is the “unforgivable sin”, the “eternal sin” of “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit”, namely, the rejection of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 12:31-32; Mark 3:28-30; Luke 12:10). But for all who do accept the truth, who do trust in Jesus, and who do follow Him faithfully maintaining their faith to the end, His atoning sacrifice has already removed sin as an issue in entering into a relationship with God, and by grace through faith though sinners in practice we are made righteous in principle, justified by the blood of the One who shed His blood in our behalf (Romans 3:24; Romans 4:25; see section II. 8 below, “Justification”).

01.02.04 - The Blood of Christ

4. The Blood of Christ: As explained in section I. 5.I. 2.2 above, “The Blood of Christ”, the efficacious and atoning work of our Lord in dying for our sins, consists in what He endured in the darkness for us while still physically alive (that is, His spiritual death in being judged for our sins in our place; see the section immediately following). So while Jesus’ physical sufferings on our account visible to all before the darkness descended on Golgotha were immense and beyond true appreciation, the intensity of the sufferings He endured under that darkness in dying for the sins of the world, dying spiritually in a way we cannot even adequately conjecture, must exceed those preliminary sufferings to an incalculable degree. This work, this death by which He provided redemption for us all, is termed in scripture “the blood of Christ”.

Throughout the Bible, blood is a symbol of life for the very simple and understandable reason that when blood is fatally shed, life comes to an end. This is why even the consuming of animal blood is forbidden – because blood represents the life of the creature; and this also explains the principle of “blood guilt”: for shedding blood and taking life are one and the same thing (Genesis 9:4-6; Leviticus 17:11; Deuteronomy 12:23; cf. Genesis 4:10). This principle was developed under the Mosaic Law wherein “nearly all things are cleansed with blood and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Hebrews 9:22). The blood of the sacrifice was necessary to procure forgiveness, not because of any magical power resident in animal blood, but because the blood of animals shed in sacrifice provides us with a very potent and graphic symbol of the need for death (i. e., blood representing life lost), of substitutionary death on our behalf, of someone else’s blood atoning for our sins, if we are to be forgiven and saved.

Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?” “Yes, my son?” Abraham replied. “The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together. When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.” Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.” Genesis 22:7-14 NIV The passage above from Genesis 22:1-24 looks forward perspicuously and unswervingly not only to the rites of animal sacrifice which the Law of Moses would ordain, but much more importantly to the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, dying for our sins. He is the “lamb” which “God will provide for Himself” (Genesis 22:8), “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). For you know that it was not with perishable things [like] silver or gold that you were ransomed from the futile manner of life passed down to you by your ancestors, but [you were redeemed] with precious

blood, like that of a lamb without spot or blemish, [that is, by the blood] of Christ. 1 Peter 1:18-19. And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing [there, looking] as if He had been slain, with seven horns and seven eyes (which are the seven spirits of God sent out into the entire earth). And He came and took [the scroll] from the right hand of the One sitting on the throne. And when He took the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell [down] before the Lamb, each with a lyre and golden bowls of incense, which [incense] are as prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain and have purchased with your blood for our God [men] from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made them into a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will rule upon the earth!" And I looked and heard, as it were, the voice of many angels around the throne and [around] the [living] creatures and [around] the [twenty-four] elders, and their number was myriads upon myriads and thousands upon thousands, [and they were] saying in a loud voice, "The Lamb who has been slain is worthy to take the power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing and every created thing in heaven and on the earth and in the sea and everything in them." Revelation 5:6-12.

It is extremely important for all Christians to understand clearly that this is a metaphor. Jesus Christ is not a literal "lamb"; and His "blood", the "blood" by which we are saved, is not literal blood. Just as from the beginning of the Old Testament blood represented life and its loss represented death, so in the case of our dear Lord Jesus' sacrifice for us on the cross the "blood" scripture mentions refers to His giving up of His life on our behalf, that is, it refers to His spiritual death in the darkness on the cross whereby He "washed away" all of our sins (see section II. 5 directly following). By the use of this metaphor, the New Testament ineluctably connects the real sacrifice of Christ on the cross with the representative sacrifices of the Law which foreshadowed that true and efficacious sacrifice to come. For it was the Lord's good pleasure (i. e., "will") to crush Him, to subject Him to torment. But though you make His life a guilt offering, He will see His seed, He will lengthen His days, and the good pleasure (i. e., "will") of the Lord will prosper in His hand. Isaiah 53:10.

Few metaphors in the Bible have been as badly misunderstood as the "blood of Christ", often with very disturbing consequences in the form of false doctrine ("transubstantiation" being the most famous but by no means the only one). The "blood of Christ" is, in scripture, always a symbol and never refers to literal blood. It cannot and should not be taken literally any more than the corresponding symbol of the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:19; Revelation 5:6; Revelation 13:8). This is not to diminish in any way what our Lord did for us on Golgotha – far from it. Rather, a proper understanding of precisely what He did do to win us back from death and hell can only be gained by first appreciated what this metaphor really means. The "blood of Christ" is a symbolic phrase which graphically sums up for us Jesus' saving work on the cross, His sacrificial death on our behalf which is foreshadowed by the Mosaic Law, and most clearly in the Tabernacle, its furniture, and the animal sacrifices which attend thereto. Just as Old Testament believers offered up animals "without spot or blemish" – pictures of Christ in His perfection – so the blood shed by these animals depicts the precious sacrifice of Christ in giving up His own life. The animals represent Christ (so He is called "the Lamb of God"). The animal blood represents Christ's giving of His life for us, His spiritual death (so this death is referred to as "the blood of Christ" – because

blood shed stands for the loss of life). In his gospel, John makes a very deliberate point of demonstrating that Jesus did not bleed to death on the cross. Not only did Jesus of His own volition “breath out” His spirit once the sacrifice was complete (so that there can be no question of death through loss of blood: Matthew 27:50; Mark 15:36; Luke 23:46; John 19:30), but John very clearly testifies that after His physical death His blood had still been retained in His body (John 19:33-35; cf. 1 John 5:6-8). It is thus critical for Christians to understand that it is not through Jesus’ literal blood but through His genuine suffering in paying the penalty for our sins being judged for them in our place, that is, through His spiritual death wherein He was condemned and punished for all our sins, that we are saved. That is what “the blood of Christ means”, with blood representing the loss of life or death, a spiritual death of a sort so intense and profound that we can scarcely come to anything close to a proper comprehension of it this side of heaven. By understanding “the blood of Christ” in these true, biblical terms, we enhance our appreciation of what Jesus did for us, not diminish it.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who, though outcasts dispersed throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, were yet selected in the foreknowledge of God the Father, by means of the Holy Spirit’s consecration, for the obedience in and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Grace and peace be multiplied unto you! 1 Peter 1:1-2. The symbol of sprinkled blood is also taken from the Old Testament sacrifices, specifically from the rituals God instituted among the Israelites to teach them about Himself and the coming sacrifice of His Son. When Moses had finished reading the “book of the covenant” (that is, the Mosaic Law as outlined in summary in Exodus 20:1-26, Exodus 21:1-36, Exodus 22:1-31, Exodus 23:1-33), he had sacrifices of “peace offerings” made, and had all the blood from them collected. Then Moses sprinkled this blood upon all the people, saying “behold, the blood of the covenant”. The blood represented a violent death (as it does in all the Old Testament sacrifices), and the phrase “blood of the covenant” meant that by the death of someone else, the Israelites had entered into a special agreement with God. This fact was visibly and dramatically portrayed to them by Moses when he literally sprinkled blood from the animal sacrifices upon all the people. Although this may seem a somewhat shocking thing to us, it was meant to be just so. Christ’s sacrifice on the cross cost Him more than we can ever know. We did nothing to help Him, we are merely “spattered” with His blood, so to speak. We receive the benefit of His sacrificial death when we believe in Him, accepting His work on our behalf. But it is of extreme importance that we understand that this sacrifice by which our sins were “washed away” entailed far more than “bleeding to death” (which our Lord most emphatically did not do) – it entailed being judged for all our sins and paying the price and penalty for them. That is what the “blood of Christ” means, His spiritual death on our behalf whereby we are delivered from the coming wrath and judgment whose end is the lake of fire. And that is why when we drink the cup of communion we are not drinking blood or anything that represents real blood; rather, we are demonstrating our appropriation by faith of Christ’s saving work on our behalf: This is My blood of the [New] Covenant which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins concerning many people. Matthew 26:28.

01.02.05 - The Spiritual Death of Christ

5. The Spiritual Death of Christ: And walk in love, just as also Christ loved you and gave Himself up as sacrifice and offering for a sweet [sacrificial] aroma to God. Ephesians 5:2. The words “sweet [sacrificial] aroma to God” clearly indicate that the Father was well-pleased with Jesus’ sacrifice, that it was effective or “efficacious” in satisfying the righteous demand of His divine justice that the full price be paid for our sins before we could be saved. But if the words used here for our Lord’s death, “sacrifice and offering” and “aroma”, while calling upon the symbolism of the animal sacrifices of the Law, are not actually meant to be understood as referring to His physical death (since His body was not immolated so as to produce a "pleasing aroma" in the manner of the Levitical sacrifices) or literal blood (and since salvation was accomplished before He gave up His spirit, and since He did not bleed to death, clearly they do not), and are instead likewise meant to be understood symbolically (which clearly they are), then the question then becomes, “what precisely do these words represent?” The answer to this question as suggested above is that “the blood of Christ”, the phrase which sums up all the Old Testament symbolism which foreshadowed the cross, refers to the penalty paid by our Lord in the darkness on the cross in bearing and expiating our sins, that is, it refers to His spiritual death. But what precisely do we mean by the term “spiritual death”? In addressing this question, Dr. L. S. Chafer makes the following comment: In respect to spiritual death, there is no clear indication how far Christ entered that realm. He of course did say, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). Where God is silent the devout mind should hesitate to intrude.

While agreeing with Dr. Chafer’s circumspection in general terms, and while acknowledging that there is much about our Lord Jesus’ death for sin through which we are saved that cannot be known this side of heaven, it is also fair to say that scripture does provide a good deal of information on this subject (even if of necessity somewhat obliquely). Given that there is no more important event in the history of the universe than Jesus’ death whereby we are delivered from a fate worse than mere physical death, we would be remiss in not investigating this question as fully as possible. It will be our task in this section, therefore, to say as much as can be said without, it is hoped, saying more than should be said. a. Christ Died Spiritually: This is a key point deserving of reiteration (see sections I. 5.I. 2.1-3 above). The physical death of our Lord which took place when He lay down His life by exhaling His human spirit (Matthew 27:50; Mark 15:36; Luke 23:46; John 19:30) occurred after He had been judged for the sins of the world. It is this prior judgment in the darkness wherein Jesus paid the penalty for our sins that we are studying here, namely, His “spiritual death”, otherwise known as the blood of Christ, as a result of which our sins are forgiven.

He lay bare His life unto death, and was dealt with as transgressors [are], so that He bore the sin of the many, and substituted [Himself] for the transgressors. Isaiah 53:12 b (8) He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even [His] death on [the] cross [for us all]. Php 2:8. In all such passages as the one above, “death” means spiritual death, not physical death. Our Lord’s spiritual death wherein He underwent the judgment due us for all our sins had already taken place at the point when He gave up His human spirit and expired. Jesus’ emphatic statement from

the cross, *tetelestai*, “It has now been accomplished!” (John 19:30 Greek: τετελεσται), is a forceful and powerful proclamation of victory, underscoring the already completed fact of salvation won by His blood – not a physical bleeding to death, but the pouring out of His life unto spiritual death in paying the price and penalty for our sins.

After [all] this (i. e., His physical suffering and His spiritual death for the sins of the world), when Jesus knew that everything had now been accomplished in order for the [prophecy of salvation found in] scripture to be fulfilled, He said, “I am thirsty”. Now a jar of wine-vinegar lay there, so they placed a sponge full of the wine-vinegar on a hyssop [stalk] and brought it to His mouth. So when He had taken the wine-vinegar, Jesus said, “It (i. e., salvation) has [now] been accomplished!” , and having thrown back His head, He gave up His spirit. John 19:28-30.

Spiritual death has always been the problem for the human race, for physical death is a result of spiritual death, not the other way around (i. e., Adam and Eve lived many years after they ate of the fruit of the tree whose penalty was “dying thou shalt die” – immediate spiritual death followed eventually by the physical death which results, and, absent salvation through the grace of God in Jesus Christ, finally by eternal death). By dying spiritually in our stead, our Lord won the greatest victory in universal history, freeing us from the evil one and from the otherwise sure and certain condemnation which had otherwise awaited us. And though you were [spiritually] dead in your transgressions and in the un-circumcised state of your flesh, [God the Father] made you alive together with [Christ], having forgiven you all your transgressions. [God] has erased the charge against us along with its particulars (i. e., our sinful nature and personal sins) which opposed our [relationship with Him], and He removed it [as an obstacle] between us by nailing it to the cross. [For by means of the cross, God] has stripped [demon] rulers and authorities [of their power] and subjected them to public humiliation, having triumphed over them in [Christ]. Colossians 2:13-15.

b. Christ Died Spiritually for us: The great victory of the cross won over the devil and his minions in this invisible conflict in which we are all presently enmeshed was fought and won for our benefit. We are the recipients and beneficiaries of the boundless grace of God poured out upon us as a result of what Jesus did for us on the cross. He died spiritually for us, and it is by His spiritual death that we are saved, for that death removed our sin forever as an impediment between ourselves and the holiness of God. For not only did Christ die for us while we were helpless – He even did so at the critical time, [dying] on our behalf, ungodly though we were. For scarcely will someone die on behalf of a righteous person; and perhaps someone might also risk death on behalf of a good person. But God commends His love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:6-8. For it is the love of Christ that constrains us, having brought us to this conclusion: One died for [us] all; so then we all have died [in Him]. And He died on behalf of all so that those who are [now] alive might no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised [from the dead]. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15. And I no longer live myself, but Christ lives in me. And that which I now do live in the flesh, I live in faith in/for the Son of God, the One who loved me and who gave Himself up on my behalf. Galatians 2:20.

[Jesus Christ] who gave Himself on our behalf to redeem us from all lawlessness (i. e., sin; cf. 1 John 3:4) and to cleanse for Himself a people [to be His] own unique possession, zealous for good works. Titus 2:14. c. Christ Died Spiritually to Expiate Sin: Solving the “sin problem” is the way in which Christ’s spiritual death benefits us. That is the primary image behind the “blood of Christ” which, in the simile, covers our sins. In animal sacrifice, the death of the sacrificial animal is

obvious from its spilled blood, while the one making the offering is cleansed symbolically by the sprinkling of that blood (Hebrews 9:13-21; Hebrews 11:28; Hebrews 12:24; cf. Exodus 24:6-8; Exodus 29:16-21; Leviticus 1:5-11; Leviticus 3:2-13; et passim in Lev. and Num.).

He made Him who had no [personal] experience of sinning [to be] sin (i. e., a sin offering) for us, so that we might have (lit., “become”) God’s righteousness in Him.

2 Corinthians 5:21.

Thus, in the analogy, actual blood represents the spiritual death of Christ which, when sprinkled on the worshiper (a picture of faith: 1 Peter 1:2), cleanses from sin. The spiritual death of Christ was necessary in order to remove sin as an impediment to salvation. As a result, it is sin – all human sin ever committed, past, present or future – which is the object or “target” of Christ’s spiritual death on our behalf. He died spiritually to expiate all sin and remove its penalty, impossible impending obligations for which no other human being could ever hope to atone. For what He died, He died to sin, once and for all, and what He lives, He lives to God. Romans 6:10. For I entrusted to you as of primary importance what I had also received, [namely] that Christ died on behalf of our sins according to the scriptures. 1 Corinthians 15:3.

[Jesus Christ], who gave Himself on behalf of our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age according to the will of our God and Father. Galatians 1:4. d. Christ Bore our Sins in His Body: Human beings are universally dichotomous, possessing both a body and a human spirit. The body is the place where we are subject to the material world, and it is only through the interaction of body and spirit in our “heart”, “mind”, “soul” (i. e., our inner person where the body and spirit interface) that we are presently capable of experiencing pain. In eternity, both in heaven awaiting the resurrection (where we will possess an interim body), and after the resurrection, where that body will be perfect and eternal, for believers, pain and suffering will be entirely things of the past (cf. Revelation 7:14-17). To expiate our sins, that is, to remove them as an issue or “barrier” between ourselves and Holy God (Ephesians 2:14-18), Jesus had to bear them in His body, that is, He had to suffer the penalty for every sin ever committed by receiving the full pain of punishment for them in His body – literally. That is why His incarnation, His taking on of a true human body as a genuine human being (in addition to His undiminished deity) was absolutely essential for us to be saved. Without a body, Christ could not bear our sins in His body, could not, that is, suffer the punishment due for those sins; and without His suffering on our behalf those sins could never be removed as an impediment to our salvation. Thus our Lord’s taking on of a human body was the fundamentally necessary step for Him to be able to die spiritually in our place, and thus make salvation available for the whole human race.

Therefore as [Jesus Christ] was coming into the world (i. e., at His birth) He said, “You [Father] did not desire sacrifice or offering, but you have prepared a body for Me. In burnt offerings for sin you have taken no pleasure. At that time (i. e., His birth) He [Jesus Christ in His deity] said, ‘Behold, I have arrived (i. e., been born) – in the scroll of a book it is written of Me – to do your will, O God’”. Above when He speaks of sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings for sins [as things which] “You did not desire nor take pleasure therein”, [these are the things] which are being offered according to the Law. [But] “Then”, He has added, “Behold, I have arrived to do your will”. [God the Father] is [thereby] taking away the first [covenant] in order to establish the second one, [and it is] by [His] will [in this matter] that you have been sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus

Christ once and for all. Hebrews 10:5-10. This is why scripture emphasizes that Christ “bore our sins in His body”. For it was in His genuine human body that He suffered spiritual death, enduring the entire penalty for all sin: For He bore our sicknesses and He carried our weaknesses. And yet we considered Him as [the One who had been] punished, smitten and afflicted by God. Isaiah 53:4.

He Himself will carry their guilt (lit., “guilts”). Therefore I will allot to Him [the plunder] among [His] many [brothers], and He will apportion plunder to the mighty [among them]. Because He lay bare His life unto death, and was dealt with as transgressors [are], so that He bore the sin of the many, and substituted [Himself] for the transgressors. Isaiah 53:11-12. For He Himself is our peace, for He has made both [Jews and gentiles] one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition, that is, the enmity between us, by discharging the Law of the commandments and its requirements in His [own] flesh, so that He might re-create the two into one new Man by making [this] peace, and might reconcile both in one Body to God through His cross, having by means of it abolished the enmity [between God and mankind]. Ephesians 2:14-16.

You were once alienated from God – your very thoughts were hostile towards Him and your deeds were evil. Yet God has now made peace with you through the death of Christ in His physical body so that you may stand before Him as holy, without blemish and free from accusation. Colossians 1:21-22. And inasmuch as it is ordained for mankind to die once (i. e., the first, “physical” death), and after this [face] judgment (i. e., “the second death”; cf. Revelation 2:11; Revelation 20:6, Revelation 20:14-15), so Christ having been offered up once to bear the sins of many will appear without [any need to bear] a sin second time unto those who are awaiting salvation. Hebrews 9:27-28. For Christ died once for us on account of our sins, the Righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in [His] flesh (i. e., His spiritual death to remove the barrier of sin), but having been made alive by the Spirit. 1 Peter 3:18.

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, in order that we might die to sins and live to righteousness. By His wound you are healed. 1 Peter 2:24. As Peter tells us in this last passage above, it by this means that we have died to sin – Jesus bearing our sins and dying spiritually for us in suffering the penalty due us; it is by this means that our wounds have been healed – Jesus being wounded for every sin ever committed by us and by all of human kind, past, present, and future.

Therefore since “these children” (i. e., believers given to Christ by God: Hebrews 2:13) have a common heritage of flesh and blood, [Christ] too partook of these same [common elements] in a very similar fashion (i. e., not identical only in that He was virgin born and so without sin), in order that through His death He might put an end to the one possessing the power of death, that is, the devil, and might reconcile those who were subject to being slaves their whole lives long by their fear of death. Hebrews 2:14-15. This is the spiritual death of Jesus Christ on our behalf. This is the “blood of Christ”: our dear Lord Jesus’ bearing the penalty, the punishment, and the pain of all mankind’s sin in His body on the cross that all might be saved. It by this “wounding” of His genuine human body that we have been “healed” (1 Peter 2:24):

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence in this entrance of ours into the [heavenly] holy of holies by the blood of Jesus, an entryway through the [heavenly] veil [of separation] which is new (lit., “newly slain”) and alive and which He has consecrated for us, that is, [through the sacrifice] of

His flesh (cf. Hebrews 10:10, Hebrews 10:18), and since we have [this] Great High Priest over the household of God, let us approach [the throne of grace (cf. Hebrews 4:16) to pray] with a truthful heart in complete faith, our hearts sprinkled [clean] of [any] bad conscience and our bodies washed with pure water [of the Word (cf. Ephesians 5:26)]. Hebrews 10:19-22. e. Christ was Forsaken for us in Dying for us: God in His perfect holiness can have no direct contact with sin and sinfulness – without, that is, executing righteous judgment upon it. Creature sin and sinfulness thus explains the voluntary sequestration of the Father in the third heaven following Satan’s revolt (the original paradise being on earth), and the separation from God which everyone experiences at birth as a result of the spiritual death that is our common heritage as human beings born in Adam’s line. It is only because of the promise and the anticipation of the Messiah’s sacrifice on our behalf that punishment for sin before the cross was held in abeyance (Romans 3:25; cf. Acts 14:16-17; Acts 17:30), and only because of Jesus’ historical expiation of sin at Calvary that we are reborn to spiritual life from spiritual death when we accept in faith that gracious sacrifice (Ephesians 2:1-9). Our Lord Jesus, of course, was born without sin and never sinned. Thus He never had any occasion to be separated from the love and fellowship of the Father – until the cross. One very important aspect of Christ’s suffering in the darkness in bearing our sins is the fact that He did so in a state of alienation from God (in His humanity). For “He was made sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21), that is, though sinless, He was treated as the one to whom the punishment for sin was due. In such a case, continued fellowship with the Father was impossible, at least as long as Jesus was being judged for all of our sins. My God, My God, why did You forsake Me? Psalms 22:1 (cf. Matthew 27:46-47; Mark 15:34-35)

These words spoken were after the sins of the world had been judged in Jesus’ body in the darkness on the cross. Moreover, as observed earlier, they were spoken for our benefit. For Jesus knew very well why the Father had broken fellowship with Him, and He had known it even before the cross. He was judged in our place, and therefore had to be forsaken for our sake in order to undergo that judgment. This cry of dereliction [i. e., “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”: Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34] reflects the heart of Jesus’ purpose in His first advent and death; to bear the penalty for human sin (Hebrews 9:28). Since sin separates from a holy God, He had to endure that separation in the moment of His death. Otherwise, the penalty could not have been paid.

Hell in its essence is being without God. All inconsolable pain in this life is part and parcel of estrangement from God; all of our true joy is inseparable from our closeness to Him. It is doubtful that, this side of heaven, anyone can come close to appreciating the magnitude of this particular part of Jesus’ sacrifice, either what this separation cost Him or what it cost the Father. What we can say in this regard is, firstly, that the judgment for our sins was over after the darkness lifted, for in Psalms 22:1 quoted directly above our Lord presents the forsaking as now past (i. e., “why did You forsake me?”). Secondly, His forsaking, far from being in vain, accomplished the mission for which He had been sent, the removal of the sins of the world as an impediment to salvation, for He Himself pronounces that mission successfully accomplished (i. e., tetelestai: “it has been accomplished”; John 19:30 compared with John 19:28 and Psalms 22:31). And, thirdly, the death which delivers us from sin was not His physical death (still future at this point), but the death He died to sin in the darkness, namely, His spiritual death, the blood of Christ, the suffering of our dear Lord Jesus in paying the penalty for all human sin. For it was there in the darkness on the

cross that He was “cursed”, made sin, a curse for us, forsaken for us, separated from the love of the Father and made to undergo His wrath in our place so that we might be delivered from that wrath through faith in Him (cf. the stricken rock of “forsaken” Mt. Horeb: Exodus 17:5-7).

Christ bought us free (i. e., “redeemed” us) from the Law’s curse, having become a curse on our behalf. For it is written: “Cursed is everyone [who is] hanged upon a tree” (Deuteronomy 21:23). Galatians 3:13.

Thus His hanging on a cross, His being made a curse for us (cf. Romans 9:3; Hebrews 6:8), and His exile into the darkness (Matthew 8:12; Matthew 22:13; Matthew 25:30, Matthew 25:41) all speak of the separation or forsaking that Jesus had to endure in order to be made sin for us, in order to bear our sins, in order to be judged and punished in our place for our sins. All of these things speak of the alienation from the Father which His spiritual death necessarily entailed, a horrific price whose true cost we can scarcely begin to understand. f. Christ Paid the Penalty for our Sins: Simply put, our Lord’s expiation of all human sin required that He suffer for them physically and literally – not the sufferings leading up to and including His being nailed to the cross (as horrendous as these were), but the sufferings involved in being punished corporally for our sins in the three hours of darkness on the hill Calvary before He gave up His spirit. The gauntlet He ran to get to the cross is itself a tale of woe and endurance beyond our ability to truly appreciate, but its chief function in this respect is to give us some very small idea of what the true judgment for sins in the darkness immediately thereafter was going to entail: if the sufferings that led to the cross were beyond imagination, what then of the task of bearing and suffering for the sins of the world? The most extensive and explicit passage dealing with this issue is Isaiah 53:1-12. It seems appropriate, therefore, to quote the pertinent parts of that passage in full as our departure point for considering what our salvation cost our Lord Jesus and His heavenly Father. For Isaiah’s prophecy, while explicating many aspects of our Lord’s passion, also vividly describes the suffering of the Messiah in bearing our sins. He “bore our sicknesses and He carried our weaknesses” (Isaiah 53:4); He is One we considered “punished, smitten and afflicted by God” (Isaiah 53:4); He was subjected “to torment on account of our transgressions” (Isaiah 53:5), and He was “crushed because of our collective guilt (lit. “guilts”)” (Isaiah 53:5); the “punishment [required] for making peace [with God] on our behalf [fell] upon Him” (Isaiah 53:5); and we have been healed “because of His wounding” (Isaiah 53:5); the Father “caused the guilt of us all to strike Him” (Isaiah 53:6); He was “oppressed and afflicted”; He was “cut off from the land of the living” (Isaiah 53:8); and He was “punished for the transgression of my people”; He suffered “His deaths (sic – plural)” on our behalf (Isaiah 53:9); for it was the Father’s will “to crush Him” (Isaiah 53:10) and to “subject Him to torment” (Isaiah 53:10); He had “trouble [inflicted] upon His life” (Isaiah 53:11), and He “carried our guilt (lit. “guilts”)” (Isaiah 53:11); He “lay bare His life unto death” (Isaiah 53:12), was “dealt with as transgressors [are]” (Isaiah 53:12); He “bore the sin of the many”; and He “substituted [Himself] for the transgressors”: For He bore our sicknesses and He carried our weaknesses. And yet we considered Him as [the One who had been] punished, smitten and afflicted by God. But [in fact] He was made subject to torment on account of our transgressions, and He was crushed because of our collective guilt (lit., “guilts”). The punishment [required] for making peace [with God] on our behalf [fell] upon Him. Because of His wounding, we have been healed. We have all gone astray like sheep. Each of us has turned to his own way. And the Lord caused the guilt of us all to strike Him. Though He was oppressed and afflicted, like a

lamb led to slaughter He did not open His mouth, and like a ewe before her shearers He did not open His mouth. By repressive judgment He was taken away, and who gave any thought to His posterity? For He was cut off from the land of the living. He was punished for the transgression of my people. And they assigned Him a grave with the wicked (pl.) and with a rich [man] in His deaths (sic). Not for any violence that He had done. Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. For it was the Lord's good pleasure (i. e., "will") to crush Him, to subject Him to torment. But though you make His life a guilt offering, He will see His seed, He will lengthen His days, and the good pleasure (i. e., "will") of the Lord will prosper in His hand. [Released] from the trouble [inflicted] upon His life, He will [again] see [the light of life] and be satisfied (i. e., in resurrection). My righteous Servant will provide righteousness for the great [of heart] (i. e., believers) through the[ir] acknowledgment of Him, and He Himself will carry their guilt (lit., "guilts"). Therefore I will allot to Him [the plunder] among [His] many [brothers], and He will apportion plunder to the mighty [among them]. Because He lay bare His life unto death, and was dealt with as transgressors [are], so that He bore the sin of the many, and substituted [Himself] for the transgressors. Isaiah 53:4-12.

It would be difficult to imagine scripture being any clearer about the physical toll of pain and torment our Lord's suffering to pay the penalty for our sins entailed. That penalty required His death (Romans 6:23; cf. Genesis 2:16-17; Romans 5:12), not the ending of His physical life (which He voluntarily gave up after redemption was an accomplished fact), but the "death" of being separated from His previously unbroken and perfect fellowship with the Father, wherein He was made a curse to deliver us from the curse of the second death (Galatians 3:13), that is, His spiritual death in the darkness wherein He paid the penalty charged to our account, a death of suffering in alienation from God so intense that Isaiah, writing under the inspiration of the Spirit, because He had nothing else to call it, called it "deaths" instead of death (Isaiah 53:9), pluralizing the experience to express in some small way just what the Messiah would have to suffer for us to be saved. And, indeed, since the penalty for sin is death, the "deaths" our Lord Jesus suffered were in effect the total collective penalty of deaths for every human being who would ever be born. He died for us all. He died for every sin ever committed. And inasmuch as it is ordained for mankind to die once (i. e., the first, "physical" death), and after this [face] judgment (i. e., "the second death"; cf. Revelation 2:11; Revelation 20:6, Revelation 20:14-15), so Christ, having been offered up once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time – without [any further need to bear] sin – unto those who are awaiting salvation. Hebrews 9:27-28. In the passage above, we see clearly that Christ's spiritual death in bearing sin on the cross is set in parallel to the second death of unbelievers who refuse to accept His sacrifice for their sins. He was judged in their place and in ours so that we and they might not have to face the Last Judgment whose end is the lake of fire. We are redeemed and transferred from judgment into life through faith in Jesus Christ (John 5:24; Colossians 1:13; 1 John 3:14), through our acceptance of His work on the cross on our behalf. But the lake of fire is reserved for all unbelievers who could not even be troubled to give the slightest minimal nod of appreciation to Jesus for what He did for them (John 3:36). As sobering as this realization is, for our purposes here the critical thing to observe is that we are delivered from the lake of fire, the second death, the darkness and the fire, because our Lord endured the punishment for our sins in our place, and the final fate of all who willfully fail to avail themselves of the grace provided through the blood of Christ points us in the direction of what has been substituted in our case: we are spared the eternal lake of fire, because what our Lord endured in the darkness for us hanging on Golgotha's cross is deemed by the Father to be an acceptable

equivalent to the eternal torment of all mankind, both for those who refuse release, and especially for those of us who have chosen Jesus and eternal life instead.

Before considering our Lord's bearing of our sins per se, it will be helpful to examine three important analogies scripture gives us to help to explain Christ's spiritual death on behalf. While all three are of course primarily concerned with the suffering of the Messiah Himself, each of these three examples helps us to understand the role of the members of the Trinity in this regard.

1) Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac: The Role of the Father: All Old Testament sacrifice looked forward to the cross, with the sacrificial victim representing Jesus Christ, and the blood shed representing His spiritual death on our behalf, "covering" our sins with the suffering He would endure in paying the price for them on the cross. In Genesis chapter twenty-two, Abraham was told to sacrifice the son of promise for whom he had waited all his life. Faithful to God to a complete degree few of us will ever achieve, and completely confident in God's faithfulness and ability to retrieve this seemingly impossible situation (Hebrews 11:17-19), Abraham proceeded without hesitation to take Isaac to Mount Moriah (the actual location where Jesus would later sacrifice Himself for our sins; cf. 2 Chronicles 3:1 with Genesis 22:2), and would have sacrificed his one and only beloved son had not God intervened at the last possible moment. From this extraordinary test we not only see displayed the legendary faith of our father in faith, Abraham, but we also are given by way of analogy a human parallel to help us understand the Father's ineffably great sacrifice in putting His Son to death on our behalf. For even though removed from the event by so much time and space, we can all nonetheless feel Abraham's excruciating emotional pain as he prepares to sacrifice Isaac. In this we are given some very small idea of what our salvation cost the Father, who for our sake considered His One and only beloved Son to be "sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21), and judged the sins of the world in His flesh. Abraham was spared having to follow through with the ordeal, and, in any case, Isaac's death would have been physical, not spiritual, and over in an instant (with miraculous resuscitation following immediately: such was Abraham's divinely acknowledged hope: Hebrews 11:19), but the Father inflicted the penalty for all the world's sins on His willing, obedient Son – so great is His love for us! For what the Law could not accomplish (i. e., solving the sin problem) because it was weak on account of [its dependence on sinful human] flesh, God [did accomplish]: having sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for the purpose of [expiating] sin, [the Father] rendered summary judgment on [all] sin in [Christ's] flesh. Romans 8:3.

2) The Baptism of Christ: The Role of the Holy Spirit: While water baptism is always symbolic of something, some scriptural baptisms are "dry", that is, literal (as in the case of the baptism of the Spirit wherein we are endued with the Spirit and placed into union with Christ by the Spirit). One such "real" baptism is the baptism of the cross, or, more specifically, our Lord Jesus Christ's identification with (or immersion in) the sins of the world.

I came to cast a fire upon the earth, and how I wish that it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo [first], and how I am pressed until it be completed! Luke 12:49-50 (cf. Mark 10:38) This literal "baptism" wherein Christ was identified with and punished for our sins was foreshadowed and explained by His water baptism which took place at the beginning of His three and a half year ministry. This was a symbolic baptism which was completely unique to Him in its meaning. For John's water baptism was, for everyone else, "a baptism of repentance for the

remission of sins” (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3), and it is for this very reason that John was so resistant to the sinless Messiah being baptized with water. But Jesus responded to John that it was necessary “to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15). In fact, Jesus’ water baptism portrays His death on the cross, His literal baptism, in a very vivid way. The water into which He was immersed had previously been used to “wash away” the sins of all those who were repentant. It was into this water symbolically laced with sin that the Messiah was plunged, not for any need on His part to be cleansed (for He is sinless), but to expiate with His perfect body and through His death to sin all sin which that water symbolically contained. Moreover, when He came up out of the water, a picture of His successful emergence from spiritual death, the Spirit visibly alighted on Him, and herein we are given some indication both of the Spirit’s role and of the relationship of the Trinity in this regard as Jesus’ humanity suffered for the sins of the world. For the Spirit had been given Him “without measure” and “since birth” (Isaiah 11:2; John 3:34 cf. Luke 1:14), but we see in this symbol the Spirit returning “after the suffering of His soul” (Isaiah 53:11). Thus Christ’s humanity was in some sense isolated from the Trinity as His human body bore and was punished for all sin, a necessity as it would seem, since Holy God cannot have direct contact with sin. This is one aspect of the “forsaking” to which Jesus Himself attested after the fact. The question is, how was this even possible? The following verse gives a clue: For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of the heifer sprinkled upon the unclean render a person holy in respect to bodily cleansing, how much more will the blood of Christ, who offered Himself (i. e., His body; cf. 1:Pet. 3:18) without defect to God through the eternal Spirit, cleanse our conscience from dead works so that we may serve the living God? Hebrews 9:14. The Spirit, with Christ before the cross and returning after His spiritual death for sin, would seem to have been the member instrumental in making the sacrifice possible. That is to say, Jesus offered up His human body “through the eternal Spirit”. The Father acted as judge, carrying out the sentence of death on His own beloved Son (as symbolized by Abraham and Isaac), but the Spirit’s mediation was necessary for that judgment to take place – just as the Father is our Lord’s Father, yet the Spirit’s role in Jesus’ conception is key (Matthew 1:18, Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:35; cf. John 1:14). And just as it was only through the Spirit that the our Lord Jesus could become a human being as well as God, being made the human Son of the Father, so also at the cross only through the Spirit was it possible for Christ’s human body to be judged by the Father in spite of Jesus’ divinity (the two natures being in hypostatic union through the Spirit; see section I. 5.e above). Thus the Spirit’s pivotal connection with the human body of Christ – at its conception, sacrifice, and also resurrection (Romans 1:4; 1 Peter 3:18) – is clear. Scripture does not come any closer than this to explaining the mechanics of a process that in many respects is beyond our ken. What we can say is that the Spirit made it possible for the Father to judge sin in Jesus’ body, and for Christ’s human body to be judged in spite of His divinity (Hebrews 9:14). This required facilitation and restraint (both key characteristics of the Spirit’s other known ministries), facilitation in making the sacrifice and the judgment possible, and restraint in preventing the complications of Christ’s deity, perfect humanity and union between the two from making the sacrifice and judgment impossible. To use a rather rough analogy, just as steel cannot be forged without an anvil to support it, so the Spirit was the “anvil” on which our Lord’s human body was hammered to purge way the sins of the world. For Jesus to stay physically alive long enough to be punished for every human sin ever committed required supernatural intervention.

. . . . Christ, who offered Himself through the eternal Spirit Hebrews 9:14 b

3) The Meaning of the Communion Memorial: The Role of the Son: Communion is the one and only biblically authorized ceremony for the Church, and its essential purpose is very clear: “Be doing this in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25). The bread represents Jesus’ body, the wine His blood. We have already seen how that the blood of Christ is a symbol representing His spiritual death rather than any physical bleeding. When we drink of the communion cup we acknowledge His sacrifice in dying for our sins and say by our action that we believe in and accept His death on our behalf. The bread, on the other hand, represents His Person, who He truly is, God become man as well in order to physically bear our sins and save us from eternal condemnation. And it is in this human body represented by the bread that He bore the sins of the world. When we eat the communion bread we acknowledge the wonder of who He is and what He has done for us, the reality of His incarnation and of the giving up of His life unto spiritual death to save us from our sins by taking our punishment in His own human flesh. Thus the blood focuses on the work of redemption; the bread on the One who sacrificed so much to win it. It is important to note that our Lord actually says in this regard that His body was “given” (“broken” is an incorrect translation of 1 Corinthians 11:24; cf. Luke 22:19), “given”, that is, over to judgment to satisfy the penalty of death on “our behalf” (1 Corinthians 11:24). The cup of blessing which we bless – is it not fellowship in the blood of Christ? And the bread which we break – is it not fellowship in the body of Christ? For one bread, one body we many are, since we all partake of that One Bread. 1 Corinthians 10:16-17.

Just as Christ in His divinity did not aid His human nature beyond measure during all the prior events of the first advent (i. e., the doctrine of kenosis; see section I. 5.e above), so we may be sure that the same principle applied as He bore our sins in His human body on the tree. But the verse above demonstrates as of prime importance in the thinking and remembering of the Church that He gave up His human nature unto spiritual death, bearing all sin in His body, so that we might become One Body with Him. It is indeed precisely because the sacrifice He made for us was so great that it is described as giving up us His body for us to eat, and pouring out His blood for us to drink. He used up His humanity as the coin with which to redeem us. This cup is the new covenant [ratified] by My blood which is shed on your behalf. Luke 22:20 b

For [on this matter] I received [directly] from the Lord what I passed on to you, namely that on the night on which He was betrayed He took bread and having blessed it He broke it and said, “This is my body which is [offered up] on your behalf. Keep on doing this in order to remember Me”. And in the same way [after eating] He took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant [made] by my blood. Keep on doing this as often as you drink [it] in order to remember Me”. 1 Corinthians 11:23-25. And having taken the bread and blessed it, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body which is being given on your behalf. Be doing this to remember Me”. Luke 22:19 (cf. Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; John 6:51-59; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25) g. The Nature of the Penalty Christ Paid for our Sins: The rendering of terminal divine judgment is characterized by three essential elements, all of which involve pain and suffering on the part of those upon whom sentence is carried out: 1) alienation and separation from God (the very definition of spiritual death: e. g., Genesis 2:17; cf. Genesis 3:24; 2 Kings 17:18); 2) utter, palpable darkness (e. g., Joel 2:30-32; cf. Genesis 1:2); and 3) fire (e. g., Isaiah 66:15-16; Revelation 20:9-10). We see all three of these, for example, in the case of the final end of those who reject Christ's sacrifice for their sins and choose to stand on their own works instead. For while the ultimate, final “hell” is the lake of fire

(Isaiah 66:15-24; Daniel 7:9-11; Matthew 3:11-12; Matthew 5:22; Matthew 18:8-9; Matthew 25:41; Mark 9:43, Mark 9:48; James 3:6; Revelation 19:20; Revelation 20:10-15; Revelation 21:8), we also see it described as “the outer darkness” (Matthew 8:12; Matthew 22:13; Matthew 25:30), a place separated from God (2 Thessalonians 1:9; cf. Revelation 21:8; Revelation 22:15). And I said, “Woe is me, for I am ruined. For I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” Then one of the seraphs flew over to me, and in his hand was a glowing coal which he had taken with tongs from [the fire of the] altar. He touched [it to] my mouth and said, “Behold, [now that] this has touched your lips, your iniquity has departed from you, and your sins have been atoned for”. Isaiah 6:5-7.

How does a live coal charged with the fire of divine judgment in the brazen altar of judgment not burn a man’s lips? Only when someone else has endured the fiery punishment that is rightfully his. Only when someone else has been made sin for him. Only when someone else has been punished for the curse he has merited by becoming a curse in his stead (Galatians 3:13). And that “curse” in the case of the one who has been spared was the lake of fire, the alienation of darkness and eternal burning (cf. Hebrews 6:8):

Then He will say to those on His left, “Away from Me, you accursed ones, into the eternal fire [already] prepared for the devil and his angels. Matthew 25:41. In contrast to John’s baptism, our Lord baptizes “with the Spirit and with fire” (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16), and His right to do so, the victory whereby He won the authority of the Name above every Name, was His own baptism on the cross, His “immersion” into the sins of the world (Luke 12:49-50; cf. Mark 10:38). Thus the baptism of fiery judgment He will bring down upon the world, culminating in its final fiery end (2 Peter 3:7-13; cf. Isaiah 34:4; Revelation 21:1), is based upon the prior endurance of His own fiery judgment, wherein He was put to death for the sins of that world (as symbolized by His appearance to Moses in a Christophany in the bush that though on fire kept burning without being consumed – the fire of judgment on the cross went on for three full hours: Exodus 3:2-3): And walk in love, just as also Christ loved you and gave Himself up as sacrifice and offering for a sweet smell to God. Ephesians 5:2. The “sweet smell” is produced by the immolation of the sacrifice in the fire of the altar. It is through His spiritual death, the blood of Christ, Jesus’ suffering on our behalf in paying the penalty for our sins, that we are saved. For You (Psalms 22:1-2) have set Me ablaze in the dust of death. Psalms 22:15.

[Released] from the trouble (i. e., suffering) [inflicted] upon His life, He will [again] see [the light of life] and be satisfied (i. e., in resurrection). My righteous Servant will provide righteousness for the great [of heart] (i. e., believers) through the[ir] acknowledgment of Him, and He Himself will carry their guilt (lit., “guilts”). Therefore I will allot to Him [the plunder] among [His] many [brothers], and He will apportion plunder to the mighty [among them]. Because He lay bare His life unto death, and was dealt with as transgressors [are], so that He bore the sin of the many, and substituted [Himself] for the transgressors. Isaiah 53:11-12.

Therefore Jesus too, in order that He might sanctify the people through His own blood (i. e., His death on the cross), suffered outside the gate (i. e., separated from fellowship). Hebrews 13:12. For it was fitting for [the Father] to make complete through sufferings Him on whose account all things exist and through whom all things exist, namely, the Captain of their salvation, even Him who has led many sons to glory, [our Lord Jesus Christ]. Hebrews 2:10.

Therefore since Christ died in His flesh, we also should arm ourselves with the same mind-set, [considering] that the One who suffered in His flesh is finished with sin (lit., “has stopped from” it). 1 Peter 4:1. In the above verse, we see the spiritual death of Christ directly equated with His suffering. And that suffering was clearly intense (Hebrews 2:10-18; Hebrews 13:12-13). For the penalty of sin is death, the second death of the lake of fire. How exactly Christ was put to death for every human sin, punished and made to suffer in our places that we might be saved, is as awe-inspiringly unfathomable as the contemplation of God Himself. But just as we know that there is a God from what He has done and does, so we know that Jesus paid the price for all our sins in His own blood, because we owe our salvation to Him and what He did for us during those three hours of darkness on the cross.

He made Him who had no [personal] experience of sinning [to be] sin (i. e., a sin offering) for us, so that we might have (lit., “become”) God’s righteousness in Him. 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Thus it is wrong to think of our Lord’s sacrifice merely in terms of the punishment He suffered at human hands, as horrific as that was. It was only after being betrayed, forsaken, denied, abandoned, arrested, falsely accused and condemned, maligned, ridiculed, spit upon, tortured, beaten to the last reserves of His strength, was nailed to a cross, and shown the loss of everything He had, that our Lord entered the darkness to die for our sins. The gauntlet of suffering He went through to reach the time and place of judgment merely gives us some small idea of what our salvation cost Him, for the suffering of the death He endured in darkness exceeded those preliminaries by unknown orders of magnitude. For our Lord, those three hours of darkness must have lasted more than a lifetime. After all, He created the universe in an instant. But in those three hours, the true history of the universe was written. They are the basis of all that ever was or will be good and blessed and glorious for us and for all who have gratefully accepted and delight in the ineffable gift of Jesus Christ.

Although there is much we shall never know about the monumental sacrifice our Lord made, suffering the ultimate punishment for us all in order to deliver us from death, we do know that when it was over He proclaimed “tetelestai”, “It has now been accomplished!” (John 19:30). With those words the entire plan of God was complete: Man who had been created to answer creature rebellion had been saved and made one with God forever (for all who choose Him), and the entire universal rift that had been started eons ago by the evil one had been made whole and right in principal – but at a tremendous cost, the blood of Christ. Now we who have gratefully accepted the grace bought for us by Jesus’ death on our behalf need only wait for God’s good timing when all things will be put under Christ’s feet, and then will come the final end when He hands over the kingdom to the Father so that God will finally be “all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28).

He paid the death penalty on the cross for you and every other human being. Every sin ever committed – past, present and future – was judged on the cross. God the Father pronounced the sentence, and Jesus Christ obeyed it. That obedience and death for our sins on the part of our dear Lord Jesus is what has opened the gate of salvation for us all. Moreover, scripture describes the results of the blood of Christ, Jesus’ spiritual death in our behalf, in four separate ways in terms of its efficacy in solving the problem of sin: propitiation (the provision of the fundamental requirement of salvation in the removal based upon the blood of Christ of God’s displeasure towards sin); this foundation has three immediate results for sinful man: redemption (the

deliverance of man from sin's grasp), justification (the judicial pronouncement of forgiveness for all who believe), and reconciliation (the removal of the enmity on account of sin between God and man and the restoration of a relationship of blessing).

01.02.06 - Propitiation

6. Propitiation: God the Father is completely satisfied with His Son's work on the cross in dying for all human sin. As a result, sin is no longer an issue as a barrier to salvation in regard to divine justice. For while prior to the cross God in His perfect righteousness could never accept sinful mankind or indeed even abide our presence (a fact that explains His self-imposed temporary "exile" from the earth to the third heaven), after the cross He is pleased to accept anyone and everyone into His family as sons and daughters, anyone, that is, who accepts the work of His Son on their behalf. All divine grace towards human beings after the fall and prior to the cross was given "on credit", so to speak, in anticipation of what Jesus would do for us on Calvary (cf. Romans 3:26). In effect, while God used to frown on us because of our sins, and so kept His distance, now through the cross of Christ the Father smiles on us, since Jesus has removed those sins forever as an offense as far as salvation is concerned. Indeed, as we shall shortly see, the Greek words which express this biblical teaching put the matter nearly in those precise terms. However, it is traditional for this doctrine to be referred to by the non-Hebrew and Greek derivatives, propitiation, expiation and atonement, each of which call attention to some aspect of this concept of God's justice being satisfied by the work of Christ towards sin.

Propitiation and expiation, are Latin, atonement English in terms of their derivation. Propitiation comes from pro ("on behalf of") and peto ("to seek"). Thus the word propitiation in its etymology calls to the mind the idea of Christ seeking forgiveness for us from the Father (and we understand that such forgiveness is based on His death to sin for us). Expiation comes from ex ("completely") and pio ("to do what is right so as to appease" – from pius, the source of our English word "pious"). Thus the word expiation in its etymology calls to mind the idea of Christ effectively changing the Father's attitude through acceptable conduct or sacrifice (and we understand that the conduct concerned is His death on our behalf which blotted out our sins). Finally, atonement is in its etymology a purely English construct: "at one -ment". Thus the word in its etymology expresses the idea of our being "made one" with God (and we understand that the means for this reconciliation is the blood of Christ shed on our behalf). Of course, as can be seen perhaps most especially in the case of the last word but also with the first two to some degree, the actual usage of these words in common and even in theological English has become convoluted to the point where they often result more in confusion than elucidation. For one finds them frequently employed in ways that strain and even sometimes break their already somewhat tenuous etymological connection with the teaching being considered here, which is that God the Father is satisfied in His justice with Christ's work: the Son's death for sin, the blood of Christ, has effectively put an end to the obstacle of sin when it comes to salvation. For the Father considers, and justly so, all our sins to have been paid in full by Christ.

It is true that the Greek and Hebrew vocabularies used to teach this concept (of divine justice pleased to accept Jesus' sacrifice in payment for our sins) approach the issue in different ways, a fact which may explain the inconsistencies in English terminology. For the predominant Hebrew verb used to express propitiation is caphar (עָפָר; cf. "Yom Kippur", the "Day of Atonement"). The

key idea of the root behind this word is that of ransoming. Thus, in the analogy, propitiation, expiation or atonement would be the payment of an acceptable ransom sufficient to satisfy, please or appease the demands of divine righteousness, with our sin being the debt which needs to be paid. In other words, just as literal animal blood is the necessary means of ritual propitiation, so the symbolic blood of Christ is the necessary means of actual propitiation. In the former, the payment of ransom for our lives, expiating our sins, is merely represented (in a very graphic way); in the latter the sin for which God's justice demands our death is truly put away in exchange for a suitable ransom which placates divine righteousness, Christ's death in place of ours.

Then [the guilty party] shall bring his guilt offering to the Lord; [he shall bring] to the priest a ram without blemish from the flock according to the penalty assessed for his guilt offering. Then the priest will make atonement (עֲדָה) for him before the Lord, and he will be forgiven once and for all for everything he has done to incur guilt. Leviticus 6:6-7. When our iniquitous deeds overcame us, you made atonement (עֲדָה) for them. Psalms 65:3. In the passages above and also in the case of the Day of Atonement, the English word "atonement" is meant to convey the idea of satisfying the penalty of sin charged to one's account. One could likewise translate in each of these cases "make propitiation for" or "make expiation for" or "pay ransom for", since in all of these uses of caphar the same central idea is present: satisfactory payment for sin and its penalty which results in forgiveness. Once atonement is made for our sins, once they have been expiated and an acceptable ransom price paid to release us from their penalty, we find God the Father no longer hostile towards us on account of our offenses, but now graciously disposed towards us, since He is well satisfied with price paid for our sins by His beloved Son, His death for ours. This is, theologically speaking, propitiation.

"When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each one must pay the Lord a ransom (Heb. עֲדָה, noun) for his life at the time he is counted. Then no plague will come on them when you number them. Each one who crosses over to those already counted is to give a half shekel, according to the sanctuary shekel, which weighs twenty gerahs. This half shekel is an offering to the Lord. All who cross over, those twenty years old or more, are to give an offering to the Lord. The rich are not to give more than a half shekel and the poor are not to give less when you make the offering to the Lord to atone for your lives (Heb. עֲדָה, verb)." Exodus 30:12-15 NIV

Here we see what is even more clear in the Hebrew, namely, the direct connection between paying the ransom price (copher, a noun form of עֲדָה) and the atonement/propitiation/expiation it achieves (cipper; the piel form of the verb עֲדָה). In this last case, the money price, which is emphatically stated to be exactly the same for all, represents the blood of Christ, the "coin" of forgiveness, which suffices to satisfy the demands of God's perfect justice for the forgiveness of all sin. The Greek root employed for teaching the principle of propitiation is directed more towards the effect Christ's sacrifice has had in changing the Father's attitude towards us than it is with the removal of sin producing that change of attitude. That is, the Greek vocabulary is concerned more with the work of Christ in the analogy accomplishing the "appeasement" or "mollification" of God's justice on our behalf. Nevertheless, we can say with certainty that these two ideas are really one, being merely two sides of the exact same coin. That is because of the direct and deliberate connection which the Greek vocabulary makes with its Hebrew counterparts. The solid gold top of the ark of the covenant, often and somewhat misleadingly translated "the mercy seat", is called in Hebrew the capporet (also from עֲדָה), and translated into Greek as the hilasterion (ἡλαστῆριον;

Romans 3:25; Hebrews 9:5; cf. Exodus 25:17-22; Leviticus 16:13 in the Greek Septuagint version). This is place where the blood of the sacrifice was poured out on the Day of Atonement “to make propitiation for the sins” of the whole people (Leviticus 16:34; Hebrews 9:7). Now the ark was a type of Christ, and the cherubim on the cover represented the Father and His court (cf. Exodus 25:22) looking down at the blood on the cover of the ark (which contained representations of the people’s sins: Hebrews 9:4), and being satisfied with the sacrifice. The word hilasterion is analogous in its formation to the Hebrew word capporet in that both words have noun suffixes which may be considered locative (i. e., “place of ___”). However, the Greek root hila- (ἡλα-) has to do not with ransom but with joy, and, when specifically attributed to a person, with being joyful or joyfully disposed (cf. English “hilarity”). In other words, the Greek idea focuses on the result of the payment of the ransom, the good favor we now enjoy from the Father in place of the previous hostility toward our sin, rather than focusing on the sin cancelled out by Christ’s blood payment (as in the case of the Hebrew terminology). In other words, while the Hebrew root for propitiation, (עֲדָה), looks to the means, “ransom”, the Greek root for propitiation, (ἡλα-), looks to the result, “appeasement” (when the ransom is found acceptable). This meaning is evident in all of the Greek vocabulary occurring in the New Testament relating to this concept: Be graciously (lit., “cheerfully” [hilastheti – ἡλασθητι]) inclined to me, O God, sinner that I am! Luke 18:13 b

God made [Christ] a means of atonement (lit., “appeasement” [hilasterion – ἡλαστῆριον]) [achieved] by His blood [and claimed] through faith, to give proof of His justice in leaving unpunished in divine forbearance [all] previously committed sins, so as to prove His justice in the present, namely, so that He would be [shown to be] just [in this] and [justified] in justifying the one who has faith in Jesus. Romans 3:25-26.

Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful [hilaron – ἡλαρῶν] giver. 2 Corinthians 9:7 NIV For this reason [Jesus] had to be like His brothers in every way, in order to become a merciful and faithful High Priest in the things relating to God in order to propitiate (lit., “appease away” [hilaskesthai – ἡλάσκεισθαι]) the sins of the people. Hebrews 2:17. For I shall have mercy upon (lit., “be kindly disposed to” [hileos – ἡλεως]) their unrighteous deeds and shall remember their sins no more. Hebrews 8:12 (quotation and translation of Jeremiah 31:34 b) And He Himself is the appeasement (hilasmos – ἡλασμός) [of God] for our sins, and not just for ours, but also for the entire world. 1 John 2:2. In this God’s love has been revealed in us, that He sent His only Son into the world that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atonement (lit., “appeasement” [hilasmon – ἡλασμόν]) [of God’s justice] for our sins. 1 John 4:9-10.

Sin is the problem which has plagued mankind since the fall. But through propitiation by means of the ransom of Jesus’ blood the Father’s righteous wrath has been forever mollified and appeased. Because of Christ’s atonement, sin no longer holds us in its grasp (we who accept His work have been “redeemed”; see point 7 below); because of our Lord’s act of propitiation, our sins no longer stand in the record against us, implacably demanding a sentence of death (we who believe in Him have been “justified”; see point 8 below); because of Jesus’ work of expiation, the wrath of Holy God towards sin no longer forms an impenetrable barrier separating us from Him in spiritual death (we who have come to Him have been “reconciled” to God; see point 9 below). Who Jesus is and what He did for us on the cross is at the center of everything we believe, of all that we are, and of

all that God has ever done and will ever do in the world. The precious blood of Jesus Christ our Savior, His work on the cross in dying spiritually for our sins, has once and for all put an end to the Genesis curse and opened the door to heaven for all who are willing to hear His voice. For while we were helpless and hopeless and doomed (since without the perfect sacrifice for sin having the perfect effect on the One who perfectly judges sin there can be no forgiveness), the Father and His holy justice have now been satisfied by the death of His one and only dear Son, with the aroma of the ransom price paid in His sacrifice on the altar of Calvary's cross being a sweet savor in His nostrils, well-acceptable to Him and ever able to propitiate Him on our behalf (2 Corinthians 2:14-15; Hebrews 7:27; cf. Genesis 8:21; Exodus 29:18, Exodus 29:25; Leviticus 1:9, Leviticus 1:13, Leviticus 1:17). And walk in love, just as also Christ loved you and gave Himself up as sacrifice and offering for a sweet smell to God. Ephesians 5:2.

01.02.07 - Redemption

7. Redemption: Redemption is the doctrine which expresses our current freedom from the bondage of sin as a result of Christ's work on the cross in paying the price for our lives. As a result of our common birth in Adam's line all human beings are born spiritually dead, possessing a sin nature with the necessary consequence that we all commit sin as well. From the point of view of the teaching of redemption, mankind is portrayed as held in bondage by this sin, with no way to escape or gain freedom absent the work of Christ on our behalf.

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." John 8:34-36 NIV

What then? Do we [Israelites] have an advantage? Not at all. For we have already brought forth the charge that both Jews and gentiles, all [of us], are under sin's control. Romans 3:9. For we know that the Law is spiritual. But I am fleshly, sold [into bondage] under [the power of] sin. Romans 7:14.

Redemption is a Latin word meaning, etymologically, to "buy back" (re- emo). In the Old Testament, we find two roots expressing this idea (padhah, ôãã and ga'al, âàì), both of which are used for literal redemption (though it can be argued that the underlying symbolism of redemption from sin is always present: cf. Exodus 6:6; Exodus 13:13; Deuteronomy 7:8; Leviticus 27:13; Psalms 49:7-8), and are also both used for explicit redemption from sin as well. In the latter case, their usage is so synonymous as to be virtually indistinguishable in expressing God's deliverance of believers from the bondage in which we are held without His deliverance:

Let Israel keep waiting on the Lord, for with the Lord is mercy, and with him is abundant redemption (padhah) For He himself will redeem (padhah) Israel from all her iniquities (i. e., sins). Psalms 130:7-8.

I have wiped away your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like vapor. Return to Me, for I have redeemed (ga'al) you (i. e., from your sins)! Isaiah 44:22. In the New Testament, there are two very closely conceptually related ways in which Christ's work as it is directed towards releasing us from sin is described, and these are reflected in the Greek vocabulary:1) [the more common] metaphorical ransoming us from an otherwise implacable force [root: lytr-, λυτρ-] (e. g., Matthew 20:28; Luke 1:68-69; Luke 2:38; John 8:31-38; Romans 3:24; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 1 Timothy 2:6; cf. Acts 7:35), and 2) buying us out of slavery [root: -agoraz-, ■γοραζ-] (e. g., 2 Peter 2:1; Galatians 4:5). These two ideas are obviously very similar, and it is not uncommon for versions of the Bible to translate all the words involved in this concept the same way regardless of the Greek root actually employed (i. e., with some form of the English words "redeem" or "redemption").

Christ bought us free (i. e., "redeemed" us: exagorazo) from the Law's curse, having become a curse on our behalf. For it is written: "Cursed is everyone [who is] hanged upon a tree"

(Deuteronomy 21:23). Galatians 3:13. In whom (i. e., Christ) we possess our ransoming [from sin] (i. e., “redemption”: *apolytrosis*), the forgiveness of our sins. Colossians 1:14. In all of these cases, the coin that pays the ransom or redemption price is “the blood of Christ” (cf. Romans 3:24; Galatians 4:5; 1 Corinthians 6:20; 1 Corinthians 7:23; Hebrews 9:15; Revelation 5:9), that is, the spiritual death of Jesus which paid the penalty for our sins, accomplishing propitiation. In whom (i. e., Christ) we possess our ransoming [from sin] (i. e., “redemption”) through His blood, the forgiveness of our transgressions according to the riches of His grace. Ephesians 1:7.

Thus the blood of Christ cannot be separated from any detailed discussion of redemption, since it is the blood of Christ which redeems us from sin (cf. Hebrews 9:12). We are “slaves”, headed for death and condemnation, headed for the fires of hell, with no way, no means to prevent either our imminent physical death or the eternal death that will inevitably follow – unless someone intervenes. God is just, and cannot overlook sin. But God is also merciful, and in His great mercy He devised a way for us to be saved, sinners though we are. He sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh into the world to be judged for sin in the flesh that we might be saved (Romans 8:1-4). That is how Jesus paid our redemption price – with His own blood. Without this payment we were lost and already condemned in principle, and held in bondage at a price which we had no means to pay ourselves since the Father’s justice could be assuaged by no less than a perfect substitute, a Lamb without spot or blemish, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But, blessedly, the Father’s justice is satisfied with the ransom price Jesus paid for us on the cross in regard to sin, so that all who put their faith in Him have been redeemed. For you know that it was not with perishable things [like] silver or gold that you were ransomed from the futile manner of life passed down to you by your ancestors, but [you were redeemed] with precious blood, like that of a lamb without spot or blemish, [that is, by the blood] of Christ. 1 Peter 1:18-19. As the passage above and indeed all redemption passages suggest, while the price has been paid for all mankind (i. e., propitiation and atonement are universal since the Blood of Christ avails for the payment of all human sin), the act of actual redemption is accomplished only for those who seek it. For redemption is directed towards sin, and sin only releases its grasp through faith. That is to say, only believers are redeemed, even though God has made the offer of free redemption through Jesus Christ available to all. This explains not only why redemption passages are addressed to believers, but also why some passages where this doctrine is taught emphasize the special relationship of believers to Jesus Christ that obtains as a result of redemption (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Peter 2:1):

Don’t you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you (whom you have from God), and that you don’t belong to yourselves? You were bought at a [precious] price. So glorify God with your body. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:23) And they sang a new song, saying, “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain and have purchased with your blood for our God [men] from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made them into a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will rule upon the earth!” Revelation 5:9-10 (cf. Revelation 14:3-4)

It should not be surprising, therefore, that the doctrine of redemption, while usually referring to our present position in Christ and spiritually released from sin, also occasionally looks forward to our ultimate status as part of His Bride, the physical release through resurrection from this body of sin in which we now dwell, and the eternal rewards that accompany it: When these things (i. e., signs

and wonders of Luke 21:25-27) begin to happen, stand up and raise up your heads, because your redemption is near (i. e., the resurrection which occurs at Christ's return). Luke 21:28. And not only the created world, but we too who have received the Holy Spirit as a foretaste [of the good things to come] agonize within ourselves as we eagerly await our adoption, that is, the redemption of our body (i. e. resurrection). This is the hope with which we were saved. Romans 8:23-24 a

[The Spirit] who is a guarantee of the inheritance that is ours in the [future] redeeming of what we have been working for (i. e., our resurrection and reward) bringing praise for His glory (in eternity). Ephesians 1:14. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God with whom you were sealed for a [future] day of redemption (i. e., the day of resurrection). Ephesians 4:30. In sum, under the concept of redemption God in Christ purchases us out from under the charges, penalties, and entanglements by which we are held by sin. Redemption is the work of Christ, the suffering Servant, who fulfilled His mission by ransoming us from the bondage of sin and death by giving up His life in exchange for ours, a boon which must be accepted in faith to be effective. For the Son of Man also did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom on behalf of many. Mark 10:45 (cf. Matthew 20:28) To the One who loves us and has released us from our sins by His blood – and He has made us a kingdom, priests of His God and Father – to Him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen. Revelation 1:5-6.

01.02.08 - Justification

8. Justification: Justification teaches the way God now relates to us, no longer as those who are stained by and steeped in sin, but as those who have been made truly righteous, justified and washed clean from sin through the blood of Christ, having placed our faith in Him for eternal life.

He (i. e., our Lord Jesus) was handed over on account of our transgressions (i. e., to redeem us from sin), and was raised up on account of our justification (i. e., so that we too could be raised, having been justified by His death). Romans 4:25.

Thus, justification is also for believers, we who have responded to the redemption provided by Jesus' sacrifice, and who now look forward to sharing in His resurrection, having been justified by faith. In Romans chapter eight, "justification" is the decision-making step in God's plan of salvation for individual believers wherein our decision to choose to come back to God through the blood of Christ, accepting the redemption He has made available, is validated. And we know that everything works together for good for those who love God, for those who have been called according to His plan. For those whom He foreknew, He also foreordained to share the likeness of His Son, so that He might be the Firstborn over many brothers [and sisters]. And those whom He foreordained, these He also called [to salvation], and those whom He called, He also made righteous (i. e., through faith in Christ; cf. Romans 4:1-5, Romans 4:25; Romans 5:1), and those whom He made righteous, these He also glorified (i. e., our future resurrection and eternal life). Romans 8:28-30. The doctrine of justification expresses the righteousness we now possess positionally, that is, by virtue of our being united to Jesus Christ, not our own maculate pseudo-righteousness, but God's own perfect righteousness credited to us on account of our being washed free of all taint of sin through acceptance of Jesus' work of redemption on our behalf. For all sin and fall short of God's glory, [but we are all] justified without cost by His grace through the redemption (lit., "ransoming" from sin) which is in Christ Jesus. God made Him a means of atonement [achieved] by His blood [and claimed] through faith, to give proof of His justice in leaving unpunished in divine forbearance [all] previously committed sins, so as to prove His justice in the present, namely, so that He would be [shown to be] just [in this] and [justified] in justifying the one who has faith in Jesus. Romans 3:23-26. As these verses show, it is because all sin has been expiated by Christ's sacrifice that God can justly pronounce us "righteous" when we believe in Jesus and are now one with Him. Instead of residing under God's condemnation, we who believe have now been "justified", are made righteous and are considered righteous in God's eyes through our acceptance of the work of Christ and our union with Him. So now, there [awaits] no judgment of condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed you from the Law of sin and death. For what the Law could not accomplish (i. e., solving the sin problem) because it was weak on account of [its dependence on sinful human] flesh, God [did accomplish]: having sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for the purpose of [expiating] sin, [God] rendered summary judgement on [all] sin in [Christ's] flesh, so that the [perfect] righteousness which the Law demands might be fulfilled in us – we who walk not according to the [sinful] flesh, but according to the Spirit (i. e., believers). Romans 8:1-4. As the

final verse of the passage shows, justification also challenges us to live up to the new status of perfection we now possess in principle (i. e., “positionally”, that is, by virtue of being “in Christ”), walking in a godly Christian way (Romans 8:4; cf. Romans 6:4, Romans 6:13-20; Ephesians 5:8; 1 John 2:6), appropriating the experiential forgiveness that attends our “righteous” status by confession of our sins when we do fail (1 John 1:9 cf. Zechariah 3:3-4; 1 John 1:7; Revelation 3:18), and by producing a crop, the “fruit of righteousness” (Php 1:11; cf. Romans 7:4; Ephesians 5:9; Colossians 1:10; James 3:17), in loving response to our Lord. For whereas without justification everything reputedly done “for God” is in fact tainted by sin and therefore completely unacceptable to Him, we have now been cleansed from our sin, justified and made righteous in Jesus Christ through sharing His righteousness, and are thus now free to produce good works of Christian ministry which are acceptable to the Lord (cf. Ephesians 2:10).

[Jesus Christ] who gave Himself on our behalf to redeem us from all lawlessness (i. e., sin; cf. 1 John 3:4) and to cleanse for Himself a people [to be His] own unique possession, zealous for good works. Titus 2:14.

Justification is thus the judicial pronouncement of forgiveness for all who believe. God examines us, and despite our prior filthiness, He now sees us “dressed in white” (as we ultimately shall always be: Revelation 3:4-5; Revelation 4:4; Revelation 6:11; Revelation 19:14), cleansed by the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:14; in contrast to the unbeliever: Matthew 22:11-14).

“Come now, and let us consider your case (i. e., judicially examine you)”, says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they will be white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they will be like [white] wool.” Isaiah 1:18.

“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes (i. e., was not clothed with the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ). ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless. “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ “For many are invited, but few are chosen.” Matthew 22:11-14 NIV

“These people dressed in white robes – who are they and where have they come from?” And I said to him, “My lord, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones who are about to come forth from the Great Tribulation. And they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Revelation 7:13-14.

Though we were fundamentally unrighteous at birth, condemned to death and alienated from God through sin and with no means of cleansing ourselves, by believing in Jesus Christ who released us from our sin through His death, we have now received God’s righteousness in place of our own intrinsic unrighteousness, and have thus been “justified by faith” (Romans 1:17; Romans 3:22-24, Romans 3:28; Romans 4:1-25; Romans 5:1, Romans 5:9, Romans 5:16-21; Romans 8:30; Romans 9:30; Romans 10:4-6; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 2:16; Galatians 3:24; Titus 3:7). The sentence of death hanging over our heads has been quashed, for the penalty of death has already been carried out against the Person of our Lord, and we have gratefully accepted His death in our place. Since the Father’s justice is completely satisfied with the substitution of His Son’s condemnation on our behalf, He declares us

righteous, justified not by any “works of righteousness which we have done” (Titus 3:5), but through faith in the Righteous One who became sin for us. For we were also once mindless, disobedient, wandering [pointlessly] astray, enslaved to all sorts of lusts and pleasures, living our lives in wickedness and envy, loathsome and hating each other. But [in spite of our prior sinfulness], when the goodness and benevolence of God our Savior appeared [in the flesh], not on account of [any] works which we had done in [so-called] righteousness did He save us, but through the washing [away of our sins which leads to our] rebirth and [to our] new beginning from the Holy Spirit whom He poured out upon us bountifully through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that [now] having been justified [in this way] by His grace, we might become heirs in regard to the eternal life for which we hope. Titus 3:3-7.

Therefore while propitiation expresses the payment for our sins by Jesus Christ, and while redemption illustrates the breaking by His death of sin’s stranglehold on us, justification consists in our cleansing from sin whereby we are now clean in God’s eyes. For through Christ’s vicarious death on our behalf and our embracing of it, we are now considered righteous in the judgment of the justice of God.

Don’t you know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor practitioners of homosexuality nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And this is [exactly] what some of you were – but you were washed [clean], but you were made holy, but you were made righteous by [faith in] the Person (lit., Name) of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. This “cleansing from sin” aspect of justification whereby all the charges against us are dropped because of Christ’s sacrifice is ubiquitous in scripture (e. g., Isaiah 43:25; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Colossians 2:14; 1 Peter 1:2; Hebrews 9:13-21; Hebrews 12:24). This was the primary message in water baptism, otherwise known as “John’s baptism”, a symbolic washing away of sins following true repentance in turning back to God (Acts 19:4; cf. Acts 1:5; Acts 11:16). After the cross, rather than a solely symbolic cleansing based upon what God would do, we now have genuine cleansing and forgiveness as a result of what God has done in judging our sins in Christ and forgiving us based upon the cleansing power of the blood of Christ.

God, from antiquity having communicated to our fathers in the prophets at many times and in many ways, has in these last days communicated to us in a Son, [the One] whom He has appointed heir of all things, [the One] through whom He created the universe. He is the shining forth of [the Father’s] glory, the precise image of His essence, the One who sustains the universe by His mighty Word. When He had accomplished the cleansing of [our] sins, He took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Hebrews 1:1-3.

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence in this entrance of ours into the [heavenly] holy of holies by the blood of Jesus, an entryway through the [heavenly] veil [of separation] which is new and alive and which He has consecrated for us, that is [through the sacrifice] of His flesh (cf. Hebrews 10:10, Hebrews 10:18), and since we have [this] Great High Priest over the household of God, let us approach [the throne of grace (cf. Hebrews 4:16) to pray] with a truthful heart in complete faith, our hearts sprinkled [clean] of [any] bad conscience and our bodies washed with pure water [of the Word (cf. Ephesians 5:26)]. Hebrews 10:19-22. This is the “new covenant” God

has made with us “by sacrifice” (Psalms 50:5), forgiving us and considering us righteous by virtue of what Jesus did in dying for us (when we embrace that work and the forgiveness that attends it).

“For I shall have mercy upon their unrighteous deeds and shall remember their sins no more (Jeremiah 31:34).” In mentioning a “New [Covenant]”, He has rendered the Old one obsolete. And that which is obsolete and antiquated is close to disappearing. Hebrews 8:12-13. In short, justification means having God’s righteousness as far as He is concerned, not based upon anything we have done, but upon Christ’s work on our behalf. We are justified, rendered and considered righteous as those who are one with Jesus Christ when we believe in Him. Justification is the first blessed benefit we seek and receive when we set ourselves to come to God through Jesus Christ. For, once we are considered righteous by the justice of God, the door has been opened through Jesus to all the blessings heaven contains. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Matthew 6:33 KJV But whatever I had gained [in my former godless life], compared to Christ I have come to consider these things as losses. Indeed, I consider everything to be a loss compared to the surpassing importance of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord, for whose sake I have suffered the loss of everything, and consider [everything I have lost] as garbage, compared to gaining Christ, and being found in Him – not having a personal righteousness [developed] through [following] the [Mosaic] law – but having that righteousness [that comes] through faith in Christ, that righteousness [that comes] from God based on faith. Php 3:7-9.

01.02.09 - Reconciliation

9. Reconciliation: The biblical teaching of reconciliation views salvation as the reestablishment of our relationship with God. Since we are all born spiritually dead “in Adam”, that is, since we all possess a sin nature through physical birth, a fact which guarantees that sin will follow our inherent sinfulness, we are all also born alienated from God (Colossians 1:21), the Father of our spirits (Hebrews 12:9). But just as the prodigal son’s father loved him dearly, and was overjoyed when he returned (Luke 15:11-32), so too our heavenly Father loves us beyond our comprehension, and has indeed done the most for us that we might be able to return to Him and reenter the grace and blessing reserved for His true sons and daughters. For in order for us to be reconciled to Him, not only do we have to be willing to turn away from the world and return to Him in humility and repentance and faith, but He first had resolve the issue of sin, that is to say, a means had to be provided for us to be made righteous and acceptable to God before we were fit to be reconciled to Him (i. e., justification must precede reconciliation).

[God] has erased the charge against us along with its bill of particulars (i. e., the record of our personal sins). This stood against us, but He removed it [as an obstacle] between us by nailing it to the cross. Colossians 2:14. In this teaching, sin thus forms a barrier, so to speak, which separates us from holy God, a wall of enmity and impending wrath, which can only be removed by the complete and righteous judgment of all of our sins. For [Jesus] Himself is our peace, for He has made both [Jews and gentiles] one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition, that is, the enmity, by discharging the Law of the commandments and its requirements with His [own] body, so that He might re-create the two into one new Man by making [this] peace, and might reconcile both in one Body to God through His cross, having by means of it abolished the enmity [between God and mankind]. For when He had come (i. e., the 1 advent), He proclaimed the gospel of peace to you who were far away [from God], and peace to those who were near. For it is through Him that we both have our access to the Father by means of one Spirit. Ephesians 2:14-18. The prerequisite for reconciliation with the Father has thus in ineffable blessedness been carried out by the full and fully effective judgment of the sins of the world in the body of Jesus Christ. It is our Savior’s blood that has torn down the wall of hostility and impending wrath and opened up the door of grace and peace. But God commends His love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. So how much more is it not true now, after we have been rendered righteous [through faith] in His blood, that we shall be saved from the [coming] wrath through Him? For if when we were His enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, how much more is it not true [now], since we have been reconciled [to Him through Jesus’ death], that we will be saved by His life? And not only that, but we even flaunt [our new relationship] with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained this reconciliation. Romans 5:8-11. In the symbolism of reconciliation, Jesus has made peace for us with God – through His own death which paid our outstanding debts – and in so doing has transformed us from being God’s enemies by nature and by birth into members of God’s own household, sons and daughters fully restored into the good graces of the loving Father who made

us. For it was [God's] good pleasure for the fulfillment [of His plan] to reside entirely in [Christ], and so through Him to reconcile everything to Himself, having made peace through Him, through the blood of His cross, whether things on earth, or things in heaven. You were once alienated from God – your very thoughts were hostile towards Him and your deeds were evil. Yet God has now accomplished reconciliation [for you] through the death of Christ in His physical body so that you may stand before Him as holy, without blemish and free from accusation – [this you will do] if you remain solidly grounded and firmly fixed in the faith, and un-moved from your hope in the gospel which you have heard proclaimed in all creation under heaven, of which [gospel] I, Paul, have become a minister. Colossians 1:19-23.

Though as sinners by birth, we were previously God's enemies, we have now been reconciled to Him by the blood of Jesus Christ through our faith in Him and His sacrifice for us on the cross, so that the wrath we once anticipated has been replaced by confidence in the justification we now possess, for now in place of enmity, we have access to God Himself (Romans 5:1-2; Ephesians 2:18; Ephesians 3:12; Hebrews 4:16; 1 Peter 3:18), and peace with the Father through the intercession of the Son. So now that we have been justified by faith, let us take hold of the peace [we have] with God [the Father] through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have also obtained our access into this grace in which we stand, and let us boast in the hope of the glory of God (i. e., in anticipation of our resurrection). Romans 5:1-2.

It is the Father Himself who initiated this process of reconciliation, striving to bring all of His lost sheep back to Himself through the greatest sacrifice He could possibly make, and empowering us who have returned to spread the message that, since Christ has removed the barrier of wrath and enmity that once separated us, instead of anger for sins past, God's attitude towards us is now one of loving acceptance, if only we are willing to accept the gift of Jesus Christ and be reconciled to Him. And all things come from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, for that God was [and is] in Christ making overtures of reconciliation between the world and Himself – not taking their transgressions into account – and has entrusted us with this message (lit., "word") of reconciliation. As ambassadors of Christ, as though God were urging you through us, we beg you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God! 2 Corinthians 5:18-20. The Son is also said to be an agent of reconciliation in the context of His becoming – like us – a genuine human being, with, moreover, that taking on of humanity being implied in the following verses as necessary in order to accomplish reconciliation (since He had to become a man in order to die for our sins). But [in fact] He was made subject to torment on account of our transgressions, and He was crushed because of our collective guilt (lit., "guilts"). The punishment [required] for making peace [with God] on our behalf [fell] upon Him. Because of His wounding, we have been healed. Isaiah 53:5.

Therefore since these children have a common heritage of flesh and blood, [Christ] too partook of these same [common elements] in a very similar fashion (i. e., not identical only in that He was virgin born and so without sin), in order that through His death He might put an end to the one possessing the power of death, that is, the devil, and might reconcile [to Himself] those who were subject to being slaves their whole lives long by their fear of death. Hebrews 2:14-15.

Jesus is thus the Mediator between God and mankind, for He alone is qualified to be so. He is not only true God and always has been, but is since the incarnation a true human being as well. As

such, He is able to represent both parties and effect reconciliation. He offers this reconciliation to us, and we who have accepted it proclaim His offer to the world (2 Corinthians 5:18-20), but the offer is only possible because of the fact that the aggrieved party, God, has been fully and completely conciliated by the ransom Jesus Himself paid to affect our return to the Father, namely, by bearing our sins in His body on the cross, and by paying the full penalty for them in dying in our place.

[God] who wants all men to be saved and come to accept the truth. For as God is One, so there is [only] One Mediator between God and Man, Christ Jesus in His humanity, who gave Himself as a ransom for all [mankind] . . . 1 Timothy 2:4-6 a This is how we enter into to the new agreement of restored and eternal fellowship with God, the New Covenant "in My blood" (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25), as our Lord said, namely, by being reconciled to the Father through faith on the basis of the death of Jesus in our place. But Christ has already arrived [in heaven] as High Priest of the good things to come, [having passed] through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, that is, the one which is not of this creation. Nor was it through the blood of goats and bullocks, but through His own blood (i. e., His spiritual death) that He entered once and for all into the holy of holies, having wrought eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of the heifer sprinkled upon the unclean render a person holy in respect to bodily cleansing, how much more will the blood of Christ, who offered Himself without defect to God through the eternal Spirit, cleanse our conscience from dead works so that we may serve the living God? And it is for this reason that He is the Mediator of a New Covenant, so that those who have been called might receive their eternal inheritance on the basis of the death He suffered to redeem us from the transgressions [committed] under the first Covenant. Hebrews 9:11-15 (cf. Hebrews 12:24)

01.02.10 - Summary of the Work of Christ in Effecting Salvation

10. Summary of the Work of Christ in Effecting Salvation: Mankind was helpless and hopeless, and facing eternal condemnation when “the goodness and benevolence of our God our Savior appeared [in the flesh]” (Titus 3:4), namely, Jesus, the “grace of God” personified, who has brought “salvation . . . to all mankind” (Titus 2:11; cf. Hebrews 9:26; 1 John 1:2; 1 John 3:5). But “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8), for you and me and for everyone, dying on the cross for every sin that has ever been committed or ever will be. The work of Jesus Christ in atoning for sin, is called in scripture the “blood of Christ”, a phrase which refers not to our Lord’s literal blood, for He did not in fact bleed to death but gave up His spirit of His own accord once the work of salvation had been accomplished, proclaiming, “It has now been accomplished!” (John 19:30), but to His work on the cross in dying for our sins, that is to His spiritual death. For Jesus was judged in our place, condemned in our place, paid the penalty for all of our sins in Calvary’s darkness, bearing them all in His body on the tree. This He did not only for us who have in humility and repentance gratefully accepted in faith His substitutionary death on our behalf, we who now call Him “Lord”, but He died also for those who rejected Him, the atonement being universal for all mankind. The blood of Christ, Jesus’ spiritual death on the cross in dying for and in paying the penalty for all of the sins of the world, has been proclaimed fully effective in satisfying the righteous demands of the Father’s justice that sin be atoned for (Ephesians 5:2; cf. Matthew 3:17; Matthew 17:5; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22; 2 Peter 1:17); we call this aspect of the blood of Christ in salvation propitiation.

God made [Christ] a means of atonement (or propitiation; lit., “appeasement”) [achieved] by His blood . . .Romans 3:25 a

Having satisfied the demands of divine justice, the blood of Christ, avails to ransom sinful mankind from the bondage of sin, buying us out of our slavery to sin by paying the full price of the penalty for everything we have done; we call this aspect of the blood of Christ in salvation redemption. In whom (i. e., Christ) we possess our ransoming [from sin] (i. e., “redemption”) through His blood, the forgiveness of our transgressions according to the riches of His grace. Ephesians 1:7. For you know that it was not with perishable things [like] silver or gold that you were ransomed from the futile manner of life passed down to you by your ancestors, but [you were redeemed] with precious blood, like that of a lamb without spot or blemish, [that is, by the blood] of Christ. 1 Peter 1:18-19.

Having been redeemed from sin’s grasp and bought out from under its control, we who walk out of the prison house in faith are washed clean by the blood of Christ, and receive His righteousness in place of our own, so that we are now considered guiltless by the justice of God; we call this aspect of the blood of Christ in salvation justification.

How much more [is it not then clearly the case that] we who have been justified by His blood shall therefore [certainly] be saved through Him from the wrath [of judgment to come]! Romans 5:9. As those who have now been washed clean of sin and justified by faith (Romans 3:28; Romans 4:1; Romans 5:1; Galatians 2:16; Galatians 3:11, Galatians 3:24), we are fit to be presented to God,

ushered back into the presence of our loving Father by our Mediator, the One who saved us by His blood, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; we call this aspect of the blood of Christ in salvation reconciliation.

Because He lay bare His life unto death, and was dealt with as transgressors [are], so that He bore the sin of the many, and substituted [Himself] (i. e., made intercession) for the transgressors. Isaiah 53:12 b For it was [God's] good pleasure for the fulfillment [of His plan] to reside entirely in [Christ], and so through Him to reconcile everything to Himself, having made peace through Him, through the blood of His cross, whether things on earth, or things in heaven. Colossians 1:19-20. For Jesus is our High Priest, God's propitiation and means of atonement for all mankind through His blood, having died that all might have eternal life. or this reason He had to be like His brothers in every way, in order to become a merciful and faithful High Priest in the things relating to God in order to propitiate the sins of the people (i. e., through the sacrifice of Himself). Hebrews 2:17.

Jesus is our Redeemer, having purchased by His blood the release from sin and redemption of all who are willing to receive it.

"The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins," declares the Lord. Isaiah 59:20 NIV And they sang a new song, saying, "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain and have purchased with your blood for our God [men] from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made them into a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will rule upon the earth!" Revelation 5:9-10 (cf. Revelation 14:3-4) Jesus is our Savior, having delivered us from condemnation through the justification which is in His blood. My righteous Servant will provide righteousness for the great [of heart] (i. e., believers) through the[ir] acknowledgment of Him, and He Himself will carry their guilt (lit., "guilts"). Isaiah 53:11 b

How much more [is it not then clearly the case that] we who have been justified by His blood shall therefore [certainly] be saved through Him from the wrath [of judgment to come]! Romans 5:9. And Jesus is our Mediator, the One who has reconciled us to God and made all with faith in Him sons and daughters of God most high, in anticipation of the eternal inheritance and resurrection that is our hope. And it is for this reason that He is the Mediator of a New Covenant, so that those who have been called might receive their eternal inheritance on the basis of the death He suffered to redeem us from the transgressions [committed] under the first Covenant. Hebrews 9:11-15 (cf. Hebrews 12:24) Our God is a God of intrinsic goodness which overflows in love.

We see this love manifest in His great grace which has effected redemption for us. Our God is a God of intrinsic holiness which overflows in justice.

We see this justice manifest in His great mercy which has effected justification for us. Our God is a God of intrinsic truth which overflows in life.

We see this life manifest in His great peace which has effected reconciliation for us. For our God has washed away our sins in the blood of Christ, having been propitiated in every aspect of His character by the death of His one and only dear Son on our behalf.

Therefore instead of slavery, we have redemption, and are free to follow Him in faith.

Instead of condemnation, we have justification, and are washed clean by His blood. And instead of alienation, we have reconciliation, and have become the sons of God.

Praise be to Lord Jesus Christ who loved us so much He died to give us this eternal life!

Conclusion: Despite the length of this study, there is so much more that could be said, for, indeed, Jesus is Himself the Word of Truth (John 1:1-5, John 1:13; 1 John 1:1-3; Revelation 19:13), and therefore all the truth of the Bible is intricately and inextricably connected to Him.

Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written. John 21:25 NIV

Beyond our “so great salvation” which He, our High Priest, Redeemer, Savior and Mediator has provided (Hebrews 2:3), He is our Maker and our Model, our Guide and our Friend, our Lord and our God. He is our everything. He is the One we love beyond all others. Because He first loved us, and gave Himself up to death on our behalf. For God who said, “Let light shine forth from the darkness!”, is He who has shone forth [His light] into our hearts to illuminate our knowledge of God’s glory in the Person of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 4:6.

01A.00. Eschatology: the Study of Last Things

Eschatology: the Study of Last Things by Dr. Robert D. Luginbill

God's future history of the world, and the destiny of believers and unbelievers.

Now all these things happened unto them for examples,

and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come.

1 Corinthians 10:11 KJV

1. God's Plan for Human History

A. Judgment, Restoration and Replacement I: Positional Victory

B. The Focus of God's Plan, Jesus Christ, His Person and His Work

C. Things to Come: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement Phases 2 & 3

D. God's Disposition of Satan: A Historical Overview

2. The Tribulation Defined

3. The Seven Churches of Revelation

4. The Tribulation's First Half

5. Antichrist and his Kingdom

6. The Great Tribulation

7. Armageddon and the Second Advent

8. Last Things

Introduction: For too long, eschatology, "the study of last things", has been the property of fringe elements. The true significance of this crucial category of Biblical truth has been ignored or de-emphasized by most serious Christians of our day. Even those who pay it lip service do not seem to fully appreciate the critical importance of the doctrines of eschatology not only to spiritual growth, but to spiritual safety as well. They are in fact fundamental. For it is a tenet of our faith that our generation is just as likely to be called upon to put them to practical use as any other generation of Christians has been in the past or may be in the future. The "Lord's Prayer", the model prayer given by Jesus to His disciple when asked "teach us how to pray as John taught his disciples", is predicated on a future event to which all of us as Christians are instructed to direct our gaze. After addressing our heavenly Father, both New Testament versions continue with the statement "Thy kingdom come!" (Matthew 1:1-13; Luke 11:2-4). The Greek aorist imperative expresses a strong desire which should reflect the attitude of all believers. We should all earnestly hope for and daily express in our prayers our desire for the establishment of the Kingdom of God

here on earth. It is only in this way that we shall truly see His "will done on earth as it is in heaven". What we are to look forward to with such intent, however, can only occur after nearly all of the prophecies of future events have first taken place. The great apostasy, the rise of the beast and false prophet, the terrible persecutions and cataclysmic events of the tribulational period must all precede the final establishment of the Kingdom of God, after the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ has finally "put all of his enemies beneath His feet" (1 Corinthians 1:1). As believers, we need to ask ourselves, "are we ready to meet the challenges of the last times?"

I. Global Eschatology The Plan of God for history, the world, mankind and angelic kind as a whole, bringing divine judgment, restoration and replacement to all things in a perfect and perfectly righteous way.

01A.01. God's Plan for Human History

1. God's Plan for Human History God created the material universe (Genesis 1:1). Therefore God controls the universe (Psalms 33:6-9).

God created time (Hebrews 1:1-2; cf. Acts 17:26; Psalms 74:16-17). Therefore God controls time (Psalms 75:2).

God is omniscient (Psalms 139:11-4). Therefore God knew everything in advance (Isaiah 46:10).

God is not reacting to the evil of this world (Psalms 33:10-11). Rather, God has planned every detail of history for our ultimate good (Romans 8:28-30; cf. Isaiah 25:1; Ephesians 1:11).

God desires the salvation of all of His creatures (Acts 17:27; John 3:16; Ephesians 3:11; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9; John 12:47 b). But God will be justified and vindicated over all who choose evil rather than good (Romans 3:4). "History" is the working out of the plan of God wherein His creatures demonstrate and confirm the fundamental choice they make for or against Jesus Christ (compare 1 Peter 1:2 with Exodus 9:16). Thus in all things, God is "in control" (Ephesians 2:1-10). But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of His heart through all generations. Psalms 33:11 NIV

01A.01A. Judgment, Restoration and Replacement I: Positional Victory

A. Judgment, Restoration and Replacement I: Positional Victory (Progeny and Promise) 1. Judgment I: of Satan and the universe a. The devil rebelled against God in eternity past (Isaiah 14:4-20; Ezekiel 28:12-19). b. God responded by devastating the earth and removing light from the universe (cf. the gap and disparity between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2; Isaiah 45:18).

2. Restoration I: of Earth a. God restored the earth to habitability and limited light to the universe in six literal days (Genesis 1:3-31; Genesis 2:4-5). b. The "fossil record" dates not from the earth's restoration but from the era of Satan's rebellion at some indeterminate time in the past (Genesis 1:1 compared with Genesis 2:4-5).

3. Replacement I: Adam and the Last Adam for Satan a. God created Man as a replacement for the devil and his rebellious angels (Genesis 1:26-30; Genesis 2:4-25). b. Without the temptation and fall, the human population of Eden would have rapidly expanded to the necessary replacement level (Genesis 1:28).

4. Satan's Reaction: The temptation and fall of Adam and Eve a. The devil assumed that by luring Adam and Eve into sin he would destroy God's plan to replace him (compare Genesis 2:17 with Genesis 3:4). b. But the fall of Man merely opened the way for salvation through the saving work of the Son of Man, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Genesis 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:22; 1 Corinthians 15:45).

01A.01B. The Focus of God's Plan, Jesus Christ, His Person and His Work

B. The Focus of God's Plan for Human History, Jesus Christ, His Person and His Work

1. The One Central Person of Human History: From the divine point of view, Jesus Christ, His Person and His work, is history, and our lives are defined and evaluated solely by our response to Him in faith or lack thereof (John 14:6; Romans 1:18-23; cf. Psalms 19:1-6; Acts 17:26-27; Hebrews 13:8).

2. The Two Phases of Human History: The Foreshadowing and Fulfillment of Jesus Christ: The Old and New Covenants: The cross divides history into two discrete phases, both referencing history's central Person, our Lord Jesus Christ. a. The Old Covenant: Looking ahead to the cross through rituals and animal sacrifices, the Old Covenant was characterized by shadows (i.e., belief in and anticipation of the Messiah and His sacrifice: Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8:5; Hebrews 10:1). b. The New Covenant: Looking back at the cross with the benefit of the entire canon of scripture, the New Covenant is characterized by reality (i.e., belief in and appreciation of the revelation of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice: Luke 2:32).

3. The Three Wilderness-Pilgrimage Eras of Human History: We believers are pilgrims and strangers in this world, walking the highway to Zion in the footsteps of Jesus Christ (Psalms 84:5-7; Hebrews 11:13-16; cf. 1 Chronicles 29:15; Psalms 39:12; Psalms 63:1; Psalms 119:19; Hebrews 11:37-38; Hebrews 13:13-14; 1 Peter 1:1; 1 Peter 2:11), sojourning here in the devil's world (1 John 5:19; cf. 1 Corinthians 7:29-31), and experiencing God's grace provision in this desert during one of three pilgrimage eras: a. The Gentile era: The first wilderness-pilgrimage era (Gentile) runs from the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden until the call of Abraham. Its pilgrim-believers are exclusively gentiles. In this era, there is an individual focus to the pilgrimage (i.e., following God as separate persons). b. The Jewish era: The second wilderness-pilgrimage era (Jewish) runs from the call of Abraham until the birth of Christ, when its completion is postponed till the commencement of the Tribulation. Its pilgrim-believers are primarily Jewish (along with gentiles in association with Israel). In this era, there is a national focus to the pilgrimage (i.e., following God as members or associates of a national community established by God and dedicated to Him, namely, Israel). c. The Church era: The third wilderness-pilgrimage era (Church) runs from the day of Pentecost until the onset of the Tribulation. Its pilgrim-believers are both Jews (the original branch) and gentiles (grafted into Israel) combined into the single body of Christ. In this era, there is a corporate focus to the pilgrimage (i.e., following God as intimate members of His family, the body of Christ which is the Church universal).

4. The Four Ages of Human History: The four ages of human history are defined by the nature of the revelation of Jesus Christ in each (represented by the faces of the four cherubs in Ezekiel chapter one and ten, and in Revelation chapter four): a. Gentile Age: Christ promised to all

humanity in general as Savior (Genesis 3:15-16). From Adam to Abraham. b. Jewish Age: Christ promised to Israel in particular as Messiah (Jeremiah 23:5-6). From Abraham to Christ. c. Church Age: Christ having been revealed in Person in the (virgin-born) flesh in humility as the suffering Servant (1 John 1:1-3). From the First Advent to the Second Advent. d. Millennial Age: Christ having been revealed in Person in the (resurrected) flesh in glory as the King (Isaiah 2:1-4). From the Second Advent to the New Jerusalem.

5. The Five Dispensational Divisions of Human History: God's dispensations or "stewardships" are periods of time distinguished by the different grace means He uses in each one to "dispense" through various "stewards" the resources of truth necessary for seeking Him to all those who desire to do so (Ephesians 3:2). a. Gentile Patriarchy: from Adam to Abraham God dispensed his truth and grace primarily through individuals like Enoch (Genesis 5:21-24; Hebrews 11:5), Noah (Genesis 6:9; Genesis 6:13-14; Hebrews 11:7) and Job (Job 1:8). b. Jewish Patriarchy: from Abraham to Moses God dispensed his truth and grace primarily through Jewish patriarchs beginning with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 15:12-16; Genesis 26:2-5; Genesis 28:13-15). c. The Mosaic Law: from Moses to Christ God dispensed his truth and grace primarily through the nation Israel (Isaiah 42:6; Isaiah 43:21; Isaiah 49:6; Acts 13:47). d. The Church Age: from Christ's first advent to His Second Advent God is dispensing his truth and grace exclusively through the Church of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:9-10; Ephesians 3:8-109; Colossians 1:25-27; 1 Timothy 1:4). God's dispensation of the truth at the present time is not now fixed or focused on any particular nation but has been handed over to all believers, namely, the Church at large (this shift in approach was signaled by our Lord in the parable of the tenants: Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-11; Luke 20:6-19). e. The Millennium: from Christ's return to the end of history God will dispense his truth and grace primarily through our Lord's direct rule of the world (Jeremiah 31:33-34; Isaiah 11:9, Revelation 21:1-27, Revelation 22:1-21).

6. The Six Chronological Periods of Human History: These six periods divide history from a secular point of view, listing in chronological order the significant divisions of human history rather than categorizing them on the basis of any spiritual significance (which is the basis for the five categories that precede and the one which follows). "Six" is the number of Man, and these six periods present history largely from the point of view of the devil's attacks on mankind. a. The Antediluvian Period: From the fall to the flood. Primary satanic target: true humanity. b. The Postdiluvian Gentile Period: From the flood to Abraham. Primary satanic target: freedom and law. c. The Jewish Period: From Abraham to Christ. Primary satanic target: the people and the nation of Israel. d. The Church Period: From Christ to the beginning of the Tribulation. Primary satanic target: the truth of the Word of God. e. The Tribulational Period: The seven years preceding the return of Christ. Primary satanic target: all of the above (humanity, freedom and law, Israel, truth) along with a particular emphasis on eradicating believers from the earth, as the devil employs any and all means available to him in the short time he has remaining. f. The Millennial Period: The thousand years following the return of Christ. Primary satanic target: the rule of Christ (attacked after Satan is released at the end of the period).

7. The Seven Days of Human History: Analogous to the seven, literal Genesis days God used for reconstruction of the earth, so also God has organized "human history" into seven millennial "days", that is, seven periods of one thousand years each, with the seventh being, like the seventh Genesis day, a period of rest:

Days 1 and 2: The Gentiles: (ca. 4065-2065 B.C.) a. The Antediluvian Civilization:

Time Frame: From Adam's fall to circa Noah.

Challenge to believers: To maintain and develop faith in God while transitioning from perfect environment to the hardships of the present world. b. The Division of the Nations:

Time Frame: From circa Noah to Abraham.

Challenge to believers: To maintain and develop faith in God in the face of unprecedented satanic attacks (i.e., the genetic dilution of Genesis chapter six, and Satan's post-flood attempt to establish one-world government).

Days 3 and 4: Israel: (ca. 2065-2 B.C.) [the 70 years of the Babylonian captivity excepted; the seven years of the Tribulation still future] c. The Nation of Israel:

Time Frame: From Abraham to circa David.

Challenge to believers: To maintain and develop faith in God as His unique witnesses (and as primary targets of the devil) in the midst of a pagan world. d. The Kingdom of Israel:

Time Frame: From circa David to Christ.

Challenge to believers: To maintain and develop faith in God as members (or associates) of His unique nation Israel (the central point of satanic opposition) in the midst of a world of devil-worshipping nations.

Days 5 and 6: The Church: (ca. 33-2033 A.D.) e. Centralized Christianity:

Time Frame: From Christ to circa the schism of the Church.

Challenge to believers: To maintain and develop faith in God despite growing opposition to the truth from monolithic, bureaucratic pseudo-Christianity. f. Decentralized Christianity:

Time Frame: From circa the schism of the Church to the Second Advent.

Challenge to believers: To maintain and develop faith in God in the face of mounting attacks on the truth from all quarters (religious, social, economic and political), culminating in the most intense period of pressure and opposition in human history, the Tribulation.

Day 7: The Kingdom of God (the Sabbath Day): (ca. 2033-3033 A.D.) g. The Millennium:

Time Frame: From the Second Advent of Christ to the Gog-Magog Rebellion.

Challenge to believers: To maintain and develop faith in God while transitioning from the devil's world to Christ's perfect rule over mankind (sinful human beings facing the ultimate prosperity test).

8. Evidence for the "Seven Days" Interpretation a. The construction of the ages: The ages of human history have been purposefully constructed by God for judging evil, restoring righteousness, and replacing evil-doers with faithful followers, all through the agency and saving work of His Son (Hebrews 11:3). b. The Millennium: The Millennium, the final period of human history and the only period of human history specifically named in scripture, is most definitely

described as a period of one thousand literal years (Revelation 20:1-7), and as a period of rest directly analogous to Genesis day 7 (Isaiah 61:2; Isaiah 63:4). c. Days and Millennia: While from the human perspective the difference between a day and a millennium is immense, to God, the Creator and Master of time, the difference between these two finite chronological periods is insignificant (Psalms 90:4; 2 Peter 3:8). d. Biblical Usage: The Bible often uses relatively short periods of time (hours, days, weeks) to designate much longer chronological periods, reflecting God's complete sovereignty over time:

1) The "year of redemption" in Isaiah 63:4 refers to the Millennium.

2) The "day of vengeance" in both Isaiah 34:8 and Isaiah 63:4 refers to the Millennium.

3) The "day of salvation" in Isaiah 49:8 refers to the Church's two thousand years in addition to the Millennium (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:1-2).

4) The "seventy sevens" prophecy of Daniel chapter nine uses each day of the "week" to represent a one year period (Daniel 9:25-27).

5) The "time, times and half a time" of Revelation 12:14 refers to the three and one half years of the Great Tribulation. (as in Daniel 4:16 the seven "times" are seven years). e. Biblical Chronology: The Bible records approximately 2000 years from Christ to Abraham and 2000 years from Abraham to Adam. With the Gentile and Jewish ages both covering ca. 2000 years, and that the Millennium, the final "day" in God's plan for human history, covering 1000 years, we posit a comparable 2000 years for the Church age. This results in a total of 7000 years wherein each millennium is reckoned as "a day" in God's system. f. The Analogy of the Week: As the Sabbath age, the Millennium of its own accord invites us to posit six prior thousand year "days". This is especially so when we consider that the original period of time wherein God began the process of restoration and replacement known as human history was the original week of seven days, also ending in a day of rest (Genesis 1:3 ff.). g. The Seven Days of Re-Creation: The seven day week is a reflection of God's overall design of human history. This can be seen by comparing the original week of re-creation with the millennial week it foreshadows. During the original seven days, God conducted a comprehensive restoration of the world which closely parallels His Plan for replacing Satan and his followers during the seven thousand years of human history. The Seven Genesis Days compared with the Seven Millennial Days:

h. The Jewish Ceremonial Calendar: The ceremonial calendar established by the Mosaic Law mirrors the overall progression of God's plan for human history, likewise evidencing the seven millennial days. This calendar is essentially composed of four "gaps" (periods of no festivals) separated by three, week-long festival clusters (Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and Tabernacles). The four gaps represent the gentile age, Jewish age, Church age, and Millennium respectively, and occur in the calendar in the same order as their chronological occurrence. The three week long festivals are symbolic of the last three ages of human history, the Jewish Age, Gentile Age and Millennium respectively. The three festivals, complete seven day weeks, each accomplish conceptually the symbolic task of designating one of these four major divisions of history, and as such appear in the exact same proportions as the overall history they represent (i.e., seven days each, a perfect whole, just as the plan of God for human history is likewise contained in seven millennial days). The increasing length of the gaps which follow these festivals represents the

proportion of believers called out in the Jewish Age, Gentile Age and Millennium respectively (with the stream of believers entering into the family of God growing ever larger until it reaches flood-tide in the Millennium). i. The Testimony of Irenaeus: The writings of Irenaeus, perhaps our last extra-biblical witness to the original New Testament eschatological teachings (before such views were squelched by the increasingly secular church), clearly show that this was the way in which he understood the critical passages of Psalms 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8. For, in *Adversus Omnes Haereses* 5.28.3, the millennial day interpretation is put as fact. j. The Problem of Science and the Bible: Differences between what the Bible teaches and the latest theories put forward by science about the construction of the universe need not cause believers concern, for the world was made by God in a manner and in a fashion which cannot be discerned through human skill (Hebrews 11:3; cf. 2 Peter 3:3-7; 2 Timothy 3:7-9) k. Chronology in the Bible:

1) As the Creator, God invented, created, and controls time and everything that takes place within it (Psalms 56:8; Psalms 139:16; Jeremiah 33:25; Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:11; 1 Peter 1:2).

2) It is not accidental that the Bible contains much chronological data.

3) To be useful to us, biblical chronological data must be correctly matched to the system of reckoning time we now use.

4) This process has a number of systemic problems, such as the A.D./B.C. shift, inclusive counting in biblical times, differences in the exact length of months and years as then reckoned, in the start times of years, and the use of multiple reckoning methods in the Bible.

5) Biblical chronological information, however, is not only absolutely accurate, but also extremely precise (cf. Exodus 12:40-42).

6) We have been given this information in order to know and understand the chronological facts the Bible records (Matthew 16:3; Matthew 24:32-35; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3).

7) As the ruler of time, it is within God's authority both to establish any system He desires (such as the seven millennial day system), and to "change the times and the seasons" should He so desire (Daniel 2:21). God is not bound to honor any human system of chronology.

9. Specific Chronology of the Seven Days of Human History a. The Life of Christ: From God's perspective, time, history is about Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ is the focus of history. Scripture calls the period of our Savior's earthly life the "conjunction of the Ages" (Hebrews 9:26; cf. Romans 5:6; Galatians 4:4; 1 Timothy 2:6; Titus 1:3; Hebrews 1:1-2; 1 Peter 1:20), and so it is, for His birth marks the postponement of the Jewish Age (cf. Matthew 11:12; Mark 1:15; Luke 12:49 ff.), while His death, resurrection and ascension to heaven signal the imminent commencement of the Church Age (Acts 1:4-5; cf. Matthew 27:51; Mark 7:27; John 2:4; John 7:8; Hebrews 9:10). Therefore all systems of biblical chronology must begin and end with Jesus Christ.

1) The Date of the Birth of Christ: Luke 3:1 states that John began baptizing "during the fifteenth imperial year of Tiberius" (i.e., from August 19th of A.D. 28 to August 18th of A.D. 29). Since Jesus was "about thirty" at the commencement of His public ministry (Luke 3:23), an event that post-dates the time when John began baptizing, the birth of Christ is to be fixed ca. 1-2 B.C.

2) The Date of the Census: The census described in Luke 2:1-3 is not the census of Quirinius. Properly translated, Luke 2:2 states that "this was a census which occurred prior to Quirinius' governorship of Syria". Luke's census was part of Augustus' universalization of the census process occurring empire-wide in seven year cycles. Since each cycle included a year of registration followed by a year of official recording, we conclude that Christ was born in 2 B.C. during the universal census of 2/1 B.C. (as Joseph and Mary journeyed to Bethlehem to fulfill their legal requirements during the year of registration).

3) The Date of the Crucifixion of Christ: Since John the baptist's ministry began sometime after August 19th of 28 A.D., the time-frame of September-October 28 A.D. has much to recommend it as the true start of John's ministry. This would fix Jesus' baptism and therefore the coincident start of Jesus' earthly ministry precisely at the point indicated by Luke (Luke 3:23), that is, at "approximately" (Greek *hosei*) the age of 30 years old in September-October of 30 A.D. (only weeks away from His thirtieth birthday assuming a December date). Following this reasoning, Passover of 33 A.D., three and one half years later, will be the correct date for the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord. Christ's earthly life is the center-piece of God's chronological design of human history, "the fullness of times" (Galatians 4:4), and "the conjunction of the ages" (Hebrews 9:26 b; cf. Hebrews 1:2). It is a 33 year interlude in the progression of the seven millennial days, which, aside from the final seven year of the Tribulation (cf. Daniel 9:20-27), marks the termination of the Jewish Age (Mark 1:15), and the commencement of the Church Age (Matthew 21:43; Mark 12:9; Luke 20:16). This thirty-three year interval, the exact period of time that David (a type of His coming Son) reigned in Jerusalem, is a grace period around which the rest of human history pivots, for within it Jesus Christ was offered to the world (though the world rejected Him). Christ's birth in 2 B.C. is the critical departure point for calculating God's historical timetable backward, while the date of His death and resurrection, 33 A.D., is the basis from which to reckon the scheme of history that follows. b. Days 4-3, and 2-1: Jewish and Gentile millennial days: Both the Age of the Gentiles and the Jewish Age comprise two millennial days each (as does the Church Age). Working backward from the birth of Christ in 2 B.C., biblical records reflect a four thousand year period from this date back to the fall of Adam when taking into consideration that: 1) The Age of Israel still has seven years to run (i.e., Daniel's 70th week, otherwise known as the Tribulation: Daniel 9:27), thus reducing Israel's two millennial days to 1993 years; and 2) The Babylonian captivity (586-516 B.C.), wherein Israel's functioning as God's mechanism for the distribution of His divine truth was held in abeyance, does not count against the two thousand years of the Jewish Age (thus adding 70 years to the chronology).

1) The Jewish Age (2165 - 2 B.C.): to 1444 B.C. (the Exodus): retrogressing 1442 years (from 2 B.C.) to the Exodus in 1444 B.C., based upon 1st Kings 6:1 which states that the 4th year of King Solomon's reign (ca. 964 B.C.) occurred 480 years after the Exodus (i.e., ca. 1444 B.C.). to 1874 B.C. (Jacob in Egypt): retrogressing from 1444 B.C. a further 430 years to the time of Jacob's arrival in Egypt, based upon Exodus 12:40 (which states that Israel remained in Egypt after Jacob's arrival exactly 430 years), and thus taking us to 1874 B.C. to 2004 B.C. (Jacob's birth): retrogressing from 1874 B.C. a further 130 years to Jacob's birth, based upon Genesis 47:9 where Jacob tells Pharaoh on his arrival in Egypt that he is 130 years old. to 2064 B.C. (Isaac's birth): retrogressing from 2004 B.C. a further 60 years to the birth of Isaac, based upon Genesis 25:26, where we learn that Isaac was sixty when Jacob was born. to 2065 B.C. (Abraham's circumcision):

retrogressing from 2064 B.C. one year to the circumcision of Abraham, the event which marks the beginning of the Jewish Age (Gen.17-18; cf. Romans 4:9-12). Subtracting from 2065 two years for the birth of Christ in 2 B.C. and seventy years for the Babylonian captivity, we are left with 1993 years, the entire two millennial days of the Jewish age (minus the 7 years of Daniel's 70th week, the yet future Tribulation).

2) The Age of the Gentiles (4065 - 2165 B.C.): to 2164 B.C. (Abraham's birth): retrogressing 99 years from 2065 to the birth of Abraham based upon Genesis 17:24. to 2456 B.C. (the flood): retrogressing 292 years from 2164 to the great flood by adding the intervals between generations from Abraham to Shem, based upon Genesis 11:10-26. to 3056 B.C. (Noah's birth): retrogressing 600 years to the birth of Noah by adding the intervals between generations from Shem to Noah, based upon Genesis 7:6 and 7:11 - 8:14. to 4112 B.C. (Adam's creation): retrogressing 1056 years to the creation of Adam by adding the intervals between generations from Noah to Adam, based upon Genesis 5:3-29. Allowing exactly 2,000 years for Age of the Gentiles from 2065 to 4065 and subtracting the latter figure from 4112, we posit that Adam sinned and was expelled from the garden at the chronological age of 47 (i.e., he was already mature when created, then fell 47 years after his mature creation).

c. Days 5 and 6: the two millennial days of the Church: The Church Age also comprises two millennial days. Working forward two complete thousand year periods from 33 A.D., the year of our Lord's crucifixion and resurrection, would bring us to the year 2033 A.D. as the date of our Lord's return and the beginning of His millennial reign. Subtracting seven years from this total, gives us the year 2026 A.D. as the time of the commencement of the seven year tribulational period. Although our Lord's crucifixion and resurrection occurred in the spring at the time of the Passover, the Tribulation will begin with the cycle of festivals occurring in the fall. The sixth month hiatus (between the spring and fall of 2026 A.D.) constitute the "half hour of silence" (Revelation 8:1), the final grace period before the commencement of that great "hour of testing" begins (Revelation 3:10).

d. The Break-points of the Three Pairs of Days: The occurrence of divinely significant events at the junctions of the ages is also a strong argument in favor of the millennial day interpretation advanced above. The Gentile, Jewish and Church Ages, though consisting of two millennial days each, are integral wholes or "pairs of days", with each divided from the other through the occurrence of the following unique events:

1) Gentile Age: Begins with the fall of Adam: The initial promise of the Messiah accompanies this event (Genesis 3:15; Genesis 3:21).

2) Jewish Age: Begins with the circumcision of Abraham: The specific promise of the Seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ, accompanies this event (Genesis 17:1-27).

3) Jewish Age: Ends with the birth of Christ: The Word becomes flesh through this event (John 1:14; see above on the time of Christ's earthly life as the unique conjunction of the ages).

4) Church Age: Begins with the death and resurrection of Christ: The promise of salvation has now been fulfilled (2 Corinthians 1:19-20), and the expansion of our Lord's Church begins.

5) Church Age: Ends with the return of Christ: The resurrection occurs and the kingdom commences at this time (Revelation 20:4-6)

e. Day 7: The Millennium: The Millennium is in many ways the capstone of the seven days of human history, a time of blessing as close to perfection as yet sinful mankind can experience, with, Satan, the prime instigator of evil, temporarily removed from the world (Revelation 21:1-3), and the Son of God Himself reigning upon the earth (Revelation 11:15). The Millennium will commence almost immediately following Christ's return (following a short period of purification: Daniel 12:11-12), and last for one thousand years (ca. 2033-3033). Following the elapse of the one thousand years, the devil will be released and a short period of human rebellion and swift divine judgment will ensue (Revelation 21:3; Revelation 21:7-10). Scripture is silent as to the length of this postscript to history (although it is "short": Revelation 21:3), but we do know that at its conclusion, the world as we know it will cease to exist, being subsumed forever by our eternal home, the New Heavens and the New Earth – a place where only righteousness will dwell (2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21:1-4; cf. Isaiah 60:21). This "new day" will have no end, as we who have chosen for God will have the inestimable privilege of living with Him and His Son forever (Revelation 22:3-5). The shifting of the "Lord's day" from the Saturday Sabbath (the seventh millennial day in history's seven day structure) to Sunday, is indicative and evocative of this "new day" that will never come to an end (cf. Revelation 1:10).

f. The Tribulational Overlap: The Tribulation's seven years belong both to the Church Age (its final seven years) and to the Jewish Age (its final seven years: Daniel's seventieth week; cf. Daniel 9:24-27). Both the Jewish and Church Ages are initially divided by the life of Christ (His birth marking the temporary end of the former and the beginning of the latter), but are ultimately joined together in the period preceding His Second Advent. This is fitting, in that both Jews and gentiles together form the true Body of Christ. Other indications that the final seven years of the Church Age run concurrently with the Tribulation include:

1) the fact that the completion of the gentile complement of the Body of Christ is coterminous with Israel's change of heart at the Second Advent (viz., at the end of the Tribulation: Romans 11:25-26).

2) the fact that this present era, described as "the times of the gentiles (that is to say, a time and a time [period] of 1,000 years each: Luke 21:24), will not come to an end as long as Jerusalem is "trodden under foot" (i.e., not until the return of Christ at the end of the Tribulation).

3) the fact that the current Church Age trend of antichrist-type deceivers will only reach its culmination with the unveiling of the antichrist during the Tribulation (1 John 2:18).

4) the fact that the prophesied (and already observable) trend towards apostasy on the part of the Church will only reach its fulfillment in the Tribulation (compare Revelation 3:14-20 with 2 Thessalonians 2:3).

5) the fact that the Church Age is in a very real and scriptural way part of the "end times" (1 Corinthians 10:11; Hebrews 1:2; 1 Peter 1:20; 1 John 2:18), a principle that makes little sense if it is to be excluded from the conclusive period of the "last days", the Tribulation.

6) the fact that much of our hope as Christians consists in our looking forward eagerly to the return of our Lord, an event that will take place at the end of the Great Tribulation (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Titus 2:13).

7) the fact that, in this way, the Church Age will end in the same miraculous fashion in which it was ushered in, with great satanic opposition, and surpassingly great divine provision and manifestation (cf. Joel 2:28-32, a passage equally applicable to Pentecost and the events preceding the Second Advent: compare with Acts 2:16-1; cf. Isaiah 32:15; Isaiah 44:3; Jeremiah 31:33-34; Ezekiel 36:24-27; Ezekiel 37:9; Zechariah 12:10).

01A.01C. Things to Come: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement Phases 2 & 3

C. Things to Come: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement Phases I, II and III: The plan of God, as set forth here, can be seen as working in three distinct phases. This three phase process, consisting of Judgment, Restoration and Replacement, phases I, II, and III respectively, is God's plan for total victory in response to the rebellion of Satan, and is given here in overview (for details on Phase I, see above; for details on Phases II and III, see below):

1. Phase I: Constitution: Lays the foundation for the eternal victory (the "much" phase). a. Judgment I: the Genesis Gap: Judgment is passed upon Satan and his angels while the devil's original headquarters, the pre-historic earth, is devastated and the original universe plunged into darkness. See section A.2 above. b. Restoration I: the Seven Days of Re-creation: Earth is restored to a habitable environment (during the Seven Days of Re-creation). See section A.2 and section B.8.g above. c. Replacement I: the First and the Last Adams: The creation of the first Adam begins the human race (the source of eventual replacement for Satan and his angels). The gift of the Last Adam, Jesus Christ, provides the grace necessary for the salvation of the human race after the fall through the Messiah's work on the Cross. The Church can then be called out for replacement. See section A.3 above.

2. Phase II: Completion: Realizes eternal objectives with victory in time (the "more" phase) a. Judgment II: the Tribulation: God's judgment upon the devil's kingdom and upon his earthly subjects. Satan and his angels are expelled from heaven and later imprisoned b. Restoration II: the Millennium: Earth is restored to an environment of blessing. c. Replacement II: Christ the King and His Church: Christ the King replaces Satan as the de facto ruler of the earth. The Church is resurrected in replacement.

3. Phase III: Consummation: Crowns the victory with surpassing blessing (the "most" phase) a. Judgment III: the Final Judgment: Satan and his angels are removed to the lake of fire along with unbelieving humanity (following the Great White Throne judgment). b. Restoration III: the New Heavens and the New Earth: The New Heavens, New Earth and New Jerusalem provide an unparalleled and eternal environment of perfect blessing. c. Replacement III: the Advent of the Father: Along with Christ, the Father will rule forever from earth. The Church is complemented by the double portion of millennial believers.

01A.01D. God's Disposition of Satan: A Historical Overview

D. God's Disposition of Satan: A Historical Overview 1. God's initial disposition of Satan: a. God's First Best Will Rejected: Although created in perfection and inhabiting a perfect universe, Satan and his followers rejected God's perfect plan for them, choosing rebellion instead of obedience. b. Judgment and Demotion: Having rejected God and mutinied against Him, Satan and his followers were judicially condemned by God for their rebellion and removed from their positions of service to Him (John 16:11; cf. Job 4:18; Job 15:15; Job 21:22; Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10). c. Judgment on the Universe: The original heavens and earth, having been contaminated by the sinful actions of the devil and his followers (cf. Job 25:5), were summarily judged by God, and plunged into utter darkness (Genesis 1:1-2). d. The Delay of Execution: Having judged the universe, God nevertheless deferred execution of Satan's sentence pending the completion of an as yet unforeseen event: human history (cf. Genesis 6:3; Romans 2:4; Romans 3:25-26; Romans 9:22; 2 Peter 3:9; 2 Peter 3:15). This delay, which we call human history, accomplished the following:

1. The glorification of God through the successful completion of His plan (centered upon His Son, Jesus Christ) in all its particulars despite all opposition.

2. The vindication of God by demonstrating the devil's complete recalcitrance and unwillingness to repent in contrast to God's faithfulness toward His new creature, Man. God is thereby vindicated in His judgments (Psalms 116:11; Romans 3:4), and justified by keeping all promises of salvation to mankind despite satanic opposition (Isaiah 49:9; John 16:11).

3. The replacement of what was lost through Satan's rebellion in a manner that has ensured the free will choice of those who replace the devil and his followers. e. First Parole: Satan was allowed the freedom to observe God's reconstruction of the world and His commencement of the process of replacement through the creation of mankind (Genesis 3:1-7). f. The Last Olive Branch: Rather than drawing the appropriate conclusions from the creation of Man (i.e., that God is invincible and therefore that the carrying out His sentence against the devil was inevitable), Satan rejected this last, tacit overture on God's part and used his freedom of action instead to recommence his rebellion, this time on the battlefield of human history (Genesis 3:1-7).

2. God's interim disposition of Satan: a. Imprisonment: With the 2nd Advent of Jesus Christ, the devil and his followers will be imprisoned in the Abyss for the duration of the Millennium so as to remove all satanic influence from the Messiah's Kingdom (Revelation 20:1-3). b. Second Parole: At the conclusion of the Millennium, Satan and his angels will be temporarily released and will stir up the peaceful world of that time for one final assault upon God (Psalms 2:1 ff.; Revelation 20:7-10). The willingness of so many human beings to reject the perfect reign of Christ and the willingness of the devil to lead them in this last futile attempt to oppose God provides the final incontrovertible proof that evil and the rejection of God is not circumstantial, but flows from the free will choice of creatures.

3. God's final disposition of Satan: At the conclusion of the Gog-Magog revolution and just prior to the creation of the pristine and holy New Heavens and New Earth, the sentence imposed upon the devil and his angels before human history began will finally be carried out (Isaiah 14:3-23; Isaiah 24:21-23; Isaiah 34:1-5; Ezekiel 28:11-19; Jeremiah 10:11; Daniel 4:35; Luke 10:18-20; 1 Corinthians 6:3; Revelation 20:7-10), and they will be consigned to the lake of fire at that point and forevermore (Revelation 20:10). The lake of fire and his final disposition in it (along with all creatures who chose to follow him instead of God) will stand as an eternal memorial to the folly of rejecting God and His mercy (Revelation 14:10; cf. Isaiah 66:24; Revelation 19:3). For by trying to replace God and His Son instead of serving them, Satan finds himself replaced by the Son who was born into the devil's world to refute and defeat him through the victory of the cross (Luke 10:18; John 12:31; Romans 16:20; Hebrews 2:14; 1 Peter 3:22; 1 John 3:8).

01A.02. The Tribulation Defined

2. The Tribulation Defined The Tribulation is the cataclysmic seven year period which precedes the Second Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. It comprises the final seven years of the Church Age as well as the final seven years of the Jewish Age (Daniel 9:24-27). As its primary name indicates, the Tribulation will be a period of intense judgment and severe trial – judgment from God against the unbelieving world, and persecution for believers at the hands of our adversary the devil and his earthly representative, antichrist (Isaiah 24:1-6; Isaiah 26:20-21; Jeremiah 23:19-20; Jeremiah 30:23-24; Daniel 8:19; Daniel 11:36; 2 Peter 3:10).

A. The Tribulation: Derived from the root thlib (θλιβ), meaning "to exert pressure", the Greek word thlipsis (θλιψις) is used commonly in secular Greek for discomfort, extreme difficulty, and, in general, physical and emotional pressures of every sort. In scripture too, the word is not restricted to being a technical term for the future time of distress we call the Tribulation, but often refers to personal tribulation here and now (cf. John 16:21; John 16:33). However, thlipsis is the most common term employed to designate the final, intense trial of human history which we have come to call the Tribulation (Matthew 24:21; Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:19; Mark 13:24; cf. Daniel 12:1).

B. The Great Tribulation: Scripture also distinguishes between the Tribulation as a whole (i.e., the entire seven year period of the apocalypse) and "the Great Tribulation", a term which properly refers to second half of this period (i.e., the final three and a half years before the return of our Lord Jesus Christ). The Great Tribulation will be the time of greatest pressure and intensity of persecution in human history as the Great Apostasy of the first half is replaced by the Great Persecution of the second half (Matthew 24:21; Revelation 7:14).

C. The Apocalypse: The book of Revelation is sometimes entitled "the Apocalypse" (Revelation 1:1), since "apocalypse" is an English transliteration of the Greek word which means "revelation" or "unveiling" (i.e., apokalypsis, αποκάλυψις). However, the full Greek title of the book is "the Revelation of Jesus Christ", and it is well to note that it is Jesus Christ who is unveiled to the world in all His glory when He returns at the end of the Tribulation (Luke 17:30; 1 Corinthians 1:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:7; 1 Peter 1:13; 1 Peter 4:13; Revelation 1:1). At that time, we, His bride, will be unveiled with Him (Romans 8:19; cf. Romans 16:25-26; Galatians 3:23; Ephesians 3:5-6). The term "apocalypse" or "revelation", therefore, is truly focused on the end of the Tribulation and our blessed hope of resurrection and reunion with our Lord (1 Corinthians 1:7-8; 2 Thessalonians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:7; Revelation 1:1).

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

E. Daniel's 70th Week: The final "seven" in the vision of the seventy sevens (or "weeks" of years) given to Daniel (Daniel 9:20-27) is a clear reference to the Tribulation. In the middle of the final

week of years, for example, the "abomination of desolation" is set up in the temple by antichrist ("the prince who is coming", Daniel 9:26; cf. Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14).

F. The Hour of Testing: Because of their faithful service, the Philadelphia generation of the Church would not pass through the Tribulation (Revelation 3:10).

G. Other Passages: There are also many other places in scripture where the Tribulation is referenced without the use of specific terminology (e.g., Genesis 49:18; Daniel 8:17-19; Isaiah 2:2; Acts 2:17; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:1; James 3:5; 2 Peter 3:3-7; Jude 1:17-18).

01A.03. The Seven Churches of Revelation

3. The Seven Churches of Revelation The seven churches of Revelation 2:1-29, Revelation 3:1-22, in addition to being seven literal and historical local churches existing in the apostle John's day, are also prophecies that outline the trends and characteristics of the seven eras of our own Church Age, an interpretation evidenced as follows:

John's apostolic authority (especially as the last apostle) extended to the entire Church, not just these seven (1 Corinthians 9:1-5; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Galatians 2:7-9). This is not a message designed by him to address specific issues in particular churches (as 1-3 John), but a message given by God to the seven "churches" (Revelation 1:10 : the definite article is significant here, because there were clearly more than seven local churches at the time of writing). Our Lord Jesus Christ is and was concerned for His entire Church, not just for these seven local churches. This revelation of His Person is clearly meant to be for His entire bride, whole Church universal, and not merely for a very small portion of it. The book of Revelation is the heritage of the entire Church. It is meant to bless all who read it (Revelation 1:3), and meant to show all who consider it (Revelation 22:6) what will happen in the end times.

Revelation, after beginning with the messages to the seven churches in chapters two and three moves immediately to the history of the end times on the far side of the Church Age's two millennial days. The book is indisputably focused on the conclusion of the Church Age, so that the preceding messages to the seven churches only make structural sense as an overview of the intervening two millennia. The seven lampstands cannot well be understood as only these seven local churches, for they are seen alone in the presence of Christ in chapter one (Revelation 1:12-13), and again alone in the presence of the Father's throne in chapter four (Revelation 4:5). The lampstands, light-giving bodies which represent the role of the Church universal in reflecting the truth of Christ in this dark world, and doing so as a totality in both instances, must therefore represent more than seven local churches in the first century. The description of Jesus Christ as "in the midst" of the seven lampstands, holding the seven stars, the angels of these churches (Revelation 1:12-16), is symbolism which strongly suggests His authority over the Church, and the entire Church at that, and would be very hard to apply exclusively to seven local churches. The number seven, the number of perfection in the Bible, also argues for these seven "churches" to be a symbolic representation of one complete Church (cf. the seven spirits of Isaiah 11:1-2 and Revelation 4:5 standing symbolically for the one and only Holy Spirit). The text of Revelation 4:1 "what must take place [i.e. the Tribulation and following] after these things [i.e., the "events" of the seven churches]" only makes good sense if the seven churches be taken as the aggregate period of time between John's penning of these words and the commencement of the Tribulation.

Finally, it is appropriate for the last book of the Bible to be addressed to Christ's entire Church (rather than merely to seven local ones). The composition of the seven eras represented by the seven churches may be summarized as follows:

1. Ephesus: 12 years 70 to 82 A.D. "The Era of Transition"

2. Smyrna: 360 years 82 to 442 A.D. "The Era of Persecution"
3. Pergamum: 360 years 442 to 802 A.D. "The Era of Accommodation"
4. Thyatira: 360 years 802 to 1162 A.D. "The Era of Compromise"
5. Sardis: 360 years 1162 to 1522 A.D. "The Era of Corruption"
6. Philadelphia: 360 years 1522 to 1882 A.D. "The Era of Revival"
7. Laodicea: 144 years 1882 to 2026 A.D. "The Era of Degeneration" The relationship of each Church era to false teaching and the infiltration of unbelieving elements into the Church-visible may be summarized as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Laodicea: No group mentioned [the false has infiltrated and blunted the true Church].

01A.04. The Tribulation's First Half

4. The Tribulation's First Half

A. The Restraining Ministry of the Holy Spirit: Before the Tribulation can begin, God's restraint on the devil in the Person of the Holy Spirit must be removed (2 Thessalonians 2:6-7). Before the removal of the Spirit's restraining ministry, Satan is unable to set up antichrist's kingdom (2 Thessalonians 2:8-12). The removal of this restraint is symbolized by the opening up of the seven seals of Revelation (Revelation 6:1-17; cf. 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 1:13-14; Ephesians 4:30), which restrain the Tribulation described in the scroll until the Lamb unseals the scroll.

1. Previous Restraining Ministries of the Holy Spirit: a. Preventing satanic activity on the devastated earth until God's seven-day reconstruction of it (Genesis 1:1-2). b. Preventing the satanic seed of the Nephilim from completely destroying true humanity until God's judgment of that seed in the great flood (Genesis 6:3). c. Specific restraint of other satanic activities (Matthew 16:19; Matthew 18:18; John 20:22-23; Acts 5:3; Acts 5:9). d. General restraint of evil (cf. Genesis 11:6; Deuteronomy 32:8; Job 12:23; Psalms 74:17; Jeremiah 18:7-10; Acts 17:26-28).

2. Restraining the "Mystery of Lawlessness": The mystery of lawlessness, that is, the growing satanic influence in the world, is already at work (2 Thessalonians 2:7; cf. 1 John 2:18-22; 1 John 4:3; 2 John 1:7). However, during the Tribulation, an exponential expansion of the present "mystery of lawlessness" constituting an unprecedented unleashing of sin and evil world-wide will occur as a direct result of the removal of the barriers put up by the Spirit, and of the devil's consequent exploitation of this opportunity (Matthew 24:12; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; 2 Peter 3:3-7; 1 John 2:18; Jude 1:17-18).

3. Restraining the "Man of Lawlessness": The rise to power of antichrist, the "man of lawlessness" and his "unveiling" to and acceptance by the unbelieving world as a god will only be allowed to occur once the Tribulation has begun, and only after the deliberate and purposeful removal of Holy Spirit restraint symbolized in these seven seals (2 Thessalonians 2:1-8; cf. 1 John 2:18-22; 1 John 4:3; 2 John 1:7).

4. Protection of Believers to Continue during the Tribulation: Even after the removal of the Spirit's restraint of lawlessness and of antichrist, believers will still enjoy the presence of the Spirit and all the divine protection which this sealing ensures. Instead of restraining the world and us in it, we will then be protected in the midst of an unrestrained world for as long as we are in it (2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 1:13-14; Ephesians 4:30; cf. Ezekiel 9:1-11; John 6:27; 1 Peter 1:1-2).

B. The Sealing of the 144,000: Like the 12 and the 70 sent forth as representatives of our Lord to prepare the hearts of His countrymen for the nearness of the Kingdom, the 144,000 are representatives of our Lord sent to prepare the hearts of His countrymen for the coming of the Kingdom in its tangible reality (Revelation 7:1-8; Revelation 14:1-5; cf. Matthew 10:1-42; Mark 6:7-12; Luke 9:1-6; Luke 10:1-20). Thus, as Second Advent messengers, the 144,000 will have a

similar role and similar function to that of the 12 and the 70. As the special representatives of Jesus Christ to the Jewish people, it is fitting that the 144,000 will not only adhere to the same mandates set down by our Lord for the 12 and the 70, but will also approximate His life and His walk (in so far as sinful human beings can do).

1. Characteristics of the 144,000 and their Ministry: a. They are Jewish: Just as our Lord, in His humanity, is clearly Jewish (Luke 3:23-38; Romans 9:5), so His 144,000 special emissaries to Israel are very clearly described as belonging to the twelve tribes of Israel (12,000 from each tribe named). Just as clearly, they are also Christians, that is, Jewish believers and followers of Jesus Christ, "servants of our God" (Revelation 7:3). The exclusion of gentiles from their number is a necessity. This will be a unique ministry with a unique purpose and will thus have correspondingly unique requirements, most especially the need to understand the Jewish point-of-view, and to avoid giving offense (Matthew 27:18; Acts 13:43-45; Acts 17:5; Acts 22:21-22; Romans 10:2; cf. Luke 15:25-32). b. They are male: Just as our Lord is male, and so these 144,000 who are chosen to spread the good news of His imminent return to the lost sheep of Israel are also male (viz., they are described in the Greek with masculine modifiers only). This is also a necessity to avoid giving offense in the Jewish tradition (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:19-23). c. They are virgins: Just as our Lord remained a virgin throughout His earthly life, so shall His 144,000 precursors who will begin to turn the hearts of Israel back to Him (Revelation 14:4; cf. 1 Corinthians 7:7-8; 1 Corinthians 9:5-6). d. They are sent to evangelize Israel: Just as our Lord became a "Minister to the circumcision" (Romans 15:8; cf. Acts 3:26), sent "to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matthew 15:24; cf. the twelve: Matthew 10:6), so the mission of the 144,000 will be directed to the Jewish people (Matthew 10:5; Matthew 10:18; Matthew 10:23; Luke 10:1), although it will be a worldwide as opposed to a centralized ministry (cf. Revelation 14:6-7). e. They are given the authority to perform miracles: Just as our Lord performed miracles in part as a badge of His authority that clearly marked Him out as the true Son of God and the Messiah (John 5:36; John 10:25; John 10:38; John 14:11; cf. Matthew 11:1-6; Luke 7:18-23), so miracles will be given to the 144,000 to perform as a witness to the fact that they speak with the authority of God:

Healing the sick (Matthew 10:1; Matthew 10:8; Mark 6:7; Luke 9:1-2; Luke 10:9; compare Matthew 4:24 et passim in the gospels; and Acts 5:15-16; Acts 8:5-7; Acts 28:8-9).

Driving out demons (Matthew 10:1; Matthew 10:8; Mark 6:7; Mark 6:12; Luke 9:1; Luke 10:17; Luke 10:20; compare Luke 8:26-37 et passim in the gospels; and Acts 5:16; Acts 8:7; Acts 16:16-18; Acts 19:11-13).

Raising the dead (Matthew 10:8; compare Mark 5:37-43; Luke 7:11-17; John 11:1-44; and Acts 9:36-42; Acts 20:7-12).

Miraculous protection from dangers (Luke 10:19; compare Luke 4:28-30; John 7:30; John 8:59; John 10:39; and Acts 12:1-10; Acts 28:3-6). f. They are subject to a special code of conduct: Just as our Lord adopted a "servant life-style" throughout His earthly life (Php 2:5-10; cf. Isaiah 42:1-25; Isaiah 49:1-26; Isaiah 52:1-15; Isaiah 53:1-12; Matthew 20:28; Luke 22:27; John 1:1 with John 1:14; John 5:18; John 10:30; John 14:9; John 17:5; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Romans 8:3; Romans 9:5; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; 1 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 2:9-18; Hebrews 10:5-10), so the ministry of the 144,000 will require extreme commitment: They will remain celibate (Revelation 14:4). Their help (healing, etc.) and their message will be offered on a grace basis, without charge (Matthew 10:8).

They will be entirely dependent upon God's day by day provision (Matthew 10:9-10; Luke 19:3; Luke 10:4). Their ministry will be conducted in a serious and purposeful fashion (Luke 10:4).

They will maintain an itinerant lifestyle (Luke 9:6; Matthew 10:11; Matthew 10:23).

They will maintain an overt and above-board dependence upon the charity of those they minister to (Matthew 10:11-15; Luke 9:4; Luke 10:5-7), but without any opportunity to amass surplus (i.e., only "room and board", trophes in Matthew 10:10).

They will maintain an overt and above-board policy of seeking and accepting support, searching diligently for a "worthy" house (a policy which will entail many nights spent in the open in travel and prior to finding a "worthy" house: Matthew 10:11-15; Luke 9:4; Luke 10:5-7).

They will maintain an overt and above-board policy of removing themselves from a particular mission field only 1) when the mission is completed (Matthew 10:11; Luke 9:4; Luke 10:7); 2) if the town proves unworthy (Luke 9:5; cf. Luke 10:10-12); 3) if forced to leave by persecution (Matthew 10:23).

They will be careful and circumspect in every aspect of their manner of life, thereby not giving offense on their own behalf in any way, but keeping the focus on the gospel message (Matthew 10:16-17).

They will make their complete faith in God obvious to all from the total reliance they will display in His protection in times of trouble (Matthew 10:16-20).

They will conduct their ministries courageously, openly proclaiming the gospel in spite of any and all consequences (Matthew 10:26-31).

They will resolutely demonstrate uncommon perseverance in a variety of threatening circumstances (Matthew 10:32-39).

They will courageously continue their ministries despite threats and opposition, departing only at the point when persecution makes further work impossible (Matthew 10:23). g. They will face stiff opposition: The 144,000 will be spoken against vociferously not only by gentile unbelievers, but also by those of their fellow Jews who have determined in their hearts not to accept their witness and return to God through Jesus Christ (Matthew 10:17; Matthew 10:21; cf. Isaiah 6:9-10; Isaiah 53:1; John 1:11; John 12:37-41). They will be betrayed by their own family members (Matthew 10:21; Matthew 10:35-37), hated by all men (Matthew 10:22), slandered (Matthew 10:24-25), imprisoned, tortured and falsely accused (Matthew 10:17-20), persecuted (Matthew 10:23), knowing no peace (Matthew 10:34), running their course as did our Lord, as did his apostles among ravening "wolves" (Matthew 10:16; Luke 10:3), faithful until the appointed end when they will give up their lives in the service of God's gospel (Matthew 10:39; Revelation 14:1-5). h. They will receive miraculous protection during the days of their ministry: The invisible seal on the foreheads of the 144,000 marks them out as special servants of God (Revelation 7:1-8). The sealing of the 144,000 is an assurance from God to them of His special superintendence of their lives and ministries, invisible to men, but obvious and understood by all angelic creatures, elect and fallen (cf. Ezekiel 9:1-6). Although their ministry will involve incredible risks, they will receive miraculous protection (Luke 10:19; compare Luke 4:28-30; John 7:30; John 8:59; John 10:39; and Acts 12:1-10; Acts 28:3-6). i. They will be martyred at the conclusion of their ministry: The 144,000

will be the first martyrs of Great Persecution of antichrist which takes place during the Tribulation's second half (Revelation 14:3-4; Revelation 17:6; cf. Matthew 10:23; Luke 21:12-19).

2. The Course of the Ministry of the 144,000 a. Some particulars of their ministry: Just as the twelve, and the 70, and John's disciples did not operate in a vacuum, but were selected, commissioned, and sent out by Jesus and John respectively (cf. Matthew 10:7; Mark 6:7; Luke 9:1), so the 144,000 will operate under the specific, earthly direction of the "two witnesses", Moses and Elijah, the prophetic counterparts of Jesus and John respectively. And just as the two witnesses are to conduct a ministry that will gain worldwide attention from its central location in Jerusalem (Zechariah 4:11-14; Zechariah 11:1-13), so the ministry of this famous pair will be projected, augmented and paralleled by the ministries of thousands of other pairs of the 144,000 serving around the globe under their supervision. b. The content of their message: The content of the message preached by our Lord Jesus Christ, as well as by John, Moses and Elijah, the 12, the 70, and the 144,000 is all one and the same, namely the gospel of the kingdom, the call to repent and turn back to God through faith in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. There is also, it must be said, an urgency to the message so given in all these cases, precisely because of the imminence of events (Malachi 4:4-6; Matthew 3:1-2; Matthew 4:17; Matthew 10:7; Mark 1:14; Mark 6:12; Luke 9:2; Luke 10:1; Luke 10:1, Luke 10:11; Acts 13:24; Revelation 11:3; Revelation 11:7; Revelation 14:1-6; Revelation 17:6). c. The results of their ministry: Although in large part the ministry of the 144,000 will not come to fruition until Israel returns en masse to the Lord at the Second Advent (Joel 2:30-32; Zechariah 12:10; Matthew 24:29-30; Romans 11:25-27; Revelation 1:7), there is ample evidence from prophecy to show that a sizeable (though unspecified) number will respond directly to the message of the 144,000. In Revelation chapter twelve (and elsewhere: Matthew 24:15-22; Mark 13:14-23; Luke 21:20-24), we find a large remnant of Jewish believers in Israel who are persecuted by antichrist immediately following the Tribulation's mid-point and are subsequently forced to flee into the desert for refuge. d. Parallels to the ministry of Christ, and also of John, Moses, Elijah, and the Apostles: The ministry of the 144,000 bears many resemblances to the most impressive divine ministries which have preceded them. These parallels are important to take note of, because they emphasize both the importance and the nature of the ministry of the 144,000, both points which we have been stressing since the beginning of this section. For the 144,000 are all ...

Jewish males: As are Christ, John, Moses, Elijah, and the apostles.

Unmarried: As are Christ, John, Elijah, and Paul.

Miraculously protected: As are Christ (Luke 4:28-30; John 7:30; John 8:59; John 10:39), Moses (Numbers 16:1-50, Numbers 17:1-13), Elijah (2 Kings 1:1-18), and the apostles (Acts 12:1-10; Acts 28:3-6).

Evangelists to Israel: As are Christ (Matthew 15:24; Luke 2:34), John (Matthew 3:7-10; Luke 1:67-80), Moses, Elijah, and Peter (Galatians 2:7).

Preachers of restoration to God: As are Christ (Luke 4:14-21), John (Luke 1:17 ; John 1:7), Elijah (Matthew 4:4-6), and the apostles (Acts 3:17-21).

Performers of exceptional miracles: As are Christ (Mark 5:37-43; Luke 7:11-17; John 11:1-44), Moses (Exodus 4:1-17; Acts 7:36), Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-24), and the apostles (Acts 9:36-42; Acts

20:7-12).

Subject to a demanding "code of conduct": As are Christ (Matthew 4:1-11), John (Matthew 3:4; Luke 1:80), Elijah (1 Kings 17:1-16), and Paul (1 Corinthians 4:8-13; 2 Corinthians 4:7-12; 2 Corinthians 6:3-10; 2 Corinthians 11:16-33; Php 3:7-11).

Confronted by fierce opposition: As are Christ (Luke 4:29; John 7:1; John 8:40), John (Matthew 14:1-5), Moses (Acts 7:39), Elijah (1 Kings 18:16-17; 1 Kings 19:1-2), and the apostles (Acts 5:17-42).

Consistent in flawless behavior (Revelation 14:4-5): As is Christ (John 8:46; Acts 8:32-35; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 1:19).

Serving a three and one half year ministry: As did Christ, Elijah (James 5:17), and John.

Martyred at the conclusion of their ministry (Revelation 14:3): As was Christ, John (Matthew 14:6-12), and the apostles (cf. John 21:18-19).

Standing as an offering of "first-fruits" to God (Revelation 5:9): As does Christ (1 Corinthians 15:23; cf. Leviticus 23:9 ff.). e. The omission of the tribe of Dan: The overarching reason for Dan's non-inclusion within the ranks of the 144,000 is the fact that antichrist will be descended from this tribe (Genesis 49:16-18; cf. Genesis 3:16). This removal of one the twelve tribes for betrayal and satanic allegiance parallels the removal of Judas from the number of the twelve apostles (replaced by Paul). f. Their reward: The 144,000 will be granted the special status of "first-fruits", a unique and preeminent martyrdom (Revelation 14:1), a special, memorial anthem (Revelation 14:3), and a unique place beside the King of Kings and Lord of Lords forevermore (Revelation 14:4). So important is their ministry that those who support them, even in seemingly trivial ways, will be rewarded as well (Matthew 10:13; Matthew 10:40-42).

C. The Lamb, the Scroll, and the Seven Seals: In Revelation 5:1-14 the scroll which represents the Father's bequest to His Son (i.e., His "revelation" to the world as its Lord and King), and therefore describes the events which lead up to His Kingdom (namely the Tribulation, Armageddon, the Second Advent, and the divine dispositions and judgments which follow) is opened by the Lamb who alone is worthy to do so. Jesus is "the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29; cf. John 1:36; 1 Peter 1:19; Isaiah 53:7), and by His death for us He has won the right to remove the seals of the scroll and bring in His glorious Kingdom. The seven seals on the scroll which must be opened before this process begins have a dual symbolism, individually representing events which are set in motion by their removal, and collectively representing the power which now restrains these trends, namely, God the Holy Spirit in His ministry as the Restrainer.

1. The first four seals: These represent four major trends related to antichrist and his kingdom which begin during the Tribulation's first half (Revelation 6:1-8):

#1. The White horse: Antichrist's Conquests: the trend of warfare and aggression.

#2. The Red horse: Civil Discord: the trend of lawlessness and political destabilization.

#3. The Black horse: Economic Constraint: the trend of economic dislocation & famine.

#4. The Pale-green horse: Accelerated Mortality: the trend of plague and rampant death.

2. The fifth and sixth seals: These represent the two major events of the second half or Great Tribulation, namely the Great Persecution of the true Church by the beast, and the extraordinary judgments which precede the return of our Lord (Revelation 6:9-17):

#5. The Martyrs: the Great Persecution: martyrdom of believers at the hands of the beast and his religion.

#6. Judgments: the Second Advent: both its preliminary and concomitant judgments.

3. The seventh seal: This represents removal of the final impediment to unleashing the Tribulation as well as the inevitable and blessed results on its farther side, namely, the coming Kingdom of our Lord.

#7. The Commencement: the Tribulation Begins: following a half hour of silence (six months), the final seven year period begins in the wake of the removal of the Spirit's restraining ministry.

D. The Great Apostasy: Coming about as a direct result of intensified satanic activity administered by antichrist and directed against believers, the Great Apostasy is a massive falling away from the faith by a third of Christians predicted to begin during the Tribulation's first half and destined to reach its culmination during the Great Persecution of the Tribulation's second half (Daniel 8:10-12; Daniel 8:23; Daniel 11:29-35; Matthew 24:3-13; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4; 1 Timothy 4:1; Revelation 12:4; cf. Revelation 6:9-11; Revelation 7:9-17; Revelation 12:12-17; Revelation 13:10; Revelation 13:11-18; Revelation 14:13; Revelation 14:14-16; Revelation 15:1-4; Revelation 16:5-6; Revelation 17:6; Revelation 18:24; Revelation 19:1-2; Revelation 20:4).

1. The Process of Apostasy: Turning away from God and away from the Person of His Son is, in general, not an immediately obvious thing, and, rather than an event, is more often a process wherein the believer progressively violates his conscience, giving himself over to sin to such a degree that he is eventually forced to make a final choice between God and repentance on the one hand, or sin and reprobation on the other. For, at some point, continuing on the wrong road far enough and willfully enough will eventually and inevitably lead to the complete breakdown of the conscience and result in the "shipwreck" of faith (1 Timothy 1:18-19). When the believer stops believing altogether, then he/she is no longer a believer (Matthew 24:10-13). The specific, biblical process involved here is the "hardening of the heart", that is a gradual loss of response and sensitivity to one's conscience, to the known will of God, and to one's commitment to following Jesus Christ as a true and faithful disciple (1 Corinthians 10:11-12; Hebrews 3:12-19; James 1:14-15; 1 John 5:16).

2. The Situation of the Church and "church-visible" on the Eve of the Tribulation: Two problems confront the contemporary Church which make it particularly vulnerable to the coming Great Apostasy: 1) the fact that not all who represent themselves as Christians really are believers in and followers of our Lord Jesus Christ, with the majority of the "church-visible" likely falling into this camp; and 2) the fact that in our current Church age of Laodicea complacency is the dominant trend. a. The Hardness of Unbelieving Pseudo-Christianity (The Seven Woes): Organized Judaism of our Lord's day present a close parallel to the situation described above. Controlled largely by the scribes and Pharisees, the religious establishment of that time had become every bit as divorced from the true grace and power of God as will be the case for organized "Christianity" in the Tribulation (cf. Matthew 23:5). Jesus' characterization of the spiritually dead "church-visible" of

His own day with "the seven woes" gives us a very clear picture of what true believers will be up against once the church-visible of that future day makes a similarly clean break from the truth. The Pseudo-Christian establishment hinders salvation for its members: So woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you lock up the kingdom of heaven [right] in front of people. For you yourselves are not going in, nor do you allow those about to do so to [actually] go in. Matthew 23:13 The Pseudo-Christian establishment reaches out to hinder salvation for others seeking God:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you scour land and sea to make a single convert, and when he becomes [one], you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. Matthew 23:15 The Pseudo-Christian establishment adds forms and rituals which obscure truth:

Woe to you, you blind guides who say, "Whoever swears by the temple has no obligation, but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obliged". You fools and blind men! For what is greater, the gold or the temple which makes the gold holy? And you [also] say, "Whoever swears by the altar has no obligation, but whoever swears by the sacrifice which is on it is obliged". You blind men! For what is greater, the sacrifice or the altar which makes the sacrifice holy? Therefore whoever swears by the altar swears both by it and by everything on it. And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by the One who dwells in it. And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it. Matthew 23:16-22 The Pseudo-Christian establishment uses minor, partial obedience to obscure major truths:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you give a tenth of your mint and of your anise and of your cummin, but you have neglected the weightier parts of the Law, [namely], justice and mercy and faith. You ought to do the former – but not neglect the latter! You blind guides! You [are careful to] filter out the gnat, but [then] you swallow down the camel! Matthew 23:23-24 The Pseudo-Christian establishment gives the appearance of holiness, but is not holy:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they teem with robbery and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup so that its outside may also be [truly] clean. Matthew 23:25-26 The Pseudo-Christian establishment gives the appearance of spiritual life, but is dead:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you resemble whitewashed tombs which, while they appear to be beautiful on the outside, on the inside are filled with dead men's bones and all uncleanness. This is just how you are. On the outside you appear to men to be righteous, but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Matthew 23:27-28 The Pseudo-Christian establishment appears to be for God, but is really hostile to Him and His:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you restore the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and you say, "If we had been [alive] in the days of our fathers, we wouldn't have participated in [shedding] the blood of the prophets". So then you are your own witnesses against yourselves that you are [indeed the] sons of those who murdered the prophets. Matthew 23:29-31

Dead pseudo-Christian organizations (of which there are plenty in our own day) may seem to pose no threat under present circumstances. However, just as soon as circumstances change (and change they will in the Tribulation, much for the worse), such organizations will be ready-made and willing co-conspirators both for the advancement of the process of the Great Apostasy and

also for the implementation of the Great Persecution. The reason for the nature of such groups is not a matter of accident: these spiritually dead organizations reflect the hardened hearts of the individuals who make them up. b. The Vulnerability of Lukewarm Believers (The Problem of Complacency): The overwhelming characteristic of believers in this current Church era of Laodicea is one of apathy when it comes to building faith, growing through the Word of God, drawing closer to Jesus Christ, and preparing for and putting into practice the gifts, ministries and effects that God has ordained for us (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:4-7; Ephesians 2:10). One could go on at great length as to the causes of such indifference toward the Lord Jesus who bought us, but it is sufficient here to point out that in its essence this appalling attitude stems primarily from loving the world more than Jesus. Complacency is a serious problem for the Church at large and for individual Christians in particular precisely because of this "zero sum" opposition between the two alternatives. For either you truly love Jesus Christ more than anything else, or the truth is that you love the world more than Him. And if you do love the world more than the Lord, then your faith is at the very least extremely fragile and vulnerable so that it may well not survive serious testing or tribulation, not to mention the Tribulation (Matthew 13:20-21; Mark 4:16-17; Luke 8:13). And, indeed, this dominant characteristic of our Laodicean era will make the Church as a whole highly vulnerable to the pressures of the Tribulation to come, thus explaining in large measure the Great Apostasy.

3. The Causes of the Great Apostasy: a. The unleashing of the "mystery of lawlessness": In 2 Thessalonians 2:7, we are told that "the mystery of lawlessness", that is, unseen satanic influence which leads to the active rejection of divine truth in all of its forms, is already at work in our day. Following the removal of the Holy Spirit's restraint at the commencement of the Tribulation, however, lawlessness will explode, embittering human life to an unprecedented degree and leading to increased pressure upon the faith of us all (2 Thessalonians 2:6-7). While this circumstance will result in the refining of the remnant of dedicated believers, in the case of lukewarm believers it will greatly contribute to apostasy (Matthew 24:10-13; 2 Thessalonians 2:11; 1 John 4:3; 1 John 4:6). b. The dearth of Bible teaching: This second major cause of the Great Apostasy is the exclusive concern of believers. While the unleashing of lawlessness and consequent degeneration of the behavior of unbelievers will only affect believers indirectly (by increasing the external pressures on faith), the coming dearth of genuine Bible teaching anticipated during the Tribulation will have a direct negative impact contributing to apostasy. As in the case of the former cause above, so in this case it will be almost exclusively the lukewarm members of the Body of Christ adversely affected by this coming famine of spiritual food. For having been complacent about solid spiritual nutrition in good times, they will find turning to substantive Bible teaching in hard times a difficult transition, both because it will be very hard to find (Amos 8:11; Hosea 4:5-6; cf. 1 Samuel 3:1; 1 Samuel 28:6; Proverbs 29:18; Micah 3:4-7), and because this very condition will have come about in no small part through their negative and complacent attitude in the first place (2 Timothy 4:1-4; cf. 2 Chronicles 15:2-4; Isaiah 6:9-10; Isaiah 28:9-13; Ezekiel 20:34; Ezekiel 20:30-31; Matthew 13:11-17; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10). c. The rise of false teaching: In addition to the pressure exerted by increased lawlessness and the difficulties created by the dearth of spiritual food, a third major cause for the massive apostasy among believers during the Tribulation will be the prevalence of persuasive false teaching. Our Lord's teachings in particular are replete with warnings about the danger of deception and the need for alertness during this dark period ahead (Matthew 24:5-6; Matthew 24:17; Matthew 24:24-25;

Matthew 25:13; Matthew 25:42; Mark 13:5-9; Mark 13:23; Mark 13:33; Mark 13:35-37; Luke 12:40; Luke 17:23; Luke 21:36; cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12; 1 Timothy 4:1-5; 2 Timothy 3:1-13; 2 Peter 2:1-22; 2 Peter 3:1-17; 1 John 2:22; 1 John 4:1-6; Revelation 12:9; Revelation 13:14; Revelation 19:20; Revelation 20:3). d. The persuasiveness of tribulational false signs: One particular aspect of tribulational false teaching that deserves special mention in regard to its contribution to promoting apostasy is the effective use to which false signs will be put by antichrist and his false prophet. For scripture is very clear that the signs performed by these two in the power of the devil will be unprecedented in human history, and will play no small part in winning over the majority of the world's population (Matthew 24:24; Mark 13:22; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10; Revelation 13:3-4; Revelation 16:13-14; Revelation 17:8; Revelation 17:11; Revelation 19:20; Revelation 13:13-15), and any believer who is not absolutely firm in his or her faith will be vulnerable to the extreme persuasiveness of these unprecedented false miracles and portents. e. The persuasiveness of coopted groups: When all the world begins to follow after the beast, even so-called Christian organizations and denominations, it will put serious pressure even on the faith of the elect (Matthew 24:24; Mark 13:22). True believers in Jesus Christ must make up their minds ahead of time to put their entire allegiance in the Son of Man and not compromise their faith for the sake of tradition, sentimentality, herd-mentality, or peer-pressure (Exodus 32:1-6; Deuteronomy 13:2-4; 2 Peter 2:1-2; 2 Peter 2:20-22; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:1-4; 1 John 4:1-3).

4. The Refining of the Remnant: If there is a silver lining in this terrible cloud of apostasy, it is to be found in the refining of the faith of all those who are truly God's people to be produced by the pressures of the Tribulation. It is true that the refining of the hearts of His people, the strengthening of faith and the testing of our commitment to Jesus Christ are givens in every era (Daniel 11:35; Daniel 12:10; cf. Job 23:10; Psalms 66:8-12; Proverbs 10:25; Proverbs 17:3; Isaiah 10:22-23; Isaiah 48:10; Luke 3:16-17; Romans 11:1-6; Ephesians 5:25-27; Hebrews 11:13-16; 1 Peter 1:6-7).

E. The Trumpet Judgments:

1. The Purpose of the Seven Trumpet Judgments: The seven trumpet judgments are literal "plagues" in the biblical sense (Revelation 8:12; Revelation 9:20; Revelation 9:18), calamities visited by God upon the earth which are not confined to physical diseases (cf. the plagues of frogs, gnats, and flies in Exodus 8:1-32). As in the case of the ten plagues the Lord inflicted upon Egypt some three and a half millennia ago (Exodus 7:14-25, Exodus 8:1-32, Exodus 9:1-35, Exodus 10:1-29, Exodus 11:1-10, Exodus 12:1-30), and also in the case of the seven bowl judgments (Revelation 16:1-21), the seven trumpet judgments are instances of divine punishment leveled upon exceptional evil (cf. Leviticus 26:14-39; Deuteronomy 28:15-68; 1 Kings 16:29-34, 1 Kings 17:1). The primary purpose of these judgments is one of warning as indicated by the blowing the trumpet (Ezekiel 33:1-20; Joel 2:1; cf. Numbers 10:1-9; Joshua 6:1-5; Joshua 6:20; Jeremiah 4:19-21; Jeremiah 6:1; Hosea 5:8-9; Amos 3:6; Zephaniah 1:15-17; 1 Corinthians 14:8).

2. The Chronology of the Seven Trumpets: Like the plagues upon Egypt prior to the Exodus, each trumpet judgment lasts for a specific length of time and comes to an end before the next one in the sequence commences. The fact that judgment #5 lasts five months invites us likewise to assign a corresponding number of months to each of the first six trumpets (excluding the seventh trumpet which represents the Tribulation's entire second half, that is, the Great Tribulation). The net result

of adding this ascending number of months (i.e., 1 month for trumpet #1, plus 2 months for trumpet #2, plus 3 months for trumpet #3, plus 4 months for trumpet #4, plus 5 months for trumpet #5, plus 6 months for trumpet #6) is a total of 21 months, exactly one half of the 42 month total of the Tribulation's first half). These six judgments should be understood to occur in immediate sequence directly prior to the commencement of the Great Tribulation: The principle of acceleration and intensification of judgment argues for understanding things in this way. The parallel seven "bowl" judgments are arranged in this way (Revelation 16:1-21).

Only with this sequencing would these judgments provide maximum warning effect. The narrative of the seven trumpet judgments does in fact lead directly into the Great Tribulation with no discernible gap or interval (Revelation 10:6-7; Revelation 11:1-14; cf. Revelation 11:15-19 with Revelation 12:1-17, Revelation 13:1-18).

3. The Ascending Intensity of the Seven Trumpet Judgments: Not only do the trumpet judgment expand sequentially in terms of their duration (being 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 42 months long respectively), but they also exhibit a progressive intensification in terms of the painful effect they produce:

Trumpet #1: Vegetation Stricken: A third of the earth is scorched and a third of its grass and trees are burned up, but no human fatalities are mentioned.

Trumpet #2: The Sea Stricken: A third of the creatures in the sea are killed and a third of all ships destroyed, unquestionably resulting in some human fatalities.

Trumpet #3: Fresh Water Stricken: A third of the world's fresh water is poisoned with the result that many human fatalities.

Trumpet #4: The Heavenly Lights Stricken: While no fatalities are mentioned in conjunction with this one third reduction in the delivery of heavenly light, this is the first judgment wherein all human beings and all portions of the world are adversely affected. The suffering caused by this diminution of light should not be underestimated (cf. Revelation 16:10-11). The administrators of these first four trumpet judgments are the four angels of Revelation 7:1-3, "to whom it had been given to harm the earth and the sea". For all four of the above judgments are targeted directly at either "the earth" (i.e., land), or at "the sea" (i.e., the waters of the earth), or, in the case of the fourth judgment, both (i.e., lack of deprivation of light affects all living things). In this they are different from the last three trumpet judgments where human beings are the objects of the judgments, and human suffering and death the main rather than merely ancillary results. Of further significance is the fact that the last three trumpet judgments, while decreed by God, are carried out by demonic forces. This is a further, clear indication of the progressive intensification of these judgments which are so much more severe in nature than the preceding four that they are given the name "the three woes" (compare Revelation 8:13 with Revelation 9:12; Revelation 11:14; Revelation 12:12).

Trumpet #5: The First Woe: Demon Harassment: The entire unbelieving population of the earth is affected.

Trumpet #6: The Second Woe: Demon Destruction: An entire third of the world's population is killed.

Trumpet #7: The Third Woe: The Great Tribulation: The "third woe" is synonymous with the Great Tribulation (cf. Revelation 12:12). While exact numbers are not provided, this three and one half year period will produce the most staggering loss of life in raw terms that has ever taken place (cf. Isaiah 13:12). The slaughter that will take place at Armageddon alone boggles the mind (Revelation 14:17-20; cf. Ezekiel 39:4-6; Ezekiel 39:11-20), and the bowl judgments of Revelation 16:1-21 which precede it are clearly more dire in their effects than the trumpet judgments (which collectively claim the lives of over a third of the world's population). Finally, the fact that the Great Tribulation lasts for 42 months, exactly seven times as long as the sixth trumpet judgment which precedes, also does much to signal the incomparably more horrendous nature of this last judgment (cf. Matthew 18:22). For as terrible as the first half of the Tribulation will be, in comparison to the Great Tribulation unleashed by the seventh trumpet it is only the "beginning of woes" (Matthew 24:3-13).

4. The Effects of the Seven Trumpet Judgments on Believers: These judgments are divine punishment upon the world of unbelievers, and are not meant or intended to harm God's people. All of us who are believers in Jesus Christ are sealed with the Holy Spirit of God (2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 1:13-14; Ephesians 4:30). Therefore, just as the 144,000 were sealed by God so as to be spared the plagues soon to be delivered by the four angels of Revelation 7:1-3, so we may have every confidence that not only are these judgments not meant for the people of God, but also that we shall be spared the worst of their effects.

F. The Two Witnesses: The ministry of the two witnesses covers the entire first half of the Tribulation, but is terminated by antichrist on the eve of the Great Tribulation (Revelation 11:1-2). Through them, God's witness to truth proceeds hand in hand with His judgments upon evil (demonstrating His grace and mercy even in the midst of severe judgment).

1. The 1,260 days of Revelation 11:3 : 1,260 days is the length of the ministry of the two witnesses (i.e., the entire first half of the Tribulation). This should not be confused with the forty-two months cited in the preceding verse, Revelation 11:2 (wherein the gentiles will "trample" Jerusalem), which is a reference to the Great Tribulation, commencing with the seventh trumpet directly after the termination of the two-witness ministry (discussed in rest of Revelation chapter eleven). Our Lord makes a similar reference to the trampling of Jerusalem by gentiles in Luke 21:24, and tells us that this situation of gentile intrusion and conquest will continue "until the gentiles' times have been fulfilled", that is, until His Second Advent brings antichrist's control of Israel and Jerusalem to a violent and immediate conclusion. Here is a summary of the various scriptural designations for the forty-two month time period covered by the Great Tribulation in contrast to the prior, preceding 1,260 days wherein the witnesses will minister: In Daniel 7:25, the saints of the Most High (i.e., believers) are said to be handed over into the power of the little horn (i.e., antichrist and the Great Persecution) for "a time, times, and half a time", a biblical way of expressing the three and one half years of the Great Tribulation. In Daniel 9:27, "the prince of the people which is to come" (i.e., antichrist as the ruler of revived Rome) will make a treaty for one "seven" and break it in the middle of the "seven", that is, during middle of the seven years at the outset of the Great Tribulation. In Daniel 12:7, the angel speaking with Daniel declares that it will be "a time, times, and half a time" before the persecutions stop and everything comes to an end, that is, the Great Tribulation will last three and one half years. In Revelation 11:2, (discussed above), the gentiles (i.e., the army of antichrist) will control Jerusalem for 42 months, that is, during the entire three and a half year

period of the Great Tribulation. In Revelation 12:6, the woman Israel is said to be protected for 1,260 days, that is, during the whole 42 months of the Great Tribulation (expressed in standard 30 day months). In Revelation 12:14, the woman Israel is said to be protected for a time, times, and half a time, that is, during this same period of the Great Tribulation's three and a half years. In Revelation 13:5, the reign of antichrist is said to last for 42 months, that is, for the duration of the Great Tribulation.

2. The Tribulational Temple rebuilt by Moses and Elijah: While the "forty-two months" of Revelation 11:2 refer to the Great Tribulation, the remainder of chapter eleven (up until the seventh trumpet of verse fifteen) is a description of events which take place during the Tribulation's first half. We see here for the first time in the book of Revelation that while the unbelieving population of the earth has been undergoing a series of horrific judgments, a significant revival has been taking place in Israel. As part of this revival, the temple has been reconstructed, and John is here invited to take precise measurements of all its dimensions. The temple rite has also been reinstated as we may conclude from the presence of the altar which meets the Mosaic specifications (implied by the command to measure it). And a considerable number of genuine worshipers (large enough that they will have to be counted with some effort) is present paying homage to God, a clear indication that by this point the revival associated with the ministry of the 144,000 witnesses has born significant fruit. The description of the measuring rod given to John is purposely reminiscent of the scene in Ezekiel chapter 40 and following. In that passage, Ezekiel is brought to the millennial Jerusalem and sees a "man whose appearance was like bronze" (i.e., a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ). Our Lord there holds a similar rod in His hands wherewith He likewise measures the millennial temple complex. It is no doubt for this reason that Revelation 11:1 has only the participle "saying" and does not identify the speaker, for, as we learn later in verse three, the speaker is also divine, and is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, whose servants the two witnesses are (i.e., they are "My servants" in Revelation 11:3; cf. Matthew 16:28, Matthew 17:1-13). From this set of facts we may deduce that the rebuilding of the tribulational temple is divinely ordained and supervised, for it corresponds to divine specifications of measurement. It is given to John by our Lord to see for himself that this is true, for the process and concept of such measurement with rods and plumb lines often involves the idea of employing a divine standard, often one which results in judgment when these standards are violated (cf. Job 38:5; Isaiah 28:17; Isaiah 34:11; Isaiah 44:13; Jeremiah 31:39; Ezekiel 40:3; Ezekiel 47:3; Amos 7:17; Micah 2:5; Zechariah 1:16; Zechariah 2:1; Zechariah 4:10; cf. also 2 Samuel 8:2). The restoration of the temple rite must also therefore have come at God's behest (cf. the pattern of restoration recorded in Ezra 3:1-13 and following), with the worshipers also legitimate followers of God, namely, those of Israel who have turned to Jesus Christ through the ministry of the 144,000 witnesses. The fact that these true, legitimate, and divinely ordained things (i.e., the temple, its rites, and the mass of worshipers) are here directly juxtaposed to and opposed by anti-God "gentiles" (i.e., antichrist and his followers) who will shortly defile the temple and thus of necessity interrupt its rites and scatter the worshipers is further evidence that the restored temple and worship of God therein has truly been of God, for God, and by God.

Inasmuch as the Tribulation is an era of restoration jointly shared by Israel and the Church in which Israel once again claims the leadership role, it should come as no surprise that we find here the reinstatement of the temple rites in a rebuilt temple. Coming as it will after so long a hiatus, and

coming as it will as a direct result of two messengers sent from God, there will be no confusion about the meaning of the renewed sacrifices: rather than shadows of things to come, it will be clearly understood that these are memorials to the already accomplished work of Christ (i.e., different in purpose from the Mosaic sacrifices just the millennial sacrifices will be; cf. Ezekiel 45:13-25). This principle of the "restoration of Israel" (that is, a turning of their hearts back to God and a reinstatement of appropriate worship), is, as we have already seen in the case of the ministry of the 144,000, very closely associated with the two witnesses and their ministry:

Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him on Horeb (i.e., Sinai) concerning all Israel, [with both its] statutes and judgments – behold, I am about to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the Day of Lord, [that] great and awesome [Day], so that he may restore [to God] the hearts of the fathers along with [their] children and the hearts of the children along with their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with complete devastation. Malachi 4:4-6 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared and were talking with Him (Malachi 4:3). And His disciples questioned Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first (i.e., before the Kingdom)". And He answered, saying, "Elijah is coming, and he will restore all things". Matthew 17:3; Matthew 17:10-13 (cf. Mark 9:11-12) So repent and turn back [to God] for the blotting out of your sins, so that times of refreshment may come from the Lord, and so that He may send to you the One acknowledged as the Christ [Messiah], [namely] Jesus, who must remain in heaven (lit., "whom heaven must receive") until the times of the restoration of all things of which God has spoken through the mouths of His holy prophets from of old. For Moses said, "The Lord God will raise up for you from among your brothers a Prophet like me". Acts 3:19-22 a

These passages closely connect the future spiritual restoration of Israel to the two witnesses and their ministry. Given that in Revelation chapter eleven the two witnesses are also placed in close association with the rebuilt temple, the revived rites, and the reinvigorated worship, we may conclude that the rebuilding of the temple and the restoration of the godly worship associated with it is indeed directed by these two heralds of the Kingdom.

We would certainly be hard pressed to choose two other Old Testament figures more suited to spiritual revival and the reestablishment of the orthodox worship of the Lord. Moses was sent to a people far removed from the Lord and mediated to them the covenant written by God Himself (Galatians 3:19). Elijah was sent to a people long in the grasp of pagan idolatry, and presided over a great and dramatic spiritual victory on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:16-46). Elijah's rebuilding of the altar of the Lord on Mount Carmel foreshadows his leading role in rebuilding the temple during the Tribulation (1 Kings 18:30-32), and Moses, of course, oversaw the construction of the original tabernacle, its furniture, and the rites ordained by God to serve it (so that there could be no better person to oversee its restoration: Exodus 25:40). The time required for the reconstruction of the (relatively small) temple itself need not be prohibitively time consuming. The massive structure of Herod's design (which took so long to build: John 2:20) was in fact an elaboration of the original second temple rather than the temple proper. Ezekiel 40:1-49, Ezekiel 41:1-26, Ezekiel 42:1-20, Ezekiel 43:1-27 which describe Ezekiel's vision of the massive millennial temple complex are also consistent with this interpretation. The temple structure itself (Ezekiel 40:48-49) is relatively modest, and, as in the case of the second temple set in the midst of Herod's massive complex, constitutes only a small part of the overall design. It is thus entirely consistent with the scriptures which deal with this subject to posit that Moses and Elijah rebuild the temple proper, leaving its

elaboration (as described in Ezekiel and elsewhere) for the millennial reign of our Lord as indicated by the following passages: The entire flock of Kedar will be gathered for you. The rams of Nebaioth will serve you. They will be sacrificed as acceptable offerings on My altar. And as for My glorious house (i.e., the temple), I shall glorify it. Isaiah 60:7 The entire glory of Lebanon will come to you, the fir, the pine, and the cedar together, to beautify My holy place (i.e., the temple), the place of My feet. And I shall glorify it. Isaiah 60:13 And He said to me, "Thus says the Lord of Hosts: Behold a Man – 'Branch' is His name (i.e., the Messiah; cf. Isaiah 4:2; Isaiah 11:1; Isaiah 53:2; Zechariah 3:8). And He will branch out from His place and will build [up] the temple of the Lord". Zechariah 6:12-13

Behold, I am about to send [forth] My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. Then the Lord whom you are seeking will suddenly come to His temple (i.e., it is already built in "preparation" for that great day). Malachi 3:1

Moses and Elijah will possess all the divine authority necessary to complete this third and final temple in the correct, godly and sanctified fashion just as God has ordained it. All problems of time, placement, politics, and logistics will dissolve under the leadership of these two divinely appointed, divinely inspired, and divinely empowered heralds of the Kingdom of our coming Lord Jesus Christ.

3. The two olive trees and the two lampstands: The fact that the two witnesses of Revelation chapter eleven occur in context with the reconstructed (third) temple also leads us to connect them to the detailed description of "the two anointed ones" of Zechariah chapter four (who are likewise prophetically associated with the second temple's reconstruction). In Zechariah's vision of a single, solid gold lampstand with seven lamps, there are two olive trees standing by the lampstand on the left and on the right (Zechariah 4:3). When he asks the meaning of this vision, Zechariah is first told "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit" (Zechariah 4:6). This part of the answer explains not the details of the vision's symbolism, but rather the overall principle that it will be God's Spirit which empowers the rebuilding of the temple. Inasmuch as the second temple was not reconstructed without divine help, and given that the two witnesses are a prophecy connected to a future rebuilding (i.e., there is no further mention of them in the rebuilding of the second temple), we may conclude that the rebuilding of the third temple seen in Revelation chapter eleven will also be accomplished by God's Spirit, and that its reconstruction will be overseen by the two witnesses of Zechariah four (who are mentioned as being present after its construction in Revelation 11:1-19). This is clearly the main reason for the Spirit's inclusion of the "two anointed" in Zechariah's vision. The name given to these two in Zechariah, generally translated "anoint-ed ones", is actually "sons of oil". While usually understood passively, the phrase should be taken actively, for it is the translation "anoint-ing ones" which gives the correct sense: like the word "witness" used in Revelation eleven, "anoint-ing ones" indicates that they are conduits of God's power and God's light rather than merely being recipients. This is the point behind the symbolism in Zechariah 4:12 where the two olive trees pour out their oil into the lampstand's golden bowl. The lampstand has seven lamps which are "the seven eyes of the Lord" which range throughout the earth. These "eyes" are often mistaken to have a purely investigative purpose, but, just as the human eye can sparkle and reflect light, so the Hebrew word 'ayin (Jyi) sometimes refers to an object's appearance as a reflector of light as well (Numbers 11:7; Numbers 22:5; Numbers 22:11; Leviticus 13:5; Leviticus 13:37; Leviticus 13:55; 1 Samuel 6:7; Ezekiel 1:4; Ezekiel 1:7; Ezekiel

1:16; Ezekiel 1:22; Ezekiel 1:27; Ezekiel 8:2; Ezekiel 10:9; Daniel 10:6; cf. Proverbs 23:31). Similarly, these two witnesses will be the primary "reflectors" of the light of God's truth during the gathering darkness of the Tribulation.

Zechariah's seven lamps which are also seven eyes are identical in symbolism to the seven Spirits of Revelation chapters four (where lamps = spirits) and chapter five (where eyes = spirits). In all three cases, we have to do with the perfect seven-fold witness of the Holy Spirit, shedding forth God's light to illuminate the darkness of this world, making use of human agencies, but always in behalf of Him who is the true Light, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ("Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit": Zechariah 4:6). And there [stood] burning before the throne seven lamps of fire, which are the seven spirits of God. Revelation 4:5 (cf. Revelation 1:4; Revelation 3:1) And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing [there, looking] as if He had been slain, with seven horns and seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent out into the entire earth. Revelation 5:6 (cf. Revelation 1:4; Revelation 3:1) In the context of Zechariah chapter four, the lampstand and its lights are clearly speaking of just such a witness of God's light in the world during the dark time to come (cf. the seven eras of the Church represented as a series of lampstands giving forth God's witness of light to the world: Revelation 1:20). Empowering this tribulational witness of light, therefore, are the "two anointing ones", the two witnesses, Moses and Elijah. During the dark days of the Tribulation, they and the ministry of the 144,000 directed by them, will constitute the major witness of God's light (and His Light, Jesus Christ) in the world, just as in our own day that witness is provided by the Church.

4. The two pillars: In the portico or entrance porch of the first temple, Solomon placed two massive bronze pillars, one on the north side, and one on the south. These pillars, flanking the threshold of the temple like two giant guardians, would doubtless have been in the mind of anyone hearing Zechariah's vision of the olive trees and the lampstands, especially had they lived long enough to have seen that first temple before its destruction (as some of the older people indeed had: Ezra 3:12; Haggai 2:3; cf. Zechariah 4:10). Columns are, in any case, originally architectural representations of trees and the same was true of the lampstand (i.e., with its "flower-like cups, buds, blossoms, and branches"; cf. Exodus 25:31-32). Moreover, when one considers that the lampstand within the holy place was not far removed from these two pillars, the connection between it and the pillars on the one hand and the lampstand in Zechariah's vision with its two olive trees on the other is hard to ignore. We may add to this picture that the unique and unparalleled verbal phrasing used in both Zechariah 4:14 and Revelation 11:4, "who are standing by/before the Lord of the earth", suggests a permanent and stable positioning, exactly in the manner of pillars. The Hebrew word for pillar, 'amudh (dvmi; viz., "a standing thing"), is derived and virtually indistinguishable from the verb used in Zechariah 4:14 of the anointing olive trees who are "standing by the Lord", making the connection between these pillars and our two witnesses even more certain. Just as the two witnesses, the anointing ones, the two lampstands, and the two olive trees all "stand [solidly like pillars] by/before the Lord of the earth", so these two pillars stood solidly on either side of the entrance to the first temple (which contained the lampstand). The one on the north side was named Boaz, while the one on the south was called Jachin (1 Kings 7:21). Jachin is to be translated "He (i.e., the Lord) establishes", while Boaz means "strength in Him". Both of these names sum up the careers of the two witnesses Moses and Elijah respectively. Jachin is erected first and Boaz second (just as Moses' first earthly

ministry preceded that of Elijah), and Jachin takes the first place of honor on the south (i.e., the "right hand" as the temple faced east with the ark or chariot throne oriented in that direction), while Boaz stood on the north, the second most honorable place. In a similar way, while Elijah's ministry was remarkable in every way, Moses' was superior (compare Paul's use of Moses' ministry as the closest parallel to that of the ministry of our Lord in Hebrews chapter three). Their ministries, after all, served somewhat different purposes. Moses was the Lord's instrument for effectively "establishing" the spiritual groundwork for Israel through his mediation of the Law ("He establishes"), while Elijah presided a significant overture from the Lord for spiritual revival (renewed "strength in Him"). From the divine viewpoint, history has always been supported by these twin pillars of original establishment of the truth and restoration to the truth, with both pillars ever looking to Him who is the truth, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the "Lord of all the earth". At His right and left hand these two witnesses stand as solidly as columns of bronze. To serve directly by the Lord's side is clearly a preeminent honor. When the mother of James and John requested this privilege for her sons, our Lord's response was "... to sit at my right or left is not for Me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared" (Mark 10:40; cf. Luke 14:8-11). For even though the twelve apostles of our Lord will indeed occupy unique positions ("judging the twelve tribes of Israel", i.e., to be heads of the twelve divisions of the family of God: Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30), it is to Moses and Elijah that this most prestigious honor will fall. Being so close to our dear Lord for all eternity is indeed an exceptional and sublime reward, earned in the case of these two by exceptional earthly service on not one, but two occasions. But I, [in contrast to the wicked,] will be like an olive tree flourishing in the house of My Lord, for I have trusted in the mercy of God forever and ever. Psalms 52:8

5. Their restoration ministries: During the Tribulation, two main areas of restoration will need to be addressed for the ministry of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000 to be effective: 1) the temple and its rites will need to be restored as a focus for renewed Jewish worship; and 2) the hearts of a large number of their countrymen will need to be won back to their Lord and ours, Jesus Christ the only Messiah. As God's instrument in founding, constructing and instituting the original tabernacle along with its statutes and ceremonies, no more authoritative person than Moses can be imagined. As God's instrument in His most dramatic offer of spiritual revival in Israel's history, one, we might add, which took place in spite of the most severe opposition from a pagan government which had wedded satanic worship to the governance of the state (reminiscent of antichrist and his false prophet), no more highly qualified person than Elijah can be found. The future ministries of both of these great men of God in restoring and multiplying the remnant of Israel during the Tribulation's first half is documented in scripture:

"The Lord Your God will raise up from your midst, from among your brothers, a Prophet like me (i.e., to whom Moses will be analogous in type). You must give heed to Him, just as you requested from the Lord your God at Horeb (i.e., Sinai) on the day of your assembly [there], when you said, 'May I not hear the voice of the Lord My God any longer, nor see this great fire lest I die!' Then the Lord said to me, 'They have done well in what they have said. I will raise up for them from the midst of their brothers a Prophet like you. And I will put My words in His mouth, and He will tell them everything I command Him. And it will come to pass that the person who does not listen to My words which He will speak in My Name, that I will require it of that person' (i.e., hold him responsible). Deuteronomy 18:15-19

Elijah's future return is more generally accepted and understood because in Old Testament prophecy the antitype of our Lord is stressed rather than the type (i.e., the Messiah instead of Moses), but in the case of His herald, it is the type who is set in the forefront of prophecy rather than the antitype (i.e., Elijah instead of John the baptist). So while the passage above does have a general application for all of the true prophets of God (cf. the following Deuteronomy 18:20-22), it is also clear from the emphasis it places upon a single prophet that we have to do here with a future coming of a single Person who would proclaim the Word in a way so preeminent that only Moses' ministry is worthy of comparison (cf. Luke 9:8; John 1:21; John 1:25; John 1:45; John 6:14; John 7:20; Hebrews 3:1-16). The sublime fulfillment of these verses is therefore in the first coming of our Savior (cf. Acts 3:22-26; Acts 7:37). This fact, however, does not preclude a final application of the passage to Moses' return. For while the salvation of Israel has indeed been accomplished by our Lord's first advent, present and prophetic circumstances still require just such a preeminent prophet to resurrect the true worship of God, and, other than our Lord whose return must await the Tribulation's conclusion, no one is more "like Moses" than Moses himself. In John 1:25 we find both sets of types and antitypes linked where, speaking to the Messiah's herald, John the baptist, the type of Elijah, the Pharisee's disciples ask, "So why are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?". It is generally accepted that one half of this pair of types will precede Jesus' return (i.e., Elijah). Given the consistent linkage of the two in scripture, there is no more likely candidate to be identified as the second witness than Moses.

Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him on Horeb (i.e., Sinai) concerning all Israel, [with both its] statutes and judgments – behold, I am about to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the Day of Lord, [that] great and awesome [Day], so that he may restore [to God] the hearts of the fathers along with [their] children and the hearts of the children along with their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with complete devastation. Malachi 4:4-6

The first thing to note about the passage above, a fact usually overlooked in interpretation, is that Moses also figures prominently in this prophecy. The specific mention of Moses in connection with "remembering" the Law with all its "statutes and judgments" foreshadows the reinstatement of the temple rite in the reconstructed temple. "Remembering the Law", in fact, comes first, and is followed by the heart-restoration said to be mediated by Elijah. As in our other parallels, Moses is first, then Elijah, indicating that the rebuilding of the temple and the reinitiating of the sacrifices will be instrumental in and fundamental to the spiritual revival (Elijah's area of expertise) and the ministry of the 144,000. Incidentally, in both passages quoted above, Sinai is called by its alternative name, "Horeb", which means "devastation" in Hebrew. This appellation brings to mind the desolate spirituality of Israel which will obtain when the two witnesses begin their ministry, and the concomitant need for complete restoration not only in terms of spiritual response, but also of the main concrete features of the Law (namely, the rebuilding of the temple and the reconstitution of its rites, Moses' area of expertise; cf. also Ex.32-34). So repent and turn back [to God] for the blotting out of your sins, so that times of revival may come from the Lord, and so that He may send to you the One acknowledged as the Christ [Messiah], [namely] Jesus, who must remain in heaven (lit., "whom heaven must receive") until the times of the restoration of all things of which God has spoken through the mouths of His holy prophets from of old. For Moses said "The Lord Your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me". Acts 3:19-22

In the context above, Peter is referring to our Lord Jesus Christ when he mentions the Prophet who was to come in order to explain to his contemporaries that Jesus was that Prophet in the most direct fulfillment of Moses'

prophecy. But it is significant that in this context of future revival that precedes our Lord's return (i.e., "so that times of revival may come" and "Jesus, who must remain in heaven until the times of the restoration"), that Moses is mentioned, once again the inseparable type to our Lord's antitype whenever the issue of the future revival and restoration of Israel comes up. Also present in the passage above is the dual focus of the two witnesses' ministry, both revival (the spiritual aspect represented by Elijah) and restoration (the visible aspect represented by Moses). That both aspects of preparation for Jesus' Second Advent should be so mentioned is not surprising, for it is through the persons of both of these two witnesses that God will prepare His people for His return. For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John [the baptist]. And if you are willing to accept [this], he himself (i.e., John) is [typical of] Elijah who is destined to come [in the future]. Matthew 11:13-14 And He answered and said, "Elijah is coming [in the future] and will [then] restore all things. And I tell you that Elijah has [also] already come [in true type] and they did not acknowledge him, but did to him such [terrible] things as they desired. In the same way the Son of Man is also going to suffer at their hands". Matthew 17:11-13 (cf. Mark 9:11-13) In both of the above passages, our Lord confirms to His contemporaries the still future coming of the actual Elijah. His true type, however, had already come (i.e., John the baptist), just as Moses' true type was standing there among them (i.e., our Lord Himself, the Prophet about whom Moses spoke). The return of Elijah, the type of John, will be accompanied by the return of Moses, the type of Christ. To help illustrate this point, a few words are in order here concerning some of the similarities between this dual set of types and antitypes . The two witnesses minister for three and one half years (Revelation 11:3), as did John and our Lord Jesus Christ.

John ministered "in the spirit and power of Elijah"(Luke 1:17), while Christ spoke of Moses' testimony about Himself (John 5:45-46; cf. Luke 24:44), and typicality to Himself (John 3:14).

Elijah's extensive exile in the wilderness (1 Kings 17:1-9) provides the type for John's ministry in the wilderness (Isaiah 40:3-5), while Moses' forty days on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:15-18) is a type of Jesus' forty days in the wilderness of testing and communion with God (Matthew 4:1-11).

Elijah's persecution by Jezebel and Ahab (1 Kings 19:1-21) is typical of John's persecution by Herod and execution at Herodias' behest (Matthew 14:1-12), while Moses disappearance and reappearance to His rebellious congregation (Exodus 32:1) is typical of Christ's death and resurrection appearances to His doubting disciples (John 20:9; John 20:25).

Both John and Jesus were martyred (although this word hardly does justice to our Lord's unique sacrifice of Himself for the sins of the world), just as the two witnesses will be.

Both Jesus and Moses are mediators of the New and Old Covenants respectively, wherein they represent man to God and God to man (Galatians 3:19-20; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 8:6; Hebrews 9:15; Hebrews 12:24), while both John and Elijah called their countrymen to repent and adhere to these covenants (1 Kings 18:21; Matthew 3:1-2).

Only Moses spoke with the Lord face to face (Exodus 33:11), and only Christ has seen the Father (John 1:18), while both John and Elijah received special communication from our Lord Himself when they faltered in their faith (1 Kings 19:9-18; Luke 7:18-28).

6. Their miracles: Besides Moses, no other Old Testament believer was responsible for administering more numerous and more impressive miracles than Elijah (e.g., the bottomless jars

of oil and flour, the raising of the widow's son, the heavenly fire which consumed the altar sacrifice, etc.). Only Elisha comes close, and his miracles were performed through the granting of a double portion of Elijah's special unction of the Spirit, before the receipt of which Elisha did no miracles (2 Kings 2:9-10; cf. Luke 1:17). Apropos of our point here is that supernatural blood was the crucial third "sign" given to Moses by the Lord to validate his authority (Exodus 4:9 with Revelation 11:5-6), the precise supernaturally validating sign of the first two trumpet judgments (Revelation 8:6-9), and that by Elijah's word and through his prayer, no rain fell for three and one half years, the precise period of the two witnesses' ministry, that is, the first half of the Tribulation (Luke 4:25; James 5:16-18; cf. Revelation 11:5-6).

7. The Transfiguration: One of the clearest proofs of the identity of the two witnesses is their appearance with our Lord at His transfiguration (Matthew 16:28, Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:1-13; Luke 9:27-36). That event is expressly stated to have been a prophetic foretaste of our Lord's Second Advent and the coming of His kingdom (cf. Matthew 16:28; Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27). Given that the passages dealing with the transfiguration mention both Moses and Elijah, the literal Moses and Elijah, in connection with this preview of Christ's return, it is natural and necessary to connect them with the two witnesses of Revelation chapter eleven who herald that very return. After the event, Jesus' disciples asked Him only about Elijah and He responded in kind. But our Lord's response, that Elijah would come "first" (i.e., before the Second Advent which His recent transfiguration had previewed), gave them (and give us) no reason to suppose that both of His famous interlocutors on the mountain would not precede Him. Moses' presence on the mountain with Elijah serves to demonstrate that, following our Lord's death and resurrection (also represented in the transfiguration: cf. respectively Luke 9:31 and Jesus' glorified, resurrection-like appearance on the mountain), both will precede His return (as the two witnesses to and heralds of that return).

8. The bodies of Moses and Elijah: The return of Moses and Elijah will not be a case of resurrection, but of resuscitation. The ruler's daughter, the widow's son, and Lazarus, all brought back by Jesus (Matthew 9:18-26; Luke 7:11-17; John 11:1-44), Tabitha brought back by Peter (Acts 9:36-42), and the boy brought back by Paul (Acts 20:7-12), the young boys brought back by Elijah and Elisha respectively (1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:8-37), the dead who rose following the crucifixion (Matthew 27:52-53), and all of the other examples of this miracle whether recorded in the scriptures or not are without exception examples of what we are calling here "resuscitation" rather than "resurrection", because in all of these cases the individuals later died again physically (in contrast to Christ who has been truly "resurrected" and is no longer subject to death in His humanity for He is "destined to see corruption no longer", Acts 13:34). Since Moses and Elijah reappear physically before the Second Advent, and since they are in fact killed by antichrist at the end of their ministry, we may say of a certainty that what we have here is indeed a case of resuscitation rather than of resurrection (cf. Revelation 11:3-12). In the cases of both Moses and Elijah, their departure from this life the first time was absolutely unique (as indeed it will also be the next time: Revelation 11:11-12). Elijah's departure in the heavenly chariot needs no great elaboration (2 Kings 2:1-18). Elisha's extensive search after the fact (at the request of the company of prophets) demonstrates that no physical trace of his body was left behind. In Moses' case, we are told that he was "buried" in the valley opposite Beth Peor (Deuteronomy 34:5-6). However, we are also told in the same verse that "to this day no one knows where his grave is".

Deuteronomy 34:6 actually attributes the burial to God Himself, and Jude clarifies the situation: the "burial" was only temporary (thus explaining why the site could not be known). Jude 1:9 explains that, like Elijah's physical body, Moses' body too was uniquely taken to heaven by angelic agency, an operation which was carried out by the archangel Michael and contested by the devil. Thus, the physical bodies of both of these two extraordinary servants of our Lord left earth in an extraordinary way, precisely so that they might later return via resuscitation after so many years in an equally remarkable and unprecedented way.

9. Their unfinished business: It is also significant that the ministries of both of these great believers were cut short. Moses did not enter the promised land and it was left for Joshua to settle the Israelites in Canaan. Elijah did not complete his ministry of revival and miraculous witness, but was succeeded in his work by Elisha. Neither man enjoyed great spiritual response from the congregation to whom each ministered so exceptionally, and both men were, in effect, "replaced" by God on account of momentary lapses in their otherwise magnificent service to the Lord (each of which was motivated in no small part by their reaction to this lack of response). In anger at the abuse heaped upon him by his stubborn charges, Moses violated God's specific instructions at Kadesh (i.e., Meribah: Numbers 20:2-13; Psalms 95:8). In fear for his life from the pagan government which the people did not overturn after the miracles on Mount Carmel, Elijah temporarily abandoned his ministry and retreated to the desert (1 Kings 19:1-4). In both cases, each was temporarily acting contrary to his own character (Moses, normally the most humble of men [cf. Numbers 12:3], reacting in arrogant anger, and Elijah, normally so courageous [cf. 1 Kings 18:8-16], reacting in self-pity and fear). Both men recovered swiftly from what may seem to us understandable and perhaps even minor transgressions, but the termination of these great ministries as a result of their failings shows us an important biblical principle: to whom much has been given, much is expected (Luke 12:48). Perhaps only a handful of believers in the history of the world have attained anything like the spirituality of these two men, and even fewer have been entrusted with ministries of the magnitude they enjoyed. With such great privilege comes great responsibility. Scripture is very clear about the fact that both men's ministries were prematurely terminated (Numbers 20:12; Deuteronomy 1:37; Deuteronomy 3:23-26; Deuteronomy 32:48-52; Psalms 106:32-33; 1 Kings 19:15-18; 2 Kings 2:9-10). In the return of Moses and Elijah, therefore, we once again see the awesome grace of God at work. For both men are going to be given a "second chance", so to speak (although, in comparative terms, the rewards they have earned even without this new opportunity will be surpassed by few if any). This observation helps to explain the symbolism of the posture of the two witnesses. Along with the olive trees, lampstands, and columns, they are standing rather than sitting. Just as the Lamb stands up to receive the scroll from the Father's hand to begin the Tribulation which terminates with His glorious return (Revelation 5:6; cf. Psalms 110:1), so the standing posture of Moses and Elijah in all of the citations and analogies given above indicates that their work is not yet done. They will return to earth once more to set the capstone on two of the most spectacular performances in history of believers in the service of our Lord. The main duties of Moses and Elijah during their forty-two month ministry have in the main been adumbrated above. They will

1) bring about the reconstruction of the temple.

2) reconstitute the temple worship.

3) direct the ministry of the 144,000.

4) be involved in the earthly direction of the trumpet judgment plagues, as well many other similar plagues of more limited scope (Revelation 11:5-6).

10. The war against Moses and Elijah: The Greek phraseology of Revelation 11:7 specifically the use of the words "war" (polemos) and "conquer" (nikao), strongly suggest that the beast's elimination of Moses and Elijah will be far from an easy or instantaneous matter. It will be, as the context intimates, a genuine battle. The God-given ability of the two witnesses to unleash blasts of fire from their mouths proved an effective deterrent during the three and a half years of their ministry (Revelation 11:5), and we may expect that, just as Elijah's prayers were answered with the result that several large detachments of soldiers were similarly destroyed, so here as well a large number of antichrist's henchmen will meet their doom. We are not told the precise means used by antichrist to overcome the two prophets, and it is possible that part of antichrist's approach will be to "fight fire with fire", making maximum use of the satanic power given to him and his key lieutenant, the false prophet (who likewise has a similar ability to bring fire down from the sky: Revelation 13:13). However, we may safely say that no means available to antichrist would have been capable of removing Moses and Elijah from the scene had it not been the will of God for their ministry to conclude in this dramatic fashion (cf. Isaiah 54:15-17).

11. The three and a half days: Days frequently represent longer periods of time in biblical symbolism. Here the three and a half days during which the bodies of Moses and Elijah will lie lifeless in the center of Jerusalem represent the three and a half years of spiritual desolation and persecution which are about to commence (i.e., the Great Tribulation). The two witnesses will be, in effect, precursors of the martyrs of the Great Persecution which is about to break out upon believers all over the world (with the 144,000 being the first to fall in it). The deaths of the two witnesses will serve to alert those faithful to Jesus Christ of that coming storm of unequalled tribulation and persecution (cf. Luke 23:31). The deaths of Moses and Elijah will be met with great joy on the part of the majority of the earth's inhabitants. Rather than being grateful to God for His gracious warnings and turning to Him, the unbelieving world will be all too pleased to see these two great men of God destroyed. The world is now ripe for dominance by antichrist, and in choosing to support him in his "war" against the two witnesses, and by rejoicing in his victory over the servants of the Lord, the world will not only be openly and unreservedly choosing for the beast, but will also be handing him the ultimate opportunity to establish his own alternative religion, and thus impose a large measure of religious dominance over the entire globe by its establishment (a development which will in turn cement the political, economic, and social control he will gain at the Tribulation's midpoint with the defeat of the last coalition to oppose him). The reviving of Moses and Elijah, on the other hand, will be a matter of great encouragement for all God's people, reminding us of His complete power, even over death. For their resuscitation at the end of the three and a half days will symbolizes the resurrection of all believers three and a half years from this point at the end of the Great Tribulation (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

12. The Third Woe: The termination of the joint ministry of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000 marks the conclusion of the second woe, because at this point the first six trumpet judgments as well as all the localized plagues administered by the two witnesses in support of the 144,000 have come to an end. The third woe, said to be "coming soon" in Revelation 11:14, begins immediately

after the ascending of the two witnesses when the seventh angel sounds his trumpet (Revelation 11:15). For the third woe, the seventh trumpet judgment, and the Great Tribulation all refer to the same period of time, the horrific final three and a half years that precede our Lord's return. That period will be a period of woe, because the earth has never and will never again see darker days (Daniel 12:1; Joel 2:2; Matthew 24:21; Mark 13:19). That period will be a warning period (symbolized by the trumpet), because its terrifying nature warns of the day of judgment soon to come (Matthew 3:10-12; 2 Peter 3:10-13). And that period will be a period of unparalleled tribulation, because within it the greatest persecution in the history of the Church of Jesus Christ will take place, when Satan and his fallen angels are cast down to earth (Revelation 12:7-9), and through his minion antichrist he vents his wrath on the Body of Christ.

01A.05. Antichrist and his Kingdom

5. Antichrist and his Kingdom A. Sources for and Prophetic Types of Antichrist and his Kingdom

Scripture assigns several names to the individual who will rise to power and control of the entire earth during the Tribulation:

1. "The beast" (Revelation 11:7; Revelation 13:1-18; Revelation 14:9-11; Revelation 15:2; Revelation 16:2; Revelation 16:10; Revelation 16:13; Revelation 17:7-10; Revelation 19:20; Revelation 20:4; Revelation 20:10) – because he is the devil's seed (Genesis 3:15).
2. "The man of lawlessness" (2 Thessalonians 2:3) – because he will oppose all divine and human law, destroying the divine framework of nationalism (Acts 17:26-27), and changing "the times and the laws" (Daniel 7:25).
3. "Antichrist" (1 John 2:18; 1 John 2:22; 1 John 4:3; 2 John 1:7). This title is perhaps the most illuminating in regard to the beast's true character and also to the devil's strategy in opposing Christ through this his most intense offensive against the people of God. The Greek preposition anti (αντι), when used in compounds of this sort, often bears two senses: first, anti means something "opposed to" the thing to which it is prefixed; secondly, it can also mean a "substitute for" that thing. And, truly, the beast, Satan's "anointed one" or false "Messiah" (Christos, Χριστός, being the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew Meshiach, משיח), will be both: a pseudo, substitute Christ who will at the same time directly and violently oppose our Lord and His holy people, Israel and the Church.

B. The Origin, Character and Rise of Antichrist:

1. The Origin of Antichrist And I shall place hostility between you and the woman, that is, between your seed and her Seed. He (i.e., Christ) will attack you head[-on], but you will attack Him from behind" (lit., "His heel"). Genesis 3:15

(8) And then the lawless one (i.e., antichrist) will be revealed, [that same one] whom the Lord Jesus will slay with the breath of His mouth and destroy when He appears at His [glorious] return – [that same lawless one] (9) whose appearance [will come about] through Satan's empowerment [and will be] accompanied by every [sort of] false miracle, both signs and portents, (10) and by every [sort of] unrighteous deception [designed] for those who are perishing, [namely those who will believe these lies] because they did not open themselves up to the love for the truth so as to be saved. 2 Thessalonians 2:8-10

These passages demonstrate the satanic paternity of antichrist, sired by the devil (in the manner of the Nephilim). As to the beast's human origin, scripture indicates that is Jewish, specifically from the tribe of Dan, the only tribe not mentioned in the list of the 144,000 witnesses in Revelation 7:5-8, and prophesied in the book of Genesis as being the tribe of antichrist's origin (compare Deuteronomy 33:22):

(16) Dan [in the person of antichrist] will judge his people as if he were [of] one of the tribes of Israel. (17) [But] Dan (i.e., antichrist) will be a serpent beside the road, a viper beside the path, one who strikes at a horse's heels, so that its rider falls [off] backwards. (18) I wait [in hope] for your deliverance, O Lord! Genesis 49:16-18 As to national origin, antichrist will come from Babylon – not the historical, middle eastern Babylon, but rather "mystery Babylon", the powerful nation which, at the outset of the Tribulation, "reigns over the kingdoms of the earth" (Revelation 17:18).

2. The Character of Antichrist

(23) And at the end of their kingdom (i.e., during the Tribulation), when rebels are being confirmed [in their apostasy], there will arise a stern-faced king (i.e., antichrist), well-versed in deception. (24) And he will become exceptionally powerful – but not through his own power. And he will be astoundingly successful in his corrupting [activities]. And he will even undertake to corrupt the mighty men (i.e., believers) and [a part of] the holy people (i.e., Israel). (25) And on account of his cunning, [his] conspiracy will prosper under his direction. And he will [greatly] magnify himself in his own thinking, and by his seductive ways he will corrupt many. He will even take his stand against the Prince of princes, and will be shattered apart from human agency. Daniel 8:23-25 The passage above, speaking about antichrist by comparison to Antiochus Epiphanes (as exegetes as long ago as Jerome have generally recognized), says much about the beast's essential character. He is said to be "stern-faced" (referring to his unequaled brazenness and audacity; cf. Deuteronomy 28:50; Proverbs 7:13; Proverbs 21:29), "well-versed in deception" (the beast will be a consummate actor and a practiced conspirator, with the phrase which literally means "understanding riddles" capturing his satanically empowered evil intelligence and the exceptionally deceptive uses to which he will apply it; cf. Daniel 11:27), "astoundingly successful in his corrupting [activities]" (referring to the beast's success in deceiving and enlisting both unbelievers and apostate believers to his cause) and "will even undertake to corrupt the mighty men and [a part of] the holy people". These essential attributes and abilities are said to flow directly into antichrist's other tribulational activities, which are likewise revealing of his character: "on account of his cunning (the beast's animal-like craftiness), [his] conspiracy will prosper" to the point that "he will [greatly] magnify himself in his own thinking" (the arrogance of antichrist outstripping the bounds of normal human restraint; cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:4), so that "by his seductive ways he will corrupt many" (the beast's politico-religious movement undermining godly thinking and behavior), and will finally "even take his stand against the Prince of princes" (i.e., in his arrogance, antichrist will even think himself capable of opposing Christ). And the beast which I saw resembled a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth was like that of lions. Revelation 13:2 a

Antichrist is, after all, "the beast", a title which calls attention to the inhuman nature of this halfling, sired by the devil. The comparison to the leopard as the main point of analogy in this passage from Revelation paints antichrist as a terrifying, decisive, dangerous, violent, treacherous, wily individual, restless in a cat-like way in his desire to further his evil schemes (cf. Habakkuk 2:5), while the bear-like feet and lion-like mouth refer to the unprecedented "tearing" and "biting" power of the beast once in control of his empire. In matters of both politics and war, therefore, antichrist will be exceptionally effective, blending guile and force in a potent and irresistible mix – just as Daniel also predicts: And there will arise in his place a [man of] contempt upon whom they will not bestow the honor of the kingship [in a normal fashion]; rather, he will come [to power] through

seductive [methods], and will take control of his kingdom by means of duplicity. Daniel 11:21 3.
The Rise of Antichrist

(21) And there will arise in his place a [man of] contempt upon whom they will not bestow the honor of the kingship (i.e., he will not come to power in a legal, conventional way). Rather, he will come [to power] through seductive [methods], and will take control of his kingdom (i.e., mystery Babylon) by means of duplicity. (22) Now it is from him that the flood waters (i.e., armies: Daniel 9:26; Daniel 11:40; cf. Isaiah 8:7-8; Isaiah 28:15-22; Nahum 1:8; Revelation 12:15) will pour forth and be shattered (i.e., at Armageddon), for he is even "the prince of the covenant" (i.e., the author of the pseudo-Messianic peace treaty with Israel: Daniel 9:27). (23) After men have leagued themselves to him, he will set his conspiracy in motion and will grow [in power] and become [very] strong, even though his faction is small. Daniel 11:21-23 This passage sets forth all the key elements in the beast's rise to power: a) the leader: antichrist's plan for gaining power in Babylon will entail "seductive means" (Daniel 11:21), "duplicity" (Daniel 11:21), and "a conspiracy" (Daniel 11:23). b) the movement: through a subtle blend of religion and politics, antichrist will come closer than anyone before him in history to offering all things to all people, combining the deepest desires of each group and faction into one policy designed to "change the world". c) the party: even though antichrist's "inner party" is small, it will be dedicated and effective in promoting the propaganda the beast will require to exploit upheaval, build a mass movement, and thus come to absolute power. d) the crusade: the key to fulfilling the program of the pseudo-Messiah and his party will be the prophetic and apocalyptic crusade for the destruction of "antichrist" and the enrichment of the true beast's party, country and allies thereby (though of course the beast is not Christ, nor will the "king of the south" be truly antichrist – albeit this is the way the beast will portray things). e) the seizure of power: while scripture does not present a specific triggering event for antichrist's taking over of Babylon, our passage above, Daniel 11:21-23, indicates that it will be an illegal move rather than accomplished through constitutional means.

C. The Kingdom of the Beast (Babylon and the Revived Roman Empire)

(7) After this, I was watching in the vision of the night and, behold, a fourth beast (i.e., Rome/revived Rome), terrible and fearsome and exceedingly powerful. And it had huge iron teeth. It devoured [all the others], crushing [them] to bits and trampling under foot whatever was left. Now this beast was different from those which preceded it, and it had ten horns. (8) I was considering these [ten] horns when, behold, another horn, a little one, came up among them. And three of the previous horns were rooted up from before it. And, behold, this horn had eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking presumptuous things (i.e., against God). Daniel 7:7-8

(19) Then I wished to know the details about the fourth beast (i.e., Rome/revived Rome) which was different from all the others. It had iron teeth which were exceedingly terrible, and claws made of bronze. It devoured [all the others], crushing [them] to bits and trampling under foot whatever was left. (20) And [I also desired to know the details] about the ten horns on its head, and the other one (i.e., antichrist) which came up later, and before which three of the former ones fell (i.e., the southern alliance) Daniel 7:19-20 a And as to the ten horns, from that kingdom (i.e., Rome, the fourth beast) ten kings will arise, and another one (i.e., antichrist) will arise after them. And he will be different from the former ones, and he will cast down three kingdoms. Daniel 7:24 In the book of Revelation, the term "beast" is used both a person (the son of Satan) and also for the

empire he personifies (the revived Roman empire). As the verses above demonstrate, antichrist, who begins his political career by rising to power in Babylon, will soon move from that power base to gain control of the territory which in John's day belonged to the Roman empire. In our day as well as in that near future day, these states will not yet be part of a powerful whole as in the case of historical Rome. That empire "has died" (Revelation 17:8-10; cf. Daniel 2:39-43; Daniel 9:26-27; and compare Daniel 7:24 with Revelation 17:12). The beast will revive the empire by taking control of the "seven kingdoms" (the seven "horns", a series of alliances or "power-blocs" by the time of the Tribulation) through conspiratorial rather than strictly military means. In this effort the "seven kings" (likely also nephilim as is the case with antichrist) will support him greatly so that the process will be concluded in an amazingly short period of time not long after the commencement of the Tribulation. The bulk of the first half of the seven years will be taken up with antichrist's reduction of the one other major pan-state empire, the three kingdoms of "the south" (called in this study "the southern alliance"). These three are also likely minions of antichrist in secret (explaining the conspiracy against the king of the south described in Daniel 11:26). Once antichrist consolidates his power worldwide, the seven and three together will constitute the "ten horns" and "ten kings" described in Revelation 17:12 (cf. Daniel 7:24). For our purposes here it is important to understand that revived Rome, described as "the beast" (as is also antichrist, its ruler), is the resuscitated Roman empire, consisting of roughly the same geographical and ethnic extent as the original at the height of its power during John's day. But this political beast (not to be confused with the personal "beast", antichrist, who rules it) is different from Babylon, the original power base of antichrist. In terms of biblical geography, the seven kingdoms of initially revived Rome constitute the "north", and these will under antichrist's leadership defeat "the south", the other three areas of the historical Roman empire, in no small part through the power of Babylon, the biblical "west", whence antichrist arises. After this series of campaigns, the biblical "east" will also fall under antichrist's control, at least nominally (cf. Revelation 13:3-4 and Revelation 16:12-14), leaving the entire world under his dominion.

D. The First Campaign against the South

[After his conquest of revived Rome, antichrist] will distribute plunder, spoils and riches to his [followers] and will afterwards plot against the [three remaining] powers (i.e., the three sub-coalitions of the southern alliance), but [will wait] for an opportune time. Daniel 11:24 b

Having secured his control of revived Rome in the fall of 2028, antichrist will, shortly thereafter, begin military operations against the Mahdi's three kingdom military alliance of the south (essentially consisting of the entire Muslim world). Any military campaign in the Mideast on the scale and of the scope of this massive invasion would be well advised to have concluded major combat operations before the heat and storms of mid-summer begin. A six month time-frame beginning at this point and ending roughly in the summer of 2029 is thus the most likely scenario for the marshaling of forces, transit to theater, combat operations, consolidation of gains, and return of the military assets necessary for this first campaign – not an implausibly short length of time when we recall that all of the beast's operations will be characterized by just such exceptional rapidity (cf. the winged leopard of Revelation 13:2). This time-line also has the virtue of allowing a comparable and parallel time period for the second campaign the following year (i.e., commencing fall of 2029), whose termination point (i.e., summer of 2030) would then coincide perfectly with the commencement of the Great Tribulation, exactly as scripture predicts (cf. especially Daniel

11:29-31). And from one of the [four horns] came forth another horn, a small one (i.e., antichrist), but it grew great towards the south and towards the east and towards the Beautiful Land (i.e., Israel). Daniel 8:9

Since antichrist already dominates the north (and arose in the west, Babylon), only the south, east, and Israel are outside of his complete control at this point of the Tribulation (for while he has the secular ruler of Israel in his camp, the ministry of Moses and Elijah will still be in place and flourishing at this point). The expansion towards the south mentioned in Daniel 8:9 refers to the conquest of the southern alliance in the two campaigns of Daniel 11:1-45, while the eastward expansion is a reference to the progressive occupation and domination of the one other remaining quadrant of the world not as yet under the beast's direct rule. By the time of Armageddon, we see the east also under antichrist's command (Revelation 16:12-14; cf. the temporary disruption of that control occasioned by the bowl judgments: Daniel 11:44). The final place on earth to succumb to the beast's direct authority will be the land of Israel, and we can see in the pattern of Daniel 8:9 not only a strategy for world domination, but also the primary purpose behind it, replacement of the worship of the One true God with the worship of the devil and his son antichrist, and the concomitant destruction of God's holy people, Israel. The southern alliance will therefore represent the last major military impediment to antichrist's domination of the world. The combination of economic, political, and military power projected by Babylon, revived Rome, and the growing coalition of the world's nations falling like dominos at the feet of the beast will remove all other major resistance by the Tribulation's mid-point. The two campaigns against the south, through their scale, rapidity, and success will in particular no doubt also produce a bandwagon effect for joining with rather than opposing the beast until the whole unbelieving world shouts with one accord "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" (Revelation 13:4).

(3) And when He sat down on the Mount of Olives, His disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us when these things will be, and what the sign is of your return and of the end of the age?" (4) And Jesus answered and said, "See to it that no one deceives you. (5) For many will come in My Name, saying, 'I am the Christ', and they will deceive many people. (6) And you are going to hear about [actual] wars and impending wars. Make sure you do not become [overly] alarmed [by such things]. For [these things] must happen, but this is not yet the end [of the Tribulation]. (7) For [before that end] a nation will rise against a nation (i.e., in general terms, the Japhetic pan-nation against the Semitic pan-nation), even a kingdom against a kingdom (i.e., Babylon and revived Rome versus the southern alliance; cf. Daniel 11:25-30; Daniel 11:40), and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. (8) But all these things are [merely] the beginning of the birth pangs (i.e., the first half of the Tribulation). Matthew 24:3-8

We can see in our Lord's words above the significance of the conflict between north and south that will dominate the secular political events of the Tribulation's first half (made parallel here to the "famines and earthquakes" which, as we have seen, are shorthand for the divine warning "trumpet judgments" which will also characterize this period). The "wars and impending wars" that will occupy the secular world's attention at this time are significant enough to rate special mention by our Lord, and so we may glean from this combination of remarks that the scale of the warfare between the beast's coalition and the Mahdi's alliance, the two most significant "nations" and "kingdoms" on earth, will be enormous.

Then he (i.e., the king of the north, antichrist) will rouse up his power and desire against the king of the south with a great force, but the king of the south will mobilize for war with an equally great force which will also be very powerful. Daniel 11:25 a

Rarely in the history of warfare have two coalitions mobilized such exceptional and comparably powerful armies for a particular confrontation. Although August of 1914 may provide a rough parallel, in terms of the numbers deployed, the distances involved, the firepower available, the ideological fervor motivating the conflict, and the overall scale involved here (i.e., with roughly two entire quadrants of the world engaged in this titanic struggle), this campaign is likely only to be eclipsed by the ones which follow (i.e., the second campaign of Daniel 11:29-30; Daniel 11:40-43, and the Armageddon campaign). In addition to all of the other issues involved in these campaigns, both coalitions will also have to contend with the trumpet judgments which, as we have seen, will be taking place during this entire later period of the Tribulation's first half. On the political front, it is at least conceivable that, for the consumption of the unbelieving world, antichrist in his capacity of pseudo-Messiah will "spin" these trumpet judgments as divine displeasure for the world's failure to support Israel (though he himself, of course, has in mind her eventual destruction), thus adding emotional impetus and added justification to his "crusade". The people who know their God will not be fooled by this false interpretation, and we can be sure that the truth will be made clear by Moses and Elijah along with the 144,000 – for all who are willing to receive the truth. On the operational front, the events of the trumpet judgments will clearly cause complications for daily life in general, and all the more so for military operations. The chart below which compares the probable time-line for these two campaigns with these judgments of divine warning indicates a coincidence of trumpet judgments three and four with the first campaign, and of trumpet judgment six with the second:

As the juxtaposition of events in the chart above makes clear, the initial phase of the first campaign will be conducted in the aftermath of the smiting of the world's fresh water by the "Wormwood" asteroid (while the world is still suffering under its effects), then, at roughly the campaign's mid-point, the world's heavenly lights will be stricken (with these effects lasting throughout the rest of the campaign). Just as king Ahab went to great lengths to preserve his military assets during a comparable water shortage occasioned by divine judgment, and no doubt did so at the expense of his suffering population (1 Kings 18:2-6), so we may expect that whatever difficulties the population of the earth experiences from the third trumpet judgment (which we are told will result in many fatalities: Revelation 8:11), both antichrist and the leader of the southern alliance will ensure that their vast armies are not seriously inconvenienced, no matter how much more difficult this may make things for their subject populations. Aside from the logistical problems of transporting additional fresh water over vast distances into terrain that is inhospitable under the best of circumstances, it is probable that the third trumpet will not otherwise seriously affect the course of this campaign (and, indeed, there is no indication from Daniel chapter 11 that it does). The fourth trumpet judgment, the significant diminution of light which will occur during the four month period that coincides with the middle and the end of this campaign, may actually have an enabling effect, for it will virtually ensure that the heat which might otherwise prove an impediment to the unprecedented marches this expedition will entail on both sides will be significantly less than would otherwise be the case. In any event, we may conclude from the scriptural testimony about the fact of this campaign and its successful conclusion on the part of the beast that at the very

worst the negative effects of these two judgments will likely affect both sides equally, and will not, in any case, prevent its successful conclusion by the forces of Babylon and revived Rome.

One of the main differences between the two campaigns which antichrist will launch against the triple coalition of the south will be that while the second campaign will be characterized by the decisive intervention of an overwhelmingly superior navy (cf. the Hebrew of Numbers 24:23-24; Daniel 11:30; Daniel 11:40; covered below), this first expedition will apparently consist, as intimated above, entirely of a ground invasion. Several reasons may be adduced for this. First, much of what still remains semi-independent in the world will still be in the process of being consolidated under antichrist's control at this time. The concentration of the southern hemisphere's population and power on the litoral of the world's great oceans will require a significant application of naval power to secure, and it is likely that the combined navies and amphibious forces of Babylon and revived Rome will be too preoccupied in this task to have much of an impact in this first campaign. Secondly, it is also likely, given the essential geography of revived Rome versus the southern alliance, that antichrist will need two campaigns to complete the task, and that this first, primarily ground operation, will have as its strategic objective an initial degradation of the south's armed forces and the seizure of key terrain for the establishment of bases and staging of resources that will ultimately be necessary to deliver a knock-out blow in the follow-on campaign. Additionally, the conduct of the first campaign as an entirely overland operation proceeding from north to south will also serve to create an opportunity for strategic surprise by making the massive naval operations of the second campaign a less anticipated development.

Nevertheless, he (i.e., the king of the south) will not be able to stand [against the king of the north], for they (i.e., the three subordinate southern kings) shall devise plots against [the king of the south]. (26) For those who eat his choice food (i.e., his inner circle) will break him, and [this is why] his force will flood away, and many will fall slain. (27) And though these two kings (i.e., antichrist and the Mahdi) set their hearts on evil and speak lies at the same table (i.e., a peace conference), it will not prosper, for there will yet be an end to the period [of the Great Tribulation]. Daniel 11:25-27

All tactical considerations aside, the verses above clearly indicate that the primary reason for the failure of the south and the victory of the north in this first confrontation will be the treachery against the southern leader or Mahdi on the part of antichrist's agents (i.e., the three subordinate kings of the south who are themselves part of the ten horns). All this suggests that the south's forces will actually be significantly stronger than antichrist's numerically inferior (if perhaps somewhat technologically superior) army, and that, had the battle taken place on a level playing field, the result would have been much different. We are not told the specifics of how this inner circle of the three kings will undermine the Mahdi's hopes in this first encounter, but it is not difficult to guess. Through a combination of bad advice (i.e., encouraging the decisive action too far north, thus making the logistical situation easier for the beast and more difficult for the south), undermining morale, spreading false rumors, keeping the beast informed of all the Mahdi's movements and plans, and deliberately failing to carry out necessary operations with appropriate vigor, these three will be in a position to bestow upon the beast a decisive advantage.

It should be noted at this point that as a result of his strategic pull-back and the peace treaty with the south, there will therefore probably be no large scale movement of the beast's troops into the

state of Israel at this time (that development will apparently await the conclusion of the second campaign when antichrist will shift his world headquarters to Jerusalem; cf. Daniel 11:41). As the relatively vulnerable *casus belli*, we may theorize that Israel's primary role during this first campaign will merely be to defend herself, and possibly also to act as a blocking force against the direct intervention by the forces of the alliances' southernmost kingdom (i.e., Egypt and its coalition partners). This does not mean, however, that the beast will not take advantage of this opportunity to begin to apply the screws to Israel while he still has significant forces in the vicinity. The political state of affairs within the state of Israel at this time is likely to be extraordinarily tense. On the one hand, the secular Jewish majority will have placed a very strong leader in power (one of the "ten kings" in fact). On the other hand, however, the ministry of Moses and Elijah and the worldwide evangelism of the 144,000 directed by them will be reaching its zenith at this point, producing a sizeable minority of believers. The defeat of the southern alliance will be a turn of events which will leave even many of the most ardent supporters of the "worthless shepherd" (i.e., the Israeli premier) somewhat less enthusiastic about the beast and his empire, while at the same time antichrist will also feel less constrained in regard to his dealings with Israel. For with the south "set up" for defeat, the entire world will be only one step away from falling completely into his hands, and the need for a great cause, that is, the "crusade" to protect Israel, will soon be obsolete. At this point, then, the beast will feel secure enough to take preliminary steps towards Israel which will leave objective observers in little doubt about his ultimate designs for that state and for the Jewish people. For while he had based his worldwide political campaign upon the need to protect Israel, in reality it had always been his father Satan's plan to destroy her.

Now as he (i.e., antichrist) returns to his own land with great booty, his heart will be set against the holy covenant, so that he will take action [against it] and [then] return to his own land. Daniel 11:28 The words "holy covenant" used here refer both to the administration of God's grace and truth to the Jewish people through the restoration ministry of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000, and to the heart and hand response of those in Israel who accept the message (cf. Daniel 11:30; Daniel 11:32). All of antichrist's long-distance efforts to hinder the ministry itself will prove unsuccessful at this time (as the Lord will provide the two witnesses with ample ability to ward off any direct threats: Revelation 11:5-6; cf. 2 Kings 1:9-15). But this verse does represent the beginning of the persecution that will break forth with a vengeance after the conclusion of the second campaign. We can only imagine what sort of intimidating measures the beast and the worthless shepherd will impose upon true believers at this time (though they will likely include activities of the sort intimated by Daniel 8:10; Daniel 8:23-25; Daniel 11:32-35), but one can safely assume that particular pressure will be brought to bear upon all those who have not openly accepted the message of salvation. Such a strategy has the advantage of creating a widening rift between "the people who know their God" and those who, while they may have a varying degree of emotional attachment to the restored ritual of the temple, will be unwilling to abandon their worldly security for a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ. Still, the reduction in personal freedoms and alteration/restriction of traditional rituals which the actions of antichrist referred to here in Daniel 11:28 will no doubt entail (especially coming at a time when the threat from the south has now been reduced) will not be well received by many in Israel and will have repercussions as we shall see below.

E. The Second Campaign against the South

(29) During this period he will return and attack the south [again], but the circumstances of this [second] campaign will not be like those of the first one. (30a) For ships of Kittim (i.e., the western "Babylon") will attack with him [so that he will be victorious]. Daniel 11:29-30 a

Now at the time of the end, the king of the south (i.e., the Mahdi) will make a thrust at him (i.e., the beast), with the result that the king of the north will come against him like a whirlwind with chariots, and with cavalry, and with many ships. Daniel 11:40 a In our consideration of this second and final campaign against the south, the reference in Daniel to the naval forces of antichrist in both of these passages is very important to note. In the first passage above, "Kittim", literally the people of the island of Cyprus, is most often used in scripture as a generic term to refer to all of "the islands", that is, the nations of the world's western quadrant (Isaiah 23:1; Isaiah 23:12; Jeremiah 2:10; Ezekiel 27:6; i.e., as representative of all of the western sons of Japheth from whom "the islands of the gentiles divided", Genesis 10:4-5). What this means is that these "ships of Kittim" are the ships of Babylon and its western allies. What we have here, therefore, is a reference to the beast's own navy rather than to some extraneous force opposing him (as is often erroneously supposed). Once this point is understood, it is clear to see that in Daniel 11:30 these ships are the reason why "circumstances are different" in this second campaign, for it is just this naval superiority which proves to be the decisive element in the beast's victory, attacking "with him". In the second passage we see that antichrist's navy is not only the ultimate element named in the threefold list of his combat arms (stressing its importance), but is also the only one marked out as exceptional in terms of its quantity (i.e., his ships are "many", even in comparison to his certainly numerous "chariots and cavalry"). Together, these two scriptures confirm that the second campaign will be won by antichrist through the decisive use of seapower, and the precise manner in which he will employ that power has also been given to us in prophecy, specifically in the last oracle of Balaam son of Besor:

(23) Then [Balaam] pronounced his oracle, and said, "Alas! Who can survive once God unleashes it (i.e., the Great Tribulation)? (24) For ships will come from the direction of Kittim, and they will afflict Ashur, and they will afflict Eber. For this is even the one (i.e., antichrist) . . . until he perishes." Numbers 24:23-24

It is not unexpected that Balaam, who sought to curse Israel, should be given this prophecy about the persecution emanating from the all-time nemesis of Israel, antichrist. However the context of Balaam's last oracles (Numbers 24:14-24) have the stated purpose of conveying information about "the days to come" (Numbers 24:14). In addition to this statement and to the other eschatological elements in these prophecies (cf. the irrefutably Messianic "star" and "scepter" of Numbers 24:17), the phraseology of the Hebrew words used in verse twenty-four above to identify the "mystery man" who will be responsible for the future "affliction of Eber" (ve-gam hu'i: "for this is even the one") is reminiscent of that used in the key passage in Daniel which likewise identifies antichrist (i.e., Daniel 11:22 b: ve-gam naghidh berith: "for he is even the prince of the covenant", cf. Daniel 9:27). Together, these facts make the connection between these "ships of Kittim" and the "ships of Kittim" in Daniel chapter 11 virtually certain. Balaam's prophecy also provides us with the crucial information which details the precise place of this invasion, namely, through present-day Lebanon-Syria and Israel. For Ashur, of course, is the original ancestor of Assyria just as Eber is of Israel (cf. respectively Genesis 10:22 and Genesis 11:10-31), making it clear that the entire eastern coastline of the Mediterranean will be the focus of this unprecedented invasion. The

purpose for the massive amphibious assault suggested by these scriptures is plain enough when one considers the actions of the king of the south described in Daniel 11:40 and above. In that verse, the king of the south is said to "make a thrust" against the king of the north in what would have to be a south to north direction, a maneuver which would entail the large-scale movement of most if not all of his forces toward the upper reaches of his realm, close to his border with antichrist's kingdom. We may surmise that this has been antichrist's expectation and plan from the very start, even from before the opening of the first campaign. By this time the Mahdi has no doubt mobilized an even larger army, confident of victory based upon the previous campaign and the improved ratio of forces that must now be even more heavily in his favor (when only those forces deployed on the ground are considered). After the king of the south thrusts to the north, Daniel 11:40 characterizes the beast's response as swift and furious (furious as a whirlwind, according to the Hebrew text), and we are again reminded of the leopard-like swiftness which characterizes all of antichrist's operations (Revelation 13:2). Once the forces of the south have advanced into his trap, the beast will spring it by launching the largest amphibious invasion in history with the objective of cutting off his enemies from the rear, thus surrounding and then annihilating them. In this way, the last major independent military force outside of antichrist's direct control will be eliminated with a single blow.

Since this seaborne invasion will be directed at Syria-Lebanon-Israel, the general location of the final battle of this campaign is thus most likely somewhere in northern Iraq-Syria and southern Turkey-Iran. This too is consistent with what we find elsewhere in scripture. As we have seen above, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, is a scriptural type of antichrist, the prophetic king of Babylon. Within the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel (esp. Isaiah 19:1-25, Isaiah 20:1-6; Jeremiah 46:1-28; and Ezekiel 29:1-21, Ezekiel 30:1-26, Ezekiel 31:1-18, Ezekiel 32:1-32), we also see the conflict between the historical Nebuchadnezzar and Egypt's Pharaoh functioning as a prophetic analogy to the end times with its conflict between Babylon's antichrist and the Mahdi of the southern alliance (whose political center of gravity is also Egypt; cf. Daniel 11:42). Therefore we can say that the conduct of antichrist's campaigns against the Mahdi and his southern alliance will be similar in general terms to the scriptural representations found in these prophecies.

Egypt will rise up like the Nile, and her waters (i.e., the forces of the southern alliance) will surge forth like the [Nile's] streams. And she will say, "I will rise up. I will inundate the world. I will destroy [its] cities and their inhabitants". Jeremiah 46:8

Jeremiah places the decisive battle which will ensue as a result of the king of the south's "thrust" and the king of the north's "whirlwind" response (cf. Daniel 11:40) in the northern reaches of southern alliance territory "by the river Euphrates", making the most likely focal point of the decisive engagement, as mentioned immediately above, somewhere in the vicinity of present-day Syria, Iraq, and southern Turkey (cf. Jeremiah 46:2; Jeremiah 46:10):

(3) "Muster [your troops] with buckler and shield, and advance to the battle. (4) Harness your horses and order your cavalry to mount up. Assemble with your helmets. Polish your spears. Put on your armor. (5) But why do I see them [all] terrified and falling back to the rear? [It is because] their picked troops have been smashed and are in headlong flight. They do not even look back, for there is terror all around [them]". (6) The Lord declares, "Let the swift not flee [to safety] nor the

strong escape. In the north, by the river Euphrates, they shall stumble and fall". Jeremiah 46:3-6 Following this massive defeat, little will be left for the forces of the beast other than to exploit this victory:

(40b) And [the beast] will invade the lands [of the southern alliance], and inundate [them] and sweep through [them], (41) and he will advance into the Beautiful land (i.e., Israel). Now many lands will fall before him, but these will escape from his control: Edom, and Moab, and the first [part of the territory] of the sons of Ammon (i.e., the southern half of historical Ammon contiguous to Edom and Moab). (42) And [antichrist] will extend his control over the lands (of the southern alliance), so that even the land of Egypt will not escape. (43) Thus he will take control of all the repositories of gold and silver, even over all of Egypt's treasures, with Libya (i.e., representing North Africa) and Cush (i.e., Sudan-Ethiopia) following her [in submission]. Daniel 11:40-43

Egypt is emphasized here because it is the main pillar upon which the southern alliance will be based. We may understand Libya to represent the entirety of North Africa, whereas Cush stands for East Africa. The northern, eastern, and southeastern reaches of the south's three kingdoms, while not mentioned by name, fall into the category of the "many lands" of verse forty-one, so that here we see the fulfillment of the prophecy of the fall of the "three horns". We should also recall in this respect that the three kings of these sub-kingdoms who were so instrumental in the beast's victory during the first campaign will certainly be exceptionally useful to him in his consolidation of power over their respective realms. Furthermore, the "bandwagon effect" of the astonishing defeat of this impressive army will not be lost on the rest of the world. It will serve to deflate the hopes of any and all who are even remotely considering opposition on the basis of secular means, especially when one considers the exponential increase in power that antichrist will experience after capturing "Egypt's treasures", namely, all the natural resources of all of the southern alliance territories. The aftermath of defeat for Egypt and by extension for all of the nations of the triple coalition that threw in with her under the Mahdi's leadership is voluminously covered in scripture, and the combination of passages which treat this subject paint a picture of abject defeat, a situation which will no doubt be all the more difficult to bear since the hopes of the south will have been thrown down from such a lofty height (see esp. Ezekiel 30:1-26; cf. Isaiah 19:1-25, Isaiah 20:1-6; Jeremiah 46:1-28; Ezekiel 29:1-21, Ezekiel 30:1-26, Ezekiel 31:1-18, Ezekiel 32:1-32):

(2) "Son of man, prophesy and say, 'Thus says the Lord, "Wail! Woe for the day! (3) For a day [of judgment] is close, [yes], the day of the Lord is close. It will be a day of clouds and time [of judgment] for the nations. (4) For a sword will come against Egypt, and writhing will come upon Cush. When the slain fall in Egypt, they will take away her treasures and her foundations will be trampled. (5) Cush, and Put, and Lydia, and all Arabia, Lybia and all the peoples in league with the land [of Egypt] (i.e., all the allies of the king of the south) will fall by the sword.'" Ezekiel 30:2-5 (cf. Ezekiel 20:45-48)

Egypt's complete undoing at the hands of the beast will, in the end, be a benefit. For it will cause the Egyptians along with many people of the lands of the south to see the impotence of their modern day "Pharaoh", the Mahdi (cf. Jeremiah 46:17; Ezekiel 32:2-15), and bring them instead to cry to the Lord for help, a prayer to be answered both at and after the return of our glorious Lord (Isaiah 19:4-25). Ultimately, the south's defeat in this second, decisive campaign will again be largely attributable to the treason of the three horns and the massive infighting that will ensue

within her own ranks in the wake of the beast's springing of his trap (cf. Daniel 11:26):

(2) For I will spur on Egyptians against Egyptians, and they will fight one against his brother and another against his friend, a city against a city and a kingdom against a kingdom (i.e., the splintering of the triple coalition). (3) And Egypt's spirit will be emptied from the midst of her, for I will confound her plans, although they consult their idols and mediums and oracles and familiar spirits. (4) And I will hand Egypt over into the hand of a cruel master (i.e., antichrist), even a stern king (cf. Daniel 8:23) [who] will rule over them, says the Lord God of hosts." Isaiah 19:2-4 As was the case during the first campaign, so here too we may expect some complication of military maneuvers on account of the trumpet judgments, specifically for this second campaign the sixth judgment or "second woe". The havoc wreaked upon the world by the bands of marauding demons is sure to affect this campaign at least to some degree, but, as was the case in the first campaign, we may expect that the worst case analysis for the army of the beast would be an equal share of disruption, and it is fair to ask whether his forces would not be largely exempted from such an assault (for otherwise one would have, in effect, a case of "Satan casting out Satan"; cf. Matthew 12:26). In any case, the result of the second campaign will be an overwhelming victory on the part of antichrist, and the removal of the last major impediment to his worldwide rule (Ezekiel 31:16-18):

(3b) And the entire earth was in awe of the beast. And they worshiped the dragon because he had given his authority to the beast. (4) And they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? And who is able to make war with him?". Revelation 13:3-4 F. The Jewish Coup Attempt and the Apparent Assassination and Resuscitation of Antichrist

Then he will be stricken [as if dead], but will revive. Therefore he will be enraged at the holy covenant, so that on his return [to Israel from the far south] he will take action [against it] (i.e., eliminating Moses and Elijah and ending the sacrifices). Daniel 11:30 b

Immediately upon the heels of his dramatic victory over the south, the beast will be the object of an attempted assassination plot, the event that gives him the "fatal wound" that is nonetheless miraculously "healed" (Revelation 13:3). The wounding and seemingly miraculous recovery of antichrist described in Daniel 11:30 is thus the Old Testament parallel for the similar information given in Revelation chapters 13 and 17. While we will continue our method of covering these verses seriatim in their proper places (in accordance with the generally chronological progression of the book of Revelation we have noted before), it will be of use to consider the four pertinent passages of scripture here: And one of its (i.e., the beast's) heads [looked] as if it had been stricken unto death, and [yet] its mortal wound had been healed. Revelation 13:3 a And he (i.e., the beast's false prophet) [will] act with all the authority of the first beast [while] in his presence, and he will make the world and all its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. Revelation 13:12 And he (i.e., the beast's false prophet) [will] deceive those who dwell upon the earth on account of the miracles (lit., "signs") which have been given to him to perform in the presence of the beast, even commanding the inhabitants of the earth to make an image of the beast, [that is] of him who received the [deadly] stroke of the sword and [yet] came [back] to life. Revelation 13:14 The beast, which you saw, was (i.e., "existed"), and is not (i.e., came "not to exist"), and is going to rise from the Abyss (i.e., the revival of Rome on the one hand and apparent resuscitation of antichrist on the other), and is going to its destruction. And the inhabitants of the

earth, [those] whose names have not remained written in the book of life [where they were written] from the beginning of the world, will be in awe when they see the beast, because he was (i.e., "existed"), and is not (i.e., came "not to exist"), and will again be present on the scene (i.e., seem to return to life in the case of antichrist, and be reestablished in respect to the empire). Revelation 17:8

Whatever one makes of these passages, we can say with authority that antichrist is most certainly not being "resurrected" here – only our risen Lord currently possesses an eternal body, and no one else will do so until the resurrection of His Church at His return (at which point the beast will be deposited in the lake of fire: Revelation 19:20). The question of "resuscitation" is a more difficult one. On the one hand, it is impossible that the devil would be able to engineer even the temporary return to life of his son, that is, a true "resuscitation", without divine permission for something so entirely unprecedented (i.e., the revival to life from death of an arch-enemy of God and his people), and of such consent we have no specific indication from scripture. On the other hand, the four passages from Revelation quoted above do suggest at the very least a physical revival which will be extraordinary in the extreme, with the final passage, Revelation 17:8, presenting the most difficult case to explain away. For even though that passage has its primary application to revived Rome, applying to the beast by extension (as opposed to Revelation 13:1-18 where this relationship of primary and secondary application is reversed), what is true of one should also be true of the other, and the words "was (i.e., "existed"), and is not (i.e., came "not to exist"), and will again be present on the scene" are most emphatic, and hard to take in any other way than as a literal return from the dead (that is, the definite departure and return of the spirit).

Whether this assassination attempt results in antichrist's actual death or, alternatively, a near-death experience so dramatic and traumatic that it will be nearly indistinguishable from actual death and resuscitation, it is clear from the reaction of the general public to the beast's recovery from this "mortal wound" that the genuineness of his death and the miraculous nature of his return to life will be taken as true and factual by the unbelieving world (cf., the amazement and resultant worship of the world: Revelation 13:3-4). It is also relatively easy to see how trauma unquestionably fatal in the case of any other normal human being might not necessarily be so for the beast – for he will not be fully human after all. The angelic paternity of antichrist will doubtless give him the physical resiliency to endure wounds to which any mere man would certainly succumb. We know from our previous study of the nephilim that prodigious physical attributes are the norm for such creatures, and it is probable that their ability to tolerate conditions which would kill normal human beings is at least part of the reason why God caused the great flood to cover the earth to such a depth and for so long a time. So it is certainly possible that while to the world antichrist may appear to have received an unavoidably fatal injury and may seem to have been "stricken unto death", this wound, mortal in every other case, may only be near-fatal in his case. From the following context of the passages in both Daniel and Revelation, there is no evidence that the beast will suffer any chronic after-effects of this wounding (beyond the permanent scar visible upon his head left by the blow from the sword which strikes him). Quite to the contrary, rather than a setback this incident will actually be a boon to the beast, for it will do much to further the idea that he really is "the true Christ", having thus "risen from the dead" in such a seemingly irrefutable way. It is therefore no accident that it will be directly in the wake of this incident that antichrist's new religion will be transformed into outright devil worship and swiftly come to

dominate the world (cf. Revelation 13:3-17). Unbelievers all over the earth will take this "resurrection" to be genuine and to be legitimate proof of the beast's status as the Messiah. However, believers who know their God and continue to hold firm to the testimony of Jesus will remember our Lord's warning to beware of all such false signs, no matter how persuasive, waiting instead on their own resurrection at the return of our truly resurrected Lord:

(23) At that time if someone says to you "Look [(as they will tell you then)]! Christ is here!", or "Here [He is]!", do not believe [it]. (24) For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will perform great miracles (lit., "signs") and wonders [sufficient] to deceive even the elect, if [that were] possible. (25) Look [(as I am telling you now)]! I have told you ahead of time. (26) So if they say to you all, "Look, He is in the desert!", do not go out [there]. [Or] "Look, He is in the inner-rooms (i.e., in hiding in the city)", do not believe [it]. (27) For as lightning [though it] comes forth from the east is visible all the way to the west, this is just how the return of the Son of Man (i.e., the Second Advent) will be. (28) For wherever the body is (i.e., the Lord), there the eagles will gather (i.e., believers rising in resurrection). Matthew 24:23-28

Beyond the details from Daniel and Revelation provided above, we can say a few a things further about this critical event. Having conquered the king of the south, the beast will be at the height of his power, with no possible alliance of the remaining independent powers on earth capable of resisting the combined might of Babylon, revived Rome, and the now occupied and cooperating territories of the southern kingdom. At this point, with the world, for all practical purposes, lying prostrate at his feet, antichrist's plan, soon to be successfully carried out, will be to move his headquarters to Jerusalem, intending to rule the world from there as if he were God (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:4). It should be observed in regard to his treatment of the Jews, moreover, that, in addition to the measures "against the covenant" already taken at the conclusion of the first campaign (Daniel 11:28), the land of Israel will be very roughly handled during the second campaign, with the invading amphibious forces treating her and her population as anything but allies (i.e., "they will afflict Eber": Numbers 24:24; cf. Isaiah 33:1-8, especially Isaiah 33:8, and Lamentations 1:2, Lamentations 1:10, Lamentations 1:19, Lamentations 1:21). The beast's horrendous plans to completely annul his agreement with the state of Israel and to thoroughly abrogate the revival of temple rite will doubtless not be totally secret, even before the fact (at least not to his inner circle, a group which we may expect will contain representatives from Israel, one of the seven original kingdoms of revived Rome). It is more than likely, therefore, that the agents of this assassination attempt will be Jewish (assuming, that is, that the entire affair is not in actuality an elaborate ruse on antichrist's part; see below). This would seem to be the best explanation for the close connection given in Daniel 11:30 between the "striking down" of antichrist and the fury released immediately thereafter against the legitimately revived worship of God in Jerusalem and those who are involved therein:

(30b) Then he will be stricken [as if dead], but will revive. Therefore he will be enraged at the holy covenant, so that on his return [to Israel from the far south] he will take action [against it] (i.e., eliminating Moses and Elijah and ending the sacrifices). Daniel 11:30 b

It should not escape our attention here that this "rage" and retaliation are an indication of antichrist's core anti-Semitism, for it will be technically misplaced. Those who are truly following Jesus Christ in response to the ministry of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000 will be focused upon

divine solutions, and will certainly not be misled into thinking that any act of violence of this sort, no matter how apparently justifiable, will in any way ward off the Great Tribulation immediately to come. At this time in Israel, there will essentially be three major factions into which the body-politic is split: 1) dedicated followers of antichrist; 2) dedicated followers of our Lord; 3) patriots (or "zealots"), most of whom were ardent supporters of the beast when he appeared to be the only worldly hope of help against the Mahdi and his hordes. As the Tribulation progresses, we can expect more and more of the first group to migrate into the third group (cf. Zechariah 12:3-8 with Zechariah 12:10). Those who truly know their God, moreover, will flee into the wilderness in accordance with the commands of our Lord just as soon as antichrist sets up the "abomination of desolation" as a putative part of his reaction to this assault on his person (though his plan all along has been to take this action). In addition to supporting his argument to be the true "Messiah", therefore, this assassination attempt will also supply the beast with a certain measure of justification for the harsh treatment of Israel to follow, and specifically for his war against Moses and Elijah and the subsequent termination of the revived temple worship (an action that will in itself enjoy a measure of worldwide popularity because of their direction of the trumpet judgments: Revelation 11:7-13). For antichrist will opportunistically, though falsely, lay this deed at their feet. Finally, it is likely that the assassination attempt will take place while antichrist is involved in directing the plundering of Egypt, the heartland of the Mahdi's power (cf. Ezekiel 30:9 with Daniel 11:30 a), for he is said to "return" to Israel after the event in order to vent his anger "against the covenant".

G. The "Abomination of Desolation" and the "Session" of Antichrist

Upon his return to Israel following his defeat of the south and his subsequent recovery from the attempt on his life, antichrist will act swiftly to annul the treaty made with Israel (cf. Isaiah 33:7-8). Using the assault upon his person as an excuse and the true believers who follow the ministry of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000 as scapegoats, the beast will commence his "war" against the two prophets with the intention of bringing a halt to the newly revived worship of the one true God, and replacing it with the overt worship of the devil and of himself (Revelation 11:7-13).

Then he (i.e., antichrist) will confirm an agreement (or "covenant"; Hebrew, בְּרִית, *beriyth*) with the powerful [in Israel] during [that] one [remaining] week (i.e., the 70th week, the Tribulation), but in the middle of the week (i.e., just prior to the Tribulation's mid-point) he will put a halt to sacrifice and offering (i.e., eliminating Moses and Elijah and interrupting the temple rites). Daniel 9:27 a

Then he will be stricken [as if dead], but will revive. Therefore he will be enraged at the holy covenant, so that on his return [to Israel from the far south] he will take action [against it] (i.e., eliminating Moses and Elijah and ending the sacrifices). And he will give his support to those who abandon the holy covenant. Daniel 11:30 b-c

Now that the two prophets with their miraculous powers have been removed, antichrist will waste no time in putting an end to all semblance of the worship of God on the temple mount (as the verses above indicate). Worse to tell, he will now implement his plan for replacing the worship of God with the worship of himself as God in conjunction with the worship of his father the devil. The first irrefutable sign of this will be the setting up in front of the temple of an abominable idol known in scripture as "the abomination of desolation".

1. The Abomination of Desolation The placement of this idol by antichrist is well-documented in scripture, being referred to both by Daniel and by our Lord as one of the critical events whereby the beast may be known (Matthew 24:15-18; Mark 13:14-16): For it is from him (i.e., the coming evil one) that the military forces will issue forth which will pollute the sanctuary (i.e., ending the ministry of Moses and Elijah), remove the daily sacrifice, and set up the abomination of desolation. Daniel 11:31

Daniel's combining of the pollution of the sanctuary and halting of the offerings to God with the setting up of this idol indicates that the place of its erection will indeed be within the temple court:

"But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it should not – let the reader understand – then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains." Mark 13:14

Matthew goes further and overtly connects this idol with the "abomination" mentioned in Daniel (i.e., Daniel 11:31 and Daniel 12:11), so as to leave no doubt about the identification of these prophecies: from Daniel's words, to our Lord's words, to the description of the idol in Revelation 13:1-18, all of these passages are clearly referring to one and the same thing, the idol of antichrist which is set up in the temple court at the Tribulation's mid-point:

(15) "So when you see the abomination of desolation (which is spoken of through Daniel the prophet) standing in a holy place – let the reader understand – (16) then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains." Matthew 24:15-16

It should be noted that in the Greek text of Matthew 24:15 there is no definite article preceding the words "holy place", so that translations which render this phrase "the holy place" are technically incorrect. This is important because, in translation, the words "the holy place" generally refer to the outermost of the temple's two spaces which contained the table of the bread of presence, the golden altar of incense, and the golden lampstand or menorah (in the LXX: Exodus 26:33; Exodus 28:29; Leviticus 16:2; etc.; cf. Hebrews 9:1-5; in Greek in all these cases, moreover, the word "place" is left out). The omission of the article thus serves as an emphatic sign that the words "holy place" most definitely do not refer to the temple, but rather to the inner court or "priest's court" (as in Daniel 8:11; Revelation 11:2; cf. Acts 6:13; Acts 21:28). The idol will be visible to all inhabitants of Jerusalem, for it will not be necessary to enter into the temple proper to view it. In fact, during the 42 months of antichrist's reign in Jerusalem, the world will make pilgrimage to the temple mount to do obeisance before the statue of the beast, thronging into the outer court from where the idol, no doubt of substantial size, will be visible from its place in the inner court before the temple (cf. Ezekiel 8:3-5):

(13) And [the beast's false prophet] [will] perform great miracles (lit., "signs"), even making fire come down from heaven to the earth in front of everyone. (14) And he [will] deceive those who dwell upon the earth on account of the miracles (lit., "signs") which have been given to him to perform in the presence of the beast, even commanding the inhabitants of the earth to make an image of the beast, [that is] of him who received the [deadly] stroke of the sword and [yet] came [back] to life. (15) And it was given to him to provide a spirit for the image of the beast so that the image might speak, and [it was also given to him] to bring it about that as many as refused to worship the image of the beast might be put to death. Revelation 13:13-15 As is clear from this description, this idol will be most impressive to the unbelievers who view it and come to worship it.

In our age of skepticism and worldliness, that is saying quite a lot. We may therefore expect this idol to be both mammoth in its proportions, incredibly and persuasively life-like in its functioning, and awe-inspiring in its verbal pronouncements. It will strike fear and reverence into the hardened hearts of the unbelievers who come to Jerusalem to worship the beast, confirming their confidence in him and strengthening their support of him. The impression made by this idol in conjunction with the miracles performed by the false prophet and the prior apparent "resurrection" of the beast in conjunction with his military conquest of the world will be more than enough for all those who have rejected the one true God to convince them of the divinity of the devil's son. The translation, "the abomination of desolation", while understandable, is a bit misleading, for even in the Greek translation of the original Hebrew phrase, "desolation" is a verbal noun which ought rather to mean something like "process of desolating", a fact even more difficult to ignore in the case of the corresponding participles of Daniel 11:31 and Daniel 12:11. Since these words are all really calling attention to the action produced by the "abominable thing" (i.e., the idol), we would have been better served had this phrase been traditionally translated "the abomination which causes desolation". In applying the exact same terminology to antichrist himself, Daniel 9:27 spells out the precise significance of these words in respect to this capacity of the "abomination" idol to produce "desolation" in a spiritual sense, namely, an appalling isolation and separation from God resulting from horrendous idolatry and in turn resulting in devastation in both spiritual and material terms. And on account of the extreme [nature] of [his] (i.e., antichrist's) abominations, he [will] be causing desolations (i.e., desertion and estrangement from God), even until the end when what has been determined will be poured out upon the one characterized by [this] desolation (i.e., the beast as archetype and cause of the alienation and rebellion from God which he fosters). Daniel 9:27 b

Unfortunately, the setting up of idols even in the very presence of the Lord God is not unprecedented in Israel's history (2 Kings 23:6; cf. Ezekiel 8:3-5). What makes this particular "abomination" distinctive is that, rather than being a mere symptom of apostasy, this particular idol will be instrumental in producing a spiritual "desolation" within Israel whence it will spread to the entire world (cf. Daniel 8:13, where the apostasy or "rebellion" is said to be instrumental in the "desolation"). For it is the obeisance paid to this idol which will be central to the new religion of beast-and-Satan worship established by antichrist at the Tribulation's mid-point, and it is the acquiescence and willing participation in this worship that will both energize the Great Persecution which follows and at the same time doom the world in general and Israel in particular to the "desolating horrors" of the Great Tribulation itself, the final intense period of judgment that precedes our Lord's return.

"And when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that her desolation is near." Luke 21:20 In Luke's account of our Lord's words above, a second sign (i.e., the mustering of the beast's armies in Israel following the defeat of the south) is given as a warning for believers to flee Jerusalem in addition to the sign of the "abomination". The Greek word used here is precisely the same word for "desolation" as the one used for the idol in Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:14. Thus in the case of Luke we are also given to see the resulting "desolation" which proceeds from the establishment of the system of worldwide idolatry in the very center of Jerusalem focused on the worship of antichrist and the idol which represents him, "the abomination [which causes] desolation".

2. The Session of Antichrist in the Temple of God The elimination of Moses and Elijah and subsequent desecration of the sanctuary through the establishment of the talking idol are preliminary steps to the purpose most dear to antichrist's cold, half-human heart, namely, taking his seat in God's temple and thereby blasphemously proclaiming to the world that he is the true God and the true Messiah (cf. Daniel 8:11-14).

(3) For [the Second Advent cannot come] unless the [Great] Apostasy has first occurred and the man of lawlessness, [antichrist,] has [first] been revealed, that "son of destruction" (cf. John 17:12 of Judas), (4) the one who will oppose and exalt himself against every so-called god and object of worship to such a degree that he will [even] take his seat in the temple of God and represent himself as being God.

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 The scope and duration of this false "session" are also discussed by Daniel:

(10) And [the little horn] (i.e., antichrist as a type and representative of the devil) magnified himself against the host of heaven (i.e., the family of God, men and angels both), and he cast down to the earth some of the host (i.e., antichrist seducing believers into apostasy) and some of the stars (i.e., Satan having seduced angels into rebellion) and he trampled them underfoot (i.e., their rebellion or apostasy in association with evil leading to their subsequent destruction; cf. Daniel 7:7; Daniel 7:19; Revelation 11:2). (11) He even magnified himself against the Prince of the host (i.e., Christ). The daily sacrifice was abolished by him, and the holy place (i.e., the inner court) was desecrated. (12) And along with the daily sacrifice, the host (i.e., believers) fell into his power on account of [the] rebellion (i.e., the Great Apostasy). And he threw truth to the ground, and was successful in whatever he did. (13) And I heard one of the holy ones who was speaking, and he said to the other holy one who was speaking, "How long will this vision of the daily sacrifice and of the rebellion which produces desolation and of the handing over of the holy [place] (i.e., the inner court) and of the trampling down of the host be?" (14) And he replied to me, "Until 2,300 evenings and mornings have passed. Then the holy [place] will be purified." Daniel 8:10-14 The beast will thus occupy the temple of God for the better part of the Great Tribulation, removing from Jerusalem only when the events which precede the Second Advent necessitate it (Daniel 11:44-45). Indeed, this prolonged "session" of antichrist is a deliberate attempt to mimic the present heavenly and coming earthly true session of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also take up residence in the temple during His thousand year millennial reign. Believers who know their God will not be fooled by the false parallels engineered by the beast (i.e., of a false Messiah ensconced in a false New Jerusalem ruling a false "kingdom come"). Just as the ark did not come to rest until Solomon, the "son of David", built a new and glorious home for it (i.e., the first temple), so our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the ark is a type (1 Chronicles 17:1-6), will be the one to "build up" the third temple in a manner and to a degree which will allow of no misinterpretation as to the true divine glory of its Builder and Inhabitant (cf. Zechariah 6:12-15). On the other hand, just as his father the devil profaned the original mountain of God (Ezekiel 28:18), so antichrist will profane and pollute the sanctuary until the 42 months of the Great Tribulation run their course and the glorious day of our Lord's return draws nigh.

3. The Revelation of Antichrist With the termination of the warning ministries of the Tribulation's first half (directed by Moses and Elijah and carried out by the 144,000), the setting up of the abomination of desolation, and the session of antichrist in the very temple of God, blasphemously

proclaiming himself to be God, not even the most skeptical nor the most ignorant will be able to doubt the identification of this individual as the beast prophesied in scripture. With these events, antichrist will have been fully "revealed" (2 Thessalonians 2:3-8), and the "number of his name" associated with the ensuing worship of him and his father the devil central to his new religion (Revelation 13:16-18) will be the final and incontrovertible proof that he is not the Son of God but rather the son of Satan. From this point forward, antichrist will be, for all practical purposes, the ruler of the world (Revelation 13:3-10), and from his new headquarters on Jerusalem's temple mount he will seek to solidify that rule through the institution of his worldwide religion. Then there will begin a time of persecution unprecedented since the beginning of the world, there will begin the Great Tribulation. This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Look! Disaster is spreading from nation to nation; a mighty storm is rising from the ends of the earth." Jeremiah 25:32 NIV

01A.06. The Great Tribulation

6. The Great Tribulation The establishment of the beast as the effective ruler of this world under the guidance and support of his father the devil and his session in God's temple in Jerusalem representing himself as God (2 Thessalonians 2:4) marks the end of the Tribulation's first phase. With this "revelation" of antichrist, we are brought to the threshold of the most terrible time in world history, the Great Tribulation. And it shall be a time of distress such as has never occurred since people first existed on the earth until that time. Daniel 12:1 b For at that time there will be a Great Tribulation such as has never occurred from the beginning of the world until now, and [such as] will never again occur thereafter. Matthew 24:21 (cf. Mark 13:19) The Great Tribulation will unquestionably be a devastating experience for all the inhabitants of the earth, but it will fall especially hard upon believers in Jesus Christ. For the principal and truly eponymous event of that period, that is, the intense tribulation that will characterize those three and a half years, will be the unprecedented persecution of the Church and the martyrdom that accompanies that persecution. Key to the solidification of his world kingdom will be the beast's pseudo-religion. As was the case to a somewhat lesser degree in historical Rome, adherence to the cult worship of the ruler will be the litmus test of loyalty to the state. But while Roman emperors made use of this admittedly evil device primarily for pragmatic reasons relating to the solidification of their power, antichrist and his father the devil will also be intent upon eradicating faith from the earth through the elimination of the faithful. This has always been a central design of Satan's plans, for if all to whom the promises of God have been made could be removed (either through death or apostasy), then God's promises would have to fail. If there is no one left for Christ to return to, then the devil wins. Such, at any rate, runs Satan's twisted thinking. With the whole world under antichrist's control, the forcible conversion of all of the inhabitants of the earth to the beast's devil worshiping religion becomes not only theoretically possible, but is also the perfect satanic final solution: all who refuse to convert will be put to death so that, either way, faith will perish from the earth. And such would be our fate, except for the mercy, the goodness, and the power of our God, who is coming to rescue us through the return of His Son our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And they will say on that day, "Behold! This is our God! We waited in hope for Him to deliver us. This is our Lord. We waited in hope for Him. Let us rejoice and be glad in His deliverance!" Isaiah 25:9

Strengthen the hands that are weak. Bolster the knees that are giving way. Say to those with anxious hearts, "Be strong! Don't be afraid! Behold! Your God will come, as an Avenger. [Your] God will come, as a Rewarder. He will come, and He will deliver you". Isaiah 35:3-4

We must ever look forward to that ultimate deliverance. But we must also remember that the Great Tribulation is aptly named, and that just as many fell through apostasy during the Tribulation's first half, many will fall in martyrdom during those final three and a half years. We must remember, learn well the lessons the Bible has – not without good reason – stored up for us in advance, and make every effort to prepare spiritually for whatever may betide.

A. The Seventh Trumpet

(15) Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven saying, "The world Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ has [now] come, and He will rule forever and ever. Amen". (16) And the twenty-four elders were sitting in front of the throne, and they fell on their faces and worshiped God, (17) saying, "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and the One who was, even because you have taken up your great power and begun to reign! (18) Although the nations thronged together in their wrath, your wrath has come, even the time for the dead to be judged, for giving to your servants the prophets and to the holy ones, even to those who fear your Name both great and small, the reward [that is due them], and for destroying those who are destroying the earth!". (19) And the temple of God which is in heaven above opened, and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple. And there occurred flashes of lightning and thunderous voices and an earthquake, and large hail [fell]. Revelation 11:15-19 With the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the Great Tribulation begins. Seven is the number of perfection and completion (cf. Psalms 12:6; Psalms 119:164; Proverbs 6:16; Proverbs 9:1), and while the first six trumpets announce and commence warning judgments of ascending intensity and longevity during the Tribulation's first half, the seventh trumpet opens the longest and most intensive warning judgment of all, namely, the Great Tribulation itself. For the Great Tribulation is the ultimate admonition to prepare to meet with God, for He is coming at the end of that final three and a half years in the Person of the conquering Messiah who will mete out vengeance to His adversaries even as He brings deliverance to His people (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12). That is why all of the other events and proclamations in this paragraph, Revelation 11:15-19, directly connect the sounding of the seventh trumpet and the Great Tribulation's commencement to that glorious future day. For the Tribulation as a whole is the opening twilight of the Great Day of the Lord whose dawn will come in blazing glory with the Second Advent of the Morning Star, the Messiah, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the true Light of the World (Numbers 24:17; Matthew 2:2-10; 2 Peter 1:19; Revelation 2:28; Revelation 22:16; cf. John 1:4-9; John 3:19-21; John 8:12; John 9:5; John 12:36; John 12:46).

B. War in Heaven

(7) And war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought with the dragon and the dragon and his angels fought [back], (8) but they did not prevail against him, and they could no longer find any place [of refuge] in heaven. (9) And [so] the great dragon, the ancient serpent, the one called Devil and Satan, was thrown down; even he who deceives the entire world was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (10) And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, "Now our God's deliverance and might and kingdom have come, even the power of His Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, the one who accuses them day and night in front of our God, has been thrown down. (11) But these [believers] have defeated [the devil] through the blood of the Lamb and the Word of their testimony. For they did not love their lives, [even] to the point of death. (12) Because of this, rejoice, O heavens and those residing in them! [But] woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you, having [great] anger, because he knows that he has [only] a short time [remaining]." Revelation 12:7-12 The fight described here between Michael and Satan and their respective forces, resulting in the expulsion from heaven of Satan and his angels, is the first event of the Great Tribulation proper. The way in which the outbreak of the "war" is described in this verse indicates that "Michael and his angels" are the initiators of this attack, and we may be certain that they commence these hostilities on divine authority. It may seem

strange to some that up until this point in human history God has allowed the devil to present himself in the heavenly assembly and to continue to bring accusations against the elect (1 Kings 22:19-22; 1 Kings 2:1; Job 1:6-19; Job 2:1-7; Job 15:8; Job 38:7; Psalms 29:1 ff.; Psalms 89:5-7; Jeremiah 23:18 & Jeremiah 23:22; Zechariah 3:1; 1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 12:10). Clearly, God has always had the power to cast the devil out of heaven, whether by immediate means or, as here, through the agency of his elect angels. But everything which has yet transpired in heaven and on earth has all been according to the ineluctable plan of God "whose judgments are unsearchable and whose ways are beyond finding out" (Romans 11:33). God's plan to repair the breach in the moral fabric of the universe rent by creature rebellion has always involved the allowance of true creature free will on the one hand together with an irrefutable demonstration of the justice and rightness of God and His perfectly holy, good and loving character on the other.

Satan's ejection from heaven along with his followers at the commencement of the Tribulation's second half will be a crucial turning point in the history of his rebellion against God. From that point forward, the dynamics of the conflict will change so radically and fundamentally that no other period in human history will be comparable. That is in no small part why, from the divine point of view, the Great Tribulation is largely inseparable from "the Day of the Lord" which brings it to a close at our Lord's return. For once Satan has devoted all of his resources to this final furious assault upon the people of God, God's wrath, God's judgment, and God's deliverance cannot be long delayed.

Thus the period of Great Tribulation which starts immediately following the sounding of the 7th trumpet and at the same time as Satan's expulsion from heaven is in essence theologically indistinguishable from the Day of the Lord which follows hard upon its heels. For this is the beginning of the judgment that is answered by restoration and replacement through Christ's millennial kingdom and reign. In the casting down of Satan and his angels we see the process of judgment beginning, immediately after the concluding sign of warning, the 7th trumpet, has been given. All of the trends of the Great Tribulation which follow are either part of the process of judgment (i.e., the seven bowl judgments of wrath and the remaining sequence of seven major judgments on Babylon, at Armageddon, and etc.) or provocations thereto (i.e., the blasphemous rule of antichrist and the Great Persecution), and are essentially inextricable from the blessed restoration and replacement that is to follow immediately when the powerful and cleansing wind of judgment has swept away all that is fetid and foul and ushered in the crisp and bright new day of righteousness in the Messiah's kingdom of a thousand years. The last three and a half years of Satan's reign thus constitute the final darkness before the dawn when the Morning Star rises and bathes the earth in the glorious light of His presence and His truth. What we have here in Revelation 12:7-12 is the first step in this process of judgment, restoration and replacement in the exclusion of Satan and his fallen angels from heaven and their consignment to the earth for this last, terrible period of human testing and suffering.

It is surely in no small part the devil's restriction to planet earth for the remainder of the time allotted to him that makes the Great Tribulation so horrific, a time like no other in the history of the human race (Daniel 12:1; Matthew 24:21-22). No longer will Satan split his time between heaven and earth, accusing our brothers and sisters before the Lord even as his minions assault us on earth. From this point forward, all of the devil's efforts will be focused upon the earth – if only because this is where he and his followers will have been confined until the Great Day of the Lord

sweeps them away. So while a number of factors contribute to the "greatness" of the Great Tribulation such as the removal of Holy Spirit restraint and the subsequent unleashing of lawlessness, and such as the one world rule of antichrist and the subsequent breakdown of all human restraint, the confinement of Satan and his minions to the earth is, nevertheless, not the least of the reasons why the Great Tribulation will be so consummately horrific.

But] woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you, having [great] anger, because he knows that he has [only] a short time [remaining]!" Revelation 12:12

Michael's victory and the devil's expulsion is nonetheless cause for great rejoicing as well (Revelation 12:12 a), for it marks a tangible beginning of the end of the reign of evil and the devil's reign of terror, made possible through the victory of Jesus Christ on the cross and now entering into the phase of final glorious fulfillment.

[For by means of the cross, God] has stripped [demon] rulers and authorities [of their power] and subjected them to public humiliation, having triumphed over them in [Christ]. Colossians 2:15 (cf. Romans 16:20; Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 3:8 b)

Satan's casting out of heaven is a first visible step in the eventual exclusion of all evil from the coming eternal kingdom wherein righteousness dwells, and one which is well documented elsewhere in prophetic scripture at that:

(12) How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, O son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, O you who laid the nations low. (13) For you said in your heart, 'I will ascend heavenward. I will set my throne above the stars of God. And I will take my seat on the mount of assembly on the sides of the north. (14) I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the Most High God'. (15) But indeed you will be brought down to Sheol, to the sides of the pit. Isaiah 14:12-15 In all your ways you were perfect from the day of your creation until unrighteousness was found in you. In your extensive conspiring, you were filled with wickedness, and you sinned. So I cast you from the mountain of God as one profaned, and I blotted out [your memory] from among the stones of fire, O covering cherub. Your heart became haughty because of your beauty, [and so] you destroyed your wisdom on account of your splendor. So I cast you to the earth, and I made a spectacle of you before kings. Ezekiel 28:15-17 The seventy returned and said with joy, "Lord, even the demons obey us in your Name!" And Jesus said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like a star". Luke 10:17-18 A brief aside is perhaps necessary at this point concerning Michael and his angels and the battle fought with Satan and his angels. While scripture does have much to say about the angelic realm, it says less than we may perhaps desire to know and yet everything we need to know. Lacking physically material bodies such as we possess, angels apparently cannot be wounded or killed (though they may be incarcerated). So the exact nature and detail of the combat that will transpire when the 7th trumpet sounds is beyond our ability to know. We are given only the result, that is, the total defeat of the devil and his forces and their complete exclusion from the heavenly realm. We have posited before that the ultimate tally of saved humanity will eventually equal twice that of the fallen angels (the first half constituting the Church, and the second the echelon of millennial believers). Therefore such massive numbers and the completeness of the victory and defeat certainly indicate that the struggle will be a monumental one, especially given the extraordinary power of angelic kind. Furthermore, the significance of the expulsion of the fallen angels from heaven, an "estate" which they have held

since before the re-creation of the heavens and the earth and the creation of mankind, is immense. This event will be real, and the mere fact that we are unable to see it and can barely imagine its specifics in no way diminishes that significance. For the world of angels, the change will be profound for both victors and vanquished, and will also of course not be without serious consequence for the earth and for humanity.

One thing that we can surmise about this decisive battle between elect and fallen angels is that, while the numbers involved will be immense, not all of angelic kind will participate. Michael, by rank an archangel, is one of a college of seven such "general officers". Positioning an equal share of the total elect "host" under the command of each officer would leave Michael in charge of a force less than one third the size of Satan's entire command (i.e., one seventh of two thirds versus a full third for the devil). This means that instead of the elect angels fighting an easy battle with overwhelming numbers on their side, Michael's victory will require extraordinary strategy and tactics, and exceptional courage and bravery. Even though this victory has been prophesied for nearly two millennia here at Revelation 12:7-9, the brazenness of the attack with such inferior numbers and the astounding nature of the defeat still seems to come as a surprise to the devil and his cohorts, and this humiliation will be no small contributing factor to the "wrath" Satan will subsequently vent upon the world in the short time remaining to him (Revelation 12:12 b). Although we are not privy to the details, a clear principle does emerge from Michael's most impressive victory. Armed with this prophecy, Michael and his forces are even now using the time allotted to prepare for the unequal fight to come, and will as a direct result of this diligence be astoundingly successful in conquering a complacent foe who has clearly drawn false confidence from superior numbers.

Finally in this regard it is very likely that Michael's forces are the elite of the elect warrior angels (we may think of them as the "Marines" or the "Rangers" among angelic kind). For as we have seen previously, the number of the elect angelic clans totals six, not seven. It certainly fits the context and everything else we may discern about angelic organization, therefore, to posit that while each clan possesses an archangel (in addition to four elders; see the previous note), Michael holds a special command composed of elite warriors who have distinguished themselves in the fight against the rebellion thus far by their martial valor, courage, integrity, and zeal for the Lord (compare David's cadre of heroes marked out for special mention: 2 Samuel 23:8-39; 1 Chronicles 11:10-37; cf. 1 Samuel 22:1-2). It certainly behooves us as loyal followers of Jesus Christ to remember that in the spiritual conflict in which we are engaged what we do for the Lord is not only of critical importance – it certainly does not go unnoticed now, nor will it be unrecognized on that great day to come. Let us therefore continue to encourage one another with the truth that, like David's mighty men and like Michael's elite, we too have a great opportunity to likewise write our names on the Lord's scroll of valor for exceptional conduct in the spiritual conflict in which we are engaged. And let us remember as well that, although the darkest of times may lie ahead, the battlefield of the Great Persecution will also offer those who fight upon it unprecedented opportunities for glorifying Jesus Christ and winning in the bargain an undying crown of glory (1 Peter 5:4; cf. Revelation 12:11).

C. The Dragon's Persecution of Believing Israel

(15) So when you see the abomination of desolation (which is spoken of through Daniel the prophet) standing in a holy place – let the reader understand – (16) then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. (17) Let the one on top of his roof not go [back] down to pick up his things out of his house, (18) and let the one in the field not turn back to pick up his cloak. (19) And woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing in those days. (20) And [so] pray that your flight may not take place during a storm or on a Sabbath. (21) For at that time there will be a great tribulation such as has never occurred from the beginning of the world until now, and [such as] will never again occur thereafter. Matthew 24:15-21 (cf. Luke 17:31-32)

(14) But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it should not – let the reader understand – then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, (15) and let the one on top of his roof not go [back] down, neither let him enter [back] into his house to pick up anything out of it, (16) and let the one in the field not turn back to pick up his cloak. (17) And woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing in those days. (18) And [so] pray that it might not take place during a storm. (19) For those days will see a tribulation the like of which has never occurred from the beginning of God's creation of the world until now, and never will occur again. Mark 13:14-19

Having disposed of Moses and Elijah, one of the first things antichrist will do upon establishing himself as a pseudo-god in Jerusalem will be to attempt to destroy all of their followers within the borders of Israel. The first to die will be the 144,000 Jewish evangelists. Their mission was and will be to the end to bring the gospel to their fellow Jews, and their deaths will serve to give these converts to the true Messiah time to escape the evil designs of the beast and his father the devil. For while believers within Israel are told to escape without so much as returning home for a coat, the 144,000 will stand their ground wherever they may be in fulfillment of this last act of courage which the Lord has ordained for them: martyrdom.

(1) And I looked, and behold, the Lamb stood upon Mount Zion, and with Him were the 144,000, having His Name and the Name of His Father written upon their foreheads. (2) And I heard a sound from heaven like a sound of many waters and a sound of thunder, and the sound which I heard was like that of lyre-players playing on their lyres. (3) And they (i.e., the 144,000) are singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders, and no one was able to learn the song except the 144,000 [singing] in unison, they who had been purchased from the earth. Revelation 14:1-3 The rewards that accompany such wonderful and sacrificial service to the Lord which the 144,000 will achieve, a ministry crowned with martyrdom that not only glorifies the Lord directly but allows the escape of those they have ministered to, will be profound indeed. When the Church in resurrection is reorganized into the twelve tribes whose names are on the gates of New Jerusalem, we will not be surprised to see the 144,000 formed into the otherwise unassigned tribe of Levi, a special tribe whose "portion is the Lord", and whose eternal status will be one of special closeness to Him – there can be no greater reward.

(13) And when the dragon saw that he had been cast down to the earth, he gave chase to the woman who had born the male [child]. (14) And to the woman were given two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly into the desert to a place [prepared] for her where she is [going to be] sustained there away from the presence of the serpent for a time and times and half a time. (15) And the serpent spewed [forth] from his mouth after the woman water like a river in order to sweep

her away. (16) And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon had spewed [forth] from his mouth. (17) And the dragon was enraged at the woman, and he went away to make war with the rest of her seed, [even] those who are keeping the commandments of God and maintaining their testimony to Jesus. Revelation 12:13-17

Even with the 144,000 acting as a rearguard at the cost of their lives, those Jewish believers who heed the warning to flee as soon as they see the "abomination" set up in the temple court will nevertheless be pursued by antichrist. As the passage above makes clear, however, they will be granted a successful escape through divine, supernatural means. Moreover, they will be granted a special place of comfort and protection somewhere in the middle of the desert wherein like the Israelites of old they will be protected and provided for by the Lord for the duration of the Tribulation, "for a time and times and half a time".

D. The Beast's Prophet and the Worldwide Anti-Christian Religion

(4) And they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast. And they [also] worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? And who is able to make war with him?" (5) And a mouth was given to [the beast] to speak presumptuous things and blasphemies [against God]. And it was [also] given to him to do what he wished for forty-two months. (6) And he opened his mouth for [the purpose of] blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His Name and His dwelling and those who dwell in heaven (i.e., the family of God). (7) And it was given to [the beast] to make war on the holy ones (e.g., believers) and to conquer them (i.e., the Great Persecution). And authority was given to him over every tribe and people and language and race. (8) And all the inhabitants of the earth will worship [the beast], [that is, all] whose names are not [still] written in the book of life [where they were written] from the beginning of the world, [even the book] which belongs to the Lamb who was slain. (9) "If anyone has an ear, let him hear. (10) If anyone is [destined] for captivity [to captivity he will go]. If it is necessary for anyone to be put to death by the sword, by the sword he must be put to death. Herein lies the perseverance and the faithfulness of the holy ones." Revelation 13:4-10

1. The Anti-Christian Religion and its Worldwide Expansion

The amazement the world will manifest at the beast's pseudo-resurrection (Revelation 13:3) along with his military successes (being now the effective ruler of the world as a result) spills forth at this point not only in the worship of antichrist himself, but also in the worship of his father, the dragon (i.e., the devil). It is to some extent a moot point whether or not these worshipers who will constitute the vast majority of the world's population really understand that it is Satan and his antichrist they are worshiping and not the one true God and His true Messiah. For the beast will certainly represent himself as the latter so that there will also be no doubt about the representation in this worldwide religion of Satan as "true God" (cf. Ezekiel 31:11; John 12:31; 2 Corinthians 4:4). Clearly, however, the world ought to know, inasmuch as antichrist's reign in Jerusalem from the temple of God itself will be pursuant to his prior eviction of the two servants of God, Moses and Elijah, who, it will be recalled, mediated the trumpet judgments of warning (Revelation 11:1-13; cf. Zechariah 4:14).

Following his consolidation of power worldwide, the first item on antichrist's agenda, and the most effective, most dramatic, and most abhorrent means that the dragon and his antichrist will employ to consolidate their kingdom, will be the establishment of a mandatory, worldwide religion designed to replace all genuine worship of the one true God with the worship of the beast and his

father the devil instead. As Revelation 13:4 demonstrates, the population of the world at large, awed by recent events, will easily and readily put aside whatever scruples and reservations they may have had before and will enthusiastically embrace the worship of Satan and antichrist. Their reasoning and motivation is simple enough and is made crystal clear in our context: the dragon will be considered a legitimate object of worship "because he gave his authority to the beast", and antichrist in turn will be regarded as such 1) because of his extraordinary person (exemplified in particular by his pseudo resurrection: "Who is like the beast?"), and 2) because of his extraordinary deeds (exemplified in particular by his conquest of the world, including his "defeat" of the two witnesses: "And who is able to make war with him?"). The world's new-found reverence for the devil and their acceptance of him as "God" is a result of their prior conviction that antichrist is God's divine representative on earth. While this may perhaps seem a somewhat unbelievable development to followers of the true Christ before the fact, we would do well to remember the words of our Lord:

(10) And at that time many will fall away and will betray each other and will hate each other, (11) and many false prophets will arise and will deceive many. (12) Now because of the increase of lawlessness [at that time], the love of the many will cool. (13) But he who endures until the end, this [is the one who] will be saved. Matthew 24:10-13 At that time if someone says to you "Look [(as they will tell you then)]! Christ is here!", or "Here [He is]!", do not believe [it]. For false christs and false prophets will arise and will perform great miracles (lit., "signs") and wonders [sufficient] to deceive even the elect, if [that were] possible. Look [(as I am telling you now)]! I have told you ahead of time. Matthew 24:23-25 The parallels between the beast and the true Messiah will be both deliberate and numerous. If, as Jesus tells us in the verse above, even the elect will be tempted to interpret the signs and wonders of antichrist as proof of his Messiahship, it is small wonder that those who have rejected the truth of Jesus Christ will be easily ensnared by the satanic lies of the beast and the dragon. In addition to the signs and wonders mentioned above, antichrist will have now defeated the "unbelieving nations" of the southern alliance in a "holy crusade" to deliver "Christendom and Israel" from Islamic tyranny; he will have defeated the "forces of evil" in the persons of Moses and Elijah who had for many months been "tormenting" the unbelieving population of the world (Revelation 11:10); and he will have (to the eyes of the world) even risen from the dead. Following these unprecedented signs, he will take up residence in the temple of God in Jerusalem proclaiming himself to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:4), and setting about to begin the millennium of blessing prophesied in scripture as he rules from Jerusalem a united world without war. Not only will it be no wonder that unbelievers, attributing his feats to the supernatural authority of his father (which is indeed true enough), will accept him as divine, but it also follows logically for those viewing the circumstances in such a way that the imposition of a mandatory form of worship upon the entire world will seem reasonable and good in every way. Only those who know their God will be able to resist the incredible pressures to take part in the new phase of antichrist's religion about to be unveiled and proclaimed worldwide. And it is likewise understandable that the satanic propaganda which has been around since pagan days and which seeks to paint the true God as "a bad god" and Satan as "the good god" bent on replacing him will find a ready audience in all those whose names are no longer written in the book of life. Therefore one of the chilling ironies of the Great Persecution about to be unleashed against all who are determined to preserve their faith in Jesus even until death is that believers are going to be charged with "devil worship" by the very people who have in fact sold themselves to Satan. Our

Lord's words on the subject are important to remember in this regard, for they accused Him, the Son of God Himself, of being in league with the devil (John 8:48-59; cf. Mark 3:22-30), and He has assured us of the world's hatred and persecution, because it hated and persecuted Him first (John 15:18-25).

Before the accomplishment of the two primary deceptions of the Tribulation's first half (i.e., antichrist's pseudo "resurrection" and pseudo-Armageddon) and the domination of the world which followed, it was neither feasible from the standpoint of persuasion nor possible from the standpoint of political power either to reveal fully the nature of the new religion or to make it mandatory worldwide. The constellation of the events at the Tribulation's mid-point are what make possible (in company "with the help of [his] foreign god") antichrist's transformation of his rule from regional to global. That transition will be both horizontal (i.e., geographic expansion until the entire surface of the globe renders him effective allegiance), and vertical (i.e., an increasing measure of loyalty and control within all political entities as well as all other power-nodes), with a corresponding degree of increased intensity in the demands he will make of those controlled. Immediately after his initial consolidation of power we can expect a greater requirement for allegiance to and participation in his cause and in his religion which will manifest itself most significantly in the Great Persecution about to be unleashed upon all who refuse such allegiance and participation.

(3) Do not let anyone deceive you in any way. For [the 2nd Advent cannot come] unless the Apostasy [the great falling away of the faithful in the first half of the Tribulation] has already occurred, and the man of lawlessness [antichrist] has been revealed, that "son of destruction" (cf. John 17:12 of Judas), (4) the one who will oppose and exalt himself against every so-called god and object of worship to such a degree that he will take his seat in the temple of God and represent himself as being God. (5) Don't you remember that I was telling you these things while I was still with you? 2 Thessalonians 2:3-5

Despite the inherent horrors of antichrist's universal religion of Satanism prophesied to be revealed and expanded at the Tribulation's mid-point and the terrors it will hold for all who refuse to bow down to it, we should not think that it will be for those reasons a system of worship that most people find oppressive and abhorrent but are only embracing out of necessity. As in the case of many cults, beyond the obvious mind-control and group coercion, there is always also an element that appeals to and even legitimizes the secret desires of many if not most of its members. Just as we would be mistaken to imagine the devil as some horrible looking creature when in fact he was made beautiful (Ezekiel 28:12-13) and even now masquerades as "a messenger of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14), so in the case of this worldwide cult designed to worship him, rather than imaging some repulsive collection of odd and onerous rituals, we would do better to understand this new religion as something that most people will find incredibly appealing (cf. Nahum 3:4 and the harlot analogy generally: Revelation 17:1-5; Revelation 17:15-16; Revelation 19:2). Cults often attract new adherents by promising them a welcoming and friendly society, and by offering them a "deeper" spiritual relationship through initiation into "secret doctrines and mysteries" unavailable elsewhere. And if in the process they also appeal to the hidden desires of the new initiate (be they of either an ascetic or licentious nature), then their appeal can seem irresistible. The unique feature of the beast's religion will be a syncretism of all such elements, allowing virtually every human being to clothe his or her base desires in the mantle of religion in a friendly and welcoming environment and with the conviction that the "truth" is thus being sought,

and the "true God" thus being served, to the end that "true eternal life" may be earned (such as antichrist seems to exhibit in his feigned rise from the dead). The Spirit explicitly says that in the end times certain men will rebel from the faith, giving their allegiance [instead] to deceitful spirits and demonic doctrines. With their own consciences seared away and speaking with the hypocrisy of men [who peddle] lies, they will [instruct their victims] to refrain from marriage, and to keep away from certain foods . . . 1 Timothy 4:1-3 a

Perspicuous in the verses above is the perverse reversal of God's natural order of things as marriage is discouraged – but not sexual practice of all sorts, both natural and unnatural. Inhabitants of urban 21st century America may well wonder what great change this will represent from contemporary practices. Nevertheless, there will be a decided change for the worse as the incipient trends now visible burst into full flood, are blessed by the state and the state religion, and become mandatory for all loyal citizens of antichrist's world state. And while believers will have as much trouble accepting this degraded and degrading behavior as they do accepting antichrist, the partisans of antichrist will be disposed by the darkness of their minds to embrace his religious strictures even as they have been drawn to embrace him – a phenomenon which cannot be disentangled from the prior rejection of the truth of God:

I have come in My Father's Name, and you do not accept Me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. John 5:43 In general terms, the religion of the beast will stress the material and the visible over against invisible spirituality of which, of course, it will be completely bereft. And in all of its worldly manifestations it will attempt to mimic the outward appearance of Christian forms (although this will be more in terms of the "traditional" forms of the church visible as opposed to genuine Christian faith and practice). One thing that will be noticeably missing from antichrist's "church" will be the Bible. For while false religions often have some doctrinal focal point or other, it behooves any organization that is in truth no part of the truth to maintain "flexibility" about the actual truth. In other words, when an organization or movement is built upon lies, the freedom to continue lying without restraint or fear of contradiction is crucial. For this reason, we may expect that with his "revelation" as the Son of God, antichrist will expect the world to accept his words as fully sufficient and authoritative since they come from "God". What need will the world then have for an outdated, outmoded written Bible when they now have the purported author to worship in person? It is worth noting in this regard that, in effect, this is where we find much of contemporary Christianity in our present Laodicean age of spiritual lukewarmness. For while many so-called Christian churches and organizations pay lip service to the Bible (and we imagine that the beast and his religion will do so as well), in terms of practice and application the scriptures often take a distant second place to entertainment, self-help, motivational speaking, emotional appeals, pop-psychology, and "worship". For many groups, therefore, the adoption of the beast's religion in both name and practice will sadly mean very little change in either outward appearance or inward effect.

Characteristics of the religion of antichrist: a. Its Ultimate Object of Worship: "The dragon and the beast" will be the ultimate objects of worship in this new religion. So while there will be other foci of worship and veneration as well (e.g., the idolatrous cult statue in the temple court and the false prophet), the world will have no excuse – Satan and his antichrist will replace the Lord God Almighty and His true Christ in the active worship in which the unbelieving world will now orgiastically indulge. The prior apostasy of one third of the Church, coupled with the removal of

Holy Spirit restraint, and the empowerment of error spoken of in 2 Thessalonians 2:11, will contribute mightily to the rapidity and the totality of the world's rush to embrace the devil and the beast (Daniel 8:10-12; Daniel 11:36-39).

b. Its Ultimate Place of Worship: Just as antichrist proclaims himself to be the true Messiah and makes every attempt to support that claim in ways that would, "if possible", deceive even the elect (Matthew 24:24), so Jerusalem and the temple of God are not accidentally chosen as the supreme place of worship. The idea of substitution is clear in everything that the beast and his father Satan will do in this regard, for it has ever been the devil's desire to replace God, so that the installing of his son on the throne of God with himself enshrined as the ultimate object of creature worship is in many respects the fulfillment of a dream which has been millennia in the making. Indeed, Satan will take pains during this entire period to represent this time as the beginning of "the Millennium". For, after all, the true Millennium begins following the revelation of Jesus Christ, the defeat of His enemies at Armageddon, and His installment in the temple at Jerusalem as the Ruler of the world. To the unbelieving world, antichrist's pseudo-resurrection, conquest of the southern alliance, and usurpation of the temple and Jerusalem for his own use will fit this bill. Needless to say, the ensuing three and half years, the time of greatest tribulation in world history, will hardly seem "millennial", but the selection of Jerusalem as the supreme place of worship will contribute to the persuasiveness of the beast's claims and to the acceptance by the unbelieving world of his new universal religion. Not since the tower of Babel will the world be so completely "united" in a political sense, or have a single unifying religious center and motivation as it will have at that time as antichrist begins his rule from Jerusalem with the intent of putting all of his enemies under his feet – if they refuse to worship him.

c. Its Ultimate Priest: As with all of the other supreme foci of the beast's religion, so in the case of the "clergy" we can expect to see a deliberate usurpation of both true and traditional Christianity in antichrist's system. There is, of course, nothing biblical about Roman Catholicism's "pope", but the false prophet will indeed be a true "vicar" or substitute for antichrist, serving him in a way that falsely parallels the true Christ but in reality models antichrist and the devil (e.g, the false prophet has "two horns like a lamb", but "speaks like a dragon": Revelation 13:11). We may expect this to be the case with the other lesser "clergy" as well, especially considering that in all probability antichrist will make use of already existing clergy who are co-opted into his new universal religion, so that any distinction as seen by the world between the beast's church and the "Christian church" will be difficult to draw (since in most cases it will be a question of the same people in the same buildings employing many of the same rituals only now committed to worshipping the beast "as Christ"). In general terms, we can expect antichrist's new clergy to be extremely persuasive (cf. Matthew 24:23-24; Colossians 2:16-23; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12; 1 Timothy 4:1-8; 2 Timothy 3:1-13; 2 Peter 2:1-22, 2 Peter 3:1-18; Jude 1:4-16).

d. Its Ultimate Sign of Membership: Believers in Jesus Christ have as their sign and as their seal of divine ownership the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 1:13-14; Ephesians 4:30; cf. Romans 8:9-17; Revelation 7:1-3). Antichrist's substitute for this true yet invisible sign is, once again in keeping with the pattern above, a false, visible sign, the "mark of the beast".

e. Its Ultimate Promise: Given that the beast has been "restored to life", it is likely that the promise of a similar reward will be given to those who embrace his religion, especially in the context of antichrist's claim to be the true Messiah. It should be noted in this connection, however, that rather than being a universal good promised to all, as in the case of the true resurrection of the righteous, we may instead expect this false promise of resurrection to be qualified, offered only to the few who distinguish themselves in

loyalty, and thus used as a goad to spur the "faithful" on to ever greater degeneracy and fanaticism. Moreover, the type of "eternal life" being offered will be along the same lines of materiality we see in every other aspect of the beast's religion, namely, the continuation (or revivification) of the sordid and (apart from God) pointless temporal life that is humanity's lot, rather than any true transformation. That so many around the world will find this offer appealing is almost a cause for pity, especially considering that antichrist will be incapable of making good on this promise in even a single instance. f. Its Ultimate Sacrifice: It is a common-place in literature to portray those who make a "deal with the devil" as having "sold their souls". And it is true that the unbelieving world of that future time, by their embracing of the beast's religion, will have likewise embraced their own condemnation, willfully rejecting through the worship of antichrist and his father Satan the grace and mercy in Jesus Christ that God was eager to give them freely (cf. Jonah 2:8). However, the true nature of the "bargain" is this: they have forsaken eternal life and spiritual riches beyond calculation for the sake of some trifling and, in many cases, totally disgusting short-lived material benefits. In other words, like Esau, the unbelieving world of that time will sell en masse "their birthright for a mess of pottage" (Hebrews 12:16). To those concerned, the bargain will actually seem reasonable, for it will involve substituting present persecution endured for the sake of intangible advantages (which their hearts blinded by unbelief find incredible) for tangible "benefits" in the here and now (cf. the pattern of Isaiah 57:1 ff.). g. Its Ultimate Service: As in the case of its ultimate sacrifice, the ultimate service for believers in antichrist and his religion will reflect a sick parallelism to genuine Christianity. After the pattern of our Savior (e.g., John 13:1-17), true Christians are committed to service for the sake and the benefit of their fellow believers, seeking their spiritual growth and welfare above all else (Romans 14:19-21). For adherents of the religion of the beast, however, "the ultimate service" will not be edification but destruction, namely, the betrayal of all who refuse to accept antichrist in preference for the true Christ.

2. The False Prophet

(11) And I saw another beast (i.e., the false prophet: cf. Revelation 16:13; Revelation 19:20; Revelation 20:10) rising up from the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. (12) And he [will] act with all the authority of the first beast [while] in his presence, and he [will] make the world and all its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. (13) And [the beast's false prophet] [will] perform great miracles (lit., "signs"), even making fire come down from heaven to the earth in front of everyone. (14) And he [will] deceive those who dwell upon the earth on account of the miracles (lit., "signs") which have been given to him to perform in the presence of the beast, even commanding the inhabitants of the earth to make an image of the beast, [that is] of him who received the [deadly] stroke of the sword and [yet] came [back] to life. (15) And it was given to him to provide a spirit for the image of the beast so that the image might speak, and [it was also given to him] to bring it about that as many as refused to worship the image of the beast might be put to death. Revelation 13:11-15 The fact that this second beast will rise up "from the earth" shows that he will be completely human (as opposed antichrist's satanic parentage). Antichrist, the first beast, received his power and authority from the devil (Revelation 13:2; Revelation 19:20), and here we see the second beast receiving his power and authority from antichrist as a clear subordinate of the first beast. In this respect we see another deliberate (though false) parallel between the high priest and the head of state in the

original Jewish monarchy. As believers in the only true God, we understand very well that Jesus is both the ultimate King and the ultimate High Priest "in the order of Melchizedek", having offered Himself on the cross as the only sacrifice sufficient to cleanse us from our sins (Psalms 110:4; Hebrews 4:14; Hebrews 5:5-10; Hebrews 6:19; Hebrews 7:1-3; Hebrews 8:1-2). Antichrist, however, will ignore the true Savior's redemptive work and will instead stress the regal aspects of the Messiah who is destined to institute the worldwide "kingdom of heaven". For those who reject Jesus and His work on the cross (i.e., the true functioning of His priesthood) and choose instead to accept antichrist's claim to be the legitimate ruler of the world, it will seem reasonable that there should be a new high priest to conduct the worship of the first beast and his father (the devil). In possessing "two horns like a lamb" while he speaks "like a dragon" we see the false prophet seeking to establish and support antichrist's claim of Messiahship (hence the horns of the lamb) furthering Satan's plan in the process (i.e., speaking like a dragon). The false prophet will take the lead in the administering of antichrist's religion, both in terms of its expansion and also in the implementation of the compulsory aspects of it, including the Great Persecution which mandatory conversion will occasion in the case of all who refuse. The administrative and cultic center of this new religion will not be Rome, as many have surmised, but Jerusalem. For it is in Jerusalem that the beast will take his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God, and it is in the temple court that the statue of the beast, the "abomination which causes [spiritual] desolation" will be erected (Daniel 11:31; Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14). Thus the temple and the idol then associated with it will be the new religion's focal point from the middle of the Tribulation onward. And it will be in front of the temple and its idol that the false prophet will perform his miracles, acting with antichrist's authority "in his presence" (Revelation 13:12-13). In his implementation of the first beast's false religion, we see the second beast following the pattern of counterfeiting true forms and practices, and, specifically now that the focus of worship has moved to the temple in Jerusalem, of paralleling the Mosaic Law with a series of practices designed to resemble the truth even as they propagate satanic lies: a. False Pilgrimage: In the law, all males in Israel are commanded to present themselves before the Lord on three occasions every year, i.e., at the Passover, the festival of first fruits, and the feast of Tabernacles (Exodus 23:14-17). We may infer from the testimony given in our context to the effect that the false prophet will "deceive those who dwell upon the earth on account of the miracles which have been given to him to perform in the presence of the beast" that many individuals, especially those of any sort of prominence, will be expected to make what amounts to a similar "pilgrimage" to Jerusalem during those 42 months in order to worship at the feet of the beast, paying homage to him and to his idol under the watchful eye of the false prophet (compare the behavior of Nebuchadnezzar vis- à-vis the idol of gold which he had erected on the plain of Dura in Babylon: Daniel 3:1-12). b. False Worship: It is likely that the false prophet will represent himself as the high priest of Israel (though scripture does not give him that title possibly for the very good reason that he is not so in fact), and that much of the ritual carried on in and around Jerusalem at this time, illegitimate though it is, will closely parallel the historical temple rite (i.e., the appointment of divisions of priests, the reconstruction of all the trappings and paraphernalia of the Aaronic priesthood, and the continuation of various rules and regulations; although apparently not sacrifices per se: cf. Daniel 9:27). It is the case that this show of historicity will in truth have nothing to do with the original temple worship, or the worship re-instituted by Moses and Elijah, or the millennial temple worship soon to be reestablished by the true Messiah. But to those who have been deceived to the point of accepting antichrist as the

Christ, restoration of the temple rite at least in some form or other far from being surprising will indeed be expected of this pseudo-Messiah who has now come to Jerusalem to begin his "millennial reign". c. False Dietary Regime: Dietary regulations play a significant role in the Mosaic Law for the purpose of "distinguishing between the holy and the profane" (Leviticus 10:10). That is to say, Israel's separation from the practices of the world in diet were to be representative of their far more important spiritual separation (Romans 4:13). Reversing this relationship, that is, claiming holiness or righteousness on the basis of "keeping the Law" in any of its aspect is, as any reader of the New Testament should know, diametrically opposed to the true purpose of the Law and the true meaning of grace. Yet a key feature of antichrist's religion as administered by his high priest, the false prophet, will be to take traditional legalism a step farther, instituting a system of aggressive vegetarianism that will give its practitioners a feeling of "holiness" and "purity" on the basis of diet (i.e., physical, substituting for spiritual, purity), despite whatever truly sinful behavior in which they may be engaged (1 Timothy 4:1-5; cf. Colossians 2:16-23; 2 Timothy 3:5; Hebrews 13:9). d. False Communion: Closely tied to these everyday dietary restraints will be the practice of a false "communion" which will follow closely after the pattern of historical pagan practices (cf. Zechariah 9:7):

Those who sanctify and purify themselves for the gardens following the lead of the one [characterized] by violence, eating the flesh of swine, and of whatever is an abomination, and of rats will be swept away together (i.e., at the Second Advent), says the Lord. Isaiah 66:17 The context of this verse (both preceding and following, but see especially Isaiah 66:18-24) shows clearly that while the behavior described is not unprecedented in Israel's past (cf. Isaiah 65:3-5), the disgusting communal meal described above will be the one in vogue during the Tribulation. Therefore the "one with violence", clearly an individual acting as a sort of priest officiating over the proceedings, is best taken to be the false prophet, antichrist's own "high priest" and the one responsible for directing his false religion. The fact that meat will be eaten in this "communion" whereas vegetarianism will be the rule otherwise is not contradictory, for this eating of abominations will represent a "sacrifice" and for that reason necessarily includes behavior not otherwise sought out or condoned. e. False Piety: The "sanctified" behavior of antichrist's religion will go beyond diet including in particular a general prohibition against normal marriage (1 Timothy 4:3). Genuine Christianity does indeed forbid sexual conduct outside of marriage (e.g., 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8), but never forbids legitimate marriage (1 Corinthians 7:8-9). Here once again, therefore, we see the beast's religion turning the truth on its head. While preaching and encouraging sexual licentiousness (cf. 2 Peter 2:17-22), the false prophet will lead the charge to forbid the only valid forum for sexual behavior. We may expect many such instances of making virtue out of sin and vice versa. One particularly well-documented form of counterfeit piety will be the tattooing of the beast's name (or number) on the forehead and/or right hand of his worshipers (see below), wherein we see a clear attempt to mimic legitimate biblical practices past and present (Isaiah 44:5; Revelation 3:12; cf. Exodus 13:9-16; Isaiah 62:2; Isaiah 65:15; Revelation 2:17), even while violating the express commands of scripture (Leviticus 19:28; Revelation 14:9-11; cf. Revelation 16:2; Revelation 19:20; Revelation 20:4). f. False Millennial Program: During the Great Tribulation, antichrist will represent himself as the Messiah. Therefore it should not be surprising that his religion will attempt to counterfeit and play off of the prophecies regarding Christ's true Millennial Kingdom. One of the key thematic characteristics of the genuine Millennium will be justice, divinely defined and directly administered by the Lord worldwide for the first time in human

history since the garden (cf. Psalms 2:1-12; Psalms 9:1-20; Psalms 24:1-10; Psalms 45:1-17, Psalms 46:1-11, Psalms 47:1-9, Psalms 48:1-14; Psalms 50:1-23; Psalms 72:1-20; Isaiah 11:1-16; Isaiah 24:1-23, Isaiah 25:1-12, Isaiah 26:1-21, Isaiah 27:1-13; Isaiah 32:1-20; Isaiah 34:1-17, Isaiah 35:1-10; Isaiah 49:1-26, Isaiah 50:1-11, Isaiah 51:1-23, Isaiah 52:1-15; Isaiah 62:1-12, Isaiah 63:1-19, Isaiah 64:1-12, Isaiah 65:1-25; Isaiah 66:1-24). Instead of true justice stemming from divine administration of the world (an under-appreciated blessing that is worth far more than many material blessings with which the Millennium will be replete), the beast's religion will offer unprecedented "freedom" from innumerable legal and societal restraints (Daniel 7:25; 2 Peter 2:17-22; cf. Isaiah 24:5), but this "freedom" will in fact help to produce the most outrageous violations of the most basic human rights as well as of the most important freedom we as a species possess, namely, the right to choose for Jesus Christ and to follow and serve Him in this life without persecution. From the believer's perspective, the beast's false millennium is best understood by its divinely assigned name, "The Great Tribulation". Instead of a time of justice and safety, these final forty-two months will be a time of trampling down of all that is just and right and decent in the name of "freedom". For whatever good one may find in anti-materialistic, new age, vegetarian, libertarian anti-commercialism, in the context of antichrist's pseudo-millennium all such things will be mere fig leaves employed solely for the purpose of covering a campaign of crime, lawlessness, licentiousness, and the judicial murder of all who find themselves in opposition to the beast for whatever reason, and especially those who have determined to stay faithful to Jesus Christ regardless of the consequences. One category of "freedom-blessings" scripture does spell out for this period is a general redistribution of wealth by antichrist on behalf of his supporters (Daniel 11:24 b; Daniel 11:39). Presented no doubt as a "jubilee" along Old Testament lines (Leviticus 25:1-55; Leviticus 27:1-34), this action will instead be motivated out of the beast's desire to firm up his own support rather than any desire to help the poor. g. False Service: Finally, the "righteous works" required of the adherents of antichrist's religion as led by his high priest, the false prophet, will entail first and foremost participation in the satanic attempt at universal conversion to the beast. In addition to all the other depravities required of those who choose to serve the beast, this final "crusade" will involve the active destruction of the free will opportunities of others to choose for Christ, even to the point of betraying those they ought to love the most (Matthew 10:36; Luke 21:16).

More persuasive than any of the lies the false prophet will spout will be the exceptional "miracles" he is permitted to perform in the name of the beast and in the power of the devil. Scripture is very clear here and elsewhere that these signs and wonders will be most impressive, "deceiving those who live upon the earth" (Revelation 13:14; cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10), and even capable of deceiving even the elect, "if that were possible" (Matthew 24:24; Mark 13:22). In the production of these miraculous signs once again we see Satan's familiar pattern of aping the wonders of God in order to appear a god in the eyes of world (2 Corinthians 11:14). Moreover, the specific false miracles given to the second beast to perform are particularly deceptive in that they so directly parallel demonstrations of genuine divine power. Moses and Elijah, both historically and even more importantly during their recent return to earth to direct the missionary activities of the 144,000, performed similar signs and miracles (Revelation 11:5; cf. 1 Kings 18:38; 2 Kings 1:9-14). Just as Pharaoh's magicians, Jannes and Jambres, were able to produce counterfeit signs and miracles that nevertheless fell short of what God gave Moses to perform (Exodus 7:11; Exodus 7:22; cf. 2 Timothy 3:8-9), and just as the devil was able to manipulate the pre-historic

creation and yet fell pitifully short of the power of God, so the false prophet's signs and miracles will in fact be pathetically lacking compared to true divine power. However, we must not underestimate their persuasive effect upon the unbelieving world. As believers contemplating these events before the fact, we need to realize that these signs and wonders will appear to the human eye as indeed being the "real thing", so that only through our understanding of the truth of scripture will we be able to resist being impressed to the point of misguided belief as the rest of the world will be. Believers in Jesus, therefore, must take pains to remember at all times (and especially at that time) that what we know to be so from the Bible is always of much greater import than anything our eyes may happen to see – it is by faith in God's truth that we navigate this world, not by how we may feel or by what we may experience or by what our eyes behold (2 Corinthians 4:18; 2 Corinthians 5:7; cf. Hebrews 11:1 ff.). However impressive and persuasive the signs and wonders we may see, the true "test" lies in whether or not those who perform them contradict the truth and seek to lead us astray (Deuteronomy 13:2-4). The fact that the world's entire unbelieving population is said to be involved in the construction of the idol, the "abomination which brings [spiritual] desolation" (Revelation 13:14), indicates that this statue will be of massive size and probably constructed of extremely valuable materials. Given the close relation between many aspects of this occurrence and Nebuchadnezzar's similar construction of the huge, ninety foot tall golden idol in the plains of Babylon (Daniel 3:1 ff), we would be justified in assuming that this statue is made of gold as well. We may posit that the false prophet in his role as high priest of the beast's religion will supervise a worldwide campaign of contributions for the construction, for this is most likely what is to be understood from the phrase "commanding the inhabitants of the earth to make an image of the beast" (cf. Exodus 35:4-35, Exodus 36:1-7). Once the idol is in place, the false prophet will animate it through satanic power (i.e., Revelation 13:15 : "it was given to him to provide a spirit for the image of the beast so that the image might speak"). This ability to animate a statue so large and impressively appointed will play no small role in the deception of the world, and we may anticipate that many who come to Jerusalem unconvinced will be awed into "belief" by this unprecedented sight (cf. Nebuchadnezzar's attempt to impart a similar sense of awe through ornate and extensive musical accompaniment: Daniel 3:5; Daniel 3:7; Daniel 3:10; Daniel 3:15).

It stands to reason that only those in the presence of the image of the beast will be capable of being put to the test as to whether or not they are willing to worship it. Thus Revelation 13:15 indicates that all whose allegiance to antichrist is suspect will be brought to Jerusalem and made to stand before the colossal idol, with those who refuse to give their obeisance in its presence being put immediately to death. The means of execution is not given, but it would certainly continue the parallel with Nebuchadnezzar's statue if the imminent demise for all who refuse was a horrifying death by fire in a furnace akin to that into which Hananiah, Mishael, and Asariah (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) were thrown upon their similar refusal (cf. Daniel 11:33). The terrifying sight of this monstrous, animated colossus, and the prospect of being cast alive into the flames for refusing to worship it, will no doubt prove too much for anyone to bear – except for those who are solidly grounded in their faith in Jesus Christ, and ready to follow Him even unto a fiery death rather than prove unfaithful in this life.

3. The Mark of the Beast

(16) And he (i.e., the false prophet) compelled everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to allow [his clergy] to place a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, (17) so that no one would be able to buy or sell except those with the mark, [consisting of] either the name of the [first] beast or the number of his name. Revelation 13:16-17

Although the text here is very straightforward, there are all manner of false and misleading theories about the mark in common currency today. As can be seen easily enough from the words above, the mark is a physical one, a visible tattoo placed upon the willing recipient by some official in antichrist's pseudo-Christian religion. Postulating signs and symbols occurring elsewhere (such as in corporate logos), or invisible alterations to DNA, or anything to do with microchips, or any other such speculative nonsense merely advances the beast's cause by making the actual mark and its process of reception seem less threatening. But just as we cannot afford to be confused about what the mark actually is, neither can any believer afford to forget that taking the mark is tantamount to denying Christ . . . and forfeiting eternal salvation.

(9) And yet a third angel followed them, saying in a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives [his] mark upon his forehead or upon his hand, (10) he himself will also drink from the wine of God's wrath which has been mixed undiluted in the cup of His anger. And [that person] will be tormented in fire and sulfur before angels, [and] saints, and before the Lamb. (11) And the smoke of their torment will go up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night, those who worship the beast and his image and whoever takes the mark of his name." Revelation 14:9-11

Several other important points about the mark itself need to be considered before proceeding to the discussion of the "number of the beast": a. The beast's universal religion results in universal compulsion to receive the mark: Whatever civil rights and benefits of citizenship obtain under antichrist's worldwide state, we are right to expect that these will all be closely tied to membership and participation in his universal religion because it is through this religion that his "majesty" will be worshiped and revered. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that at this juncture the false prophet will administer the placement of a visible sign of obeisance upon all of the beast's followers with the objective of "marking" the entire world. Given the dire consequences the reception of this mark will have, we may posit that, in addition to true believers, there will be an indeterminate number of unbelievers who will avoid it as well. We should not, however, underestimate the short-term negative consequences which resisting this mark will entail. b. The placing of the mark is most likely carried out by the clergy of the beast's religion: Since antichrist's religion is a purposefully syncretic mixture of all other religions distinguished mainly by its universal acknowledgment of the beast as God, we do not have to find in this policy of marking its adherents any fundamental reconstruction or reorganization of its parts. More than likely, the same priests, pastors, imams, etc. of all religions and cults previously co-opted into antichrist's universal religion will be at the forefront of the process of marking all of the world's "believers" in antichrist, and that this process will be essentially religious rather than civil in nature (though it will have definite civil consequences). c. The pressure to receive the mark: The mark will accomplish a melding together of church and state such as the world has not seen since the tower of Babel. For while the taking of the mark will have a putative religious purpose and be imprinted in a religious setting, its consequences for every other sphere of life can hardly be underestimated. In addition to the economic hardships of a posture of refusal spelled out in Revelation 13:16-17 (i.e.,

essentially banning the unmarked from commerce of any sort), we may expect all such persons to become what amounts to "unpersons", bereft of any rights, legal recourse, or any consideration of any kind whatsoever under the beast's system of governance. The beast's focus upon economic activity as related in verse seventeen is entirely understandable since that is obviously the most effective stimulus to the progress of this universal conscription of humanity into the official ranks of evil. For while legal matters, voting, various registrations and the like might all be of use in the process of coercing the world to enroll, "buying and selling" are weekly if not daily activities in which all but those engaged in the most independent of agricultural operations must necessarily engage. As one of the most important functional and practical spheres of daily life, therefore, commerce, and specifically the exclusion of the unmarked from commerce, will be an ideal vehicle for the universal enrollment of mankind into antichrist's religion. In addition to the necessities of life, commerce is also the entrepôt into all of the key aspects of the devil's worldwide system of lust generally:

1. Money: If currency, cash, gold, money and fungible assets of every sort were "important" in the eyes of the world in the past, during the Tribulation, a time of such intense insecurity, we can expect the twin desires for financial security and opportunity based upon a large store of liquid assets to be more intense than ever. Clearly, under the new mandate of the mark, everyone needing or desiring financial assets will feel the pressure to be marked all the more intensely according to the degree of their wants, desires, lusts, and needs for them. For without the mark, not only will they be unable to acquire monetary assets, but they will also be largely unable to make use of what they have previously accumulated.

2. Possessions: A large part of the beast's system will entail the redistribution of wealth, real estate in particular. We can well imagine that gaining new lands and holdings will be virtually impossible for those who lack the mark, and that without it retaining what substantial possessions one may have will also be difficult in the short run and essentially impossible in the long run. Most large, hard assets, moreover, require various types and degrees of maintenance, a process that also requires engaging in commerce on some level (paying taxes and insurance bills, for example). Therefore it will be very difficult for those who are rich in any sense in which this world defines it to maintain that wealth and those possessions during this period without receiving the mark.

3. Pleasure: Whether large or small, illicit or legitimate, the gratification of non-essential pleasures makes up a large part of the current world economy. Inevitably, in order to gratify most pleasures one must engage in commercial activity. Therefore even those who might for other reasons be willing and able to resist the process of marking – and be stubborn and bold enough to do so – will be sorely tested on this count, for they will find themselves largely shut out of this particular aspect of the devil's world system if they do.

4. Fame: Glory, celebrity, reputation, fame of every sort, large and small, is an important area of lust in Satan's world system. For those whose self-image and ultimate desires are bound up in this area, the prospect of becoming an "unperson" and being shut out of all commercial activity and the essential things that often attend that activity will be difficult even to contemplate. However defined or derived, antichrist will have a virtual monopoly on "fame" during the Great Tribulation, so that failure to take the mark will necessarily turn any good reputation to "infamy", a hard road to take for any one who does not value God's opinion over the opinions of mankind.

5. Power: The ultimate lust in the devil's world system is that of power (on whatever level), the myth of having some sort of control over others by virtue of position or other means. Generally this also has a base in commercial activity on some level (if only indirectly). But in any case, it is virtually certain that, during the Great Tribulation, the powerful will owe continuation in their positions of power to antichrist, making it a near certainty that they will be among the first to receive the mark.

Since everything that human beings lust after and desire apart from God will be put at risk by refusing to accept the mark of the beast, it is a mistaken notion to assume that the taking of the mark will be something easily avoidable by merely refraining from direct "legal" commercial transactions. The end result will thus be that many who would rather not take the mark, even if they would be otherwise willing to go underground or seek to skirt the system not out of any love for God but just on general principles (i.e., the taking on to one's body of a large tattoo not even of one's choosing is bound to rub many people the wrong way, not only Christians), will ultimately do so. For, otherwise, they will find themselves entirely deprived of or at least seriously hindered from seeking and enjoying the things that, for a large part of the secular world, "make life worth living". For those who know their God, the loss of the things of this world, culminating for many in the loss of their very lives, will constitute a true blessing, the privilege of persecution and martyrdom for the Lord who died for us (though the world will not realize it as such). But for those who do not believe, the down side of refusing to take the mark will be so horrific without any apparent appreciable benefit that only the most irascibly independent are likely to try. One thing is certain: anyone at this point who "has anything" as defined by the five areas delimited above will certainly think twice before refusing the mark and losing everything, even though accepting it is a guarantee of divine judgment (Revelation 14:9-11; cf. Revelation 16:2; Revelation 19:20; Revelation 20:4). For during the Great Tribulation, at the center of the spider's web of these five main cross-fertilizing and intersecting lusts of Satan's world system will be the beast himself and his religion, Satanism, the worship of the devil in preference to the worship of God. And this is the devil's strategy and objective: to present to God a world inhabited only by those who of their own "free will" have taken upon themselves the mark as a proof of their choice of Satan over God. d. The mark will take the form of a permanent, visible tattoo: The Greek word used here for the "mark" is charagma (χαραγμα), meaning something that has been permanently marked, generally through inscription or carving or other permanent imprinting (cf. our derived word "character"). The context and its logic certainly suggest the same, for there would be little purpose to antichrist's requiring an easily removable mark. The whole point is to make the world choose for him in a visible and irremediable way, and requiring a permanent, highly visible tattoo certainly accomplishes this purpose. But the beast's "sealing" of his faithful is so dramatically at odds with our Lord's sealing of us that it bears comment. We are sealed with the Holy Spirit, an act of God on our behalf with positive and invisible spiritual consequences for good in every way (2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 1:13-14; Ephesians 4:30), while those who choose for antichrist and for Satan are physically sealed for short-term material benefit without any positive spiritual consequences whatsoever. Indeed, receiving the mark is guarantee of condemnation (Revelation 14:9-11; cf. Revelation 16:2; Revelation 19:20; Revelation 20:4). e. The significance of the two places for the mark: Why two places for the mark? The answer most likely has to do with a hierarchy of marking, that is, we may assume that the mark received on the forehead will be considered "better" than merely marking the hand. While it is possible that this distinction will be one of choice with each person deciding

where to receive it, the more likely scenario is that only the elite will be "allowed" to receive a mark on the forehead, and this will constitute a badge of honor showing that those who have it are not merely responding to universal coercion but are instead enthusiastic communicants of antichrist's religion. The danger in this two-track system for those under pressure to receive the mark is that they may make the mistake of assuming (in the face of divine warning to the contrary) that only the mark on the forehead is spiritually dangerous (i.e., since the mark on the hand will represent more of an attitude of acquiescence than of enthusiasm). But in fact receiving the mark in either place will be a cause for "drinking of the wrath of God" (Revelation 14:9-11). f. The significance of the two variations of the mark: An additional "choice" is afforded those who respond to the false prophet's demand that the whole world be marked for antichrist, namely of receiving the "number of his name" in place of the name itself. The fact that the number comes second in the sequence in verse seventeen (just as the forehead marking comes second) suggests that this is the "better" choice signifying a deeper commitment to the beast. The fact that verse eighteen is taken up with explaining the significance of the number of the beast confirms this analysis. Inasmuch as the name or the number can be placed on either the forehead or the hand, we see in this system a hierarchy of four levels of dedication to antichrist as follows:

Highest: Number on the forehead
Second Highest: Name on the forehead
Third Highest: Number on the hand
Lowest: Name on the hand

As noted above, scripture is quite clear that in God's eyes there will be no distinction between the highest and lowest in this hierarchy, for by taking the mark in any of its four manifestations the individual in question is willfully throwing his lot in with antichrist and his father the devil, and so by definition and of necessity has in the process deliberately turned his back on God the Father and His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. One further monitory note here. Since in every way possible he attempts to counterfeit the true Messiah, it is very possible that the beast's "name" will in some way mimic one of Jesus' names or titles. We cannot know the precise "name" before the fact, but it is worth noting that several divine names come very close to the requisite "six hundred and sixty six" when computed via the Greek numbering system wherein letters of the alphabet represent numerals (n.b., the system of Arabic numerals which we use today is a much later development). For example, Messiah in Greek, *Messias* (Μεσσηιας), is short by only one letter, an iota, of 666 (a deficit easily made up by any number of initials that would equal ten in the Greek system). If this word or any number of other legitimate divine titles variously calculated should turn out to be antichrist's name, there is at least the danger that some believers under coercion may rationalize the taking of the mark as really being a name of the Lord, since it may well be, at least in some form. But scripture is adamant about the fact that the mark, however innocuous it may seem and whatever alternative meaning it may be made to bear, will constitute an act of ultimate unfaithfulness so extreme that any and all who may have been believers before the fact will by that act become believers no more – taking of the mark by any brother or sister will put faith to death (Revelation 14:9-11; cf. Revelation 16:2; Revelation 19:20; Revelation 20:4).

4. The Number of the Beast

Here is wisdom: let everyone who is alert [at that time] calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man[’s name]. And his (i.e., the beast’s) number is six hundred and sixty six (i.e., 666 "ways"). Revelation 13:18

Since in the verse just prior (Revelation 13:17) we are told specifically that the alternative form of the mark is "the number of his (i.e., the beast's) name", said number here must be the numerical equivalent of antichrist's name referenced in that previous verse. That is to say, "six hundred and sixty six" is the number which both constitutes a numerical value for the beast's name and which also functions as the alternative (and superior) form of the mark.

Before considering the number of the beast per se, we need to say a few words about his "name" as it will occur in the other versions of the mark along with its numerical value. The "wisdom" given here is not in any way mysterious. If at that future time one is paying any attention to what scripture says about this issue, the formula provided will easily dispel all doubt about what the true "mark of the beast" is, so that believers will have no trouble whatsoever identifying it (and no excuse for failing to avoid it). As part of the New Testament, this book of the Bible is written in Greek, and for that reason it is the Greek system of numerals which must be employed to calculate the "name" for its numerical value, certainly not Arabic numerals (whose use in the west was not even widespread until the 15th century). In the Greek system, each letter of the alphabet (and some symbols as well) has a numerical value, with alpha, the first letter equaling one, and omega, the last letter equaling eight hundred. For example, the Greek transliteration mentioned above for the Hebrew word Messiah (meaning, "anointed one"), is as follows:

Μεσση■ας: $M = 40 + \varepsilon = 5 + \sigma = 200 + \sigma = 200 + \iota = 10 + \alpha = 1 + \varsigma = 200 > = 656$ By adding "tha" the Aramaic imperative meaning "come!" (cf. Marana tha!, "O our Lord, come!"), we create a phrase equaling the requisite number of six hundred and sixty six (because the letters theta and alpha equal nine and one respectively so that tha, $\theta\alpha$, = +10). Before the reader gets too excited about all this, let me point out what should be readily obvious, namely that in such a system the number of possibilities for constructing names that add up to 666 is incalculably large (if not literally infinite). For this reason, the information given us in Revelation 13:18 cannot possibly be used to figure out antichrist's name before the fact. Even if a person were fortunate enough to hit upon the precise sequence of letters for his actual name, there would be absolutely no way to determine before his revelation that said sequence was the uniquely correct one. What we are given in Revelation 13:18 is thus not a key to figuring out the identity of antichrist before the fact. On the contrary, it is an analytical tool or "litmus test" for evaluating the putative name of the beast to see if the person in question is indeed antichrist after we have a name to work from. With a simple transliteration of any name into the Greek system, we can with relative ease examine any name and discover fairly easily whether it might have the numerical value of 666. This was a fairly common sort of cipher in antiquity (often called a "gematria"), and one finds, for example, graffiti recovered from Pompeii where the names of lovers were concealed in this manner, as well as riddles on funeral monuments in the Greek speaking areas of the Mediterranean which substitute a sum of letters for the name of the deceased and invite the onlooker to solve the puzzle. Without clues, such riddles are impossible to solve, since, as mentioned above, the number of names that can be made to fit into any large sum is, for all practical purposes, endless. The relatively small number "10", for instance, could be represented by a lone iota, an alpha plus a theta, or a beta plus an eta, etc., etc. And the possibilities grow geometrically the larger the numbers become.

One should also note that once the universal marking begins, decoding the precise mark of the beast as it occurs at that time will be a fairly simple matter despite issues of transliteration. Before the precise form of his name as it is to be used for the mark comes to light, however, this test is

unlikely to be the best litmus test for uncovering antichrist. For example, will the mark contain only his last name? Will it include his first name or merely his initials, and which ones? More to the point, will antichrist change his name in some way at the point when he takes his seat in the temple of God in Jerusalem and proclaims himself to be God? The point is that until the exact form of the name as it occurs in this alternative version of the mark becomes generally known, there is little point in making the calculation recommended here. And Bible believing Christians should take careful note that scripture only gives us this information at the point when the actual marking begins, indicating very clearly that any attempt to identify antichrist in this way before the process of universal marking is pointless. In any case, by the middle of the Tribulation it is difficult to comprehend how any genuine believer in Jesus Christ who has the least bit of spiritual discernment could not know that the dictator who has come to control the world and has invaded God's very temple is antichrist. The real danger here is that believers in the early days of the Tribulation will fail to recognize the beast because his name as it occurs at that time may not seem to fit the formula given in verse eighteen. As to the significance of 666, the first thing to emphasize here is that we do not necessarily have to do with three consecutive numeral "sixes", that is, some precise variant of 6-6-6. In our system of Arabic numerals, a system that does not greatly antedate the printing press here in the west, it is true that there is no distinction between the number six hundred and sixty six and its representation by three consecutive sixes: 666. In the Greek system, however, this is not at all the case. In Greek, the language of Revelation and therefore the basis for the system that must be employed to understand this issue correctly, six hundred and sixty six would be represented by two letters and a symbol, namely, chi, xi, and stigma. What this means for our purposes here is that much popular theorizing that makes the "sign of the beast" a series of three sixes may be entirely wrong. And while it is certainly possible that three Arabic numeral sixes will indeed constitute the essential mark that stands for the name of antichrist, there is no convincing reason why this should be so. Just as the Arabic numeral representation 666 would appear different in the Greek system (i.e., as χξϞ), so it is also fair to point out that the contemporaneous Roman system (i.e., "Roman numerals" wherein 666 = DCLXVI) and Hebrew system (an alphabetic system similar to Greek wherein 666 = ךךך) certainly have as much claim to be considered as the much later, non-contemporaneous western version of the Arabic system. Moreover there is no way that we can say before the fact that antichrist might not adopt, say, a base two system (stressing technology), or a base twelve system (stressing Babylonian mysticism), or any other system of mathematical, geometrical, or mystical symbolism to represent the integer 666, perhaps even one of his own devising not yet extant. The point is that discerning Christians cannot afford to assume that any mark that does not have three Arabic numeral sixes (i.e., 666) could not possibly be "the mark of the beast". The significance of the number itself has also long been a matter of as much speculation as its appearance. Like "pi", a repeating system of sixes may have some significance for the mythology that antichrist creates around himself and his system of devil worship. As Christians, we would rather choose to note that whether 666 is seen as single integer, a series of sixes, or a repeating decimal, at all points it falls short of perfection by "one" (i.e., of the perfect number seven), namely, through rejection of the "One" who is the way, the truth and the life, our true Savior Jesus Christ. One thing that is generally not appreciated in such discussions is that, unlike English, Greek numerals are at times declinable, and such is the case in this instance. Specifically, "six hundred and sixty six" in this instance at Revelation 13:18 is feminine, so that what the text here is really saying is "six hundred and sixty six feminine

some things, and it is left to the reader to fill in the blank from the context as to what those "some things" are. This is a not unfamiliar situation in Greek where one often understands the occurrence or repetition of a particular noun which can be easily guessed (by context and usage) from the information contained in the ending of an adjective (in contrast to English where adjectives are unchangeable). Of course there is no feminine noun in this context, a situation which no doubt explains why various other versions switched the ending to masculine, neuter, or eliminated the problem entirely by using symbolic notation (i.e., the Greek equivalent of 666 mentioned above: ϞϞϞ). But in fact the case of a feminine adjective with no noun expressed is far from unprecedented in Greek, there being a generally understood short list of common nouns to be supplied in such circumstances. By far the most common noun to supply in such situations is the Greek word for "road" or "way", hodos (ϞδϞ; cf. "odometer" = "road-measurer"), and that is indeed the noun to be supplied here. Since 666 represents an infinitely repeating cipher, the "six hundred and sixty six ways" may be understood as the all inclusive and virtually infinite number of "paths to salvation" in the beast's religious system. Provided only that one worship antichrist and his father the devil as god, all other religious, traditional, or cultic practices will be pronounced acceptable and deemed effective in "saving" the individual worshiper. But in fact, this cipher leaves out the "one" that would end its pointless repetition and instead produce completion and fulfillment, the "One" who is truly the one and only true "Way" to salvation, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 9:2; Acts 19:9; Acts 19:23; Acts 22:4; Acts 24:14; Acts 24:22; 2 Peter 2:2):

I am the Way: the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. John 14:6
E. The Great Persecution:

1. Introduction: The Great Persecution is what makes the Tribulation's second half "Great". This "distress" and "tribulation" which characterize the final seven years of human history before Christ's return are seen in scripture first and foremost from the standpoint of believers (cf. Daniel 12:1; Matthew 24:21; Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:19; Mark 13:24). It is true that many of the events of that terrible time to come will weigh heavily on the people of God, but believers will be protected to a large extent from much of the worst of it (viz. the judgments of God which are directed toward the reprobate). The Great Persecution is the preeminent exception, for it will be a period of the greatest testing wherein because of widespread martyrdom believers in unprecedented numbers will have to put into practice what we should all understand in principle, namely that our true security consists in our eternal relationship with Jesus Christ rather than in clinging to this temporary physical life (Matthew 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 17:33; John 12:25; Revelation 12:11). The uniting of the globe under the banner of antichrist and the one-world "peace" which results will be the worst thing that has yet happened in human history by virtue of its elimination of any countervailing power to check the machinations of the beast and of his father the devil. This will be particularly true for believers in regard to the Great Persecution, an event which will begin not long after antichrist's consolidation of power. For with the world united in evil, there will be no place to hide, no place to run. Those who in the will of God are destined for martyrdom will be martyred, while those who are destined to survive must endure persecution until the return of our Lord (Revelation 13:10; cf. Jeremiah 43:11). The Great Persecution will begin not long after the beginning of the Tribulation's second half, the Great Tribulation. Following his total defeat of the southern alliance, antichrist will quickly turn his attention to the establishment of his capital in Jerusalem. The beast will be the target of an assassination attempt at this time, and his

remarkable recovery coupled with his victory will do much to swing the great majority of the world's population in his favor. Using this attempt on his life as a pretext, antichrist will make war on Moses and Elijah, killing them and then occupying the temple of God, even proclaiming himself to be God, erecting the "abomination that causes [spiritual] desolation" in the temple court. Those in Israel who have responded to the ministry of the two witnesses and the 144,000 will flee to the wilderness at this time, evading through divine intervention the beast's attempts to catch and destroy them. His frustration in this attempt will result in the commencement of the Great Persecution, a reign of terror directed against all true believers in Jesus Christ, the implementation of which will be part and parcel of the establishment of antichrist's worldwide system of religion: And the dragon was enraged at the woman (i.e., the escaping Jewish believers), and he went away to make war with the rest of her seed, [even] those who are keeping the commandments of God and maintaining their testimony to Jesus. Revelation 12:17 This scapegoating of believers in the matter of the assassination attempt will have the dual effect of provoking a violent reaction both in Israel and worldwide against all believers on the one hand, and on the other hand will also contribute to an environment of great suspicion wherein unbelievers will be eager to show by their acceptance of the mark that they are without blame in the matter, and even more eager and willing to "smoke out the traitors" by way of this litmus test. Thus will the stage be set from the very early days of antichrist's worldwide reign for the event that more than any other defines and characterizes the coming Tribulation, namely, the Great Persecution.

2. Key Passages:

(9) And when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the fifth seal, I saw below the altar the living persons who had been slain because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained. (10) And they cried out with a loud voice, saying "How long, O Master, holy and true, will you [wait and] not render judgment and vindication for our blood upon those who dwell on the earth?" (11) And a white robe was given to each one of them that they might rest yet a little while longer until their brothers who were destined to be killed in the same fashion should also fulfill [their course]. Revelation 6:9-11

Comment: Only two seals, the fifth and sixth, deal with the trends of the last three and a half years of the Tribulation (the seventh serving to "open the book" and begin the seven year period itself), with the sixth seal referring to Armageddon and related events. Therefore the fact that this fifth seal serves as the sole agent of characterization for the bulk of the Tribulation's second half demonstrates that the Great Persecution is the decisive event of that period.

(9) After this I looked and, behold, [there was] a huge multitude which no one was able to number from every nation and tribe and people and tongue standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes and with palm branches in their hands. (10) And they were shouting in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God, the One who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!" (11) And all the angels had taken their stand around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures. And they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, (12) saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might belong to our God forever and ever! Amen!" (13) And one of the elders who was speaking with me replied, "These people dressed in white robes – who are they and where have they come from?" (14) And I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who are about

to come forth from the Great Tribulation. And they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (15) For this reason they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple. And the One who sits upon the throne will pitch His tabernacle over them. (16) They will neither hunger nor thirst again, nor will the sun beat down upon them nor any burning [heat], (17) because the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and will lead them to fountains of living water (lit., "fountains of waters of life"), and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes". Revelation 7:9-17

Comment: There are so many who have been martyred that they cannot be counted, showing clearly the scope of the Great Persecution. Moreover, the fact that these martyrs come "from every nation and tribe and people and tongue" demonstrates the worldwide nature of the persecution. Finally, this passage definitely fixes the time of the Great Persecution, for as the angel says in verse fourteen, these martyrs are "about to come forth from the Great Tribulation", that is, the second half of the seven year period.

(7) And war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought with the dragon and the dragon and his angels fought [back], (8) but they did not prevail against him, and they could no longer find any place [of refuge] in heaven. (9) And [so] the great dragon, the ancient serpent, the one called Devil and Satan, was thrown down; even he who deceives the entire world was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (10) And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, "Now our God's deliverance and might and kingdom have come, even the power of His Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, the one who accuses them day and night in front of our God, has been thrown down. (11) But these [believers] have defeated [the devil] through the blood of the Lamb and the Word of their testimony. For they did not love their lives, [even] to the point of death. (12) Because of this, rejoice, O heavens and those residing in them! [But] woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you, having [great] anger, because he knows that he has [only] a short time [remaining]!" Revelation 12:7-12

Comment: In verse eleven the martyrs are described as virtually synonymous with all believers alive at this time, indicating the breadth of the Great Persecution. The casting down of Satan at the midpoint of the Tribulation (verse nine) and the proclamation that his remaining time is short (verse twelve) further serves to fix the time of the Great Persecution as the final three and a half years. Finally, in this synopsis of the Great Tribulation, we see that from the standpoint of believers the Great Persecution is the event which dominates this period. And the dragon was enraged at the woman (i.e., the escaping Jewish believers), and he went away to make war with the rest of her seed, [even] those who are keeping the commandments of God and maintaining their testimony to Jesus. Revelation 12:17

Comment: Just as the dragon, Satan, attempted to use his newfound mastery of the world's political systems united under his son, the beast, for the destruction of Jewish believers in Israel, so now, at the Tribulation's midpoint, he will turn his attention to the destruction of "the rest of her seed", namely, gentile and Jewish believers worldwide. This passage likewise fixes the time of the Great Persecution (i.e., it follows the escape of believing Jews from Israel immediately after the beast's victory and shift of headquarters to Jerusalem), demonstrates the universal sweep of the persecution (i.e., the target is all the rest of "her seed", that is, all other believers not removed to the special place of protection), and characterizes its horrible nature (i.e., it will be a "war" whose

object is the annihilation of the faithful).

"If anyone is [destined] for captivity [to captivity he will go]. If it is necessary for anyone to be put to death by the sword, by the sword he must be put to death. Herein lies the perseverance and the faithfulness of the holy ones." Revelation 13:10

Comment: This caveat from our Lord removes all doubt about either the intensity of the Great Persecution to come or the possibility of avoiding it. Only two outcomes are contemplated, death or prison cell. While other outcomes are not necessarily ruled out, this passage suggests that they will be the exception rather than the rule, and thus encourages us to steel ourselves to these grim realities before the fact. And it was given to him (i.e., the false prophet) to provide a spirit for the image of the beast so that the image might speak, and [it was also given to him] to bring it about that as many as refused to worship the image of the beast might be put to death. Revelation 13:15

Comment: Here we see that the Great Persecution is central to the institution of the beast's worldwide religion, for it will be by means of the litmus test of willingness to worship antichrist that true believers will be winnowed out. This passage also makes it clear that the number of those martyred will be significant, for refusal to worship, once a believer has been "processed" to that point, will apparently result in a sentence of death in every case. And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on so that they may rest from their labors", says the Spirit. "For their deeds follow with them." Revelation 14:13

Comment: This verse, coming immediately after the most stringent of warnings to refrain from the beast's religion in any form (i.e., the third angel's proclamation of Revelation 14:9-12), encourages believers to face martyrdom with confidence and a sense of peace, since the end will be rest and reward. The need for such comfort is a sure indication that the Great Persecution will be a horrendous experience which is near universal in its scope and impossible to survive apart from a close walk with the Lord.

(14) And, behold, a white cloud. And sitting on the white cloud was what looked like a man with a golden crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. (15) And another angel came out of His temple, shouting in a loud voice to the one sitting on the cloud, "Send [forth] your sickle and reap, because the hour of the harvest has come, and the harvest [crop] is ripe" (lit., "dry"). (16) And the one sitting on the cloud set his sickle to the earth, and the earth was harvested. Revelation 14:14-16

Comment: The reaper represents Jesus Christ, and the believers martyred during the Great Persecution are the harvest. This passage shows that, far from being an accident, the Great Persecution is an integral part of the plan of God designed for the glory of God, reflected in the faithfulness of His witnesses, and the ultimate good of the martyred, who, like a ripe crop, are removed at precisely the right time, being spared the time of final judgments of the Great Tribulation while yet receiving all the rewards that accrue to those genuinely martyred for Jesus Christ. The dramatic and worldwide nature of the Great Persecution is also evident from the above.

(2) And I saw [something] like a sea of glass, [but this time it was] mixed with fire, and those who were [in the process of] winning the victory over the beast and his image and over the number of his name were standing on the sea of glass holding lyres of the Lord God, (3) and they were

singing the song of Moses the servant of God, even the song of the Lamb, saying . . . Revelation 15:2-3 a

Comment: While this passage is often taken to represent the victorious martyrs who have come out of the Great Tribulation, the fact that they are seen here actually standing on the glass sea, the "viewing port", so to speak, whereby earthly events are visible from heaven, gives us instead a picture of faithful believers enduring the Great Persecution while still on earth. The glass sea is described as being "mixed with fire", a clear and hardly subtle symbol of the intensity of the trial that the believers of that time will experience (1 Peter 1:7; 1 Peter 4:12; cf. Daniel 11:33; Hebrews 11:34). This continued endurance of the faithful, those "who were [in the process of] winning the victory", demonstrates that they are still in the midst of the fiery trial. The implication is that no one who maintains faith in Jesus Christ at that time will be exempt from the fire or the fight (nor, blessedly, from the exaltation of victorious struggle on behalf of the Lord who bought us). And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them (i.e., they sat in judgment), namely the persons who had been executed (lit., "beheaded with an ax") because of their witness for Jesus and because of the Word of God, [that is] whoever did not worship the beast or his image and did not take the mark on their forehead and on their hand. For they came to life and began to rule with Christ for a thousand years. Revelation 20:4

Comment: We know from a number of important and specific New Testament passages (1 Corinthians 15:50-55 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 in particular) that a significant number of believers do survive the Great Persecution and are resurrected while yet alive at Christ's return. The fact that this verse equates refusal to worship the beast with execution demonstrates unequivocally the widespread (though not total) martyrdom of the Church and the intensity of the Great Persecution.

(21) I was watching, and this horn (i.e., antichrist) was waging war with the holy ones (i.e., believers). And he was prevailing over them (i.e., "conquering them"), (22) until the Ancient of Days came (i.e., our Lord's second advent) and rendered judgment on behalf of the holy ones of the Most High, and the time came when the holy ones took possession of the Kingdom. Daniel 7:21-22

Comment: As in Revelation 12:17, the Great Persecution is here described as a "war", with antichrist continuing to "conquer" (i.e., execute) believers until our Lord's return. The implication is that no believers will be "neutral", that is, immune from the effects of the Great Persecution. Further, the casualties (i.e., martyrs) will likely be horrific since the beast will continue to "prevail" until the second advent. And he (antichrist) will speak words against the Most High, and he will persecute the saints of the Most High God. And he will plot to change times and law. And they (i.e., believers, "the saints") will be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time (i.e., for the duration of the Great Tribulation). Daniel 7:25

Comment: This passage also fixes the period of time during which antichrist will persecute (lit., "wear down", "consume") believers as lasting throughout the entire Great Tribulation (the "time and times and half a time", or three and a half years). The Great Persecution is here also connected directly to the implementation of the beast's religion and his not unconnected radical social "reforms", the net effect of which places all believers "into his hand" (i.e., subject to persecution) until our Lord returns.

(10) And [the little horn] magnified himself against the host of heaven (i.e., the family of God, men and angels both), and he cast down to the earth some of the host (i.e., antichrist seducing believers into apostasy) and some of the stars (i.e., Satan having seduced angels into rebellion) and he trampled them underfoot. (11) He even magnified himself against the Prince of the host (i.e., Christ). The daily sacrifice was abolished by him, and the holy place (i.e., the inner court) was desecrated. (12) And along with the daily sacrifice, the host (i.e., believers) fell into his power on account of [the] rebellion (i.e., the Great Apostasy). And he threw truth to the ground, and was successful in whatever he did. (13) And I heard one of the holy ones who was speaking, and he said to the other holy one who was speaking, "How long will this vision of the daily sacrifice and of the rebellion which produces desolation and of the handing over of the holy [place] (i.e., the inner court) and of the trampling down of the host be?" (14) And he replied to me, "Until 2,300 evenings and mornings have passed. Then the holy [place] will be purified." Daniel 8:10-14

Comment: This passage and its broader context (cf. Daniel 8:23-35) deal primarily with the Tribulation's first half when seduction will be the primary means of leading believers away from Jesus Christ. But also clearly foreshadowed in the verses above is the near future time when seduction gives way to compulsion (i.e., in verse 12 "the host fell into his power", and in Daniel 8:13 "the trampling down of the host") which is only terminated by our Lord's second advent.

(32) And with enticements he will seduce [people] to violate the covenant, but the people who know their God will continue to hold fast to it. (33) And those among the people who have insight will teach the people who will be persecuted by sword (i.e., martyrdom), and flame (i.e., torture leading to martyrdom), and captivity (i.e., imprisonment), and plundering (i.e., confiscation of property), for some time. (34) And when they are persecuted, they will receive a little help, yet many will ally themselves to them under false pretenses. (35) And even from among [the ranks of] those who have insight, some will be persecuted, in order to refine, purify, and cleanse them until the final end. For [it is] yet to come at its appointed time. Daniel 11:32-35

Comment: These verses are some of the most explicit in detailing the harrowing time that those who continue to "hold fast" to Jesus Christ will have. Set in the context of antichrist's establishment of the abomination (Daniel 11:31), and indicating that the ordeal will continue "until the final end", this passage likewise establishes the time period for the Great Persecution as essentially extending over the entire final 42 months of the Great Tribulation, and likewise apportions the suffering, "sword, and flame, and captivity, and plunder", to everyone subject to it.

(8) But all these things (of Daniel 11:3-7) are [merely] the beginning of the birth pangs (i.e., the first half of the Tribulation). (9) Then (i.e., the beginning of the Great Tribulation) men will betray you [bringing you] into tribulation (i.e., the Great Persecution), and will put you to death, and you will be hated by all of the nations on account of My Name. Matthew 24:8-9 (cf. Matthew 10:16-33; Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:12-24)

Comment: Our Lord's words here anchor the previous prophecies of Daniel and later prophecies of Revelation, and demonstrate with certainty the reality of a coming persecution during the second, final phase of the Tribulation of such unprecedented scope and intensity that it can only be described as "great". The above are only the major passages which directly describe the Great Persecution in some detail, but they are sufficient to show that this widely underappreciated teaching is both heavily stressed in scripture and of absolute importance to us all "upon whom the

ends of the ages have come" (1 Corinthians 10:11). Nor are these the only passages where one finds reference to the Great Persecution (cf. also Isaiah 24:16; Jeremiah 31:2; Micah 7:1-7; John 16:1-4; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10; cf. Jeremiah 9:4; Jeremiah 12:5-6; Jeremiah 31:2). For example, the attribution of the divine wrath that will come upon the earth at the end of the Tribulation is consistently characterized by scripture as a direct divine response to the "blood of the saints", that is, divine judgment descending upon antichrist, his kingdom, and his minions as a direct result of the Great Persecution (e.g., Isaiah 26:20-21; 2 Peter 3:10 b; Revelation 16:5-6; Revelation 17:6; Revelation 18:24; Revelation 19:2). In conclusion, it may also be mentioned that there have always been persecutions of believers in every age of world history, so that the many biblical passages which deal with this subject in general will be, if anything, even more important and applicable during the quintessential persecution to come, the Great Persecution (cf. Jeremiah 45:1-4; Micah 7:1-7; Matthew 13:21; John 15:20; John 16:33; Acts 14:22; 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10; 1 Thessalonians 3:3; 2 Timothy 3:12; Hebrews 11:32-40; 1 Peter 4:12-19).

3. The Precedence of the 144,000: Immediately following the description of the false prophet, of his administration of the Great Persecution, and of the mark and number of the beast in Revelation chapter thirteen, chapter fourteen turns directly to the 144,000. The appearance of these unique Jewish witnesses at this point, following the inception of the Great Persecution in the chronological sequence (yet preceding the angelic blessing upon those about to be martyred and the symbolic description of the general course of the Great Persecution in Revelation 14:14-16), is highly significant. This juxtaposition of passages definitively establishes the martyrdom of the 144,000 as the inaugural event of the Great Persecution. Scripture describes them here as being "purchased first from among men for God [the Father] and for the Lamb" (Revelation 14:4), an explicit representation of these witnesses as having been delivered from the crucible of tribulation through martyrdom.

We should not let it go unnoticed here that this precedence of the 144,000 in martyrdom is an exceptional honor which in turn teaches us how we should view the prospect of our own potential martyrdom during that most difficult of times to come. Instead of seeing the possibility of literally giving up our lives for Jesus Christ as a terrible tragedy to be endured, we need to learn to see it for what it truly is, namely, a deliverance which is both a great honor and a great blessing, honoring the One we love, while guaranteeing great reward for us through all eternity. This does not mean that we seek martyrdom (the choice is God's, not ours), nor that the experience is likely to be easy or painless, only that if so wills the will of God we need to be ready to accept the eventuality of martyrdom not with sullen resignation but with confidence, faith, and joy that God is accomplishing His will for our lives in a special way that brings special honor to our dear Savior and ultimate benefit to us (if only we comport ourselves honorably in the process – and this we shall do, God helping us).

Demonstrate faithfulness unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. Revelation 2:10 b

4. The Number of the Martyred:

(9) After this I looked and, behold, [there was] a huge multitude which no one was able to number from every nation and tribe and people and tongue standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes and with palm branches in their hands. Revelation 7:9 As we have already seen, many of the passages dealing with the Great Persecution present the possibility of

martyrdom for those who would remain faithful to Jesus Christ as a near certainty. This passage which describes them as "a huge multitude which no one was able to number from every nation and tribe and people and tongue" removes all doubt about the magnitude of their number, while at the same time emphasizing the worldwide nature of the Great Persecution. The actual number is withheld in Revelation 7:9, a significant fact in and of itself inasmuch as the Book of Revelation does often provide specific numbers, even when they are extremely large (e.g., Revelation 9:16). Nor are we given a ratio, another form of specification found on more than one occasion in the book (e.g., Revelation 8:7-12). Yet we know, even given the unprecedented magnitude of the number of these martyrs, that even so there will apparently be a sizeable host of believers still alive when our Lord returns at the end of the Great Tribulation (1 Corinthians 15:50-54; cf. Matthew 24:36-31; Matthew 25:1-13; 1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12):

(15) For we tell you this by the Lord's own Word, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord (i.e., the Second Advent which brings the Great Tribulation to a close) will not precede those who have fallen asleep. (16) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command, with the archangel's blast on the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first (in resurrection), (17) then we who are alive and remain will be snatched up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and in this way we shall always be with the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

It is worth noting in this regard therefore that the fact that those martyred will be an innumerable multitude does not necessarily mean that they will constitute the majority of those still faithful to Jesus Christ when the Great Persecution begins (although that may be the case). Based upon the passages covered above all we can say of a certainty is that virtually all believers will be subject to persecution during that time, and that an extremely large number will be martyred while a sizeable number will be spared in order to be resurrected while still alive at our Lord's return. It is therefore probably best to estimate the ratio at approximately "50/50". This proportion of the martyred to those who survive until the coming of the Lord is supported indirectly by the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-13. In that parable the light of the lamp represents faith so that the five virgins whose lamps are extinguished before the bridegroom arrives stand for those who fall away in the Great Apostasy. Thus the five wise virgins whose lamps continue to shine represent those who maintain their faith until the end of the Tribulation (in contrast with those who fall away). Since we do know that those who fall away constitute one third of the Church (see part 3A, section II, "The Great Apostasy"), and since in this parable they are complemented by an equal number of believers who survive until the second advent, the only way that the one third proportion can thus be preserved is by positing an equal number who neither fall away nor abide until the end, namely, the martyrs who will quite possibly be commensurate in number with both of the two groups described in the parable.

5. General Persecution and Imprisonment: The refusal of believers to accept the mark of the beast will, from the very start, bring upon them general persecution including but not limited to social ostracism and economic hardship (Matthew 10:17-20; Matthew 24:9; Mark 13:9; Luke 21:12-15; John 15:20-21; John 16:2). As the Great Persecution gathers momentum, moreover, we may expect the faithful to come under ever greater pressures and more intense forms of persecution, not the least of which will be imprisonment (and possibly torture) as a transitional stage preceding

eventual martyrdom.

(33) And those among the people who have insight will teach the people who will be persecuted by sword (i.e., martyrdom), and flame (i.e., torture leading to martyrdom), and captivity (i.e., imprisonment), and plunder (i.e., confiscation of property), for some time. Daniel 11:33 In fact so many passages of scripture allude to the widespread incarceration of believers during the Great Persecution either directly or by application that it seems the most prudent course on the basis of Revelation 13:10 for us to assume our imprisonment as a matter of course, even if it should be God's will for some believers to be spared this particular ordeal (Isaiah 14:16-17; Isaiah 42:7; Isaiah 49:9; Isaiah 51:13; Isaiah 61:1; Daniel 11:33; Habakkuk 1:9; Zechariah 9:11-12; Matthew 10:17-20; Mark 13:9, Luke 4:18-19; cf. Psalms 79:11; Psalms 102:13-20; Isaiah 14:2; Matthew 14:3; Matthew 18:30; Matthew 25:36-44; Acts 5:19, Acts 8:3; Acts 12:4; Acts 16:23; Hebrews 10:34; Hebrews 13:3).

But, [what is] even more [grievous] than these things (i.e., the disruptions of the Tribulation's first half), they will lay hands upon them (i.e., believers during the Great Persecution), betraying them into [the hands of] their [religious] assemblies and prisons, haling them before kings and governors for the sake of my Name. Luke 21:12 Have no fear of what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Revelation 2:10 a

6. Betrayal: Notwithstanding the difficulties for believers in sustaining life, and the dangers involved in collective worship that will attend the Great Persecution, it is still questionable whether such a large number as prophesied would or could ever be rounded up for imprisonment and execution without an efficient method for actively hunting them down. But the Bible leaves us in no doubt about the fact that many of the "candidates" for persecution will be secured in a most disheartening way, namely, by betrayal, often by those most near and dear to them (see also Daniel 11:34; Micah 7:5-7; Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:12; cf. Jeremiah 9:4; Jeremiah 12:5-6; Matthew 24:23-26).

(16) And you will be betrayed even by parents and siblings and friends. And they will put some of you to death, (17) and you will be hated by everyone because of my Name. Luke 21:16-17

(10) And at that time many will fall away and will betray each other and will hate each other, (11) and many false prophets will arise and will deceive many. (12) Now because of the increase of lawlessness [at that time], the love of the many will cool. (13) But he who endures until the end, this [is the one who] will be saved. Matthew 24:10-13

(34) Do not think that I have come to hurl peace upon the earth. I have not come to hurl peace upon the earth but a sword [of divisiveness]. (35) For I have come to divide, [so that] "a man [will be set] against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; (36) [with the result that] a man's enemies will be the members of his own household" (cf. Micah 7:6). (37) Whoever loves his father or mother above Me is not worthy of Me, and whoever loves his son or daughter above Me is not worthy of Me. (38) And whoever does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. (39) Whoever has found his life will lose it, and the one who has lost his life for My sake will find it. Matthew 10:34-39 In these passages we can also see the close connection between the Great Persecution and the Great Apostasy, as the

pressures of persecution serve to intensify the trend of abandoning Christ. For those believers determined to stay loyal to Jesus no matter what, the example of Daniel comes to mind: he was thrown into the lions' den precisely because he refused to alter his behavior of prayerful worship to God in spite of the fact that his enemies in the Persian government had managed to make it illegal (Daniel 6:1 ff.). Confronted with the suspicious eyes of nearly all of our prior acquaintances who are now hostile towards us no matter how close the prior relationship, it will be nigh on impossible to live and worship as true believers in Jesus Christ without exposing ourselves to similar charges of illegality and without inviting similar persecution. But just as God was able to deliver Daniel contrary to all human expectation, we need to be confident of the same potential deliverance (cf. the "help" promised in Daniel 11:34), even as we accept the very real possibility outlined throughout this section that it may well be God's will for us to die as witnesses for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Timothy 2:11-13. We must be prepared to show the world that we truly do love Him more than our very lives. But these [believers] have defeated [the devil] because of the blood of the Lamb and their word of witness (lit., "martyrdom"). For they did not love their lives, even to the point of death. Revelation 12:11

7. The Mechanics of Martyrdom: In his famous exchange of letters with the Roman emperor Trajan (no. 96-97), Pliny the younger in his capacity as governor of Bithynia was told that the government should not initiate investigations to determine who might or might not be a member of this new "sect", Christianity, but that once someone was denounced as a Christian, failure to sacrifice to the emperor must be considered a capital offense. Harsh as this "don't ask, don't tell" policy was, it will appear mild in contrast to the regime of persecution that will obtain during the Great Persecution. For the elimination of faith from the earth has always been an objective near and dear to the devil's heart, and with the entire world now under the thumb of his son antichrist, the process of actively hunting down Christians in order to extirpate Christianity stock and stem will have no equal in world history. The combination of the economic prohibitions directed at those who lack the mark of the beast, the (seemingly certain) prohibitions upon Christian worship et al. (along with the infiltration of true Christian groups: Daniel 11:34; cf. Matthew 24:23-26; Mark 13:21-23; Luke 21:8), and the pressures placed upon friends and family to betray their kindred who are still faithful to Christ (no doubt out of a persuasive mix of penalties for inaction and rewards for cooperation) will all combine to produce a flood of captive believers into the hands of the beast's politico-religious apparatus. Those who do not immediately acquiesce by renouncing Christ while proclaiming antichrist's divinity will become the grist for the mill of the Great Persecution. Although the scale of the Great Persecution will dwarf anything of the like in the past, in individual terms such has often been the lot of those who truly do choose Jesus over this world (cf. Revelation 2:10; Revelation 2:13).

Some [of these great believers of the past] were tortured, refusing release, that they might obtain a better resurrection (i.e., worth more to them than their lives; cf. Psalms 63:3). Others endured ridicule and beatings, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, sawed in half, killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goat hides. They were deprived, persecuted, abused. The world was not worthy of them. They wandered the deserts and the mountains, making their homes in caves and fissures in the earth. And through their faith, all of them became witnesses [to the world] (lit., "were martyred") . . . Hebrews 11:35-39 a

Although individual experiences will no doubt differ somewhat, scripture gives us enough information to establish a basic schematic of the typical stages of the process to be endured by a believer during the Great Persecution once betrayed and arrested upon initial refusal to "repent". It should be noted that the three stages delineated below parallel exactly the sort of ordeal to be faced by a person wrongly accused of some heinous crime for which the penalty is death.

a. Imprisonment: We have covered above the Bible's frequent references to the imprisonment of believers during this period. The wide-scale incarceration of so many believers at this time on the basis of "religious crimes" would no doubt be impossible without the cooperative efforts of clergy and authorities in a world-state where there is effectively now no separation between "church" and state, and it is further likely that only logistical issues will prevent the immediate imprisoning of the entire believing population of the world. Indeed, it is a blessed encouragement to remember that God's limitation of the devil's logistical reach, great though it will be at this time, will stymie Satan's efforts to achieve his goal of removing faith from the earth (cf. Mark 13:20). But, as noted above, a large percentage of believers will indeed be cast into prison, and, given the emphasis that scripture places upon their release at the hands of the returning Messiah, we can expect that once arrested, most of those who are not executed will not see freedom again until the second advent (cf. Isaiah 14:17; Isaiah 42:7; Isaiah 49:9; Isaiah 51:14; Isaiah 61:1; Zechariah 9:11-12; Luke 4:18-19). This prospect will undoubtedly add to the pressure to apostatize on the part of those whose faith is weak. Finally, the atmosphere in which these mass arrests will take place will probably be ugly in the extreme. Just as Nero blamed the Christians for destroying Rome in order to deflect attention from himself, antichrist will in an analogous way blame believers for the assassination attempt on his person, so that we should not underestimate the zeal and vitriol with which the followers of the beast, many of them nominal "Christians", will turn to rounding up these "enemies of the state" who refuse to swear allegiance to antichrist, and, in doing so, will actually feel that they are doing God a favor: But a time will come when everyone who kills you will think that he is making an offering in worship to God. John 16:2 b.

Quasi-Judicial Scrutiny: Just as our Lord's false arrest, imprisonment and trial was carried out on the basis of pretext alone (cf. Isaiah 53:7-9; Matthew 26:55; Mark 14:55-56; Luke 22:37; Luke 22:52-53; Acts 3:13-15; Acts 8:33; 1 Peter 2:22), so those who are called to "walk in His footsteps" (John 13:15; 1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Peter 2:21-25; 1 John 2:6; cf. Matthew 11:29; Matthew 16:24; Mark 10:38-39; Php 2:5) and "share in His sufferings" (Romans 8:17; 2 Corinthians 1:5; Php 1:29; Php 3:10; Colossians 1:24; 1 Peter 4:13; cf. Galatians 6:17) in this special way will be subjected to a severe process of interrogation, pressure, and abuse, along with judicial and quasi-judicial inquisition. Anyone who has been through any sort of trial will understand immediately how a string of illegal and abusive ordeals will bring enormous emotional pressures to bear on those so accused. When we add to this the concomitant physical abuse, scourging, ostracism, humiliation, and plundering of all that we have (Matthew 10:17; Mark 13:9; cf. Daniel 11:34), it should be obvious that this gauntlet of opposition will constitute an enormous test of faith, and one for which those so tested will be extremely grateful for every bit of prior preparation in the Word and its application. Clearly, what we may have to endure, no matter how stressful or terrible, will be nothing like what our Lord did endure. Yet we must in any case avoid underestimating either the difficulties of this process so as to lose heart, or the great honor it bestows in God's eyes so as to fail to count it the great joy amid the tears that it can and should be. Many of the greatest believers of all time endured similar extreme tests of their faith (and it is very much worth studying in this regard the examples of Daniel and his

friends: Daniel 3:1 ff.; Daniel 6:1 ff.; Stephen: Acts 6:8-15, Acts 7:1-59; Peter: Acts 5:17-42; Acts 12:1-19; and Paul: Acts 21:1-40, Acts 22:1-30, Acts 23:1-35, Acts 24:1-27, Acts 25:1-27, Acts 26:1-32, Acts 27:1-44, Acts 28:1-31). Further, in that time of testing we will receive divine "help" (Daniel 11:34), so that even the words we shall speak will not be ours, but will be graciously given to us through the Holy Spirit with the result that even those among us who are not gifted in public speaking need not worry in the least about this ahead of time:

(17) Beware of [all] men. For they will betray you into [the hands of their] tribunals and will scourge you in their assemblies. (18) And you will be haled before governors and kings for my sake as a witness to them (i.e., the pseudo-Christian leaders) and to the gentiles (i.e., generic unbelievers). (19) But when they betray you, do not worry how you will speak or what you will say. For it will be given to you in that [very] hour what you will say. (20) For you will not be the ones speaking, but your Father's [Holy] Spirit will be the One speaking in you. Matthew 10:17-20

(9) Take care for yourselves. For they will betray you into [the hands of their] tribunals and you will be beaten in their assemblies. And you will stand before governors and kings for my sake as a witness to them. (10) For the gospel must first (i.e., before "the end"; cf. Matthew 24:14) be proclaimed to all the nations. (11) And when they betray and hale you [in before them], do not worry about what you will say, but whatever is given to you in that [very] hour, say that. For you are not the ones speaking but the Holy Spirit. Mark 13:9-11

(11) And when they bring you into their assemblies and rulers and authorities, do not worry how or what defense you shall make or what you shall say. (12) For the Holy Spirit will instruct you in that very hour [as to] the things which must be said. Luke 12:11-12

(12) But, [what is] even more [grievous] than these things (i.e., the events of vv.8-11), they will lay hands upon them, betraying them into [the hands of] their [religious] assemblies and prisons, haling them before kings and governors for the sake of my Name. (13) For this will result for you in an act of witnessing [for Me]. (14) So set it [firmly] in you hearts not to prepare ahead of time to make a defense. (15) For I will give you a mouth and wisdom which none of your enemies will be able to oppose or refute. Luke 21:12-15 c. Trial by Fire: As these martyrs follow in the footsteps of our Lord, if their betrayal by their friends and loved ones and consequent imprisonment is roughly analogous to His betrayal by Judas and arrest in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:48-49), and if the inquisition they undergo is roughly analogous to His series of trials by Herod, Pilate, and the Jewish religious leaders, then their subsequent trial by fire will be roughly analogous to His condemnation and ordeal in crucifixion (excepting, of course, His death for our sins). Please understand, what our Lord did for us at the cross is not to be compared with any other earthly event. But as we are called to walk in imitation of Him (John 13:15; 1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Peter 2:21-25; 1 John 2:6; cf. Matthew 11:29; Matthew 16:24; Php 2:5), and to share His sufferings (Romans 8:17; 2 Corinthians 1:5; Php 1:29; Php 3:10; Colossians 1:24; 1 Peter 4:13; cf. Galatians 6:17), the parallels which scripture points out in general terms between His experience and that of these martyrs does need to be considered. Indeed, our Lord Himself drew a clear parallel between His imminent death for us and the high calling of those who choose to follow Him (i.e., we too are to "pick up our cross" and follow Him: Matthew 10:38; Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23). So while we would never wish to make an exact comparison between martyrdom and our Lord's unique sacrifice (for only His death could suffice to accomplish our salvation), it is nonetheless true

that these martyrs for our Lord by their similar experience will be His unique witnesses, calling attention to His unique sacrifice through the absolute faith they will demonstrate in it and in Him, when they give up their lives rather than denouncing the One who bought them with His life's blood. And when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the fifth seal, I saw below the altar the living persons who had been slain because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained. Revelation 6:9 In the preceding section, the verses in the gospels which detail the process of the inquisition that these believers will undergo mention first "tribunals" and "assemblies" (Matthew 10:17; Mark 13:9; cf. Luke 21:12). The second word is a translation of the Greek word *synagoge*, often transliterated as *synagogue*. This is somewhat misleading in that it suggests a solely Jewish setting whereas in truth what we should understand in terms of the true context being studied here is indeed a religious venue but one which is much more likely to be pseudo-Christian than Jewish. For what is being described in respect to the quasi-judicial examination process of believers incarcerated during the Great Persecution is part and parcel of the pressure placed upon them by antichrist's religious establishment. These believers will be commanded to "repent" of their "misplaced" faith in that "other Messiah" (i.e., our true Lord and Savior Jesus Christ), and to declare instead their acceptance of antichrist as the true Christ by taking the mark of the beast. As in the case of our Lord who was called upon to deny Himself, and who was tried numerous times in the hours before His crucifixion, this process may involve numerous "trials" before various tribunals, but in every case those doing the examination will be adherents of the beast's political and religious apparatus. In particular, as has been suggested above, it is likely that many main line religious organizations completely co-opted at that time by antichrist to serve and worship him will take the lead, at least initially, in the process of pressuring those who still have true faith to abandon it in order to save their lives. That is what is meant by the "tribunals" (*synedria*), namely, smaller screening bodies of religious officials analogous to Jesus' first trial before Annas and the Sanhedrin (derived from *synedrion*, the singular form of the same word: John 18:12-24), whereas "assemblies" (*synagogai*) will refer to more public meetings presided over by larger numbers of religious officials with a larger audience, analogous to our Lord's second trial before Caiaphas (compare John 18:24 with Matthew 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65). In this regard we should recall that the apostle John identified "many antichrists" at work during the Church age (1 John 2:18-22; cf. 2 John 1:7), and gave as the means for that identification the fact that "they went out from us". Applied to our present discussion, this gives us a clear indication that both antichrist and many of his key followers will be erstwhile "Christian leaders". We have already noted here a consistent parallel between our Lord's trial by fire prior to the cross and the experience of the martyrs of the Great Persecution. In this respect we may anticipate present-day equivalents among the beast's co-opted "Christian leaders" which likewise parallel the various religious sects of our Lord's day, groups which in prior years and centuries had no doubt included genuine believers, but which by the time of Jesus' multiple trials had similarly been co-opted into doing the devil's work. For the "scribes" who consistently put tradition over truth, the similarly traditionalist denominations of the Orthodox and Catholic persuasions are the best fit. For the secularist Sadducees, the old line now quite liberal Protestant denominations who have come to prefer "reason" to scripture along with other related groups (e.g., Unitarians and Christian Scientists) are a good match. The legalistic Pharisees who used judgmental applications of the Law to eliminate mercy and faith bring to mind the trends now found in many conservative Protestant denominations such as various Baptists and other spin-off independent denominations

(and one may wish to place the Mormons here as well). The other-worldly Essenes are somewhat analogous to the various "charismatic" groups who worship experience over scripture, while we may find in the Zealots a parallel for any of the many fringe groups, left or right, which embrace violence, setting their extreme efforts in place of God and His plan. Apologies ahead of time to any and all who are partial to any of the groups mentioned above, but the reader is asked to remember that we are talking here about future events that will take place only after the removal of the Holy Spirit's restraining influence in the crucible of the Tribulation. This set of parallels is thus not meant to indict any present group (and indulgence is also asked for any which may have been inadvertently left out), but merely to illustrate how the various tendencies of all the major Christian (not to mention pseudo-Christian) organizations could very well result in their being employed in the service of evil once they no longer contain any true believers, that is, the very situation which obtained in our Lord's day and the very one which we are contemplating during the Tribulation after antichrist co-opts the church-visible for his own ends.

Before final approval is given for the execution of those who refuse to repent despite such pressures, the political authorities will also have to weigh in. These are the "governors and kings" mentioned in the pertinent scriptures above (Matthew 10:17; Mark 13:9; Luke 21:12), and are analogous to our Lord's trials before Herod and Pilate. Just as religious officials are co-opted in antichrist's kingdom, so of course will all of the world's political officials be, for the beast's rule will be a worldwide one (Revelation 13:1-9). For those being persecuted, it is very important to understand that being alone and having been subjected to extreme physical and verbal abuse, these trials will constitute an inordinate amount of pressure the degree of which is difficult to grasp before the fact, even by those among us who may have been subjected to a lengthy legal process. It is therefore imperative as we study these things to appreciate ahead of time the importance of prior spiritual preparation to the successful endurance of such trials, even as we gain a better appreciation for the gauntlet our Lord ran for us even before He got to the cross and died for our sins.

Revelation 6:9 quoted above tells us that those put to death in the Great Persecution will be executed "because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained". We have also seen that the false prophet will be given the authority "to bring it about that as many as refused to worship the image of the beast might be put to death." (Revelation 13:15). Further, the resurrected martyrs seen in Revelation 20:1-15 who reign with Christ for a thousand years are said not to have worshiped "the beast or his image and did not take the mark on their forehead and on their hand" (Revelation 20:4). The litmus test then for execution and martyrdom will be the two-sided coin of refusing to reject the true Christ on the one hand and of refusing to worship the pseudo-Christ beast and his image in conjunction with the reception of his mark on the other. This brings up the question of whether or not a person can be said to refuse to worship the image of the beast in any place other than Jerusalem. For clearly the false prophet who forces obeisance and administers capital punishment on all who refuse will be in Jerusalem, as will antichrist and antichrist's abominable image. Given the vast numbers of those put to death for the Lord and their geographical diversity, "a huge multitude which no one was able to number from every nation and tribe and people and tongue" (Revelation 7:9), it is likely that, when Jesus tells us in Matthew 24:9 "and [they] will put some of you to death", He is talking about the local "governors and kings" mentioned above. Therefore just as the mark of the beast is discussed in a manner that seems to

connect it with worshipping the statue in person (i.e., Revelation 14:9-11; Revelation 16:2; Revelation 19:20; Revelation 20:4), and yet it seems improbable that everyone who agrees to take the mark will have to go to Jerusalem to do so, so in this case it seems preferable to understand some sort of satellite process, possibly enhanced through technology, whereby many of the martyrs will be put to death locally. As to the timing, we can expect persecution to go hand in hand with the ceremonial placing of the mark of the beast, with the coercion, compulsion, and execution of some believers beginning from the start. It stands to reason, however, that the process of denouncing, arresting, examining, and executing those who refuse to acknowledge the beast will have to gather speed and momentum over time. Human limitations being what they are, a period of transition into the new, harsh economic reality that accompanies the mark (Revelation 13:7) will thus be unavoidable despite the devil's best efforts, so that not all believers will be identified immediately (indeed, as we have seen, fully half of those who remain at that time will most likely survive until the coming of the Lord). Nevertheless, we can be sure that the beast will do everything in his power to make that time of transition as short as possible so that we may expect to see a rapid implementation of this policy and subsequent ensnaring of the faithful. Given the desire for speed, sheer logistics would seem to indicate that, while there will be a certain amount of celebrity worship and marking done in Jerusalem itself (and the conspicuous execution of prominent Christians there too, for that matter), this process will take place mainly on the local level. Whether or not the local venues will have smaller replicas of the "abomination that causes [spiritual] desolation" or be fitted out with large viewing screens or some other such substitute, we cannot say for certain. What is certain, however, is that worshipping the beast and his image, in person or remotely, and taking the mark, whether from the second beast himself or one of antichrist's clergy far from Jerusalem, will just as surely guarantee condemnation. Finally, inasmuch as Revelation 13:15 shows that the false prophet will be engaged in personal direction of some of these inquisitions which result in the execution of those who refuse to worship the beast and his image and take his mark, it is therefore also the case that some of the martyrs will indeed be killed in Jerusalem – and perhaps a large number of them at that. For those so "selected", it will certainly mean the necessity not only of being strong under the initial pressures following imprisonment, but of staying strong in faith for what is likely to be a long and arduous process. Gaining a temporary reprieve on the local level merely for the purpose of being transported to the headquarters of evil for "special treatment" will no doubt be very much like facing a firing-squad twice. As to the manner of execution, scripture does not provide any basis for dogmatically singling out a preferred method (although see Revelation 20:4 where the martyrs are described as having been beheaded). The "sword" in Revelation 13:10 is a common biblical metaphor for capital punishment (cf. Matthew 26:52; Romans 13:4). Crucifixion as well as more traditional modern modes of execution are certainly possible (cf. John 21:19). However, given that fire is closely connected with antichrist and his false prophet (Revelation 13:13), and the close analogy already noted between the refusal by Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to worship the statue of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 3:1-30, it is more than likely that a similar death by fire will be the end result of this "trial by fire" for the tribulational martyrs (cf. the "fiery sea" of Revelation 15:2). Just as those three great men of God were not intimidated into forsaking Him despite the terror before them and were vindicated in a most miraculous way, so we need to commit ourselves to trust and obey God in spite of the commands of the world's authorities to reject Him, in spite of the confidence of the beast's followers that they are "doing good" in putting us to death (cf. John

16:2), and in spite of every terrifying eventuality with which we may be threatened. For while it will not be the fate of the tribulational martyrs to walk out of the fiery furnace the way Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did, it will be their lot to rise first in the ranks of the redeemed (1 Thessalonians 4:16 b), and to reign with Jesus a thousand years: And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them (i.e., they sat in judgment), namely the persons who had been executed (lit., "beheaded with an ax") because of their witness for Jesus and because of the Word of God, [that is] whoever did not worship the beast or his image and did not take the mark on their forehead and on their hand. For they came to life and began to rule with Christ for a thousand years. Revelation 20:4

8. The Great Persecution in Israel: The vast majority of believers within Israel will respond to the divine command to flee into the desert and will thus be shielded from the otherwise universal persecution of the faithful. However, Daniel chapter eleven, a passage already covered above in some detail, does seem to indicate that, along with Moses and Elijah and the 144,000, a certain number of believers will remain in the land of Israel at this time (as is also indicated by a number of other passages which suggest continued problems for believers in Israel despite the flight of the faithful: e.g., Jeremiah 30:7; Daniel 8:12; Daniel 12:7; Zechariah 10:11).

(30) For ships of Kittim (i.e., the western "Babylon") will attack with him (i.e., antichrist) [so that he will be victorious]. Then he will be stricken [as if dead], but will revive. And he will be enraged at the holy covenant, so that on his return [to Israel from the far south] he will take action [against it] (i.e., ending the sacrifices, setting up the abomination, taking his seat in the temple). And he will give his support to those who abandon the holy covenant. (31) For it is from him that the military forces will issue forth which will pollute the sanctuary (i.e., ending the ministry of Moses and Elijah), remove the daily sacrifice, and set up the abomination of desolation. (32) And with enticements he will seduce [people] to violate the [holy] covenant, but the people who know their God will continue to hold fast to it. (33) And those among the people who have insight will teach the people who will be persecuted by sword (i.e., martyrdom), and flame (i.e., torture leading to martyrdom), and captivity (i.e., imprisonment), and plundering (i.e., confiscation of property), for some time. (34) And when they are persecuted, they will receive a little help, yet many will ally themselves to them under false pretenses. (35) For even from among [the ranks of] those who have insight, some will be persecuted, in order to refine, purify, and cleanse them until the final end. For [it is] yet to come at its appointed time. Daniel 11:30-35

Whether it is the case that those described in the above persecution in Israel following the Tribulation's mid-point failed to depart at the proper time, or were led by the Spirit to remain, or became believers after the fact, it is certainly true that what is being described here is applicable to the Church as a whole and to the pattern of the Great Persecution as a whole everywhere else in the world as well (and that is undoubtedly an important connection we are meant to make). One thing is certain: all those who remain in the land during this period, believers and unbelievers both, are in for a very difficult time (e.g., Isaiah 8:14-15).

9. The Role of Babylon: The book of Revelation very emphatically makes Babylon responsible for the Great Persecution, both directly (Revelation 17:6; Revelation 18:20; Revelation 18:24; Revelation 19:2; cf. Revelation 16:6), and also in terms of the beast's religion of "prostitution and witchcraft" which lies behind it and for which she is the primary source (Revelation 17:1-5;

Revelation 18:3-4; cf. Revelation 14:8-9; Revelation 16:19). In fact, Babylon the great prostitute is said in Revelation 17:6 to be "drunk with the blood of the holy ones, even from [the blood of] the witnesses for Jesus", providing us with a clear linkage between the Great Persecution and Babylon in her capacity as the original headquarters of antichrist's religious and political base. Babylon, of course, is also the wealthiest state in the world (cf. the descriptions in Revelation 17:1-6 and in all of chapter 18), so that the commercial restrictions upon those who lack the mark (whereby so many believers will be identified, incarcerated and martyred) are doubtless to be understood as intimately connected with her role in this regard as well. Since the Great Persecution is thus largely indistinguishable from Babylon in scripture, showing that she will thus be the chief agent of that persecution through the amalgamated world-system of religious, economic and political power she represents, we are further correct to conclude that the new pseudo-Christianity developed by antichrist in Babylon will be instrumental in conducting the Great Persecution itself. Just as our Lord was haled before a series of Jewish religious councils which ought to have worshiped Him, the Messiah of the Jews, so believers during the Great Persecution will find themselves being accused, berated, and condemned by erstwhile fellow "Christians", a fact that will make the burden of martyrdom all that much more difficult to bear.

10. A Brief Christian "Code of Conduct" for the Great Persecution: It is hoped that the following list of guiding principles, though not meant to be exhaustive, will prove to be some help to those facing the trying circumstance of that future time (or indeed similar pressures in the present): a. Don't hide your light of faith under a bushel (Matthew 5:15-16): Be courageous in continuing to carry out the ministries and Christian witness to which Christ has called you (Matthew 10:28). Many contemporary Christians seem to believe that once the Tribulation arrives we are to go into "survivalist mode". This seems to run counter to everything the Bible has to say. When the apostles were told to stop speaking and teaching in the Name of Jesus, they refused on pain of scourging, imprisonment and death (all three of which fates lay in wait for many of them because of their determination to serve Jesus no matter what the cost; cf. Acts 5:29). Certainly, we are told to be wise as well as innocent in the way we conduct ourselves in the world (Matthew 10:16; cf. Romans 16:19; 1 Corinthians 14:20), and no one is suggesting that we volunteer to be executed, that we "dare" the authorities to martyr us, or that we deliberately go out of our way to run afoul of those who are administering the Great Persecution, calling attention to ourselves rather than to Christ (cf. Matthew 6:2). This extreme is clearly not what God would have us to do any more that He expects us to run for cover rather than confess our faith in His Son. Daniel and his three friends give us the perfect examples of how we should behave in this regard. Daniel did not immediately go into the presence of the king and protest the wicked decree forged against him, daring him to make him a martyr for the Lord; but neither did he run and hide as he well might have done for just a day, or even change in any way his normal walk with the Lord, but continued in exactly the same way as he had before the harsh decree was passed. Likewise, Hananiah, Mishael, and Asariah (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) did not make a point of identifying themselves to the king, daring him to throw them into the fiery furnace so that they might be martyrs for the Lord; but neither did they run and hide as they well might have done for just that day, or even change their normal manner of faithful service to the king as a reflection of their duty to God, but were present on the plain of Dura at the king's command. In each case, continuation of faithfulness in normal spiritual and secular behavior led these men to be martyred – but in each case God delivered them in a miraculous way. It is well for us to consider, should it so be that we face such

circumstances ourselves, that God is completely capable of delivering us as well, so that if we should be caught in the process of living our lives as God would have us to do and then be martyred as a result, it can only be because this is the will of God for us, and it is only through our response to His will that He is glorified through us (Isaiah 43:7; Ephesians 1:5-14). Everyone will have to make his or her own applications of this principle during that time and it may very well be that some measure of greater circumspection will be appropriate in some things (such as avoiding commercial venues where the lack of the mark will be an issue; cf. Isaiah 26:20; Matthew 10:17; Mark 13:9), while more boldness will be appropriate in others (such as visiting those who have been imprisoned for their faith: Matthew 25:39; Hebrews 13:3; cf. Revelation 2:10). The point is that, just as we should do today, during the Great Persecution we ought to be consulting our Lord and His Word of truth in prayer and in the power of the Spirit in order to know the right thing to do in trying circumstances, rather than consulting the world and our circumstances in it first and foremost, making God merely an afterthought.

[But in contrast to those who receive the mark of the beast and worship him], the saints have perseverance, [even] those who in this way (i.e., by refusing to receive the mark or worship the beast) keep God's commandments and [retain] their faith in Jesus (viz., even though it may cost them their lives). Revelation 14:12 b. Don't fall asleep spiritually (Mark 13:32-37): Stay alert through continued spiritual growth and ministry. As we mentioned above, one of the most disturbing ironies of the Great Tribulation is that true believers in Christ will be persecuted as at no other time in history for being unwilling to accept this pseudo-Messiah. Therefore we should not underestimate the degree to which antichrist and his pseudo-Christianity will resemble the real thing at least on the surface, nor the degree to which the pressures to conform and join-in arising both from putative fellow "Christians" and also especially from friends and family will be persuasive (as they were in the case of Jewish believers in Israel during the first century: cf. Hebrews 10:23-39). For the comforting aspects of "belonging" to the pseudo-church of that day will be even more deadly to faith in truth than it was in the situation described throughout the book of Hebrews or than it is today (where what we are experiencing is in most cases merely rank superficiality and lukewarmness to the truth of scripture rather than outright worship of the devil). Embracing apostasy out of pressure, even the extreme pressure of persecution, is the one sure way to put faith to death and thereby lose out on all the blessings of eternity so very close at any time, but especially during the waning days of the Tribulation (Hebrews 11:26; Hebrews 11:37; cf. Revelation 14:9-11). c. Don't let your light of faith go out (Matthew 25:1-13): Keep fighting the good fight of faith in spite of the many difficult challenges to faith that will arise during the Great Persecution. Holding onto faith will require the correct mental perspective informed by scripture regarding the true situation at that time. Even Moses became distraught at Pharaoh's lack of positive response amid the increased pressures on the children of Israel (Exodus 5:22-23), but we have the advantage of hindsight so that we know from the Bible what the Lord's plan was all along. We know from scripture how it was that the Lord would work everything out for good in spite of repeated trouble and testing. And we know too, unfortunately, that the people continually failed to trust the Lord in spite of the many extraordinary miracles they witnessed. As believers who may experience the things to come, we need to remember this example (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:1-13). We need to prepare ourselves, not with canned goods in the basement but with Bible truth in the heart, to endure what the Lord has told us about through scripture ahead of time, remembering not to take these terrible times and events personally, but rather to appreciate the inner workings of the

overall plan of God upon these final events of history before the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The believers of that time who do survive with faith intact will be those who were prepared to stand against their country (cf. Revelation 18:4), family (cf. Matthew 10:36; John 16:1-4), church (cf. John 16:2), and economic well-being (Revelation 13:17). For as bad as the Great Persecution will be from the very start, we may expect it to grow progressively worse before our Lord returns. d. Don't value your life over your faith (Matthew 16:24-27): Love the Lord with all your heart. Don't put physical things, even those essential for minimal survival, over the truly more important spiritual ones. If it comes to it, it is far better to lose one's life for His sake than to gain the world without Him at the price of forfeiting the eternal life that is in Him (Matthew 10:37-39). The Tribulation in general and the Great Persecution in particular will be a refining process (Daniel 11:35; cf. Daniel 7:18-27), whereby the Lord will not only demonstrate who are truly His but will also glorify Himself through what those who prove faithful in this trial are willing to suffer for His Name. The entirety of human history is "God's threshing floor" (Matthew 3:12), used by Him to demonstrate beyond any doubt what we really do choose, and how emphatically we choose it (the basis for rewards on the part of believers). At no time will this be more true than during the Great Persecution. If we really are thinking like God is thinking, instead of becoming disconsolate under the pressures, inconveniences, trials, tribulations, and loss of the Great Persecution, we will see beyond the veil that shrouds this life from the next and realize that the rewards we are earning through patient endurance and joyous acceptance of our Lord's will for us are not to be compared to any of the troubles we are presently suffering, even if they cost us a few short years of our physical lives, lives which would be completely pointless in any case apart from our faith in and faithfulness to our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who died for us (Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:17). e. Don't be afraid (Luke 12:32-34): Let hope and joy rule your heart as you continue to look forward in eager anticipation to the glories of the Kingdom to come rather than focusing upon the miseries of the present. The beast and his father the devil along with all their followers can only kill the body, not the spirit (Matthew 10:26-31), and can only do that if the Lord allows – our deaths are always precious in His sight and we can expect that to be doubly true during this unprecedented period of martyrdom (Psalms 116:15). Given that as we have seen above the likelihood is for fully one half of those whose faith survives the Great Apostasy to perish in glory as martyrs for our Lord during the Great Persecution, our hope of eternal life and joy in our eternal reward ought always to temper any prospect of earthly survival in light of the very real possibility of martyrdom (cf. Zephaniah 2:3; Jeremiah 45:1-5), ever making it our first priority to demonstrate faithfulness to the One who is ever faithful to us.

Therefore let all those who are suffering according to the will of God entrust their lives (while doing what is good) to a Creator who is faithful. 1 Peter 4:19 Demonstrate faithfulness unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. Revelation 2:10 b In all of this, then, we need to keep in mind that the Tribulation is an essential part of the Plan of God and could never happen in the first place apart from His specific will (2 Thessalonians 2:6-8; Revelation 5:1-5). That is true both on the worldwide level and in the case every individual believer, no matter what the Lord has in store for us personally. As we have seen in our comparison of the competing tribulational trends, the Tribulation constitutes a key part of God's demonstration of Satan's complete evil and ultimate powerlessness on the one hand, and of His own righteousness and faithfulness on the other (with the Millennium which follows providing the ultimate counterpoint to a world ruled by the devil in contrast to a world ruled by God). The Tribulation thus has an important role to play in the overall

Plan of God and in His refutation of Satan. For it will be seen more clearly than ever before during those final seven years that the devil is in no way "for" mankind as he seeks to destroy the world, while at the same time we will observe God's miraculous protection of a holy remnant in the world in spite of otherwise complete satanic control. And not only that, but the Tribulation will also demonstrate that in spite of the greatest pressures of human history, there will indeed be those who continue to remain faithful to the Lord, notwithstanding the incredible enticements of its first half (which is destined to sweep so many away in the Great Apostasy), and the unprecedented pressures of its second half (wherein half of the faithful will be subjected to martyrdom). In short, though we may be forced during those dark days ahead to "make hay without straw" for what seems a never-ending stretch of time, we should recall that in the analogy of the days preceding the Exodus, Pharaoh, a type of antichrist, was really making the Lord the issue in this persecution (cf. Exodus 5:17). Those abused during the Great Persecution will likewise and most assuredly be persecuted because of Jesus Christ, and this is at once the greatest compliment to a believer's faith and the greatest opportunity to demonstrate that faithfulness, separating for all the world to see the seed in good soil from that which fell upon the rock.

Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we persevere, we will also reign with Him. If we disown Him, He will also disown us; If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself. 2 Timothy 2:11-13

01A.07. Armageddon and the Second Advent

7. Armageddon and the Second Advent A. The Bowl Judgments As to the precise placement of the bowl judgments in the chronology of the Great Tribulation, scripture provides a number of clues which give us the ability to project a plausible time-line for their occurrence. As is made clear throughout chapter sixteen of Revelation, the exact terminus for the bowl judgments is Armageddon and the Second Advent (see esp. Revelation 16:16-17), since both of these events and the build-up to them are part and parcel of bowls six and seven. Further, the start-point for these seven judgments must occur at some point during the Tribulation's final three and a half years (obviously, in that, along with everything else which follows Revelation 11:15-19 and precedes Christ's return in chapter 19, they are part of the seventh trumpet which represents the Great Tribulation). So although there is clearly a relationship (and many obvious parallels) between the seven judgments of warning (trumpets – first half of the Tribulation) and the seven judgments of punishment (bowls – second half of the Tribulation), at first glance it may seem impossible for the bowls to parallel the trumpets in terms of raw time since the total number of months of warning comprised by the trumpet judgments is 63 (when the 42 months of the seventh trumpet, the Great Tribulation, are included in the count). On the other hand, the termini provided by the start and stop points of the Great Tribulation can provide us with only 42 months at most. In actuality, of course, the linear total has to be far fewer than 42, since a good deal of time before their commencement must be allowed at the beginning of the Great Tribulation in order for the Great Persecution to first get underway (because it is to this offence that the bowls constitute a divine response; cf. Revelation 16:5-7). The correct solution lies in positing an overlap in the effects of the bowl judgments (i.e., a continuation of the effects of each judgment even as the next in sequence begins, with the effects of all seven continuing until Christ's return). In this way it is possible to telescope these seven in a manner that will both yield a total of 63 total (partially overlapping) months of judgment parallel to the 63 (sequential) months of warning represented by the Trumpet Judgments, while at the same time allowing the Bowl Judgments to fit into the Great Tribulation's second half in a reasonable and workable way.

The above schema is certainly in keeping with the rising crescendo of punishment designed to be unbearable in contrast to the sequential and (relatively) endurable hardships of the warning judgments (cf. Isaiah 30:32). Bowls six and seven, which comprise the entire Armageddon campaign along with all of the other events which precede the Second Advent, form the anchor for this system. Since, as we have already seen, Armageddon and our Lord's return occur in the fall (as symbolized by the Day of Atonement), and since the events of bowls six and seven will almost certainly require the bulk of the preceding summer and spring (the summoning and transporting of the beast's armies to Israel from throughout the world likely being a particularly time-consuming logistical task), the positing of six and seven months for the seventh and six bowl judgments respectively fits the evidence. This schema also has in its favor the fact that the supplying of a further month for each additional bowl judgment working backward (i.e., totals of 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and, finally, 12 months for each bowl judgment from the seventh to the first respectively) yields the

desired total of 63 months reckoned in overlapping total, yet manages to do so in only 12 months of overall, linear chronological time (as can be seen from the diagram above). This modeling of the likely chronology of the bowl judgments also has in its favor:

1) It allows for the fact that just as the seven trumpets constituted a build up to the Great Tribulation, so the seven bowls constitute a rising crescendo of judgment in anticipation of the return of our Lord and His judgment of the beast, the devil, and all their minions at the battle of Armageddon (cf. Isaiah 30:32).

2) It allows for the fact that, inasmuch as these judgments are in no small part the divine response to the Great Persecution (Revelation 14:1-20, Revelation 15:1-8 plus Revelation 16:5-7; cf. Isaiah 35:4; Revelation 19:15), sufficient time must first pass for that persecution to take place before the bowl judgments begin (and, as we have seen, the persecution is allowed to take its course for quite some time).

3) It allows for the bowl judgments to fit into the gap between the Great Persecution and Armageddon (and it is difficult to see how this could extend much past the suggested chronology of the Tribulation's final year).

4) It allows for the time required for all of the armies of the world to gather for Armageddon, the subject of the fifth and sixth bowl judgments, with this assembly taking place during the spring and summer of the final tribulational year, and with Armageddon itself taking place in the fall (i.e., lining up with the Day of Atonement), as well as allowing for sufficient time for the prophesied war between the beast's invading forces and Israel.

5) It allows for sufficient time for the other events which are prophesied to take place in this final year or so, including the plunging of the beast's kingdom into darkness (the event that dislodges him temporarily from Jerusalem), the revolt of Babylon and Israel, the destruction and pillaging of Babylon, and the invasion of Israel preparatory to Armageddon. For the Lord has a day of vengeance, even a year of retribution for Zion's cause. Isaiah 34:8 (cf. Isaiah 63:4)

Although the overall length of time for this punitive period of judgment is only twelve months from beginning to end, we are not to draw from this fact the notion that the bowl judgments will for that reason be less intense. Quite the contrary. Such an idea is easily refuted by the nature and effect of this second set of judgments as should be obvious even from a cursory reading of Revelation chapter sixteen. Moreover it is also the case that, in contrast to the trumpet judgments which are sequential and non-overlapping, the effects of each bowl judgment continue from their inception right down to the end of the Tribulation at the battle of Armageddon and the Second Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. This build up of "blow upon unrelenting blow" is characteristic of the pattern of divine punishment where the objects of God's wrath have emphatically and categorically rejected His mercy (cf. Deuteronomy 28:16-68; 2 Thessalonians 1:9). Thus the manner in which these final seven judgments are administered reflects their punitive nature (in contrast to the monitory nature of the trumpet judgments; see Revelation 15:1; Revelation 15:8; Revelation 16:1).

Bowls: The Greek phiale (φιάλη), equivalent to the Latin patera (the diminutive of which is patella), is a large, deep saucer (about the size of a medium deep-dish pizza pan). This deep-dish plate was commonly used in antiquity for libations so that it had a general sacrificial use. It was chosen for libations instead of what might seem to us more practical utensils such as true bowls, cups or

jars no doubt because of its suitability for dispersing the liquid libation in a way so as to maximize the emission of fragrance, the visibility of the outpouring, and the area moistened. So in our analogy here, the widespread and tangible nature of the judgment produced is the picture we are meant to receive through the use of this particular ceremonial device: the consequences of the bowl judgments will be even more emphatic, wide-ranging and viscerally felt than was the even case with the trumpet judgments. The Seven Angels: The number seven suggests that, as in the case of the trumpet judgments, the archangels are once again in charge of administering this series of judgments. As with the blowing of the trumpets, the pouring out of the bowls constitutes the command to begin. Upon receiving this command, we may understand that the large number of elect angels under each archangel's command will then be responsible for carrying out the particulars of each judgment. One additional important difference between the trumpet and the bowl judgments is that while in the case of the former each angel received individual, sequential orders to blow his trumpet, here we see all seven archangels commanded at the same time to "pour out upon the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God" (a fact which further argues for the overlapping duration of the bowl judgments as explained above).

1. Sores

(1) And I heard a loud voice from the [heavenly] temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out upon the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God". (2) And the first [angel] went out and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and dreadful and terrible sores arose upon the people who had the mark of the beast and upon those who were worshiping his image. Revelation 16:1-2

Beyond the physical pain involved, afflictions of the skin are particularly psychologically wearing because they are at once difficult to put out of mind and at the same time obvious to others. When given the opportunity to attack Job physically, the devil, a shrewd judge of human nature, chose to smite Job "with painful sores from head to foot" no doubt as much because of the anticipated effect upon his morale as anything else (Job 2:4-8). The sores in question here, recalling the "boils" that afflict the Egyptians during the sixth Exodus plague (Exodus 9:8-12), "arise" upon the followers of the beast immediately after the first bowl is poured out, and we can take heart that the scripture here names these reprobates as the recipients, thereby indicating that believers will be exempt (as in the case of many of the effects of the trumpet judgments as we have seen; cf. Exodus 15:26). The sores themselves are described as "dreadful and terrible". The Greek words here are generic (*kakos/κακός* and *poneros/πονηρός* respectively), with the former most likely referring to their ugly appearance and the latter to their unpleasant quality. Suffice it to say that they will serve as a constant reminder to everyone who worships the beast of God's displeasure, right up until the point of our Lord's return in glory.

2. Sea Turned to Blood And the second [angel] poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like the blood of a dead [person], and every living thing in contact with the sea died. Revelation 16:3 This second bowl judgment also represents a clear intensification over the similar second trumpet judgment wherein only a third of the creatures in the sea perish as a result of a third of the sea being turned into blood (Revelation 8:8-9). Human fatalities are also to be understood here as well (cf. Revelation 8:9 b), since it is not only "everything in the sea" which perishes but everything (and everyone) "in contact" with the sea at the instant this judgment comes down. As with the sores which appear on all of the beast's followers, so this plague upon

the earth's seas is deliberately reminiscent of the plagues upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians in response to his persecution of the Israelites (compare Exodus 9:8-12 with Exodus 7:14-24). And just as Pharaoh and his armies were destroyed soon after the end of that cycle of judgment, so it will be with antichrist and his hordes when our Lord annihilates them at the battle of Armageddon. But until that time, this judgment of blood and the deprivation of the sea as a source of food will, like the sores of the first bowl judgment, continue to weigh heavily upon the anti-God population of the world until that blessed end comes to pass. Finally it should be noted that in all three instances the blood in question is literal blood, making the reality of the divine source of this judgment impossible to refute – except by hearts that have been hardened past the point of any return to reality or repentance (the universal state of affairs for antichrist and his followers). Therefore here we clearly see God's power and righteousness underscored by this judgment: in spite of undeniable proof of its evil, the world nevertheless stubbornly refuses to repent.

3. Waters Turned to Blood

(4) And the third [angel] poured out his bowl onto the rivers and the springs of waters, and it (i.e., all fresh water) became blood. (5) Then I heard the angel of the waters (i.e., the third angel) saying, "O You who are and [always] were, the Holy One, You are justified in rendering these [seven bowl] judgments. (6) For [the inhabitants of the earth] have poured out the blood of [Your] saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. The very thing which they deserve." (7) And I heard the altar saying "Yes, [O] Lord, God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments." Revelation 16:4-7

Just as the previous bowl judgment affected all bodies of salt water on the earth, so this third judgment will affect all bodies of fresh water. Just as the Israelites were protected during the simPsalms 42:1-2ilar cursing of the river Nile (cf. Exodus 7:18 and Exodus 7:21 : "the Egyptians will not be/were not able to drink the water"), so we may expect that believers still alive at this time will be provided some respite. For although the method and manner of the relief for those who have not succumbed to the worship of the beast are not specified, it is very clear from the verses above that the punishment involved here is specifically directed at antichrist's followers (and Revelation 16:5 b applies this principle to all seven of the bowl judgments). Water, lest we forget, is symbolic of the life-giving truth of the Word of God (Isaiah 55:1; John 3:5; John 3:8 [Greek]; John 4:10; John 4:13-14; John 7:37-39; 1 Corinthians 10:4; Ephesians 5:26; Hebrews 10:22; 1 John 5:8; Revelation 7:17; Revelation 21:6; Revelation 22:1; Revelation 22:17; cf. Exodus 17:5-6; Numbers 20:8; Psalms 36:8-9; Psalms 42:1-2; Psalms 63:1; Psalms 84:5-7; Isaiah 8:6; Isaiah 12:3; Isaiah 41:17; Isaiah 44:3; Isaiah 55:10-11; Jeremiah 2:13; Jeremiah 17:13; 1 Corinthians 3:6-7; Hebrews 6:7). The appropriateness of this judgment, therefore, whereby the world's fresh water is turned into a symbol of judgment not fit to drink should be evident: just as the worshipers of the beast have rejected the sweet water of truth and spilled the blood of those who love it instead, so their access to the fresh water which symbolizes that truth has now been taken away and replaced with undrinkable blood. A word should be said here about the justice of God. Despite what might seem to be terrible and unthinkable judgments falling upon countless people the world around, the third angel is given here to sing a hymn praising God precisely for the justice of what He is doing in holding the world to account for its evil in following and worshiping the beast and thus facilitating the massive persecution of the true Church, believers in Jesus Christ. Indeed, in verse six, it is "the inhabitants of the earth" who are charged with spilling the blood of the "saints

and prophets". Even though the moral ambiguity which reigns in our day would no doubt find great fault in the destruction of all sea-life, the pollution of all fresh water, and the severe smiting of so many people with painful sores, God is completely "justified in rendering these judgments". They are pure, and good, and righteous according to the angel's hymn, and this evaluation is seconded by none other than the Son of Man Himself who died on behalf of all mankind on the altar of the cross (a sacrifice now memorialized by the heavenly altar of incense represented here), our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: "Yes, [O] Lord, God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments."

4. Scorching Heat

(8) And the fourth angel poured out his bowl onto the sun. And it was given to it to burn men with [its] fire. (9) And men were burned with a great scorching, and they blasphemed the Name of God, the One who holds the authority over these plagues, but they did not repent [so as] to give Him glory. Revelation 16:8-9 As with the sores of the first judgment, this plague also affects primarily the skin (a place of visible and intensive suffering as we have pointed out above) of those who worship the beast, and with even greater apparent immediacy and intensity than was the case in the plague of the sores. The type of scorching described in these verses and the fact that it affects the entire unbelieving world argues for the effects of this plague being supernaturally present regardless of precautions men may seek to take. Just as the frogs, flies, gnats and locusts of the Exodus plagues made their way into the innermost places of the houses of the Egyptians (and they were incapable of avoiding them), so it seems that these burns will be impossible for the followers of antichrist to escape altogether (cf. Exodus 8:3; Exodus 8:17; Exodus 8:21; Exodus 10:6). On the other hand, here too we anticipate our Lord's divine protection for those who remain faithful to Jesus (1 Thessalonians 1:10): The Lord is the One who guards you. The Lord is your shade, at your right hand. By day the sun will not strike you down, nor will the moon [do so] by night. Psalms 121:5-6 By the time of this fourth bowl judgment we might expect the cumulative effect and build-up of the cursing – the sores and the oceanic devastation and the undrinkable fresh water and now this scorching heat – to have finally broken the will to resist among the followers of antichrist. For, one would think that all of these events, pressing down with such force and effect at the same time, would leave no doubt as to the insanity of opposing the God who made heaven and earth and who holds our very lives in His hands. But instead of giving in to this truth, instead of crying "uncle!" and acknowledging the obvious fact of His superiority, instead of repenting and giving Him the glory due His Name, those who worship the beast actually have the temerity to blaspheme that holy Name in the face of such inexorable judgments! No stronger evidence can be found in scripture for the blindness brought on by the hardening of the heart through the embrace of evil, except perhaps for the example of Pharaoh. And it is in fact Pharaoh that we are meant to recall, who, in his similar blind arrogance, so inexplicably and defiantly continued to oppose the God of heaven in the face of similarly irresistible plagues (Exodus 9:16). But just as his implacable resistance only served to further the plan of God – both by demonstrating God's power and also by proving beyond all question the solidity, depth and irreversibility of Pharaoh's arrogant disposition – so now this curse directed toward God, at once so impotent and so horrific, only serves to show that no amount of mercy or judgment could ever be sufficient to sway the followers of the beast from their evil ways. This incredibly arrogant behavior is in stark contrast to that of a previous world ruler, the "head of gold" himself, Nebuchadnezzar, who when personally confronted with the awe-inspiring power of God, humbled

himself in response to the Lord's discipline (Daniel 4:28-36):

Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble. Daniel 4:37 NIV

5. Darkness

(10) And the fifth [angel] poured out his bowl onto the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became darkened, and [the inhabitants] were chewing their tongues because of the suffering [this caused them]. (11) And they blasphemed the God of heaven on account of their sufferings, but they did not repent. Revelation 16:10-11

Darkness is one of the most significant of all divine judgments (e.g., Exodus 10:21-23; Exodus 14:20; Isaiah 8:22; Matthew 8:12; Matthew 22:13; Matthew 25:30; 2 Peter 2:4; 2 Peter 2:17; Jude 1:6; Jude 1:13), for God is light, and there is no darkness in Him (1 John 1:5-7; cf. John 1:3-9). Response to the light, God's truth, is thus the universal litmus test of true creature character. Therefore, as in His turning off of the universal lights in response to Satan's rebellion (Genesis 1:2), God has always used this judgment of darkness to show in a very graphic and tangible way not only His power but also the true character of those judged: antichrist and his most ardent core of followers are given the darkness they truly love and have unquestionably merited by their entirely blind and light-less conduct (cf. Genesis 19:11; Deuteronomy 28:28-29; 2 Kings 6:18 ff.; Acts 13:11). And this is the [basis for] judgment: the Light (i.e., Jesus Christ) has come into the world, yet men loved the darkness more than the Light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who commits detestable practices hates the Light and does not come to the Light, lest his deeds be exposed [for what they really are]. But everyone who acts in accordance with the truth comes to the Light so that it becomes obvious that his deeds have been done in God (i.e., in accordance with God's will). John 3:19-21 As was the case with the darkness occasioned by the fourth trumpet judgment (Revelation 8:12), it will be impossible for contemporaries to rationalize away this casting of the beast's kingdom (comprising roughly a fourth part of the earth) into what is being described here as at the very least near total darkness. But again, although the power of God is unquestionably being made manifest in this judgment, and although the pain and suffering this judgment brings ought to provoke a response of humility and repentance, in the completely hardened hearts of the worshipers of antichrist it will provoke instead only impotent blasphemy against the One who made and sustains the very heavens and earth (cf. Jeremiah 6:27-30; Ezekiel 22:17-19). In this respect too then, this bowl judgment at least foreshadows the supernatural darkness that will occur just prior to the Second Advent, the time when the beast and his followers will finally be destroyed for so enthusiastically serving the darkness rather than the light (Isaiah 13:9-13; Isaiah 34:4; Isaiah 60:1-3; Ezekiel 32:7-10; Joel 2:2; Joel 2:31; Joel 3:15; Zephaniah 1:15-18; Zechariah 14:6-8; Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:24-25; Acts 2:17-21; Revelation 6:12-13). That the darkness mentioned here affects only "the kingdom of the beast" is extremely significant. It will be remembered that the fourth trumpet judgment, while seemingly less intense in that it reduced the emission of light from the sun, moon and stars by a third whereas here the darkness is described in absolute terms, was nevertheless the first judgment wherein the entire earth was adversely affected. By contrast here we see the darkness, while total in the area directly stricken, said to affect only that one particular area, namely the "throne" and "kingdom" of the

beast. By this point in the Tribulation, it is true that antichrist will exercise some degree of control over the entire world, enough, for example, to orchestrate the Great Persecution in all quarters of the globe. But in the precise terminology used here, "throne" and "kingdom", something less than the entire world is meant. Specifically, Revelation 16:10 has to be referring to the original seven members of the ten nation confederacy (i.e., the European continent) which, following his seizure of Babylon, came to constitute the power base for the beast's worldwide dominion.

(40b) And [the beast] will invade the lands [of the southern alliance], and inundate [them] and sweep through [them], (41) and he will advance into the Beautiful land (i.e., Israel). Now many lands will fall before him, but these will escape from his control: Edom, and Moab, and the first [part of the territory] of the sons of Ammon. (42) And [antichrist] will extend his control over the lands (of the southern alliance), so that even the land of Egypt will not escape. (43) Thus [antichrist] will take control of all the repositories of gold and silver, even over all of Egypt's treasures, with Libya (i.e., representing North Africa) and Cush (i.e., Sudan-Ethiopia) following her [in submission]. (44) But reports [coming] from the east and the north will disturb him, with the result that he will depart [from Israel] in a great rage to destroy and to exterminate many. (45) Then [upon his return to Israel] he will pitch the tents of his [royal] pavilion between the seas (i.e., the Mediterranean and the Dead seas) near the mountain of the beauty of holiness (i.e., the temple mount in Jerusalem). But [in spite of this (i.e., his hopes for success in the battle of Armageddon)] he will come to his end, and no one will aid him [then]. Daniel 11:40-45 As we have seen previously, Daniel 11:40-43 above describes the beast's conquest of the southern confederacy and consolidation of his power during the Tribulation's second half. Then, in Daniel 11:44, we are given additional critical information about antichrist's subsequent conduct, specifically, his actions at the time of the fifth bowl judgment which we are presently studying. At that time, the beast will quit Jerusalem because of "reports" which will "disturb him". These "reports", furthermore, are said to emanate from "the east and the north". They will provoke him to "a great rage" and motivate him "to destroy and to exterminate many". The following context in Daniel 11:45, is a clear reference to the battle of Armageddon where the beast will meet his end at the hands of our victorious returning Lord. This means that antichrist's hasty departure from Jerusalem in Daniel 11:44 has to be sandwiched between the two, and in the description given seems to occur during the time period just prior to the Second Advent (as also in Zechariah 9:8, NASB: "him [i.e., antichrist] who passes by and returns"). There is thus much to recommend understanding the cause of these "reports" which so enrage the beast and cause him to abandon his new world headquarters in Jerusalem's temple for a wide-ranging and destructive punitive campaign as being the darkness of the fifth bowl judgment. For just as in Daniel 11:40-45 the departure lies between events taking place late in the Great Tribulation and the return of Christ, so in Revelation chapter sixteen the fifth bowl judgment occurs just before the commencement of the Armageddon campaign (the sixth bowl judgment), and is likewise positioned late in the Great Tribulation (e.g., it follows the Great Persecution and the previous four bowl judgments). So in the same way that Babylon will be singled out during the seventh bowl judgment, here we see the earth's northern quadrant (essentially synonymous with antichrist's seven nation European confederacy, although for geographical reasons we can omit Israel in this case) being similarly singled out – not destroyed, as Babylon will be, but plunged into darkness. That this blacking out of the entire continent of Europe will be the cause of much political and social disruption should come as no surprise especially given the horrendous nature of antichrist's social and economic

policies in particular (that is to say, there will unquestionably be many who will take advantage of this opportunity to rid themselves of his rule). The mention of the "east" here as also being a source of the disturbing reports is significant as well. The degree of control enjoyed over the world's eastern hemisphere by antichrist at this time will be, as previously discussed, based upon an overall military, political, and economic dominance, and exercised in that quadrant largely through surrogates (i.e., "the kings of the east"), rather than being underpinned by large-scale military occupation (although the deployment of his substantial naval superiority in this endeavor is not to be ruled out). Therefore, though not suffering the judgment of darkness itself, the global disruption of command and control that this unprecedented event will produce can reasonably be expected to engender at the very least the rumblings of an increased degree of political independence in these eastern regimes. It is certainly in keeping with antichrist's character to react vigorously and ruthlessly to any perceived threats to his power and position, especially when they are so potentially serious as what we are contemplating here. In such circumstances, a campaign of terror designed to put down any hint of rebellion in the north and by example squelch all potential moves towards political independence in the east may be understood in phraseology of Daniel 11:44 : i.e., antichrist's method in temporarily relinquishing Jerusalem "in a great rage" will be "to destroy and to exterminate many" in order to repair the breaches in his worldwide empire. In Daniel 11:45 we see antichrist returned to Israel, and taking up positions with ominous intent against rather than in Jerusalem. As with verse 44, this description is again in complete harmony with what we find in Revelation chapter sixteen where, shortly after the darkening of the north during the fifth bowl judgment, we find that the "kings of the east", rather than entertaining rebellion, are now full-fledged participants in the anti-God Armageddon campaign (Revelation 16:12). This development, and the mustering of the armies of the world to do battle with the soon to return Lord Jesus Christ, is sufficient to show that antichrist's efforts to reestablish his authority in the north and east following the disruption of his control occasioned by the darkness will be entirely effective. The Jewish Rebellion: As we have seen, following antichrist's second campaign against the south, the campaign following which he takes up residence in the temple in Jerusalem, Israel was said to be subject to "harsh treatment" at that time according to Balaam's prophecy (Numbers 24:23-24). Much of this "harsh treatment" is almost certainly a proleptic reference to the "rage" with which antichrist will return to Israel from Egypt following the failed attempt upon his person (Daniel 11:30). Thus the bulk of the maltreatment suffered in Israel at that time will be intimately connected with the beast's war upon Moses and Elijah and the 144,000, the scapegoats chosen by antichrist to atone for the unsuccessful attempt to assassinate him (Revelation 11:7-13). We can also expect as a result of these developments, especially in light of the fact that the beast from this point forward takes up residence in Jerusalem, that personal freedom in Israel during this period will be even more limited than is the case in the rest of antichrist's empire. Conservative unbelievers and zealots, who resisted the message of Moses and Elijah but fell short of wholeheartedly embracing antichrist as God, will be extremely resentful of the beast's representation of himself as the Holy One of Israel. Indeed, the source of the previous assassination attempt will most likely derive from these circles, and this "breaking of the [pseudo-Messianic] treaty" between himself and Israel during the middle of the Tribulation will be a major grounds for continuing unrest (Daniel 9:27). But although political liberties may be nonexistent in Israel during the Great Tribulation, relative to much of the rest of the world she will be experiencing at least some measure of material prosperity thanks in no small part we may

assume to the fact that Jerusalem has now become the capital of the world. Thus the resulting pilgrimages to the temple and the embassies connected with the Great Persecution on the one hand, and the likely desire of the beast to make "the place of his feet glorious" (as part of the pseudo-fulfillment of the messianic promises to which he lays claim: Isaiah 60:13) will to some degree enrich Israel in material terms (cf. Ezekiel 38:7-16 where Israel appears as relatively prosperous before Armageddon), even though she will never know a time of greater spiritual abasement. Nevertheless, scripture does also indicate that even in the case of this relative material prosperity, the bulk of the population will be subject to extreme exploitation and maltreatment at the hands of the beast's ruling class, notable among them being the "false shepherd", one of the "ten kings" and Israel's ruler during this period (Ezekiel 28:1-5).

We can therefore easily understand how many elements within Jewish society at this time would find the supernatural darkening of antichrist's home kingdom and his departure from Israel with the greater portion of his military forces an ideal opportunity to throw off the beast's yoke once and for all, little understanding or appreciating that this very action will soon set in motion the Armageddon campaign as the beast summons all of the world's military forces to Israel in hopes of destroying her forever in retaliation for her unfaithfulness. This rebellion and the response it provokes thus fulfills the prophecies of wars and desolations destined to continue for her until our Lord returns (Daniel 9:26; cf. Luke 21:9). A word needs to be said here as well about the role in this rebellion of prophetic Babylon (i.e., the U.S., antichrist's original home country). Although it will be recalled that antichrist is Babylon's "king", scripture also indicates that she will have a regent as well, no doubt managing her government while the beast is occupied overseas (as he will be for the bulk of the Tribulation). This would be the "regent" of Babylon as opposed to her true "king", antichrist (contrast Ezekiel 28:2-10 referring to the former, with Ezekiel 28:12-19, which applies to the latter). We can well imagine that with the beast and the majority of his imperial guard disappearing into the darkness that enshrouds Europe at this time, it will not only be Israel and the eastern marches of the beast's empire who are entertaining thoughts of independence. Therefore a revolt centered upon antichrist's new capital is likely to bring a receptive response from all such quarters, and none will be more naturally sympathetic toward such a development than Babylon and her regent. The emotional tie between Babylon and Israel did much to bring about the two campaigns that led to antichrist's world dominion in the first place. And as to the deputy ruler of Babylon, scripture indicates that in his arrogance he is very likely to see himself as the beast's natural successor, with the present crisis providing an opportunity to move that succession forward in time beyond anything previously anticipated. But of course this thinking represents a miscalculation in the extreme.

(1) Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, (2) Son of man, say to the prince[-regent] of Tyre (i.e., as opposed to the "king" in v.12), "Thus says the Lord. Because your heart is lifted high [with pride], and because you say 'I am a god [and] I occupy a position like God's in the heart of the seas', but because you are a man and not a god, though you have indulged your heart [with divine prerogatives] as if it were God's heart . . . (3) behold, you are wiser than Daniel! No hidden thing is concealed from you! (4) It is by your own wisdom and understanding that you have enriched yourself and piled up gold and silver in your storehouses! (5) It is by your own abundant wisdom, by your own trafficking, that you have multiplied your wealth! But [in fact] your heart has been lifted high [with pride] because of [that very] wealth of yours.' Ezekiel 28:1-5

We see the regent of antichrist's home country Babylon described above as the "prince-regent of Tyre", with Tyre being an alternative representation for the same prophetic future state stressing economic as opposed to military power (cf. Ezekiel 28:12 ff. where the king of Tyre is a type of both antichrist and Satan). The unfaithfulness demonstrated by the beast's sub-ruler at this time will have much to do with motivating the destruction of Babylon soon hereafter.

(46) And lest your heart grow faint and you become afraid at the report heard against the land (i.e., antichrist's decree against Israel in his call to Armageddon: Revelation 16:12-16), in the year this report comes, after it will come another report in the same year; the one [will be] of violence against the land [of Israel], the other of a ruler (i.e., antichrist) against a ruler (i.e., the prince of Babylon). (47) For behold, in days to come I will render judgment on the idols of Babylon. Her entire land will be ashamed, and all of her slain will fall in her midst. Jeremiah 51:46-47

Another representation for this deputy ruler is "Pharaoh" in those cases where Egypt and Pharaoh are being contrasted with Assyria and her king in prophetic contexts. In such situations, Assyria and her king represent revived Rome and her ruler antichrist, while Egypt and Pharaoh represent prophetic Babylon and antichrist's disobedient deputy respectively. Israel's reliance at this time upon prophetic Babylon, a pagan nation which only recently contributed mightily to her troubles, is eerily parallel to her reliance in the past upon literal Egypt. In both cases not only does such confidence prove to be entirely misplaced, but it also demonstrates the folly of Israel looking anywhere for help apart from the Lord who created her (Isaiah 30:1-6; Isaiah 31:1-3; Lamentations 4:17).

(6b) [I shall destroy you in this way, O Pharaoh], because you have been a staff [made only] of reed for the house of Israel. (7) When they took hold of you, you splintered in their hands, and [so] you broke everyone's back [who leaned on you. Ezekiel 29:6-7 At this juncture, therefore, though there will be a renewed dialogue between antichrist's home country and insurrectionist forces within Israel for reasons of political expediency on both sides, and though this will serve to greatly encourage the rebel camp within Israel, whatever material support Babylon may give to this rebellion will all be for naught. For Babylon will be destroyed soon thereafter, while the rebellion itself will only furnish motivation and pretext for that destruction, as well as for the Armageddon campaign which follows in its wake.

(13) And I heard one of the holy ones who was speaking, and he said to the other holy one who was speaking, "How long will this vision of the daily sacrifice and of the [spiritual] rebellion (i.e., apostasy) which produces desolation and of the handing over of the holy [place] (i.e., the inner court) and of the trampling down of the host be?" (14) And he replied to me, "Until 2,300 evenings and mornings have passed. Then the holy [place] will be purified." Daniel 8:13-14 This passage in Daniel allows us to reconstruct the timing of the rebellion with great specificity. It will be recalled from the chart of the bowl judgments above, that the supernatural darkness which strikes the beast's kingdom of revived Rome will occur at the beginning of the eighth month preceding our Lord's return at the end of the Great Tribulation. That is to say, the fifth bowl judgment occurs 1,120 days into the Great Tribulation and 240 days from its termination. The information in Daniel's prophecy above further assures us that the beast's pollution of the temple, begun it will be recalled at the Great Tribulation's outset, will last for 1,150 days (i.e., 1,150 evenings plus 1,150 mornings). This means that it will take just over four months (130 days) after the fifth bowl judgment begins for

the Jewish rebels to re-occupy the Temple Mount and complete the requisite ritual purification of the holy place (a process which took the priests under Hezekiah half a month to complete: 2 Chronicles 29:17). Thus the beast's departure from Israel, the formation (or coming out into the open) of an armed resistance, the capturing of the Temple Mount, its ritual purification, and antichrist's reaction in mounting the Armageddon campaign will all happen in rapid-fire succession as the pace of events accelerates toward the Tribulation's end. The re-conquest of the Temple mount will certainly not mean the end of armed struggle within the borders of Israel. Part of antichrist's modus operandi of rulership worldwide will be to cement his control through the use of "fortresses" (Daniel 11:38-39), strong points manned by his loyalists as a hedge against just such attempts on his regime, and scripture indicates that the same will be true in Israel (Isaiah 2:15; Isaiah 25:12; Isaiah 30:25; Zechariah 1:16; Zephaniah 3:6 Zephaniah 3:15 [Hebrew only]). Once the rebellion begins, these strong-points will no doubt be occupied not only by the beast's residual garrison, but also by those Jews whose allegiance to antichrist has passed the point of no return (as, for example, the "king" of Israel: Zechariah 14:15-17). Given the progression of the Armageddon campaign (covered below), we can expect a number of these outposts to hold out until antichrist returns for the battle of Armageddon, and thus for the struggle to continue right up until our Lord's return (Daniel 9:26), for it will be His Second Advent which destroys the beast and delivers Israel rather than this rash attempt at self-deliverance.

(6) Then [one of the two other angels] said to the man (i.e., the angel) clothed in linen who was [suspended] above the waters of the river, "How long [will it be] until the end of [these] astounding things?" (7) And I heard the man (i.e., the angel) clothed in linen who was [suspended] above the waters of the river. He raised his right hand and his left hand to heaven and he swore by Him who lives forever and ever that it would be a period [of time and] two periods [of time] and half [a period of time] (i.e., the three and one half years of the Great Tribulation), and that [just] when the power of the holy people was being completely crushed, [all] these things would come to their completion. Daniel 12:6-7 And after the sixty two weeks, Messiah will be cut off and have nothing (cf. Isaiah 53:8), and the people of the prince who is coming (i.e., antichrist) will destroy both the city and the holy place. And his end will come with a flood (i.e., the "flooding away" of his armies at Armageddon), and until that end there will be wars – [appalling] devastation has been decreed. Daniel 9:26 6. Preparation for Armageddon

(12) And the sixth [angel] poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water dried up in order that the way of the kings of the orient (lit., "sun's rising") might be prepared. (13) And I saw [coming] out of the mouth of the false prophet three unclean spirits like [unto] frogs. (14) Now these are spirits of demons which produce "signs": they will go forth to the kings of the entire earth to gather them together for the war of the great day of God the Almighty. (15) – Behold, He (i.e., our Lord Jesus) is coming like a thief. Happy is he who both stays awake and guards his clothing, in order that he may not walk about naked and [people] see his shame. – (16) And they (i.e., the demons) gathered them (i.e., the kings of the earth and their armies) together to a place called in Hebrew, "Armageddon". Revelation 16:12-16 The Kings of the East: It will be remembered that reports coming from both east and north had compelled antichrist to abandon temporarily his new world headquarters in Jerusalem in order to re-secure his base of power. Only the north, the "kingdom of the beast", had been plunged into supernatural darkness, but the disruptions caused in that quadrant of the world produced rumblings of insurrection in the eastern quarter of the globe

as well. Now, scarcely a month later, we see the situation entirely reversed. In characteristically "leopard-like" fashion (Revelation 13:2), the beast's fierce and lightning-swift reaction to incipient rebellion in his own kingdom has not only restored complete control to the north, his current location, but has apparently so over-awed the "kings of the east" that they are now more than willing to offer him the use of their own massive if inferior military forces as a sign of their loyalty and obeisance (and no doubt with the intention of warding off a similar punitive strike aimed in their direction). And the entire earth was in awe of the beast. And they worshiped the dragon because he had given his authority to the beast. And they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? And who is able to make war with him?". Revelation 13:3-4

Thus, the other rumblings of rebellion are rapidly and mercilessly squelched by antichrist and die out without so much as a whimper. Instead of their actions being cloaked by a worldwide insurrection to throw off the beast's yoke, the rebels within Israel now find themselves not only bereft of erstwhile allies (Babylon temporarily excepted), but have also become the primary target of the remaining military might of the entire world. For antichrist is now mustering every available battalion from the four corners of the earth. Previously in control of the south, and having regained control of the north, here we see even the forces of the east available to him. As this process begins to unfold, we now find ourselves some six or seven months away from the climax of the Armageddon campaign which culminates with our Lord's return at the Second Advent. Judging from the description of massive troop movements from the east, it appears that the beast, with time now on his side, will opt for a somewhat different strategy to crush Israel. Rather than striking immediately with limited forces as was his method in the past, he will choose instead to gather all of the world's military forces in and around Israel for a final massive assault on Jerusalem with the intention of annihilating Israel stock and stem (and we can expect him to use every aspect of his considerable political and social control to bring this campaign to pass in a spectacular way). Thus, even as the Jewish rebellion proceeds and consolidates around the newly reclaimed temple, antichrist's juggernaut will be gathering momentum even as it grows ever greater in size, assembling on the borders of Israel from every corner of the globe. Finally, as to Babylon, as suggested in the parallels to Egypt and Pharaoh and the historical disappointments they consistently dealt to Israel whenever she relied on them for support against northern invaders, the west, still under Babylon's nominal leadership, will provide no tangible help (for reasons covered below), so that her previous encouragement will only have served to have emboldened secular Israel to take up this hopeless fight, hopeless, that is, without extreme divine intervention, a contingency upon which these rebels never planned. The Sixth Bowl: The meaning of the drying up of the Euphrates is symbolic (cf. Isaiah 11:15). As a purely geographical barrier, it presents no great obstacle to the passage of a massive modern army, whether dry or at flood stage. However it did once mark the traditional boundary between east and west, one which was rarely crossed in antiquity with any sort of effect. By "drying it up" we are meant to understand that all of the factors which have so far prevented or restrained involvement of "the east" from the seat of conflict in the Middle East have now been removed by divine intervention. It may seem somewhat odd that this sixth bowl judgment seemingly plays into antichrist's hands, removing all restraint on the previous reluctance of the kings of the east to participate in Middle-Eastern conflict. But just as the removal of Holy Spirit restraint worldwide was a necessary measure in order to allow "the book to be opened" and the Tribulation to begin, so the removal of the barrier to involvement by the kings of the east is a necessary measure to allow all of the earthly forces of evil to assemble for the Great

Day of Lord, the battle of Armageddon. This, then, is truly a judgment as well, because now the east too, the last quadrant of the world so far not directly involved in the military affairs of the Tribulation, will be drawn into the destruction about to rained down by our returning Lord Jesus Christ.

Armageddon: Armageddon is the scene of the last battle of the Tribulation, the place where our Lord will destroy the massive armies of antichrist on the "great day of God the Almighty" just as they are on the point of destroying Israel and all who have recently sought shelter within her borders. Contrary to popular belief, Armageddon has nothing to do with "Megiddo", an ancient city located in the north of what today is the state of Israel. Armageddon is, rather, a prophetic name for Jerusalem, the place where the unbelieving rebels and the saints recently escaped from Babylon make what appears to be their "last stand". The popular (and misinformed) association of Armageddon with Megiddo rests entirely upon the similarity in spelling between these two proper names. This is not an unreasonable place to begin a consideration of what scripture means by the name "Armageddon" (a word that occurs only here in Revelation 16:16), but further investigation will show that, while the perceived etymological connection is illusory, scripture leaves us in no doubt whatsoever about the fact that, just as we ought to have expected, it is at Jerusalem that the final battle of the Tribulation will occur (while, on the other hand, the Bible is entirely silent about Megiddo on this score; cf. Psalms 2:1-6; Isaiah 4:3; Isaiah 22:1-14; Isaiah 25:6-7; Isaiah 31:9; Isaiah 33:3-5; Psalms 33:10-22; Isaiah 40:1-2; Isaiah 40:9-10; Isaiah 52:1-8; Isaiah 60:1-3; Isaiah 62:11; Joel 3:1-2; Zephaniah 3:14-17; Romans 11:26):

(1) Woe to you, Ariel, Ariel, the city where David encamped (i.e., Jerusalem)! Add year to year, let your festivals run their course, (2) but I will besiege Ariel so that there will be mourning and lamentation, and she will become to Me like an "Ariel" (lit., "God's [sacrificial] altar"). (3) For I will beleague you round about with palisades, and surround you with siege works. (4) You will be brought low and speak from the ground, and from the dust your speech will be humbled. Your voice will come ghost-like from the earth, and your speech will come muttering from the dust. (5) But the multitude of your enemies will become like pulverized powder, even like chaff swept away [on the wind], that multitude of ruthless [enemies]. And it will come to pass in an instant that (6) you will experience visitation from the Lord of Hosts [Himself], with thunder and quaking [of the earth] and a loud voice, with tempest and whirlwind and devouring flames of fire. (7) And the hordes of the nations mustering against Ariel will become like [just] a dream in the visions of the night, even all those who camp against her and her fortress and besiege her. (8) And it will be as when a hungry man dreams he is eating, but when he awakes his appetite remains unfulfilled, or as when a thirsty man dreams he is drinking, but when he awakes his thirst remains. This is how it will be for the multitude of all the nations who are going to marshal themselves against Mount Zion. Isaiah 29:1-8

(9) Break forth [in song] and rejoice altogether, O ruins of Jerusalem! For the Lord has had compassion on His people. He has redeemed Jerusalem. (10) The Lord has uncovered His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God! Isaiah 52:9-10

(18) As they have done, so He will repay them, wrath to His adversaries and recompense to His enemies. Even unto the islands (i.e., the remotest lands of the west) He will repay the recompense

[due them], (19) so that they will fear the Name of the Lord in the west, and His glory from the rising of the sun (i.e., the east). For although the enemy (i.e., antichrist) will attack like the River (i.e., the great Nile or Euphrates; cf. Daniel 11:22; Daniel 11:26), the Spirit of the Lord will put him to flight. (20) For the Redeemer will come to Zion, even to those in Jacob who turn away from their transgression. Isaiah 59:18-20

(30) For I will display wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. (31) The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the Day of the Lord, that great and terrible [day]. (32) And it will come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance as the Lord has said, even among the survivors whom the Lord calls. Joel 2:30-32

(12) Let the nations be roused [from their places], and let them come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat (i.e., the valley of "the Lord will judge"). For there I will sit in judgment over all the nations on every side. (13) Send forth the sickle for the harvest is ripe! Come down into the winepress for it is full and the vats overflow. For great is their wickedness. (14) Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of doom! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of doom. (15) The sun and moon will darken, and the stars will gather up their light. (16) Then the Lord will roar from Zion, and from Jerusalem He will let sound His voice, and the heavens and the earth will quake. Joel 3:12-16

(15) For the day of the Lord is near against all the nations. Just as you have done, it will be done to you, and your recompense will return on your own head. (16) For just as you have drunk on My holy mountain, so all the nations will drink continually. They will drink and swallow down [the Lord's cup of wrath] and will be as if they never were. (17) But on Mount Zion there will be deliverance. Obadiah 1:15-17 a

(2) For behold, I am going to make Jerusalem a cup of reeling for all the nations round about. And Judah also and Jerusalem will be besieged. (3) And it will come to pass on that day that I will make Jerusalem a burdensome rock for all the nations. Everyone who tries to lift it will surely be injured. For against her (i.e., Jerusalem) will be gathered all the nations of the earth. Zechariah 12:2-3 And it will come to pass on that day that I will make it My purpose to destroy all the nations which are attacking Jerusalem. Zechariah 12:9 And this is the plague with which the Lord will smite all the peoples who marshal themselves against Jerusalem: Their flesh will rot even as they stand on their feet, and their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. Zechariah 14:12

Thus the precise place where our Lord was crucified and resurrected, and to which He is prophesied to return, is where this final battle of the Tribulation will take place (cf. Acts 1:11):

(1) The Lord said to My Lord, "Sit down at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." (2) From Zion the Lord will send forth your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies! (3) Your people will volunteer on the day of your valor[ous victory] (i.e., the armies of Israel). In the holy chambers, from the womb of the dawn, your young [troops] will [come] to you like the dew (i.e., the armies of the newly resurrected). (4) The Lord has sworn and He will not recant, "You are a priest forever in the manner of Melchizedek." (5) The Lord is at your right hand. He will shatter [those] kings on the day of His wrath. (6) He will render judgment on the nations. He

will shatter [their] head (cf. Genesis 3:15) broadly throughout the land filled with corpses [as a result]. (7) [But as to His troops], they will drink from a brook beside the way. Therefore He will lift up their head. Psalms 110:1-7

Thus says the Lord: I will return to Zion and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And Jerusalem will be called "the City of Truth", and "the Mountain of the Lord, the Mountain of Holiness". Zechariah 8:3

Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion. Shout [for joy], daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, your King will come to you. Righteous and victorious He is; humble and riding on a donkey, even on a colt, a donkey's foal. Zechariah 9:9

(2) For I shall gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against her. The city will be captured, its houses will be sacked, and its women will be ravished. (3) Half of the city will be taken away captive, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. Then the Lord will go forth, and He will fight against those nations as when He fights on a day of battle. (4) For His feet will stand on that day on the Mount of Olives which lies before Jerusalem on the east. Zechariah 14:2-4
And the winepress [of the slaughter of Armageddon] was trodden down outside of the city [of Jerusalem]. And blood from the winepress went forth up to the horses' bridles for a distance of twelve hundred stadia. Revelation 14:20

Given the overwhelming testimony of scripture to the fact that Jerusalem will be the focal point of the final battle of the Tribulation, it is indeed strange that the misunderstanding of the name "Armageddon", a hapax legomenon occurring only at Revelation 16:16, has had such a profound (and negative) influence on the true interpretation of these events. Most interpreters agree that the Har- of Armageddon (the "h" sound present in the Greek being commonly if unfortunately left out in the traditional transliteration of this name) is the Hebrew word for "mountain" (and it should be noted in passing that the most common geographical feature that has recommended Megiddo to exegetes has been its extensive plain rather than any "mountain"). This leaves us to explore the second part of this compound place name, -Mageddon. First in this respect, it is best to take the Ma- as a pre-formative mem used here in the locative sense, i.e, "Mountain-which-is-a-place of _____". The use of the letter "m" as a prefix indicating "place of" to whatever root it is attached is a well-attested phenomenon in Semitic languages. This leaves us to derive -geddon from either the "double ayin" root gdd (גדד), or the hollow root gud (גוד). The distinction is largely academic here, as both roots have the same essential meaning in Biblical Hebrew: "attack, cut, go in troops or throngs". Given that the most commonly attested substantive from either root, ghedhudh (גדוד), generally refers to military formations, the most likely meaning of Armageddon is "Mountain of Troops" or "Mountain of [mustering] Troops". So what we have in this name is a very clear reference to the assembly from the world over of all the forces of antichrist to Jerusalem. Here they will assemble, at Jerusalem called here prophetically and appropriately "the Mountain of [Assembly of] Troops", for here all of the beast's worldly armies will be annihilated by our Lord. Indeed, it is for this very purpose that they will be so assembled: And it will be as when a hungry man dreams he is eating, but when he awakes his appetite remains unfulfilled, or as when a thirsty man dreams he is drinking, but when he awakes his thirst remains. This is how it will be for the multitude of all the nations who are going to marshal themselves against Mount Zion. Isaiah 29:8

(2) For behold, I am going to make Jerusalem a cup of reeling for all the nations round about. And Judah also and Jerusalem will be besieged. (3) And it will come to pass on that day that I will make Jerusalem a burdensome rock for all the nations. Everyone who tries to lift it will surely be injured. For against her will be gathered all the nations of the earth. Zechariah 12:2-3 And this is the plague with which the Lord will smite all the peoples who marshal themselves against Jerusalem: Their flesh will rot even as they stand on their feet, and their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. Zechariah 14:12

Understood in this way, we can then see in Micah 5:1-5 a the locus classicus, for "Armageddon", that is, the passage which John under the guidance of the Spirit had in mind when coining this prophetic name. In Micah 5:1-5 a, we see that this predominantly Second Advent passage also brings in testimony about our Lord's first advent, weaving the two events together in a wonderful, poetic way, a common phenomenon in Hebrew prophecy:

(1) But now marshal your [own] troops (<gdd,), O city (lit., "daughter") of troops (<gedhudh,) [which are marshaled against you]. For they have laid siege to us. For they have struck on the cheek with a rod the Judge of Israel. (2) But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, too small to be numbered among the clans of Judah, from you I will bring forth the One who is to rule over Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, even from the days of eternity. (3) For He will give them over [to the oppressor] until the time when [Jerusalem] labors [like] a woman in labor. At that time the rest of His brethren will return to the sons of Israel (i.e., prior to the Second Advent). (4) For He (i.e., our Lord Jesus at His return) will arise and will be their Shepherd, in the might of the Lord, and in the majesty of the Name of the Lord His God. And they (i.e., His flock) will abide, for then He will be great, even to the ends of the earth. (5) For this One will be our Peace. Micah 5:1-5 a

7. Earthquake and Hail

(17) And when [the seventh angel] poured out his bowl upon the atmosphere, a loud voice issued forth out of the [heavens coming] from the throne [of God], saying "It is done!" (18) And there occurred thunderous voices and flashes of lightning and a great earthquake such as had not occurred since men came to be upon the earth – of such great magnitude was [this] earthquake. (19) And the great city (i.e., Jerusalem) was split into three parts. And the cities of the gentiles fell. And Babylon the great was remembered before God [so as] to give to her [the] cup of the wine of [God's] angry wrath (Jeremiah 25:19-32; Obadiah 1:16; Zechariah 12:2-3; cf. Jeremiah 51:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-199; Revelation 17:4; Revelation 18:6). (20) And every island fled, and mountains could not be found. (21) Then great hail stones the size of a talent (i.e., approx. 80 lb.) were coming down out of heaven upon mankind, and they blasphemed God on account of the plague of hail, because that plague was very severe. Revelation 16:17-21 The seventh bowl comprises all of the final events of the Great Tribulation which culminate in our Lord's return and His destruction of the beast and his armies at Armageddon. Some of the items in this description, specifically, the thunderous voices (of God) and the flashes of lightning, the earthquake and the hail, we have seen before (Revelation 4:5; Revelation 8:5; Revelation 11:19). All of the signs mentioned here presage the coming of the Lord. As with their parallel predecessors, these miraculous signs will be perceptible around the globe and as yet unimaginably awesome to experience (as was the case in their previous occurrences). Moreover, their intensity will dramatically increase (cf. of the earthquake "such as had not occurred since men came to be upon

the earth" and of the hail "the size of a talent"). The increased intensity here indicates that our Lord's coming is now imminent, even as the words "It is done!" are unquestionably meant to show. In fact, history since our Lord's ascension into heaven has been, from the divine perspective, a series of preparatory periods of intensifying warning telescoped into ever smaller windows of time: The Church Age (2000 years), whose last era is Laodicea (144 years), which culminates in the Tribulation (7 years), whose most intense phase is the Great Tribulation (three and a half years), which ends with the seventh bowl judgment (six months), which is itself concluded by the Second Advent proper (a unique, single day, the "Day of the Lord": cf. Zechariah 14:1-7). For as with the signs which preceded the Lord's descent to Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16-20), these signs too are indications of the imminence of the awesome and terrifying presence of God Himself, soon to return to the earth in judgment. With the words "It is done!", we have God's assurance that the Great Tribulation is now in its final phase. The Earthquake: Earthquakes are prominent precursors of most of the ever shortening periods of warning that lead up to our Lord's return (Matthew 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11; cf. Amos 1:2 w/ Amos 1:1; Haggai 2:6-7; Hebrews 12:26-29), and, as this unprecedented temblor indicates, their intensity parallels the intensity of the period covered. For we find exceptional earthquakes characterizing and marking the commencement of . . . 1) the Church Age (lasting 2000 years: Matthew 27:51; Matthew 27:54; Matthew 28:2; Acts 4:31; cf. Acts 2:1-2); [2] possibly the era of Laodicea (lasting 144 years)¹; 3) the Tribulation (lasting 7 years: Revelation 8:5); 4) the Great Tribulation (lasting 3.5 years: Revelation 11:13; Revelation 11:19); 5) this earthquake which accompanies the Seventh Bowl Judgment (and governs the period six months prior to the Second Advent: Revelation 16:18-20); 6) the Second Advent proper (coincidental with the Day of the Lord's official commencement: Isaiah 29:6; Ezekiel 38:19; Habakkuk 3:6; cf. Zechariah 14:3-5; Revelation 6:12); and finally, 7) the beginning of eternity (Haggai 2:6-7; Haggai 2:20-21; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 6:12-17; Revelation 20:11). As is the case with many of the horrendous events destined to occur during the Tribulation, it is difficult to digest and appreciate without experiencing it firsthand the magnitude of this particular earthquake and the terror it will inspire at that time (cf. Luke 21:25-31). Scripture clearly indicates that this earthquake will be unparalleled in human history and experience, and of such incomprehensible force that it will bring down "the cities of the gentiles".

Although Babylon is often described as "the great city" (cf. Revelation 14:8; Revelation 17:1; Revelation 17:5; Revelation 18:2; Revelation 18:10; Revelation 18:16; Revelation 18:18-19; Revelation 18:21; Revelation 19:2), her punishment is related in this context as the third event in the sequence of events which comprise the seventh bowl judgment (following the lightning and the earthquake). That punishment will be unique, and is detailed in Revelation 17:15-18, Revelation 18:1-24, Revelation 19:1-3. Jerusalem, antichrist's world capital of late, is the "great city" mentioned here (as she is described at Revelation 11:8 as well, also in the context of a great, local earthquake, #4 above: Revelation 11:13). Having previously undergone an earthquake judgment earlier in the first half of the Tribulation (Revelation 11:13), and with another major earthquake foretold to accompany the Second Advent proper (Isaiah 29:6; Ezekiel 38:19; cf. Zechariah 14:1-7; Revelation 6:12), Jerusalem will at this time be physically split into three parts. It will be recalled that those Jews who responded to the ministry of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000 are at this time enjoying safe haven in the desert (Revelation 12:6). This earthquake, among other things therefore, will be another sign to the as yet unbelieving population of Israel of the futility of seeking deliverance apart from God. For we can expect this mammoth quake to seriously disrupt all plans

for resistance to the beast as he begins to muster his forces for Armageddon. The earthquake which splits Jerusalem into three parts will have two salutary effects, however: 1) while it will degrade the overall effectiveness of the Israeli armed forces, it will make Jerusalem herself more defensible (cf. the complications to the German offensive at Stalingrad caused by the great mass of industrial ruin and debris); and 2) the dislocation caused by the earthquake will result in opening up the way for an influx of refugees from Babylon (who might otherwise be denied entrance were the civil administration not reeling from this event).

Since as explained above the seventh bowl entails a series of divine judgments which begin six months prior to but culminate in the return of our Lord, we may expect little or no time between the last event described here, the plague of hail, and that return. On this point, the preceding words "every island fled, and mountains could not be found" must be applied to the next major earthquake which accompanies that return (i.e., happening as a result of earthquake #6 above, and not #5). This second earthquake in context, the "2nd Advent" quake, will be a gigantic one, with these words indicating that few geographical features will remain unaffected by its massive, global shockwaves. The world's islands and coast-lands will be swamped by the tsunami effect of this world-wide event, with its violent vibrations affecting all of the world's mountains as well, bringing many eminences crashing to earth as a result. This fourth event in the seventh bowl judgment is thus the same earthquake referred to in the description of the Second Advent given in the sixth seal (Revelation 6:12-17), the same event often mentioned in prophecy as the harbinger of our Lord's return (Isaiah 2:21; Isaiah 24:18-20; Isaiah 29:6; Ezekiel 38:19-20; Joel 3:16; Haggai 2:6-7; Haggai 2:21; cf. Zechariah 14:1-7), with the "fleeing" of mountains, islands, earth and sky being a characteristic feature which accompanies the coming of the Lord to execute judgment (Revelation 20:11; cf. 2 Peter 3:10): And I saw when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the sixth seal, a great earthquake occurred, and the sun became black like hairy sackcloth, and the moon became entirely like blood [in appearance], and the stars of heaven fell to the earth like a fig tree casting its fruit when shaken by a strong wind, and the heaven retreated like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and hill was moved from its place. And all the kings of the earth and the prominent men and the generals and the wealthy and the powerful and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and the rocks of the mountains. And [thus] they say to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of the One who sits upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, because the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand [before them]? Revelation 6:12-17

Hail: Large hailstones falling worldwide, it will be recalled, also accompanied the blowing of the seventh trumpet, the event which heralded the beginning of the Great Tribulation proper, also accompanied by "thunderous voices and flashes of lightning and an earthquake" (Revelation 11:19). But just as the earthquake of the seventh bowl judgment is exponentially larger and incomparably more devastating than its predecessor, so this worldwide hailstorm will be without parallel in world history, surpassing both the seventh plague of the Exodus (Exodus 9:18-35) and the hail rained down by the Lord upon the Canaanite kings at Gibeon (Joshua 10:11) – not only in its ferocity, but also by virtue of the fact that it will not be localized as those two judgments were: everyone on earth will feel the fury of this divine judgment (believers excepted to some degree as always: cf. Isaiah 26:20-21; Isaiah 32:19-20).

Though we can scarcely imagine the terror produced or the damage caused by the raining down of hailstones some eighty pounds in weight, yet the most remarkable thing about this judgment will be the continued implacable hardness of heart on behalf of the worlds' unbelieving population. In spite of the massive earthquake, in spite of this massive hail, in spite of the warning voices, thunder and lightning, there is still not the slightest thought of repentance. Indeed, their only response is to blaspheme God. Surely in all this God has shown Himself to be just in all He has done – and in all He is about to do to this world of unrepentant and irremediable evil.

(5) For the earth has befouled itself at the hands of its inhabitants. For they have transgressed the teachings [of God]; they have altered [His] statute[s]; they have violated the eternal covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants are punished. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are incinerated, and little of mankind remains. Isaiah 24:5-6 B. Judgment on Babylon 1. Babylon, the Woman who Rides the Beast

(1) Then one of the seven angels with the seven bowls spoke with me, saying, "Look! I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters, (2) [the one] with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication even as the inhabitants of the earth have become drunk from the wine of her fornication." (3) And he took me off in the Spirit to a desert. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was covered with blasphemous names, [and which] had seven heads and ten horns. (4) And the woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and was adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, [and was] holding a golden cup in her hand filled with abominations and [all] the unclean things of her prostitution and [the prostitution] of the earth (Jeremiah 51:7; Revelation 18:6; cf. Jeremiah 25:19-32; Obadiah 1:16; Zechariah 12:2-3). (5) And on her forehead a name was written: "mystery Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the world". (6) And I saw that the woman was drunk from the blood of the saints, even from the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw [this], I was greatly amazed. (7) And the angel said to me, "Why are you amazed? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and the beast who is carrying her, the one who has the seven heads and the ten horns. (8) The beast, which you saw, was (i.e., "existed"), and is not (i.e., came "not to exist"), and is going to rise from the Abyss (i.e., the revival of Rome on the one hand and apparent resuscitation of antichrist on the other), and is going to its destruction. And the inhabitants of the earth, [those] whose names have not remained written in the book of life [where they were written] from the beginning of the world, will be in awe when they see the beast, because he was (i.e., "existed"), and is not (i.e., came "not to exist"), and will again be present on the scene (i.e., return to life in the case of antichrist, and be reestablished in respect to the empire). (9) This calls for a mind having wisdom: the seven heads [of the beast (cf. Revelation 17:3 and Revelation 13:1)] are seven mountains whereon the woman sits. They are also seven kings. (10) The [first] five [of these kings] have fallen. The [next (i.e., the sixth)] one is now [alive]. The last (i.e., antichrist) has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain for a short time (i.e., the Tribulation). (11) And [as to] the beast which was and is not, this is the eighth [king] and he is [also] one of the seven, and he is going to [his] destruction. (12) And the ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they will receive authority as kings for one hour (i.e., time period, specifically, the Tribulation) along with the beast. (13) These will have one purpose and [are going to] give their power and their authority to the beast. (14) These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, because He is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, and those who are

with Him are called, and elect – and [have remained] faithful." Revelation 17:1-14 a. The Woman Babylon who Rides the Beast (Revelation 17:1-6)

Like the four horsemen of Revelation 6:1-17 and the woman and the dragon of Revelation 12:1-17, this vision which John is given to see of Babylon and the beast is an allegory, that is, a symbolic representation of events which provides concentrated and memorable content related to the future. Babylon is the home country of the beast, an economic, military, and cultural powerhouse which was the first part of antichrist's kingdom and the springboard both for his military conquests as well as for his worldwide religion. As verse fifteen later tells us, the "waters" upon which the woman sits are "peoples and multitudes and nations and languages", and this clearly speaks to the potency of Babylon's worldwide power and influence (cf. Jeremiah 51:12-13). But John does not see her "sitting on many waters". This bit of information comes in verse one before the angel shows him the vision in verse two. What John sees in this vision is a gaudy prostitute sitting on a scarlet beast with seven heads. The woman Babylon's appearance and behavior as described above in terms of prostitution and fornication tell us much about the character of her role in antichrist's plan for world domination and the institution of Satan's pseudo-millennium. In the metaphor here, prostitution and fornication refer in general terms to illegitimate, sinful, and evil as opposed to godly behavior and relationships. Specifically, the metaphor is comparing to prostitution Babylon's embracing of and trafficking for the devil's pseudo-Messiah (antichrist, the beast) and the devil's pseudo-divine kingdom (of which she styles herself the capital). Just as prostitutes use superficial yet attractive wiles to entice their customers, so Babylon will be instrumental in "selling" antichrist's ideology and false religion. Her methods are cultural, economic-technological, and military ones, yielding political, social, and religious results for the beast's conquest and domination of the world. Rather than serving the One who should be her true Husband, our Lord Jesus Christ (to whom the entire world owes its true allegiance), Babylon has developed her unfaithfulness to a high art, and has sold herself to the devil's anointed in the prosecution of his horrible goals. This facilitation of the beast's influence and power on Babylon's part is said here to extend both to the "kings" and also to the "inhabitants" of earth generally, demonstrating that the witches brew of her influence, i.e., the "wine" she has mixed for her victims, has had an enormous effect both strategically (in the larger military-political scheme of things) and tactically (on the level of personal influence through culture, religion, and techno-economic impact). It should be noted here that the sinful and evil aspects of current day U.S. cultural and other influences are quantitatively and qualitatively not to be compared to what Babylon of the Tribulation will do. For the "fornication" of that final eschatological day will be conscious, deliberate, and out of all proportion to anything presently imaginable. Therefore she will be completely without any excuse whatsoever in the face of the divine judgment described in Revelation 17:1-18, Revelation 18:1-24, Revelation 19:1-21. Babylon's outrageous aiding and abetting of antichrist's corruption, seizure and abuse of the world generally constitutes the first divine charge against her. The second charge on the bill of indictment against Babylon is her facilitation of the Great Persecution as the original headquarters of antichrist's world religion. This is the meaning of the description of her in verse six as "drunk from the blood of the saints, even from the blood of the martyrs of Jesus", and the fact that this heady wine has intoxicated her suggests that rather than being a reluctant participant in the Great Persecution, Babylon has taken a sick pleasure in it, for she is "drunk" on this wine. The "desert", a place of physical desolation where we find the woman mounted on the back of the beast, speaks of the spiritual desolation of

the world under the rule of antichrist, in which spiritually desolate Babylon has played a signal role. This symbolism, moreover, has for Babylon a double meaning, for the spiritual desolation she has fostered is about to bring upon her a literal, physical desolation through the judgment which God is about to unleash upon her as a result. The scarlet color of the beast speaks of the unprecedented slaughter which will characterize antichrist's reign, and that is also the point of comparison in the woman Babylon's scarlet dress, for she has aided and abetted antichrist in the slaughter of his opponents generally and in his martyrdom of believers in particular. She is also described as wearing "purple", the color of royalty, and this is a reference to the fact that Babylon styles herself the "Queen of the World", the jewel of kingdoms through which the beast has gained world political dominion. It is from this lofty height that she shall fall, with her fall all the more precipitous and destructive as a result. For you [O Babylon] said, "I will be a queen forever". But you did not consider these things (i.e., the ramifications of your evil actions) in your heart. You did not call to mind the consequences [of your deeds]. Isaiah 47:7 (cf. Isaiah 47:3) To the same degree that she glorified herself and indulged in wanton excess, to that same degree give her torment and grief. For she says in her heart, "I am enthroned as a queen, and I am not a widow and I shall not see grief". Revelation 18:7 The golden goblet encrusted with gemstones and pearls, yet filled with fornication and abomination, completes the allegory of Babylon. All of these elements speak to the nature of her evil influence upon the world in the service of the beast. She has prostituted herself for antichrist, and this description of the cup and its contents relates entirely to that service on antichrist's behalf. The "wine" of fornication, antichrist's message of political "deliverance" and religious "devotion" is potent, taking away the wits of the nations and kings of the world who drink it (Jeremiah 51:7; Revelation 18:6), and yet it is delivered in a very attractive package (the impressive goblet) at the hand of an alluring agent (though it will bring on the corresponding cup of God's wrath in the end: Jeremiah 25:19-32; Obadiah 1:16; Zechariah 12:2-3). Babylon appears to be a beautiful and perfect mate, but she is in reality a shameless prostitute. These symbols indicate in no uncertain terms that the prostitute and her wiles will be difficult to resist – except for those who know and faithfully follow their God. b. The Beast on whom Babylon Rides (Revelation 17:7-14)

Revelation 17:7-14 serve to bring the focus of action back to the beast and his kingdom, reprising the history of his rise and bringing us forward to the threshold of the Great Tribulation's end, a cluster of eschatological events which precede the Second Advent, key among which is the destruction of Babylon:

Revelation 17:7 : The word "mystery" is used here because the vision of the woman riding the beast which John sees is an allegory which must be explained. The woman is Babylon, the beast is antichrist, and the seven hills and ten heads represent the beast's original European federation and the ten rulers of his post-conquest composite empire respectively. The beast is said to be "carrying" Babylon at this point, because, now that antichrist has conquered the world and faces no more political opposition, Babylon's support is no longer necessary (making her vulnerable to the judgment described below).

Revelation 17:8 : Rising from the Abyss, the symbolic place of death (and actual present place of deceased unbelievers) represents antichrist's pseudo-resurrection and his European empire's seemingly miraculous reconstitution. Thus, the three-fold description "was, is not, and will come" is descriptive both of antichrist, the personal beast, and the empire of revived Rome, the territorial

beast, which constitutes the power-base from which (in addition to his original kingdom of Babylon) antichrist will gain world dominion. The three-fold description as applied to the territorial beast refers to revival in modern form of a pan-European power block which will greatly resemble the Roman empire in size, power, and location. The three-fold description as applied to the personal beast refers to his apparent death and pseudo-resurrection through which he will falsely convince much of the world's unbelieving population that he is the true Messiah. As a result of being deceived, these unbelievers will not come to saving faith in Christ, for although their names were originally written in the book of life "before the foundation of the world", they are blotted out for actively rejecting Jesus Christ by choosing instead to follow antichrist. This description allows for the existence of unbelievers who, in spite of all that has presently transpired, do not put their faith in the beast (including many Jewish unbelievers who will yet turn to Christ when they witness His Second Advent return: Zechariah 12:10-14).

Revelation 17:9-11 : The seven heads of the beast represent seven "mountains" or power-blocks within the revived Roman empire (cf. Jeremiah 51:25). In terms of the vision John sees of the scarlet beast, they also represent rulers of the historic Roman empire. This device is used to explain antichrist's status. The beast will be "the seventh" in the line of absolute rulers or "Caesars" in that he will likewise come to have complete power and authority over the area ruled by Rome just as the Julio-Claudians, the original ruling house of the Roman empire, possessed. Five of these emperors were "fallen" or deceased at the time John wrote Revelation, but the sixth, Nero, was still alive. Antichrist is described here as being the next in the sequence (i.e., he will be a ruler just as powerful and absolute over revived Rome as the Julio-Claudians were over historic Rome), but he is also said to be "the eighth" while at the same time being "one of the seven" because in addition to being the new emperor of revived Rome (number seven) he will also be king of Babylon, a kingdom and an empire in its own right through the dominance of which antichrist will come to control revived Rome (and leader of the contemporaneous seven kings who will dominate the seven power-blocs during the Tribulation).

Revelation 17:12-14 : The ten horns are the ten kings of the beast's composite empire of revived Rome, seven of whom will be his regents over the seven "mountains" (his original European power-base plus Israel), three of whom will be his regents over the three power-blocks of the southern alliance which the beast will conquer during the Tribulation's first half. All ten of these sub-rulers are likewise servants of Satan, and will be in league with antichrist from the beginning. The truth of this may be seen in verse thirteen where they are said to "have one purpose and [are going to] give their power and their authority to the beast". By the Tribulation's midpoint, the entire globe will be under antichrist's control to one degree or another, opening the way for the Great Persecution which defines its second half and yields the name, "The Great Tribulation". In verse fourteen, the synoptic view offered by this vision and its allegory now moves swiftly forward through those events of the Tribulation's second half (which John has just written about in detail in Revelation 13:1-18, Revelation 14:1-20, Revelation 15:1-8, Revelation 16:1-21), and on to the battle of Armageddon and the Second Advent, the closing events of the Tribulation. But although the assembled military might of the entire world of that time will be marshaled against Him, it will be no match at all for the conquering Lamb of God. For He is "Lord of Lords and King of Kings", true God and true man in One unique Person forever. Having won the victory over death through His own death on our behalf on the cross, He will quickly dispatch the forces of evil arrayed

against Him on that future day of His glorious return. Here we are given a particular and blessed piece of encouragement: as believers in Jesus, no matter whether we are taken to be with Him before the Tribulation begins, die as martyrs for our Lord during that fiery trial, or endure until His return, we will in any case accompany Him, resurrected at the point of His return to live forever with Him in glory, partaking with Him in the victory of that great and glorious day. We are described, moreover, as "the called, selected, and faithful". This gives the progression of our salvation, called to believe, selected to the family of God on the basis of that belief, and maintaining that belief firm until the end, no matter what may come. For it is on the basis of our faith, held fast until the end of life or the resurrection, whichever may come first, that we will experience the "first resurrection" (cf. Revelation 20:5), and will rise to meet and then accompany our Lord in His victorious return. These words thus serve as an important reminder to all believers of the critical importance of maintaining our faith firm until the end, even in the face of the most intense tribulation the world will ever know, the Great Tribulation.

Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. Mark 13:13 NIV (cf. Matthew 10:22; Matthew 24:13) 2. Hatred of Babylon

(15) Then he said to me, "These [waters] which you saw upon which the prostitute sits are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. (16) Now as for the ten horns which you saw and the beast, these will come to hate the harlot [Babylon] and will render her desolate and naked, and they will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire. (17) For God put it into their hearts to carry out His purpose and to be of one accord and to give their kingdoms to the beast until the words of God shall be fulfilled. (18) And the woman whom you saw is the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth." Revelation 17:15-18

Revelation 17:15 : This verse demonstrates the worldwide scope of Babylon's power and influence, a major point in the jealousy she arouses, not least in the beast, whose ego cannot brook the elevation of anyone or anything to any degree of earthly glory that might compete with his own. The fact that without Babylon and her political, economic, military and, last but far from least, cultural influence he never would have achieved the mastery of the world he now enjoys will matter little to antichrist. As a true son of his father the devil, there is not a scintilla of gratitude to be found in the beast's heart of solid stone, a fact that should give pause to any and all who contemplate serving him or his master Satan, even from a strictly worldly way of evaluating matters.

Revelation 17:16-17 : This is our first indication in Revelation of the precise manner in which Babylon will meet her demise. In all of the various Old Testament passages which speak of the destruction of Babylon (historical and eschatological), God is the cause, but in all such instances He makes use of earthly means. The seven European rulers together with the three rulers of the southern alliance's main power-blocs will all be equally jealous of Babylon's status, power, influence and wealth, no doubt all the more so inasmuch as we have already seen that Babylon will, up to this point, have been largely spared from the worst effects of the Tribulation, including much of the economic dislocation (as evidenced by the description of the prostitute's wealth earlier in this chapter), the ravages of war (since the conflicts will be fought far from her doorstep), and, as the beast's home country and favored realm, from the worst of antichrist's social, religious, economic and political system and "reforms". The beast's own hatred is also unquestionably

predicated upon Babylon's recent infidelity to him. For it will be recalled that during the just concluded fifth bowl judgment, Babylon had made use of the dislocation occasioned by the darkness of the seven kingdoms to conspire against him. The unfaithfulness demonstrated by the beast's sub-ruler in charge of Babylon at this time will have much to do with motivating her destruction. Rather than expressing disapproval in the face of the ruler of Babylon's intrigues with Israel during antichrist's emergency expedition into the darkness of the rebellious north, there is no indication that either the powerful or the general population of Babylon were at all averse to exploring the possibility of alternative leadership. Given that Babylon has up until now been the privileged exception to all of the beast's depredations, it is no wonder that his attitude on returning will be one of "hatred" for Babylon, motivated by his own anger over such ingratitude, and mixing with the "hatred" born of jealousy on the part of the ten kings.

Although antichrist and his ten rulers are the means used, this judgment itself originates directly from the hand of God and is completely in God's plan (for reasons that will be made clear below). But in verse seventeen we are also given a good deal of information about the course and manner of this judgment. First, Babylon will be isolated from allies and support (the beast and the ten kings will "render her desolate"), then stripped of all of her defenses (made "naked"). Once Babylon is completely defenseless, "they will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire", a twofold process wherein Babylon will first be plundered ("eat her flesh"), and then made subject to a devastating conflagration, with all aspects of this horrendous judgment emanating from antichrist and his subordinates, but originating with God: "for God put it into their hearts to carry out His purpose".

Revelation 17:18 : While Babylon represents religious, cultural, and technological power, she is first and foremost a discrete geographical nation, a great "city-state" (Greek polis, πῶλις) "which has dominion over the kings of the earth". This dominion, rule, and influence which preceded antichrist's rise to power came primarily as a result of her political, military, and economic power (and it is of these assets and defenses that she will be stripped before being plundered and destroyed). Babylon represents the jewel in Satan's crown. Aside from ancient Rome, no other nation in the history of the world has come close to matching such systematic and tangible power (political, military, and economic), wrapped up in such systematic and intangible influence (religious, cultural, and technological). But whether we focus upon Babylon as a nation projecting power or Babylon as a system projecting influence, we should not forget that, in the end, Babylon is made up of people, and it is the collective depravity of her population on that future, eschatological day which will call down this extreme divine judgment.

Raise the standard on the walls of Babylon! Strengthen the guard, station the watchmen, prepare the reinforcements! But nevertheless what the Lord has planned, that He will do, namely, what He has decreed against the inhabitants of Babylon. Jeremiah 51:12 3. Fallen is Babylon:

(1) After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven with great power, and the earth was lit up by his glory. (2) And he cried out in a mighty voice, saying, "Babylon the great has fallen! And she has become a dwelling place for demons, and a place of confinement for every [sort of] unclean spirit, and a place of confinement for every unclean and detestable bird. (3) For the nations have drunk from the wine of [God's] wrath [that flows] from her prostitution. And the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her. And the merchants of the earth have grown rich with her from the [economic] power [flowing from] her wanton excess". Revelation 18:1-3

Revelation 18:1 : Like the angel with the little scroll of Revelation chapter ten, this angel too is best seen as a type of Christ. For just as in the case of the angel of Revelation chapter ten, this angel too is seen "coming down from heaven" (a picture of the Second Advent). This angel too is said to possess "great power" (cf. Revelation 18:1 with Revelation 10:1), and have a "mighty voice" (cf. Revelation 18:2 with Revelation 10:3). And in a manner analogous to the powerful angel of Revelation chapter ten whose hair and face "were like the sun" (Revelation 10:1), in the case of this angel it is said that "the earth was lit up by his glory" (Revelation 18:1). Since the fall of Babylon is, in prophetic terms, intimately connected with the final events of the "Day of the Lord", comprising part of the final series of judgments which bring the Great Tribulation to an end and usher in the Millennial Kingdom of the Messiah, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the fact that this prophecy about the impending fall of Babylon should be given to another powerful angel whose appearance likewise foreshadows the now imminent return of our Lord serves to emphasize the immediacy of that return: once Babylon has been destroyed, Armageddon and the Second Advent will follow in rapid-fire succession.

Revelation 18:2 : As in the case of the angel in Revelation chapter ten, the proclamation given here, "Babylon the great has fallen!", is prophetic – but only just so. The command to "flee Babylon" comes immediately upon the heels of this prediction (Revelation 18:4), with the actual destruction following with very little intervening time elapsed (the description of which begins in Revelation 1:1). The symbolic relegation of post-judgment Babylon to a habitation for demons, unclean spirits, and unclean birds, serves to underscore that this judgment is from God and that it represents cursing of the first order. Just as the original earth, a paradise of light and delight created perfectly and out of nothing from the hand of God in Genesis 1:1, was cursed with the devastating judgment of being made dark in utter waste and desolation becoming "ruined and despoiled" by the time of the situation described in Genesis 1:2 as a result of God's judgment upon Satan's rebellion, and just as Sodom and Gomorrah were totally annihilated with fire and brimstone and remain a curse to this day, so Babylon's judgment will be cataclysmic, with her end serving as a memorial to the folly of serving Satan in place of the one true God (cf. Revelation 18:22-23; Revelation 19:3).

Revelation 18:3 : While we have already considered the reasons why the beast and his ten sub-kings should hate Babylon (retaliation and jealousy respectively), here we are given the first of two reasons why Babylon has earned such a devastating judgment from God. This first reason concerns the negative effect she has had upon the world, primarily upon unbelievers, in promoting, supporting, and in fact to a very great degree producing the system of spiritual "prostitution" which will characterize human life throughout the Tribulation and which will hold sway throughout the world of that time. This corrupting influence is described here as having three main venues: 1) other nations generally, 2) the "kings" or ruling hierarchies around the world, and 3) the "merchants". Herein we are given to see just how all-pervasive Babylon and her corrupt values and practices have been. For in this three-fold breakdown we can see her cultural and religious, political and military, and economic and technological influences at work upon these three respective groups. The spirit of prostitution, of seeking solutions apart from God (and turning instead by definition to Satan, and explicitly so in following the beast), will penetrate deep down into the marrow of every significant power-bloc in the world of that future day. With this level of culpability, having made herself essential to all that antichrist and his father the devil have

"accomplished" in the world at large during the Tribulation, it is small wonder that Babylon has incurred such an extraordinary measure of divine wrath.

4. Flee Babylon: And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out from her, O my people, that you may not receive a share of [the punishment for] her sins, and that you may not partake of the plagues [which are about to fall upon] her. Revelation 18:4

Up until this point, as we have had occasion to mention before, Babylon has apparently been spared many of the more draconian aspects of the beast's tribulational rule. The command given here in verse four is a clear indication that she has also been a sort of "safe haven" for believers. We should not, of course, expect that believers dwelling in Babylon and her vicinity have been completely exempt up until now from either the general trials of the Tribulation (e.g., the two series of worldwide divine judgments and the general suffering brought about by antichrist's policies), or from the Great Persecution. However, the fact that the remainder of this chapter in Revelation definitely paints a picture of a Babylon characterized by excessive luxuries certainly indicates that she has fared far better than the rest of the world to this point, with at least her privileged classes knowing very little lack as judged from the description in Revelation 18:4-24. Secondly, our present verse definitely assumes that 1) there are a sizeable number of believers still alive and living in Babylon in spite of the Great Persecution, and that 2) at this point at any rate they have the freedom of action and opportunity necessary to respond to this command to "flee Babylon". For some, it will doubtless be the case that their prior imprisonment or confinement or restriction had been lifted at the point of Babylon's rebellion, when the beast and his imperial guard temporarily disappeared into the supernatural veil of darkness which had fallen upon his kingdom. For others, it may well be that they had been largely spared the intensive trouble endured by their brothers and sisters in Jesus around the world. For all concerned, however, the recent destruction in Jerusalem on account of the worldwide earthquake will make that city seem the last place that anyone should flee to, especially in light of that city's recent status as antichrist's world capital. But regardless of prior experience or human reasoning, it will be absolutely critical for believers to respond to this command when it comes, for the safe haven of Babylon is about to become a danger zone. Failure to do so will result in "sharing the plagues which are about to come upon her" (Revelation 18:4). Given other previous heavenly commands, signs, and signals during the Tribulation (e.g., Revelation 8:5; Revelation 10:3-7; Revelation 11:15; Revelation 11:19), it is best to understand this command to flee Babylon as one which will likewise be audible and, to all believers within Babylon's borders at least, comprehensible. All the more so then will it be absolutely essential for those who have retained their faith in Jesus Christ to respond to this mandate immediately, for there will be no excuse for non-compliance with this exceptionally clear warning (cf. 2 Peter 3:1-13).

(28) Likewise just as it happened in the days of Lot, [people] were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, buying and selling, planting [orchards] and building [homes]. (29) But on the day that Lot left Sodom, it rained fire and sulfur from heaven, and [the judgment] destroyed everyone [who had not left]. (30) It will be the same on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. (31) In that day, who[ever] is on [the roof of] the house, even though his possessions are in the house, let him not come down to collect them, and let the one who is in the field likewise not turn back. (32) Remember Lot's wife! (33) Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses it (i.e., treats it as lost) will preserve it. Luke 17:28-33 When [people] are saying "Peace!" and

"Safety!", at that precise time destruction will fall swiftly upon them, just like labor pains on a pregnant woman (i.e., the tribulational judgments culminating in Armageddon will begin). 1 Thessalonians 5:3 The verses above, while not technically describing this situation, are certainly applicable, with the first passage driving home the lesson that our response at that time must be swift and decisive, with no looking back and no indecision, while the second passage indicates that the need for flight will be completely counter-intuitive. To the secular world, the fifth bowl judgment which plunged the beast's kingdom into darkness, the instability which followed, and antichrist's temporary disappearance into the gloom will seem to mark the end of a long nightmare, but in reality it will begin what is apparently a very short count-down to Babylon's annihilation. Those who draw the false conclusion that their trouble is over once and for all will likely fail to flee in time, even if they recognize their error after antichrist's re-emergence from the darkness prior to Babylon's destruction: this passage in Revelation definitely indicates that the window of opportunity for flight will be a narrow one indeed.

Depart from Babylon! Flee from the Babylonians! Isaiah 48:20 a

(8) "Take flight from the midst of Babylon and from the land of the Babylonians! Depart, and be like the he-goats at the head of the flock! (9) For behold, I am about to stir up and bring up against Babylon an assemblage of great nations from the land of the north. And they will array themselves against her, and from there she will be captured. Their arrows are like those of a skilled warrior who bereaves – they will not return without effect. (10) The Babylonians will be plundered, and those who plunder them will get their fill", says the Lord. Jeremiah 50:8-10

Cut off the sower from Babylon, and the one who grabs the sickle in time of harvest. Let everyone return to his own people and let everyone flee to his own land from before the sword of the oppressor. Jeremiah 50:16

(6) Flee from the midst of Babylon, and save your lives, everyone! Don't be annihilated on account of her iniquity! For this is the time of the Lord's vengeance, and of His recompense – He will repay her in full. (7) Babylon is a golden cup in the hand of the Lord which makes the whole earth drunk. The nations have drunk of her wine, [and] therefore the nations have gone mad. (8) Babylon will fall in an instant and be broken. Lament over her! Get balm for her disease! Perhaps she can be healed. (9) We would have healed Babylon, but she could not be healed. Abandon her! And let us get out, everyone to his own land. For the judgment against her has reached up to heaven and has risen to the clouds. Jeremiah 51:6-9

(6) "Awake! Awake! And flee from the land of the north (i.e., Babylon), even though I scatter you like the four winds of heaven [were driving you on]!" says the Lord. (7) "Awake! Flee to Zion, you who dwell with the Babylonians! Zechariah 2:6-7 The above passages all have a double application, referring first to the historical return of the Jews to Israel following the Babylonian captivity, but also referring to the situation at hand, the escape of believers from eschatological Babylon prior to her destruction. Indeed, many of the details in these and other like passages are incomprehensible without understanding and applying this final fulfillment in the last days. From the above quotations, the answers to several important questions about this escape come to light: a. What is meant: Three "exoduses" are mentioned in the prophecies about the end times: 1) the rapid flight of believers within Israel to the divinely prepared sanctuary in the desert which takes place as antichrist assumes worldwide control at the Tribulation's mid-point (cf. Revelation 12:6;

Revelation 12:13-16; covered above); 2) the measured exodus of Jews from all the nations of the world returning to Israel after the end of Tribulation following the Second Advent (e.g., Isaiah 60:4 ff.; Isaiah 66:20); *3) the rapid flight of believers from within mystery Babylon just before her destruction prior to Armageddon (Revelation 18:4, our subject here). b. Where to flee: As we have seen, the one place other than Babylon at this time not under antichrist's control will be Israel. Scripture indicates that believers who flee Babylon at this time will have but one safe haven and therefore one objective in fleeing, namely, Jerusalem:

Wail, O gate! Howl, O city! Melt away, all you Philistines! A cloud of smoke comes from the north, and there is not a straggler in its ranks. What answer shall be given to the envoys of that nation? "The Lord has established Zion, and in her (i.e., Jerusalem) his afflicted people will find refuge." Isaiah 14:31-32 NIV The voice of the refugees and fugitives from the land of Babylon [resounds], to tell in Zion (i.e., Jerusalem) of the vengeance of the Lord our God, vengeance for His temple (i.e., believers; cf. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21; 1 Peter 2:4 ff.

Jeremiah 50:28

(9) We would have healed Babylon, but she could not be healed. Abandon her! And let us get out, everyone to his own land. For the judgment against her has reached up to heaven and has risen to the clouds. (10) The Lord has brought forth the vindication [due us] (cf. Revelation 19:8 b). Come and let us tell in Zion (i.e., Jerusalem) of what the Lord our God has done [for us]. Jeremiah 51:9-10

(44) For I will visit [judgment] on Bel in Babylon, and I will bring out of his mouth what he has swallowed (i.e., believers released from antichrist's religious persecution represented by "Bel"). And the nations will never stream to him again. For the wall (i.e., the military protection) of Babylon has fallen. (45) Come out of her My people! And let everyone [of you] save his own life [by fleeing] from the fierce wrath of the Lord! Jeremiah 51:44-45

You refugees, flee from the sword! Don't stay put! Remember the Lord from your far away land (i.e., Babylon), and let Jerusalem ascend in your hearts (i.e., set your thoughts on her)! Jeremiah 51:50

(2) But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, too small to be numbered among the clans of Judah, from you I will bring forth the One who is to rule over Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, even from the days of eternity. (3) For He will give them over [to the oppressor] until the time when [Jerusalem] labors [like] a woman in labor. At that time the rest of His brethren will return to the sons of Israel. Micah 5:2-3

(6) "Awake! Awake! And flee from the land of the north (i.e., Babylon), even though I scatter you like the four winds of heaven [were driving you on]!" says the Lord. (7) "Awake! Flee to Zion, you who dwell with the Babylonians! Zechariah 2:6-7 c. When to flee: Given that before the bowl judgments begin, antichrist is ruling in Jerusalem as Satan's world regent with the world as a whole to one degree or another directly under his control, the beast's departure into the gloom of the fifth bowl judgment's darkness and the accompanying revolts in Israel and Babylon would seem to be the first opportunity for believers either to leave Babylon or to escape to Zion. As we have seen above, antichrist, to the amazement and confounding of his adversaries, reappears

very shortly thereafter and issues his directive to all of his confederate forces throughout the world to assemble at Armageddon. This order given to all of the armies of the world under his command (i.e., with apparently only the meager forces of Israel and Babylon being excepted), constitutes the sixth bowl judgment, an event which occurs a mere month after the beast's disappearance (see chart above). Although we may suppose that the proclamation for Armageddon comes immediately after the beast's reappearance, and that in light of the severe dislocation of this command structure as a result of the preceding events effective implementation of this command and reassertion of his worldwide control will lag to some extent, it can nevertheless be concluded that from this point forward flight will become problematic. Thus the guidance given above about the necessity for immediate flight upon the first opening of this narrow window of opportunity should be heeded with all the rigor demanded by our Lord's warning to flee in haste and not turn back (Matthew 24:18; Mark 13:16; Luke 17:28-33; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:3), in spite of the fact that in the (temporary) absence of the beast this will seem completely counter-intuitive to worldly eyes (cf. the pre-judgment description of Babylon as "lounging in security": Isaiah 47:8). The necessity for rapid flight would also seem to rule out any sort of extensive preparations. Believers who have either been imprisoned or living under great restriction of their personal freedom heretofore will have to trust the Lord to "make a way through the Red Sea", that is, to provide the necessary transport to Israel. Whether by air or by sea, time will be of the essence, and it is very likely that little in the way of tangible material assets will be capable of being brought along. Like Lot leaving Sodom and the Israelites leaving Egypt, we will have to depart with what we can carry, and do so in great haste (cf. Jeremiah 21:9).

d. Why flight is necessary at this time but may be ill-advised earlier: The command given here to flee Babylon is clearly given to believers (i.e., "my people"). Thus ipso facto this command to flee shows that there are some of God's people still in Babylon at this time, and, given the prominence of this command in scripture, one would imagine a goodly number of them. We must therefore conclude that at the very least while these facts do not prohibit an early flight from Babylon, it is no sin for a believer to be still residing within Babylon's borders during the second half of the Tribulation. As suggested above, for many if not most believers, an earlier escape may be impossible. For we may expect that during the Great Persecution, even if those dwelling in Babylon proper are spared execution for their refusal to take the mark of the beast and worship antichrist, it is very likely nevertheless that they will be placed under severe restrictions (which may include incarceration in prison or concentration camps, seizure of property, restricted travel and mobility, etc.). Therefore the issue of leaving Babylon before this time may be entirely moot for most of those who choose to follow the Lamb wherever He leads instead of bowing to the beast. There are other reasons too why seeking an earlier departure may be ill-advised, among which may be 1) to continue Christian service and ministry; 2) to continue spiritual preparation for the crisis; 3) to continue witnessing for the Lord; 4) to provide leadership and support for those who are not able or who are unwilling to leave earlier. In sum, we must assume that for many if not most believers in Babylon, the Lord has a purpose for us being here until that final directive to withdraw, and it is not an insignificant consideration that to leave before this command in Revelation 18:4 will be to act in the absence of a clear and definitive divine message (even though we are told here through prophecy that this very one will indeed be forthcoming). Finally, it is well to ask the critical question of those who are inclined to remove themselves from Babylon before this crucial last command to do so: what possible place of refuge might they find? For prior to this moment the entire world has been under antichrist's control, with

only Babylon offering any degree of sanctuary for believers (with the exception of course of the divinely provided and completely inaccessible refuge in the wilderness provided for the believing refugees from Israel just prior to the Great Tribulation's commencement). Thus it could very well be the case that attempts to anticipate this command may put those who opt for early flight to some self-selected refuge in a far worse situation than if they had patiently awaited the Lord's timing. Only at this point, with the beast's control temporarily disrupted, will there be a clear opportunity to depart and a definite, divinely prophesied destination to seek: Jerusalem. e. How: Just as when haled before the beast's tribunals during the Great Persecution we are instructed to give no thought ahead of time to what we will say (Matthew 10:19-20; Mark 13:11; Luke 21:14-15), so it would seem that prior preparation for this exodus will be of little help, if only because the precise particulars of that future situation are unknowable except for the fact that the window of opportunity will be so narrow. This last point suggests that elaborate prior plans will not be able to be implemented and could act as a hindrance, at least to the extent that they cause those who have made them to delay until "everything can be worked out". For is it more than likely that we shall all have to leave much behind in order to obey the Lord's insistent command: houses, property, possessions, assets, money – even loved ones who are for whatever reason reluctant to flee with the required rapidity. Those who delay overmuch are likely to end up like Lot's sons in law; those who look back are likely to end up like Lot's wife. A corollary to this principle is that, since specific prior preparations are likely to be of no use when the time comes, there is little point to making them. Scripture gives no support for adopting a "survivalist mentality", stock-piling food and weapons and withdrawing to some remote location. Indeed, it is more than likely that over the course of the seven years of Tribulation antichrist will have little trouble identifying, locating, and persecuting all who are truly "of Christ". Rather than seeing this as an entirely negative thing, it is also possible to look on the positive side. Since when the time comes the Lord will provide a way for us to follow His directive to flee Babylon, the loss of all of our worldly goods in the Great Persecution which precedes is something we should try not to take to heart: there will be a way out because God ordains it, and, on the other hand, if we have managed to retain and are relying upon our possessions to provide that "out", it is just possible that these may instead form an "anchor" which keeps us from departing in a timely fashion. When we hear the command "flee Babylon!", for most of us it will probably be the case that we have little to gain by staying behind anyway, and that may prove to be a blessing in disguise. As suggested above, the temporary departure of antichrist from Israel and Babylon's sympathizing with Israel's rebellion will provide an opportunity for travel to Jerusalem. Isaiah 43:14 describing the later flight from Babylon of unbelieving fugitives at least suggests that travel by sea at this time will also be the likely means of transport (although Isaiah 21:6 indicates that a variety of transport is possible). We can well imagine that, with Jerusalem's recent status as the beast's world religious and political headquarters, and with all the world making pilgrimages to the temple in order to demonstrate their allegiance to antichrist, a large ferry service will have developed along the lines of the one we see bringing Moslems to Mecca, only in this case even much more extensive and serving all regions of the world, Babylon most especially. With the temporary cessation of all such activities, this same ferry service would seem the likely means to transport believers to Jerusalem. Those just released from prison and or camps may have little or no material resources, but we can have complete confidence in the Lord that He will provide the material means for our departure. Just as the Lord gave the Israelites "favor in the eyes of the Egyptians" and enriched the children of Israel in their

hasty departure from Egypt (Exodus 12:35-36; cf. Exodus 3:21-22; Exodus 11:2-3; Psalms 105:37), so we can be absolutely sure that no one who is willing to follow our Lord's command will be left behind for want of boat fare (or anything else).

(33) And those among the people who have insight will teach the people who will be persecuted by sword (i.e., martyrdom), and flame (i.e., torture leading to martyrdom), and captivity (i.e., imprisonment), and plundering (i.e., confiscation of property), for some time. (34) And when they are persecuted, they will receive a little help . . . Daniel 11:33-34 a f. The Exodus parallel: The experience of the children of Israel during the Exodus furnishes a prophetically important and detailed parallel to the experience of believers undergoing the Tribulation over all. However the actual departure from Egypt provides some critical points of comparison for the future departure from mystery Babylon:

1) The origin and character of the people being delivered: Just as Israelites went down to Egypt, so a godly seed came to America and has been both nourished and expanding ever since. But just as there was a time for God to make a distinction between those who were His and those who were not, and to call forth His people from Egypt, so it will be in Babylon's case (cf. Hebrews 11:7-8).

2) Deliverance from oppression by divine agency: Just as Egypt was originally very hospitable to the people of God, so also in the case of Babylon. However, in the last days of Israel's abiding in that land, a harsh ruler oppressed the Israelites mightily. So also in the case of Babylon we may anticipate that the days of Tribulation will weigh heavily upon the people of God, and that believers will face ever increasing oppression in this country. But just as the Israelites were delivered from the hand of Pharaoh by the mighty power of God, so also the bowl judgments of retribution will create a situation whereby God opens the doors of the prison house so that we may safely take our leave of Babylon. Just as darkness preceded immediately the plague of the firstborn and the Exodus, and just as there was light for the Israelites but darkness for the Egyptians, so on that coming day there will be darkness on the kingdom of antichrist but light for believers to escape from Babylon.

3) Divine provision: As mentioned above, the Lord did not allow the Israelites to leave Egypt empty handed, but gave them grace in the eyes of the Egyptians so that they "plundered" them (Exodus 12:35-36; cf. Exodus 3:21-22; Exodus 11:2-3; Psalms 105:37). So also we may have every confidence that no matter how we may have been oppressed, no matter how long we have been in prison or otherwise confined, no matter how widespread and extensive the confiscation of our belongings has been, we shall nevertheless be provided the means we need to depart Babylon for Jerusalem.

4) Rapid departure: God led Abraham out of his country to the land of promise at just the right time (Hebrews 11:8). God prepared Noah to "flee" the destruction of the world of his day by following His instructions so that he was preserved and not destroyed along with it on the day the flood came (Hebrews 11:7). And God brought the Israelites out in an equally swift and decisive manner, having them leave at twilight ready for a hasty march when the time came to depart (Exodus 12:11; Exodus 12:31; Exodus 12:34; Deuteronomy 16:6). Just so, when the divine command is clearly received on that future day, it will be incumbent upon the believers who receive it to make haste in carrying it out.

5) Deliverance through the sea to the promised land: Just as the Israelites who faced the seemingly impossible obstacle of the Red Sea between them and the land of promise were miraculously delivered through the sea by the mighty hand of God, so also we may have every confidence that our Lord will bring us through every trouble, trial and tribulation, safely to the place He has made for us in Jerusalem to await His return (and in the New Jerusalem thereafter where we will rejoice in Him forever).

5. Babylon Destroyed:

(5) For [Babylon's] sins have been piled up to heaven, and God has called to mind her wicked deeds. (6) Repay her just as she also herself has repaid. And give her a double measure according to her deeds. In her own cup with which she mixed [her evil brew], mix a double batch for her. (7) To the same degree that she glorified herself and indulged in wanton excess, to that same degree give her torment and grief. For she says in her heart, "I am enthroned as a queen, and I am not a widow and I shall not see grief". (8) Because of [all] this [arrogance of hers], her plagues will come in one day: death and mourning and famine. And [then] she will be burned down with fire (the invasion undertaken by the beast and his confederates). For the Lord God who has judged her is mighty. Revelation 18:5-8

It is an occupational hazard of great material abundance to lose humility and all sense of proportion in terms of our mortality. This is true on an individual as well as a national level (Deuteronomy 8:10-18; Deuteronomy 32:15; Proverbs 30:7-9; cf. Hosea 13:6). But Babylon is seen here to have taken this principle to what may be a historical extreme. In the divine wisdom of God, her punishment will consist in her deprivation of the very things she has treasured and boasted of, things of which she had thought she would never be deprived, and the loss thereof will be like a sword piercing her heart, a "double measure" and "double batch" of destruction that will bereave her of everything upon which she has arrogantly prided herself (cf. Ezekiel 7:1 ff.; Isaiah 47:5-15). a. Babylon Attacked: As we saw above in Revelation 17:15-18, Babylon is destroyed in accordance with the will of God, but the agents of His judgment are the beast and his sub-kings for "God put it into their hearts to carry out His purpose" (Revelation 17:17). It is not uncommon for the Lord to make use of the devil and his minions, whether human or angelic, to accomplish His overarching purpose (cf. Paul's handing over of the offending Corinthian believer "to Satan for the destruction of his flesh", 1 Corinthians 5:4-5). The actual destruction of Babylon will be preceded by a military invasion that will occasion much plundering, after which Babylon, or at least all of her significant cities and towns, will be put to the torch by this invasion force. This sequence of events is clearly visible in the near context of Revelation 17:16 where we are told that the beast's henchmen (1) "will render her desolate and naked", (2) "and they will eat her flesh", then (3) "will burn her up with fire" (cf. Revelation 18:8 : "her plagues will come in one day: death and mourning and famine. And [then] she will be burned down with fire."). The rendering of Babylon "desolate and naked" in Revelation 17:16 refers to the removal of all of her defenses, the "eating of flesh" to the plundering of Babylon by the beast's invasion force, and the "burning with fire" to the literal physical destruction of Babylon at the conclusion of this campaign. b. The Disarming of Babylon: It will be remembered that by this time the beast will have been in control of the world for several years, with all its military forces under his command (directly or indirectly). At this time, it is very doubtful that Babylon will possess significant forces within her borders. On the one hand, the need for defense against foreign attack will have evaporated (or so it will seem). On the other hand,

what use there will be for the military at this time will be in maintenance of the beast's control over his realm beyond her borders. Furthermore, the campaign to reduce the north to full obedience occasioned by the darkness of the fifth bowl judgment is likely to have resulted in the summoning of the remaining major portion of Babylon's military power to his aid (and this would have preceded her rebellion). In short, by this time the vast bulk of whatever military force Babylon does possess in principal will be fully integrated into the beast's one-world army, and geographically located outside of Babylon. Finally, there are indications from scripture that by this time much of Babylon's military will be composed of foreign nationals or "mercenaries" in any case (a trend already incipient today), so that Babylon is unlikely to be able to count on the loyalty of those who are at this time still ostensibly in "her army" (Ezekiel 27:3-11).³⁸ Rendering Babylon "desolate and naked" may demand little more than requiring her few remaining troops to place their oath of fealty to the beast ahead of their oath to her, with the result that the few resident forces which choose to remain loyal will be pitifully insufficient to prevent her destruction.

Look at your troops – they are all women! The gates of your land are wide open to your enemies; fire has consumed their bars. Nahum 3:13 NIV c. The Invasion of Babylon: As the passage cited above describing the fall of historical Babylon and eschatological Babylon shows, the campaign of conquest will not be much of a campaign at all (cf. Nahum 3:7; Jeremiah 51:29; Ezekiel 27:27). In practical terms, this assault will amount to little more than a rapid "Blitzkrieg" style occupation of an essentially defenseless country. Based both upon the scriptures which predict it and the scant time remaining before all of antichrist's forces are collected at Armageddon, we can safely say that the small forces still remaining in Babylon are likely to put up only scattered and token resistance in the face of what will be a rapid and largely unexpected onslaught by an overwhelming assemblage of opponents assaulting her from the north (Jeremiah 25:9; Jeremiah 50:3; Jeremiah 50:9; Jeremiah 50:41 ff.; cf. Revelation 17:16), the east (cf. Ezekiel 27:26), the desert (Isaiah 21:1-10), the sea (Ezekiel 27:34), in short, from each and every side (Jeremiah 51:1-2).

"Therefore, behold, I am going to bring foreigners against you, the [most] ruthless of the nations, and they will un-sheath their swords against the allure of your wisdom, and they will defile your glory." Ezekiel 28:7 (cf. Ezekiel 28:10; Isaiah 13:4-5)

We cannot underestimate the fury which Babylon's behavior during the Tribulation has aroused worldwide, both externally among the other nations of the world, all of whom to one degree or another have to this point been her imperial possessions, and also internally among a large and most likely majority population of immigrants, slaves, and those reduced to penury and indentured servitude. Likewise, we cannot underestimate the attractiveness of plundering Babylon at this time given the extreme contrast between her excessive wealth and the incredible poverty and dearth otherwise throughout the world during the dark days of the Great Tribulation. Thus the motive for the latter internal unrest as well for the invading armies will be two fold, jealousy and revenge on the one hand (Nahum 3:19; Habakkuk 2:6; Revelation 17:16-17), and greed and plunder on the other (Jeremiah 50:10; Zechariah 2:8-9; Isaiah 21:2; Isaiah 33:1; Nahum 2:9-10; Jeremiah 50:37; Ezekiel 26:5-6; Ezekiel 26:12; Habakkuk 2:7-12). d. The Destruction of Babylon: As a political state, historical Babylon was destroyed by the Persian invasion "from the north" ca. 529 B.C., but Babylon the province was never entirely depopulated (cf. Daniel 5:31, Daniel 6:1-28, Daniel 7:1-28, Daniel 8:1-27; Daniel 9:1), and Babylon the city, though in decline ever after, continued as provincial capital of the Persian empire and, later, as Alexander's eastern capital. In the time of

Christ, the city was a shadow of its former self, and in recent times it has indeed become completely depopulated (though it was revived as a tourist attraction under Saddam). These historical facts invite us to pose the question of whether or not the devastating destruction leveled upon eschatological Babylon by antichrist and his forces will indeed be total in our modern, western sense of the word. For without a doubt there are many passages which certainly suggest something like total destruction by any definition (Isaiah 13:5; Isaiah 13:19; Isaiah 47:3; Jeremiah 40:12-13; Jeremiah 50:29; Jeremiah 50:39-40; Jeremiah 51:29; Jeremiah 51:13; Ezekiel 26:17-21; Ezekiel 27:26-36; and compare the similarity of these last two passages with Revelation 18:1-24, Revelation 19:1-21). Babylon will be "burned with fire", left "naked and desolate" with her "flesh eaten" (Revelation 17:16-17; Revelation 18:19-23; Revelation 19:1-3; cf. Isaiah 13:19-22; Isaiah 14:3-4; Isaiah 14:21-23; Isaiah 24:10-12; Isaiah 27:10; Jeremiah 50:21; Jeremiah 50:26; Jeremiah 51:4; Jeremiah 51:29; Zechariah 9:3-4). Clearly, the coming judgment upon Babylon, whether or not it involves her complete and total depopulation and systematic devastation for all future time, will be horrendous. Babylon's affliction will produce a dramatic outflow of her non-native population (Isaiah 13:14; Jeremiah 51:8). Babylon's native population will be terribly abused and depleted (Isaiah 13:15-16; Jeremiah 51:2). Babylon will never be rebuilt to her former glory (Isaiah 25:2; Isaiah 47:5). In many respects, then, it is a moot point whether the territory of Babylon, devastated by this invasion and its aftermath, will play host to any significant millennial population. For on the one hand, in the coming kingdom of our Lord, Babylon's name, fame, power and prestige will be gone forever in any case, with her commercial might completely obliterated. And, on the other hand, no one in their right mind who with the benefit of scripture has discerned the "signs of the times" will forsake the opportunity to flee during this narrow window when the world in general and the population of Babylon in particular wrongly assume that antichrist's reign of terror has come to end. On balance, the many descriptions of complete devastation seem to leave little doubt that Babylon will be irreparably destroyed by antichrist's dual assault of massive invasion followed by deliberate incineration. It seems clear that the Lord is making a very deliberate example of Babylon, one whose lesson will continue into the millennial kingdom (and the extensive description given in the rest of chapter eighteen certainly confirms this impression). All other things being equal, therefore, one might suppose that everyone who does not take the opportunity to escape to Jerusalem during the calm before this storm will be caught up in it and destroyed (with the exception of those who somehow manage later to flee successfully: e.g., Isaiah 47:2). There is, however, one piece of information which may challenge this assumption. We have posited in the past that up until this point, Babylon, the original homeland of the beast, has to a large degree been shielded from some of the worst of antichrist's depredations, and may in fact have functioned as a sort of safe haven – not necessarily just for dedicated Christians, but possibly also for marginal believers and for non-believing Jews as well (especially perhaps in regard to avoiding the mark, something they will no doubt be keen to do in spite of a lack of faith in Christ: cf., Deuteronomy 11:18; Jeremiah 30:11). Now one of the first orders of business in Christ's millennial kingdom will be the regathering for evaluation of all remaining Jews from the four corners of the world (cf. Isaiah 11:11-12; Jeremiah 48:20-21; Jeremiah 52:12). It will be recalled that the ministries of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000 resulted in the salvation of a large number of Jewish people around the world though by no means anything like a majority. At this point in time, the believing remnant is enjoying a protected interlude in the desert kept safe by the power of God from all the troubles of the Great Tribulation until Christ's return (Revelation 12:13-17). Given the

large Jewish population in this country, and the very likely possibility that it will increase significantly as Jews around the world seek a place of safety during the worst of the tribulational events, it stands to reason that those Jews living in Babylon at this time will at least escape with their lives so as to be available for the great regathering after our Lord's taking up of His millennial kingship (and that they may perhaps form the largest element of this return).

Writhe in agony, O Daughter of Zion, like a woman in labor, for now you must leave the city to camp in the open field. You will go to Babylon; there you will be rescued. There the Lord will redeem you out of the hand of your enemies. Micah 4:10 NIV (cf. Isaiah 48:20-21; Ezekiel 20:34-36; Revelation 17:3-5)

Such a deliverance from Babylon after the fact would follow the parallel of the Jewish return to the land after the destruction of the historical Babylon. It is thus entirely possible and consistent with the scriptures to envision a scenario wherein Babylon will be so thoroughly looted and so deliberately put to the torch that she becomes largely uninhabitable for all time to come, yet without the complete and immediate destruction of all who live within her borders at that time, even though the loss of life may be extreme and the loss of property nearly complete. According to this interpretation, the transfer of population from out of the territory of destroyed Babylon will occur after Christ's return with life in the ruins until that time existing on a bare subsistence level (quite a contrast to Babylon's former unprecedented luxury). This is what the Lord says – your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "For your sake I will send to Babylon and bring down as fugitives all the Babylonians, in the ships in which they took pride." Isaiah 43:14 NIV C. The Beast's Armageddon Crusade

Believers who have now escaped from Babylon in response to the divine warnings that preceded her destruction will have occasion to appreciate the Lord's deliverance of them from that fatally stricken country, no matter how wrenching the departure may have been or how much they may have seemed to have lost in a material way: to have stayed would have meant losing everything, and most probably their lives as well. Jesus tells us that we believers are "the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13; Mark 9:50; Luke 14:34; cf. Leviticus 2:13; Numbers 18:19; Colossians 4:6), and salt with its preservative properties is a piquant metaphor for the preservative effect of a remnant of genuine, godly believers whose presence God honors wherever they may be found, even if it be in the midst of the Great Prostitute. But now, with all responsive believers having heeded the Lord's command to withdraw from Babylon, the wanton creature has found herself without any shred of protection. And while from the human viewpoint the lack of military defense will seem critical, those who know their God will realize that just as the withdrawal of Lot from Sodom paved the way for her destruction, so the removal of the remnant of believers from Babylon will likewise remove the final impediment to her reaping what she has sown. In the description of her in Revelation chapter 18, Babylon is dressed in fine linen (bespeaking her economic dominance and luxury), purple (referring to her [tyrannical] rulership), scarlet (the color both of prostitution and of blood), and is adorned with gilding and precious stones (the results of these three anti-God activities: Revelation 18:16). In every respect then, Babylon had become the queen of the nations, but what did this profit her? Though she came close to gaining the entire world, she has now been made bereft of everything she had possessed, plundered, looted, and put to the torch.

Following the destruction of Babylon, the events of the Tribulation will move swiftly to their appointed end. With the north back under antichrist's control, with all restraint removed for the assembly of the kings of the east, with Babylon now out of the way, and with the forces employed in her destruction now available, the beast's mustering of the armies of the world for the assault upon Israel will begin in earnest. Throughout his rule and visible in his opposition to all truth, antichrist has continually represented the lie as the truth and evil as good. This trend will reach its apex now at the end of the Great Tribulation in the battle of Armageddon, where our returning Lord will be represented by the beast as the usurper who must be opposed at all costs (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:4). We may expect the beast to bill this final "crusade" as being one of so-called "good" against so-called "evil" (Ezekiel 38:1-23, Ezekiel 39:1-29; Revelation 16:12-16; Revelation 19:19-21), casting the Jewish people in the role of the last stain which much be erased in order to gain the final victory. Moreover once Israel is destroyed, there will be no one left to deliver. Thus antichrist's gathering of the nations to Jerusalem to exterminate Israel will seem to him and his father the devil the ideal way to put the Lord "on the spot", daring Him to prevent the elimination of the Jewish state and the Jewish race. Since he is the pseudo-Messiah, it had no doubt been a sweet thing for the beast prior to this Jewish rebellion to have his military headquarters at Jerusalem, the prophesied millennial capital. For the past several years, Jerusalem was the capital of death where many were forced to come to worship antichrist on pain of execution; but Jerusalem is also the coming capital of life, where all will desire to come and appear before the true Messiah (Zechariah 8:23; cf. Isaiah 2:3 ff.). That coming wave of visitation will be in response to the divine millennial blessings about to be poured out upon the entire earth. At present, however, we see the earth reeling under the bowl judgments of which Armageddon is the final travail. The unbelieving world led by antichrist is responding to these just judgments from the Lord exactly as Pharaoh had done, by attacking God's people rather than learning from their mistakes. Instead of repentance, the proper response in the face of such clear divine disapproval, the world as a whole is only too happy to join in the madness of the beast's crusade – in an attempt to fight against God Himself.

Now these are spirits of demons which produce "signs": they will go forth to the kings of the entire earth to gather them together for the war of the great day of God the Almighty. Revelation 16:14

(1) Why are the nations forming into a mob and the peoples [of the earth] grumbling idly. (2) The kings of the earth are assembling and its princes are gathering together – against the Lord and His Anointed One, [saying] (3) "Let us pull off Their chains, and cast Their cords from us!" Psalms 2:1-3 The beast's response to the Jewish rebellion will be characteristically swift (cf. Daniel 7:6; Revelation 13:2), and yet overwhelming in spite of its speed, coming "like a flood" raging over the land of Israel (Isaiah 8:6-8; Daniel 9:26; Daniel 11:22 [in the Hebrew]). Feverishly mustering the united armed forces of evil from all the remaining quarters of the earth, antichrist will cause to descend upon the true center of the world an innumerable, polyglot horde with Jerusalem as its objective. But the Lord will help her "at break of day" (Psalms 46:5), and, indeed, it has been His plan all along to bring antichrist and all his forces together and cause them to founder on Zion's Rock.

(9) Proclaim this among the nations! Prepare a holy war! Rouse [all] the mighty men! Let all the men of war come near [and] come up [to Jerusalem]. (10) Beat your ploughshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears! Let [even] the feeble man say "I [too] am a mighty man (i.e., fit for

service)!" (11) Hurry and come from every direction that you may be assembled there! And Thou, O Lord, Do Thou [likewise] bring down Thy [own] warriors [there to Jerusalem]. (12) Let the nations be roused [from their places], and let them come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat. "For there I will sit in judgment over all the nations on every side." (13) Send forth the sickle for the harvest is ripe! Come down into the winepress for it is full and the vats overflow. For great is their wickedness. (14) Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of doom! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of doom. (15) The sun and moon will darken, and the stars will gather up their light. (16) Then the Lord will roar from Zion, and from Jerusalem He will let sound His voice, and the heavens and the earth will quake. Joel 3:9-16 The call to Armageddon will be a universal proclamation to all the nations on the face of the earth, bringing every able-bodied man to do battle at Jerusalem (Revelation 16:12-16). Overlooked universally in the translations of the passage cited immediately is the fact that the Hebrew verb in the second command of Joel 3:9 means "consecrate" rather than simply "prepare" (from the root qdsh, ■■■). This will indeed be a "holy war", the final "crusade" of Satan and his antichrist against the coming true Messiah at His own truly holy and righteous return. The massive nature of the mobilization can be seen from the description in verse ten above where even the implements of peace are rapidly forged into weapons of war for this final assault on the people of God, a command famously and stunningly reversed in the millennial prophecies of Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3 in a way which serves to demonstrate quite clearly the difference between the pseudo-Messiah and the genuine One about to come. From the passage above we also see that even those who would otherwise be disinclined to enter military service will be zealously enthusiastic to join in this final battle of "total war" between the forces of the devil, seen and unseen, against the camp of God in Jerusalem.

1. Gog of Magog:

(1) And you, son of man, prophesy against Gog, and say, "Thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I am against you, Gog (i.e., antichrist), chief prince of Meshech and Tubhal. (2) And I will fetch you back, and conduct you, and bring you up from the far reaches of the north. For I will make you come to the mountains of Israel. (3) Then I will strike your bow from your left hand (cf. Revelation 6:2), and make your arrows fall from your right hand". Ezekiel 39:1-3

"Gog" is synonymous with the beast, while "Magog" means "the place of Gog". That is to say, in our prophetic context Magog is mystery Babylon (MGG via the use of the Hebrew cryptographic technique of athbash stands for LBB = BBL = Babel). It is true that the consonants are reversed in the cryptogram (i.e., a direct correspondence would require Babylon's cryptographic name to be "Gogam"). But "Magog" is a historical name (he is one of the sons of Japheth: Genesis 10:2), so that the reversal is used no doubt to preserve the identification with mystery Babylon without altering the historical name and so losing that part of the analogy. For it is precisely by using the historical name "Magog" that the power center of this future invader of Israel is plainly located for the reader in the far north, the historical locale of Japheth's second son. Now while eschatological Babylon is, strictly speaking, in the west, historical Babylon is in "the north" in terms of biblical geography, and, until her destruction at the end of the Tribulation, is indistinguishable from the revived Roman empire as part of antichrist's dual base of power. Thus, for Ezekiel's listeners, the association of "Gog", the future invader of the land, with "Magog", one of if not the most remote of the northern nations, not only conveys in contemporary terms a perfect picture of what will actually happen, but also allows us with the benefit of later prophetic details to take things a step further

and identify "Magog" with prophetic Babylon for the reasons already delineated. Further, if we see in the root of the names "Gog/Magog" a doubling of the Hebrew word for gentile, (goy, גוי), then "Magog" will mean something like "archetypical gentile nation". And with eschatological Babylon being, in ethnic terms, on the one hand more representative of more Japhetic nations than any other single nation, and on the other hand more polyglot in general than any other nation, the use of "Magog" to represent mystery Babylon as the homeland of the beast (he is "chief prince" of Magog) and the lynchpin of the dual confederation presided over by Magog (composed of the two parts, Meshech and Tubhal) makes perfect sense. There are, moreover, many indications throughout the context that show of a certainty that Ezekiel is speaking exclusively of far future events in chapters 38-39, and specifically of the events of Armageddon: a) The Lord Himself repeatedly stresses His own role in assembling all of His enemies worldwide for this final showdown and their destruction (Ezekiel 38:3-4; Ezekiel 38:7; Ezekiel 38:16; Ezekiel 39:2), something which never happens before Armageddon (and certainly not in the two previous campaigns between antichrist and the southern alliance). b) Gog's confederacy indisputably includes peoples from around the world, and clearly from the south as well as the north working in unison, so that it is indisputable that this is a worldwide undertaking unlike any preceding campaign against Israel, including the preceding campaigns of the Tribulation. c) The occasion of burying the bodies of the Lord's enemies after Armageddon in Ezekiel 39:1-29 suggests no further satanic activity thereafter but a time of unprecedented peace and prosperity (esp. Ezekiel 39:25-39). In all of human history after Eden, only the Millennium fits the situation so described. Additionally, the length of time required for this cleanup (cf. especially the "seven years" of Ezekiel 39:9) is clearly inconsistent with the immediate arrival of New Jerusalem at the end of the Millennium (following the similarly named Gog-Magog assault on Jerusalem directed against the rule of the Messiah). On this last point, at the end of the post-millennial Gog-Magog rebellion, we are also told that "fire came down from heaven and devoured" this final set of rebels, so that there would be no bodies to bury in that case (Revelation 20:9). d) The statement at Ezekiel 39:26 that "they will forget their shame and all the unfaithfulness they showed toward Me when they lived in safety" must be looking back to the contemporary and tribulational situation, not to the time of the perfect rule of Christ during the Millennium (when there will be no such "shame" or "unfaithfulness"; e.g., Jeremiah 31:33-34). Moreover the following verse, Ezekiel 39:27 sets the time frame as still future from our perspective today: "when I have brought them back from the nations", namely, the regathering of Israel by divine agency after the 2nd Advent at the conclusion of the battle of Armageddon (as distinguished from the present political situation; cf. Isaiah 60:8 ff.; Zechariah 8:23). e) The great earthquake mentioned in this context is an event which precedes the 2nd Advent (i.e., around the time of the seventh bowl judgment: compare Ezekiel 38:19 with Revelation 16:18). f) There is only one human army described here, that of antichrist, showing that this is not one of the earlier campaigns of antichrist against the south or an earlier historical invasion, but the predicted arraying of the nations against the Lord and His Anointed at Armageddon (Psalms 2:1-12). g) The way in which the warriors of the beast go mad and kill each other in a frenzy is also consistent with other 2nd Advent-Armageddon passages (compare Ezekiel 38:21-22 with Zechariah 14:13). h) The plague of hail at Ezekiel 38:22 is, as we have seen, also a well-known pre-cursor of the 2nd Advent-Armageddon (cf. Revelation 16:21). i) The Lord uses the destruction of Gog's army to make Himself and His power known to the world (Ezekiel 38:16; Ezekiel 38:23; Ezekiel 39:6), something that only happens at its most emphatic at

the 2nd Advent during the battle of Armageddon (cf. Revelation 1:7; Revelation 19:11-16), analogous to the way in which He dealt with the Pharaoh of the Exodus, a type of antichrist as we have seen (Exodus 9:16). j) The bodies of the dead providing food for the birds is also a 2nd Advent-Armageddon reference (compare Ezekiel 39:17 ff. with Revelation 19:17-18). k) The fire which is poured out upon Magog (Ezekiel 39:6) is in part a reference to the same event as the fiery destruction of Babylon in Revelation 17:1-18, Revelation 18:1-24 (although with the phrase "even upon those of the coast-lands who live in safety", we have an expansion of the judgment to more of the west after Armageddon; see below). l) Ezekiel 39:26 speaks of the regathering of Israel following the invasion as a result of which there will be "no one to make them afraid" any longer, a clear reference to the peace and security of the Messiah's millennial kingdom.

(2) "Son of man, set your face against Gog (i.e., antichrist) of the land of Magog (i.e., Babylon, the home kingdom of the beast) [he who is] chief prince of Meshech and Tubhal (i.e., Revived Rome). Prophesy against him (3a) and say 'Thus says the Lord God. Behold, I am against you, Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubhal. Ezekiel 38:2-3 a

Just as Ezekiel's reference to historical Magog refers prophetically to the beast's home country, Babylon, so his use of Meshech and Tubhal, also sons of Japheth, is likewise focused on future rather than contemporary events. The pairing here of these two ancient nations reveals to us that in addition to ruling his own "super-nation", Babylon, antichrist also holds sway over a larger, composite empire (a.k.a., "revived Rome"), one consisting of two essential parts and named here "Meshech and Tubhal" (cf. Genesis 10:2; 1 Chronicles 1:5; Isaiah 66:19; Ezekiel 27:13; Ezekiel 32:26; Ezekiel 39:1). Thus, as in the case of Magog, these names are given to Ezekiel by the Spirit in order to express future prophetic realities in geographical terms understandable to his contemporary readers. For our purposes here in examining the beast's Armageddon campaign, we can say that the core of his invasion force will be composed of the same set of armies he used to conquer the south, the armed forces of the west and the north, that is, of (now destroyed) Babylon and her allies and of the revived Rome and her allies respectively. However, since both Meshech and Tubhal are mentioned, we can be sure that the second part of antichrist's revived Roman empire, the newly conquered southern alliance (i.e., the three horns out of the ten which fall before the small horn in Daniel 7:8), will also contribute her entire complement of military might (and we have also seen from Revelation 16:12 that the east will contribute as well).

(3b) "And I shall bring you back [here again] (i.e., for Armageddon). (4) For I shall put my hooks in your jaw and make you come, [you] and your entire army of horses and horsemen, all of them fully arrayed [in battle gear], a vast multitude, all of them with shields and bucklers and carrying swords. (5) Persia, Cush, and Put will be with them, all with shield and helmet, (6) Gomer, and all her hordes, Beth-Togarmah (i.e., "the house of Torgarmah") [at] the recesses of the north and all her hordes, a host of [allied] nations with you [O Gog]. (7) Make thorough preparations, you [O Gog] and all your troops who have gathered together around you, and be on your guard for them." Ezekiel 38:3-7 This passage demonstrates that bringing the beast and his hordes to Jerusalem in order to destroy them utterly is unquestionably "of God", while the image in verse four of our Lord physically impaling Gog and his armies with a hook and dragging them to the slaughter of Armageddon states in the most unequivocal terms the irresistible nature of the divine plan to defeat this final offensive of the devil and the devil's chosen one, and to do so in an unprecedentedly decisive way. For it is the Lord who will "bring you back". The Hebrew verb here

(shabhabh, ■■■) indicates quite unmistakably that Gog has been in Israel before (a reference to antichrist's prior residence in Jerusalem). This theme of Gog being led to his destruction by the Lord in the manner of Pharaoh is later emphatically repeated in the above quoted beginning of Ezekiel 39:1-3 as well where the Lord renews His pledge to "bring Gog back" to Israel, adding that He Himself will "conduct you" (i.e., the Lord's facilitation of a rapid and complete arrival of antichrist's forces to Jerusalem), "bring you up from the far reaches of the north" ("up", as always because of Jerusalem's relative elevation; "the north" is precisely the region whence antichrist will begin the campaign) and, finally "make you come". This last phrase shows us once again that in spite of the beast's and the devil's enthusiasm for this evil crusade, the Lord is the One who is leading them on to a complete annihilation that is already firmly determined in the plan of God, precisely as He led Pharaoh into the Red Sea only to dispose of him and his army in an equally complete and miraculous manner. The following verses describe in vivid terms the sheer size of this expedition which will constitute the largest and most powerful force ever brought to bear against a single objective in world history (Ezekiel 38:4 "a vast multitude", and cf. the muster list later in the chapter). Nor should we assume based upon the excessively large numbers involved that the quality of these troops will be substandard. The large number of volunteers will be welded onto a large base of veterans from the previous campaigns. It will be an entirely mechanized force (Ezekiel 38:4 an "entire army of horses and horsemen"), and an exceptionally well equipped one as well (Ezekiel 38:4 "all of them fully arrayed [in battle gear]", "all of them with shields and bucklers and carrying swords"; Ezekiel 38:5 "all with shield and helmet"). Also, in spite of the swiftness of its mustering and the rapidity of its assembly in the theater of operations, this vast army will not for all that be either disorganized, or unprepared, or operating without proper plans or orders. For the Lord Himself is seen here to give the command and to offer encouragement to the beast and his general staff to put forth their very best effort in this regard as well (Ezekiel 38:7 "Make thorough preparations, you [O Gog] and all your troops who have gathered together around you", and "be on your guard for them"). In short, this will be absolutely the largest, best equipped, best trained and prepared, most professional combat force conducting the most effective operation in world history – and that is precisely the point. Were the defenders reduced to mere human means, they would stand less than no chance before antichrist and his irresistible Blitzkrieg. But it is the Lord whom they will meet at Armageddon, and the sharp sword that proceeds out of the mouth of the glorious Messiah, the Son of Man, our Savior Jesus Christ (Revelation 19:15; cf. Isaiah 1:20; Isaiah 49:2; Hebrews 4:12; Revelation 1:16; Revelation 2:12; Revelation 2:16). As to the nations listed in Jeremiah 38:3-7 above, these can be broken down into three essential groupings: 1) Persia, Cush, and Put; 2) "Gomer, and all her hordes" along with "Beth-Togarmah [at] the recesses of the north and all her hordes", and 3) "a host of [allied] nations". As to the first group, these nations are representative of the south and, specifically, of the three regional powers of the southern alliance now subject to the beast (i.e., three of the ten horns that form the revived Roman empire; cf. Daniel 7:7; Daniel 7:20; Revelation 12:3; Revelation 13:1; Revelation 17:3-16). Persia may be taken to represent Iran and the central Asian power center (Turkey to Kazakstan). Put refers to Libya and represents North Africa. Cush, in biblical terms usually refers to Ethiopia but sometimes also to Mesopotamia (cf. Cush, the father of Nimrod who operated in that region: Genesis 10:8), and in our context probably has both meanings, referring to the arc of southern kingdoms from Ethiopia and Sudan across the Red Sea and into Arabia and Iraq. Egypt is notably missing from this description no doubt because as the head of the southern alliance she suffered

especially grievously at the hands of antichrist after their defeat (cf. Ezekiel 30:2-26; Ezekiel 32:11-15).

"For I will spur on Egyptians against Egyptians, and they will fight one against his brother and another against his friend, a city against a city and a kingdom against a kingdom (i.e., the splintering of the triple coalition). And Egypt's spirit will be emptied from the midst of her, for I will confound her plans, although they consult their idols and mediums and oracles and familiar spirits. And I will hand Egypt over into the hand of a cruel master (i.e., antichrist), even a stern king (i.e., antichrist; cf. Daniel 8:23) [who] will rule over them, says the Lord God of hosts." Isaiah 19:2-4 (cf. Isaiah 19:5-17 compared with Isaiah 19:18-24) In the second grouping we find only two subdivisions, Gomer and "the house of Togarmah". That is because these two sons of Japheth represent the twin pillars of the beast's power during the first half of the Tribulation, the west from whence he sprang (and which until only just recently was dominated by the now destroyed Babylon), and the north (that is, the first seven kingdoms of revived Rome), conquered in the early days of the Tribulation. Gomer and Togarmah, often taken to be the Cimmerians dwelling in the (at that time) terra incognita of the northern steps and the somewhat less remote Armenians, thus represent from the biblical perspective the more and the less exotic quadrants of the world respectively, namely, the (in Ezekiel's time) unknown west and the somewhat less mysterious north. With the addition of the final element in verse six, "a host of [allied] nations with you [O Gog]", we have a reference to the last of the world's four quadrants, the east, now brought into this final conflict by specific divine facilitation represented by the "drying up" of Euphrates to "prepare the way for the kings of the east" at Revelation 16:12 in the sixth bowl judgment, "Armageddon" (cf. Revelation 16:16). In the clearest possible terms his contemporaries could fathom, Ezekiel has thus through his delineation of the muster list of antichrist demonstrated through the Spirit that this mobilization will be worldwide in its scope and massive in its implementation.

(8) "Many days from now you [and your forces] will be mustered. At the end of the years (i.e., at the end of the 6,000 years of human history just prior to Armageddon) you will come to a land restored from the sword, [to a nation] gathered out of many peoples, [you will come] against the mountains of Israel which had [previously] been [in a state] of continual devastation. (9) When you come up [against the land of Israel] you will come like a cataclysm. You will be like a [storm] cloud and cover the land, you and all your hordes and the many peoples with you." Ezekiel 38:8-9 For the many reasons already delineated (i.e., the list of twelve given above), what is being described here is not the end of the Millennium, but rather the political situation as it will obtain on the eve of Armageddon. The passage is very careful not to say that the inhabitants of the land have been regathered "by the Lord" (the process of this prophetically necessary pre-Tribulation regathering is already far advanced in our time of course). Further, while the situation in Israel on the brink of the beast's invasion will be one of "restoration from the sword", nothing more is implied by these words than a breathing space from war and domination by others (and certainly not the much anticipated prosperity of the Millennium). The fact that the world in general and the government of Israel with her ally Babylon had imprudently anticipated antichrist's demise as he disappeared into the darkness of the fifth bowl judgment will merely make the short respite all the more disappointing. For the contrast between the anticipated end to the beast's rule and all the concomitant evils of the Great Tribulation and the approach of Armageddon will be jarring as the newfound peace and tranquility dissolves into the cataclysm of this advancing storm.

(10) Thus says the Lord God, "It will come to pass on that day that thoughts will rise in your heart and you will devise an evil plan. (11) For you will say, 'I shall go up against [that] land of unfortified towns and villages. I shall attack those who are at peace, all living in [false] security, all of them inhabiting [towns and villages] without defenses (lit., "bars and doors", i.e., city gates).' (12) [For you shall] take plunder and take spoil and set your hand against [previously] desolate places which are [now] inhabited, and against a people [recently] gathered from the nations and now in the process of acquiring livestock and property and dwelling at the center of the world. (13) Sheba and Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish and all her nobles will say to you, 'Have you come to take plunder? Have you gathered your troops to carry off silver and gold, to take [their] cattle and property, to take much loot?'" Ezekiel 38:10-13 In no further need of the Jewish state and eager to punish them for their unfaithfulness, antichrist at the behest of his father the devil has conceived the "evil plan" of annihilating the Jewish race now heavily concentrated in this single location. As at the present time, the indications are that during the Tribulation the Jewish state has continued to rely on the strategy of counter-attack and mobile rather than static defenses. While generally a superior approach for a small and highly skilled armed force, against vastly numerically superior and equally skilled opponents attacking simultaneously from every direction, the lack of any significant fixed fortifications will be sorely felt, and, as the scriptures above suggest, will place the Israeli army at a considerable disadvantage. We may expect that, as news of the beast's re-emergence and of his mustering of the world's armies for Armageddon reaches Israel, it will occasion a frantic effort to construct makeshift forts and entrenchments throughout the land, and especially around the capital of Jerusalem. To the rest of the world, however, the imminent demise of the Jewish state will seem certain, so that the international merchant class, represented by the traders of Sheba, Dedan and Tarshish (noted trading nations of Ezekiel's day representing from their relative geography vis-à-vis Israel the mercantile interests of the south, west, and north respectively), will be looking forward to the opportunity of trafficking in what promises to be a wholesale liquidation of all property within the borders of the Jewish state just as soon as antichrist's mission is accomplished. The eagerness visible in the verses above is no doubt accentuated by the fact that the seven years of tribulation have taken their toll on the world and its wealth (not to mention that their best customer, Babylon, has just recently been obliterated), but Israel, as the headquarters of the beast and his religion for the past three years has benefitted economically significantly more than any other nation, though that "benefit" has come at the extremely high cost of having to experience the presence of antichrist and his anti-God rule more directly than any other nation.

(14) "Therefore prophesy, son of man, and say to Gog, 'Thus says the Lord God. On that day when My people are living [in false] security will you not realize it? (15) For you will come from your place, from the far north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding horses, a huge multitude and a vast army. (16) And I will bring you up against my people Israel like a cloud covering the earth. At the end of days (i.e., in the last days, the Tribulation: cf. Isaiah 2:2) it will come to pass that I will bring you against my land so that the nations may know Me (i.e., understand who I am) when I show forth My holiness in their sight by [destroying] you, O Gog.'" Ezekiel 38:14-16

Finally, it should also be pointed out here that the essential strategy of Armageddon has been developed by Satan, and that Israel is really not so much the target as she is the bait, for it is the

true essence of the devil's mad plan to force the issue in one place and at one time in a final confrontation of all the forces he can muster, human and angelic, with the Lord Himself (e.g., Psalms 2:1-3; Revelation 16:14). But of course the entirety of all creature effort is a laughable pittance in the face of the least expression of divine power. Just as the Lord raised up Pharaoh for the very purpose of displaying His power and proclaiming His Name (Exodus 9:16; cf. Romans 9:17), so all the devil's efforts through the mobilization of more human might than has ever been deployed in one place in world history will only serve to "show forth my holiness in their sight by [destroying] you, O Gog" (Ezekiel 38:16).

2. The Jewish Resistance: As the class most resentful of antichrist in his portrayal of himself as "the Holy One of Israel" coupled with his breaking of the pseudo-Messianic treaty (Daniel 9:27), we may expect that it will have been the religious conservatives and nationalistic zealots who took the lead in rebelling against the beast. While the first object of their attention, Jerusalem, has by now most likely come completely under their control (or nearly so: cf. Revelation 11:2), we may also posit as suggested above, that, at the time of the beast's re-emergence from the northern darkness and his call to Armageddon, there will still remain strongholds within the land of Israel whence the loyalists of the secular party and the relatively small contingents of antichrist's armed forces still based in the land of Israel at that time will have fled for safety. The existence of these hostile strong-points throughout Israel in the face of an imminent invasion of incredibly mammoth proportions will pose a major complication for the leaders of the Jewish resistance and will greatly complicate the defense. Indications from scripture are that instead of attempting to defend the entire land of Israel, a very difficult prospect under the best of circumstances and objectively impossible in this situation, the Jewish generals will fall back upon Jerusalem and fortify the capital with every available soldier and all available means (as was typically the case in antiquity, e.g., 586 B.C. versus the Babylonians and 70 A.D. versus the Romans). Thus it is at Jerusalem that the final battle of the Tribulation will be fought, the "Mountain of [the assembly of] Troops" otherwise known as Armageddon. This has been the Lord's plan from the beginning, and it is He who is in truth directing things to this end (Ezekiel 38:16).

Something to keep in mind as we examine the passages which relate the heroic but seemingly futile Jewish resistance to antichrist's invasion is that these defenders however noble and however courageous share a common characteristic which has brought them to this pass: they all rejected the ministry of Moses and Elijah during the Tribulation's first half. Had they accepted the testimony of these two great prophets and the ministry of the 144,000 martyrs, they would presently find themselves safely ensconced in the wilderness far east of Jerusalem, riding out the storms of the Great Tribulation and this latest catastrophe in the embrace of God's protection, waiting for the return of the King when they, in company with all believers still alive and all who have by then passed on to be with the Lord, would have been resurrected on that glorious day of victory at the 2nd Advent of Jesus Christ. Many if not most of these men and women who resist the beast's assault will convert when they see the sign of the Son of Man and witness His return with their own eyes (Matthew 24:30; cf. Zechariah 12:10; Revelation 1:7), but their reluctance to put their faith in Jesus before His actual return will mean that they will have to wait for their own time of resurrection as the double portion of Christ's victory prize, the resurrection of the Friends of the Bride who will take on immortality at the end of His millennial kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:24). Nevertheless, there is indeed also a distinction to be made on the one hand between these

courageous, conservative defenders whose hearts have been vexed in all of antichrist's doings, who come in for scriptural praise in their conduct of the defense, and who apparently do convert upon our Lord's return, and on the other hand the secular compromisers who embraced the beast, no doubt accepting his mark. This distinction is also born out in the prophetic passages which describe honorable fighting by the former group while other scriptures describe the low state of affairs in Israel on the threshold of this invasion. Since the Tribulation is a time of judgment, the Lord is using this invasion also as a final bit of punctuation to demonstrate that compromise with evil whether to a small or great degree (i.e., failure to choose for the good on the one hand and wholehearted choosing of evil on the part of the latter) both invite divine judgment.

(1) Blow a trumpet in Zion, and raise the alarm on my holy mountain. All the inhabitants of the earth are distressed, because the Day of the Lord is coming, because it is near at hand. (2) A day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and deep gloom. An army great and mighty is [coming], spreading itself out over your mountains like the dawn. There has never been anything like it since the beginning of time and never will be again in latter times from generation to generation. (3) Fire devours in front of them, and behind them flames are set ablaze. In front of them the land is like the garden of Eden, but behind them is a desolate desert and nothing escapes them. (4) Their appearance is like that of horses, and they race forward just like mounted cavalry. (5) Their clatter on the mountains is like that of chariots, like the sound of fire devouring chaff, like a mighty army arraying itself for battle. (6) Before them the nations writhe in anguish and every face turns pale. (7) They rush on like mighty men. Like men of war they storm the wall. They all keep their ranks and all march straight ahead. (8) They do not crowd each other. Each maintains his file. They throw themselves at the defenses. They do not falter. (9) They charge into the city. They rush the wall. They go up into the houses. They enter into the windows like a thief. (10) The earth trembles before them and the heavens quake. The sun and the moon grow dark and the stars contract their light. (11) Then the Lord will sound forth with His voice before His host, for His army is [also] very large, for [the forces] who obey His word are [also] numerous. For the Day of the Lord is great and extremely awesome. Who can endure it? Joel 2:1-11

Comment: The passage above is a very clear example of the sort of dual application of prophetic scripture we have been discussing since the beginning of this series. Through the use of the "Day of the Lord paradigm", Joel is very clearly speaking both about the invasion of locusts during his own day (cf. Joel 1:2-4), while at the same time illustrating that invasion through comparison to the beast's invasion for Armageddon. By terming the locust "a nation" in chapter one verse six, Joel has prepared his readers for this more expansive comparison in chapter two wherein the invasion of locusts is deliberately compared to the invasion of the beast's army prior to Armageddon, an event which ends in the "Day of the Lord" proper when Christ returns and destroys the literal armies of antichrist. The comparison is rendered unmistakable when Joel actually describes this "locust" invasion as directly preceding "the Day of the Lord" (framing the passage with that description in both verse one and verse eleven). Through this common prophetic and Holy Spirit inspired device, not only are Joel's contemporaries given a helpful point of comparison for their suffering in judgment, but we too are blessed in being given a precisely parallel representation of the beast's invasion where the speed, shock, and irresistible nature of antichrist's offensive are brought home in a very graphic way. The eschatological significance not only of this and other passages but also of the situation generally cannot have been lost on the Jewish rebels who are

led by religious though non-believing conservatives. It is safe to say that as in the case of other such Jewish rebellions in the past, they are staking their survival on divine intervention, and, specifically, on the return of the Messiah. It is thus more than a little ironic that these religious conservatives will in truth have correctly divined the signs of the times and the prophetic situation, but will have missed the main point of this entire exercise (i.e., the need for faith in Christ), stumbling over the cross of Messiah in order to embrace His crown. But before this campaign is at an end, the futility and pointlessness of all human endeavor apart from accepting the merciful provision of God in the Person of Jesus will be made evident.

(6) "Because this people has rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah and rejoices over Rezin and the son of Remaliah, (7) therefore the Lord is about to bring against them the mighty floodwaters of the River — the king of Assyria with all his pomp. It will overflow all its channels, run over all its banks (8) and sweep on into Judah, swirling over it, passing through it and reaching up to the neck. Its outspread wings will cover the breadth of your land, O Immanuel!" (9) Raise the war cry, you nations, and be shattered! Listen, all you distant lands. Prepare for battle, and be shattered! Prepare for battle, and be shattered! (10) Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted; propose your plan, but it will not stand, for God is with us. Isaiah 8:6-10 NIV

Comment: The word "Shiloah" means "[the] One sent" and is reference to the true Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ (John 3:16; John 3:34; John 17:1-5; John 17:18; John 17:20-22; Romans 8:3; Galatians 4:4-6; Hebrews 3:1; 1 John 4:9-10; cf. Genesis 49:10; Isaiah 8:6; Zechariah 2:9; Zechariah 2:11; Zechariah 4:9; Zechariah 6:15), and the water is a reference to the truth of the gospel that brings rest and salvation (John 3:5; 1 Corinthians 10:4; Revelation 7:17; Revelation 21:6; Revelation 22:1; Revelation 22:17). Isaiah's contemporaries, like the religious conservatives on the brink of Armageddon, were relying on human agency rather than the divine help which only comes to those who are seeking God in the correct way – through His Son Jesus Christ. As a result, the "hired razor from beyond the Euphrates" (Isaiah 7:20) would be employed to destroy the idolatrous northern kingdom and chastise the sinful southern kingdom, not entirely annihilating the latter, but, as the passage above says, sweeping through the land like a flood that reaches all the way up to the neck (i.e, stops only just short of utter devastation). It will be recalled that the Lord did indeed deliver the kingdom of Judah on this occasion and in miraculous fashion as the Angel of the Lord (an appearance of Christ in "Christophany") slew 185,000 Assyrian soldiers encamped before Jerusalem (Isaiah 37:36). Thus we see many parallels in the previous historic situation to the one presently under discussion wherein Immanuel, "God with us" is indeed on the point of returning to rule the world. Just as the northern kingdom was swept away at that time, so on this occasion only Jerusalem and its environs will prove able to provide anything more than token resistance in the face of antichrist's assault, and just as the Lord made a point of delivering Judah in an unanticipated and miraculous way only after she had been thoroughly chastened and only after all human means had utterly failed, so our Lord will return in glory to extirpate the beast's hordes only after the resistance of the rebellion has been broken (cf. Daniel 12:7). The Messianic war cry of the rebels, "God is with us!", that is "Immanuel", will prove to be true indeed, but not for the reasons they suppose, nor will their deliverance come at a time or in the manner they hope. They will first have to experience the shattering of their might, and then will be revealed the sign of "the Son of Man" emblazoned in the heavens for all to see: the Cross of Jesus Christ (Matthew 24:30; cf. Zechariah 12:10; Revelation 1:7).

(9) And He said to me, "Go and say to this people, 'Hear well, but do not comprehend. See well, but do not understand'. (10) Harden the heart of this people, make their ears heavy, and blind their eyes, so that they may not see with their eyes, nor hear with their ears, nor understand with their hearts, nor repent and be healed". (11) Then I said, "Until when, Lord?" And He replied, "Until their cities are devastated without anyone dwelling [there] and their houses [are empty] without any inhabitants, and their land is devastated with appalling destruction. (12) And [until] the Lord removes the inhabitants far away so that the desolation is great in the midst of the land [of Israel].
Isaiah 6:9-12

Comment: This passage, along with many others, firmly connects the resistance of the inhabitants of the land of Israel to this final scourging judgment at antichrist's hand, so that whether the recipients are secular confederates and servants of the beast or conservative religious Jews who have continued to resist the reality of the true Messiah Jesus Christ, the essential reason for the devastating nature of the beast's invasion will be precisely on account of their rejection of God's will for them (see also especially Isaiah 3:1-26, Isaiah 4:1; Isaiah 5:8-30; Isaiah 17:4-14; Isaiah 33:7-9; Isaiah 51:17-20; Isaiah 64:9-12, prophetic descriptions of the dire state of affairs in Israel at this time and the underlying reason for it).

(5) "Announce in Judah and proclaim in Jerusalem and say: 'Sound the trumpet throughout the land!' Cry aloud and say: 'Gather together! Let us flee to the fortified cities!' (6) Raise the signal to go to Zion! Flee for safety without delay! For I am bringing disaster from the north, even terrible destruction." (7) A lion has come out of his lair (i.e., the beast); a destroyer of nations has set out (i.e., antichrist). He has left his place to lay waste your land. Your towns will lie in ruins without inhabitant. Jeremiah 4:5-7 NIV

(11) At that time this people and Jerusalem will be told, "A scorching wind from the barren heights in the desert blows toward my people, but not to winnow or cleanse; (12) a wind too strong for that comes from me. Now I pronounce my judgments against them." (13) Look! He advances like the clouds, his chariots come like a whirlwind, his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us! We are ruined! Jeremiah 4:11-13 NIV

(15) A voice is announcing from Dan, proclaiming disaster from the hills of Ephraim. (16) "Tell this to the nations, proclaim it to Jerusalem: 'A besieging army is coming from a distant land, raising a war cry against the cities of Judah. (17) They surround her like men guarding a field, because she has rebelled against me,'" declares the Lord. Jeremiah 4:15-17 NIV

(29) At the sound of horsemen and archers every town takes to flight. Some go into the thickets; some climb up among the rocks. All the towns are deserted; no one lives in them. Jeremiah 4:29 NIV

Comment: These excerpts from Jeremiah 44:1-31 speak about the contemporary situation of Nebuchadnezzar's imminent invasion of Israel during the 6th century B.C., but also have the same prophetic application we have been noticing throughout. The attribution of the attack to "a lion" and "a destroyer of nations" is a clear reference to the beast, and the message that the judgment about to be leveled at his hands has a divine origin is impossible to overlook. The swiftness of the assault and stunning nature of the devastation it will wreak are also very clear from the quotes above and from the rest of Jeremiah chapter four as well. Finally, these passages also illustrate

the last ditch strategy of the rebels, namely, retreat to the most inaccessible and highly fortified areas within the land of Israel, and, preeminently, to Jerusalem, the one place most worth fighting for to the end, and the one place where divine deliverance may best be expected. The rapid narrowing in of the campaign to the network of valleys surrounding Jerusalem and leading down to the coast is especially obvious in Isaiah chapter 22 where the frantic efforts to fortify the capital in the face of the northern invasion are recounted.

(1) An oracle concerning the Valley of Vision: What troubles you now, that you have all gone up on the roofs, (2) O town full of commotion, O city of tumult and revelry? Your slain were not killed by the sword, nor did they die in battle. (3) All your leaders have fled together; they have been captured without using the bow. All you who were caught were taken prisoner together, having fled while the enemy was still far away. (4) Therefore I said, "Turn away from me; let me weep bitterly. Do not try to console me over the destruction of my people." (5) The Lord, the Lord Almighty, has a day of tumult and trampling and terror in the Valley of Vision, a day of battering down walls and of crying out to the mountains. (6) Elam takes up the quiver, with her charioteers and horses; Kir uncovers the shield. (7) Your choicest valleys are full of chariots, and horsemen are posted at the city gates; (8) the defenses of Judah are stripped away. And you looked in that day to the weapons in the Palace of the Forest; (9) you saw that the City of David had many breaches in its defenses; you stored up water in the Lower Pool. (10) You counted the buildings in Jerusalem and tore down houses to strengthen the wall. (11) You built a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the Old Pool, but you did not look to the One who made it, or have regard for the One who planned it long ago. Isaiah 22:1-11 NIV

All of the factors discussed above are evident here, the rapidity of the oncoming disaster, the early shift of focus for the defense exclusively to Jerusalem, and the stop-gap measures taken to ward off the coming assault. And even in the face of the overwhelming force swiftly arrayed in battle line before the city and the irresistible nature of their approach, still we see a stubborn refusal to understand that this judgment is from the Lord and is the result of the rejection of His true Messiah.

3. The Siege Begins: But now marshal your [own] troops O city of troops [marshaled against you]. For they have laid siege to us. Micah 5:1 a

Then [upon his return to Israel] he (i.e., antichrist) will pitch the tents of his [royal] pavilion between the seas (i.e., the Mediterranean and the Dead seas) near the mountain of the beauty of holiness (i.e., the temple mount in Jerusalem). But [in spite of this (i.e., his hopes for success in the battle of Armageddon)] he will come to his end, and no one will aid him [then]. Daniel 11:45

(1) Woe to you, Ariel, Ariel, the city where David encamped (i.e., Jerusalem)! Add year to year, let your festivals run their course, (2) but I will besiege Ariel so that there will be mourning and lamentation, and she will become to Me like an "Ariel" (lit., "God's [sacrificial] altar"). (3) For I will beleaguer you round about with palisades, and surround you with siege works. (4) You will be brought low and speak from the ground, and from the dust your speech will be humbled. Your voice will come ghost-like from the earth, and your speech will come muttering from the dust. (5) But the multitude of your enemies will become like pulverized powder, even like chaff sweeping away [on the wind] that multitude of ruthless [enemies]. And it will come to pass in an instant that (6) you will experience visitation from the Lord of Hosts [Himself], with thunder and quaking [of the

earth] and a loud voice, with tempest and whirlwind and devouring flames of fire. (7) And the hordes of the nations mustering against Ariel will become like [just] a dream in the visions of the night, even all those who camp against her and her fortress and besiege her. (8) And it will be as when a hungry man dreams he is eating, but when he awakes his appetite remains unfulfilled, or as when a thirsty man dreams he is drinking, but when he awakes his thirst remains. This is how it will be for the multitude of all the nations who are going to marshal themselves against Mount Zion. Isaiah 29:1-8

These passages, while presaging the beast's defeat in the soon to ensue battle of Armageddon, show antichrist hemming in the resistance in preparation for a grand assault on Jerusalem. At His return, our Lord will breathe courage and might into the defense (Isaiah 28:5-6; Obadiah 1:18; Micah 4:11-13; Micah 5:5-9; Zechariah 9:13-16; Zechariah 10:3-7). At this moment, however, as the dire nature of their predicament sinks in, the defenders have begun to realize the complete hopelessness of their cause absent a miraculous divine intervention, a situation producing mixed emotions and pleas for help amidst expressions of despair (cf. Psalms 60:1-12): The harvest is over, the summer has past (i.e., time-frame nearing the Day of Atonement), but [still] we have not been delivered! Jeremiah 8:20

(9) Proclaim this among the nations! Prepare a holy war! Rouse [all] the mighty men! Let all the men of war come near [and] come up [to Jerusalem]. (10) Beat your ploughshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears! Let [even] the feeble man say "I [too] am a mighty man (i.e., fit for service)!" (11) Hurry and come from every direction that you may be assembled there! And Thou, O Lord, Do Thou [likewise] bring down Thy [own] warriors [there to Jerusalem]. Joel 3:9-11

(5) For this One (i.e., the Messiah) will be our peace. When Ashur (i.e., a type of antichrist's world coalition) comes against our land, and when he tramples upon our fortifications, we will appoint seven generals (lit., "shepherds"; cf.) against him, even eight rulers of men (i.e., the seven and the supreme civil commander represented by Shebna in Is.22:20-25). (6) And Ashur will ravage the land with the sword, even [the people of] Nimrod right up to the very entrances [to Jerusalem]. Micah 5:5-6 a For I will assemble all the nations to Jerusalem for war, and the city will be captured, and its houses will be plundered, and its women will be ravished, and half the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. Zechariah 14:2

(6) And I asked the man (i.e., angel) clothed in linen [suspended] above the waters of the Euphrates how long [it would be] until the fulfillment of these marvelous things. (7) And I heard the man (i.e., angel) clothed in linen [suspended] above the waters of the Euphrates; for he lifted his hand and his left hand to heaven and swore by the One who lives forever that it would be a time, times, and a half (i.e., the three and a half years of the Great Tribulation), and that when [they] (i.e., the beast's forces) had finished shattering the power of the holy people, all these things would come to an end. Daniel 12:6-7 As the last two passages in particular demonstrate, all resistance will prove vain, for it has not been of God. The Lord will allow the "power of the holy people" to be shattered, and Jerusalem to be captured and on the point of going completely into exile – and then He will arise to deliver His people.

D. Signs of the Second Advent

It is only during the last hours before our Lord's return to earth that the final indisputable signs of His Second Advent will occur, namely, the supernatural darkness of that unique day, along with the cataclysmic heavenly and earthly events which accompany it (cf. Luke 21:25-31).

(6) Howl, for the Day of the Lord is near, all destroying from the Almighty. (7) Therefore will every hand hang slack and every human heart melt, and they will be dismayed. (8) Convulsions and pain will seize them, and they will writhe like a woman about to give birth. They will look at each other in astonishment, their faces ablaze. (9) Behold, the Day of the Lord is coming, a mighty day of anger and intense wrath, to make the earth desolate and remove her sinners from upon her. (10) For the stars of heaven and the constellations will not flash forth their light. The sun will grow dark on its course and the moon will not pour out its light. (11) Then will I punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity. I will bring an end to the arrogance of the proud and bring down the haughtiness of the ruthless. (12) I will make men more rare than gold, and mankind than the choice bullion of Ophir. (13) Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will quake from its place on account of the anger of the Lord and on the day of His fierce wrath. Isaiah 13:6-13

(6) This is what the Lord Almighty says: "In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. (7) I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory," says the Lord Almighty. Haggai 2:6-7 NIV (cf. Haggai 2:21-22)

Immediately preceding the glorious Second Advent of our Lord which will rend the darkness with brilliant light, these will be the unmistakable signs of His coming: seismic disruption on the earth below, catastrophic turmoil in the heavens above, and all enshrouded in supernatural darkness (cf. Isaiah 2:10; Isaiah 2:19-21; Isaiah 5:30; Isaiah 24:1-6; Isaiah 24:17-20; Jeremiah 4:23; Jeremiah 25:32; Jeremiah 30:7; Ezekiel 38:18-19; Hosea 10:8; Amos 5:18-20; Amos 8:9 [at noon]; Malachi 3:2; Matthew 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11; Hebrews 12:26; 2 Peter 3:7-13; cf. Ezekiel 32:7):

You will experience visitation (i.e., the judgment of Armageddon) from the Lord of Hosts [Himself], with thunder and quaking [of the earth] and a loud voice, with tempest and whirlwind and devouring flames of fire. Isaiah 29:6

(2) The Lord is angry with the nations; His wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them, He will give them over to slaughter. (3) Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will send up a stench; the mountains will be soaked with their blood. (4) All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree. Isaiah 34:2-4 NIV

(1) Blow a trumpet in Zion, and raise the alarm on My holy mountain. All the inhabitants of the earth are distressed, because the Day of the Lord is coming, because it is near at hand. (2) A day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and deep gloom. Joel 2:1-2 a

(30) For I will display wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. (31) The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the Day of the Lord, that great and terrible [day]. (32) And it will come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance as the Lord has said, even among the survivors whom the Lord calls. Joel 2:30-32

(12) Let the nations be roused [from their places], and let them come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat (i.e., the valley of "the Lord will judge"). For there I will sit in judgment over all the nations on every side. (13) Send forth the sickle for the harvest is ripe! Come down into the winepress for it is full and the vats overflow. For great is their wickedness. (14) Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of doom! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of doom. (15) The sun and moon will darken, and the stars will gather up their light. (16) Then the Lord will roar from Zion, and from Jerusalem He will let sound His voice, and the heavens and the earth will quake. Joel 3:12-16

(18) Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord! Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light. (19) It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him. (20) Will not the day of the Lord be darkness, not light – pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness? Amos 5:18-20 NIV

(14) The great Day of the Lord is near, very near and coming quickly. The sound of the Day of the Lord will be one of warriors roaring bitterly. (15) That day will be a day of blackness, a day of constraint and pressure, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and deep gloom, (16) a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the high corner-towers. (17) For I shall bring distress upon mankind, and they will walk about like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord. And their blood will be poured out like dust, and their innards like excrement. (18) Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the anger of the Lord. And all the earth will be devoured by the fire of His jealousy. For He will bring all the inhabitants of the earth to a complete, yes, a terrifying end. Zephaniah 1:14-18 And I saw when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the sixth seal, a great earthquake occurred, and the sun became black like hairy sackcloth, and the moon became entirely like blood [in appearance], and the stars of heaven fell to the earth like a fig tree casting its fruit when shaken by a strong wind, and the heaven retreated like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and hill was moved from its place. And all the kings of the earth and the prominent men and the generals and the wealthy and the powerful and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and the rocks of the mountains. And [thus] they say to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of the One who sits upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, because the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand [before them]?" Revelation 6:12-17

Thus the last day of the Tribulation which is also the beginning of the Day of the Lord proper, the day of Jesus' return, will be a unique day, a day which begins with darkness, but which ends with light. This supernatural darkness which gives way to equally miraculous light is thus not only the unmistakable sign of the 2nd Advent, but a powerful metaphor for the return of God's rule on earth in the person of the Messiah, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as the darkness of the world now become complete gives way to the light of Him who is the Light of the world, the bright Morning Star (2 Peter 1:19; Revelation 2:28; Revelation 22:16). The moon will shine like the sun, and the sunlight will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven full days, when the Lord binds up the bruises of his people and heals the wounds he inflicted. Isaiah 30:26 NIV For behold, the darkness – it will cover the earth, even a deep gloom its peoples. But the Lord will rise over you, and His glory will appear above you. Isaiah 60:2

(6) For it will come to pass that on that day there will be no light. [The light of the] heavenly bodies will be withheld (lit., "curdled"). (7) For it will be a unique day, one which is known [only] to the Lord, neither day nor night, and it will come to pass at evening time that there will be light. Zechariah 14:6-7 For in His day, the Son of Man will be just as lightning which, when it flashes, lights up the earth from one horizon to the other. Luke 17:24 E. The Resurrection 1. The Interim Body

Since the death of the first human beings after mankind's expulsion from the garden of Eden, death has not meant oblivion or even a "bodiless" state. In between physical life and the resurrection, everyone has had and continues to have what may be termed an "interim" body upon departure from this life. For believers, this "interim state", while far inferior to the resurrection to come, is nonetheless far superior to the difficult life we are leading now in these corrupt and temporary physical bodies.

Contrary to the false doctrine of "soul sleep", those who die in the Lord are not waiting for the resurrection in what amounts to a coma, oblivious to all events (compare our Lord's interim state in Hades for the three days prior to His resurrection: 1 Peter 3:18-19; cf. other instances of the conscious departed: 1 Samuel 28:11-19; John 8:56; Luke 16:19-31; Revelation 6:9-11; Revelation 7:9-17). After all, why would Paul (and others) be so anxious to "be with the Lord", if it only meant that they would be "asleep" until some far distant future time (Php 1:23)? Instead, departed believers constitute the "cloud of witnesses" observing from heaven the ineluctable advance of the Plan of God and our progress in it here on earth (Hebrews 12:1; cf. John 8:56; Revelation 6:10). The following passages make it clear that upon, departing from this body of sin, believers receive a temporary "tent" which, while superior to this present flesh in every way and devoid of sin is nevertheless not to be compared to the eternal home for our spirits which we shall receive at the resurrection (please note that many of the most important English versions deliberately alter the Greek text of the italicized phrase in the first passage cited, 2 Corinthians 5:3, although there is no ancient textual support for this whatsoever [e.g., NASB, NIV, RSV]): For we know that if our earthly tent-dwelling (i.e., our physical body) be struck, we have an abode [that comes] from God, a dwelling made without human agency, eternal in the heavens. For indeed we do groan in this one, desiring to put on our habitation which comes from heaven. And even if we do put off this present one, we will not be found naked (i.e., our spirits will not be "body-less" at death because we shall receive an interim body; cf. Psalms 141:8). 2 Corinthians 5:1-3 And when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the fifth seal, I saw below the altar the living persons who had been slain because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained. And they cried out with a loud voice, saying "How long, O Master, holy and true, will you [wait and] not render judgment and vindication for our blood upon those who dwell on the earth?" And a white robe was given to each one of them that they might rest yet a little while longer until their brothers who were destined to be killed in the same fashion should also fulfill [their course]. Revelation 6:9-11 And one of the elders who was speaking with me replied, "These people dressed in white robes – who are they and where have they come from?" And I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who are about to come forth from the Great Tribulation. And they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Revelation 7:13-14

Other passages of scripture support this truth as well, such as the brief interview of the departed Samuel by Saul (1 Samuel 28:13-19), and the appearance of Moses and Elijah at the mount of

transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36). Neither of these appearances would be possible if the dead in Christ were somehow "asleep", or if they were disembodied spirits without interim bodies. Of particular interest in this regard is the parable of Abraham's bosom (Luke 16:19-31), wherein Jesus gives us rich detail of the interim state and abode as it was before our Lord's ascension. Lazarus, the rich man, and Abraham are all recognizable, and (aside from their presence in eternity), are largely indistinguishable from the living. All this is perfectly understandable when we consider that we are creatures of both a material and an immaterial nature (i.e., body and spirit), for that is the way God made us, each and every one (cf. Genesis 2:7). Therefore, God will not leave us in any other condition than He always meant us to be, possessing both a body and a spirit (and that is even true of those who reject His will for their lives: cf. Daniel 12:2; Luke 16:19-31; Revelation 20:11-15).

While what we can know about our interim status in eternity is limited to such detail as we are able to glean from scripture, it would thus be a great mistake to imagine that our person or our essential human form or functioning will be radically altered after departing this earth (except for the good in the case of believers). For example, it is clear that while we occupy the interim body we shall be visible as the persons we have always been (Revelation 6:9), capable of speaking (Revelation 6:10), of wearing clothing (Revelation 6:11), of worshiping God (Revelation 7:9-10), and of experiencing all the joy of communion and fellowship with Him and with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Revelation 7:15-17). This joy is impossible for us to comprehend at present, but from the time of our transfer to the third heaven (probably, as in the case of Abraham's Bosom, conveyed there by angels: cf. Luke 16:22), there shall be no more unhappiness of any kind, only the bliss of eternity in the presence of the Lord (Revelation 7:15-17; Revelation 21:4). Thus we can expect both this interim state (and our ultimate resurrection state) to be better to an unknowable degree than what we are now experiencing without making us fundamentally different individuals (apart from the welcome absence of sin).

2. Paradise before the Cross: In anticipation of our Lord's sacrifice (which was acceptable to the Father in every way), the Father had mercifully delayed judgment upon sin until the time when He gave His own Son to be a means of propitiating all sin for those who put their faith in Him (Romans 3:25-26; 2 Corinthians 5:19; cf. Acts 14:16; Acts 17:30). This salvation – forgiveness of sin and provision of eternal life – extends not only to all who have trusted in Jesus since the cross, but also to all those who sought forgiveness and eternal life from God before the cross, trusting in His promises and in His promised One to come so clearly portrayed in the tabernacle and all its rites, so clearly foreshadowed and prophesied throughout the Bible (e.g., Genesis 3:15; Genesis 3:21; Genesis 4:4; Psalms 22:1-31; Isaiah 52:1-15, Isaiah 53:1-12; Luke 24:25-27). Because the way into the presence of the Father was not opened until Jesus' sacrifice and ascension to Him, the righteous who died before these events (which constitute "the conjunction of the ages": Hebrews 9:26) were taken after death to an interim "paradise" below the earth (also known as "Abraham's bosom": Luke 16:19-31). This paradise was a place of blessing to be sure, but was still separated from the presence of the Father by the veil of the heavens until the fulfillment of the Messiah's mission. This is the "hell" to which our Lord descended after His death on the cross before His resurrection (1 Peter 3:19; cf. Ephesians 4:9-10 with Ezekiel 26:20-21; Matthew 11:23). Therefore this region of "hell" was not a place of torments (although part of Hades was and still is reserved for that function), but rather, in the case of all those who died in the Lord from Abel until the

resurrection, it was a place of rest and repose in which to await the opening of the way into the heavenly inner sanctum through the blood of Christ. It is to this interim paradise that Jesus refers when on the cross He tells the believing thief "today you will be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43; cf. Luke 16:19-31).

3. The Third Heaven after the Cross:

Before our Lord's ascension into the presence of the Father following His resurrection, no human being had ever entered the third heaven (John 3:13). All this changed when Jesus "split the veil" of heaven and entered into the presence of the Father on the basis of His saving work on the cross, then took His seat at the Father's side until the time when He should return to the world to establish His kingdom (Psalms 110:1; Hebrews 1:1-3). Our Lord's ascension through the heavenly veil and session in the heavenly temple are clearly portrayed in the symbolism of the tabernacle. In the tabernacle (and in the later temple) there are two spaces, commonly referred to as the holy place and the holy of holies respectively. The holy place, the outer space and the larger of the two rooms, contained the table of the bread of presence, the altar of incense, and the golden candlestick, and was representative of the fellowship between God and sanctified believers in paradise. From before the creation of man, to Eden, to paradise below the earth, to the present third heaven, to eternal New Jerusalem, although the location of "paradise" has been variable, the most fundamental aspect of it has always been the same: it is the place where God's creatures enjoy untrammelled fellowship with Him. At the present, ever since our Lord's crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, His passage "through the heavens" into the heavenly Holy of Holies, "paradise" has meant the third heaven, the heavenly temple and dwelling-place of God the Father. Christ's ascension into heaven "split the veil" of the heavens, rending the barrier of separation between man and God through His blood, opening the way of "access" to the Father for all who believe and follow His Son (cf. Ephesians 2:18; Ephesians 3:12). For Jesus Christ is the only entrance, the only way into heaven (Matthew 7:13-14; Luke 13:24-25; John 10:7-9; John 14:6; cf. Revelation 3:7-8; Revelation 19:11), and so He is in a very literal sense our "leader" into the heavenly holy of holies (our archechos: Acts 3:15; Acts 5:31; Hebrews 2:10; Hebrews 12:2). That is why at Jesus' death, the moment when He had completed His victorious life and sacrifice perfectly in every way, the Father caused the temple's literal veil to be split open, graphically demonstrating – for any and all who would not refuse to see it – the reality of His provision of salvation symbolically portrayed in the temple which speaks entirely of Jesus' work: with the cross an accomplished fact, man can now enter into the very presence of God – but only on the basis of our Lord's sacrificial death (compare Matthew 27:51 with Hebrews 10:19-20). For Christ's work removed the veil-barrier of enmity and estrangement (erected by man through the sin of our first parents) making possible our reconciliation to the Father, so that we may now stand in His presence through the blood of Christ (Romans 5:10-21; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Ephesians 2:14-18; Colossians 1:19-22).

Since our Lord's resurrection from the dead, ascension to the third heaven, and session at the right hand of the Father, there is now nothing to hinder departed believers from entering into the presence of the Father along the "newly opened and living way" that Jesus has made for us into His presence (see especially John 14:2-3; cf. John 17:24; Hebrews 1:3; Hebrews 4:14; Hebrews 6:19-20; Hebrews 8:1-5; Hebrews 9:11-12):

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence in this access of ours into the [heavenly] holy of holies by the blood of Jesus, an entryway, so to speak, through the veil (which is His flesh), an entrance which is new and alive and which He has consecrated, and since we have [this] great high priest over the household of God, let us pray with a truthful heart in complete faith, our hearts sprinkled [clean] of [any] bad conscience and our bodies washed with pure water [of the Word (cf. Ephesians 5:26)]. Hebrews 10:19-22 This tangible reality of believers liberated from the necessity of occupying a temporary abode (i.e., the underground paradise of sheol) and free to anticipate their destined home with God in heaven after death was promised by our Lord (John 14:1-6; cf. John 12:26; John 17:24), and is clearly visible in the biblical descriptions of believers now actually in the presence of the Father and the Lamb (2 Corinthians 5:8; 2 Corinthians 12:1-6; Php 1:23; Hebrews 12:22-23; cf. Revelation 6:9; Revelation 7:9-17). Moreover, it is also clear from a number of passages that our Lord, when He made His actual as well as highly symbolic journey through the heavens and into the Father's presence, Jesus led "captivity captive" (Ephesians 4:8; cf. Psalms 68:18), freeing from the subterranean paradise known as "Abraham's bosom" all the faithful who had previously died (Luke 23:43; cf. Psalms 146:7 b; Isaiah 14:17 b; Isaiah 42:7; Isaiah 49:9; Psalms 61:1; Luke 16:19-31), and taking them in His train up to the third heaven (cf. Psalms 68:24-27; John 14:2-3; John 17:24; Colossians 2:15; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Revelation 1:18). Since the veil of the heavenly temple of God (i.e., "the third heaven", the "antitype" or true location represented by the Holy of Holies in the earthly tabernacle) has now been split open by Christ's victory, there is no further distinction in heaven between the Holy Place (representing the previous subterranean compartment of sheol, "Abraham's bosom") and the Holy of Holies, with saved, departed humanity now resident in the presence of the Lamb and of the Father. For it is into this genuine "Holy of Holies" in heaven above that Christ entered when He ascended, along with all those who had previously died in the Lord and had previously been awaiting this momentous event in the paradise below: For Christ did not enter into a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one. Rather, He entered into heaven itself, so as to present Himself before God [the Father] on our behalf. Hebrews 9:24 4. The Resurrection of the Lamb's Bride

(29) Immediately following the tribulation of those days, the sun will grow dark and the moon will not give out its light, and the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (30) And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven. And then all the tribes of the earth will mourn and will see the Son of Man coming in command of the clouds of heaven (i.e., the heavenly hosts) with power and much glory. (31) And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet, and He will gather together His elect from the four winds from one end of the heavens to the other (i.e., this is not to "help" us but to marshal us – we are already flying to meet those just resurrected). (32) Learn this parable from the fig tree. When its branches become supple and its leaves sprout, you recognize that the summer is close. (33) In the very same way when you behold all these things (i.e., the events of Matthew 24:1-31), recognize that [My return] is right at the door. Matthew 24:29-33 (Mark 13:24-27)

Just as dawn is preceded by the darkest part of the night, so it will be at the end of the present age when our victorious Lord returns and turns our darkness into light (cf. Numbers 24:17; Isaiah 9:2; Isaiah 60:1; Isaiah 60:19; Matthew 2:2; Matthew 2:9-10; John 1:4-5; John 8:12; 2 Peter 1:19; Revelation 2:28; Revelation 21:23; Revelation 22:16). The wonder of the Second Advent return of that One truly New Person, our resurrected Lord, will seem all the more wonderful in contrast to

the pain of the Tribulation that preceded it. And the brilliance of the glory of His return will seem all the more brilliant in contrast to the darkness of the supernatural night that preceded it. This will be all the more so true for His Bride, the Church, of which we who believe are all a part. For on that glorious day of days, those of us who are still "in the body" will be resurrected while we yet live, and lifted up in our new bodies to join the Lord at His return in company with all who have gone before us. As Paul tells us in 1st Corinthians, the resurrection takes place in three echelons: 1) our Lord Jesus Christ, 2) the Church (the Bride), and 3) all who believe after Jesus' return (the Friends of the Bride).

(23) But each [will be resurrected] in his own echelon. Christ [is the] first-fruits. Next [will be] those belonging to Christ at His coming (i.e., the 2nd Advent). (24) Then the end, when He will hand the Kingdom over to the Father, after He has brought an end to all rule, all power, and all authority. (25) For He must rule until He has placed all His enemies under His feet – (26) and death is the final enemy to be done away with. 1 Corinthians 15:23-26 The resurrection of Jesus Christ Himself, the Head of the Body, constitutes the initial echelon of the resurrection. And as the Head, our Lord rules two further, subordinate echelons. The first of these is the Church, that is, all believers who have ever lived from Adam and Eve to the last person to accept Christ before His return when the resurrection of the Bride begins. The uniting of Christ with His Church in resurrection is the "wedding" that finally binds us together forever with our Husband Jesus Christ in full experiential reality (cf. Matthew 9:15; Matthew 25:1-13; Mark 2:19; Luke 5:34; John 3:29; 2 Corinthians 11:2-3; Ephesians 1:22-23; Ephesians 5:22-23; Revelation 19:6-8; Revelation 21:2-4; Revelation 21:9 ff.; Revelation 22:17). Although we are His here and now in a positional way, on that greatest of days we shall be His irreversibly and unconditionally forevermore, "and thus shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). For only when we are resurrected do we become His Bride in this official and permanent way. This wedding of the entire Church to Christ, described in Revelation 19:6-8, is a preliminary event which immediately precedes our Lord's taking up His rightful rule over the earth in the wake of His victory at Armageddon. The final echelon of the resurrection will occur at the end of the Millennium, just prior to the last judgment, the destruction of the present heavens and earth, and the creation of the new heavens and the new earth. This final group to be resurrected we call "the Friends of the Bride" in accordance with what the angel tells John at Revelation 19:9 : "Happy are those who have been called to the wedding of the Lamb" (cf. the "virgin companions" of the Messiah's Bride in Psalms 45:14, a clearly Messianic victory Psalm). Revelation 19:9 expresses the invitation to the great banquet in the kingdom given to all who believe after Christ's return (Matthew 8:11; Matthew 22:1-14; Matthew 25:1-13; Luke 13:29; cf. Isaiah 25:6-9), a group which at the time will largely be composed of repentant and now believing Jews. At the end of human history, the number of believers in each of the two subordinate echelons of the resurrection, that is, the Church and the Millennial Believers, will be precisely equal, and will in turn collectively be precisely equal to the number of elect angels. The final fulfillment of both the Church at Jesus' return and the complement of Millennial believers at the end of human history will thus leave the devil and his fallen angels not only effectively replaced, but superabundantly and marvelously so (in a ratio of two to one – replaced directly by the Church one-for-one, complemented by the Friends of Bride in equal numbers). It will be at that point at the end of history, at the point of the defeat of all hostile human and angelic opposition (cf. Revelation 20:7-10) at the end of the present creation and at the beginning of the new, eternal one, that death itself, the last enemy (cf. Psalms 110:1), will be

removed from the scene once and for all, as we and our fellow servants of the Lord live an indescribably blessed eternal life with Jesus ever after and forevermore.

(15) For we tell you this by the Lord's own Word, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord (i.e., the Second Advent which brings the Great Tribulation to a close) will not precede those who have fallen asleep. (16) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command, with the archangel's blast on the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first (in resurrection), (17) then we who are alive and remain will be snatched up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and in this way we shall always be with the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 In the above passage we see the essentials of the resurrection at Christ's return. First, our Lord returns from the third heaven where He is presently seated at the Father's right hand "until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet" (Psalms 110:1; cf. Acts 2:35; Hebrews 1:13; Hebrews 10:13). Glowing with refulgent light brighter than the sun (as befits the Light of the world; cf. Acts 26:13), He will split the supernatural darkness which has enveloped the world and in the heavens above will be visible to everyone on the earth (Revelation 1:7; cf. Matthew 24:30). It is in that instant that Jesus will give the command to rise (cf. John 11:43), while the archangel at His side blows assembly in response (cf. Matthew 24:31). Then all those believers who have to that point passed from life will rise from the places where they were laid to rest, the dust of their former bodies being transformed into their eternal forms in the manner of the Son of Man Himself (Php 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2), while all believers still alive on earth will follow them in a living resurrection, transformed into their eternal state without ever experiencing physical death, a significant blessing experienced only by those who have had to endure the Tribulation (while unbelievers are "left behind": Matthew 24:36-41; Luke 17:34-35). As each group rises in resurrection, either through the uniting of their departed spirits with their new eternal bodies or, in the case of those still alive, through the transformation of their bodies while their spirits still indwell this present flesh, we will all be conducted to the assembly area above the earth (cf. Matthew 24:31), where our Lord and the rest of His heavenly legions of elect angels (i.e., those not involved in the process of mustering the newly resurrected believers; cf. Mark 13:26) are arrayed in anticipation of initiating the battle of Armageddon once His entire host is complete (Daniel 7:13; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 17:14; cf. Luke 2:13; Matthew 16:27; Matthew 25:1-13):

First, Jesus returns and appears with His angelic legions above the earth, visible to the whole world:

Immediately following the tribulation of those days, the sun will grow dark and the moon will not give out its light, and the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven. And then all the tribes of the earth will mourn and will see the Son of Man coming in command of the clouds (i.e., the angelic hosts) of heaven with power and much glory. Matthew 24:29-30

"But I say to you, from now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and [after that] returning in command of the clouds (i.e., the angelic hosts) of heaven." Matthew 26:64 b (cf. Mark 14:62; Luke 21:27)

Behold! He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the peoples of the earth will grieve on account of Him. Revelation 1:7

Then our Lord gives the command for the dead to rise, and for those of us who are His and still in our physical bodies to be resurrected while yet alive as well, and so we shall be resurrected in response to the archangel's trumpet blast (Matthew 24:31; cf. Psalms 50:5):

(50) But I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (i.e., live in eternity with the Lord), nor can corruption inherit incorruption (i.e., we need the resurrection to live forever). (51) Behold, I tell you a mystery: not all of us will fall asleep, but all of us will be changed (52) in [that] moment of time, in the blink of an eye, at the final trumpet blast. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will rise incorruptible, and we too (i.e., believers still alive) will be changed [at that time (i.e., the Lord's Second Advent return)]. 1 Corinthians 15:50-52

(16) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command, with the archangel's blast on the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first (in resurrection), (17) then we who are alive and remain will be snatched up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and in this way we shall always be with the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

Finally, Christ and all His hosts, elect angels and resurrected believers alike, proceed to the final battle of the Tribulation: And His armies (i.e., elect angels and the Church once the mustering of the resurrection is complete) were following Him in the sky [mounted] on white horses, [and] clad in linen white and pure (cf. Revelation 19:8). Revelation 19:14 This is our future hope (2 Corinthians 4:17-18; Colossians 1:27; Colossians 3:1-4; 1 Timothy 1:1), the full realization of our adoption as sons and daughters of the Lord (John 1:12-13; Romans 8:16-17; Galatians 3:21-29, Galatians 4:1-7; Ephesians 3:15; Hebrews 12:4-11; 1 John 3:1-2), the redemption of our physical bodies (Matthew 6:12; Matthew 18:27-32; Matthew 20:28; Luke 1:68; Luke 24:21; Romans 3:24; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 1 Corinthians 6:20; 1 Corinthians 7:23; Galatians 3:13; Galatians 4:4-5; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; Colossians 2:14; 1 Timothy 2:6; Titus 2:14; Hebrews 9:12-15; 1 Peter 1:18; 2 Peter 2:1; Revelation 5:9; Revelation 14:3-4), that is, their transformation into perfect and eternal "resurrection bodies" in which we shall dwell forevermore in the presence of our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as we enjoy sweet fellowship with Him for all eternity in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 2:7; Revelation 2:11; Revelation 2:17; Revelation 2:26-28; Revelation 3:4-5; Revelation 3:12-13; Revelation 3:21; Revelation 21:4; Revelation 21:27; Revelation 22:3-6; Revelation 22:14). While scripture may not tell us everything we should wish to know about the body we shall inhabit forever, we have some very definite information that does tell us two very significant things about them: 1) these eternal "resurrection" bodies will be comparable to the one possessed by our Lord Jesus Christ, and 2) they will be characterized by "glory", that is, the pure resplendent light that is our God. For our [true] citizenship has a heavenly existence, and it is from there that we expectantly await our Savior, Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform this humble body of ours into one that matches His glorious body through His powerful ability to subordinate everything to Himself. Php 3:20-21

Beloved, we are already the children of God, but what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We know that when He is revealed [in glory], we will be like Him, that we shall see Him exactly like He is. 1 John 3:2 As the Son of Man returns to earth, marshaling His hosts in the skies above, His glory will split the supernatural darkness like a flash of the most intense lighting imaginable and illuminate the dark world below. For He is the Light of the world, literally as well as in every other way (John 1:4-9; John 3:19; John 8:12; John 9:5; John 12:46; cf. Revelation 21:11; Revelation

21:23; Revelation 22:5). It is unto this radiant Savior of ours that we shall congregate as we rise up from the earth, flocking to Him like eagles gathering in the sky above.

(26) So if they say to you, "Look! [The Messiah] is [out] in the desert!", don't go out there, or "Look! He is in the inner rooms (i.e., hidden somewhere in town)!", don't believe [it]. (27) For just as lightning flashes in the west and lights up the sky all the way to the east, so it will be with the Son of Man's return. (28). Wherever there is a body, there the eagles will gather. Matthew 24:26-28

(30) "It will be just like this (i.e., the examples of vv.22-29) on the day the Son of Man is revealed. (31) On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. (32) Remember Lot's wife! (33) Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. (34) I tell you, on that night (i.e., just previous to vv.30-33 which represent the dawning of the Day of the Second Advent) two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. (35) Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left." (37) "Where, Lord?" they asked. He replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather." Luke 17:30-37 NIV (cf. Matthew 24:40-41) Here am I, and the children the Lord has given me. Isaiah 8:18 a NIV (cf. Hebrews 2:13)

United now with our Lord Jesus for all time to come (John 12:26; John 14:1-3; John 17:24; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Php 1:23; 1 Thessalonians 4:17), and clothed in our eternal forms, we shall be free from tears and pain and want forever after (Revelation 7:17; Revelation 21:4; cf. Isaiah 25:8; Isaiah 35:10; Isaiah 65:17-19; 1 Corinthians 15:54-58; Hebrews 2:14; Revelation 2:7; Revelation 2:11; Revelation 2:17; Revelation 2:26-28; Revelation 3:4-5; Revelation 3:12-13; Revelation 3:21; Revelation 21:4; Revelation 21:27; Revelation 22:3-6; Revelation 22:14).

"These are the ones who are about to come forth from the Great Tribulation. And they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple. And the One who sits upon the throne will pitch His tabernacle over them. They will neither hunger nor thirst again, nor will the sun beat down upon them nor any burning [heat], because the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and will lead them to fountains of living water (lit., "fountains of waters of life"), and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes". Revelation 7:13-17 This is our blessed future hope, for a critical part of the true good news of Christianity is that we will not cease to exist after death (as atheism claims) or experience some sort of "shadow existence" as many pagan religions claim, but will instead have a tangible real body forever in resurrection, and one that is far better than at present we can have any idea: So now that we have been justified by faith, let us take hold of the peace [we have] with God [the Father] through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have also obtained our access into this grace in which we stand, and let us boast in the hope of the glory of God (i.e., in anticipation of our resurrection). Romans 5:1-2 To all [believers] God desired to make known what wealth there is in this glorious mystery regarding the gentiles, for it is that Christ – your hope of glory – is in you. Colossians 1:27

[W]e who are awaiting the blessed hope, namely the epiphany of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (i.e., when we too will be resurrected in glory when He appears). Titus 2:13 As the passages quoted immediately above make clear, "glory" is the word often used for our blissful eternal state, not as an abstract expression of that blessed future time to come, but on the

contrary the word has been deliberately chosen because it expresses vividly our sharing in God's glorious light in a very real and tangible way after our bodies have been transformed in resurrection.

(17) And if we are God's children, then we are also His heirs, even fellow heirs of Christ – that is if we have indeed suffered with Him so that we might also be glorified together with Him. (18) For I do not consider these present hardships in any way comparable to the glory destined to be revealed for us [at the 2nd Advent]. (19) For all creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God. (20) For the created world is now subject to futility – not of its own choosing, but because of Him who subjected it [as a consequence of Adam's sin] – but not without hope. (21) For [at the 2nd Advent] the created world will be liberated from its enslavement to decay at the glorious liberation of the sons of God (i.e. our resurrection). (22) For we know that the whole creation has been experiencing intense pain and agony right up until this present time. (23) And not only the created world, but we too who have received the Holy Spirit as a foretaste [of the good things to come] agonize within ourselves as we eagerly await our adoption, that is, the redemption of our body (i.e. resurrection). (24) This is the hope with which we were saved. Romans 8:17-24 a The effulgent glory of divine light is an essential trait of our Lord's divinity (Isaiah 40:5; John 12:41) and also of His humanity now that this part of His nature too has been glorified (Matthew 24:30; Matthew 25:31; Mark 8:38; Mark 9:2-8; Mark 13:26; Luke 9:26; Luke 21:27; cf. John 7:39 b). Therefore since our confident hope is to share in this same resurrection glory, we can learn much about our own glorification in resurrection from considering the glory which characterizes His resurrected, eternal human form. For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay every man in his own coin. Matthew 16:27 And [there on the Mount of Transfiguration] He was transformed before them, and His face shone like the sun and His clothing became white like light [itself]. Matthew 17:2

(29) And it came to pass while He was praying that the appearance of His face changed and His clothing [turned] white, flashing forth [like lightning]. (30) And, behold, two men were speaking with Him – and they were Moses and Elijah. (31) These [two] appeared in glory . . . Luke 9:29-31 a And now glorify Me, Father, with your own glory, [that glory] which I had in your presence before the world existed." John 17:5

[Jesus Christ], who appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the [Holy] Spirit, was revealed to angels, was preached among the nations, was believed upon in the world, was taken up in glory. 1 Timothy 3:16

[Jesus] is the shining forth of [the Father's] glory, the precise image of His essence, the One who sustains the universe by His mighty Word. When He had accomplished the cleansing of [our] sins, He took His seat (i.e., beyond the veil) at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Hebrews 1:3 But now we do see Jesus crowned with glory and honor on account of the death He suffered, even He who became "a little lower than the angels" [for a brief span] so that by the grace of God He might taste death on behalf of us all. Hebrews 2:9 But to the degree that you are [truly] participating in Christ's sufferings, be joyful about it, so that at the revelation of His glory, you may also rejoice with great gladness. 1 Peter 4:13

(12) So I turned around to see [the source of] the voice that was speaking to me, and when I had turned around, I saw seven golden lampstands. (13) And in the middle of the lampstands was

what looked like a man, dressed in a long robe with a golden belt tied around His waist. (14) And His head and his hair were as white as wool or as snow, and His eyes were like a fiery flame, (15) and His feet were like white-hot bronze when super-heated in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. (16) And He held seven stars in His right hand, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword. And His face shone like the sun in its glory. Revelation 1:12-16 As part of His Body, the Bride, the Church, glory will characterize our eternal human forms as well. For we shall share the glory, the divine refulgent light of the Son, a characteristic which does much to explain the nature of the eternal life we shall lead with Him forever (1 Corinthians 2:7; 2 Corinthians 3:11; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 5:8-14; Ephesians 5:27; 1 Timothy 1:11; 1 Peter 5:10). For we shall be children of light (Ephesians 5:8) in an eternity where, just as there will be no more death, there will never be darkness again as all evil will have been inexorably and eternally expunged from the New Heavens and the New Earth (Revelation 21:1-27, Revelation 22:1-21; cf. 1 John 1:5): light and life, the glory of our eternal bodies and the eternal life we shall evermore enjoy in them are inseparable. In the holy chambers, from the womb of the dawn, your young [troops] will [come] to you like the dew (i.e., the armies of the newly resurrected). Psalms 110:3 b But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead. Isaiah 26:19 NIV

(2) For many who sleep in the dust will awake, some to eternal life, but the others to shame and eternal separation [from God]. (3) Then those who have insight will shine like the shining forth of the dawn, even those who led the many to righteousness, like stars forever and ever. Daniel 12:2-3

(6) [God], who will give to each person according to his works, (7) to those who by persevering in the good course are seeking glory, honor and immortality, [He will give] eternal life. Romans 2:6-7 (cf. Romans 2:10; Romans 3:23; Romans 15:7)

(29) For those whom He foreknew, He also foreordained to share the likeness of His Son (i.e., to have identical resurrection bodies), so that He might be the Firstborn over many brothers [and sisters]. (30) And those whom He foreordained, these He also called [to salvation], and those whom He called, He also made righteous [through faith in Christ], and those whom He made righteous, these He also glorified (i.e., our resurrection and eternal life has been set fast in the plan of God since before the world was made). Romans 8:29-30

(17) For this present light affliction of ours is working out for us an eternal weight of glory beyond any possible estimation. (18) [Let us] not [then be] having [any] regard for what can be seen, but [instead] for what cannot be seen. For the things which can be seen are ephemeral. But the things which cannot be seen are eternal. 2 Corinthians 4:17-18

(1) Therefore since you have been resurrected [positionally] with Christ, strive for the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (2) Think on the things above, and not the things on the earth. (3) For you are already [positionally] dead [to all that], and your [true] life has been hidden away with Christ in God. (4) When Christ – your [true] life – is revealed [at the 2nd Advent], then you too will be revealed in glory. Colossians 3:1-4 For it is precisely for this purpose (i.e., salvation through the sanctification of the Spirit and faith in the truth; v.13) that He called you through our gospel in order that you might gain lasting possession of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (i.e., the resurrection). 2 Thessalonians 2:14 (cf. Ephesians 1:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:9;

Hebrews 10:39; 1 Peter 2:9) For this reason I endure all things for the sake of the elect, in order that they themselves too may lay hold of the salvation that is in Jesus Christ with eternal glory (i.e., resurrection). 2 Timothy 2:10 For it was fitting for [the Father] to make complete through sufferings Him on whose account all things exist and through whom all things exist, namely, the Captain of their salvation, even Him who has led many sons to glory (i.e., resurrection), [our Lord Jesus Christ]. For the One who sanctifies and those who are sanctified belong to One [Father], and for this reason [Christ] is not ashamed to call them His brothers, as He says: "I will proclaim Your name to My brothers. In the midst of the assembly I shall praise you." and elsewhere, "I [too] shall put My confidence in Him (i.e., the Father)," and elsewhere, "Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me". Hebrews 2:10-13 May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be praised, who has in His great mercy caused us to be reborn to a hope which lives through Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead, and to an inheritance which will never be destroyed, defiled, or dimmed, but which is being guarded in heaven for us, who are ourselves also being kept safe by God's power and our faith in Him to an ultimate deliverance ready to be unveiled at the end of time. Rejoice in this [salvation to come], even though at present it may for a time be your lot to suffer through various trials so that this validation (lit., "assaying") of your faith [which results from your successful passing of these tests] may result in praise, glory and honor for you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. For this [validation process] has a greater benefit [for you] than [is true in the case of] gold, which, while it is also proved by fire, ultimately perishes (e.g., in contrast to the eternal rewards of faith proved genuine through testing). 1 Peter 1:3-7

(1) So I urge the elders among you as a fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, even one who shares [with you] in the glory which is about to be revealed, (2) pastor the flock of God under your charge, overseeing them not out of compulsion but willingly in response to God, not eager for shameful material gain, but out of genuine enthusiasm, (3) not lording it over the charges [entrusted to you], but as genuine examples to your flock. (4) And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will carry off in victory the crown of glory which will never fade. 1 Peter 5:1-4 As can be seen from the passages above, eternal rewards are an important part of the glorification of the resurrection, and indeed eternal rewards are not given out until the resurrection (cf. Hebrews 11:39-40), for it is the resurrection body which will be glorified forever in no small part by these rewards (with which they are indelibly associated: cf. Daniel 12:13). The process of evaluation of the Church known as "the Judgment Seat of Christ" will take place when Jesus has taken His seat as Ruler of the world in Jerusalem and begun His millennial rule (see below, section 8.A.7; cf. Matthew 16:27; Matthew 19:28; Matthew 20:8; Luke 14:14; Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:6-10; Revelation 2:7; Revelation 2:10-11; Revelation 2:17; Revelation 3:5; Revelation 3:11-12; Revelation 2:26-27; Revelation 3:21; Revelation 11:18; Revelation 20:4-6). Nor should it be thought that until that blessed day of resurrection when we see the Lord in His glory and partake of a similar body of eternal glory that we will in any way be disadvantaged. For as we have seen the interim state our departed brothers and sisters in Christ presently enjoy is greater than our earthly state in ways we can only dimly imagine (though it falls short of the glory we shall enjoy forever in resurrection). For we know that if our earthly tent-dwelling (i.e., our physical body) be struck, we have an abode [that comes] from God, a dwelling made without human agency, eternal in the heavens (i.e., the resurrection body). For indeed we do groan in this one, desiring to put on our habitation which comes from heaven. And [even] if we do put off this present one, at any rate, we (i.e., our spirits) will not be found naked (i.e., "body-less"; for we will

enjoy an interim body in the meantime: cf. Luke 16:19-31; Revelation 6:9-10; Revelation 7:9-17). 2 Corinthians 5:1-3 The resurrection body, its nature and its capabilities, consistently described in terms of "glory" as we have seen above, can best be understood from a consideration of the resurrection body of our Lord Jesus Christ (although it is important to keep in mind as we have noted above that in all of His post resurrection, pre-ascension appearances He had not yet been glorified as would soon be the case; compare those appearances with John 7:39; and with Acts 9:1-6; Acts 22:6-11; Acts 26:12-18; Revelation 1:12-16). Rather than being a diminishment of our current bodily state in any way, the resurrection body will constitute an improvement upon our present state of affairs in every way – and to a degree we cannot properly now appreciate. For all its benefits and glory, the resurrection body is still a real and genuine body. In resurrection, Jesus is recognizable as Himself and behaves as Himself with no diminishment of personality in any way (Luke 24:31; John 20:16; John 20:20; John 20:26-28; John 21:12). Christ's transformed body is solid and tangible (Matthew 28:9; Luke 24:39; John 20:17; John 20:27), and capable of the entire range of normal human activities (Matthew 28:10; Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:15; Luke 24:43; John 21:13-15). And even before His ascension and glorification, the resurrection body of our Lord (the model and the pattern for the one we shall receive: Romans 6:5; Php 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2), possessed super-material capabilities without at the same time sacrificing material advantages, being capable of negotiating material space at will (cf. Matthew 28:1-3; Luke 24:31; Luke 24:36; John 20:19; Acts 1:9-10). The most complete description of these specifics is given by the apostle Paul in the book of 1st Corinthians:

(35) Now somebody will no doubt say, "In what manner do the dead rise? And with what sort of body do they come back?" (36) Use a little common sense! When you plant a seed, it doesn't "come back to life" unless the seed itself is first destroyed, does it? (37) And what you put in the ground is not the actual plant which later sprouts, but an "empty shell", so to speak, of the wheat or of whatever you are planting. (38) God then transforms this seed into a plant in accordance with His creative plan, giving each specific seed its own unique structure. (39) [As it is with seeds and plants, the same is true of animate bodies.] For in an analogous way, not all bodies are the same. Obviously, the bodies of men are different from the bodies of cattle, the bodies of birds are different from the bodies of fish, (40) and, just as obviously, bodies capable of dwelling in heaven are different from the bodies we occupy here on earth. Moreover the splendor of our heavenly bodies will transcend that of our earthly ones. (41) [Nor should we imagine that all heavenly bodies will possess the same degree of splendor.] After all, the radiance of the sun and of the moon and of stars is different in each case, and even the stars differ amongst themselves in glory. (42) So it is with the resurrection of the dead. The body sown is corruptible, the one raised incorruptible. (43) The body sown is dishonorable, the one raised glorious. The body sown is weak, the one raised powerful. (44) The body sown is suited to physical life, the one raised to spiritual life. If there is a physical body (and there patently is), then there is also a spiritual one. (45) For as it has been written that "Adam, the first man, became a physical being, possessing life", so Christ, the last Adam, became a spiritual being, bestowing life. (46) However it is not the spiritual body, but the physical body which comes first, and the spiritual body follows. (47) The first man was earthly, being taken from the ground. The second Man is heavenly. (48) And as was the earthly man, so also are we of the earth. And as is the heavenly Man, so also shall we be when we too take on heavenly form. (49) For just as we have born the image of the earthly man, so also shall we bear the image of the heavenly Man. 1 Corinthians 15:35-49 As the verses above make clear, the

"spiritual" or resurrection body is not in any way less real or tangible or capable than the corruptible body we now inhabit. Far from it. We will still be "who we are" in the eternal home we will receive on that great day of days, only then possessing a body that is completely in tune with the life we shall live with God forevermore, capable of appreciating Him and the blessings of the eternal life He has prepared for us and for all who love the appearance of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is our blessed hope. For this we wait in expectation day by day, looking forward to the return of our Lord, the redemption, the adoption, the glorification of our bodies in resurrection, and the rewards and wonders of eternal life in the New Jerusalem in the presence of our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ forever and ever (Matthew 13:30; Matthew 25:1-13; John 5:29; Acts 24:15; Romans 6:5; Romans 6:9; Romans 8:11; Romans 8:23; Romans 8:29; 1 Corinthians 6:12-14; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 2 Thessalonians 2:1).

(1) Rise up! Shine forth! For your Light has arrived, and the glory of the Lord has burst forth upon you. (2) For behold, the darkness – it will cover the earth, even a deep gloom its peoples. But the Lord will rise over you, and His glory will appear above you. (3) Nations will come to His light, and kings to the brilliance of His rising. Isaiah 60:1-3

"For this is My Father's will, for everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him to have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." John 6:40

(25) Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me will live, even if he dies. (26) And everyone who lives and believes in Me will surely not die forevermore." John 11:25-26 F. The Repentance of Israel The process of "mourning" and grieving on the part of all unbelievers on account of their failure to recognize the true Messiah will commence immediately upon His return to the heavens above the earth in blinding light that splits the sky from one horizon to the other, accompanied by the sign of the cross (Matthew 24:27-31). And we may be sure that the rising of the Church in resurrection into our glorious resurrection bodies, with the previously departed being raised up bodily from their graves and with living believers then being transformed before the eyes of all, and with all flying up to meet the Lord in the air, will undoubtedly be an unimaginably astounding sight which will leave the world's unbelievers aghast. At this time many will no doubt turn to the Lord – too late to be part of this echelon of the resurrection, but in time to enjoy the blessings of Jesus' millennial reign as His followers. But as impressive as the resurrection of the Church will be, scripture makes it quite clear that for unbelieving Israel, at any rate, it will be the glorious return of the Messiah Himself that will bring about the end of the "hardness in part" which has characterized the Jewish people since our Lord's first advent (i.e., the "this generation" of which our Lord often spoke: Matthew 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32; cf. Matthew 11:16; Matthew 12:41-42; Matthew 23:36; Mark 8:12; Luke 7:31; Luke 11:30-32; Luke 11:50-51; Luke 17:25).

(25) Brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery (and so think more of yourselves than you should): hardness has come over a part of Israel until the time when the fullness of the gentiles has come in [to the family of God] (i.e., when the Church is completed at the 2nd Advent). (26) And it is in this way (i.e., coming to believe upon witnessing the Messiah's return) that all [true] Israel will be saved just as it is written: The Deliverer will come from Zion. He will expel ungodliness from Jacob. (27) And this will be My covenant with them when I take away their sins. Romans 11:25-27 For He will give them over until the time when she who is about to give birth

gives birth (i.e., the mother of Jesus' humanity, Mary: the First Advent), and the rest of His brothers return to the sons of Israel (i.e., Jewish repentance at the Second Advent). Micah 5:3 This return to the Lord will commence immediately, just as soon as He appears. For He will be visible to the entire world, seen by every earthly eye, prominent at the head of His legions of angels and the now assembled, resurrected Church. Then the reality of their mistake in failing to recognize Jesus as the Christ before this moment of His revelation to the world as the true Messiah and Son of God will cause the entire world "to grieve".

Behold! He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the peoples of the earth will grieve on account of Him. Revelation 1:7 This grief will in many cases be part of a godly repentance in turning to the now revealed Lord Jesus Christ, a phenomenon that will be especially pronounced in Israel. And I will pour out on the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem a Spirit of grace and repentance. For they will look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they will grieve for Him like the grieving for an only son, and they will [weep] bitterly for Him like the bitter [weeping] for a firstborn son. Zechariah 12:10

(4) For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar and without ephod or household idols. (5) Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the Lord and to His goodness in the last days. Hosea 3:4-5 NASB

Moreover, there will be no need for anyone to explain that the glorious Messiah visible to all the world in the heaven above is Jesus Christ our Lord, for His sign, the sign of the cross, will also be emblazoned across the sky, leaving no basis to deny that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and the one and only true Messiah.

(29) Immediately following the tribulation of those days, the sun will grow dark and the moon will not give out its light, and the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (30) And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven. And then all the tribes of the earth will mourn and will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and much glory. Matthew 24:29-30

Then our Lord will respond to the repentant hearts throughout Israel and particularly in besieged Jerusalem. For He will unleash His violent fury against those who dare to touch "the apple of His eye" (Zechariah 2:8; cf. Deuteronomy 32:10).

(12) "Even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. (13) Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. (14) Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave behind a blessing – grain offerings and drink offerings for the Lord your God. (15) Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. (16) Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber. (17) Let the priests, who minister before the Lord, weep between the portico and the altar. Let them say, "Spare your people, Lord. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'" (18) Then the Lord will be jealous for his land and take pity on his people. (19) The Lord will reply to

them: "I am sending you grain, new wine and oil, enough to satisfy you fully; never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations. (20) I will drive the northern army far from you, pushing it into a parched and barren land, with its front columns going into the eastern sea and those in the rear into the western sea. And its stench will go up; its smell will rise." Surely he has done great things. Joel 2:12-20 NIV

(30) I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. (31) The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. (32) And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the survivors whom the Lord calls. Joel 2:30-32 NIV For the Redeemer will come to Zion, even to those in Jacob who turn away from their transgression. Isaiah 59:20 G. The Second Advent and Armageddon 1. Antichrist and his Armies And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war with the One riding on the [white] horse and with His army. Revelation 19:19 In that antichrist is described here as leading "the kings of the earth", we are meant to understand that all the standing armies of the world, now under his power, have been assembled in Israel. Further, this verse makes it quite clear that the true, mad purpose of this assembly is "to make war" with Jesus Christ! Therefore antichrist's immediate purpose of destroying Israel is merely "bait" to bring our Lord to battle. Oh the insanity that arrogance brings! But in this purpose the beast is not only following the behest of his father the devil – he is mimicking Satan's actions is rebelling against God before human history began. The results will be comparable, and equally dramatic and swift at that. The place of this assemblage of the armed forces of the entire world will be, as we have explained above under our treatment of the name "Armageddon", namely, Jerusalem, whose eastern valleys will accommodate the leading elements of antichrist's advanced guard, no doubt composed of his most elite warriors. This will be the schwerpunkt or center of his operational mass at the point of our Lord's return, with the rest of his troops deployed throughout the length and breadth of Israel from north to south and centered around Jerusalem.

(45) Then [upon his return to Israel] he will pitch the tents of his [royal] pavilion between the seas (i.e., the Mediterranean and the Dead seas) near the mountain of the beauty of holiness (i.e., the temple mount in Jerusalem). But [in spite of this (i.e., his hopes for success in the battle of Armageddon)] he will come to his end, and no one will aid him [then]. Daniel 11:45

(1) For behold, in those days and at that time when I restore the captives of Judah and Jerusalem,
(2) I will gather all the nations and bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat (i.e., "the Lord will judge") and will enter into judgment with them there on behalf of My people and My inheritance Israel whom they have scattered among the nations and whose land they apportioned [to others].
(3) They even cast lots for My people and exchanged a boy for a prostitute and sold a girl for the wine they drank. Joel 3:1-3

"Therefore wait for Me," says the Lord, "until the day I rise up for plunder; My determination is to gather the nations to My assembly of kingdoms, to pour on them My indignation, all My fierce anger; all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy." Zephaniah 3:8

"Be silent before me, you islands! Let the nations renew their strength! Let them come forward and speak; let us meet together at the place of judgment." Isaiah 41:1 NIV 2. The Seizure of the Beast

and his False Prophet

(20) And the beast was snatched up and the false prophet along with him, the one who had performed the signs in his presence and had thereby deceived those who had received the mark of the beast, even those who were worshiping his image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with sulfur. Revelation 19:20

Even before the great slaughter of Armageddon proper commences, antichrist along with his false prophet will be removed from the head of their armies, thus decapitating the forces arrayed against Jerusalem at the most critical time (a fact that will only intensify the terror of their last moments on earth). Herein we see very clearly the value of walking with the Lord and the terrible folly of making Him an enemy (cf. Jeremiah 30:16), for on that day the judgment He exacts will be swift and severe upon all those who have chosen to oppose Him (cf. Isaiah 10:22-23; Romans 9:28). The beast, and, for his pivotal role in deceiving the followers of antichrist, the false prophet are immediately "cast alive" into the lake of fire, the final end of all unbelievers and fallen angels (notice that antichrist's abominations are so extreme and unique in the history of the world that no explanation need be given in the verse above for this immediate seizure and disposition). Not only are these two the first to experience the "second death", but they will do so without the formality of the "last judgment". This final adjudication is completely unnecessary in their case since they have proven by their extreme words and actions beyond all doubt or argument to the entire world that they never had the slightest interest in responding to God. Indeed, they have opposed Him and His people to such a unique and unprecedented degree that no additional formal process is required to demonstrate their free will choice of the devil over the Lord. Like the fallen angels, their choice has been confirmed to such an extent that human history (and in the case of the beast and his false prophet, their time and actions in it) constitutes their "trial".

(32) Every stroke the Lord lays on them with his punishing rod will be to the music of tambourines and harps, as he fights them in battle with the blows of his arm. (33) Topheth (i.e., the lake of fire) has long been prepared (cf. Matthew 25:41), it has been made ready for the king (i.e., antichrist). Its fire pit has been made deep and wide, with an abundance of fire and wood; the breath of the Lord like a stream of burning sulfur, sets it ablaze. Isaiah 30:32-33 NIV

Meanwhile, I kept looking on account of the sound of the arrogant words which the horn (i.e., antichrist) was speaking. I kept looking until he was killed and his body destroyed and given over to the burning fire. Daniel 7:11 (cf. Daniel 9:27 b; Daniel 11:45)

(13) You came out to deliver your people, to save your anointed one. You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness, you stripped him from head to foot. Selah (14) With his own spear you pierced his head when his warriors stormed out to scatter us, gloating as though about to devour the wretched who were in hiding. Habakkuk 3:13-14

(8) And then the lawless one (i.e., antichrist) will be revealed, [that same one] whom the Lord Jesus will slay with the breath of His mouth and destroy when He appears at His [glorious] return – (9) [that same lawless one] whose appearance [will come about] through Satan's empowerment [and will be] accompanied by every [sort of] false miracle, both signs and portents, (10) and by every [sort of] unrighteous deception [designed] for those who are perishing, [namely those who will believe these lies] because they did not open themselves up to the love for the truth so as to

be saved. 2 Thessalonians 2:8-10 3. The Battle of Armageddon a. Jesus Christ's Return to Earth on the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:2-7):

(2) For I shall gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against her. The city will be captured, its houses will be sacked, and its women will be ravished. (3) Half of the city will be taken away captive, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. Then the Lord will go forth, and He will fight against those nations as when He fights on a day of battle. Zechariah 14:2-3 At this point we see all the nations of the world already gathered in Israel by antichrist and his false prophet. According to the situation described in these two verses, the battle for Jerusalem has been going on now for some considerable time, at least long enough to transport the world's armies to the middle east and reduce most if not all of the rebellion's strong-points shielding Jerusalem (Isaiah 22:8). Given the seven months between the call to Armageddon and Christ's return, fighting may have been going on at Jerusalem proper for several months by now. The situation at the Messiah's imminent return is dire indeed. Rebel resistance is on the point of collapse, the western half of the city has already been consolidated in the hands of antichrist's troops, and those captured have been harshly used, the women raped (Zechariah 14:2), the young sold into slavery (cf. Joel 3:1-8), and those not killed in the process of the attack now captives of the beast. But now that the situation is at its most desperate, Jesus Christ will come to the rescue of His people (cf. Isaiah 49:24-26 : the captives will be rescued "from the fierce"). It is often the case that our Lord will bring us to the point of complete helplessness before delivering us, precisely to demonstrate His power, mighty to save (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:10). The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, "It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed." Daniel 12:7 NIV

It is precisely at this time of seemingly utter hopelessness that the Lord of hope will return, and, after appearing in the heavens above and gathering His Church to Himself, will swiftly descend at the front of His heavenly army to deliver the remnant of His holy people.

(4) This is what the Lord says to me: "As a lion growls, a great lion over its prey – and though a whole band of shepherds is called together against it, it is not frightened by their shouts or disturbed by their clamor – so the Lord Almighty will come down to do battle on Mount Zion and on its heights. (5) Like birds hovering overhead, the Lord Almighty will shield Jerusalem; he will shield it and deliver it, he will 'pass over' it and will rescue it." Isaiah 31:4-5 NIV For His feet will stand on that day on the Mount of Olives which lies before Jerusalem on the east. Then the Mount of Olives will be split in its midst [into] a very great valley [leading] east and west. For half of the mountain will recede [out of the way] to the north, and half of it to the south. Zechariah 14:4 As the verse above states plainly, before commencing the slaughter of His enemies, our Lord will first rescue the remaining inhabitants of Jerusalem. He will physically land on the eastern heights of the city known as the Mount of Olives which looks down on the temple and Mount Zion. The Mount of Olives is really a long hog-back ridge running roughly north to south and blocking access to and egress from Jerusalem to the east (absent a time-consuming ascent and descent of this ridge). Cleaving it asunder in this miraculous way will occasion a significant earthquake, prophesied by Ezekiel:

(18) This is what will happen in that day: When Gog attacks the land of Israel, my hot anger will be aroused, declares the Sovereign Lord. (19) In my zeal and fiery wrath I declare that at that time there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. (20) The fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, every creature that moves along the ground, and all the people on the face of the earth will tremble at my presence. The mountains will be overturned, the cliffs will crumble and every wall will fall to the ground. Ezekiel 38:18-20 NIV Our Lord's astounding splitting of this obstacle in two will greatly facilitate the escape of the beleaguered occupants and defenders of Jerusalem, giving them much needed respite as He proceeds to resolve the Tribulation's final battle. Herein we shall see a fulfillment of the promise of faith for those who now believe: "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him" (Mark 11:23; cf. Matthew 21:21; 1 Corinthians 13:2). The moving of the Mount of Olives will be an occasion for great rejoicing, anticipating the victory and deliverance which the Messiah is about provide.

(9) You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" (10) See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and his arm (i.e., Jesus Christ) rules for Him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. Isaiah 40:9-10 NIV (cf. Nahum 1:15)

(7) How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (8) Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the Lord returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. (9) Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. (10) The Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God. Isaiah 52:7-10 NIV

Then you will flee by way of the valley of My [two new] mountains, for the valley between the mountains will reach directly over to [you] (i.e., in Jerusalem). Thus you will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uziah king of Judah (i.e., swiftly). And then the Lord my God will enter [the battle], and all His holy ones with Him. Zechariah 14:5 (cf. Luke 17:28-33) The historical earthquake which took place during the days of Uziah king of Judah (ca. 792-740 B.C.), was not accompanied by enemy activity, therefore the direction of the flight of Jerusalem's population was no doubt to the west, down-hill and through the valley approaches to the city, rather than east and up-hill over the Mount of Olives. In this case, with the western approaches occupied by the armies of the beast (which by this time undoubtedly have also flanked the city on the north and the south, east is the only viable direction of retreat, so that this "way of escape" (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:13) opened up by our Lord will be as timely, welcome, and necessary as His opening up of the Red Sea to provide a similar escape from the armies of Pharaoh, who was typological of antichrist.

(6) For it will come to pass on that day that there will be no light. [The light of the] heavenly bodies will be withheld (lit., "curdled"). (7) For it will be a unique day, one which is known [only] to the Lord, neither day nor night, and it will come to pass at evening time that there will be light. Zechariah 14:6-7

These verses harken back by way of explanation to the period before Christ's descent onto the Mount of Olives. Just as the splitting of the mountain to provide deliverance is reminiscent of the Lord's deliverance of Israel from Pharaoh's forces at the Red Sea, so also this picture of supernatural darkness wherein light is miraculously withheld from the enemies of God is a deliberate repetition of the circumstances that obtained before Israel's escape on that former occasion (Joshua 24:7; cf. Exodus 14:19-20; Psalms 105:39).

(2) For behold, the darkness – it will cover the earth, even a deep gloom its peoples. But the Lord will rise over you, and His glory will appear above you. (3) Nations will come to His light, and kings to the brilliance of His rising. Isaiah 60:2-3 b. The Terrifying Signs and wonders:

Coincident with our Lord's glorious, resplendent return and His subsequent descent onto the Mount of Olives, various celestial and terrestrial signs and wonders will further serve to terrify the adversaries of God even as they encourage His people. Heaven and earth will be shaken in a dizzying display of the transcendent power of God, events which are well-documented in the prophetic passages which anticipate the Second Advent.

Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will quake from its place, on account of the anger of the Lord and on the day of His fierce wrath. Isaiah 13:13 (cf. Isaiah 24:17-20; Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:25; Luke 21:25-26)

(6) You will experience visitation (i.e., the judgment of Armageddon) from the Lord of Hosts [Himself], with thunder and quaking [of the earth] and a loud voice, with tempest and whirlwind and devouring flames of fire. (7) And the hordes of the nations mustering against Ariel (i.e., "Jerusalem") will become like [just] a dream in the visions of the night, even all those who camp against her and her fortress and besiege her. Isaiah 29:6-7

(2) The Lord is angry with the nations; His wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them, He will give them over to slaughter. (3) Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will send up a stench; the mountains will be soaked with their blood. (4) All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree. Isaiah 34:2-4 NIV

(30) For I will display wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. (31) The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the Day of the Lord, that great and terrible [day]. Joel 2:30-31

(15) The sun and moon will darken, and the stars will gather up their light. (16) Then the Lord will roar from Zion, and from Jerusalem He will let sound His voice, and the heavens and the earth will quake. Joel 3:15-16 This is what the Lord Almighty says: "In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. (7) I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory," says the Lord Almighty. Haggai 2:6-7 NIV (cf. Haggai 2:21-22; Hebrews 12:26)

(12) And I saw when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the sixth seal, a great earthquake occurred, and the sun became black like hairy sackcloth, and the moon became entirely like blood [in appearance], (13) and the stars of heaven fell to the earth like a fig tree casting its fruit when shaken by a strong wind, (14) and the heaven retreated like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every

mountain and hill was moved from its place. (15) And all the kings of the earth and the prominent men and the generals and the wealthy and the powerful and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and the rocks of the mountains. (16) And [thus] they say to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of the One who sits upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, (17) because the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand [before them]?" Revelation 6:12-17 (cf. Isaiah 2:19-21; Isaiah 51:6; 2 Peter 3:14) c. Israel Fights

(1) The Lord said to My Lord, "Sit down at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." (2) From Zion the Lord will send forth your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies! (3) Your people will volunteer on the day of your valor[ous victory] (i.e., the armies of Israel). In the holy chambers, from the womb of the dawn, your young [troops] will [come] to you like the dew (i.e., the armies of the newly resurrected). (4) The Lord has sworn and He will not recant, "You are a priest forever in the manner of Melchizedek." (5) The Lord is at your right hand. He will shatter [those] kings on the day of His wrath. (6) He will render judgment on the nations. He will shatter [their] head (cf. Genesis 3:15) broadly throughout the land filled with corpses [as a result]. (7) [But as to His troops], they will drink from a brook beside the way. Therefore He will lift up their head (cf. Judges 15:1-20). Psalms 110:1-7 In one of the most well-known Messianic Psalms we see very clearly the close connection between our Lord's return to rule the earth and His support and empowerment of the hard-pressed Israeli forces at the point of His intervention in the battle of Armageddon. Simply put, while Jesus Christ will for the most part destroy the armies of antichrist Himself (by means of the swift sword that proceeds from His mouth: 2 Thessalonians 2:8; Revelation 1:16; Revelation 2:12; Revelation 2:16; Revelation 19:15; Revelation 19:21; cf. Isaiah 11:4; Isaiah 49:2), Jewish soldiers who repent and turn to Him at the point of His return will be allowed to share in the honor of the final battle. They will be the "willing volunteers" of verse three above, "flocking" to the standard of our Lord as He goes forth to annihilate the forces of the beast, refreshed and energized to play their role in the Tribulation's ultimate battle (verse seven above).

(9) Proclaim this among the nations! Prepare a holy war! Rouse [all] the mighty men! Let all the men of war come near [and] come up [to Jerusalem]. (10) Beat your ploughshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears! Let [even] the feeble man say "I [too] am a mighty man (i.e., fit for service)!" (11) Hurry and come from every direction that you may be assembled there! And Thou, O Lord, Do Thou [likewise] bring down Thy [own] warriors [there to Jerusalem]. (12) Let the nations be roused [from their places], and let them come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat. For there I will sit in judgment over all the nations on every side. (13) Send forth the sickle for the harvest is ripe! Come down into the winepress for it is full and the vats overflow. For great is their wickedness. (14) Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of doom! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of doom. (15) The sun and moon will darken, and the stars will gather up their light. (16) Then the Lord will roar from Zion, and from Jerusalem He will let sound His voice, and the heavens and the earth will quake. Joel 3:9-16 The battle will turn against the beast first at Jerusalem, the front line where Jewish defenders have so far held off antichrist's forces from re-taking the temple mount in spite of the fall of the city proper (cf. Zechariah 9:8 "but I will defend My house against marauding forces" with the following verse, Zechariah 9:10, Messiah's return). Thus Jerusalem, as we saw during our treatment of Armageddon above, along with her Jewish defenders, will be the anvil upon which the Lord will first begin to hammer out the salvation of the

Great Day of the Lord. It will not, however, be the place where our Lord's personal treading down of the wine press of Armageddon begins, but rather the place of His final return to assume His throne in the temple at Jerusalem once His victory is complete (Malachi 3:1). For just as Joshua in his campaigns to occupy the promised land upon the Israelites' entry into Canaan began his attack in the south then moved to the north (Joshua 10:1-43, Joshua 11:1-23, Joshua 12:1-24 : Joshua, as we have seen, is a type of Christ, and his campaign is a type of the 2nd Advent; cf. Joshua 10:12-14), so our Lord will rescue "Judah" before Jerusalem. That is, the slaughter will commence from the south, as our Lord annihilates antichrist's armies which are at this time spread out in a wide arc before the city stretching over hundreds of miles from north to south (with Jerusalem in the concave center of this arced deployment). That is the essential meaning behind Zechariah 12:1-14 wherein the "honor of Jerusalem" is prophesied to be no greater than that of Judah – not because of any relative merit or deficiency, but because the Lord's campaign of Armageddon, while beginning with the splitting of the Mount of Olives and the shielding of Jerusalem, will then proceed to the south, then from south to north, then back southeast to Jerusalem in a triangular or clockwise-shaped route designed to sweep up every last enemy in the net of destruction.

(2) Behold, I am about to make Jerusalem a cup of reeling for all the nations round about. And also for Judah there will be a siege against Jerusalem. (3) And it will come to pass on that day that I will make Jerusalem a burdensome rock for all the peoples. All who try to lift it will certainly be ruptured (lit., "lacerated"). For all the nations of the earth will be gathered against her. (4) On that day, says the Lord, I will strike every horse with confusion and every rider with madness. But toward the house of Judah I will open my eyes. But I will strike with blindness the eyes of every horse of all the peoples [gathered against her]. (5) Then the generals of Judah will say in their hearts, "The inhabitants of Jerusalem are a strong support for me through the Lord of Hosts their God!". (6) On that day I will make the generals of Judah like a fire pot put to wood and like a fiery torch put to sheaves of grain. For they will consume on the right hand and on the left all of the peoples round about. Thus Jerusalem will continue to dwell in her place, even in Jerusalem (i.e., she will not be completely deported). (7) But the Lord will deliver the tents of Judah first with the result that the honor of the house of David and of Jerusalem's inhabitants will not be greater than that of Judah. (8) On that day, the Lord will put His shield around the inhabitants of Jerusalem so that even those on the point of falling will become like David and the house of David will become like gods (or "angels"), [even] like the Angel of the Lord before them. (9) And it will come to pass on that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations who are attacking Jerusalem. Zechariah 12:2-9 As can be seen from the passage above, the Spirit of the Lord will both empower and protect the Israeli forces in Jerusalem while our Lord Jesus goes about His work of destroying the armies of antichrist. This protection, inspiration and empowerment for battle of the Jewish army on the Day of the Lord is in fact prophesied in many other passages of scripture:

Like birds hovering overhead, the Lord Almighty will shield Jerusalem; he will shield it and deliver it, he will 'pass over' it and will rescue it. Isaiah 31:5 NIV

(5) On that day (of Armageddon), the Lord of Hosts will be [like] a glorious crown, [like] a beautiful diadem to those who survive among His people. (6) [He will be] a Spirit of [inspiring good] judgment to him who sits in judgment (i.e., the leadership, political and military), and [He will be a Spirit] of [inspiring good] courage to those (i.e., the soldiers) who are turning back the enemy attack (lit., "war") from the gate. Isaiah 28:5-6

(11) For at that time many nations will be gathered against you[, O Zion], who will say, "Let her be profaned! And let our eyes look upon Zion [in her defeat]!" (12) But they do not know the plans of the Lord, nor do they understand His purpose. For He has [deliberately] gathered them [to Zion like] tussocks of grain to His threshing floor. (13) "Wake up and thresh, daughter of Zion! For I will make your horn a horn of iron, and I will make your hooves into hooves of bronze." Micah 4:11-13

(13) "Indeed, I will bend Judah for Myself like a bow and I will fill [his bowstring] with Ephraim (i.e., south and north = all of Israel together). I will wield your sons [like a weapon] O Zion (i.e., Jerusalem), against your sons, O Greece (lit., "Javan", a reference to the origin of antichrist's typological parallel, Antiochus), and I will gird them on like a warrior's sword." (14) For the Lord will appear above them, and His arrows will shoot forth like lightning. And the Lord God will sound the trumpet, and He will march forth in the whirlwinds of the south (cf. Isaiah 21:1). (15) And the Lord of Hosts will be a shield around them, and they will devour (the enemy) and be impervious to [his] sling-stones. And they shall rage [against the enemy] and drink [them down] like wine until they are completely [poured out] like a bowl as [at] the corners of an altar. (16) For the Lord their God will deliver them on that day like the flock of His people. Zechariah 9:13-16 a

(3b) For the Lord of Hosts will give attention to His flock, even the house of Judah, and He will make them like a war-horse in its glory. (4) From [Judah will come] the corner, from [him will come] the peg, from [him will come] the battle-bow – from [him will come] every leader altogether. (5) And they will become in that battle like mighty warriors trampling down [the enemy like] mire in the streets. (6) For I will make the house of Judah mighty warriors, and I will save the house of Joseph, and I will restore them because I love them deeply. And they will be as if I had not rejected them [previously]. For I am the Lord their God, and I will answer them. (7) Then the men of Ephraim will be like mighty warriors, and their hearts will be glad as [when gladdened] with wine. Zechariah 10:3-7 a

(5) For this One (i.e., the Messiah) will be our peace. When Ashur (i.e., a type of antichrist's world coalition) comes against our land, and when he tramples upon our fortifications, we will appoint seven generals (lit., "shepherds"; cf.) against him, even eight rulers of men (i.e., the seven and the supreme civil commander represented by Shebna in Isaiah 22:20-25). (6) And Ashur will ravage the land with the sword, even [the people of] Nimrod right up to the very entrances [to Jerusalem]. Then He [who is our peace] will deliver [us] from Ashur when he comes against our land and tramples our borders. (7) Then the remnant of Jacob will be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the Lord, like plentiful rains which do not wait for man and which do not tarry for the sons of men (i.e., they will be unstoppable). (8) Then the remnant of Jacob will be among the nations [surrounding Jerusalem], in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among flocks of sheep from whom no one can rescue when it passes by and tramples down and mauls. (9) Your hand will be lifted up against your enemies, and all your enemies will be cut down. Micah 5:5-9 a In the passage above, the "generals of Judah" are seen to be seven in number with an additional commander in charge of the overall operations. For the brief and unspecified "day", wherein the day begins with darkness, "but at evening, there will be light" (Zechariah 14:6-7), a day not limited to any particular span of time (as Joshua's day of victory at Gibeon was supernaturally extended: Joshua 10:12-13), the Jewish army will be unstoppable, inspired and empowered by the Lord Himself, even as their enemies flee in terror from before Jerusalem. And Judah also will fight in Jerusalem. Zechariah 14:14

(9) Raise the war cry, you nations, and be shattered! Listen, all you distant lands. Prepare for battle, and be shattered! Prepare for battle, and be shattered! (10) Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted; propose your plan, but it will not stand, for God is with us (i.e., "Immanuel"). Isaiah 8:9-10 d. The Great Slaughter Our Lord Jesus Christ will first return to earth descending upon the Mount of Olives from the east, the direction of the sunrise toward which the temple is oriented (Exodus 27:12-13; Ezekiel 11:23; Ezekiel 41:14; Ezekiel 43:1-4). But in between His splitting of the Mount of Olives and His entrance into the temple at Jerusalem, the nations arrayed against Jerusalem will come to know the full fury of our Lord's wrath and of His zeal for His people.

1) The Vintage: The slaughter or "vintage" of Armageddon will be carried out by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself by means of the terrible swift sword that proceeds from out His mouth (2 Thessalonians 2:8; Revelation 1:16; Revelation 2:12; Revelation 2:16; Revelation 19:15; Revelation 19:21; cf. Isaiah 11:4; Isaiah 49:2), for the battle is the Lord's (1 Samuel 17:47; 2 Chronicles 20:15). Just as Pharaoh and his Egyptian armies raced after Israel into the dry bed of the Red Sea in order to destroy her only to meet their own destruction at His hands, so the massive military forces of the beast have in truth been led to a similar place of slaughter.

(5) The Lord is at your right hand. He will shatter [those] kings on the day of His wrath. (6) He will render judgment on the nations. He will shatter [their] head (cf. Genesis 3:15) broadly throughout the land filled with corpses [as a result]. Psalms 110:5-6

(15) See, the Lord is coming with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. (16) For with fire and with his sword the Lord will execute judgment upon all men, and many will be those slain by the Lord. Isaiah 66:15-16 NIV

(11) And I saw the sky above opened up, and, behold, a white horse, and the One seated on it is called "Faithful and True", and in righteousness He renders judgment and makes war. (12) And His eyes were a flame of fire, and on His head were many [kingly] crowns, with names written [on them] which no one knows except He Himself. (13) And He is dressed in a robe splattered all about with blood, and His Name has [always] been called, "The Word of God". (14) And His armies were following Him in the sky [mounted] on white horses, [and] clad in linen white and pure. (15) And a sharp broadsword proceeded from His mouth wherewith to smite the nations, and He Himself will shepherd them with an iron staff, and He Himself will trample the winepress of the furious wrath of God the Almighty. (16) And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written: "King of Kings and Lord of Lords". (17) And I saw a single angel having taken his stand in front of the sun. And he cried out in a loud voice, saying to all the birds flying in the sky, "Come, gather together for the great banquet of God, (18) that you may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of generals, and the flesh of horses and those who ride upon them, and the flesh of all [these wicked men], free and slave, small and great [alike]" (cf. Ezekiel 39:17-20). (19) And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war with the One riding on the [white] horse and with His army. (20) And the beast was snatched up and the false prophet along with him, the one who had performed the signs in his presence and had thereby deceived those who had received the mark of the beast, even those who were worshiping his image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with sulfur. (21) And the rest [of the beast's forces] were killed by the broadsword which came forth from the mouth of the One riding on the [white] horse. And all of the birds gorged themselves on their flesh. Revelation 19:11-21 As the

passage above shows, the battle of Armageddon is described as the trampling down of the vintage of grapes in a winepress, a process which cannot help but splatter the one doing the crushing with the "blood of the grape". This extremely vivid image is meant to impress us with the graphic nature of our Lord's slaughter of the armies of the beast. For the victory of Jesus Christ at Armageddon will prove beyond any doubt the folly of opposing Him. Thus, His millennial reign, built upon a decisive victory carried out by irresistible force, will set the tone for a time of unparalleled prosperity during our Lord's perfect rule wherein no disobedience or rebellion will be tolerated (thereby allowing the righteous to live in peace).

He (i.e., Judah, and thus the Messiah) will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch (cf. Matthew 21:1-8); he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes. Genesis 49:11 NIV

(1) Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah, with his garments stained crimson? Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength? "It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save." (2) Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress? (3) "I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. (4) For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come. (5) I looked, but there was no one to help, I was appalled that no one gave support; so my own arm (i.e., the Messiah) worked salvation for me, and my own wrath sustained me. (6) I trampled the nations in my anger; in my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground." Isaiah 63:1-6 NIV

(30) "Now prophesy all these words against them and say to them: "The Lord will roar from on high; he will thunder from his holy dwelling and roar mightily against his land. He will shout like those who tread the grapes, shout against all who live on the earth. (31) The tumult will resound to the ends of the earth, for the Lord will bring charges against the nations; he will bring judgment on all mankind and put the wicked to the sword," declares the Lord. (32) This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Look! Disaster is spreading from nation to nation; a mighty storm is rising from the ends of the earth." Jeremiah 25:30-32 NIV

(12) Let the nations be roused [from their places], and let them come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat (i.e., the valley of "the Lord will judge"). For there I will sit in judgment over all the nations on every side. (13) Send forth the sickle for the harvest is ripe! Come down into the winepress for it is full and the vats overflow. For great is their wickedness. (14) Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of doom! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of doom. (15) The sun and moon will darken, and the stars will gather up their light. (16) Then the Lord will roar from Zion, and from Jerusalem He will let sound His voice, and the heavens and the earth will quake. Joel 3:12-16

(17) Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. (18) And another angel came out from before the altar, [the one] having authority over the fire (i.e., of judgment), and he shouted in a loud voice to the [angel] with the sharp sickle, saying "Send forth your sharp sickle and gather up the clusters of the earth's vineyard, because its bunches [of grapes] are ripe". (19) And the angel cast forth his sickle onto the earth, and he gathered up the vintage of the earth and threw [it] into the great winepress of God's wrath. (20) And the winepress

was trodden down outside of the city. And blood from the winepress went forth up to the horses' bridles for a distance of twelve hundred stadia (i.e., approx. 143 miles). Revelation 14:17-20 As in the case of the destruction of Pharaoh's army, this slaughter will be complete, leaving no survivors. All who participate on behalf of antichrist and his father the devil are deemed fully culpable for their actions, and will pay with their lives.

(2) The Lord is angry with the nations; His wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them, He will give them over to slaughter. (3) Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will send up a stench; the mountains will be soaked with their blood. Isaiah 34:2-3 NIV

(21) I will summon a sword against Gog on all my mountains, declares the Sovereign Lord. Every man's sword will be against his brother. (22) I will execute judgment upon him with plague and bloodshed; I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulfur on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him. (23) And so I will show my greatness and my holiness, and I will make myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord. Ezekiel 38:21-23 NIV 2) The Plague and the Madness: The soldiers of the beast's armies who are not destroyed by the Lord Himself, by His terrible swift sword or the plague of hail and burning sulfur (Ezekiel 38:21-23; cf. Isaiah 29:6), and all who do not perish at the hands of the reinvigorated Jewish army, will fall by the swords of their very own fellow soldiers (cf. Judges 7:22; 1 Samuel 14:20; 2 Chronicles 20:23; Isaiah 19:2), or else will rot in place while still standing on their feet, until every last enemy of the Lord has been destroyed. This combination of such divinely inflicted madness and this terrifying plague are unique in human history. Such is the folly of opposing the Messiah, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

(12) And this is the plague with which the Lord will smite all the peoples who marshal themselves against Jerusalem: Their flesh will rot even as they stand on their feet, and their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. (13) And it will come to pass on that day that a great madness from the Lord will fall upon them, so that everyone will grab hold of the hand of his comrade and will lift up his hand against his comrade (i.e., they will attack each other). (14) And Judah also will fight in Jerusalem. The wealth of all the nations round about will be gathered up, their gold and silver and clothing in abundance. (15) And thus also a plague will befall their horses, mules, camels, donkeys, and all [the other] animals in their camps just like this plague [that befalls the soldiers]. Zechariah 14:12-15

I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and their drivers; horses and their riders will fall, each by the sword of his brother. Haggai 2:22 NIV On that day, says the Lord, I will strike every horse with confusion and every rider with madness. But toward the house of Judah I will open my eyes. But I will strike with blindness the eyes of every horse of all the peoples [gathered against her] Zechariah 12:4

(24) Can plunder be taken from warriors, or captives rescued from the fierce? (25) But this is what the Lord says: "Yes, captives will be taken from warriors, and plunder retrieved from the fierce; I will contend with those who contend with you, and your children I will save. (26) I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh; they will be drunk on their own blood, as with wine. Then all mankind will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob." Isaiah 49:24-26 NIV

(21) I will summon a sword against Gog on all my mountains, declares the Sovereign Lord. Every man's sword will be against his brother. (22) I will execute judgment upon him with plague and bloodshed; I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulfur on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him. (23) And so I will show my greatness and my holiness, and I will make myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord. Ezekiel 38:21-23 NIV 3) The Winepress of Armageddon

(12) Let the nations be roused [from their places], and let them come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat. For there I will sit in judgment over all the nations on every side. (13) Send forth the sickle for the harvest is ripe! Come down into the winepress for it is full and the vats overflow. For great is their wickedness. (14) Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of doom! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of doom. Joel 3:12-14 The valley of Jehoshaphat, mentioned only here in scripture and meaning "The Lord will judge", is a poetic designation for the system of ravines and wadis sloping down from Jerusalem generally westward (and branching off to the north and south as well). As the natural highways of approach, these areas will be filled with antichrist's forces, from his forward combat units to their rearmost logistical tails.

(2) The Lord is angry with the nations; His wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them, He will give them over to slaughter. (3) Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will send up a stench; the mountains will be soaked with their blood. Isaiah 34:2-3 NIV As this passage shows, the slaughter will not be limited to the network of valleys to the west of Jerusalem, but will cover the entire area wherein the forces of antichrist are amassed. Since the ridges separating the valleys are the high ground whereon the defense will no doubt be concentrated, these obviously cannot be ignored in the assault on Jerusalem. We may expect some of the best shock units to be assigned the task of clearing the ridges, working their way towards Jerusalem in this manner. The total area of deployment necessary for assembling the world's armies and organizing an attack on the entire Judean hill country will thus of necessity be quite large indeed. The book of Revelation itself gives some very specific details about the extent of this "winepress" or "killing field", the place of the last stand of the devil's earthly armies under his son the beast.

(17) Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. (18) And another angel came out from before the altar, [the one] having authority over the fire (i.e., of judgment), and he shouted in a loud voice to the [angel] with the sharp sickle, saying "Send forth your sharp sickle and gather up the clusters of the earth's vineyard, because its bunches [of grapes] are ripe". (19) And the angel cast forth his sickle onto the earth, and he gathered up the vintage of the earth and threw [it] into the great winepress of God's wrath. (20) And the winepress was trodden down outside of the city. And blood from the winepress went forth up to the horses' bridles for a distance of twelve hundred stadia (i.e., approx. 143 miles). Revelation 14:17-20

Centered on Jerusalem, this distance covers from the northern part of contemporary Israel from a point roughly even in latitude with the Sea of Galilee, to a point some twenty miles south of the southern most extremity of the Dead Sea.

(3) God will come from Teman, even the Holy One from Mount Paran. His glory will cover the heavens, and His praise will fill the earth. (4) His splendor will shine forth like the light [itself] (i.e., brighter than the sun). Rays [of light will shoot forth] from His hand, and there His hidden power [will be revealed]. (5) Plague goes before Him, and bolts of lightning follow in His train. (6) He will

take His stand, then take the measure of the earth. He will take in the sight, then cut off the nations. Habakkuk 3:3-6

Teman and Mount Paran are located in the Negev (or, alternatively, in biblical Edom) south of the Dead Sea and thus south of Jerusalem, and mark the southern boundary of the beast's major military deployments. In these verses we see our Lord's campaign of annihilation of the armies of antichrist being carried out in complete consonance with the other passages quoted above, only here the direction of the assault is made clear: it will begin with the southern flank of antichrist's armies and finish in the north (exactly as in the case of Joshua's campaigns to occupy the promised land: Joshua 6:1-27, Joshua 7:1-26, Joshua 8:1-35, Joshua 9:1-27, Joshua 10:1-43, Joshua 11:1-23, Joshua 12:1-24; cf. Judges 5:4; Psalms 68:4-17; Isaiah 40:3-5).

(20) I will drive the northern army far from you, pushing it into a parched and barren land, with its front columns going into the eastern sea and those in the rear into the western sea. And its stench will go up; its smell will rise." Surely he has done great things. Joel 2:20 NIV The armies of the beast are described in toto here as "northern" because that is the compass point from which most of them will enter into the land of Israel. Here we see the reaction of the nations to the terrifying sight of our Lord in all His glory cutting a wide swath through the very heart of their army. In their crazed panic, many will flee to the west and northwest and perish in the Mediterranean Sea, while many others will flee to the southeast and perish in the Dead Sea (again, reminiscent of the panic and demise of the Egyptian army; cf. Exodus 14:24-25).

(27) See, the Name of the Lord comes from afar, with burning anger and dense clouds of smoke; his lips are full of wrath, and his tongue is a consuming fire. (28) His breath is like a rushing torrent, rising up to the neck. He shakes the nations in the sieve of destruction; he places in the jaws of the peoples a bit that leads them astray. Isaiah 30:27-28 NIV

Still others, fleeing from the advancing terror, will flee into the trackless desert of the Negev directly south of Jerusalem, far from any civilized habitation. Ezekiel 39:11 describes a probable specific concentration of the slaughter of the southern wing, the valley of "Hamon-Gog" (i.e., "Gog's multitude") which will be given as a burial place generally for the remains of antichrist's soldiers in order to cleanse the land of ritual pollution (Ezekiel 39:12-16). Connecting the idea of the winepress with this otherwise unknown southern valley, we may perhaps identify it very tentatively as the "Great Crater" (or, more literally, "Great Mortar") south of present day Dimona, a geographical feature which resembles an ancient wine-press and whose general location, orientation, and physical features certainly fit a scenario which finds a large portion of the southern wing of the beast's army pouring headlong into this inescapable killing field in a manner comparable to their predecessors' rushing into the Dead Sea to their deaths. The following chart summarizes the information we are given about the Messiah's campaign, the winepress of Armageddon .

After splitting the Mount of Olives and securing the safe retreat of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, our Lord will "pass over Jerusalem" (Isaiah 31:4-5), breathing courage into its defenders and sowing intense panic in the hearts of its assailants. Then He will begin His campaign of destruction, heading first to the south and the slaughter of the southern winepress, turning then to the north and the remaining wing of the beast's army, all the while driving the terrified survivors fleeing in a deranged panic to their deaths in the eastern and western seas, and ending His flying campaign of

slaughter in Jerusalem, where, all His enemies destroyed, He will take His seat in the temple as the true Messiah to rule Israel and the entire world from Jerusalem during His blessed millennial reign. Between the swift sword which will proceed from our Lord's mouth, the inspired counter-attacks of the Jewish army, the plague that will smite down many who will rot while yet standing on their feet, and the uncontrollable madness and panic which will drive the rest into the waters of the Mediterranean and Dead seas westward and eastward, the forces of antichrist will be utterly destroyed – there will be no survivors.

(12) Oh, the raging of many nations – they rage like the raging of the sea! Oh, the uproar of the peoples – they roar like the roaring of great waters! (13) Although the peoples roar like the roar of surging waters, when he rebukes them they flee far away, driven before the wind like chaff on the hills, like tumbleweed before a gale. (14) In the evening, sudden terror! Before the morning, they are gone! This is the portion of those who loot us, the lot of those who plunder us. Isaiah 17:12-14 NIV In this way too, our Lord will see to it that the land of Israel will be kept from being so entirely polluted by the slaughter of Armageddon that functional life in its aftermath might be impossible. Those enemy soldiers not driven into the seas or deserts or consumed by the plague will be feasted upon by the carrion eating birds of the entire world, summoned to Israel by angelic agency for just this purpose (Ezekiel 39:1-5; Ezekiel 39:17-20; Revelation 19:17-18). The remainders of the slaughter, the bones of the dead, will be systematically purged from the land, buried in the "valley of Hamon-Gog", far from the populated areas of the land. Though this army shall have been the largest ever assembled in one place in human history, in short order nothing will remain.

(7) And the hordes of the nations mustering against Ariel will become like [just] a dream in the visions of the night, even all those who camp against her and her fortress and besiege her. (8) And it will be as when a hungry man dreams he is eating, but when he awakes his appetite remains unfulfilled, or as when a thirsty man dreams he is drinking, but when he awakes his thirst remains. This is how it will be for the multitude of all the nations who are going to marshal themselves against Mount Zion. Isaiah 29:7-8 6. The Humbling of the Wicked and the Joy of the Redeemed The complete defeat and total annihilation of antichrist along with all his earthly forces, the concomitant defeat of Satan and his legions and their removal from the world, and our Lord's vindication of all the words and promises of God evidenced by this awesome victory, followed by His session in the temple of Jerusalem as the true Messiah – all of these things will be a cause of utter terror to the wicked who remain (Revelation 6:16-17; cf. Isaiah 2:10-21; Hosea 10:8; Malachi 3:2; Luke 21:25-27; Luke 23:30), of abject humiliation to the proud who had cast their lot with the beast (Isaiah 2:9-22; Isaiah 5:15-16; Isaiah 13:11-12; Isaiah 23:9; Isaiah 26:1-5; Zephaniah 3:11; Malachi 4:1; cf. 1 Samuel 2:1-10; 2 Samuel 22:18; Luke 1:51-53), but of unrestrained joy and jubilation to the people of God (as attested by the many hymns in scripture which anticipate that great Day of Days: e.g., Psalms 9:7-8; Psalms 45:1 ff; Psalms 75:1 ff; Psalms 76:1-3; Psalms 93:1-5, Psalms 94:1-23, Psalms 95:1-11, Psalms 96:1-13, Psalms 97:1-12, Psalms 98:1-9, Psalms 99:1-9; Psalms 100:1 ff; Isaiah 9:2-7; Isaiah 12:1 ff; Isaiah 14:1 ff; Isaiah 25:1-27, Isaiah 26:1-21, Isaiah 27:1 ff; Isaiah 30:27-29; Isaiah 35:1 ff; Isaiah 52:7-10).

(1) "Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the Lord Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them. (2) But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. (3) Then

you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things," says the Lord Almighty. Malachi 4:1-3 The time has now come for the meek to inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5; cf. Psalms 37:11; Zephaniah 2:1-3), and our Lord Jesus Christ's astoundingly blessed millennial reign will begin with the unleashing of a torrent of emotion, as the way of the world as it seemingly always has been is turned on its head (cf. 2 Peter 3:3-13). Many who were first will be last, and the last first as the promises of retribution upon the wicked who oppose God find their experiential fulfillment at last (Matthew 19:30; Matthew 20:16; Mark 10:31; Luke 13:30), while those who have now set themselves to seek God in humility and truth experience the relief, the deliverance, and the joy of "God with us" in the Person of the Savior Himself, come to rule the world in righteousness (cf. Isaiah 51:14; Isaiah 61:1-3).

(14) They raise their voices, they shout for joy; from the west they acclaim the Lord's majesty. (15) Therefore in the east give glory to the Lord; exalt the name of the Lord, the God of Israel, in the islands of the sea. (16) From the ends of the earth we hear singing: "Glory to the Righteous One." Isaiah 24:14-16 a NIV

Despite the amazing might of the beast and all his depredations, despite the harsh rule of his father the devil over this scarred world for some six thousand years, in the end, the day came when all their fortresses fell (Isaiah 30:25; Isaiah 31:9; Daniel 1:1-39; Zephaniah 1:16; Zephaniah 3:6; Zephaniah 3:15; cf. Isaiah 2:15; Isaiah 23:11-14; Isaiah 25:2; Isaiah 25:12; Amos 1:10; Amos 6:8; Obadiah 1:3; Micah 5:11; Zechariah 9:3), at the hands of the One who died for us that we might live for Him.

(24) The Lord Almighty has sworn, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand. (25) I will crush the Assyrian in my land; on my mountains I will trample him down. His yoke will be taken from my people, and his burden removed from their shoulders." (26) This is the plan determined for the whole world; this is the hand stretched out over all nations. (27) For the Lord Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back? Isaiah 14:24-27 NIV (cf. Proverbs 21:30)

01A.08. Last Things

8. Last Things A. The Second Advent Judgments: Revelation 20:1-3 The seven thunders of Revelation 10:3-4 represent the seven judgments directly connected to Christ's return at the end of the Tribulation, inappropriate to discuss just prior to the commencement of the Great Tribulation where they are mentioned in Revelation 10:1-11 (since they would not actually happen until later on), but easily discernible from scripture and necessary to consider here in their place of chronological occurrence. The first of these Second Advent judgments, the destruction of Babylon, occurred just prior to but closely associated with Christ's return; the time frame of judgments two through four is essentially contemporaneous with the Second Advent; judgment five will apparently occur in very short succession thereafter; judgments six and seven will require progressively longer periods of time to complete, and will occur sequentially. Once all of these judgments have been accomplished, the King's millennial reign, His coronation, His victory at Armageddon, and His wedding to His Bride the Church will be officially celebrated, then followed by a thousand years of bliss and blessing unlike anything the earth has seen since the fall of Adam and Eve. The Tribulation followed by the Millennium is the final "day" of human history, the "eschaton" or end times, the "Day of the Lord" in which all divine judgment will be completed in the Person of Jesus Christ. This process began with the tribulational judgments, will be followed by these seven judgments, and will be concluded at the end of Christ's thousand-year righteous rule by the Last Judgment, after which the present universe will be re-created, cleansed by fire and transformed into the New Heavens and New Earth "where righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13). But before that blessed day of eternity, Christ must rule until all enemies are placed under His feet (1 Corinthians 15:25; cf. Psalms 110:1; Hebrews 2:5-9).

"For [God] has appointed a Day (i.e., the final Day of human history culminating in the Last Judgment) in which He is going to judge the world by [the standard] of righteousness through a Man whom He has ordained for this [very purpose], having supplied [us] with the proof [of His identity] by raising Him from the dead." Acts 17:31

1. Babylon This judgment, covered in the section above, "Judgment on Babylon", has already taken place at this point, occurring at the threshold of the Second Advent but considered eschatologically a part of it (i.e., it is literally "wrapped" into the seventh bowl judgment whose main application is the Second Advent: Revelation 16:19 in the context of Revelation 16:17-21).

2. The Armies of Armageddon The Second Advent and our Lord's destruction of the armies of the beast at Armageddon has been covered immediately above. Following Babylon's destruction and occurring at the point of Christ's glorious return, this judgment has likewise already taken place at this point in the chronology of Revelation.

3. The Beast and the False Prophet

Uniquely among all of woman born, antichrist and his false prophet will be cast into the Lake of Fire to experience the second death immediately upon Christ's return: And the beast was

snatched up and the false prophet along with him, the one who had performed the signs in his presence and had thereby deceived those who had received the mark of the beast, even those who were worshipping his image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with sulfur. Revelation 19:20 This judgment as well has already taken place, occurring between the initial point of Christ's return (Revelation 19:1-19), and the culmination of the slaughter of Armageddon (Revelation 19:21). These two are deprived of their part in the final trial, "The Last Judgment" because by their extreme words and actions in serving Satan and in attempting to utterly destroy God's people throughout the Tribulation – a trial in and of itself – they stand self-condemned beyond all doubt or argument. As with the fallen angels, no further trial is necessary to illuminate their choice, since that choice has been confirmed to such an unprecedented extent. The Tribulation constitutes their "trial" just as human history in its entirety constitutes the trial of Satan and his angels (Isaiah 30:32-33; Daniel 7:11-14; Daniel 9:27; Daniel 11:45; Habakkuk 3:13-14; 2 Thessalonians 2:8; cf. Jeremiah 25:26; Daniel 7:26; Habakkuk 2:2-20). The beast and the false prophet are denied any further "last judgment" or process of adjudication because of their non-human status (being nephilim not created in the image of God).

4. The Incarceration of Satan and his Demons

(1) And I saw another angel coming down from heaven with the key to the Abyss and with a great chain in his hand. (2) And he took hold of the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the Slanderer (diabolos, i.e., "devil"), even Satan. And he bound him for a thousand years (3) and he cast him into the Abyss, locked it, and set a seal upon it, so that he might not [be able] to deceive the nations [any longer] – until the thousand years (i.e., the Millennium) were completed. After that, he must be released for a short time. Revelation 20:1-3 Not only is Satan now prevented from appearing before God the Father to slander believers (Revelation 12:10). Here we see the fulfillment of the much anticipated removal in toto of the devil from the affairs of this world.

(12) How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, O son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, O you who laid the nations low. (13) For you said in your heart, 'I will ascend heavenward. I will set my throne above the stars of God. And I will take my seat on the mount of assembly on the sides of the north. (14) I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the Most High God'. (15) But indeed you will be brought down to Sheol, to the sides of the pit. Isaiah 14:12-15 In all your ways you were perfect from the day of your creation until unrighteousness was found in you. In your extensive conspiring, you were filled with wickedness, and you sinned. So I cast you from the mountain of God as one profaned, and I blotted out [your memory] from among the stones of fire, O covering cherub. Your heart became haughty because of your beauty, [and so] you destroyed your wisdom on account of your splendor. So I cast you to the earth, and I made a spectacle of you before kings. Ezekiel 28:15-17 The seventy returned and said with joy, "Lord, even the demons obey us in your Name!" And Jesus said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like a star". Luke 10:17-18

"Now the judgment of this world is [imminent]. Now the ruler of this world is about to be cast out [of it]." John 12:31 a. The Other Angel: This angel is not named, but based upon angelic military conduct as described elsewhere in scripture it is probable that he is of archangel rank and it is likely that he is none other than Michael. As the commander of the most elite angelic warriors who have distinguished themselves in the conflict with Satan (comparable to David's "mighty men"),

Michael is the most likely choice for this extraordinary mission, possibly in direct leadership of his crack unit of angels. b. The Key: This is the key to the Abyss proper, not the key to its entry shaft which we saw used in Revelation 9:1 to effect a partial release of some of the demons detained therein for the fifth trumpet judgment. This second key to the Abyss proper (as opposed to its entryway only) includes not only the power to open and close the subterranean dungeon, but also to lock and unlock all the restraints therein (and was previously apparently used by the angel in Revelation 9:14 to release for the sixth trumpet judgment the large number of fallen angels enchained in the Abyss proper behind its main entrance door). c. Special Security Precautions for Satan: We should note here that the security measures used to sequester the devil for the duration of the Millennium are threefold and are therefore unique. First, he is locked in the Abyss (in common with all other fallen angels removed from circulation from the beginning of human history for various violations of divine ground rules; cf. Luke 8:31). Secondly the devil is placed in chains within the Abyss as a second level of security (as were those fallen angels who severely violated protocol by cohabiting with human women prior to the flood; Genesis 6:1-22; 2 Peter 2:4-10; Jude 1:5-7; Revelation 9:13-19). Finally and uniquely, the Abyss is specially "sealed", indicating that throughout the Millennium there will be no access to the Abyss whatsoever (and hence no possible chance of the devil exiting until the appointed time through either accident or design). The exceptional level of precautions taken here shows very clearly the importance of a Millennium without the devil. Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man (i.e., analogous to Satan)? Then he can rob his house (i.e., analogous to the distribution of the plunder upon conquering his kingdom: Psalms 68:18; Isaiah 33:23 b; Isaiah 53:12; Isaiah 60:11; Luke 11:22; Ephesians 4:7-8). Matthew 12:29 NIV In the absence of any Satanic influence whatsoever, and with the provision of perfect environment by the Messiah Himself (as perfect, that is, as the mortal and therefore still inherently sinful human beings who will populate the world of that time can tolerate), mankind will nevertheless by and large still make use of its God-given free will to reject rather than to accept in faith the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, thus proving both the nature of free will and the reality of it. This is also true for angelic kind, for even though the fallen angels will be put out of operation for a thousand years and given to witness not only their own total defeat but also the coming of the astoundingly marvelous Kingdom and penultimate Eden on the threshold of eternity, no change of heart or regret will be visible in any of them, to the extent that the devil, when he is released at the Millennium's end, will once again do all that is in his power to continue to fight against God. d. Status of the Other Fallen Angels during the Millennium: As the head of the opposition to God, Satan's imprisonment is naturally emphasized here in Revelation 20:1-3, especially as this event fulfills many long-anticipated prophecies (e.g., Genesis 3:15; Luke 10:18; symbolically as a type of Pharaoh and Egypt cf. also Rahab: Job 26:12; Psalms 89:10; Isaiah 51:9; and Leviathan: Psalms 74:14; Isaiah 27:1). However, the fact that only Satan is specifically said to be imprisoned should not be taken to mean that the fallen angels are exempt; rather, this is an instance of scripture focusing upon the leader of the rebellion and leaving us to understand by implication that his followers share his fate. Just as the devil is mentioned alone as being summarily thrown into the lake of fire at the Millennium's conclusion (Revelation 20:10) and yet we know that his demons will suffer an identical end (Matthew 25:41), so we should assume here that his fallen angels are likewise expelled from Christ's Kingdom at His return to languish in the Abyss for a thousand years along with their leader, a blessing similarly anticipated in prophecy.

[For by means of the cross, God] has stripped [demon] rulers and authorities [of their power] and subjected them to public humiliation, having triumphed over them in [Christ]. Colossians 2:15

Given the reasons for the devil's removal from circulation during the Millennium discussed above, allowing his untold number of minions to remain at liberty would seem to be inconsistent with everything we know about that blessed time to come. Indeed, there are strong biblical indications that all demons are in fact removed to the Abyss at this time, with the devil merely being the last to be deposited therein before it is sealed for the duration of the Millennium.

(21) And it will come about on that day (i.e., the 2nd Advent) that the Lord will visit punishment upon the host of the [heavenly] heights in the [heavenly] heights (i.e., the fallen angels), and upon the kings of the earth upon the earth (i.e., antichrist's elite following). (22) And they will be crowded together, bound in a pit, and imprisoned in a prison. And after many days they will be punished. Isaiah 24:21-22 The "pit" here is the place to which the human "kings" are committed, and is a synonym for Sheol or Hades (Psalms 30:3; Isaiah 14:15; Isaiah 14:19; cf. Psalms 28:1; Psalms 143:7; Isaiah 38:18; Ezekiel 26:20; etc.). Specifically it refers to Torments, that part of the underworld where all departed unbelievers reside, awaiting the Last Judgment (Luke 16:19-31). The prison is a reference to another part of Sheol-Hades, namely, the Abyss (which in our context is described in precisely these terms with its chains, and with its locked and sealed entry door). It is into the latter that the "host of the heavenly heights", that is, the fallen angels who cast their lot with Satan, will be placed to await their final disposition at the end of history.

(4) All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree. (5) My sword has drunk its fill in the heavens; Isaiah 34:4-5 a NIV

"Tell them this: 'These gods (i.e., demons worshiped as gods), who did not make the heavens and the earth, will perish from the earth and from under the heavens.'" Jeremiah 10:11 NIV

All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. [God] does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. Daniel 4:35 a NIV This incarceration of the demons to await their final judgment at the end of human history stands in direct and blessed contrast to the theme of the release of the (human) prisoners at the Messiah's return.

(6) I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, and shall take You by the hand, and guard You, and appoint You a covenant for the nations and a Light for the gentiles, (7) to open the eyes of the blind, to bring forth the prisoner from the dungeon, and those who dwell in darkness from their place of captivity (i.e., physical and spiritual redemption). Isaiah 42:6-7

(8) This is what the Lord says: "In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances, (9) to say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!'" Isaiah 49:8-9 NIV The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me [the Messiah], for the Lord has anointed Me. He has sent Me to proclaim victory on behalf of the afflicted, to bind up the wounds of the broken hearted, to announce liberation for the captives and freedom for the prisoners, to announce the year of the Lord's favor [the Millennium], and a day of vengeance for our God [the 2nd Advent], to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who grieve for Zion, to anoint them with joy as with a crown in place of their grief, and to dress them in garments of praise

in place of their faint spirits. Isaiah 61:1-3 a As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit. Zechariah 9:11 NIV e. The Participation of the Resurrected Church in this Operation: Believers most assuredly share Christ's authority in administering His millennial government (1 Corinthians 4:8; 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 2:26-27; Revelation 3:21; Revelation 20:4), and when we are also told that we shall "judge angels" at 1 Corinthians 6:3, it seems likely that fallen angels are meant (for what need would the elect angels have for any sort of judicial evaluation, however small?). Further, while Revelation 19:21 places sole responsibility for carrying out the slaughter of Armageddon in our Lord's hands, Zechariah 14:5 and Revelation 19:19 state that we shall indeed "enter battle" in company with our Lord: And then the Lord my God will enter [the battle], and all His holy ones with Him. Zechariah 14:5 And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war with the One riding on the [white] horse and with His army. Revelation 19:19 At this point in time, that is, the point of the Second Advent, all fallen angels are at liberty (having been released in the course of the trumpet judgments), and yet all have been confined to the earth and its environs (since Satan and the other demons were "thrown down" by Michael and his forces: Revelation 12:7). Since, as we have had occasion to see in the past, the number of resurrected believers belonging to the Church, the first part of Christ's double portion, will be precisely equal to the number of fallen angels, passages such as this may indicate that the reason we "enter battle" with the Lord will be for each of us individually to dispatch our demonic counterpart back into the Abyss (enjoying at that time the same superiority in our resurrection bodies over angels as that possessed by Christ: Hebrews 1:4-14). If such is the case, this would be a fitting way for our Lord to underscore the replacement of the devil and his angels by the Church, now just newly resurrected and glorified for the first time. The Lord came from Sinai, and burst forth like the dawn against them (i.e., all of his foes, human and angelic) from [Mount] Seir. He shone forth from Mount Paran, and advanced with His holy multitudes; from His right hand [He cast] fiery judgment against them. Deuteronomy 33:2

God will not turn back His anger; Beneath Him crouch the helpers of Rahab (i.e., the mythical serpent symbolic both of Egypt and the devil). Job 9:13 NASB

(5) Let the holy ones (i.e., believers) rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds. (6) May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands, (7) to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, (8) to bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron, (9) to carry out the sentence written against them. This is the glory of all his saints. Praise the Lord. Psalms 149:5-9 (cf. Song of Solomon 2:15) "Behold! The Lord has come with His holy multitudes, to render judgment against all . . ." Jude 1:14-15 a

(2) Or don't you know that the holy ones (i.e., believers) will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you really unworthy to judge [these] insignificant matters of dispute? (3) Don't you know that we will judge angels? How much more will that not be the case with earthly matters? 1 Corinthians 6:2-3 For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against [angelic] princes, against [angelic] authorities, against the cosmic powers of this [present] darkness, against evil spirits in the heavenly realms. Ephesians 6:12 f. Satan's Later Release: While Revelation 20:7-10 clearly tells us that the devil will be released at the end of the Millennium for a short time, there is no indication that his followers will likewise be set free – nor is there any reason for this. The temporary release of Satan and the world's rapid rallying to his banner to oppose the rule of

the perfect Ruler will demonstrate once and for all that mankind, even in the most perfect environment possible in this sinful world, will still resent God's authority. The Gog-Magog rebellion will thus prove conclusively that salvation, universally provided by the grace of God in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, is ultimately a matter of choice. Those who perish do so of their own free will out of an essential unwillingness to submit to the Lord, even though the alternative is the forfeiture of eternal life.

5. The Baptism of Fire ("Fire upon Magog and the Coastlands")

Then (i.e., immediately after Armageddon) I will send fire upon Magog (i.e., eschatological Babylon) and upon those who dwell securely in the islands (i.e., the remainder of the gentile world; Genesis 10:5; cf. Psalms 97:1; Isaiah 11:11; Isaiah 13:22; Isaiah 24:15; Isaiah 40:15; Isaiah 41:1; Isaiah 41:5; Isaiah 42:3; Isaiah 42:10; Isaiah 49:1; Isaiah 51:5; Isaiah 59:18; Isaiah 66:19; Jeremiah 31:10; Ezekiel 27:35; Micah 5:15; Zephaniah 2:11; Zechariah 3:8 b), so that they may know that I am the Lord. Ezekiel 39:6 The judgment on Babylon which occurred prior to Armageddon, while devastating her territory in a singularly horrific way, did not destroy her entire population. We have already suggested that she will have given sanctuary to a large Jewish population, presently to be repatriated to the land of Israel (cf. Micah 4:10). At the time of our Lord's Second Advent, there will be found within her borders and throughout the gentile world at large a sizeable number of people who have taken the mark of the beast, yet were not present at the battle of Armageddon and so were not destroyed at that time. While refusal to receive the mark exempts those who so refused from this judgment (Revelation 13:8; Revelation 17:8 b cf. Joshua 6:25; Matthew 25:37-40), all who have worshiped antichrist and allowed themselves to be so marked will be excluded from our Lord's millennial kingdom, and miraculously so, by being supernaturally incinerated in the wake of His return, similar in fashion to the fate of the soldiers who sought to arrest Elijah (2 Kings 1:9-15; cf. Luke 9:52-55), and similar in its selectivity to the destruction of Korah, Dathan and Abiram and their families (Numbers 16:1-50).

"But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them – bring them here and kill them in front of me." Luke 19:27 NIV The criteria for this destruction are twofold: not only unbelief, but also "reveling in unrighteousness", namely, supporting the beast and his anti-God agenda and so by definition rejecting the Messiah in favor of the counterfeit, the very thing which accepting the mark implies (2 Thessalonians 2:12).

(8) And then the lawless one (i.e., antichrist) will be revealed, [that same one] whom the Lord Jesus will slay with the breath of His mouth and destroy when He appears at His [glorious] return – [that same lawless one] (9) whose appearance [will come about] through Satan's empowerment [and will be] accompanied by every [sort of] false miracle, both signs and portents, (10) and by every [sort of] unrighteous deception [designed] for those who are perishing, [namely those who will believe these lies] because they did not open themselves up to the love for the truth so as to be saved. (11) And for this [very] reason God is going to send upon them an empowerment of error so that they may believe the lie, (12) in order that they may be condemned, [even all those] who have not believed the truth but have [instead] approved of unrighteousness. 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12

Other passages foreshadowing this elimination of such stumbling blocks from Messiah's incipient kingdom include the following:

1. The workers in the field who are not taken (Matthew 24:36-44).
2. The wicked servant who is thrown out with hypocrites where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 24:45-51).
3. The sleepy virgins who are shut out of the kingdom (Matthew 25:1-13).
4. The lazy servant who is thrown out into darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 25:14-30).
5. The enemies of the King who did not want Him to rule over them who are killed in His presence at His return (Luke 19:27; quoted above). The supernatural fire sent upon Magog-Babylon (singled out here because it was the home country of the beast) and also upon the rest of the nations outside of Israel is sometimes referred to as "the Baptism of Fire" after the phrase used by John the baptist for the eschatological alternative to accepting Jesus Christ (so as to receive instead the Baptism of the Spirit; Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16; cf. Mark 1:8):

(10) For the ax has already been put to the trunk of the trees. Accordingly, every tree which does not produce good fruit is about to be cut down and thrown into fire. (11) Now I am baptizing you with water for the purpose of [your] repentance. But the One coming after me is more powerful than me and I am not worthy to carry His sandals. It is He who is the One who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. (12) His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will sweep clean His threshing floor, and will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Matthew 3:10-12

Just as the baptism of the Holy Spirit, poured out at Pentecost, began the Church Age, so also the baptism of fire will be one of the first acts of the returning King to begin the Millennium. Jesus will make a "clean sweep" of His threshing floor, removing the "chaff" (unbelievers who have already formally declared their hostility to Him through accepting the mark) by subjecting them to a fiery end (described here as "unquenchable" since this execution by fire is followed, after a thousand years in torments, by final disposition in the Lake of Fire). The gathering in of the wheat has a double reference, looking forward as it does to the end as a whole, comprising both the frequently prophesied regathering of Israel into the Messiah's millennial kingdom, and the final eschatological gathering up of all believers into the eternal kingdom following history's end (cf. Matthew 13:24-30; Matthew 13:47-50).

(1) "Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the Lord Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them. (2) But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. (3) Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things," says the Lord Almighty. Malachi 4:1-3 NIV

(6) . . . since indeed it is just for God to repay with tribulation those who are subjecting you to tribulation, (7) and to give you who are being distressed relief along with us at the revelation of our Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels, (8) wreaking vengeance in a flame of fire upon these [same persecutors] who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and the glory

of His power. 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 (cf. Isaiah 59:18 b) The second passage here also conflates the Baptism of Fire at the commencement of the Millennium with the disposition of all unbelievers at the Last Judgment and the entrance of all believers into the eternal kingdom at the Millennium's end. In respect to its Second Advent application, not all unbelievers on earth will be subjected to fiery judgment on our Lord's return (if they were, then no one would remain to repopulate the human race, since all believers alive at the Second Advent are resurrected "to meet the Lord in the air"; 1 Thessalonians 4:17). Those taken away by fire are indeed unbelievers, those who "do not know God" and who "do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus". However, it is only those guilty of "subjecting you to tribulation" who are to be summarily dispatched with a fiery end. This offense seems to be one of which all those who received the mark of the beast are universally guilty. For the persecution of believers during the Great Tribulation was a key characteristic of all those who cast their lot with antichrist, participating in his pseudo-Christian religion, and acting as his instruments in the Great Persecution. Therefore no one who joins the beast and receives his mark will be found to have clean hands in this respect, and none will be allowed to remain and taint the Messiah's incipient Kingdom.

(15) For behold, the Lord will come with fire, and His chariots will be like a whirlwind, to bring down His wrath in anger and His rebuke in flames of fire. (16) For with fire the Lord is going to execute judgment – and with His sword – upon all flesh, and many will be those slain by the Lord. (17) Those who sanctify and purify themselves for the gardens following the lead of the one [characterized] by violence, eating the flesh of swine, and of whatever is an abomination, and of rats will be swept away together (i.e., at the Second Advent), says the Lord. Isaiah 66:15-17 The dual destruction mentioned above, by means of sword (i.e., at the battle of Armageddon: Revelation 19:21), and by fire, clearly indicates two phases of destruction: 1) Armageddon, where all assembled to do battle with the Lord will be destroyed by "the sharp broadsword which proceeds from His mouth" (Revelation 19:15); and 2) the Baptism of Fire directed towards all who have taken the mark. This can be seen from Isaiah 66:17 above, where the description of abominable cult activity refers to those who worship the beast and take part in his religion's foul rites and activities (which are by association with antichrist "[characterized] by violence" references to the persecution of believers referred to in 2 Thessalonians 1:7 quoted above), including the Great Persecution.

Just as the resurrection which immediately precedes the Second Advent is selective and determined on an individual basis (cf. Matthew 24:40-41), so the Baptism of Fire which occurs at the commencement of the millennial kingdom will be restricted to a select population; but instead of consisting of those who lived for Jesus Christ and were uniquely resurrected while yet alive, this group will consist of those who chose against Him in the most forceful and willful possible manner. Their removal from the earth to prevent them taking any part in the glories of the Millennium will be likewise unique in the course of human history.

(9) And yet a third angel followed them, saying in a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives a mark upon his forehead or upon his hand, (10) he himself will also drink from the wine of God's wrath which has been mixed undiluted in the cup of His anger. And [that person] will be tortured/tormented in fire and sulfur before the holy angels and before the Lamb. (11) And the smoke of their torture/torment will go up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night, those who worship the beast and his image and whoever takes the mark of his name."

Revelation 14:9-11 As Ezekiel 39:6 quoted above suggests, the Baptism of fire will be extensive and will no doubt consume the great majority of the world's remaining population (for most of those who are not followers of Jesus will have chosen instead to follow the beast: Revelation 13:8; Revelation 17:8 b). It will not, however, be total, and we can expect a very large proportion of those who survive this judgment to be children who had not yet reached the age of accountability and consent at the time of the Second Advent (cf. Isaiah 2:2-3; Isaiah 60:14). The purpose of this judgment will be two-fold and merciful in every way to all inclined to respond to God's mercy. By cleansing the threshing floor and removing all such stumbling blocks out of Messiah's kingdom (cf. Isaiah 57:14; Zephaniah 3:11; Matthew 13:41), the fire sent "upon Magog and upon those who dwell securely in the islands" has another very specific purpose, and one that works hand in glove with the first: "so that they may know that I am the Lord" (Ezekiel 39:6).

(2) At the end of days, the mountain of the temple of the Lord will be established as the chief of all mountains, and it will be raised higher than all [other] hills, and all the nations will flow to it. (3) And many peoples will come and they will say, "Come let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us of His ways, and that we may walk in His paths." Isaiah 2:2-3 6. The Regathering and Purging of Israel The return of the Jewish people into the land of Israel is at once one of the most blessed and most frequently occurring of all of the promises of Old Testament prophecy. It would be nigh on impossible to produce a completely comprehensive list of the passages, ubiquitous in scripture, wherein the return is expressed literally or figuratively, prophetically and by promise, in the Old Testament or in the New.

After Armageddon, our glorious Lord will immediately begin the process of bringing all survivors of Jewish blood back to the Land. Whether hailing from Babylon (Jeremiah 50:4-8; Micah 4:10) or previously imprisoned (Isaiah 51:14; Isaiah 61:1; Zechariah 9:11-12; cf. Psalms 68:6; Psalms 79:10-11; Psalms 102:20; Psalms 146:7, whether dwelling abroad as a result of the recent diaspora caused by antichrist's depredations (Deuteronomy 26:6-8; Hosea 8:10; Joel 3:2-8; Zechariah 14:2; Luke 21:24) or in long established Jewish communities throughout the world (Jeremiah 3:18; Jeremiah 30:10; Ezekiel 37:21; Zephaniah 3:10), all who are of Jewish blood will be repatriated to the place of judgment on the threshold of the Land of Israel in the opening days of the Millennium. There, in the "desert of the nations", they will stand judgment for their right to enter the land. The return will be prominently announced:

(11) In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the surviving remnant of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the Mediterranean. (12) He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; he will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth. Isaiah 11:11-12 NIV

(12) In that day the Lord will thresh from the flowing Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt, and you, O Israelites, will be gathered up one by one. (13) And in that day a great trumpet will sound. Those who were perishing in Assyria and those who were exiled in Egypt will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain in Jerusalem. Isaiah 27:12-13 NIV

(10) They will follow the Lord; he will roar like a lion. When he roars, his children will come trembling from the west. (11) They will come trembling like birds from Egypt, like doves from Assyria. "I will settle them in their homes," declares the Lord. Hosea 11:10-11 NIV

(8) "I will signal for them and gather them in. Surely I will redeem them; they will be as numerous as before. (9) Though I scatter them among the peoples, yet in distant lands they will remember me. They and their children will survive, and they will return. (10) I will bring them back from Egypt and gather them from Assyria. I will bring them to Gilead and Lebanon, and there will not be room enough for them. (11) They will pass through the sea of trouble (i.e., the Tribulation); the surging sea will be subdued and all the depths of the Nile will dry up. Assyria's pride will be brought down and Egypt's scepter will pass away. (12) I will strengthen them in the Lord and in his name they will walk," declares the Lord. Zechariah 10:8-12 NIV The return will be orderly:

(11) Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing! Come out from it and be pure, you who carry the vessels of the Lord. (12) But you will not leave in haste or go in flight; for the Lord will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard. Isaiah 52:11-12 NIV The return will be rapid:

(7) "Before she goes into labor, she gives birth; before the pains come upon her, she delivers a son. (8) Who has ever heard of such a thing? Who has ever seen such things? Can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment? Yet no sooner is Zion in labor than she gives birth to her children. (9) "Do I bring to the moment of birth and not give delivery?" says the Lord. "Do I close up the womb when I bring to delivery?" says your God. Isaiah 66:7-9 NIV The means for the return will be abundantly provided (Isaiah 43:19-21; Isaiah 48:20-21; Isaiah 60:4; Isaiah 52:10):

(15) The Lord will dry up the gulf of the Egyptian sea; with a scorching wind he will sweep his hand over the Euphrates River. He will break it up into seven streams so that anyone can cross over in sandals. (16) There will be a highway for the remnant of his people that is left from Assyria, as there was for Israel when they came up from Egypt. Isaiah 11:15-16 NIV

(7) The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow. (8) And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness; it will be for those who walk on that Way. The unclean will not journey on it; wicked fools will not go about on it. (9) No lion will be there, nor any ravenous beast; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, (10) and those the Lord has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away. Isaiah 35:7-10 NIV

(9) to say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!' "They will feed beside the roads and find pasture on every barren hill. (10) They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat down on them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water. (11) I will turn all my mountains into roads, and my highways will be raised up. (12) See, they will come from afar – some from the north, some from the west, some from the region of Aswan." Isaiah 49:9-12 NIV

Surely the islands look to me; in the lead are the ships of Tarshish, bringing your children from afar, with their silver and gold, to the honor of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor. Isaiah 60:9 NIV

"And they will bring all your brothers, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the Lord – on horses, in chariots and wagons, and on mules and camels," says the

Lord. "They will bring them, as the Israelites bring their grain offerings, to the temple of the Lord in ceremonially clean vessels." Isaiah 66:20 NIV The Lord Jesus Christ Himself will be the Agent of the return (Ezekiel 11:17; Ezekiel 20:41-42):

(5) "Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. (6) I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth – (7) everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made." Isaiah 43:5-7 NIV The return will be complete (Daniel 12:1 b):

Then they will know that I am the Lord their God, for though I sent them into exile among the nations, I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind. Ezekiel 39:28 NIV

(12) "I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people. (13) One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out. Their king will pass through before them, the Lord at their head." Micah 2:12-13 The return will be a vindication:

(19) "At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you; I will rescue the lame and gather those who have been scattered. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they were put to shame. (20) At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes," says the Lord. Zephaniah 3:19-20 NIV b. The Purging of the Jewish People prior to Reentering the Land:

(4) He summons the heavens above, and the earth, that he may judge his people. (5) "Gather to me this consecrated people, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice." Psalms 50:4-5 NIV (cf. Hosea 6:11) In that day you shall not be shamed for any of your deeds in which you transgress against Me; For then I will take away from your midst those who rejoice in your pride, and you shall no longer be haughty in My holy mountain. Zephaniah 3:11 NKJV

Although the regathering will indeed apply to all Jews who survive the Tribulation, only those who accept the Messiah will be allowed into the land of promise (those who believed before Christ's return have, of course, already been resurrected as part of Christ's Bride). This process of purging is the sixth of the seven "thunder judgments", the purifying of the new remnant of Israel following their regathering to the threshold of the land of Israel so that only the righteous may enter to inaugurate the Messiah's millennial kingdom (cf. Isaiah 60:21).

(34) I will bring you from the nations and gather you from the countries where you have been scattered—with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with outpoured wrath. (35) I will bring you into the desert of the nations and there, face to face, I will execute judgment upon you. (36) As I judged your fathers in the desert of the land of Egypt, so I will judge you, declares the Sovereign Lord. (37) I will take note of you as you pass under my rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. (38) I will purge you of those who revolt and rebel against me. Although I will bring them out of the land where they are living, yet they will not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord. Ezekiel 20:34-38 NIV

Comment: In this passage we see all of the essential features of the process of regathering: 1) All of Jewish stock who did not receive the mark are regathered (Ezekiel 20:34); 2) The place of initial regathering is near the Land, but not actually in the Land (Ezekiel 20:35); 3) The purpose for this phased arrival into Israel is to render judgment as to who is fit to enter (Ezekiel 20:36-37); 4) Those who "revolt and rebel" even after witnessing the Messiah's miraculous return and their own astounding regathering will be purged from the remnant and will not enter the Land (Ezekiel 20:38).

1) The Place of Purging: As explained immediately above, this judgment will take place near the Land of Israel but not actually in the Land (Ezekiel 20:38). Ezekiel 20:35 describes the place of judgment as "the desert of the nations" (Hebrew: midhbar ha'amiyim, ■■■■ ■■■■■■). This is most often taken to mean the places of Jewish diaspora around the world, but that is obviously incorrect since verse thirty-eight very clearly states that all individuals of Jewish stock will "brought out of the land where they are living" yet "will not enter the Land of Israel". The true identification of "the desert of the nations" is Sinai. Israel was delivered from the nations to be her own nation-state under God by going through the desert of Sinai and undergoing a process of cleansing and judgment under the leadership of Moses (a type of Christ). Just as Sinai was the place of testing and purging in the first Exodus, so also at this future time the same "desert of [deliverance from] the nations" will be Sinai. The strong parallel deliberately drawn in Ezekiel chapter twenty between the situation of this future generation and that of the Exodus generation supports this identification: a prolonged stay in Sinai was the unhappy alternative for that previous generation who had likewise experienced the miraculous deliverance of God in bringing them forth from the nations. Sinai is on the threshold of the Land of promise. In terms of biblical geography, it is not technically in Egypt, but neither is it "in the Land" (the "brook of Egypt" will be the southwestern boundary of millennial Israel Ezekiel 47:19; Ezekiel 48:28). We can therefore conclude that the "desert of the nations" is indeed Sinai, given this unique name now because all those of Jewish blood are brought back to this place from all of the nations of the world where they had previously been scattered, not just from Egypt. Sinai will be the place of blessed cleansing for all willing to accept the Messiah, an event soon followed by their repatriation to the Land of Israel.

Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. Hosea 2:14 NIV This is what the Lord says: "The people who survive the sword will find favor in the desert; I will come to give rest to Israel." Jeremiah 31:2 NIV

2) The Time of Purging: As noted above, scripture describes the return to the land as something that will rapidly follow Jesus' return, so we may expect that the entire process of collection, transfer to Sinai, judgment and repatriation to be a very swift affair. In fact, Daniel 12:1-13 provides us with a detailed and definitive schedule:

(11) From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. (12) Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days. Daniel 12:11-12 NIV The phrase from verse eleven above, "from the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up", refers to the Tribulation's mid-point and antichrist's session in the temple of God, an event that will be accompanied by the abolition of the daily sacrifice and the erection of the cult-idol statue of antichrist which the false prophet will animate (i.e., the "abomination of desolation", or more

correctly, "the abomination that causes desolation": Daniel 9:27; Revelation 13:11-15; cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12). Moreover, the "1290 days" must then stretch to a time beyond the end of the Tribulation past the Second Advent. That is because the Great Tribulation itself, the period which begins with the events mentioned here in Daniel 12:11, lasts for three and one half years only, a time frame described in scripture (in terms of lunar years) as either 42 months, or 1260 days, or "a time, times and half a time" (Daniel 7:25; Daniel 1:1; Revelation 11:2; Revelation 12:6; Revelation 12:14; Revelation 13:5). And since this period of time will be further shortened to some degree at least "for the sake of the elect" (Mark 13:20), it is impossible for the 1290 days to be fit in its entirety into this window of the Tribulation's second half. Even calculating on a 365 day year, the maximum yield for the period would 1278 days assuming a leap year, and this figure does not include the unspecified span of curtailment "for the sake of the elect". It seems best, therefore, to understand the differential between the actual return of Christ and the 1290 days as the interval within which all Israel will be regathered into Sinai so that we should complete Daniel's words somewhat as follows: "From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days [until all Israel is regathered]", that is, until the premier prophetic event to which Daniel was looking in anticipation comes to pass. The place of regathering, for the purpose of judgment and purging, will be the "desert of the nations", and the process of regathering will occupy approximately 30 days (depending upon the variables noted above). There then remains the differential between the 1290 days and the 1335 days, a span of 45 days. This 45 day period will then be the time frame of the actual judgment. In addition to meshing seamlessly with all of the other information we have about these events, the above interpretation also has two further advantages:

1) It allows for a close parallel to the events of the Exodus. As we have seen, the fact that Israel will be regathered initially into "the desert of the nations", that is, Sinai, and winnowed in a way similar to that experienced by the original Exodus generation, invites this comparison generally. As we have seen since the beginning of this series, days are often representative of years in prophetic contexts (e.g., Psalms 90:4; Daniel 9:25-27), so that the 45 days naturally suggests the 40 years of wandering and testing in Sinai in addition to the 5 years of entrance under Joshua (cf. Joshua 14:10). In its application to this particular prophecy in Daniel, the 40 days will then be the time of our Lord's judging all regathered to Sinai, and the 5 days the period of their restoration to and resettlement in the Land of Promise under Messiah's reign.

2) This also explains Daniel's words "Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days". According to this interpretation, those who "wait for the Lord" (a picture of faith: Psalms 27:14; Psalms 37:9; Isaiah 40:31; Micah 7:7; Habakkuk 2:3; Zephaniah 3:8; Romans 8:25; cf. Matthew 24:13; Luke 12:36; Romans 11:25-26), and "reach the end" are the Jewish returnees who pass muster in the desert and enter the Land. All who do survive this judgment will most certainly be "blessed", both in comparison to those who do not and in absolute terms as well, for theirs it will be to experience the ineffable blessings of Millennial Israel under Messiah's reign, a boon much anticipated in prophecy from Genesis to Revelation.

(15) When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God." (16) Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. (17) At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' (18) "But they all alike began to

make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.' (19) "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' (20) "Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.' (21) "The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.' (22) "'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' (23) "Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full. (24) I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'" Luke 14:15-24 NIV

(1) Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: (2) "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. (3) He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. (4) "Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.' (5) "But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. (6) The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. (7) The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. (8) "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. (9) Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' (10) So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. (11) "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. (12) 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. (13) "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie his hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (14) "For many are invited, but few are chosen." Matthew 22:1-14 NIV As our Lord's parable makes unmistakably clear, while being present at the great banquet in Israel (the wedding banquet "of his Son": cf. Matthew 22:2) which celebrates the wedding of the Lamb and His Bride will be blessed indeed (Luke 14:15 above), only those who attain to it, that is, only those who are not destroyed first by outright rejection of the invitation (i.e., those who accept the mark of the beast and so are destroyed in the prior "thunder judgment", also known as the "baptism of fire"), and who are not subsequently found wanting during the judgment in the desert (represented by the man without proper attire in Matthew 22:11-14 above), will be allowed to enter the Land and enjoy all of the marvelous blessings to come (n.b., these passages also apply to the entrance into the eternal kingdom at the end of the Millennium).

3) The Process of Purging:

(25) Brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery (and so think more of yourselves than you should): hardness has come over a part of Israel until the time when the fullness of the gentiles has come in [to the family of God] (i.e., when the Church is completed at the 2nd Advent). (26) And it is in this way (i.e., coming to believe upon witnessing the Messiah's return) that all [true] Israel will be saved just as it is written: The Deliverer will come from Zion. He will expel ungodliness from Jacob. (27) And this will be My covenant with them when I take away their sins. Romans 11:25-27 When all Israel is assembled on the border of the Land, many in her number will already have come to believe in Jesus Christ, having been convicted of the truth of His

Messiahship upon witnessing His sign of the cross appearing in the heavens along with His miraculous return.

Behold! He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the peoples of the earth will grieve on account of Him. Revelation 1:7 And I will pour out on the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem a Spirit of grace and repentance. For they will look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they will grieve for Him like the grieving for an only son, and they will [weep] bitterly for Him like the bitter [weeping] for a firstborn son. Zechariah 12:10

There are indications, moreover, that the process of repentance will continue right up until the end of the present judgment we are discussing:

(4) For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar and without ephod or household idols. (5) Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the Lord and to His goodness in the last days. Hosea 3:4-5 NASB As the context of Hosea 3:1-5 quoted above makes clear, the Lord is eager for reconciliation with Israel despite her previous reluctance (just as Hosea is commanded to reconcile with his wife despite her serious indiscretions).

(10) "Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you," declares the Lord. (11) "Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you." Zechariah 2:10-11 NIV

During the Millennium, the change of heart among the offspring of the remnant of Israel will bring a flood of Jews to faith in Christ (comparable to the flood of gentiles that characterizes the Church age). Seeing the Messiah face to face (Deuteronomy 4:30; Isaiah 17:7-8; Jeremiah 3:22-25; Joel 3:17; Zechariah 12:10-14; Revelation 1:7; cf. Isaiah 31:6; Isaiah 60:20-21; Matthew 24:30), Israel will turn to Him in numbers that will proportionally outstrip the greatest gains of the Church age, as God abundantly blesses His chosen people, fulfilling all the promises He has made (Psalms 80:18; Isaiah 65:8-10; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 20:33-38; Ezekiel 37:11-14; Hosea 1:10-11; Malachi 4:5-6; Matthew 23:39; Romans 11:26). However, it is a sad fact that in spite of the nearly two millennia that Israel has spent "in the wilderness" (Amos 9:9), in spite of all the pressures of the Tribulation (cf. Isaiah 48:10; Luke 13:6-9), in spite of all of the glories of Second Advent where "all mankind together will see the glory of the Lord" (Isaiah 40:5), and in spite of this process of face to face judgment with our Lord, the hardness of the hearts of many of the original survivors will prove persistent and not susceptible to being cracked (cf. Zechariah 2:10-11). Scripture is very clear on this point. Not all who are regathered will enter, only the remnant, and that remnant is consistently described as small (Isaiah 6:13; Isaiah 17:5-7; Isaiah 65:8-12; Jeremiah 50:20; Joel 2:32; Micah 4:6-7; Romans 9:27-29; cf. Zechariah 13:8).

Although your people may be like the sand of the sea, O Israel, [only] a remnant of them will return. Isaiah 10:22 I will choose you—one from a town and two from a clan—and bring you to Zion. Jeremiah 3:14 NIV

(8) "In the whole land," declares the Lord, "two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. (9) This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like

gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.'" Zechariah 13:8-9 NIV As is clear from the last passage in particular, in addition to the high casualty rate suffered by the Jewish population of the Tribulation generally, the "one third" who survive will be "refined". That is to say, they will be purified by a purging that distills them into a remnant of believers. This remnant will in turn provide the root stock for the abundant Jewish population of the Millennium, the majority of whom will continue in the footsteps of their forefathers in faith in Jesus Christ, the true Messiah. The process of purging is clear to see from Ezekiel chapter twenty, the pertinent section of which for this topic is as follows:

(37) I will take note of you as you pass under my rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. (38) I will purge you of those who revolt and rebel against me. Although I will bring them out of the land where they are living, yet they will not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord. Ezekiel 20:34-38 NIV The procedure for this judgment will thus be very similar to what will transpire at the end of the Millennium during the initial stage of the last judgment as described in Matthew 25:31-46, otherwise known as the judgment of the sheep and the goats. In both cases we have a mixed population that must be separated, and in both cases it is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who will do the separating. However, while the sheep and goats judgment will involve the entire millennial population at the end of history, this judgment will only concern those Jews still alive after the baptism of fire who have been repatriated to the doorstep of the Land of Israel. And while the later judgment will end in a living resurrection, with the believers entering eternity and the unbelievers cast into the lake of fire (Matthew 25:41-46), no such resurrection occurs at this time. Those who are shown to truly be believers in Jesus will enter the millennial kingdom of the Messiah in their physical bodies. Those who refuse to accept Jesus will be dispatched to torments (the temporary residence after death of all unbelievers since the beginning of history) to await the last judgment. The criterion or basis of judgment will be the individual's attitude towards the newly returned Messiah. As Ezekiel 20:38 states, Jesus will "purge you of those who revolt and rebel against Me". All those who resist accepting and obeying Jesus Christ through faith, that is, all who persist in unbelief in spite of all that has transpired, will not be allowed to enter the land.

There are thus five discrete categories among those of Jewish blood who survive the Tribulation:

- 1) Those who previously accepted the mark of the beast: these are executed as part of the baptism of fire.
- 2) Those who accept the Messiahship of Jesus Christ upon witnessing His return: these are allowed to enter the land at the conclusion of this judgment.
- 3) Those who refuse to accept the Messiahship of Jesus Christ in spite of the previous miracles and the message given during this judgment: these are executed in the process of this judgment and dispatched into torments to await the last judgment.
- 4) Those who did not accept the Messiahship of Jesus Christ as they saw Him return, but who do repent and accept Jesus as their Savior during the process of this judgment: these are also allowed to enter the land at the conclusion of this judgment.

5) Those who have not yet attained to an age or capacity of accountability, and so are not yet responsible for making this critical decision: these are also allowed to enter the land at the conclusion of this judgment. The purpose of this judgment is therefore not only to assure that the Millennium begins with a pure cadre of Jewish believers in the Land of Promise cleansed of all prone to "revolt or rebel" against the truth or to grumble against the Lord Jesus, their ruling Sovereign (cf. the parallels of Leviticus 24:10-23 and Acts 5:1-11), but also to give even those who have so far demurred for whatever reason every opportunity to put aside their hard-heartedness and accept the free grace of God for salvation. The fact that some sizeable portion of those so gathered will nevertheless still refuse to accept the truth of the Messiahship of Jesus Christ is at once a startling and horrifying fact, and a testimony to the power of self-willed arrogance to blind the human heart against the truth even when it is so overwhelmingly revealed. For to be brought face to face with the Messiah Himself, to the gospel message from His own lips, to see the consequences of unbelief with one's own eyes, and to persist in arrogant rejection of Him nonetheless, is irrefutable testimony to the fact that, short of taking away our free will entirely, nothing God could ever do would result in all human beings turning to Him in faith. And as we are here for the purpose of exercising our free will in faith to accept Jesus Christ (or reject Him), this He will most certainly not do. And it will come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance as the Lord has said, even among the survivors whom the Lord calls. Joel 2:32

(11) "For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. (12) As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. (13) I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. (14) I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. (15) I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord. (16) I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice. (17) As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats. (18) Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? (19) Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet? (20) Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says to them: See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. (21) Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, (22) I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another. (23) I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. (24) I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the Lord have spoken. Ezekiel 34:11-24 NIV As it was during the time of the Exodus when far from the entire complement who left Egypt entered the land of promise (indeed, only Caleb and Joshua of the older generation did enter the land), so it will be during this future judgment. Just as in the Exodus the children who had not yet reached an age of accountability did enter the land after the forty

years of refining, so also in a similar way, we may expect a large proportion of those entering and passing this judgment to consist of those too young to be held accountable at present with the result that they are automatically allowed to enter. There will also be opportunity for repentance, the giving of the gospel message from the Lord Himself, the truth about salvation through the washing of the water of the Word of God wherein accepting His Person and His work, the blood of Christ, results in cleansing from all sin, deliverance and salvation for all who are willing to accept the truth (John 3:5; Ephesians 5:26; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 10:22; 1 Peter 3:21; cf. Hebrews 9:14; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23). The Lord will wash away the filth of the women of Zion; he will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire. Isaiah 4:4 NIV

I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me. Jeremiah 33:8 NIV In those days, at that time," declares the Lord, "search will be made for Israel's guilt, but there will be none, and for the sins of Judah, but none will be found, for I will forgive the remnant I spare. Jeremiah 50:20 NIV

(18) Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. (19) You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. Micah 7:18-19 NIV

(9) "Then will I purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him shoulder to shoulder. (10) From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, my scattered people, will bring me offerings. (11) On that day you will not be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me, because I will remove from this city those who rejoice in their pride. Never again will you be haughty on my holy hill. (12) But I will leave within you the meek and humble, who trust in the name of the Lord. (13) The remnant of Israel will do no wrong; they will speak no lies, nor will deceit be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid." Zephaniah 3:9-13 NIV

"On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity." Zechariah 13:1 NIV

(2) But who can endure the day of [the Messiah's] coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. (3) He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, (4) and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years. Malachi 3:2-4 NIV But while all who repent of their prior unbelief and accept Jesus as the Messiah and the true Son of God at this time will be cleansed and forgiven, the purging process will discover the dross, and those who would otherwise have been the "sons of the kingdom" will be thrust out into outer darkness.

I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities. Isaiah 1:25 NIV

(11) "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. (12) But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matthew 8:11-12 NIV At the completion of this process, God will conduct the remnant,

those who have passed the test of faith, into the Land of Promise to experience the glorious blessings of the millennial rule of Jesus Christ.

(8) This is what the Lord says: "As when juice is still found in a cluster of grapes and men say, 'Don't destroy it, there is yet some good in it,' so will I do in behalf of my servants; I will not destroy them all. (9) I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, and from Judah those who will possess my mountains; my chosen people will inherit them, and there will my servants live. (10) Sharon will [again] become a pasture for flocks, and the Valley of Achor a resting place for herds, for my people who seek me." Isaiah 65:8-10 7. The Judgment and Reward of the Church So then each of us will give an account to God concerning himself. Romans 14:12 It is appointed unto men to die once, and, after that, judgment is in store. Hebrews 9:27 The final evaluation of all believers constituting Christ's Church (that is, all believers from Adam and Eve to the last person saved during the Tribulation) will not be judgment of assessing blame for sin since Christ has already died for all of our sins; rather it will be an evaluation of assessing our production for the Lord during our earthly lives wherein everything we have thought, said and done will come to light (Matthew 10:26; Mark 4:22; Luke 8:17; Luke 12:2; Romans 2:16; 1 Corinthians 4:5), with reward coming for everything good and with fire purging away everything else:

If anyone's work is burnt up, he will suffer the loss [of any potential reward for it], but he himself will be saved – but in this way [just described] as through fire [which evaluated his false works as worthless and burnt them up]. 1 Corinthians 3:15

Also known as "the judgment seat of Christ", this judgment is Christ's evaluation of His Bride, the resurrected Church. Our Lord will personally evaluate the lives of every human being who has ever lived following their resurrection, whether it is unto life or unto death. This is the first such resurrection judgment: since the Church is the first echelon of the resurrection following the resurrection of Jesus Christ, final judgment begins with us. For [the] time for the [last] judgment to begin with the household of God is [imminent] (cf. 1 Peter 4:7). And if it begins first with us, what [in the world] will be the result for those who are disobeying the gospel of God (i.e., the "good news" of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ)? 1 Peter 4:17 a. The Time and Place of the Judgment: For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay every man in his own coin. Matthew 16:27

Behold, I am coming quickly, and I bring with me my wages with which to repay each according to his work. Revelation 22:12 The passages above and many others refer to the time of our rewarding at our Lord's Second Advent (e.g., Isaiah 40:10; Isaiah 62:11; Matthew 16:27; Luke 14:14; Revelation 11:18; Revelation 22:12). The judgment of the Church will thus almost certainly take place immediately after the conclusion of the regathering and purging of Israel, following the resettlement of the remnant in the Land of Israel. Rather than a judgment of those still in mortal bodies, however, the final evaluation of the Church will concern believers from Adam and Eve to the Second Advent, all of whom were already resurrected to form part of Christ's Bride at His return. For believers and unbelievers both, resurrection confirms every person's final eternal state (saved or lost), and is a necessary event before receiving final judgment (for reward or for confirmation of condemnation respectively; cf. Daniel 12:1-3; Revelation 20:11-15).

"But as for you, [Daniel], be on your way until the end. For you will rest, and [then] at the end of days you will arise [in resurrection] to receive your allotted inheritance." Daniel 12:13

Therefore our eternal status will not be at issue in this judgment. Even in cases where production for Jesus during one's lifetime has been virtually nil, while all false efforts will be burned up, those believers with little to show for their lives will yet "be saved", though "so as through fire" (1 Corinthians 3:15). Having survived life with our faith in Jesus Christ still intact, we shall remain part of His Body forever, even if our eternal rewards are at a minimal level.

(10) According to the grace of God given to me like a wise architect I have laid down a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each one take care how he builds upon it. (11) For no one can lay another foundation except the One that has been laid down: Jesus Christ. (12) And if someone builds upon his foundation with gold, silver, and precious stones, [or] with wood, hay, and stubble, (13) [in either case] his work will be made manifest [as to its true quality], for the Day [of judgment] will make it clear [for what it truly is], because it will be revealed (lit., uncovered) with fire. And the fire will evaluate (lit., "assay") the work of each person as to what its [true] quality is. (14) If anyone's work which he has built [on his foundation of faith in Christ] remains (i.e., is not burnt away by the fiery evaluation), he will receive a reward [for it]. (15) If anyone's work is burnt up, he will suffer the loss [of any potential reward for it], but he himself will be saved – but in this way [just described] as through fire [which evaluated his false works as worthless and burnt them up]. 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

Romans 14:10-12 and 2 Corinthians 5:10 both state that the judgment will take place "before Christ's tribunal". The word "tribunal" (also often translated "judgment seat"), is the Greek word *bema* (βήμα), and refers to a public podium, dais, or rostrum, used for public speaking or administering justice. The latter accords better with the analogy Paul is drawing in these two passages, comparing the public evaluation of believers' earthly service with the Roman administration of justice (Acts 18:12-17; cf. Matthew 27:19; John 19:13; Acts 12:21; Acts 25:6-17). Unlike most contemporary settings of jurisprudence today where trials are held indoors and generally not made widely available, by contrast as in the example of Roman justice (where the trial occurs in some central part of the city or municipality, often in the open air, and always accessible to all), our evaluation before Christ's *bema* or judgment seat will be public, and since all members of the Church will be evaluated, it certainly stands to reason that the entire Body of Christ will attend. This circumstance argues for an outdoor venue (rather than within the holy of holies of the temple whence Christ will reign for a thousand years), and we know from Isaiah that during the Millennium there will be just such a large, open-air area for assembly in Jerusalem near the temple, miraculously protected from the elements:

(5) And the Lord will create over Mount Zion and over all her assemblies a cloud – one of smoke by day, and of a shining flame of fire by night. For there will be a canopy above the glory [of His presence, covering it] entirely. (6) It will be a shelter from the heat by day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain. Isaiah 4:5-6

Difficulties of space (the approximate size of the Church is unknown, but if the number of those who truly put their faith in the Lord from Eden onwards reached into the billions, it would not be at all surprising), and of time (obviously, to give each person an individual evaluation would require a tremendous amount of "earth time"), are likely to be met supernaturally. After all, everyone being evaluated will be at that point "eternal", so that both Judge and judged will be capable of standing somewhat outside of normal temporal and spatial constraints as well as within (compare the ability

of the resurrection body to defy the limitations of time and space as we presently understand them). Therefore although the question of how long a time this last of the seven judgments, the "judgment of the Church", will take is not set out in scripture, on the basis of its association with the other Second Advent judgments it must surely be relatively short-lived (again, in "earth time"). That would seem to suggest that this will be a case of our Lord doing almost instantaneously (in terms of our present understanding of time) what would otherwise require a very long period to accomplish, if one were to be restricted to the current laws of time and space (which our Lord clearly is not, and, in resurrection, our present earthly restraints will be greatly changed as well). In other words, it will both be a short judgment (in calendar terms), and a long and detailed one (in terms of the precise and exacting evaluation of each of us by our Lord Jesus Christ). The fact that we like He at that point will no longer be subject to temporal constraints in the same way as we are now (for we shall have been resurrected at that point) no doubt explains much about the potential to compress this process temporally from the earthly point of view.

b. The Order of Judgment: While the sequence in which we shall be judged by our Lord is not expressly specified in scripture, there is much to suggest that the order will proceed according to merit. That is to say, the judgment will not be chronological (i.e., starting with Abel, Adam and Eve, etc.), nor reverse chronological (i.e., beginning with the last tribulational cohort to be saved before Christ's appearance), but instead it will progress from the greatest believers to the least, beginning with the likes of king David and the prophets and the apostles, and terminating with all those whose production during this life was at the bare minimum level.

1) Many who are last shall be first: Our Lord's prophecy to the effect that many of those who were exalted in this life will find their positions reversed with those who were not is clearly tied to the principle that self-exaltation in the service of self-interest (i.e., not rank or position per se, but self-sought promotion) tends to negate reward, while self-abasement in the service of the kingdom of God (i.e., not asceticism practiced perversely for its own sake, but genuine sacrifices made on behalf of serving Christ's Church) tends to produce this reversal of the present order.

"Whoever wishes to be first will [have to become] last of all and a servant of all." Mark 9:35

"So whoever lowers himself like this child, this person will be higher [ranking] in the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 18:4 "For the one who is [making himself] smaller among you all, this person is the great[er] [one]." Luke 9:48

It is in this sense that we should understand Jesus' words about the exchange of places between "the first and the last": the standards of this world are not the ones our Lord will use in determining our eternal rewards; rather, our Lord will execute a true judgment wherein "many" who seem great in this life will be found to have produced little, while "many" who seemed insignificant in this life will be found to have produced much, with each group being rewarded "according to what they have done" (Psalms 62:12; Matthew 16:27; Romans 2:6; 1 Corinthians 3:8; Revelation 2:23; Revelation 22:12). And it is not that everyone who seems to be "great" to the world's eyes will not also be so in eternity (e.g., David, Moses, Daniel, the prophets, the apostles, and many others seemed great at the time and genuinely were; these individuals will without question figure high on the list on that day of days); nor is it the case that everyone who seems insignificant in the world's estimation will not also be so in eternity (for some who seem not to be producing for the Lord really are not producing for the Lord). Nevertheless, the emphasis our Lord put on this point suggests

strongly that we should take to heart the principle that present appearances are likely to be deceiving in "many" cases. For "many" who may seem to us now as likely to be among the first in the kingdom will in fact be shown not to have produced much at all that is significant for the Lord, while "many" whose work and sacrifice is not highly visible at present will be revealed as having produced significant results for Jesus Christ "on the day when God will judge the secret things of men through Jesus Christ according to my gospel" (Romans 2:16). It is for this reason that we should be reluctant to "judge before the time":

(4) The Lord is the One who judges me. (5) Therefore, do not make judgments before the time, until the Lord shall come, who will illuminate the hidden things of darkness, and reveal the intents of every heart, and then the praise of each shall come to him from God. 1 Corinthians 4:4-5

Seen from this perspective, our Lord's statements about the "many first being last" and "many last being first" likely also indicate that the order of the judgment of Christ's Church will proceed as suggested above, that is, from the most meritorious to the least so. But many who are first will be last, and the last first. Mark 10:31 NIV Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last. Luke 13:30 NIV The context of the first passage above, Mark 10:17-31, is the request made of Jesus by the rich young ruler to know what must be done to inherit eternal life, his disappointment when told to sell his possessions, and Peter's desire to receive confirmation of the reward he and others will receive for following Jesus sacrificially. Against this background, Jesus' words "many who are first will be last, and the last first" are meant to demonstrate that although to the world's eyes the apostles were at that time nothing compared to the rich and powerful Pharisees and Sadducees, at the judgment their places would be reversed (so that Peter and his fellows should keep their eyes focused on their eternal reward rather than on their present humble status). The context for the second passage above, Luke 13:22-30, is Jesus' description of the narrow door of salvation, and the exclusion of many of the prominent religious figures of the day from the great millennial celebration-banquet. Against this background, Jesus' words "there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last" likewise indicate that few of those who are seen to be celebrities in this world will be so in God's eyes in the next, and that on the other hand many who are of no account in the world's thinking will be honored on that future day.

Perhaps the clearest evidence from this set of "first-last-last-first" passages which indicates that a correspondence is to be found between this reversal of roles (i.e., between the only apparently spiritual and with those who are truly meritorious though anonymous workers for Christ) and the order of judgment-reward (with the new "first" being the more highly rewarded) comes from the parable of the workers in the vineyard.

(30) "But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first. (1) For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. (2) He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. (3) About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. (4) He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' (5) So they went. He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. (6) About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?' (7) 'Because no one has hired us,' they answered. He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.' (8) When evening came, the owner of the

vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.' (9) The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. (10) So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. (11) When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. (12) 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.' (13) But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? (14) Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. (15) Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?' (16) So the last will be first, and the first will be last." Matthew 19:30, Matthew 20:1-16 NIV With the use of the word "so" (Greek houtos, ο■τως, "thus / in this way") in verse sixteen above, we see that it is the reversal of the expected order that constitutes the fulfillment of the "last/first – first/last" prophecy. Applying this to the Church at large, the denarius represents the award of salvation which all who trust in Christ will possess equally. The workers hired first represent those who seem in the world's eyes according to the world's standards as likely to receive a larger reward, while those hired last appear to be precisely the opposite, namely, those whose reward will be the least. But in fact, the situation is exactly the reverse of worldly impressions. For our purposes here, the critical point of interpretation is the greater honor given to those whose production is often invisible to us here and now being represented by the order of evaluation: rather than having to wait at the end of the line, this group is promoted by being given their wages first (while on the contrary those who appear to our sight to be worthy of more, are not, and are in fact placed behind the truly more worthy). Thus this parable indicates that those who are truly first in God's eyes will receive their judgment and reward first, while those who may seem more prominent to us but are actually not so in truth will have to wait until later, a situation which also reflects their relatively lesser rewards.

2) The Parable of the Banquet Guests:

(7) When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: (8) "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. (9) If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. (10) But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. (11) For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Luke 14:7-11 NIV As in the case of the first and the last, many of those who assume that they are deserving of "first place" (and are assumed by others to be so as well), will find themselves demoted to the end of the line when the true Judge begins His process of evaluation. In contrast, those who were at first not deemed worthy by their fellow diners of such honor, nor even deeming themselves so, will be promoted to the first rank. Humbling oneself for Christ, that is, pursuing Jesus' agenda in this life rather than what the world esteems, though such a course of action usually results in little worldly glory, is the only way to achieve anything worthwhile for Him and thus to be exalted by Him on that great day so as to be moved up to the first rank, that is, to be evaluated earlier in the order reflecting greater rewards (in contrast to those who sought honor in this life and accomplished little for Jesus, and will thus be among those

evaluated last, an indication of lesser reward).

3) The Parable of the Talents and the Minas: The parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30), and the parable of the minas (Luke 19:11-27), though not identical in all details do teach the same principles. In both cases, the master or king represents our Lord, while we are represented by his servants. In each telling of this parable, the servants are given money belonging to their lord and commanded to make good use of it until he returns (with his return representing the Second Advent). The money given to (us) represents the means, opportunity, and authority (cf. Mark 13:34) to act for the Lord in His stead here on earth according to the gifts we have been given (n.b., the English word "talent" actually comes from this parable). Talents and minas are both monetary units used throughout the ancient Mediterranean world from Babylon to Rome. Depending upon the specific standard employed, the approximate weight of a talent could range from some 60 to 100 pounds. At current rates for gold, therefore, a single talent might be worth as much as a million and half dollars in contemporary terms (although its buying power in the ancient economy where money was scarcer in relative terms would be significantly greater). A mina (or mna), was commonly one sixtieth of a talent and thus, while still very valuable, was worth considerably less (i.e., comparing the total value of the amounts given to the servants who received the talents to that given to the servants who each received a single mina equates roughly to eight million dollars versus twenty to thirty thousand dollars). The disparate range between these two similar parables indicates a similarly large range in the gifts and opportunities we are given, but the standard of judgment is the same in every case: our Lord expects a return on His investment, and will reward us wonderfully and marvelously in proportion to our efforts (i.e., the one whose mina gained ten more is placed over ten cities; the one whose mina gained five more is placed over five cities), but will do so with a reward that abundantly exceeds our results to an unimaginable degree (i.e., by the standards of the ancient world even more so than today, rulership over a city would be vastly more valuable than a single mina). For our purposes here, we see in both versions that the servants who accomplished the most are judged and rewarded first, and that the judgment continues in a descending order until it reaches the servant who accomplished nothing.

4) Millennial Offices: Finally, since we know that believers will share Christ's millennial rule (Matthew 25:19-23; Luke 22:28; 1 Corinthians 6:3; Romans 8:17; 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 1:6; Revelation 2:26-27; Revelation 3:21; Revelation 20:4-6; and see below), it stands to reason that those who will hold the highest positions will be rewarded first (as it is customary in the organizing of any hierarchy to begin with the top positions). It is not only logical but consistent with scriptural notions of appropriate honor for the likes of David and the two who will sit at Christ's right and left hands (presumably Moses and Elijah) and the twelve apostles to have the honor of first place in evaluation so as to take their places first in the millennial command structure which our Lord will establish. c. The Procedure and Criteria of the Judgment: With the incarnation, all judgment was placed into our Lord Jesus Christ's hands (John 5:22; cf. Acts 10:42). Jesus is our Judge here and now and will be the One who judges us on that day; and since that is so, any idea we may have of taking judgment into our own hands in criticizing our brothers and sisters in Christ is horribly presumptuous (as the passage immediately below states). We are Jesus' Bride, His Church, and He is the One who will personally evaluate "how we did" in living this life for Him (or not).

(10) But you, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you also belittle your brother? For we will all stand before God's tribunal (11) as it is written: "As I live", says the Lord, "every knee will bow to Me, and every tongue will praise God" (Isaiah 45:23). (12) So then each of us will give an account concerning himself to God. Romans 14:10-12 For we must all stand before Christ's tribunal, so that each of us may receive recompense for what he has accomplished through this body, whether it be good or worthless. 2 Corinthians 5:10

It is clear from these and other passages that this will be a thorough and comprehensive judgment: our actions will be individually evaluated, with the eternal rewards we receive depending upon "what we accomplished" with our time, resources and opportunities here in life. Our Lord's judgment of us will thus be quite detailed, covering all of our positive actions, and all of our negative ones as well (1 Corinthians 3:12-15), including even our every word (Matthew 12:6-37; cf. Hebrews 13:17; Jude 1:15). In the context of the passage immediately above, 2 Corinthians 5:10, we see Paul using this future judgment to motivate our behavior here and now: because this future judgment is the crowning event of our lives on earth (though it takes place after resurrection), we should "make it our [primary] ambition to please Him (i.e., our Lord Jesus Christ)" (2 Corinthians 5:9). For if we were to find ourselves standing before Him this instant, we would certainly realize more fully and deeply than we can presently imagine that all of the troubles and pleasures of this life had meaning only in so far as we overcame them in service to Him (or failed to do so). In fact, the word Paul uses to express what should be our goal or desire or mind-set is the Greek *philotimeomai* (φιλοτιμωμαι), meaning etymologically and essentially "to love honor/office/promotion". This verb is used throughout Greek literature to express the inner drive of highly motivated individuals to compete for the top honors in society, be it in politics, athletics or any other field. Individuals characterized in this way are "ambitious", that is, possessed of a burning desire for success in their respective fields of endeavor. As Paul says elsewhere (1 Corinthians 9:25), non-Christians pour their all into their work, professions or pursuits "to win a perishable prize, but we do it to win an imperishable one". When we stand before Jesus, we can be sure that it will not only be our words and actions that are evaluated, but also the intentions and motivations of our hearts. If we have loved the world and the things of the world more than our rewards and the One they glorify forever, that will be made abundantly clear. The Lord is the One who judges me. Therefore, do not make judgments before the time, until the Lord shall come, who will illuminate the hidden things of darkness, and reveal the intents of every heart, and then the praise of each shall come to him from God. 1 Corinthians 4:4-5 Not only should we not judge others, but we should even refrain from judging ourselves "before the time". The reason for this seems obvious: if we are too harsh on ourselves for lack of visible progress in our ministries, we may be unnecessarily discouraging ourselves on account of trivial things that are truly not our fault, with the unfortunate result of possibly backing off on our efforts (but there have always been ministries which, while it is the Lord's desire for them to be done, yet do not yield the same obvious results as what those of others may seem to be yielding); on the other hand if we are too pleased with ourselves and our work, whether we are justified in our assessment or are grievously miscalculating, in either case we are similarly more likely to back off on our efforts as if we have already "arrived" (although if our Lord has given us a particularly fertile field it is certain that He expects more from us in terms of visible production rather than less). It is our Lord Jesus who has assigned to us the particular field we are to till, be it exceptionally fertile or barren (1 Corinthians 12:5), and it is God the Father who provides the results (1 Corinthians 12:6; cf. Mark 4:26-28).

Therefore, we will avoid both potential pitfalls by keeping our eyes on the finish line ahead and resisting the temptation to look backward (cf. Luke 9:62; Luke 17:32).

(13) Brethren, I do not consider that I have already acquired it. This one thing only [do I keep in mind]. Forgetting what lies behind me [on the course] and straining towards the [course] ahead,
(14) I continue to drive straight for the tape, towards the prize to which God has called us from the beginning [of our race] in Christ Jesus. Php 3:13-14

We know the course; we know the rules; we know how to run. Now is not the time to survey the course, or look back at how far we have come. Now is the time to run. If we keep on running in the way our Lord would have us do, our reward will take care of itself. In terms of procedure, as suggested above, our evaluation will take the form of a dialogue between us and the Lord. In the parables of the talents and the minas, the master in each case summons his servants to discover how they have done, and in each case his servants give him a report (cf. Matthew 25:19; Luke 19:15); likewise in each case, whether the report is favorable or unfavorable, the master pronounces reward (or punishment) based upon the results. Two obvious differences between the general approach indicated by these parables and the specific procedure of the Judgment Seat of Christ are, first, that our Lord knows very well ahead of time exactly what we have done (so that there is in no sense any "finding out" on His part during these proceedings). Secondly, the last individual in each case, the one who fails utterly to carry out his master's orders and is thrown into hell as a result, represents faithless unbelievers who squander their lives entirely. This group will not be evaluated until the last judgment. Believers whose production is at a bare minimum level will be rewarded last and least (discussed above), and while believers whose efforts have been in truth mostly worthless will suffer loss of anticipated reward (1 Corinthians 3:10-15, discussed below), no one at this judgment will lose their eternal life or full share in Jesus Christ. The dialogue format of this judgment can also be deduced from our Lord's synoptic description of the parallel evaluation of millennial believers (i.e., the "sheep" of Matthew 25:1 ff.), and the final "last" judgment of all unbelievers which follows it immediately (i.e., the "goats" of Matthew 25:1 ff.). In each case, our Lord begins with an overall evaluation of the person's life based upon their deeds which in turn reflect their status, saved or lost respectively; and in each case the person being evaluated responds with a question which is then answered by our Lord. As this treatment is meant to be seen as synoptic in nature (e.g., the list of deeds or failures is clearly not meant to be seen as identical in every case), all we can glean from this description about the procedure of our own judgment is that there will be a verbal give and take whereby we are given to see the quality of our life's work (or lack thereof). This same essential picture is found at 1 Peter 4:5 where we are told that unbelievers, who we know are judged "according to their deeds" (Revelation 20:12-13), will "render an account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead", and also at Hebrews 13:17 where pastor-teachers are said to work hard (lit., depriving themselves of sleep) "as those who will have to render an account" – those sitting under their ministries should obey them and yield to them "so that they may do this (i.e., render an account to the Lord) with joy and not with groaning – for that would be unprofitable for you". In short, what the Bible has to say about the actual procedure of our life-evaluation before Christ's tribunal is precisely the sort of thing we ought to expect when a Judge with full powers and complete evidence evaluates an individual's record for the purpose of instruction and reward, namely, a dialogue wherein the facts of the case are revealed through a process of questioning and answering, with a final pronouncement from the

Judge which, in this case, will determine our eternal rewards for all eternity. The conclusion Paul draws from this sobering thought, appended directly to his discussion of the judgment seat of Christ in 2 Corinthians 5:10 (quoted above), is telling:

Since then we understand what it means to fear the Lord (i.e., in anticipation of this judgment), we are [trying to] persuade everyone (i.e., to run a good race). Our motives in this are clear to God, and I hope that they are also clear in your hearts (lit., "consciences") as well. 2 Corinthians 5:11

We should all certainly take the above in deadly earnest, and set to ordering our lives according to this future judgment. After all, if we are striving for success in whatever it is we must do in this life (work and profession), whatever we have obligated ourselves to do in this life (marriage and family), and even in whatever it is we choose to do in this life (hobbies and avocations), how is it that we are not striving with at least equal vigor in what will count not only for the short span of these lives of ours on earth but also for all eternity? The prospect of being publically judged by our Lord Himself in the presence of all our brothers and sisters in the Church should certainly fill us with reverent fear – but not with irrational terror. God is not asking us to do anything we cannot do, no matter how hard living our lives for Jesus may sometimes appear. We run this race one step at a time, one day at a time, one thought, one word, one deed at a time – and they all count. No matter how late in the race it may be, we still have time – "as long as it is still called 'today'" (Hebrews 3:13) – to make all our remaining opportunities count for Jesus Christ. He will provide us with the means to will and to do (Php 2:13), if only we are willing to do. We should also take comfort in the fact that God is totally fair, cannot be otherwise, and that therefore our Lord Jesus' judgment of us will be absolutely impartial, totally objective, and based upon absolutely perfect and complete information. Jesus will take every pertinent factor into consideration in a perfect way, and render a judgment which is absolutely just in every respect.

(5) But according to the hardness and unrepentant nature of your heart, you are storing up for yourself wrath in the Day of wrath and revelation of God's just judgment, (6) [God], who will give to each person according to his works. (7) To those who by persevering in the good course are seeking glory, honor and immortality, [He will give] eternal life. (8) But to those who are disobedient to the truth out of selfish ambition, obeying unrighteousness instead, [there will be only] wrath and anger. (9) Tribulation and vexation will be the lot of every single individual who does what is wrong, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek (i.e., gentile). (10) Glory and honor and peace will be the blessing upon everyone who does what is right, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek (i.e., gentile). (11) For there is no favoritism with God. (12) As many as sin without the Law will perish without the Law, and as many as sin under the Law will be judged through the Law. (13) For it is not the hearers of the Law who are righteous before God, but it is those who follow (lit., "do") the Law who will be justified. (14) For whenever the gentiles who do not have the Law do by nature the things [written in] the Law, these who have no Law are a Law for themselves. (15) For they demonstrate that the essence of the Law has been written in their hearts when their conscience testifies against them, and their [mental] deliberations [based on conscience] alternatively either condemn them or acquit them. (16) This [examination will take place] on the day when God will judge the secret things of men through Jesus Christ according to my gospel. Romans 2:5-16

(12) For the Word of God is living and powerful; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even to the point of being able to divide the spirit from its earthly life and the marrow from its bones; [for] it (i.e., the Word when resident in our conscience) acts as a judge of our heart's intentions and emotions. (13) For there is no created thing [which can remain] invisible before Him. Everything is naked and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. Hebrews 4:12-13 So if you are calling upon a Father who renders judgment upon each man's work in a [completely] impartial way [and you most certainly are], then [you should make it your practice to] live the remaining time of your [temporary] sojourn here [on earth] in [Godly] fear. 1 Peter 1:17 In regard to the standard of judgment which will be employed, it is evident from the passages treated above and indeed from a multiplicity of passages that all will be judged "according to works" (e.g., Matthew 16:27; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Peter 1:17; Revelation 2:23; Revelation 20:12-13; Revelation 22:12). However, it needs to be understood that "works" (from the Greek *ergon*, ἔργον, cf. English "erg", "ergonomics", "energy"), is a generic term employed in the Bible to encompass the totality of our actions in this life and, by extrapolation, our lack thereof (something which one would hope is obvious from the equally large number of passages where the judgment is described in slightly different terms but with the same overall meaning: e.g., Romans 2:7; Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 4:4-5; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Peter 1:9-11). Suffice it to say that we will be judged not by what we were tempted to do and didn't, nor by what we intended to do and didn't, but by whatever we actually did do in thought, word and deed throughout the entire course of our earthly lives. This will clearly include our motivations and reasons for doing (or not doing) whatever we did (or did not) do, as well as all the attendant circumstances pertaining thereto. Simply put, the Lord will know (and in fact already knows) more about what we did and why we did it than we could ever possibly dream to know ourselves in this life, even if we made such an investigation our prime concern (and what a hopeless, pointless task that would be). The assumption on the part of many Christians that "works" is a phrase restricted to deeds of charity (or concrete, physical "acts" at all) is thus entirely incorrect. James tells us that "faith without works is dead", but the examples he uses to describe what the "work of faith" looks like are not charitable actions at all, namely, Abraham's trusting of God in the command to sacrifice Isaac, and Rahab's concealing of the spies because she feared God more than threat to her life from her own townsmen (James 2:21-25). In a similar way, in chapter eleven of the book of Hebrews where the apostle Paul gives us a veritable catalog of the "great deeds" of believers of the past, there is not a single instance of what we today would consider "charity". What all of the "deeds" in this chapter have in common are a remarkable faith-response to God, trusting Him in the most difficult of circumstances and doing what He has called us to do regardless of the consequences. It is out of such faith that the "deeds" with which God is truly pleased must come, in the hope that He will reward steadfastness and steadfast service to Him and His Son our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now without faith, it is impossible to please [God]. For whoever wishes to draw nearer to God must believe that He exists, and that He will reward those who earnestly seek Him. Hebrews 11:6

Ultimately, it is the sum of our faith-choices for God, generating our hope, and manifesting a genuine love for God and His children (which is never without its own tangible fruits), which forms the basis for our reward. These are our true deeds, regardless of the misconceptions of the world or the sad manner in which some organizations may wish to define and limit them.

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:11-12 NIV

(5) And to this end, along with your faith zealously develop morality, and along with morality, knowledge, (6) and along with knowledge, self-control, and along with self-control, perseverance, and along with perseverance, godliness, (7) and along with godliness, love of the brethren, and along with love of the brethren, love. (8) For if these things be in your possession and increasing, they will render you neither unfit nor fruitless in your confession of our Lord Jesus Christ. (9) But whoever does not possess these [virtues] is nearsighted or even blind, having forgotten the cleansing of his previous sins. (10) Strive all that much more then, brothers, to make your calling and election secure. By devoting yourselves to these things [virtue, growth and Christian production] you shall never be tripped up along your way. (11) For it is by such means that your path into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be smoothly and generously paved. 2 Peter 1:5-11 d. The Rewards: On the issue of rewards, the first thing that we should understand is that "reward motivation" in the Christian life is not only legitimate but absolutely essential for a proper and successful running of the Christian race. We run to win, not to lose. For whoever wishes to draw nearer to God must believe that He exists, and [must believe] that He will reward those who earnestly seek Him. Hebrews 11:6 b

Reward motivation is a quintessential means of transforming our thinking, leading us to modify our outlook on the world, to change our behavior where appropriate, and to adjust our priorities to the eternal over the temporal. Do not store up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and corrosion eat them away and where thieves dig through and steal them. But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor corrosion eat them away and where thieves neither dig through nor steal them. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:19-21

Great believers in every generation of the Church from Adam and Eve to the end of the Tribulation have always had (and always will have) the desire to please God and to be rewarded by Him (albeit eternally rather than temporally) as the foundation of their thinking, motivating their entire approach to the Christian life, spurring them on in the race.

(24) By faith, Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, (25) and chose instead to suffer maltreatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin, because he considered the reproach [suffered on behalf] of Christ greater riches than the treasure vaults of Egypt. (26) For he was looking to his reward. Hebrews 11:24-26 To be rewarded at the highest level requires in turn the highest sort of diligent attention to the truth and to the application of it to one's life. Further, such a manner of life is only possible if one really believes that what is done for Jesus Christ in this life is of infinitely greater importance than anything else. Thus it is that there is nothing more important than focusing on the treasures which await those who have performed well in the Christian life (instead of focusing on the transitory treasures of this world which are in truth merely dust) – at least for all those who wish to be richly rewarded in a manner which will be pleasing to our Lord. And indeed there is no better proof of this truth and no better example of the proper way to think about this issue than the example of our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ:

(1) Since then we too [like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and run with endurance the race set before us, (2) turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despite, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:1-2 As the most successful warrior on this battlefield, our Lord has won "the Name above every Name" (Php 2:9), and has been seated at the right hand of the glory of God to await the day of His installment as King of King and Lord of Lords (Psalms 110:1). But as the verses above demonstrate, as part of His reward He has also won for Himself a Bride, His Church. We are "the joy" or special reward with which our Lord motivated Himself to run that most difficult of all races here in the devil's world.

(20) Which [divine power] He (i.e., the Father) exercised in Christ by having raised Him from the dead and having seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly [places] (21) far above every other rulership or authority or power or lordship and [far above] every other name which may be mentioned not only in this age but also in the age to come. (22) And He (i.e., the Father) subordinated all things under [Christ's] feet and gave Him [as] Head over all things in the Church (23) which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills up all things in all ways. Ephesians 1:20-23

All things have fallen to Him who has won the victory of victories, and we believers have in turn come "into the joy of our Master" (Matthew 25:21-23). Just as our Lord Jesus encouraged Himself with "the joy that was before Him", so we too should never let slip from our mind's eye the joy of being rewarded and commended by Him for a job well done on this earth, for that is precisely what He desires us to do.

(5) You too should have this attitude which Christ Jesus had. (6) Since He already existed in the very form of God, equality with God was [certainly] not something He thought He had to grasp for (or which could be taken from Him). (7) Yet in spite of this [co-equal divinity He already possessed], He deprived Himself of His status and took on the form of a slave, [and was] born in the likeness of men. (8) He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even [His] death on [the] cross [for us all]. (9) Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the Name that is above every name (10) that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth (11) and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Php 2:5-11 As Jesus' sacrifice was the most sublime of all time, not only in humbling Himself and becoming a human being, not only in enduring the most difficult life in human history, not only in ministering the perfect ministry whose end was condemnation and crucifixion, but also and most importantly in paying the penalty for all sin by being put to death for them in the darkness on the cross (His spiritual death), so He has reaped the greatest imaginable reward, and our own rewards on that day before His judgment seat will be apportioned out to us from what He has won. Thus, He is our example of the perfect approach, and a large part of that approach, not only legitimate but necessary for success, is a sharp focus on the eternal rewards which will accrue to those who walk like Jesus walked. For everything we do in this life that is truly for Jesus Christ will not fail to have its reward, given to us by the Lord Himself and enduring for all eternity.

"But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded." 2 Chronicles 15:7 NIV This is what the Lord says: "Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded," declares the Lord. Jeremiah 31:16 a NIV

"He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward." Matthew 10:40-42 NIV (cf. Mark 9:41)

Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." Luke 14:12-14 NIV

(5) You who are slaves, obey your masters according to the flesh with fear and trembling with simplicity of heart just as you [should obey] the Lord, (6) not doing so with "eye-service" (i.e., only when they are watching you) as those who seek to please men, but as servants of Christ, accomplishing God's will from your heart, (7) serving with good will as if to the Lord and not to men, (8) for you know that whatever good thing each one of you accomplishes, he will receive [a reward] for this from the Lord, whether he is slave or free. Ephesians 6:5-8

(23) Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, (24) since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Colossians 3:23-24 NIV And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on so that they may rest from their labors", says the Spirit. "For their deeds follow with them." Revelation 14:13

Every true believer will have at least something to show for their time on this earth. For as James assures us, "faith without works is dead"; therefore every true believer with a genuinely living faith will not fail to have accomplished at least some small acts that stem from that faith while here on earth. As mentioned above, we should resist seeing such acts as being restricted to what is currently thought of as "charity" (notice that in the list of great believers and their accomplishments in Hebrews chapter eleven there is not a single thing commended there that could be described as "charity"). Acting out of faith can take many forms, for as Jesus Himself assures us the fundamental "work" of all Christians is "to believe in the One He has sent" (John 6:29). Regardless of the level of production in this life and corresponding level of reward in the next, all true believers in Jesus Christ who exit this world with their faith still intact will receive an eternal inheritance "which will never be destroyed, defiled, or dimmed" (1 Peter 1:4), a perfect resurrection body, a place in the New Jerusalem, and eternal access to the Son of God Himself, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. There will be many other extraordinary benefits in which the entire Body of Christ will share, some to which scripture alludes (as in our access to the tree of life: Revelation 2:7; Revelation 22:2), and others which we cannot even at present imagine: But as it is written: "What the eye has not seen and the ear has not heard, and [what] has not entered the heart of man, [these are the very] things which God has prepared for those who love Him". 1 Corinthians

2:9

(6) "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, (7) in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus." Ephesians 2:6-7 NIV This common set of eternal blessings which will fall to the lot of every believer for all eternity is analogous to the inheritance that all Israelites received upon their entrance into the Land of Promise – or more precisely put, the temporal inheritance is actually an analogy which teaches the enduring eternal one (just as the earthly temple is merely a representation of the true heavenly realities, etc.). Indeed, we find the New Testament replete with this inheritance analogy, indicating just how important it is for us to concentrate our focus on the eternal possessions we shall enjoy rather than on the ephemeral here and now. As members of the Body of Christ, we are God's heirs and we are Christ's heirs, possessors of an inheritance of eternal life in God's eternal Kingdom whose richness exceeds anything we can presently even imagine. Regardless of how little or how much we have done for Him in this life, all believers will receive a full share in Jesus and the kingdom:

(16) For the Spirit Himself testifies to our spirit that we are God's children. (17) And if we are God's children, then we are also His heirs, even fellow heirs of Christ – that is if we have indeed suffered with Him so that we might also be glorified together with Him. Romans 8:16-17 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. Galatians 3:29 NIV So that [now] having been justified [in this way] by His grace, we might become heirs in regard to the eternal life for which we hope. Titus 3:7

Just so God, out of a desire to make it abundantly clear to us, the heirs of His promise [after the pattern of Abraham's faith], that His will in this matter [of salvation and its resultant blessings] is unchangeable, guaranteed it with an oath (Genesis 22:16-17). Hebrews 6:17

Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? James 2:5 NIV

(8b) in all wisdom and understanding [God] has made known to us the mystery He has willed (according to His own benevolent purpose which He determined in [Christ]) for administering this [present] fulfillment of the epochs: namely the incorporation of all things in Christ, things in heaven, and things on earth – (11) In whom we also have an inheritance, having been ordained according to the design of Him who is working everything out according to the desire of His will, (12) that we who have previously placed our hope in Christ might serve the purpose of generating praise for His glory (in life). (13) In [Christ] you also when you heard the Word of truth, the good news of your salvation, in whom [I say], when you believed, you were sealed by the Spirit of promise, the Holy [Spirit], (14) who is a pledge of our inheritance for redeeming its preservation (i.e., safeguarding our resurrection and reward in every way), to the praise of His glory. Ephesians 1:8-14

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints. Ephesians 1:18 NIV

. . . . giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. Colossians 1:12 NIV

(23) Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, (24) since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Colossians 3:23-24 NIV And it is for this reason that He is the Mediator of a New Covenant, so that those who have been called might receive their eternal inheritance on the basis of the death He suffered to redeem us from the transgressions [committed] under the first Covenant. Hebrews 9:15 May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be praised, who has in His great mercy caused us to be reborn to a hope which lives through Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead, and to an inheritance which will never be destroyed, defiled, or dimmed, but which is being guarded in heaven for us, who are ourselves also being kept safe by God's power and our faith in Him to an ultimate deliverance ready to be unveiled at the end of time. 1 Peter 1:3-5

One important aspect of our coming reward which needs to be considered here is that a good deal of the authority, the gifts and the other tangible rewards we shall receive from the Lord are said to come to us as a result of our sharing in the plunder or "spoils" that He won by His victory on the cross (cf. Psalms 68:12; Psalms 110:1-7; Micah 4:13).

Arise, O God! Judge the earth! For You will assign [us] an inheritance among all the nations. Psalms 82:8

Then (i.e., at the 2nd Advent) an abundance of spoils will be divided and even the lame will carry off plunder. Isaiah 33:23 b NIV

Therefore I will allot to Him [the plunder] among [His] many [brothers], and He will apportion plunder to the mighty [among them]. Because He laid bare His life unto death, and was dealt with as transgressors [are], so that He bore the sin of the many, and substituted [Himself] for the transgressors. Isaiah 53:12

(21) "When a strong man (i.e., Satan by analogy; cf. Luke 11:14-20), fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. (22) But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils. Luke 11:21-22 NIV (cf. Matthew 12:25-29)

(7) And to each of us this grace has been given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. (8) For it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive (i.e., He brought pre-cross believers to heaven). He gave gifts to men." (9) Now [as to] this [phrase] "He ascended", what can it mean except that He had also [previously] descended into the lower reaches of the earth (i.e., Hades, from whence He brought the pre-cross believers to heaven)? (10) The One who descended is also the One who ascended above all the heavens (i.e., into the third heaven, the place of the Father's residence), in order to fulfill all things (i.e., complete the victory won at the cross; cf. Psalms 110:1). Ephesians 4:7-10 (cf. Psalms 68:18) In this last passage, we note that the spiritual gifts that are the unique province of Church Age believers are essentially our "weapons" whereby we may earn the battlefield decorations and earn a share of these "spoils" which will be ours for all eternity. Since the devil and his angels are described as the ones defeated at the cross and made subject to plunder, there is a sense in which all that they now have (i.e., their positions, powers, and territories on earth and within the universe) will fall to our lot on that great future day of distribution.

Reaping significant rewards is not, however, automatic. Establishing the sort of track-record in the Christian life commensurate with substantial honors awarded before the judgment seat of Christ requires diligence, consistency, persistence, and perseverance.

"Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. Luke 12:35-38 NIV

(6) Let him who receives instruction in the Word share in all good things with him who gives instruction. (7) Do not be deceived. God cannot be mocked. For whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. (8) For the one whose sowing is directed to his own [sinful] flesh from that [sinful] flesh will reap corruption, but the one whose sowing is directed toward the Spirit, from that [same] Spirit will reap eternal life. (9) And [so] let us not grow weary of doing the good [work of God], for at [the appointed] time we will reap [our reward], provided that we do not give up. (10) So then as long as we have this opportunity, let us keep accomplishing the good [work of God] towards all [people], and especially to the family of faith. Galatians 6:6-10

Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules. The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. 2 Timothy 2:5-7 NASB

(7) So be patient, brothers, until the coming (parousia, 2nd Advent) of the Lord. Consider: the [good] farmer waits for the earth [to yield its] precious crop, waiting patiently for it until it receives the late and early rains [which make it grow]. (8) So then, [see to it that] you too exercise [such] patience, [and] steady your hearts, because the return of the Lord has drawn near. (9) Brothers, do not grumble against one another so that you may not be judged [for it]. Behold, the Judge [Jesus Christ] is standing in front of the door (i.e., His return and our final judgment are imminent)! James 5:7-9

(35) So do not throw away this conviction of yours – it leads to a great reward. (36) You need to keep persevering so that you may carry off in victory what has been promised – after you have accomplished God's will. (37) For yet a little while, how short, how [short the wait], and He who is coming shall come, nor will He delay. (38) "Then shall my righteous one live by his faith, but if he shrinks back, My heart takes no pleasure in him (Habakkuk 2:3-4)." (39) Now we are not possessed of cowardly apostasy which leads to destruction, but we have faith which leads to [eternal] life. Hebrews 10:35-39

Moreover, this consistent and dedicated work for which we shall be richly rewarded is nothing more, of course, than precisely what we are supposed to be doing in any case.

(7) "Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? (8) Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? (9) Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? (10) So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are

unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.' " Luke 17:7-10 NIV For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for [the purpose of accomplishing] good works, which [very works] God has prepared ahead of time for us, that we might walk in them (i.e., live our Christian lives in the accomplishment of them). Ephesians 2:10 The Land of Promise requires a significant journey. To receive our promised inheritance therein (and especially to receive it bountifully) we have to follow the Lord wherever He leads us (cf. Revelation 14:4). Despite shortages of water or food, God has and will always provide (Psalms 23:1; Luke 22:35). Despite opposition from enemies numerous and strong, He always has and always will give us the victory (Psalms 66:12). The fight we fight, the journey we travel, the struggle with which we have to contend may not be obvious to the world (the purpose behind it and its ultimate reward certainly are not). But the way in which we negotiate the distance between "point A" (wherever we now find ourselves), and "point B" (the moment when our Lord Jesus calls us back to Himself) makes all the difference. Only by continuing to walk, fight, and struggle in a faithful way will we reap the maximum rewards to which we have been called.

(1) For I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, about the fact that our [spiritual] forefathers (i.e., the Exodus generation) were all under the cloud (i.e., protected by the Glory). (2) And all of them were baptized into Moses (i.e., closely identified with him) in both the case of the cloud and of the sea (i.e., received the same protection and deliverance as he did). (3) And all of them ate spiritual food (i.e., divinely provided manna). (4) And all of them drank the same spiritual drink (i.e., divinely provided water). For all of them drank from the spiritual[ly significant] Rock which followed them – for that Rock was Christ. (5) But God was not pleased with most of them and their bones were strewn about in the desert as a result. (6) And in this they have come to serve as examples for us, so that we might not lust for wicked things as they lusted for them. (7) So do not become idolaters as some of them did, as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to play (i.e., feasting followed by indulgence in idolatrous rites)". (8) And let us not commit fornication, as some of them committed fornication, and there fell in a single day 120,000 of them. (9) And let us not put Christ to the test, as some of them tested the Lord and [as a result] were killed by serpents. (10) And let us not complain, as some of them complained, and were killed by the Destroyer. (11) All these things happened to them as an example to us, and were written to warn us – we who live at the culmination of the ages. (12) So let him who thinks he stands firm beware lest he fall. (13) You have not suffered any testing beyond normal human [experience]. And God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your capacity, but, along with the test, He will grant you the way out, so that you can bear up under it. 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 As Paul's assessment of the poor performance of the Exodus generation above indicates, the dangers and pitfalls along the way to Zion are numerous, and the number of believers who overcome them to win significant rewards is small in consequence. Indeed, through its use of athletic and military metaphors wherein significant rewards accrue only to the few, scripture seems to confirm what observation suggests, namely, that those who will receive the highest levels of reward will be relatively few in number, and thus in turn that while all believers will enjoy salvation, eternal life, an equal share of Jesus Christ, a resurrection body, and a place forever in the New Jerusalem, many if not most will have little to show for their life here on earth in terms of additional rewards (cf. Romans 2:7; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Galatians 6:7-9; Php 3:11-16; 1 Peter 1:9). For in the case of many believers, it will be seen that their time here on earth was largely wasted (from the divine point of view). Instead of living for Jesus, they were distracted by fear and greed, and worked for themselves instead. In the parable of the Sower, these are those who fell among the weeds and the thorns:

"And he who was sown among the thorns, this is the one who hears the Word, but the worries of this life and the deceptiveness of wealth stunt the [productive power of the] Word so that he becomes unproductive." Matthew 13:22

(18) "And others were sown among the thorns. These are those who heard the Word, (19) but the worries of life and the deceptiveness of wealth, and the lust for other things grow up [over them like thorns and weeds] and stunt the [productive power of the] Word so that they become unproductive." Mark 4:18-19

"And as to that [seed] which fell among the thorns, these are they who have heard the Word, but who are stunted by worries and by wealth and by the pleasures of this life with the result that they do not bear a full crop to harvest." Luke 8:14

Finally in this regard, there is a large difference between what God judges to be genuine, legitimate production and what mankind may perceive. As the parable of the Sower makes clear, genuine production is always a result of genuine spiritual growth which precedes it. It is only the "good ground" which receives the Word and accepts it without compromise, responding to it in an acceptable and godly way, which produces a significant crop (Matthew 13:23; Mark 4:20; Luke 8:15). It is a very common thing in the Christian life – and has been very common throughout human history – for people to attempt to "work" their way into heaven or into God's good graces. Even a cup of cold water offered in the Lord's Name will not fail to receive its due reward (Matthew 10:42; Mark 9:41), but the gift of millions of dollars done out of self-righteousness and self-aggrandizement is of absolutely no avail in entreating God's favor. When unbelievers employ such methods, they are only engaging in self-deception. When believers do the same, attempting to substitute self-works for spiritual growth and true, godly production, their false efforts will be erased at the Judgment Seat of Christ. They themselves will be saved (just as the seeds that fall among the thorns indicate genuine believers who are ineffective for Jesus Christ), but only "though as through fire".

(10) According to the grace of God given to me like a wise architect I have laid down a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each one take care how he builds upon it. (11) For no one can lay another foundation except the One that has been laid down: Jesus Christ. (12) And if someone builds upon his foundation with gold, silver, and precious stones, [or] with wood, hay, and stubble, (13) [in either case] his work will be made manifest [as to its true quality], for the Day [of judgment] will make it clear [for what it truly is], because it will be revealed (lit., uncovered) with fire. And the fire will evaluate (lit., "assay") the work of each person as to what its [true] quality is. (14) If anyone's work which he has built [on his foundation of faith in Christ] remains (i.e., is not burnt away by the fiery evaluation), he will receive a reward [for it]. (15) If anyone's work is burnt up, he will suffer the loss [of any potential reward for it], but he himself will be saved – but in this way [just described] as through fire [which evaluated his false works as worthless and burnt them up]. 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

Watch out for yourselves, lest you lose what you have worked so hard for, but may instead receive a full reward. No one who goes wandering off, that is, anyone who does not keep to the teachings about Jesus Christ, has [even] a share in God. 2 John 1:8-9 I am coming quickly. Hold on to what you have so that no one takes your crown [away]. Revelation 3:11

Level 1 Rewards: All those who truly love Jesus Christ should take to heart the wonderful news that all of their legitimate efforts for Him here on earth will be richly rewarded by Him at His judgment seat. Indeed, above this basic level of salvation without significant production (representing those who were distracted by the "thorns" of life), scripture details three higher levels of reward (represented in the crowns of righteousness, life, and glory respectively, and in the 30, 60, and 100-fold harvest of the parable of the Sower). Before moving on to these higher level rewards, a few additional, general points need to be made here.

1) All believers will receive an inheritance for placing their faith in Jesus Christ and maintaining that faith to the end of their lives. This inheritance will be wonderful beyond expression and beyond our present ability even to understand it. It is doubtlessly true that a moment of eternal bliss experienced by the very last person in line when our Lord hands out eternal rewards will exceed to infinity the longest and most blessed human life here in time on earth. All believers will have eternal life, a full share in Jesus Christ and eternal access to Him and our heavenly Father, a resurrection body which will never age or know pain or grief, access to and a place in the New Jerusalem, and many other exquisitely sublime blessings which at present we cannot even dimly comprehend. That said, it is still the case that even "more" is possible, that we are called to have "more", that this "more" is earned through spiritual growth, progress and ministry here in time, and that this "more" will glorify our Lord Jesus forever, even as our efforts to win it please Him now and will be officially acknowledged by Him during this judgment.

2) There is an important distinction to be drawn between the type of believer being considered here who has very little to show for a life of faith (the thorny-ground type), and on the other hand an unbeliever who never had faith at all (the packed-ground type) or one who lost faith (the rocky-ground type). Faith without any works whatsoever is dead (James 2:20), so that all true believers will have some record of legitimate production, however small (Exodus 34:20 b). This category is thus not one of "dead faith" but rather of a faith on "life-support", namely, a marginal believer just barely hanging onto their faith in Jesus, distracted by the worries of the world and its pleasures, never having committed to spiritual growth, and therefore never truly having been tested nor having accomplished the ministry intended for him/her. This thorny-ground category of believer does exist. In fact all scriptural and experiential indications suggest that it is by far the category containing the largest number of Christians. It is nonetheless the case that, in addition to being the most scantily rewarded category, it is also by far the most dangerous category. For that reason, as we can clearly see from the parable of the Sower (the thorny ground) and from the passages quoted above (i.e., 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 John 1:8-9; Revelation 3:11; etc.), biblical descriptions where this category is evident make very little distinction between the almost completely unproductive Christian and the unbeliever. That is because far from taking comfort in the biblical truth that even without significant production in life, eternity will be immeasurably wonderful, such Christians should rather take fright – because their marginal conduct makes them incredibly vulnerable to falling away from Jesus Christ altogether (not to mention that they are disregarding entirely the desires of their Lord and failing to engage in any meaningful way with the mission to which they have been called and for which they were given specific gifts at salvation and left here in life to utilize).

(45) "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? (46) It will be good for that servant

whose master finds him doing so when he returns. (47) I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. (48) But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' (49) and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. (50) The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. (51) He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Matthew 24:45-51 NIV As with the parables of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) and the minas (Luke 9:11-27), we see the main distinction emphasized in scripture to be one of the productive believer versus the unbeliever. In the passage above, largely unproductive believers are not even mentioned, while in the parables of talents and minas, they are represented by the theoretical option with which the unbeliever is reproached: putting out the "talent" on interest to let someone else do the work (but gaining at least some return, albeit marginal). All evidence suggests very clearly that a marginal Christian life wherein little is accomplished for Jesus Christ falls just short of being a wasted life – though it is inestimably superior to dying in unbelief.

3) Finally (in terms of preliminary matters), there is also an important distinction to be drawn between what the world may see and perceive as "good works" on the one hand, and genuine production for Jesus Christ which receives a reward on the other. We certainly know that this is the case from the very vivid description Paul gives us in 1st Corinthians chapter three where we are told that "wood, hay and stubble" will be burned up, and that the believer under evaluation will "suffer loss" of reward for things he/she no doubt assumed would be richly rewarded. Only doing what Jesus really wants us to do and doing it His way results in reward. Doing what we want to do or what the world praises us for doing or what we wrongly assume is pleasing to God will not be rewarded. From a positive point of view, the three higher levels of rewards treated immediately below lay out in general terms what God's will truly is in this regard: spiritual growth (level 2); spiritual progress (level 3); and ministry corresponding to spiritual gifts (level 4). These three higher levels are, moreover, sequential, so that, minor overlaps aside, a truly meaningful fulfillment of the ministry God has planned for a person and gifted him or her for is impossible without prior spiritual maturity and prior testing successfully passed (which are in turn essential components of truly effective ministry). From a negative point of view, there are also important scriptural caveats which make clear the distinction between legitimate production which will be rewarded and illegitimate production which will be burned. Man looks at the surface of things, but God looks on the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). A cup of cold water given "because [the recipient] is My disciple" (Matthew 10:42; Mark 9:41) receives a reward, but not, we conclude, a cup of cold water given at random and from improper motives. God can certainly tell the difference between proper and improper motivation, even if it is difficult for us to make such distinctions.

(25) I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. (26) Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. (27) And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian." Luke 4:25-27 TNIV

Correct motivations always flow from humility, from obedience to God and to His truth, and from a desire for His glory, not our own (just as our Lord sought the glory of the One who sent Him).

"The one who speaks for himself seeks his own glory. But the One who seeks the glory of Him who sent Him, this is the One who is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him." John 7:18 The Pharisees did all that they did not out of a desire to glorify God but instead to glorify themselves.

"All their works they do [only] to be observed by men [in so doing]". Matthew 23:5 a

Anything done with such motives brings no reward from God, even if it would have done so when accomplished with correct motivation.

"(1) Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' in front of others, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. (2) So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full." Matthew 6:1-2 TNIV

"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full." Matthew 6:5 TNIV

"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full." Matthew 6:16 TNIV

While we tend to think of monetary gifts given to charity as the prime means and measure of "good works", in fact, not only are gifts given for the wrong reasons worthless to God (a prime means and measure of the works to be burnt up before Christ's judgment seat), but we are also very wrong to imagine that the amount counts with God. For He has need of nothing (cf., Psalms 50:8-15; Acts 17:25), and evaluates our giving on the basis of our true motives and our true means.

(41) Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. (42) But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. (43) Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. (44) They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on." Mark 12:41-44 TNIV As with virtually everything else in the Christian life, legitimate production is a function of spiritual growth, and depends upon a proper attitude of the heart exercised in faith, for it is for faith that we have been called, and it is faith in Jesus Christ that is the fundamental "work" upon which all others depend.

Jesus answered, "This is the work of God, that you believe in the One He has sent." John 6:29

Higher Rewards: Certain basic rewards will be the province of all believers, no matter how minimal their efforts for Jesus Christ during this life. All will take part in the resurrection, with the perfect, eternal, unimaginably wonderful resurrection body furnishing the essential "platform" for the enjoyment of a blissful eternity wherein there will be no pain or trouble or anything negative at all, only an inexpressibly delightful existence in which we shall revel for all eternity (e.g., Revelation 7:17; Revelation 21:4; Revelation 21:9-27; Revelation 22:1-5). Merely being resurrected into eternal life will entail blessings and benefits beyond our present ken, the entire fulfillment of that for which we were made, and the hope for which we presently yearn.

(17) And if we are God's children, then we are also His heirs, even fellow heirs of Christ – that is if we have indeed suffered with Him so that we might also be glorified together with Him. (18) For I do not consider these present hardships in any way comparable to the glory destined to be revealed for us [at the 2nd Advent]. (19) For all creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God. (20) For the created world is now subject to futility – not of its own choosing, but because of Him who subjected it [as a consequence of Adam's sin] – but not without hope. (21) For [at the 2nd Advent] the created world will be liberated from its enslavement to decay at the glorious liberation of the sons of God (i.e. our resurrection). (22) For we know that the whole creation has been experiencing intense pain and agony right up until this present time. (23) And not only the created world, but we too who have received the Holy Spirit as a foretaste [of the good things to come] agonize within ourselves as we eagerly await our adoption, that is, the redemption of our body (i.e. resurrection). (24) This is the hope with which we were saved. Romans 8:17-24 a

All these wonders await the believer in Jesus Christ, regardless of spiritual effort in this life, and all who come through this life with their faith intact will experience the divine seal of approval at this judgment as our Lord Jesus acknowledges our name "in the presence of My Father and in the presence of the holy angels" (Revelation 3:5). That name, our name, will be from that day forth a "new name" (Revelation 2:17; Revelation 3:12; Isaiah 65:15; cf. Isaiah 62:2 b), and our re-naming at the time of this judgment will be a very significant event. For our new name will reflect the spiritual course of our lives here on earth. Just as all God-given names in the Bible are incredibly important and are always expressive of essential spiritual realities, so we may be sure that our eternal name will encapsulate the effort we put forward for Jesus Christ and His Church, whether prodigious or pathetic. This fact alone ought to fill us with a single-minded determination to do all we can in our Lord's service to ensure that this new name will be a cause of rejoicing rather than regret, a name which glorifies Him forevermore through the accomplishment of the works prepared ahead of time for us to do by grace in the power of His Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:8-10). For not everyone who stands before His judgment seat will receive a "Well done!" from Jesus Christ on that great day along with the additional rewards which accompany our Lord's positive endorsement, but only those who attain through their legitimate efforts to the higher levels of reward which exceed the basic blessing that will be the province of all believers.

"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'" Matthew 25:21 NIV

"'Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'" Luke 19:17 NIV The most common biblical symbol of exceptional service for Jesus Christ meriting these higher level rewards is the (athletic) crown or stephanos (Greek στέφανος; in contrast to the regal crown, the diadema, διάδημα). The stephanos "crown" has a long and colorful history in the Greek and Roman world, but there is a common thread which connects its multifarious uses. Whether awarded for military, athletic, artistic or political exploits (and all such instances are widely attested), the stephanos crown is invariably given as a reward for meritorious service or exceptional conduct of some sort. As such, it is often closely connected in scripture with our hope for rewards which extend beyond the resurrection body: So then my beloved brothers whom I deeply desire, my joy and my crown [of victory], stand fast in the Lord, beloved, in this way [in which I have written you]! Php 4:1

(19) For who is our hope and our joy, or the crown [of victory about which we] boast? Is it not in fact even [all of] you? [For you are our crown of victory] before our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming. (20) For you are our glory and our joy. 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 I am coming quickly. Hold on to what you have that no one takes your crown [away]. Revelation 3:11 The essential idea which lies behind the crown of competitive-like effort in striving for achievement is ubiquitous in scripture. However, we are competing against the "world, the flesh, and the devil", not against our fellow Christians. We believers strive to win, without that hoped for victory necessitating any measure of loss whatsoever by our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ (indeed, we win our highest honors by helping them do the same). We can all win top rewards (or fail to do so), for it would most certainly be within the power of God to provide the same level of ultimate blessing and reward to every single believer (and indeed to every single human being, were it the case that all chose to believe). The fact that the majority of believers will not attain to the highest honors in eternity has nothing to do with God's provision but everything to do with the choices made by each and every individual each and every day. For this reason every one of us ought to take pains to see the life we have been given for what it really is: not only a time of responsibility to do as God requires, but also as a time of immense opportunity to win the rewards our Lord Jesus very much desires us to win (Mark 4:21-25).

Once we have been saved, once we have committed ourselves and our lives to Jesus Christ, the purpose for our continued existence here on earth really has nothing at all to do with the priorities upon which the secular world focuses (essential as some of them may be), but instead has everything to do with carrying out our Lord's command to follow Him. It is through our determined and consistent efforts to seek our Lord Jesus (spiritual growth and application), and serve our Lord Jesus (spiritual progress and ministry) that rewards are won. And while as described above we will all be heir to blessings the least of which put the best of what the current world can offer in the shade to an infinite degree, nevertheless it is also true that there are indeed higher levels of reward which will fall to the lot of those who made following Jesus and serving Him their top priority – not merely biding their time here on earth with an occasional "nod to God", but by taking up on a daily basis the challenge of making the most of our opportunities in time to excel for our Lord – in hope of reward for so doing. Thus, whenever we see individuals rewarded and honored in this life for their exceptional earthly achievements, be they of a military, political, artistic, athletic or other professional nature, we should make it our practice to reflect that we are involved in a similar quest, with the signal exception that we are seeking rewards and honors which are eternal rather than evanescent and temporal (cf. Galatians 2:2; Galatians 5:7; Php 2:16).

Don't you know that all the runners in the stadium run the race, but that only one receives the prize? Run in such a way so as to achieve what you are after. And again, everyone involved in competition exercises self-control in all respects. Those athletes go through such things so that they may receive a perishable crown of victory, but we do it to receive an imperishable one. So as I run this race of ours, I'm heading straight for the finish line; and as I box this bout of ours, I'm making every punch count. I'm "pummeling my body", one might say, bringing myself under strict control so that, after having preached [the gospel] to others, I might not myself be disqualified [from receiving the prize we all seek]. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

(12) [It is] not that I have already gotten [what I am striving for], nor that I have already completed [my course]. Rather, I am continuing to pursue [the prize] in hopes of fully acquiring it – [this prize

for whose acquisition] I was myself acquired by Christ Jesus. (13) Brethren, I do not consider that I have already acquired it. This one thing only [do I keep in mind]. Forgetting what lies behind me [on the course] and straining towards the [course] ahead, (14) I continue to drive straight for the tape, towards the prize to which God has called us from the beginning [of our race] in Christ Jesus. Php 3:12-14

(3) Endure hardship with me like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. (4) No one on military campaign becomes involved in the affairs of normal life. [He avoids such things] that he may please the one who enlisted him. (5) Likewise if anyone engages in athletic competition, he does not win a crown if he fails to compete according to the rules. 2 Timothy 2:3-5

(1) Since then we too [like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and run with endurance the race set before us, (2) turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despise, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:1-2

(12) Therefore (going back to the race analogy of v.1), pick up those hands hanging slack at your side, put some strength back into your weak knees, (13) and make straight tracks for your feet, so that, [even though you fell down,] what you sprained might not be twisted completely out of joint, but might instead work its way back to health. Hebrews 12:12-13

All of the passages above make absolutely clear that there is no time to lose in this race of ours, and no effort which should be spared in putting our all into this competition in which we are engaged. For not only is this our duty, but there are also great rewards in so doing. The higher level rewards occur in three distinct categories, and these are represented by the three levels of production yielded by the "good ground" in the parable of the Sower described as "thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold" (Matthew 13:8; Matthew 13:23; Mark 4:8; Mark 4:20; cf. Luke 8:8), by the "gold, silver, and precious stones" of 1 Corinthians 3:12 (albeit here in descending order), and by the victory crowns of "righteousness", "life", and "glory" which likewise correspond to this three tiered system. To use a modern analogy, everyone whose earthly production entitles them to enter one of these three higher-level classes of reward will be "officer grade", set apart from the enlisted rank and file; but the three levels will be discernible even within this class (as between company, field, and general grade officers in our contemporary military establishment). To carry this analogy a step farther, it is also true that even within the highest class, there are a very small number of top-ranking individuals (such as the joint chiefs), and that will undoubtedly be the case in eternity as well. We can certainly expect the two witnesses, Moses and Elijah, the twelve apostles, and the famous prophets and believers of the Bible to constitute a unique and special subset of the highest class.

If the desire to glorify Jesus through the awards we win, the desire to be praised by Him at this final judgment (and the reluctance to have our efforts shown to have come to naught instead) were not enough to motivate us to make our spiritual growth, production and ministry the absolute top priority of our lives, then the details of the rewards given by scripture, limited though they may be, should be sufficient to spur us on to greater efforts. The rewards that lie ahead for those who are committed to striving for them in a godly and acceptable way are absolutely disproportionate to

any suffering or sacrifice or effort in this life. The parables of the talents considered above makes this abundantly clear: the servants who produce a (relatively) small amount of return proportionate to what they have been given are rewarded with the rulership of cities, that is, rewards exponentially more valuable than anything they had possessed or achieved in the king's absence. And if that is true in an earthly analogy, just imagine applying this same principle to eternal rewards in a new universe wherein there is no scarcity but only superabundance beyond our dreams!

(17) For this present light affliction of ours is working out for us an eternal weight of glory beyond any possible estimation. (18) [Let us] not [then be] having [any] regard for what can be seen, but [instead] for what cannot be seen. For the things which can be seen are ephemeral. But the things which cannot be seen are eternal. 2 Corinthians 4:17-17

We may expect all such achievement which rates the three higher levels of reward to be violently opposed by the evil one. Indeed, to a certain degree such opposition is an essential part of the effort-reward principle. The higher level rewards represent recognition for effective engagement in the struggle which is the true Christian way of life, and military decorations (another frequent use of the stephanos-crown in antiquity) are an equally valid parallel to be employed here. Whether we think of these three higher levels of reward as "bronze, silver, and gold medals" or as "silver stars, navy crosses, and congressional medals of honor", in both analogies a higher degree of difficulty and accomplishment is clearly associated with each, and in terms of eternal rewards, that opposition comes increasingly and more aggressively at every stage from the satanic forces arrayed against us. Just as our Lord was opposed, so those who bear His Name and determinedly advance in His service will likewise be opposed. Indeed, it is our Lord and the example of His life which sets the pattern and the principle: just as the most effective and self-sacrificing life and ministry produces the most for God even as it garners the most opposition from the devil, so also it is right that it reap the highest rewards as well:

(5) You too should have this attitude which Christ Jesus had. (6) Since He already existed in the very form of God, equality with God was [certainly] not something He thought He had to grasp for (or which could be taken from Him). (7) Yet in spite of this [co-equal divinity He already possessed], He deprived Himself of His status and took on the form of a slave, [and was] born in the likeness of men. (8) He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even [His] death on [the] cross [for us all]. (9) Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the Name that is above every name (10) that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth (11) and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Php 2:5-11

(5) For it is not to angels that He subordinated the world to come (which is our present topic), (6) but someone testifies at some point saying, "What is Man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels, you crowned him with glory and honor. (7) You made him sovereign over all the works of your hands, (8) you put everything under his feet" (Psalms 8:4-6). For in subordinating the world to Him, He left nothing that was not subordinate to Him. However, we do not now yet see the world in subordination to Him. (9) But we do now see Jesus crowned with glory and honor on account of the death He suffered, even He who became "a little lower than the angels" [for a brief span] so that by the

grace of God He might taste death on behalf of us all. Hebrews 2:5-9 In general terms, believers achieve the second level of rewards by means of spiritual growth and the attainment of spiritual maturity, persevering in the learning, believing and applying of divine truth to their lives, thus demonstrating consistent faith which transcends visible realities. The third level is achieved by passing serious and significant testing beyond the normal, everyday sort, thus demonstrating surpassing hope in eternal realities over temporal opposition. Believers attain the highest or fourth level of rewards through effective and consistent ministry in spite of all opposition to the point of fulfilling the ultimate purpose for their lives and spiritual gifts, thereby demonstrating a love for their Savior which exceeds all other personal concerns. Finally, although it is certainly true that in any life, there will be some overlap in these functions, nevertheless, these reward levels are very much progressive in nature: consummate ministry (level 4) is impossible without the prior preparation of serious testing and refining (level 3); and the ability to pass such tests is impossible without prior spiritual growth and the attainment of true spiritual maturity (level 2).

Level 2 Rewards: The Crown of Righteousness – The "Faith" Level of Spiritual Maturity The crown of righteousness, represented by the 30-fold production in the parable of the Sower and by the "precious stones" of 1 Corinthians 3:12, is the "faith level" of high reward. It is achieved by the attainment of spiritual maturity, the completion of spiritual growth that comes to the believer who consistently learns the Word of God, believes the truth he/she has learned, and consistently applies Gods' truth to his/her life. What this means can be seen at least in part from the negative examples provided by the parable of the Sower and the judgment as described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:1-23. In the case of the latter, many believers, and notably many of those who have not attained higher-level rewards, must stand by and watch while everything done in life is burned up before Christ's judgment seat – the individual believer is saved, "yet as though by fire", and with "loss [of reward]" (1 Corinthians 3:15). The fire which "assays" the work of each of us will not damage the genuine "rewards" we have achieved (even in the case of those who, while not attaining to a crown, will yet have some legitimate production to show for their time in this world), but the "wood, hay and stubble", representing the false works, missteps, and wasted opportunities of this life, will be obliterated by divine fire which tests and evaluates its true quality. Those whose effort in this life is found to be at least on the level of "precious stones" will thus of necessity have taken some advantage of the opportunities given, will have pursued sanctification to a sufficient degree to be rewarded in a significant way, having walked in faith consistently enough to produce spiritual growth and achieve spiritual maturity.

Scripture very clearly does draw a very visible line in the sand between those who are spiritually mature and those who are not (1 Corinthians 2:6 [cf. 1 Corinthians 3:1]; Colossians 1:28; Php 3:15; Colossians 4:12; Hebrews 5:14; Hebrews 6:1; James 1:4).

Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature. 1 Corinthians 14:20 NASB

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Galatians 6:1 NASB

We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 1 Corinthians 2:6 NIV

These specifics are fleshed out in more detail in the parable of the Sower where spiritual maturity is described by its results. The good ground, even that which yields only this first higher-reward level of "30-fold", will of necessity have avoided the pitfalls of the previously considered type of ground, the ground plagued by thorns (cf. Matthew 13:1-9; Mark 4:1-9; Luke 8:48):

"And he who was sown among the thorns, this is the one who hears the Word, but the worries of this life and the deceptiveness of wealth stunt the [productive power of the] Word so that he becomes unproductive." Matthew 13:22

(18) "And others were sown among the thorns. These are those who heard the Word, (19) but the worries of life and the deceptiveness of wealth, and the lust for other things grow up [over them like thorns and weeds] and stunt the [productive power of the] Word so that they become unproductive." Mark 4:18-19

"And as to that [seed] which fell among the thorns, these are they who have heard the Word, but who are stunted by worries and by wealth and by the pleasures of this life with the result that they do not bear a full crop to harvest." Luke 8:14

Therefore in order to achieve spiritual maturity, worry, desire for wealth, and the placing of the pleasures of this life in front of God's will must all be overcome. This does not suggest that a flawless Christian walk must be perfected before achieving any true results for the Lord, but it does indicate that a believer who allows the worries of life, wealth or pleasure to dominate his or her outlook and modus vivendi will of necessity not be capable of producing a "level two" crop for Jesus Christ. For if we are too worried and concerned about the necessities of life, we have not yet built up our faith to the point necessary for trusting the Lord to take care of our problems as a mature believer should (cf. Matthew 5:25-34; Luke 12:22-34). And if we are still looking first and foremost to the riches of this world for our satisfaction and security then we have yet to develop a mature Christian hope which sets its heart on the rewards of eternity instead (cf. Matthew 6:19-23; Luke 12:33-34). And as long as we are primarily focused upon our own pleasures rather than seeking to please the Lord, it is very clear that we have not yet progressed in our Christian love to the point of spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity, defined above as having grown to the point where in the basic Christian virtues we have effectively turned our backs on the world and towards the Lord instead is the entry point to the field of battle whereon the higher level rewards may be won.

Don't be a lover of this world, nor of what is in this world. If anyone is a lover of this world, a [genuine] love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world and its lust are passing away, but whoever does God's will is [going] to stay [alive with God] forever. 1 John 2:15-17 As seen in this and in many other verses, sanctification, the turning away from sin and carnality generally is an important part of the spiritual growth equation: a good defense is essential for any military operation or competitive contest. But as in both of these secular analogies, defense cannot win on its own. Even more important in attaining spiritual maturity is our spiritual offense, and that process is all about God's truth: taking pains to seek it out, listen to it respectfully, take it into our hearts by believing it, and then applying it to our lives – actually acting and behaving out of faith, hope and love in a truly godly and correct way, based upon what is actually God's will as known from His truth (rather than merely upon immature assumptions).

(11) Christ Himself appointed some of us apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers (12) in order to prepare all of His holy people for their own ministry work, that the entire body of Christ might thus be built up, (13) until we all reach that unifying [goal] of belief in and full-knowledge (epignosis) of the Son of God, that each of us might be a perfect person, that is, that we might attain to that standard of maturity whose "attainment" is defined by Christ; (14) that we may no longer be immature, swept off-course and carried headlong by every breeze of so-called teaching that emanates from the trickery of men in their readiness to do anything to cunningly work their deceit, (15) but rather that we may, by embracing the truth in love, grow up in all respects with Christ, who is the head of the Church, as our model. (16) In this way, the entire body of the Church, fit and joined together by Him through the sinews He powerfully supplies to each and every part, works out its own growth for the building up of itself in love. Ephesians 4:11-16 The "goal" mentioned in verse thirteen above is described as consisting of "belief" (i.e., "faith", *pistis*) and "full-knowledge" (i.e., *epignosis*). The linking of these two words here is key. The latter word is usually translated (insufficiently) as "knowledge"; but while there are a number of Greek words for mere knowledge, the prefix *epi-* on this critically important New Testament technical term shows direction: this is not just something understood – this is something understood and effectively applied. *Epignosis* is knowledge which is believed, and which has been completely internalized by faith (1 Corinthians 13:12; 2 Corinthians 1:13; Ephesians 4:13; Colossians 1:9-100; Colossians 2:2; 1 Timothy 2:4; 1 Timothy 4:3; 2 Timothy 2:25; 2 Timothy 3:7; Titus 1:1; 2 Peter 2:20-21; cf. Romans 1:28; Romans 1:32; Romans 3:20; Romans 10:2; Ephesians 1:17; Php 1:9; Colossians 1:6; Colossians 3:10; Philemon 1:6; 2 Peter 1:2-3; 2 Peter 1:8). *Epignosis* transforms the person who has fully digested it, because this new "information" is not only part of the memory – it has also critically become part of the conscience, forming and reforming the inner-person to see and to act in a completely new and different way. *Epignosis* causes internal change which produces external results. Thus, it is only by believing truth that true spiritual growth takes place. True spiritual growth is an "inside-out" process. We can clean and scrub the outside of the cup *ad nauseam* (as the Pharisees did), but this will never produce growth. We can adopt the most rigorous code of personal behavior (as the Pharisees did), but this will not bring us closer to God, nor will it prepare us to live for Christ and to serve Christ. Committing facts to memory may help a person pass a secular, written test. Committing divine truth to the heart through faith is the only thing that contributes to a believer's passing of life's spiritual tests which alone harden and develop faith, focus and sharpen hope, and motivate and direct love in response to our Lord Jesus Christ in the cause of His Church.

After all, it is possible to be "ever learning" but "never come to an understanding of the truth", because when the "knowledge" or "understanding" (as it is in this passage, 2 Timothy 3:7) is only *gnosis*, mere academic appreciation of some abstract principle, there is no inner change, no spiritual growth. Only the incorporation of divine truth into the heart by faith, only God's knowledge understood and believed, has the potential of transforming our inner-man and rendering us useful to Jesus Christ so as to produce for Him and His Church. Even attending a Bible study where the truth is taught genuinely, accurately and in great detail (a rarity to be sure in this Laodicean era of the Church) will not in and of itself produce spiritual growth: truth has to be understood and believed to become usable; truth has to be believed to become *epignosis*. The passage quoted above, Ephesians 4:11-16, also shows very clearly the method by which the Body of Christ is to be built up: the teaching of the Word of God among the entire community of believers by gifted and

prepared men for the purpose of spiritual maturity, a godly situation which in turn empowers the gifts of all, and in a blessed "feed-back loop" results in more growth and more effective service by all. This is the ideal process to which we have been called. Sadly, Christian fellowships today where the teaching of the truth exists beyond even a superficial level are few and far between. But even if such a fellowship is found, God's truth in Jesus Christ must be believed to be of any benefit. Only by this essential spiritual mechanism empowered by the Spirit is epignosis assimilated, God's truth made usable for the Spirit in the believer's heart, and spiritual growth thus attained.

(7) I have fought the good fight. I have completed my course. I have kept the faith. (8) In the future there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that [great] day [of judgment] – and not only to me, but to all who have loved His appearance (i.e., who have exercised consistent love for Jesus Christ in anticipation of His return).
2 Timothy 4:7-8

Righteousness comes by faith to all who believe in Jesus Christ (Romans 1:17; Romans 3:22; Romans 4:3-24; Romans 9:30-31; Romans 10:6; Galatians 3:6; Galatians 5:5; Php 3:9; Hebrews 11:7; James 2:23). However, it is not by entry-level faith that this crown is won but by "keeping" the faith and advancing through faith in the same manner in which we were saved (Php 3:16; Colossians 2:6), defined above as "fighting the good fight" and "completing the course" which God has laid out for us that believers earn this award. We all have God's righteousness in Jesus Christ but only those who have achieved spiritual maturity actually live in consonance with the righteousness all believers positionally possess. The crown of righteousness is given for the witness of maturity, for achieving a measure of spiritual growth whereby a person actually "lives like a Christian", staying true to the faith and its principles ("I have kept the faith"), looking forward to the rewards of eternity more than earthly ones ("the crown . . . which the Lord will award me on that day"), and loving the Lord more than this world ("[having] loved His appearance"). Faith, hope and love, the three basic virtues of the Christian walk, become fully functional at the point of spiritual maturity (1 Corinthians 13:13). In 2 Timothy 4:7-8 quoted above, Paul in characteristic humility does not lay claim to the next two levels of reward, the crown of life (given for endurance of testing) and the crown of glory (given for completion of ministry) – although if there has ever been a "triple crown winner" in the Church, it is most assuredly the apostle Paul. Instead, as an encouragement and an exhortation to "follow me", he holds out the promise of this first crown, the crown of righteousness, to "all" who have come to the point of a solid, mature faith, a focused and vibrant hope, and a genuine and constant love for Jesus Christ. Most if not all believers have some degree of faith beyond the basic "mustard seed" which brought them into union with Christ. Most if not all believers have some hope of the resurrection and the glories of eternity to the point that these truths form a part of their Christian motivation and encouragement. And most if not all believers love Jesus Christ to the point of doing or having done something for Him, His truth, His Church, in response to His sacrifice on our behalf by which we have been saved. Spiritual maturity, however, is the point where all three of these representative virtues are fully formed, complete, and "ripe". Just as we can watch the development of any fruit or vegetable as it grows, from being just barely discernible, to nearly full-sized yet green, to ripe and ready for picking, so it is in the case of a believer's spiritual growth. There are various degrees of size, quality, color and overall "goodness" in any ripe fruit or vegetable – and indeed in the Christian life God has set no

limit or end to the potential for goodness which may be attained – yet what all mature believers have in common is this "ripeness" or discernible, distinct maturity. Immature believers may occasionally (and inconsistently) manifest some or all of the characteristics identified with these basic Christian virtues, but just as there is a clear difference between a green tomato, whatever its size, and a ripe red one, so those who have not yet attained to spiritual maturity are obvious – certainly to God, usually to other believers, and also often to the world at large. In the same way, mature believers are also known "by their [ripe] fruit" to be honorable and faithful followers of Jesus Christ (cf. Matthew 7:15-20; John 15:1-17). The mature witness of our lives in effectively and consistently living up to the standard of righteousness which we have in Jesus Christ through faith is the essential produce which yields this second level reward, the crown of righteousness.

Level 3 Rewards: The Crown of Life – The "Hope" Level of Spiritual Production The crown of life, represented by the 60-fold production in the parable of the Sower and by the "silver" of 1 Corinthians 3:12, is the "hope level" of higher reward. It is achieved by those who demonstrate the hope they have in eternal rewards above earthly considerations, mature believers who endure significant testing successfully by preferring eternal life to this life. Winners of the crown of life of necessity have first attained spiritual maturity. This mature faith and faithfulness is then tested in the crucible of life in order to refine it further and also to demonstrate its true quality to the world of men and angels both. Just as the righteous life consistent with that righteousness by faith we all receive through faith in Jesus Christ is a witness to the world, reflecting the grace and goodness of God, to an even greater degree the perseverance of mature believers under severe pressure and tribulation yields unmistakable proof that such individuals really do esteem God more than anything in this life, and that Jesus' opinion – and the eternal life and rewards He promises – are more real to them and more important to them than anything this world of dust and decay could possibly offer.

(6) In anticipation of this ultimate deliverance, your joy overflows, though at present it may be your lot to suffer for a time through various trials to the end that your faith may be shown to be genuine.

(7) But your faith, when proven genuine in the crucible of life, will result in praise, glory and honor for you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:6-7

Many of the believers being addressed in the passage above had matured spiritually, and were at the time undergoing intensive pressure and testing. Specifically, the recipients of this letter were experiencing social ostracism along with legal and economic sanctions as the new "religion" of Christianity began to spread throughout the Roman world in the mid to late first century, and to incur increasing opposition as it did so. All truly good intentions on the part of Christians will be opposed by the evil one, and the reality of satanic opposition at every step and at every stage of spiritual advance is a scriptural fact. However, it is also very much the case that mature believers come in for – and are allowed to come in for – attacks of greater intensity. As the book of Job makes abundantly clear, such exceptional testing and tribulation really is "a compliment", though it doubtless will seldom seem so at the time. Believers who have not yet attained the solidity and consistency of faith which is defined by spiritual maturity are incapable of bearing up under such concentrated satanic attack – and God never puts upon us more than we are capable of bearing.

You have not suffered any testing beyond normal human [experience]. And God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your capacity, but, along with the test, He will grant you the way

out, so that you can bear up under it. 1 Corinthians 10:13

It may indeed often seem to us that the load put upon us is impossible to carry, but that is part of such tests. To grow beyond the basic level of maturity, we have to learn to trust God that though things seem unbearable to us, He is faithful and will see us through, and a large part of gaining and retaining that perspective is necessarily based upon the anticipation of future rewards (Hebrews 11:6).

(24) By faith, Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, (25) and chose instead to suffer maltreatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin, because he considered the reproach [suffered on behalf] of Christ greater riches than the treasure vaults of Egypt. (26) For he was looking to his reward. Hebrews 11:24-26 For believers who have grown up spiritually, this next level of resistance to our progress is essential if that mature faith is to be refined and made even more resilient. In Peter's analogy (1 Peter 1:6-7, previously quoted), we see precisely what God intends. Just as steel is tempered in a crucible, so fiery testing is essential to strengthen faith. In order for our faith to be honed into a focused hope capable of truly and experientially seeing the reward ahead as more valuable than anything in this life and as worth whatever suffering and significant trouble must be endured on this earth, we must successfully pass through trials and tribulation beyond the common sort (cf. Mark 10:30; Acts 14:22; 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4; 1 Peter 2:19-21; 1 Peter 4:12). Only in this way does one earn the crown of life. Have no fear of what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Demonstrate faithfulness unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. Revelation 2:10 The mark of a believer who has successfully negotiated the hurdle of this penultimate level of reward is a positive attitude in the midst of suffering. That is to say, the believer who has mastered this third level of spiritual advance not only endures severe testing with faith intact, but can actually be loving, hopeful, and even joyous in the process – an utter impossibility for anyone who has yet to mature spiritually or who has yet to be refined to the point of actually esteeming eternity and its rewards beyond this life. Only such a heavenly perspective is capable of laughing through tears.

Brothers, when you are being beset with all manner of trials, take pains to be joyful. For you should keep in mind that this testing of your faith develops perseverance. So let your perseverance develop fully, that you may become fully mature and entitled to a full reward, having been found lacking in no respect. James 1:2-4 And not only this, but let us glory in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces patience, and patience produces proven character, and proven character produces hope – and this hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us (cf. 2 Timothy 1:7). Romans 5:3-5 For I do not consider these present hardships in any way comparable to the glory destined to be revealed for us. Romans 8:18 Level 4 Rewards: The Crown of Glory – The "Love" Level of Completed Ministry The crown of glory, represented by the 100-fold production in the parable of the Sower and by the "gold" of 1 Corinthians 3:12, is the "love level" of highest reward. It is achieved by those who demonstrate the love they have for Jesus Christ by successfully, faithfully and consistently completing the ministries He has assigned them for the building up of His Church. Winners of the crown of life must first necessarily have attained spiritual maturity, and must have then had that mature faith refined into a constant, eternal hope through serious and significant testing. Having been thus spiritually "blooded", these battle-tested veterans are then prepared for

and capable of being used by the Lord for the edification of His Body through the effective employment of their various spiritual gifts in ministries which He Himself assigns (1 Corinthians 12:5; cf. Acts 9:15; Romans 1:1). Having first properly oriented to our place in the world by faith through our attainment of spiritual maturity, and having thereafter had this faith refined into a surpassing "blessed" hope focused on Jesus Christ, a hope which "anchors us" to the heavenly perspective in the face of temporal pressures and tribulations (Titus 2:13; Hebrews 6:19), we are ready to direct this mature faith and tested hope to our fellow believers in love for Jesus Christ and out of love for Him and His Church. This effective deployment of mature love in hopeful anticipation of reward will always involve the successful completion of a distinct ministry corresponding to the individual believer's particular spiritual gift(s). An important caveat here is that Jesus is interested in the actual building up of His Church, not in wasted or only apparent effort expended in activities of only superficial significance. Only those whose faith is mature and whose hope has been tested are qualified to contend for this highest level of reward, and only ministry which actually does contribute to the salvation of unbelievers and/or the building up and progress of the faith of believers is capable of fulfilling this requirement. Moreover, although the effort involved necessary to win this highest crown will unquestionably be considerable, requiring faithful labor of long-standing duration, we should nonetheless be very reluctant to see such ministries only in traditional terms. It is not only those occupations and activities which are traditionally seen as "full-time ministry" that can qualify a person for the crown of glory. There is no formal "track" for such things, and the individual possibilities for ministering to Christ's Church in a significant way are as numerous and varied as the number of spiritual gifts multiplied by the various circumstances of each of us and of our brothers and sisters in Christ (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-31; Ephesians 4:7-16). As each one has received a [particular spiritual] gift, [so let us be] ministering it to each other as good stewards of the multi-faceted grace of God. 1 Peter 4:10

Furthermore, it is important to remember that the choice of gift(s) we receive at salvation is the province of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4; 1 Corinthians 12:11), and that the choice of specific ministry is the province of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 12:5). Therefore an essential part of effective ministry is the proper identification of our individual gifts and proper sphere of effort in support of the edification of Christ's Body – and only mature, tested believers are truly capable of allowing themselves to be led into just the right place so as to be used by the Lord in just the right way. Before the judgment seat of Christ, "many who are first will be last", and it will certainly be the case that many who are assumed in this life to be worthy of this highest award simply because of their role in traditional full-time ministry will not receive it, while others who are not even involved in anything that the traditional church visible has proclaimed to be a legitimate ministry will be called up to the "higher place" to the great surprise of all (Luke 14:7-11).

(1) So I urge the elders among you as a fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, even one who shares [with you] in the glory which is about to be revealed, (2) pastor the flock of God under your charge, overseeing them not out of compulsion but willingly in response to God, not eager for shameful material gain, but out of genuine enthusiasm, (3) not lording it over the charges [entrusted to you], but as genuine examples to your flock. (4) And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will carry off in victory the crown of glory which will never fade. 1 Peter 5:1-4 (cf. Hebrews 13:17) The crown of glory is here promised by the apostle Peter to all pastors whose

ministry is properly carried out (it is not denied to other believers, merely specifically promised to pastors by way of example). With a few choice contrasts, Peter characterizes the attitude of service we should all adopt. We should minister "not out of necessity, but willingly as God would have it; not looking for gain, but with eagerness, and not as overlords, but as examples to your flock" (v.2-3; cf. 1 Corinthians 9:16). Caring for Christ's flock, the goal of all ministry and essential purpose of all spiritual gifts, was the issue emphasized by our Lord during one of His last recorded conversations with Peter (John 21:15-19), and He repeatedly and emphatically made the point that all true love for Himself must manifest itself in such ministry. If we truly do love Jesus Christ, then we will minister to His Body, the Church, according to the ministry we have each been assigned. Such ministry is the proof of our love, and is rewarded with the crown of glory. As Jesus told us in the parable of the faithful servant, service of this type will be richly rewarded at His return (Matthew 24:45-51; Luke 12:41-48).

(2) For many who sleep in the dust will awake, some to eternal life, but the others to shame and eternal separation [from God]. (3) Then those who have insight will shine like the shining forth of the dawn, even those who led the many to righteousness, like stars forever and ever. Daniel 12:2-3

It is for this reason that love is the greatest of the virtues – not love as unbelievers or the world in general may define it, but love as God defines it, namely, loving Jesus with our whole heart, and reflecting that love in all we do in this life (Matthew 7:12; Matthew 22:36-39). But [until that future time of our Lord's return] there now remains faith, hope and love, these three [cardinal virtues] – and the greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13:13 And to this end, along with your faith zealously develop morality, and along with morality, knowledge, and along with knowledge, self-control, and along with self-control, perseverance, and along with perseverance, godliness, and along with godliness, love of the brethren, and along with love of the brethren, love. For if these things be in your possession and increasing, they will render you neither unfit nor fruitless in your confession of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:5-8 The ultimate demonstration of such love is to be found in providing for our Lord's Body by fulfilling the ministries to which we have been called through the effective application of our respective spiritual gifts (cf. 2 Peter 1:10 [in Greek]).

(15) When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." (16) Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." (17) The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep". John 21:15-17 NIV In the same way you also, since you are [so] desirous of spiritual gifts, seek that you may abound [in them] for the purpose of the edification of the Church. 1 Corinthians 4:12

Let all these things (i.e., the functioning of the various spiritual gifts) be done for the purpose of edification. 1 Corinthians 14:26 b As we observed at the beginning of this section, the life of love, service and sacrifice of our dear Lord Jesus, and the glory He has received as a result, demonstrate beyond all question that the greatest rewards follow the greatest legitimate production. He was rejected by this world and made to wear a crown of thorns. But now He has

been crowned with many crowns, and bears the Name that is above every Name so that it is to Him that all shall bow (Php 2:9-10). If we would share in His glory and in His rewards to the full, we need to make it our business to follow Him wherever He leads, even if it be that such boldness means that we must share in His sufferings (Acts 5:41; Romans 8:17; 2 Corinthians 1:5; Php 1:29; Php 3:10; Colossians 1:24; 1 Peter 2:21; cf. 2 Corinthians 13:4; 2 Corinthians 13:9; Galatians 6:17).

(28) "You are those who have stood by me in my trials (lit., "tests"). (29) And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, (30) so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Luke 22:28-30 NIV

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

(24) By faith, Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, (25) and chose instead to suffer maltreatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin, because he considered the reproach [suffered on behalf] of Christ greater riches than the treasure vaults of Egypt. (26) For he was looking to his reward. Hebrews 11:24-26

(12) Therefore Jesus too, in order that He might sanctify the people through His own blood (i.e., His death on the cross), suffered outside the gate (i.e., separated from fellowship). (13) So then let us go out to Him outside of the camp (i.e., likewise choosing God over the world), bearing His reproach. Hebrews 13:12-13 e. The Consequences of the Judgment: Whatever loss of potential reward we may experience at Christ's judgment seat (1 Corinthians 3:12-15), whatever embarrassment we may suffer for failure to live up to our full potential (Hebrews 13:17), and no matter how we may blush if our Lord Himself finds fault with our efforts here on earth (Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10-11), we may be sure that eternity for all those resurrected and face to face with our dear Savior in the New Jerusalem will be ecstatically blissful beyond our current comprehension. However, the prospect of eternal rewards instead of loss, of fulfilled rather than failed potential, and of hearing "Well done, good and faithful servant!" from the One we love the most ought to be sufficient motivation for us to grow "above the weeds" and produce a crop in response to His commands – as well as to make every effort day by day to ensure that we do not lose what we have worked so hard for hitherto (Colossians 2:18; 2 John 1:8; Revelation 3:11). For the rewards we earn during this very short time here on earth will last forever, and will be a source of joy to us and glory to Jesus Christ for all eternity. As part of the "spoils of victory" which are distributed after the final defeat of the devil by our Lord at the second advent (compare Psalms 110:1-7 with Isaiah 53:12; cf. Ephesians 4:7-8; Luke 11:21), and which we will then be able to use and enjoy in our newly resurrected bodies, these eternal rewards to be received at this final, post-second advent judgment will be operative immediately upon reception for utilization and enjoyment during the Millennium (Romans 8:17; 1 Corinthians 6:3; 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 1:6; Revelation 2:26-27; Revelation 3:21; Revelation 20:4-6).

Therefore I will allot the great [of heart] to Him [as His portion of the plunder], and He will apportion plunder to the[se same] mighty [of heart]. Isaiah 53:12 a

While Moses and Elijah (the most likely candidates to be seated at Christ's right and left hand; cf. Matthew 20:23; Mark 10:40), the twelve apostles (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:28-30), and David (Jeremiah 30:9; Hosea 3:5) will have special roles during the thousand years (and this will no doubt be true of other exceptional believers of the Bible as well), all of us who take part in the resurrection will share Christ's millennial rule, having some part in His worldwide administration (with the higher positions of governance unquestionably going to those who receive higher levels of reward).

(26) And to the one who wins the victory and gives heed to My works until the end, I will give to him authority over the nations. (27) And he will shepherd them with an iron rod and crush them like vessels of clay, just as I have received [the authority] from My Father. Revelation 2:26-27

Given all that is at stake, it would certainly be to our eternal benefit to make maximum use of all that scripture has to say about eternal rewards, and motivate ourselves thereby to serve our Lord consistently and to the best of our ability here on earth, taking maximum advantage of the unique opportunity we have for glorifying Jesus Christ and earning laurels that will never fade in the process.

(24) Don't you know that all the runners in the stadium run the race, but that only one receives the prize? Run in such a way so as to achieve what you are after. (25) And again, everyone involved in competition exercises self-control in all respects. Those athletes go through such things so that they may receive a perishable crown of victory, but we do it to receive an imperishable one. (26) So as I run this race of ours, I'm heading straight for the finish line; and as I box this bout of ours, I'm making every punch count. (27) I'm "pummeling my body", one might say, bringing myself under strict control so that, after having preached [the gospel] to others, I might not myself be disqualified [from receiving the prize we all seek]. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

(12) [It is] not that I have already gotten [what I am striving for], nor that I have already completed [my course]. Rather, I am continuing to pursue [the prize] in hopes of fully acquiring it – [this prize for whose acquisition] I was myself acquired by Christ Jesus. (13) Brethren, I do not consider that I have already acquired it. This one thing only [do I keep in mind]. Forgetting what lies behind me [on the course] and straining towards the [course] ahead, (14) I continue to drive straight for the tape, towards the prize to which God has called us from the beginning [of our race] in Christ Jesus. Php 3:12-14 B. The Wedding Supper of the Lamb

(7) Lift up your heads, O gates, And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in! (8) Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. (9) Lift up your heads, O gates, And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in! (10) Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory. Psalms 24:7-10 NASB

(1) Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy. (2) How awesome is the Lord Most High, the great King over all the earth! (3) He subdued nations under us, peoples under our feet. (4) He chose our inheritance for us, the pride of Jacob, whom he loved. Selah (5) God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the Lord amid the sounding of trumpets. (6) Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. (7) For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise. (8) God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne. (9) The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham, for the kings of the earth

belong to God; he is greatly exalted. Psalms 47:1-9 NIV

(19) [Messiah speaks:] "Open for Me the gates of righteousness (i.e., the eastern gate of Jerusalem and the gate of the temple facing east)! I shall enter by them and praise the Lord. (20) This is the Lord's gate. The righteous will enter by it (i.e., through Christ; cf. John 10:1-9). (21) I shall praise You although You humbled Me (i.e., 1st Advent sufferings), for You have brought me deliverance (i.e., the victories of resurrection and Armageddon)." (22) [The chorus of celebrants responds:] "The Stone which the builders rejected has become the Cornerstone! (23) This has come from the Lord, and it is wondrous to our eyes! (24) This is the Day which the Lord has made (i.e., the 2nd Advent)! Let us rejoice and delight ourselves in it! (25) Yes, Lord, deliver us we pray (hoshi'ah na' = hosanna!) [from the Tribulation]. Yes, Lord, bless us with prosperity (i.e., the blessings of the Millennial Kingdom)! (26) Blessed be the One (i.e., the Messiah) who is coming in the Name of the Lord! We greet you all (i.e., the Messiah and His retinue) from the house of the Lord! (27) The Lord is God! And He has caused His Light to shine upon us! Bind up the Sacrifice with ropes to the horns of the altar (i.e., the inaugural memorial sacrifice of the Millennial Kingdom meant to remind us of the cross)." Psalms 118:19-27 The triumphal entry of our Lord Jesus Christ into Jerusalem described in the prophetic, Messianic psalms above has already occurred at this point in our narrative, as has our Lord's session in the temple in Jerusalem and His completion of the seven thunder judgments, including the judgment and evaluation of the Church, the Bride of Christ. With all these preliminary matters concluded, and before the beginning of His day to day millennial reign, the most amazing celebration in the history of the world will take place, the celebratory banquet of our Lord's victory, the wedding supper of the Lamb. This feast is so named because it also serves to commemorate Jesus' winning and receiving His most precious possession, the Church, won at the cross and now placed in His arms forever through resurrection.

(6) And I heard something like the sound of a great crowd, like the sound of many waters, and like the sound of powerful peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah (i.e., "praise the Lord")! For God our Lord the Almighty has begun His kingly reign! (7) Let us rejoice and be jubilant, and let us give glory to Him, because the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His Bride (lit., "wife"; cf. Revelation 21:9) has prepared herself. (8) And it has been given her to wear a pure, resplendent [gown] of the finest material (now this fine material represents the righteous acts of His holy ones [believers])." (9) And [the angel] said to me, "Write this down: Happy are those who have been called to the [wedding] supper of the Lamb! These [words] of mine are the true words of God". Revelation 19:6-9

We have already studied the scriptural image of the Church as Christ's Bride (cf. Ephesians 5:22-32). However it is important to note here that the celebration of this wedding is to be found even in Old Testament prophecy. The Song of Solomon (as has been traditionally understood in Calvinistic circles) is an allegory relating to Christ as the Bridegroom and the Church as His Bride (Song of Solomon 3:6-11; Song of Solomon 8:11-12; cf. 1 Chronicles 25:5-19; Solomon is the typological though not the prophetic Son of David), and this analogy of the Messiah and His Betrothed is also found most notably in the Messianic marriage psalm, Psalms 45:1-17. Notable in that psalm is the presence there too of the "friends of the Bride" (Psalms 45:14-15). These "friends" were also seen in Revelation 19:9 as those invited to the great wedding feast ("Happy are those who have been called to the [wedding] supper of the Lamb!"). These individuals will include

all who are at this point believers in Jesus Christ though not yet resurrected (since they believed after His return), and will no doubt be mainly that large company of Jews who turned to Jesus immediately upon witnessing His return, although gentiles who have done so will certainly not be excluded (cf. Zechariah 8:23).

People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Luke 13:29 NIV (cf. Matthew 8:11-12; Matthew 22:1-14; Matthew 25:1-13; Luke 14:16-24) As to the location of the banquet, it will indeed take place at Jerusalem.

(6) On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine – the best of meats and the finest of wines. (7) On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; (8) he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. (9) In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation." Isaiah 25:6-9 NIV The special preparations for assembly will include the supernatural "canopy" which will, among other things, shield the congregation from the elements. And the Lord will create over Mount Zion and over all her assemblies a cloud – one of smoke by day, and of a shining flame of fire by night. For there will be a canopy above the glory [of His presence, covering it] entirely. It will be a shelter from the heat by day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain. Isaiah 4:5-6

Exclusion from this feast will be a cause of grief and regret, especially for those who have been removed from the earth by the fifth and sixth thunder judgments:

(11) I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. (12) But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matthew 8:11-12 NIV (cf. Luke 13:28; Revelation 3:19-20)

Happy indeed will those be who respond to the Messiah when He returns, for they will be invited to celebrate gloriously on that great day of days in company with all who kept the faith in the great times of trial to come and rose to meet the Lord at His return! For these wonderful and blessed events are not vain hopes, but future realities decreed by the unswerving will of God; they are "the true words of God" (Revelation 19:9 b). The length of the feast per se is unknown, but will no doubt continue for many weeks (cf. 2 Chronicles 30:23). In many respects, however, the Millennium itself will be a celebration of the victory and reign of Jesus Christ, 1,000 years of blessing unparalleled since the garden of Eden, and not to be matched until the commencement of the eternal state. For good reason, then, the Prophets and the Psalms in particular are replete with songs of victory, celebration and gratitude which anticipate this wondrous moment, and which will undoubtedly be sung on that grand occasion with their depth of meaning only then fully appreciated (e.g., Psalms 47:1 ff.; Psalms 76:1 ff.; Psalms 95:1-11, Psalms 96:1-13, Psalms 97:1-12, Psalms 98:1-9, Psalms 99:1-9, Psalms 100:1 ff.; Isaiah 26:1 ff.).

Bless our God, O peoples, and make the sound of His praises heard. He has preserved our lives, and has not let our feet stumble. Yes, O God, You tested us, and You refined us as [one] refines silver. You brought us into the [prison] fortress. You set tribulation upon us (lit., "on our loins"). You

made men ride over our heads. We went through fire and water. But in spite [of all this] You have brought us forth into [a place of] refreshment (i.e., deliverance). Psalms 66:8-12

Let us then make it a personal priority not only to be a part of that wonderful celebration, but to occupy a prime place from which to enjoy it to the full as a result of our life's work for Jesus Christ.

(7) When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: (8) "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. (9) If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. (10) But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. (11) For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Luke 14:7-11 NIV C. The Millennial Reign of Jesus Christ: Revelation 20:4-6 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them (i.e., they sat in judgment), namely the persons who had been executed (lit., "beheaded with an ax") because of their witness for Jesus and because of the Word of God, [that is] whoever did not worship the beast or his image and did not take the mark on their forehead and on their hand. For they came to life and began to rule with Christ for a thousand years. (5) This is the first resurrection (i.e., that of all believers).² (6) Blessed and holy is the one who has a share in this first resurrection! Over these the second death (i.e., condemnation on unbelievers) has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with Him for the thousand years. Revelation 20:4-6 With these verses Revelation introduces and "covers" in broad strokes the entire millennial reign of Jesus Christ (the verses which follow move to its termination and the "Gog-Magog" revolt). The brevity of the account is not entirely unexpected. As we have seen from the very beginning of this series, Revelation assumes that we have "done our homework", and that we as readers, or, more particularly, as teachers, will bring to bear the other pertinent passages, doctrines, and information that may be found elsewhere in scripture. As it happens, of course, the blessed reign of the Messiah is a subject very well covered in the Old Testament in particular so that there is indeed much to say. Before we supplement this passage, however, we should not fail to notice the special emphasis these verses place on the role the newly resurrected Church will play in the administration of our Lord's earthly kingdom, in particular, those believers who were martyred during the Tribulation for the sake of Jesus Christ. As we have already observed in great detail, the entire Church has already been resurrected by this time and will be rewarded in this way, and Revelation 20:4-6 neither says nor means to imply otherwise (especially when the correct translation is figured in; see the preceding footnote). But it is certainly the case that the tribulational martyrs for Jesus come in here for special mention with the unquestionable purpose of providing special encouragement. For those whose lot it will be to negotiate the Tribulation, to be persecuted by the beast and his followers, and to suffer death on Christ's behalf, the prospect of a solid reward which includes reigning with Him is put here as a given. This special guarantee is thus a pledge from God meant to motivate and support this group of believers during the Tribulation's darkest days: no matter how hopeless things may seem, and no matter that the cost of true discipleship during that terrible time may well be one's life, God has promised salvation, and beyond salvation, the reward of sharing in Christ's rule for all those who reject antichrist's sovereignty, preferring to be executed for the Name of Jesus rather than to bow down to the beast.

(19) "So repent and turn back [to God] for the blotting out of your sins, so that times of revival may come from the Lord, (20) and so that He may send to you the One acknowledged as the Christ [Messiah], [namely] Jesus, (21) who must remain in heaven (lit., "whom heaven must receive") until the times of the restoration of all things of which God has spoken through the mouths of His holy prophets from of old." Acts 3:19-21 The Millennium will be a literal one thousand year period wherein Jesus Christ will personally rule the restored earth without any interference from the devil or his followers. The Messiah's thousand year reign over the entire earth from Mount Zion will be an inexplicably blessed time, the penultimate Eden whose glories will eclipse those of any other time in human history since the garden of Eden and until the ultimate Eden commences, that is, the eternal state and New Jerusalem. For the storm of the Tribulation now has passed (Jeremiah 25:32), and Jesus Christ Himself will henceforth preside over an unprecedented time of calm, peace and plenty, ruling His kingdom in perfect righteousness and justice under Eden-like conditions. For just as God previously restored the earth and heavens from a condition of catastrophic darkness to habitable status in order to create mankind in answer to Satan's rebellion, so during the Millennium the earth will witness a return to much of its earlier glory. The fact that in the Millennium we shall still be "in time" (and therefore still coexisting with sin, even though Satan and his angels will be imprisoned until the Millennium's end) means that the environment on earth will not be "perfect", but it will provide the most exquisitely wonderful conditions seen since Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden.

Just as the seventh Genesis day was a demonstration that everything God had done in re-creating the earth "was good" (Genesis 1:31), so the Millennium will demonstrate that only a world ruled by God (through His anointed Son), can be made "good". The earth of Genesis chapter one is gradually reclaimed from a condition of darkness and devastation (following God's judgment upon Satan's revolt) by systematically ridding it of all factors unfavorable to human life and habitation, both by separation from elements hostile to life, and by replacement and filling with the elements necessary for life. In an analogous fashion, the millennial earth under the perfect rule of Jesus Christ will restore "goodness" to the world again, not only by removing from it the most pernicious source of evil (the devil and his angels and the world system of evil they promote: Revelation 20:1-3), but also by the provision of all things necessary to bring about blessing and abundance under the perfect reign of Jesus Christ. Only when Satan and his followers have been removed from interference in human life, and only when the world finds itself under the direct reign of the Son of God (Psalms 2:1-12; Revelation 19:6) will the earth be "good" again, and it is important for believers to understand that without these two key factors of the devil's removal and Christ's return, nothing approaching paradise on earth is remotely possible. The Millennium will see, through the perfect rule of the Son of God, the reclaiming of God's direct control over the earth, and of Man's as well in the person of Jesus Christ, the Last Adam, reclaiming that which was lost by the first Adam (Hebrews 2:5-9; cf. Psalms 8:5-8). Though sin will not disappear until the present heavens and earth are destroyed by fire and replaced with the new heavens and earth (Isaiah 65:17; Isaiah 66:22; 2 Peter 3:7; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21:1), the Millennium will be a period that begins and ends with winnowing and purification (i.e., the seven thunder judgments covered above, and the final judgments of men and angels covered below). Like the seventh Genesis day, the Millennium will be a time sanctified (i.e., made holy) by God Himself, who will provide mankind with a world of true justice and righteousness enforced by the Son of God Himself (Psalms 2:1-12; Revelation 19:11; cf. 2 Peter 3:13). According to Deuteronomy 5:15, a major purpose of the

Sabbath day was for Israel to remember their deliverance from Egypt by God's mighty power. It was to be a day of rest so that even those without other recourse, servants and animals, might have some repose (Deuteronomy 5:14). Just so, the Millennium will be a time to remember God's deliverance of the world from the devil's grasp, so vividly and horribly experienced in the Great Tribulation which immediately preceded it (Revelation 20:1-3), a time to enjoy the rest and blessing of the Christ's perfect rule, and to celebrate the great deliverance God has wrought from the worst period of human history:

(1) The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me [the Messiah], for the Lord has anointed Me. He has sent Me to proclaim victory on behalf of the afflicted, to bind up the wounds of the broken hearted, to announce liberation for the captives and freedom for the prisoners, (2) to announce the year of the Lord's favor [the Millennium, the seventh millennial day], and a day of vengeance for our God [the 2nd Advent, the "Day of the Lord"], to comfort all who mourn, (3) to provide for those who grieve for Zion, to anoint them with joy as with a crown in place of their grief, and to dress them in garments of praise in place of their faint spirits. Isaiah 61:1-3 a 1. The Unique Physical Conditions of the Millennium a. The Millennial Rule of Christ:

(1) Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness. (2) He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice. (3) The mountains will bring prosperity to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness. (4) He will defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; he will crush the oppressor. (5) He will endure as long as the sun, as long as the moon, through all generations. (6) He will be like rain falling on a mown field, like showers watering the earth. (7) In his days the righteous will flourish; prosperity will abound till the moon is no more. (8) He will rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. (9) The desert tribes will bow before him and his enemies will lick the dust. (10) The kings of Tarshish and of distant shores will bring tribute to him; the kings of Sheba and Seba will present him gifts. (11) All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him. (12) For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. (13) He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. (14) He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight. (15) Long may he live! May gold from Sheba be given him. May people ever pray for him and bless him all day long. (16) Let grain abound throughout the land; on the tops of the hills may it sway. Let its fruit flourish like Lebanon; let it thrive like the grass of the field. (17) May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun. All nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed. (18) Praise be to the Lord God, the God of Israel, who alone does marvelous deeds. (19) Praise be to his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen. Psalms 72:1-19 NIV

Old Testament prophecy is replete with passages which anticipate the Messiah's coming reign, for He is the fulfillment and focus of all God's promises to Israel (2 Samuel 7:14; Jeremiah 33:14-17; Luke 1:32-33). In Psalms 72:1-19, penned by Solomon who, as David's son, is there a type of David's greater Son, the Messiah, we see expressed many of the most salient aspects of Jesus' millennial rule. While that time will be one of blessing in every conceivable way (and all the more so given that it will follow immediately upon the absolute worst of times during antichrist's tribulational rule), certain particular features of His reign and kingdom are continually emphasized in prophecy:

1) The Exceptional Joy and Gladness Occasioned at its Establishment: The day of our Lord's return will be one of delight for the entire world and especially for Israel, but also for everyone else (that is, apart from those who have opposed Him: Isaiah 9:3; Isaiah 12:3; Isaiah 12:6; Isaiah 35:1-10; Isaiah 42:11; Isaiah 44:23; Isaiah 49:13; Isaiah 55:3-11; Isaiah 60:1; Isaiah 61:1-7; Isaiah 65:18; Jeremiah 31:4-13; Jeremiah 33:9-11; Zephaniah 3:14-20; Zechariah 8:19; Zechariah 10:7).

(7) How comely on the mountains are the feet of the one who gives the good news, the one who proclaims peace, who gives the good news of fair tidings, who proclaims salvation, saying to Zion, "Your God has become King!" (8) The voice of the watchers [is heard]. They lift up their voice. They rejoice together. For [all] will see [Him] face to face when the Lord (i.e., the Messiah) returns to Zion. (9) Break forth [in song] and rejoice altogether, O ruins of Jerusalem! For the Lord has had compassion on His people. He has redeemed Jerusalem. (10) The Lord has uncovered His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God! Isaiah 52:7-10

2) Its Exceptional Justice and Righteousness: The righteous rule of Christ will suppress the effects of the sin nature so pronounced in our own experience (e.g., especially by crime and injustice; cf. Zechariah 5:1 ff.), meting out swift and perfect justice upon all malefactors and on behalf all who are unjustly oppressed (Psalms 2:9-12; Psalms 72:1-2; Psalms 72:12-14; Isaiah 1:26-31; Isaiah 9:6-7; Isaiah 11:3-5; Isaiah 16:4-5; Isaiah 32:1-8; Isaiah 42:1-4; Isaiah 51:4-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Jeremiah 33:15; Ezekiel 34:16; Zechariah 9:9). But the Lord shall be seated as king forever: He sets up His throne for judgment, to judge the world in righteousness, to render justice to its peoples. Psalms 9:7-8 Justice will dwell in the desert, and righteousness in the cultivated fields. Isaiah 32:16 No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise. Isaiah 60:19 NIV

3) Its Exceptional Peace and Prosperity: The Millennium will be a time of true peace and prosperity, of security and plenty such as has not been seen on earth since the garden of Eden (Isaiah 11:6-9; Isaiah 32:16-20; Isaiah 65:25; Jeremiah 33:16; Zephaniah 3:15 b; cf. 1 Kings 8:56). Indeed, the Millennium is the penultimate Eden. For He will judge between the nations, and chasten many peoples. Then they will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will no longer raise the sword against nation, and they will not study war any longer. Isaiah 2:4 (cf. Micah 4:3-4)

(6) For a child is born to us, and a Son is given to us. Dominion shall rest on his shoulder, and His name will be called "He whose counsel is wondrous", "Mighty God", "the Father of Eternity", "the Prince of Prosperity". (7) To His dominion and its prosperity there will be no limit or end. He will establish it and lay its foundation on David's throne and over his kingdom, in justice and righteousness, now and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this. Isaiah 9:6-7

(4) Then He (i.e., the Messiah) will arise and will shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the Name of the Lord His God. And they will dwell [in peace], for then He will be great to the ends of the earth. (5) And He will be their peace. Micah 5:4-5 a

He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. Zechariah 9:10 NIV

4) The Most Profound Blessing of All: The Presence and Personal Rule of Jesus Christ (see also Psalms 2:1 ff.; Psalms 45:1 ff.; Psalms 48:1 ff.; Psalms 72:1 ff.; Isaiah 2:1-5; Ezekiel 48:35; Daniel 7:14; Zechariah 14:1-21; Luke 1:32; Revelation 19:11-21, Revelation 20:1-6): The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed; for the Lord Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders, gloriously. Isaiah 24:23 NIV In those days and at that time, I will make a Branch of righteousness sprout forth for David, and He will accomplish justice and righteousness on the earth. Jeremiah 33:15

(13) I kept looking during my vision of that night, and behold – with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming up, and He approached the Ancient of Days (i.e., the Father) and they brought Him before Him. (14) And to Him was given dominion and honor and a kingdom, so that all nations and peoples and tongues should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away, and His kingdom one which will not be destroyed. Daniel 7:13-14 But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, too small to be numbered among the clans of Judah, from you I will bring forth the One who is to rule over Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, even from the days of eternity. Micah 5:2

Thus says the Lord: I will return to Zion and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And Jerusalem will be called "the City of Truth", and "the Mountain of the Lord, the Mountain of Holiness". Zechariah 8:3 As discussed previously, the 2nd Advent followed by Christ's millennial reign is the capstone of phase two of God's plan for replacing the devil and restoring the world to complete harmony and perfection. In phase one, God created a new order of creatures, mankind, as the ultimate source for completely replacing Satan and his angels. The original man, Adam, and his spouse were capable of sin, and their eventual exercising of this capability plunged them (immediately) and their progeny (at birth) into a natural state of sin. Contrary to the devil's design and expectation, however, God provided the means for redeeming Adam and Eve along with any and all of their progeny who would desire redemption through the gracious gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, the Last Adam, and in every generation before and since believers have been enlisting into the roles of His Church. Christ's assumption of true humanity and His sacrifice on the cross opened the way for the next stage of replacement, the resurrection of believing humanity, with the way already having been led by the "Prince-Ruler of our salvation" (Hebrews 2:10): When He had accomplished the cleansing of [our] sins, He took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Hebrews 1:3 b

Phase one laid the ground work for replacement, providing a new Ruler (Jesus Christ) to replace the present ruler of the world (Satan), a new kingdom (the Kingdom of Heaven) to replace the present kingdom of darkness (Colossians 1:13), and new subjects (believers bought with the blood of Christ) to attend the King in place of the devil's angelic followers (Php 3:20). During phase one, these replacements are essentially such in principle only as they await the fulfillment of the two further phases: Christ has been glorified, but has not yet returned to commence His reign; the Kingdom is here in principle (in the persons of believers and the Spirit of Christ: Luke 17:21), but is not yet functioning in practice (cf. Matthew 11:12); and the Church is coming rapidly to completion, but has not yet been resurrected. During phase two, Christ our King will return (the Second Advent), and will lay claim to His Kingdom (Revelation 11:15), while His Church (His Body of believers called out during the first six days of human history) will be resurrected to share in His millennial rule (1 Corinthians 15:23). As the rightful King, the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ replaces the devil as the ruler of this world from the time of the 2nd Advent, and will rule until the

end of time when eternity commences at the Millennium's end. a) His Kingship is founded upon His victory on the cross:

Through the cross, Christ has overcome and will terminate the devil's kosmos (John 16:33).

Through the cross, the Father has in principle already triumphed over the devil's forces and stripped them of their power (Colossians 2:14-15).

Through the cross, Christ has in principle already put an end to the one having the power of death (i.e., the devil: Hebrews 2:14; cf. 2 Timothy 1:10).

Through the cross, therefore, Christ has the right to bring on the final epoch of Satan's direct rule (i.e., the Tribulation), thus opening the door for His direct millennial rule (Revelation 5:5).

Through the cross, Christ has led condemned mankind to the victory of eternal life (Matthew 12:20; cf. Colossians 2:12-14; Hebrews 2:10).

Through the cross, therefore, we share in His victory over death (1 Corinthians 15:54-57). b) His Kingship is confirmed by proclamation, resurrection, ascension, and session:

Proclamation of His victory to the demons previously imprisoned in Hades (i.e., in the Abyss: 1 Peter 3:19; cf. Romans 10:5-7; Colossians 2:15; Ephesians 4:8-10) confirmed the success of Christ's mission and the imminency of His reign. It was also an indication of the coming superiority of His followers over the angels (1 Corinthians 6:3; Hebrews 2:5).

Resurrection confirmed the prophecies of the Messiah's coming reign (Psalms 16:10; Acts 2:24-31; Acts 13:30-38), confirmed His status as heir of the Kingdom (Acts 5:30-31; Acts 10:40-43; Acts 17:31; Romans 1:4; 1 Peter 1:21), and confirmed the effectiveness of His sacrifice (1 Corinthians 15:13-19; 1 Corinthians 15:21; Php 3:10; 1 Peter 1:3; 1 Peter 3:21), which forms the basis for His followers to share in that resurrection (Romans 6:5; Romans 8:11; Romans 8:34-35; Romans 10:9; 1 Corinthians 6:14; 2 Corinthians 4:14; 2 Corinthians 5:15; Colossians 2:12).

Ascension confirmed the acceptability of the sacrifice of our High Priest (Hebrews 4:14; Hebrews 6:19-20; Hebrews 7:26; Hebrews 9:11-12), while His entrance into the true Holy of Holies opened the door for believers to enter into the presence of God the Father (Hebrews 10:19), with believers who had died prior to the cross led to heaven by Christ in triumph at the time of His ascension (Psalms 68:18; Ephesians 4:8; cf. Psalms 68:24-27; Psalms 146:7 b; Isaiah 14:17 b; Isaiah 42:7; Isaiah 49:9; Isaiah 61:1| John 14:2-3; John 14:6; John 17:24; Colossians 2:15; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Revelation 1:18).

Session validated Jesus' status as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Acts 2:32-36; Acts 5:30-31; Ephesians 1:20-23; 1 Peter 3:22), made His ultimate rule only a matter of time (Psalms 110:1-7; Acts 3:21; Hebrews 1:13; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:7-8; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; Titus 2:13; James 5:8), and so became the basis for the reward of believers (Psalms 68:18; Isaiah 40:10; Isaiah 62:11; Ephesians 4:8; cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:19; Hebrews 12:2; 1 Peter 1:7; Revelation 22:12). c) His Kingship is consummated at the 2nd Advent: With the commencement of His reign, human rule over the earth lost by the first Adam will be restored in the person of the Last Adam, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Psalms 8:1-9; Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:45; Hebrews 2:7-9). With the commencement of His reign, the final stage of reducing all God's enemies to complete

submission will begin (1 Corinthians 15:24-26; cf. Php 2:10). With the commencement of His reign, there will also begin the final process of reconciling "all things" and restoring completeness and harmony to God's universe (Colossians 1:20; cf. Ephesians 1:10). With the commencement of His reign, earth will forevermore enjoy the perfect rule and presence of the perfect Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ (Revelation 11:15; cf. Psalms 2:1 ff.; Psalms 45:1 ff.; Psalms 48:1 ff.; Psalms 72:1 ff.; Isaiah 2:1-5; Ezekiel 48:35 b; Daniel 7:14; Zechariah 14:1-21; Luke 1:32-33; 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10; Revelation 19:11-21, Revelation 20:6). b. The Millennial Administration: The Millennium will present a unique situation in administrative terms in that it will be the first (and only) era of human history where earth will contain not only a (rapidly expanding) population of sinful mortals, but also a host of resurrected believers (the Church) who lived their previous earthly lives at various times during the preceding six thousand years; and both groups will be subject to a perfect, all-powerful and all-knowing Ruler. The precise extent to which the static number of resurrected believers will interact with the rapidly growing millennial population is not spelled out in scripture, but, as we saw in the previous section, it is clear that a part of our reward will be to share in Christ's millennial administration (cf. Isaiah 32:1-2; Daniel 7:22; Daniel 7:27; Matthew 19:28-29; Matthew 25:21; Romans 8:17; Revelation 1:4-6; Revelation 20:4-6; cf. Revelation 22:5).

"Well done, my good servant!" his master replied. "Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities." Luke 19:17 NIV

(28) "You are those who have stood by me in my trials (lit., "tests"). (29) And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, (30) so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Luke 22:28-30 NIV

(2) Or don't you know that the holy ones (i.e., believers) will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you really unworthy to judge [these] insignificant matters of dispute? (3) Don't you know that we will judge angels? How much more will that not be the case with earthly matters? 1 Corinthians 6:2-3

(11) Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with Him, we will also live with Him; (12) If we persevere, we will also reign with Him. If we disown Him, He will also disown us; (13) If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself. 2 Timothy 2:11-13

(26) And to the one who wins the victory and gives heed to My works until the end, I will give to him authority over the nations. (27) And he will shepherd them with an iron rod and crush them like vessels of clay, just as I have received [the authority] from My Father. Revelation 2:26-27 The one who wins the victory, I will grant him to sit with Me on my throne just as I also have won the victory and have taken my seat with My Father on His throne. Revelation 3:21

(9) And they sang a new song, saying, "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain and have purchased with your blood for our God [men] from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, (10) and have made them into a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will rule upon the earth!" Revelation 5:9-10

These passages all establish the fact of resurrected believers forming the cadre of our Lord's millennial administration. It will not be angels who enforce law and order, ruling and administering justice during Jesus' millennial reign, but His Church, resurrected and rewarded, with the positions we hold during that thousand year period appropriate to the rank we have earned during our

present lives on this earth. It can also be gleaned from the passages above that our enforcement of the law, our execution of justice, and our general administration exercised over the areas and territories entrusted to us will be perfect – just as we have been made perfect to serve perfectly our perfect Lord.

(1) See, a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice. (2) Each man (i.e., resurrected member of Jesus' administration) will be like a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm, like streams of water in the desert and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land. Isaiah 32:1-2 NIV (cf. Isaiah 32:8) As resurrected believers, incapable of experiencing physical or emotional pain or fatigue, our administrative duties during the Millennium will be a "labor of love", "delightful work" such as Adam was given in the garden of Eden, only much more satisfying and devoid of trouble to the degree that our eternal state will infinitely surpass his pre-fall state. Once abused and discarded, once outcasts and sojourners on the earth (cf. Hebrews 11:36-38), we shall at that glorious time have "attained the promise" of resurrection and reward (cf. Hebrews 11:39-40). No longer subject to the world and the caprices of its present evil ruler (cf. Isaiah 33:18-19), we shall rule the world with the Righteous One as His viceroys for a thousand years.

(18) In your thoughts you will ponder the former terror: "Where is that chief officer? Where is the one who took the revenue? Where is the officer in charge of the towers?" (19) You will see those arrogant people no more, those people of an obscure speech, with their strange, incomprehensible tongue. Isaiah 33:18-19 NIV As seen from these verses, the blessings of Christ's administration will stand in stark contrast to the rule of the evil one (most egregiously demonstrated by the reign of the beast) not only for us, but also for the millennial population which survives the Tribulation, and most especially for those of Israel whose future reaction is related directly above. Indeed, the government of Israel will be the most blessed and most unique in this regard. For Jerusalem will be the new capital of the world, now ruled by the Messiah Himself, personally residing there. Israel proper will be ceremonially ruled by David himself in resurrection in the capacity of her king (in fulfillment of the biblical promises: Jeremiah 30:9; Jeremiah 33:15-17; Ezekiel 34:23-24; Ezekiel 37:24-25; Hosea 3:5), with the routine administrative duties born by "the prince", a non-resurrected member of the Davidic line endowed with special privileges (Ezekiel 45:1-25, Ezekiel 46:1-24). The prince himself will likewise have under-shepherds to aid him in his tasks chosen from the non-resurrected population.

(3) "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. (4) I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the Lord. Jeremiah 23:3-4 NIV

Herein we most likely see the pattern – perfect oversight but with a mortal interface – which is no doubt duplicated around the world. Resurrected believers, as we have seen, will participate in Christ's administration, but probably in a sort of super-executive capacity (in the fashion of David), as well as in a judicial capacity (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30; 1 Corinthians 6:2; Revelation 3:21; Revelation 20:4-6), leaving the hands-on, day to day administration to our non-resurrected counterparts (and more and more so as the population and situation following the Tribulation recover). Given the role angels currently play as messengers and intermediaries in God's plan (and specifically in regard to serving the Son of God: John 1:51), it would be strange if they too

were not involved in the Messianic millennial rule, though no doubt continuing to serve Jesus Christ behind the scenes even more so than the Church. Finally, perfect, resurrected members of the Church will make the best possible selections when it comes to choosing their mortal counterparts in every administrative venue around the world, so that even within the most fragile branch of the government, human beings with sin natures, here too we may expect the highest possible standard to be achieved (as the "code of conduct" in the Psalm below indicates):

(2b) I will walk in my house with blameless heart. (3) I will set before my eyes no vile thing. The deeds of faithless men I hate; they will not cling to me. (4) Men of perverse heart shall be far from me; I will have nothing to do with evil. (5) Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret, him will I put to silence; whoever has haughty eyes and a proud heart, him will I not endure. (6) My eyes will be on the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me; he whose walk is blameless will minister to me. (7) No one who practices deceit will dwell in my house; no one who speaks falsely will stand in my presence. (8) Every morning I will put to silence all the wicked in the land; I will cut off every evildoer from the city of the Lord. Psalms 101:2-8 NIV

Finally, from some of the few details scripture gives about the millennial world government we can also extrapolate the essential administrative principle of the Messiah's rule, namely, that of a perfect central standard, accommodating local needs.

1) Language: The official language of Christ's government will be Hebrew. Not only does this make a certain amount of logical sense, for He will be ruling from Jerusalem with the Jewish nation as His unique possession, but there is scriptural evidence for this probability as well. The Lord states at Zephaniah 3:9 that, after unleashing His fury on the nations during the Tribulation (Zephaniah 3:8), "I will give to the peoples a pure lip/language (saphah berurah), that they all may call upon the name of the Lord and serve Him of one accord". While this purification of the lips does not exclude forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ, the context clearly suggests appropriate ceremonial behavior as well, and it is thus very likely that Hebrew will be the requisite language for the (sometimes mandatory; cf. Zechariah 14:17) worship at Jerusalem (see below). Isaiah 19:18 further informs us that "five cities of Egypt will be speaking the language of Canaan" (i.e., Hebrew). From this we may deduce that there will be an eagerness in some pockets of exceptional responsiveness to the Lord and His truth to assimilate to the perfect standard as much as possible and in every way. However, the fact that this development is deemed remarkable also shows us that while Hebrew will be the official legal and ceremonial language, no attempt will be made to enforce its use worldwide. In all other instances, the nations will retain their own languages. Rather than stifling free expression, we may expect a flourishing of legitimate conversation, with only evil communication being restrained.

2) Economics: Ezekiel 45:9-14 establishes a perfect system of weights and measures for use within Israel proper during the Millennium, and we may glean from this that there will be perfect economic regulation not only in Israel but throughout the world – not an attempt to control legitimate human decision-making in any local economy, but rather a process of oversight wherein truly unfair and criminal behavior is prevented. As in the case of language, we may extrapolate that it is the principle which is universally enforced, not the specifics. Unique local weights and standards, along with diverse practices, will be allowed to continue with a resulting explosion of free enterprise prosperity bursting forth under the Millennium's blissful conditions – only dishonest

behavior will be restrained.

3) Nationalism: We know of course that the Messiah's worldwide rule will restrict all the negative aspects of national competition, for there will be no war between nations during His millennial rule, as Jesus Christ Himself will settle all such serious disputes. For He will judge between the nations, and chasten many peoples. Then they will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will no longer raise the sword against nation, and they will not study war any longer. Isaiah 2:4 (cf. Micah 4:3-4) And yet there will still be unique and discrete individual nations as this passage itself shows, with even some of the most ardent of Israel's enemies restored to their own lands (Jeremiah 12:14-15).

(23) In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. (24) In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. (25) The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance." Isaiah 19:23-25 NIV

Thus this principle of tempered control most likely sets the pattern for all other aspects of Christ's millennial rule. The nations will still be nations, and Israel will still be Israel. Antichrist had tried (albeit unsuccessfully) to destroy nationalism (Daniel 2:41-43). Our Lord's administration will remove the problems inherent in a world full of independent (and sinful) nations, without at the same time eliminating national and cultural distinctions. After all, apart from those who belong to the resurrected Church, the rapidly expanding human population of the millennial earth will still be subject to sin, evil and crime, as the sin nature will still reside in all mortal human beings. It is most enlightening to consider that the Messiah will not attempt to change what cannot be changed without destroying the present heavens and earth altogether, but instead will institute the perfect system of control for an inherently sinful world: not the eradication of choice through stringent, Procrustean homogenization, but the preservation of free will through a system of wise and judicious oversight. In the truly perfect world government to be instituted by our Lord, better regulation will actually result in more genuine freedom. For its object, perfectly attained, will be the restraint of evil (rather than what has often been the case in the devil's world, the suppression of freedom in the service of evil). For these reasons, the Millennium, the time of most complete direct control of a single unified government over the earth, will also be the time of greatest individual freedom to pursue all legitimate goals and aspirations. This will be so in no small part because of the effectiveness of Messiah's system to restrain crime and evil without at the same time unnecessarily hampering the freedom of action of those not involved in such antisocial pursuits. c. Physical Blessings of the Millennium: During the Millennium, though human beings will continue to be born mortal and imperfect, yet the righteous rule of Christ (Psalms 2:9) will suppress the effects of the sin nature so pronounced in our own experience. The marvelous physical blessings of the Millennium will be due in no small part to the fact that the curse God placed upon the ground at Genesis 3:17-19 will finally be removed (to complement the rule of Christ and the resurrection of His Church: Romans 8:18-24; cf. Genesis 5:29). For the first time since the fall, this curse which resulted from the disobedience of the First Adam's eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil will be removed – at the return of the Last Adam who paid for its removal through His obedient death on Calvary's tree (Romans 5:12-19):

(18) For I do not consider these present hardships in any way comparable to the glory destined to be revealed for us [at the 2nd Advent]. (19) For all creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God. (20) For the created world is now subject to futility – not of its own choosing, but because of Him who subjected it [as a consequence of Adam's sin] – but not without hope. (21) For [at the 2nd Advent] the created world will be liberated from its enslavement to decay at the glorious liberation of the sons of God (i.e. our resurrection). (22) For we know that the whole creation has been experiencing intense pain and agony right up until this present time. (23) And not only the created world, but we too who have received the Holy Spirit as a foretaste [of the good things to come] agonize within ourselves as we eagerly await our adoption, that is, the redemption of our body (i.e. resurrection). (24) This is the hope with which we were saved. Romans 8:18-24 a

Once the cursing that came as a result of Adam's fall has been reversed, the result will be a veritable heaven on earth, an environment as perfect as possible (given the limitation that it will contain imperfect human beings still subject to sin), a world overflowing with blessing in its sights and sounds, its prosperity, and in the physical and spiritual wholeness flowing forth from Jerusalem where the Righteous One Himself will rule. This will be the prophesied "year (i.e., season) of the Lord's favor" (Isaiah 61:2); this will be the long-anticipated "time of restoration" (Acts 3:21).

(10) Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns." The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity. (11) Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; (12) let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; (13) they will sing before the Lord, for he comes (lit, "has come"), he comes (lit, "has come") to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth. Psalms 96:10-13 NIV The Lord will have compassion on Zion, and compassion on all her ruins, and He will make her desert like Eden, and her wilderness like the garden of the Lord. Isaiah 51:3 As this last verse indicates (and as we have intimated above), during the Millennium with the removal of the Genesis curse on the earth, the entire world will be a paradise. In the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, the earth will truly be "Eden restored" to all its prior glories, save for the continued imperfection of the rapidly-expanding, non-resurrected human population. However, the sinful nature of un-resurrected mankind will not prevent the Millennium from being truly Eden-like, with Satan bound for a thousand years, with all demons likewise removed from the world, and with the Holy Spirit's ministry of restraint not only reestablished (after being removed during the Tribulation: 2 Thessalonians 2:6-12), but now more expansive than ever before (since He will be "poured out" in a dramatic and unprecedented way not seen since the early days of the Church; cf. Isaiah 44:3; Joel 2:28). When we add to these significant changes the perfect rule of the perfect Ruler administered by His Church, the blessedness of earthly conditions during Christ's coming kingdom are certainly understandable in spite of the flawed nature of its subjects. In his (i.e., the Messiah's) days the righteous will flourish; prosperity will abound till the moon is no more. Psalms 72:7 NIV

1) Eden-like conditions as seen from the millennial Jerusalem: Jerusalem, the tribulational "rock of stumbling" upon which the Lord Jesus Christ caused the armies of the beast to founder, though subjected to terrible damage during the battle of Armageddon, will rapidly and miraculously rise from the ashes to become the capital city of the Messiah.

(1) Great is the Lord, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain. (2) It is beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth. Like the utmost heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion, the city of the Great King. (3) God is in her citadels; he has shown himself to be her fortress. (4) When the kings joined forces, when they advanced together, (5) they saw her and were astounded; they fled in terror. (6) Trembling seized them there, pain like that of a woman in labor. (7) You destroyed them like ships of Tarshish shattered by an east wind. (8) As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord Almighty, in the city of our God: God makes her secure forever. Selah (9) Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love. (10) Like your name, O God, your praise reaches to the ends of the earth; your right hand is filled with righteousness. (11) Mount Zion rejoices, the villages of Judah are glad because of your judgments. (12) Walk about Zion, go around her, count her towers, (13) consider well her ramparts, view her citadels, that you may tell of them to the next generation. (14) For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end. Psalms 48:1-14 NIV

Every biblical paradise shares certain unique features that mark it out as a place of extreme blessing, first and foremost of which is the physical presence of God Himself for the purpose of fellowship (rather than judgment). Just as in the garden of Eden, where our first parents Adam and Eve enjoyed sweet fellowship with our Lord when He habitually visited them "in the cool of the day" (Genesis 3:8), so the millennial Jerusalem will be blessed with the permanent presence of our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and all of the millennial blessings which mankind will enjoy on that great day will be a result of and will flow from His presence (as is always the case since all blessing originates with God: James 1:17).

(2) The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow. (3) You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. (4) No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah (i.e., "I delight in her"), and your land Beulah (i.e., "married"); for the Lord will take delight in you, and your land will be married. (5) As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you. (6) I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest, (7) and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth. Isaiah 62:2-7 NIV (cf. Jeremiah 3:14)

Though devastated by the events of the Tribulation, the beast's Armageddon campaign in particular, Jerusalem will be swiftly rebuilt in a supernatural way by the Lord Himself, to become the most impressive place on earth (cf. Isaiah 11:10; Isaiah 44:24-28; Isaiah 51:3; Isaiah 52:1-2; Micah 4:8), now to rest ever safe and secure under His protecting wings (cf. Jeremiah 31:38-40; Isaiah 54:14-15).

(1) He has set his foundation on the holy mountain; (2) the Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. (3) Glorious things are said of you, O city of God: Selah (4) "I will record Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me—Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush— and will say, 'This one was born in Zion.'" (5) Indeed, of Zion it will be said, "This one and that one were born in her, and the Most High himself will establish her." (6) The Lord will write in the register of the peoples: "This one was born in Zion." Selah (7) As they make music they will

sing, "All my fountains are in you." Psalms 87:1-7 NIV But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. Isaiah 65:18 NIV In addition to the ultimate blessing, the actual presence of God Himself in the Person of the Messiah, the Son of God, millennial Jerusalem will share other features in common with the most well-known Eden (and with all of the other biblical paradises as well): a) An Exalted Location: Millennial Jerusalem will be a city of greatly expanded dimensions (Ezekiel 48:30-35), and will literally be raised up in elevation to an exceedingly great height (cf. Psalms 68:15-16; Ezekiel 17:22): At the end of days, the mountain of the temple of the Lord will be established as the chief of all mountains, and it will be raised higher than all [other] hills, and all the nations will flow to it. Isaiah 2:2 (cf. Micah 4:1) In visions of God he took me to the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain, on whose south side were some buildings that looked like a city. Ezekiel 40:2 NIV

(10) The whole land, from Geba to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem, will become like the Arabah. But Jerusalem will be raised up and remain in its place, from the Benjamin Gate to the site of the First Gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the royal winepresses. (11) It will be inhabited; never again will it be destroyed. Jerusalem will be secure. Zechariah 14:10-11 NIV b) The Living Waters and the Tree of Life:

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. Psalms 46:4 NIV

Proceeding forth from the millennial temple in Jerusalem will be a stream of "living water", a supernatural source of refreshment akin to the streams that watered the garden of Eden. The stream will grow in breadth and depth as it runs eastward and descends to the plain of the Arabah (while another branch flows west to the Mediterranean: Zechariah 14:8), finally emptying into the Dead Sea. Along the banks of this stream, "trees of life" will spring up, comparable to the tree of life of Genesis 2:9, and to the "tree(s) of life" in the final New Jerusalem (Revelation 22:2). These trees will share the same purpose as the one which preceded and those which will follow, namely, to impart spiritual as well as physical blessing (cf. Isaiah 41:19; Isaiah 55:12-13; Ezekiel 34:27; Ezekiel 36:8; Ezekiel 47:7; Revelation 22:2): And on the bank of the river gorge on both sides will spring up every sort of food-producing tree. Their foliage will not wither, nor their produce fail, but every month they will yield a new crop, for they will be irrigated by the waters flowing from the sanctuary; their produce will serve as food and their foliage as medicine. Ezekiel 47:12 The river on whose banks the trees described above will flourish will share important qualities with the rivers of Genesis chapter two and with the "river of the water of life" of Revelation 22:1-21 :

1) It originates from a central source: Just as water flowed out of the garden of Eden, so the millennial river of living water will rise from a fountainhead at the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem (Ezekiel 47:1-12; Joel 3:18; Zechariah 14:8), a very similar situation to that of "the river of the water of life" which we find in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 22:1-2).

2) It produces a miraculously fertile effect: The river is associated with agricultural fecundity and abundant fisheries in Ezekiel 47:1-12, while Joel 3:18 connects the fountain with the blossoming of the land in general (cf. a similar, symbolic reference in Isaiah 66:12 : "I will extend peace to her like a river and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream").

3) It has a life-giving influence: The river is one of "living water" in Zechariah 14:8, a title which, in light of Revelation 22:17, suggests the spiritual blessings it will confer (see also Jeremiah 2:13; Isaiah 55:1).

Just as the Messiah's Kingdom is likened to a life-giving tree (Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19; cf. Daniel 4:10-27; Ezekiel 17:3-24; Ezekiel 31:1-18), so we find in the millennial kingdom literal trees of life flourishing on the banks of the river of living water for the first time since our original parents rejected the first tree of life for the tree of knowing good and evil. It is well to remember that none of these blessing could be possible but for the fact that our Lord Jesus bore all the cursing which was rightfully ours on that "other tree", for it is thus that we are eternally healed:

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, in order that we might die to sins and live to righteousness. By His wound you are healed. 1 Peter 2:24 c) Unique Prosperity: The wondrous nature of millennial Jerusalem will be so exceptional to such an extraordinary degree that it surpasses our present ability to adequately imagine:

(11) "O afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted, I will build you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with sapphires. (12) I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones. Isaiah 54:11-12 NIV Your gates will be open always, day and night they will not be closed, so that the wealth of the nations may be brought to you, and their kings led before you. Isaiah 60:11

(15) "Although you have been forsaken and hated, with no one traveling through, I will make you the everlasting pride and the joy of all generations. (16) You will drink the milk of nations and be nursed at royal breasts. Then you will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob. (17) Instead of bronze I will bring you gold, and silver in place of iron. Instead of wood I will bring you bronze, and iron in place of stones. I will make peace your governor and righteousness your ruler. (18) No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise. (19) The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. (20) Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end. Isaiah 60:15-20 NIV You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. Isaiah 62:3

I am about to extend prosperity to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing torrent. Isaiah 66:12

Then this city will bring me renown, joy, praise and honor before all nations on earth that hear of all the good things I do for it; and they will be in awe and will tremble at the abundant prosperity and peace I provide for it. Jeremiah 33:9 NIV

(26) I will bless them and the places surrounding my hill. I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing. (27) The trees of the field will yield their fruit and the ground will yield its crops; the people will be secure in their land. Ezekiel 34:26-27 NIV

2) Eden-like conditions as seen from the millennial Israel: The paradise-like conditions of the millennial Jerusalem will be duplicated to a great degree within boundaries of the entire expanded millennial state of Israel as well (and apparently to an only marginally lesser degree to the earth as a whole). The Millennium under the perfect rule of Jesus Christ will be a time of agricultural bounty without scarcity, of flourishing environmental conditions without the hardships and disasters of previous eras, and of general prosperity and blessing beyond anything now remotely imagined – and it will begin with Israel:

(29b) "I will call for the grain and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you. (30) I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the field, so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of famine. (31) Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices. (32) I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign Lord. Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, O house of Israel!" (33) This is what the Sovereign Lord says: "On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt. (34) The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it. (35) They will say, "This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited." (36) Then the nations around you that remain will know that I the Lord have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I the Lord have spoken, and I will do it." Ezekiel 36:29-36 NIV

(21) "In that day I will respond," declares the Lord— "I will respond to the skies, and they will respond to the earth; (22) and the earth will respond to the grain, the new wine and oil, and they will respond to Jezreel (i.e., Israel, "the Lord's planting"). (23) I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one'. 'I will say to those called 'Not my people', 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God.'" Hosea 2:21-23 NIV

(16) The Lord their God will deliver them on that day (for His people are to Him as a precious flock, like jewels in a crown set prominently in His land). (17) For how fair and beautiful they will be. Grain will make the young men flourish and new wine the young women. Zechariah 9:16-17

It will, in short, be a time of the veritable rebirth of Eden, with Israel being preeminent in the experiencing of all these blessings (Jeremiah 31:2), as evidenced by a) an end to the ferocity of wild animals (contrast to Ezekiel 14:21):

(6) The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. (7) And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. (8) And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. (9) They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. Isaiah 11:6-9 KJV

I will make a covenant of peace with them and rid the land of wild beasts so that they may live in the desert and sleep in the forests in safety. Ezekiel 34:25 NIV (cf. Ezekiel 34:28) In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground. Hosea 2:18 a NIV b) miraculously improved physical and agricultural conditions: The mountains will bring forth prosperity for the people, and the hills righteousness.

Psalms 72:3

Let grain abound throughout the land; on the tops of the hills may it sway. Let its fruit flourish like Lebanon; let it thrive like the grass of the field. Psalms 72:16 NIV

(23) He will also send you rain for the seed you sow in the ground, and the food that comes from the land will be rich and plentiful. In that day your cattle will graze in broad meadows. (24) The oxen and donkeys that work the soil will eat fodder and mash, spread out with fork and shovel. (25) In the day of great slaughter, when the towers fall, streams of water will flow on every high mountain and every lofty hill. (26) The moon will shine like the sun, and the sunlight will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven full days (viz., a hyperbole literally fulfilled in the eternal state), when the Lord binds up the bruises of his people and heals the wounds he inflicted. Isaiah 30:23-26 NIV

(1) The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, (2) it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the Lord, the splendor of our God. Isaiah 35:1-2 NIV

(18) I will make rivers spring forth on the barren heights, and fountains in the valleys. I will fill the desert with pools of water, and the arid places with springs of water. (19) I will set cedar trees in the desert, acacias, myrtles and olive trees. I will place cypress, elm and box trees together in the Arabah, (20) so that [all] may see and know and take it [to heart] and understand together that the hand of the Lord has done this, and that the Holy One of Israel has created it. Isaiah 41:18-20 For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground. Isaiah 44:3 a NIV The Lord will have compassion on Zion, and compassion on all her ruins, and He will make her desert like Eden, and her wilderness like the garden of the Lord. Isaiah 51:3 The mountains and hills will let out a cheer and the trees will clap their hands. Instead of thorns, cypress will grow, and instead of thistles, myrtles. Isaiah 55:12-13 a

Sharon will become a pasture for flocks, and the Valley of Achor a resting place for herds, for my people who seek me. Isaiah 65:10 NIV

(12) They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord—the grain, the new wine and the oil, the young of the flocks and herds. They will be like a well-watered garden, and they will sorrow no more. (13) Then maidens will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow. (14) I will satisfy the priests with abundance, and my people will be filled with my bounty," declares the Lord. Jeremiah 31:12-14 NIV I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing. Ezekiel 34:26 b NIV

I will provide for them a land renowned for its crops, and they will no longer be victims of famine in the land or bear the scorn of the nations. Ezekiel 34:29 NIV (cf. Ezekiel 34:27) And it will come to pass on that day that the mountains will drip with sweet wine, and the hills run with milk. And all the watercourses of Judah will run with water. Joel 3:18

Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when the one who ploughs will catch up with the reaper, and the one who treads the grapes will catch up with the sower. The mountains will drip with sweet

wine and the hills will be liquid [goodness]. Amos 9:13 For there will be prosperity for what is sown: the vine will yield its fruit, and the land will bring forth its produce, and the sky will give forth the [necessary] moisture. Zechariah 8:12 c) general peace and prosperity (cf. Psalms 68:16; Isaiah 9:4; Jeremiah 31:22):

Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety. Hosea 2:18 b NIV

(14) In righteousness you will be established: Tyranny will be far from you; you will have nothing to fear. Terror will be far removed; it will not come near you. (15) If anyone does attack you, it will not be my doing; whoever attacks you will surrender to you. Isaiah 54:14-15 NIV

Then will all your people be righteous and they will possess the land forever. They are the shoot I have planted, the work of my hands, for the display of my splendor. Isaiah 60:21 NIV

(3b) They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor. (4) They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. (5) Aliens will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. (6) And you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast. (7) Instead of their shame my people will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace they will rejoice in their inheritance; and so they will inherit a double portion in their land, and everlasting joy will be theirs. Isaiah 61:3-7

(38) "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when this city will be rebuilt for me from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. (39) The measuring line will stretch from there straight to the hill of Gareb and then turn to Goah. (40) The whole valley where dead bodies and ashes are thrown, and all the terraces out to the Kidron Valley on the east as far as the corner of the Horse Gate, will be holy to the Lord. The city will never again be uprooted or demolished." Jeremiah 31:38-40 NIV
d) the expansion of the territory of Israel: During the Millennium, the territory of Israel will finally be expanded to the boundaries she was always meant to have, and her land will be newly allotted to ensure a bountiful inheritance to all of Abraham's offspring. Her Kingdom now united under Messiah's rule (Isaiah 11:12-13; Jeremiah 3:18; Ezekiel 37:15 ff.; Hosea 1:11), she will possess the full grant of land God originally made to Abraham (Ezekiel 45:7-8; Ezekiel 47:13-23, Ezekiel 48:1-29; Zechariah 9:10). In those days, Israel will be exalted to the premier position among the nations for the first time since Abraham received the promises (Genesis 12:2-3; Genesis 15:5-21; Genesis 17:4-19; Genesis 22:17-18).

(1) For the Lord will cherish Jacob, and will again choose Israel, and place them in their own land. Foreigners will join with them and will attach themselves to the house of Jacob. (2) Nations will take them and bring them to their [rightful] place. Then the house of Israel will receive them by lot in the land of the Lord [for use] as servants and maidservants. For they will take their captors captive, and rule over those who oppressed them. Isaiah 14:1-2 e) the special enrichment of Israel: In an era of intensive blessing, Israel will be doubly blessed (Isaiah 61:7; Joel 2:25; Zechariah 9:12), and will be a blessing herself to the whole world (Zechariah 8:20-23; cf. Genesis 12:3). One of the distinct blessings prophesied to fall to Israel's lot during the Millennium is that she will be bountifully enriched in a variety of ways. In addition to the facts of the presence of the

Messiah Himself, her status as the new world capital, and the special blessings upon her agriculture and environment examined above, she will also benefit from "plundering" the nations, both through reaping the benefits that will come from recycling the vast treasures of antichrist's recently annihilated armies (Ezekiel 39:7-16; Zechariah 14:1; cf. Psalms 68:12-13; Isaiah 9:3-5), and also from direct tribute from all of the other nations, the "double portion" of spoils which will come to her as the Messiah's special possession (Isaiah 23:17-18; cf. Exodus 3:22; Exodus 12:36; Deuteronomy 6:10; Revelation 21:24).

(29) Because of your temple at Jerusalem kings will bring you gifts. (30) Rebuke the beast among the reeds, the herd of bulls among the calves of the nations. Humbled, may it bring bars of silver. Psalms 68:29-30 a NIV (cf. Psalms 72:15)

(5) Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. (6) Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the Lord. (7) All Kedar's flocks will be gathered to you, the rams of Nebaioth will serve you; they will be accepted as offerings on my altar, and I will adorn my glorious temple.

Isaiah 60:5-7 NIV Your gates will be open always, day and night they will not be closed, so that the wealth of the nations may be brought to you, and their kings led before you.

Isaiah 60:11

You will drink the milk of nations and be nursed at royal breasts. Then you will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

Isaiah 60:16 NIV

(5) Aliens will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. (6) And you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast. (7) Instead of their shame my people will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace they will rejoice in their inheritance; and so they will inherit a double portion in their land, and everlasting joy will be theirs.

Isaiah 61:5-7 NIV

I am about to extend prosperity to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing torrent. Isaiah 66:12 The wealth of all the nations round about will be gathered up, their gold and silver and clothing in abundance. Zechariah 14:14

3) Eden-like conditions as seen from expanded longevity, health and happiness: The improvements in the physical health, longevity and general well-being of human beings during the Millennium will likewise be extraordinary, and we may take scripture's focus on Israel in these respects as a result more of its concern with the fulfillment of the promises to the Jewish people than as any indication that the rest of the millennial world will be left out. We may well expect these effects to be most pronounced in Jerusalem proper and in Israel in general, but the whole testimony of scripture taken together seems to suggest that disease, poverty, and even death to some great degree will be removed as serious concerns worldwide under the blessing of the

Messiah's glorious world rule. In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see. Isaiah 29:18 NIV

(5) Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. (6) Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Isaiah 35:5-6 a NIV (cf. Isaiah 32:3-4) No one living in Zion will say, "I am ill"; and the sins of those who dwell there will be forgiven. Isaiah 33:24 NIV The passage immediately above is informative regarding one of the more controversial aspects of the Millennium, namely the question of whether or not human life spans will expand to their remarkable pre-flood lengths – or even beyond. To put it more directly, will anyone die during the Millennium?

(22) No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands. (23) They will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the Lord, they and their descendants with them. Isaiah 65:22-23 NIV This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with cane in hand because of his age. Zechariah 8:4 NIV

(19) I will rejoice over Jerusalem and be filled with joy for My people. The sound of weeping and the cry of distress will no longer be heard in her. (20) No longer will there be there any infant that perishes in his youth, nor any old man who fails to live out his days in full. For a man will be accounted but a youth should he die at a hundred, even the sinner a hundred years old who suffers this curse. Isaiah 65:19-20 This last passage in particular is sometimes taken to mean that no one will die of natural causes during the Millennium, but verse twenty contains an important caveat: "even the sinner a hundred years old who suffers this curse (i.e., will even so be accounted to have died early)". Given that near millennium-long life spans were indeed commonly achieved before the great flood (cf. Genesis 5:1-32), and outside of the garden of Eden at that, it is certainly not impossible that with the restoration of Eden-like conditions on earth we should expect even greater physical resilience and health under the perfect conditions of the reign of Jesus Christ (the Genesis curse on the earth being finally removed as well). However, Isaiah 65:20 quoted above does state that death will occasionally occur nonetheless, and indicates that the key factor in bringing it on will be "sin". After all, even in pre-flood days, people did die, and it is well to consider that the exceptionally long lives recorded in Genesis chapter five apply to believers of exceptional spirituality. In Isaiah 33:24 also quoted above, we are told that illness will be absent in Zion, for "the sins of those who dwell there will be forgiven". Thus we may conclude that spirituality versus carnality will be a determining factor in this regard. For as Isaiah 65:19 says, it is "the sinner" who dies at a hundred who will be thought so accursed.

"On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity." Zechariah 13:1 NIV As the verse above suggests, the life-giving waters which emanate from the temple in Jerusalem (Ezekiel 47:1-11; Joel 3:18; Zechariah 14:8), giving rise to medicinal trees which spring up along its banks (Ezekiel 47:12), would seem to have not only healing properties but also the power of spiritual cleansing from the physical side-effects of sin. We may thus indeed expect believers who are walking with the Lord to live exceptionally long lives, with even the possibility of reaching through the entire Millennium not to be discounted. On the other hand, we may expect those who are, in addition to being

unbelievers, spiritually reprobate ("sinners") to have their life-spans curtailed as a result; even so, as Isaiah 65:19-20 suggests, their lives will be long by contemporary standards. Between the two extremes, that is, between essential righteousness and inveterate immorality, there will no doubt be many points along the scale (with a variety of life-spans resulting). We may also expect a number of deaths as punishment for criminal activity to occur during the Millennium under the Messiah's perfect administration of justice wherein there will be a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to crime. There are some passages which may point to the possibility of deaths from natural causes, as in the case of Ezekiel 46:16-18 where regulations are given to the prince concerning the assignment of inheritances. We should also recall that at least the original millennial "seed-stock" will come from human beings who have lived a portion (and in some cases a great portion) of their lives under far less than ideal conditions (most recently the seven year Tribulation). It seems best to conclude, therefore, that people probably will still die during the Millennium (in spite of greatly increased health and longevity). After all, even in the case of uncommonly responsive believers, everyone not yet resurrected will still have a sin nature.

Finally, there is also the question of the disposition of believers who may die during the Millennium, whether from natural causes, or from crime or accidents. Even if these are unusual occurrences, or possibly even especially so, it seems out of place for these individuals to be thenceforth excluded from the millennial kingdom, and we find no indication in scripture that they will then find themselves in the third heaven for the duration of the Millennium, a place which though by far not unpleasant will now otherwise be empty of other saved human beings. It seems better to suppose that in such cases either 1) such individuals will be resuscitated immediately (as in cases of murder, et al.), or 2) given an interim body so as to enjoy our Lord's presence – precisely as is the case today with all departed believers – with the main difference in the millennial regime being that they will enjoy that presence here on earth rather than in the third heaven as our departed brethren are currently doing.

4) Eden-like conditions as seen from expanding population: In addition to the vast destruction of Armageddon, and along with the purging out of Jews who though regathered still refuse to accept Jesus as Messiah (the sixth thunder-judgment), the fifth thunder-judgment will also punish with destruction all unbelievers who took the mark of the beast (and that most likely constitutes the majority of tribulational survivors). Taken in conjunction with the enormous loss of life for many other reasons during the Tribulation, therefore, it is virtually certain that the Millennium will begin with a very small population relative to the billions of human beings who now inhabit planet earth. But even if this figure be reduced to one percent (and we are told that mankind will become "rare as gold of Ophir" as a result of the tribulational judgments: Isaiah 13:12; cf. Isaiah 24:6; Zephaniah 1:2-3; Micah 7:13), the remaining millions of survivors under the conditions of millennial blessing and enjoying expanded human life-spans would be certain to rebound to previous levels in very short order (and to surpass them significantly by the Millennium's end). This would also seem to be borne out by the precedents of the rapid expansions of both the pre-flood human population (which began with only two, after all), and of the population after the flood (from a seed stock of only eight), both having occurred under far less favorable conditions. Starting with what must be at the very least some millions more than this (judging from the facts that "we who remain" in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-18 is a sizable enough category to deserve mention, and that the regathering of Jews from around the world at this time is one of the most prominently emphasized scriptural

prophecies), even this relatively small "seed stock" will no doubt prove more than sufficient to surpass current population levels in very little time (so that by the time of the final event of the Millennium's end those who will oppose the Lord will be as numerous as "the sand of the seashore": Revelation 20:8). The place where this expansion of population will be most pronounced is within the land of Israel (Isaiah 9:3; Jeremiah 33:10-13; Ezekiel 36:13-15):

(19) "Though you were ruined and made desolate and your land laid waste, now you will be too small for your people, and those who devoured you will be far away. (20) The children born during your bereavement will yet say in your hearing, 'This place is too small for us; give us more space to live in.'" Isaiah 49:19-20 NIV

(1) Rejoice, O barren woman who has never born a child! Break forth with rejoicing and shout for joy, O woman who has never given birth! For the children of the desolate woman will be more than those of the married woman, says the Lord. (2) Enlarge the place for your tent. Let your tent curtains stretch wide and don't hold back. Lengthen your ropes and strengthen your stakes. (3) For you will burst forth on the right and on the left. Your offspring will possess the nations, and the deserted cities will be inhabited. Isaiah 54:2-3 The least of you will become a thousand, the smallest a mighty nation. I am the Lord; in its time, I will do this swiftly. Isaiah 60:22 NIV

I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pastures where they will be fruitful and increase in number. Jeremiah 23:3 NIV

(18) "This is what the Lord says: I will restore the fortunes of Jacob's tents and have compassion on his dwellings; the city will be rebuilt on her ruins, and the palace will stand in its proper place. (19) From them will come songs of thanksgiving and the sound of rejoicing. I will add to their numbers, and they will not be decreased; I will bring them honor, and they will not be disdained." Jeremiah 30:18-19 NIV

(8) " 'But you, O mountains of Israel, will produce branches and fruit for my people Israel, for they will soon come home. (9) I am concerned for you and will look on you with favor; you will be plowed and sown, (10) and I will multiply the number of people upon you, even the whole house of Israel. The towns will be inhabited and the ruins rebuilt. (11) I will increase the number of men and animals upon you, and they will be fruitful and become numerous. I will settle people on you as in the past and will make you prosper more than before. Then you will know that I am the Lord. (12) I will cause people, my people Israel, to walk upon you. They will possess you, and you will be their inheritance; you will never again deprive them of their children. Ezekiel 36:8-12 NIV

(37) "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Once again I will yield to the plea of the house of Israel and do this for them: I will make their people as numerous as sheep, (38) as numerous as the flocks for offerings at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts. So will the ruined cities be filled with flocks of people. Then they will know that I am the Lord." Ezekiel 36:37-38 NIV d. Spiritual Blessings of the Millennium: During the prior period of the Tribulation, Satan had attempted a most vigorous suppression of the knowledge of God (Luke 18:8; cf. Amos 8:11), through his instigation of the greatest apostasy in world history (Daniel 8:12-13; Daniel 11:33-35; Matthew 24:4-5; Matthew 24:24-25; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 Timothy 4:1), the greatest persecution in world history (Matthew 24:9-12; Revelation 6:9-11; Revelation 7:13-14), and his most direct control over the

earth in world history (through his minion, antichrist: Revelation 13:1-18). By way of the most stark possible contrast, during the Millennium, when God reigns directly in the Person of Jesus Christ, the knowledge of God will be more bountifully available than ever before in the history of the world (Isaiah 12:3; Isaiah 19:21; Isaiah 54:13 a; Jeremiah 31:34; Jeremiah 32:38-40; Ezekiel 11:19-20; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Habakkuk 2:14; Hebrews 8:10-11):

"Come let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us of His ways, and that we may walk in His paths." Isaiah 2:3 For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord just as the waters cover the sea. Isaiah 11:9 b Those who are wayward in spirit will gain understanding; those who complain will accept instruction. Isaiah 29:24 NIV

(3) Then the eyes of those who see will no longer be closed, and the ears of those who hear will listen. (4) The mind of the rash will know and understand, and the stammering tongue will be fluent and clear. Isaiah 32:3-4 NIV

(5) The Lord is exalted, for he dwells on high; he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness. (6) He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure. Isaiah 33:5-6 NIV All your sons will be taught by the Lord, and great will be your children's peace. Isaiah 54:13 NIV For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. Habakkuk 2:14 NIV

(33) "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. (34) No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." Jeremiah 31:33-34 NIV

1) The Presence of the Messiah, the True Object of Worship: When our Lord reigns in person in Jerusalem, there will no longer be any reasonable doubt about who He is, the glorious Son of God and the Messiah, worthy of worship as God in His own right and for what He did for us in dying for our sins in His humanity:

(1) Rise up! Shine forth! For your Light has arrived, and the glory of the Lord has burst forth upon you. (2) For behold, the darkness – it will cover the earth, even a deep gloom its peoples. But the Lord will rise over you, and His glory will appear above you. (3) Nations will come to His light, and kings to the brilliance of His rising. Isaiah 60:1-3 "And the name of the city from that time on will be: The Lord is There ." Ezekiel 48:35 b NIV And the Lord will be king over all the earth. On that day the Lord will be the only One and His Name the only Name. Zechariah 14:9 And while Jesus will be the clear focus of all true worship, false religion will no longer be tolerated in His kingdom (cf. Isaiah 1:27-29; Isaiah 46:1; Isaiah 65:16; Jeremiah 16:19; Ezekiel 34:25).

(17) Therefore say, "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries among which you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. (18) When they come there, they will remove all its detestable things and all its abominations from it. (19) And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh.'" Ezekiel 11:17-19 NIV

(2) "On that day, I will banish the names of the idols from the land, and they will be remembered no more," declares the Lord Almighty. "I will remove both the prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land. (3) And if anyone still prophesies, his father and mother, to whom he was born, will say to him, 'You must die, because you have told lies in the Lord's name.' When he prophesies, his own parents will stab him. (4) "On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his prophetic vision. He will not put on a prophet's garment of hair in order to deceive. (5) He will say, 'I am not a prophet. I am a farmer; the land has been my livelihood since my youth.' (6) If someone asks him, 'What are these wounds on your body' he will answer, 'The wounds I was given at the house of my friends.' Zechariah 13:2-6 NIV And in that day, the Lord will provide an abundance of worthy teachers who will provide true teaching for salvation and spiritual growth.

Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding. Jeremiah 3:15

2) The Pouring out of the Spirit: Ever since the day of the Church's first Pentecost, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, critical to spiritual growth, progression and service in all eras of human history, has been more vividly and dynamically felt. That is because while the Spirit has always been "with" believers, Christ's ascension has made possible the gift of the Spirit whereby believers are baptized with the Spirit so as to have Him on the "inside" (a benefit which even before the close of the apostolic period came to be experienced by all who believe in Jesus: Romans 8:9; cf. John 14:17; 1 Thessalonians 4:8; 2 Timothy 1:14; Hebrews 6:4). The Millennium will constitute a third phase in the Spirit's ministry wherein Jewish believers, at least (cf. Ezekiel 37:9), will not only be indwelt by Him, but dramatically empowered in the manner of the first Pentecost and the early, apostolic days of the Church. As is evidenced by their lack of (genuine) occurrence today, the empowerment of those earlier, dramatic "sign" gifts was a temporary phenomenon designed to bridge the gap between the incipient Church and the establishment by the apostles of local churches around the Mediterranean world, governed by the teachings of faith and practice set down in a completed New Testament. During the Millennium, however, this miraculous manifestation of the Spirit will not only be universal among the community of Jewish believers in Jerusalem and Israel, but will also be a permanent feature of the Messiah's Kingdom (rather than a temporary, inaugural phenomenon).

(14) The fortress will be abandoned, the noisy city deserted; citadel and watchtower will become a wasteland forever, the delight of donkeys, a pasture for flocks, (15) till the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the desert becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest. Isaiah 32:14-15 NIV I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. Isaiah 44:3 b NIV

(20) "The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins," declares the Lord. (21) "As for me, this is my covenant with them," says the Lord. "My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever," says the Lord. Isaiah 59:20-21 NIV

(26) I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. (27) And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Ezekiel 36:26-27 NIV

"I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord." Ezekiel 37:14 NIV

"I will not hide My face from them any longer, for I will have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel," declares the Lord God. Ezekiel 39:29 NASB

"I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication . . ." Zechariah 12:10 a NASB

(28) "It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. (29) Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days." Joel 2:28-29 NASB
In this last passage we see most perspicuously the dramatic effects of the millennial outpouring of the Spirit, an event foreshadowed by the parallel fulfillment at Pentecost at which time Peter noted the comparison: "This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16). In each case, the wondrously overt manifestations of the Spirit are unique markers of the inauguration of a new era in commemoration of Christ's victory (on the cross and at Armageddon respectively), the difference being that during the Millennium these gifts will endure just as the Messiah continues to abide in Jerusalem (n.b., Joel 2:30-32 shifts the subject back to the events preceding the Second Advent).

3) The Resumption of Jewish Spiritual Leadership: The above special gift of the Spirit to Israel is a sign of another major millennial trend, namely, the refocusing of God's spiritual economy upon the Jewish people. For not only will the number of the Jewish people expand massively and the proportion of Jews within the world's believing community come to dominate as it did in the age of Israel, but we shall also see the spiritual leadership of the community of faith in the world come again into the hands of a predominantly Jewish cadre as in apostolic times, a trend which began, as we have seen, the Tribulation. As we have also already seen, the first new wave of millennial believers will be Jews, who, when confronted with the reality of the returning Messiah, will turn to God (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Joel 2:30-32; Zechariah 2:10; Romans 11:12; Revelation 1:7). Secondly, Israel and, in particular, Jerusalem will not only be the political nerve-centers of the Millennium, but also its spiritual focal points and for precisely the same reason: the presence of the One who combines the offices of Great High Priest and King of Kings in His own Person:

(14) "Return, faithless people," declares the Lord, "for I am your husband. I will choose you—one from a town and two from a clan—and bring you to Zion. (15) Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding. (16) In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land," declares the Lord, "men will no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord.' It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made. (17) At that time they will call Jerusalem The Throne of the Lord, and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the Lord. Jeremiah 3:14-17 a NIV
A key function of the "shepherds" referenced in verse fifteen above will be spiritual leadership, and we find this theme of the special divine provision of spiritual guidance a prominent one in millennial passages as the gift and office of prophecy are once more empowered for the edification of the people of God:

(19) People of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you. (20) Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. (21) Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it." (22) Then you will desecrate your idols overlaid with silver and your images covered with gold; you will throw them away like a menstrual cloth and say to them, "Away with you!" Isaiah 30:19-22 NIV

(9) "For I am the Lord your God – since [you dwelt] in the Land of Egypt [I have been so]. (10) I shall again make you dwell in tents as in the days of your festival (i.e., Sukkoth representing the second advent regathering). At that time I will [again] speak to your prophets and will multiply [their] visions. Indeed, through the prophets I will provide you with intelligible teaching." Hosea 12:9-10 The result of this expanded teaching of the truth, coupled with the special pouring out of the Spirit, will be the ubiquitous presence of the knowledge of God, especially among His people: For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Isaiah 11:9 b (cf. Habakkuk 2:14)

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

(26) I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. (27) My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. (28) Then the nations will know that I the Lord make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever.' " Ezekiel 37:26-28 NIV

Just as the second temple whose construction was originally unimpressive compared to the first temple (Haggai 2:3) was later elaborately expanded and impressively ornamented, so the tribulational temple, after ceremonial cleansing and repair, will be marvelously embellished and adorned, so as to take on the full form and beauty recorded in Ezekiel's description (i.e., in Ezekiel chapters 40-47). The temple is itself a form of palace (i.e., the Hebrew word *heychal* means either "temple" or "palace"), just as the ark in the Holy of Holies is a representation of a throne (and battle chariot). Furthermore, antichrist, it will be remembered, actually "took his seat" in the temple of God precisely so as to "represent himself as being God" (2 Thessalonians 2:4). These facts in conjunction with the return of the Shekinah glory to the temple invite us to postulate that our Lord will indeed be enthroned in the Holy of Holies (Ezekiel 43:1-12), ruling the world and administering from that very place the one true faith – the worship of Himself as the Savior of the world.

He said to me, "Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell among the sons of Israel forever. Ezekiel 43:7 a NASB

(12) And He said to me, "Thus says the Lord of Hosts: Behold a Man – 'Branch' is His name (i.e., the Messiah; cf. Isaiah 4:2; Isaiah 11:1; Isaiah 53:2; Zechariah 3:8). And He will branch out from His place and will build [up] the temple of the Lord. (13) For it is He who will build [up] the temple of the Lord. And He will raise up [its] glory. And He will sit and rule [as King] upon His throne. And He will [also] be Priest upon His [kingly] throne. For there will be a [unity of] consultation between the two [offices]." Zechariah 6:12-13 The temple rites which will take place during the Millennium will constitute a form of worship which while similar to that of the first and second temples will be significantly different in one very important respect: the animal sacrifices and other ceremonies of the past were shadows which represented and looked forward to the coming of our Lord and His death on the cross on our behalf; by way of great contrast, the millennial rites will be memorials of what He has already done (e.g., according to Ezekiel 39:13, the Day of Christ's glorification will be a special "memorial day"). For as Hebrews 10:18 tells us, following the reality of Christ's work in dying for us on the cross "there is no longer any sacrifice for sin". Therefore these millennial sacrifices will not be the means of any sort of atonement, even ceremonially speaking, but instead they will serve as a kind of group "communion" to teach and remind of what Jesus has done for us all. While Jesus will be ruling in person as the King of Kings, it will still be helpful for people to remember that in the past He was the Suffering Servant who died for all of their sins. For even revering Jesus as the Ruler of the world will not bring salvation; the adherence to the gospel will still require accepting His work on the cross in washing away our sins as well as appreciating Him as the unique God-Man. This purpose of memorialization (as opposed to foreshadowing) could never have been achieved while the second temple was standing, because the rituals practiced there even after our Lord's resurrection followed the prescriptions of the Mosaic Law. As such, those who participated in them after the cross were continuing to "crucify the Son of God afresh" (Hebrews 6:6) even after He had already suffered and died for our sins – making such participation a terrible blasphemy (for which the Jerusalem believers are soundly rebuked in the book of Hebrews). With our Lord present in person and actually enthroned in the temple, we may be absolutely certain that the meaning of the millennial sacrifices and rituals will be seen for precisely what they are, namely, memorials to His work on the cross, rather than shadows of what is to come. The difference in meaning will also result in significant if somewhat subtle differences in procedure between the Mosaic Law and the function of the millennial temple rite. There will be no ark of the covenant in the millennial temple, no doubt because Jesus has already fulfilled everything it and the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement foreshadowed:

(16) "In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land," declares the Lord, "men will no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord.' It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made." Jeremiah 3:16

There will be specific differences in the millennial regime of animal sacrifice as well, reflecting the memorializing aspect of that future practice in contrast with the forward-looking lessons of the Old Testament. Only one lamb will be offered as a morning sacrifice, representing the "new day" Christ's reign embodies, even as the evening sacrifice is no longer required because all judgment has passed for those who believe (Ezekiel 46:13-15). Significantly also, the gentiles will now be included in this worship, representing their full inclusion into the family of God (Isaiah 56:3-8; cf. Psalms 106:4-5; Isaiah 60:7), all enmity between God and sinful mankind having been dissolved "to reconcile both of them (i.e., Jews and gentiles) to God through the cross" (Ephesians 2:15-16).

Indeed, the feast of Tabernacles, for example, will be a festival to which all the worlds' peoples will be required to send representatives, and it is further reasonable to suppose that all who consider themselves followers of the Lord will want to assemble before Him in Jerusalem once a year (Isaiah 19:18-20; Isaiah 66:23-24; cf. "three times a year" in ancient Israel: Exodus 23:14-17).

"On that day I shall stand David's fallen booth back up, and repair its holes and everything else which has been trampled down I shall [also] stand up. And I shall rebuild it as in days of old, so that the remnant of mankind and all the gentile [nation]s which are called by My name may seek Him, declares the Lord who is going to accomplish this." Amos 9:11-12 (cf. Acts 15:16-17) The feast of Tabernacles is significant in this regard because it is the festival which looks forward to the Millennial Kingdom of the Messiah (for the Israelites will dwell "in booths" when they re-enter the land, just as that first generation in the promised land had done). Therefore this feast will be a memorial and a celebration of the Messiah's reign (and of Israel's return to the land – God having fulfilled all of His promises to them in this regard). As far as other nations are concerned, failure to be represented at this festival will constitute a grave offense for suggesting by their absence that, in effect, they are displeased with the King's rule (cf. Luke 19:14; Luke 19:27).

(16) Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. (17) If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, they will have no rain. (18) If the Egyptian people do not go up and take part, they will have no rain. The Lord will bring on them the plague he inflicts on the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. (19) This will be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. Zechariah 14:16-19 NIV

4) The Evangelizing of the Gentiles and their Response: The Millennium will also see the greatest explosion of evangelism in history (accompanied by a substantial response: Isaiah 19:18-20). Radiating out from its spiritual center, Jerusalem, Jewish evangelists, in the main, will cover the world and bring to fulfillment the prophecy of that great time, "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9; Habakkuk 2:14): And I will place a sign among them, and I will send survivors from among them to the nations, to Tarshish, and Put, and Lud, those who draw the bow, Tubhal, and Yavan, the islands far away who have not heard my Name, and have not seen my Glory. Thus will they proclaim my Glory among the nations. Isaiah 66:19 Nor will this traffic for the sake of the truth be one way only, for many whose hearts are drawn to Jesus Christ will come to Jerusalem to worship at His footstool and to receive instruction in His Word of truth, even going so far as take up permanent residence in Israel so as to be closer to Him and so as to drink more deeply and directly from the waters of truth (cf. Micah 7:11-13; Micah 7:17).

"I will record Rahab (i.e., Egypt) and Babylon among those who acknowledge me—Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush—and will say, 'This one was born in Zion.'" Psalms 87:4 NIV

"Come let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us of His ways, and that we may walk in His paths." Isaiah 2:3 The Lord will have compassion on Jacob; once again he will choose Israel and will settle them in their own land. Aliens will join them and unite with the house of Jacob. Isaiah 14:1 NIV

(14) This is what the Lord says: "As for all my wicked neighbors who seize the inheritance I gave my people Israel, I will uproot them from their lands and I will uproot the house of Judah from among them. (15) But after I uproot them, I will again have compassion and will bring each of them back to his own inheritance and his own country. (16) And if they learn well the ways of my people and swear by my name, saying, 'As surely as the Lord lives' —even as they once taught my people to swear by Baal—then they will be established among my people. (17) But if any nation does not listen, I will completely uproot and destroy it," declares the Lord. Jeremiah 12:14-17 NIV

(21) "You are to distribute this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel. (22) You are to allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who have settled among you and who have children. You are to consider them as native-born Israelites; along with you they are to be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. (23) In whatever tribe the alien settles, there you are to give him his inheritance," declares the Sovereign Lord. Ezekiel 47:21-23 NIV "Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people." Zechariah 2:11 NIV

(20) This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Many peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come, (21) and the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say, 'Let us go at once to entreat the Lord and seek the Lord Almighty. I myself am going.' (22) And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord Almighty and to entreat him." (23) This is what the Lord Almighty says: "In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.'" Zechariah 8:20-23 NIV

(20) In that day there will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, "Holy to the Lord", and the cooking pots in the Lord's house will be like the bowls before the altar. (21) Every cooking pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the Lord of hosts; and all who sacrifice will come and take of them and boil in them. And there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts in that day. Zechariah 14:20-21 NIV e. Millennial Believers: These gentiles along with the great number of Jews who will turn to the Lord after His glorious return will constitute a complement or filling up of the family of God above and beyond the fullness which is the Church at Christ's return. That is, the millennial believers are given to Christ over and above the number needed to replace the devil and his followers on a strictly one for one basis (for that will by this point already have been accomplished by the resurrection of the Church at the 2nd Advent). The post 2nd Advent believers who are "invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb" (the uniting of Christ and His Church and its celebration throughout the memorial time of the Millennium: Revelation 19:9), will, along with all of their spiritual off-spring, share and enjoy the world-wide blessing and bounty of Christ's millennial reign. Thus the believers of the Millennium constitute an additional blessing for Christ, a "double portion" blessing that is traditionally the right of the first born (Deuteronomy 21:15-17; cf. Genesis 48:22; 1 Samuel 1:5; 2 Kings 2:9; Job 42:10; Isaiah 61:7; Zechariah 9:12; 1 Timothy 5:17). This is most appropriate for the "First Born of all creation" (Colossians 1:15; cf. Psalms 89:27; Colossians 1:18; Hebrews 1:6), so that He might truly be "the First Born among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). Given the dramatic and unprecedented repopulation of the earth during the Millennium (treated above; cf. Revelation 20:8 b), and given that the already resurrected Church constitutes a one for one replacement of the devil's followers, it is likely that the Millennial echelon of believers, being Christ's double portion, will match the Church precisely in number (a thousand years of perfect environment being more than ample time from the

standpoint of population growth).

D. The Gog and Magog Rebellion: Revelation 20:7-9

(7) And when the thousand years were completed, Satan was released from his prison, (8) and he came forth to deceive the nations which [reside] in the four quadrants (lit., "corners") of the earth, Gog and Magog (whose number is as the sand of the sea) in order to marshal them together for war. (9) And they went up to the plains of the land [of Israel] and encircled the encampment of the saints and the beloved city [Jerusalem], and fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. Revelation 20:7-9 The first thing to notice about the last major event in human history before the commencement of eternity is that the Gog and Magog mentioned here bear only a symbolic relationship to the Gog of the land of Magog addressed in Ezekiel 38:2. The latter passage, in mentioning "Gog of Magog" (i.e., not "Gog and Magog as in Revelation 20:8), is referencing antichrist, with the context of Ezekiel 38:1-23, Ezekiel 39:1-29 describing the vast coalition the beast will bring against Jerusalem during the final days of the Tribulation at the battle of Armageddon. However, this last human rebellion against the Lord Jesus Christ and His millennial rule, the Gog-Magog rebellion of Revelation 20:7-9, will share much in common with that earlier attack. Both are instigated by the devil's deceit, both seek to unseat God, and both will draw unprecedentedly large numbers of troops from around the world in order to do battle with Jesus Christ at Jerusalem. For these reasons, John's sanctified use of this well-known appellation, "Gog and Magog", makes perfect sense as a generic phrase to indicate the involvement of the totality of the gentile world in this assault.

It seems evident from the verses above that the process of Satan's enlistment of the nations to attack the Great King will be as rapid as it is successful. In spite of perfect government and a thousand years of blissful prosperity more blessed than the world has ever seen, as soon as he is released the devil's efforts will meet with a most enthusiastic response on the part of the vast majority of the millennial population. The fact that what appears to be the entirety of the unsaved population of the world at that time will jump at the chance to rid itself of the absolutely fair and just rule of Jesus Christ only goes to show that free will is not a function of environment. The determination to reject God "no matter what" is deep-seated in the heart of unbelief and cannot be coaxed into genuine change no matter how many material blessings are bestowed. This should not really surprise us, because if the forgiveness of our sins at no cost to us through Jesus' death on our behalf and the offer of eternal life through faith by grace are not enough to satisfy those who reject Him, why should their dissatisfaction with His perfectly fair and abundantly prosperous millennial reign seem at all odd? Arrogance and avarice can never be satisfied. This Satan knows very well, and his new "platform" of freedom from the temporal rule of Jesus Christ whom his audience has already rejected for salvation will cause a wildfire revolt whose appeal will be so intoxicating to all unbelievers that the devil will be able to muster them for the final battle of the world almost effortlessly and even in spite of a lack of support from his legions of imprisoned fallen angels. The description of Jerusalem at this time as "the camp of the saints" also suggests that despite the rebellion's rapid growth, there will be sufficient time for many who have chosen for Jesus Christ to make their way to Jerusalem before the Gog-Magog invasion and assault begin.

(24) Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. (25) But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came

and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. (26) But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. (27) The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' (28) And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' (29) But he said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. (30) Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn." (36) Then He left the crowds and went into the house And His disciples came to Him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field." (37) And He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, (38) and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; (39) and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. (40) So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. (41) The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, (42) and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (43) Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father He who has ears, let him hear." Matthew 13:24-30; Matthew 13:36-43 NASB The parable of the tares describes the pollution of the millennial kingdom during its last days along with the manner of the divine solution: rebelliousness is allowed to come to fruition, which in this case means the actual assault upon Jerusalem, the Messiah's capital city. After the destruction of the attacking force, the remainder of those who set their hearts against Jesus in response to the evil one will be "uprooted" and "burned" (a metaphorical reference to the last judgment and their final end, the lake of fire; see below). In all this we see a very clear parallel to Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. Like our first parents, the millennial population will find themselves living under marvelous circumstances, and yet will still be vulnerable to the offer of something more, not "knowledge", as in the case of Eve, but "freedom" as the devil will deceitfully frame the issue for them (Ps.2:1-3). Thus, the millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ will be the third and final paradise which Satan will corrupt, having first suborned one-third of angelic kind and having thus brought about the destruction of the original earth, and having next deceived and corrupted Eve and through her Adam and having thus brought about their expulsion from the garden. Each such action has of course only furthered God's plan, bringing about the creation of mankind in the first instance and initiating the process of human history in the second. At the conclusion of the Gog-Magog rebellion, history will be brought to an end, and the eternal state will commence – after, that is to say, the final disposition of Satan and his followers and the final reward of the millennial believers along with the last judgment of all unbelievers. As can be seen from the short description in Revelation 20:7-9 (of the complete and instantaneous annihilation of the vast multitudes who will attack Jerusalem in those days), the devil's representations are, as always, mere lies and deceit. For the utter folly of opposing the power of God is something which only blind arrogance can fail to see, and that folly born of arrogance comes through very clearly in the other major passage to treat this revolt, Psalms 2:1-12 (cf. Psalms 46:6):

(1) Why are the nations forming into a mob and the peoples [of the earth] grumbling idly. (2) The kings of the earth are assembling and its princes are gathering together – against the Lord and His Anointed One, [saying] (3) "Let us pull off Their chains, and cast Their cords from us!" (4) The One

enthroned in heaven will laugh. The Lord will mock them. (5) At that time He will speak to them in His anger, and in His wrath He will throw them into confusion. (6) "But as for Me, I have anointed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain." (7) I shall relate the Lord's decree. He said to Me, "You are My Son. Today I have begotten You. (8) Ask of Me and I shall give [You] the nations as your inheritance, and as Your possession the ends of the earth. (9) You shall shepherd them with a rod of iron, and You shall shatter them like a potter's vessel. (10) So now, O kings, learn prudence! Take warning, you judges of the earth! (11) Serve the Lord with reverence and rejoice with trembling! (12) Kiss the Son (i.e., pay homage to Him), lest He become angry [with you] and you perish for your [insolent] behavior. For His anger may blaze up in an instant [if you do not]. Blessed are all those who take refuge in Him." Psalms 2:1-12

Finally, this rebellion and the disaffection and dislocation it will temporarily cause worldwide, conditions to which the millennial population will be otherwise entirely unaccustomed, will also serve to provide a litmus test for the essential spiritual status of all those inhabiting the earth at that time, soon to be brought up at the final judgments which precede eternity.

(31) "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. (32) All the nations will be gathered before him (i.e., after that millennial reign), and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. (33) He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. (34) "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. (35) For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, (36) I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' (37) "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? (38) When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? (39) When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' (40) "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' (41) "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (42) For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, (43) I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' (44) "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' (45) "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' (46) "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." Matthew 25:31-46 NIV For this time will truly be a time of testing for the entire world, and those not directly involved in the military aspects of the rebellion will still have to face the issue of how to treat believers being persecuted, opposed, or hindered by satanic forces in their journey to Jerusalem. For their actions towards "the least of these" will be a clear indication of their faith or lack thereof.

(12) Oh, the raging of many nations – they rage like the raging sea! Oh, the uproar of the peoples – they roar like the roaring of great waters! (13) Although the peoples roar like the roar of surging waters, when he rebukes them they flee far away, driven before the wind like chaff on the hills, like tumbleweed before a gale. (14) In the evening, sudden terror! Before the morning, they are gone!

This is the portion of those who loot us, the lot of those who plunder us. Isaiah 17:12-14 NIV E. The Final Disposition of Satan and his Angels: Revelation 20:10 And the devil who was deceiving them (i.e., the millennial rebels, a.k.a. "Gog and Magog") was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet [already are], and they will be tormented day and night for all eternity (lit., "to the ages of the ages"). Revelation 20:10

Satan here meets his final end, joining in the lake of fire the beast and the false prophet who have likewise been deprived of the benefit of any last analysis of their cases or formal pronouncement of sentence. By your many sins and dishonest trade you have desecrated your sanctuaries. So I made a fire come out from you, and it consumed you, and I reduced you to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching. Ezekiel 28:18 NIV The devil's instigation of the Gog-Magog rebellion constitutes an extraordinary act of rebellion against the perfect rule of the Messiah similar in its egregious temerity to the instigation of the Armageddon campaign (different only in that the latter was designed to resist His return rather than to overthrow His rule). But while the beast and the false prophet are denied any further "last judgment" or process of adjudication because of their non-human status (being nephilim not created in the image of God), and are subjected to this summary though entirely just judgment instead, Satan has already been judged.

(8) "When He [the Holy Spirit] comes, He will call the world to account regarding sin, and righteousness, and judgment: (9) regarding sin, because they do not believe in Me; (10) regarding righteousness, because I am going to my Father and you are not going to be seeing Me any longer; (11) regarding judgment, because the ruler of this world has been convicted [already]." John 16:8-11

Man was created for the glory of God (Isaiah 43:7; cf. Ephesians 1:5-14), and a large part of that glory is won in the responsiveness that some (though sadly far from all) human beings show in coming to God through faith so as to be saved by grace on the basis of Jesus' death to sin. This is so because human history as seen from our Lord's perspective rather than from our myopic human viewpoint was always meant to be the means by which God's condemnation of Satan and the fallen angels would be demonstrated as just. For Satan's case was already adjudicated by the Lord before human history ever even commenced (that is, prior to the reconstruction of the earth during the seven Genesis days and the creation of Adam and Eve). In your extensive conspiring, you were filled with wickedness, and you sinned. So I cast you from the mountain of God as one profaned, and I blotted out [your memory] from among the stones of fire, O covering cherub. Ezekiel 28:16 With the successful redemption of mankind at the cross and subsequent belief in the work and Person of Jesus Christ by His Church, God has demonstrated not only the willingness of creatures possessed of free will to repent and return to Him, but much more importantly His ability and willingness to provide the means for their salvation at a cost beyond imagination, the suffering and death of His own dear Son our Lord. This is the victory God has won over the devil in human history, not his physical defeat (which God could have accomplished in the blink of an eye and with no discernible effort), but the demonstration of His love and of His justice, of His ability to be true to the one without compromising the other – by means of the cross of Jesus Christ.

(31) Now is the judgment of this world. Now will the prince of this world be driven out. (32) And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to Myself. John 12:31-32

[For by means of the cross, God] has stripped [demon] rulers and authorities [of their power] and subjected them to public humiliation, having triumphed over them in [Christ]. Colossians 2:15

Inasmuch as Satan's conviction predates human history, his execution, otherwise known as "the second death" (Revelation 20:14; Revelation 21:8; cf. Revelation 20:6), has long since been prepared for him and his followers in the form of the "lake of fire", an eternal place of cursing and separation from God which all creatures who have rejected God the Father and His Christ will share forever.

Then He will say to those on His left, "Away from Me, you accursed ones, into the eternal fire [already] prepared for the devil and his angels." Matthew 25:41

Although the book of Revelation does not say so, the passage immediately above, Matthew 25:41, indicates that the other fallen angels will share the devil's fate (i.e., the lake is prepared for the devil and his angels: Job 4:18; Job 15:15; cf. Jude 1:13 b). But while Satan will not have the benefit of a last, official hearing, and while neither their consignment to the lake of fire nor any final judgment for the fallen angels is described in the book of Revelation, other scriptures indicate that this process of their disposition will be the next eschatological order of business: Will anyone teach God knowledge, since He will judge the high ones (i.e., angels)? Job 21:22 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but plunged them into Tartarus with its gloomy pits (i.e., the Abyss), preserving them for the [day of] judgment . . . 2 Peter 2:4 And the angels who did not keep to their own realm but deserted their proper habitation He has imprisoned with everlasting chains in the gloom below (i.e., in the Abyss) in anticipation of the judgment of that great day. Jude 1:6 So while for the reasons discussed above, Revelation 20:10 singles out the devil for consignment to the fiery lake at this time, there is no reason to suppose that Satan's followers will be granted any further stay of execution. Since the last judgment of human beings follows next in the eschatological scheme of things, it seems certain that the rest of the fallen angels will follow their leader, the devil, into the lake of fire in short order if not immediately after his relegation to the eternal flames. For the eternal state will be a place "where [only] righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13; cf. Daniel 9:24), and it is consistently described as being free of every trace of uncleanness (Revelation 21:8; Revelation 21:27; Revelation 22:5; Revelation 22:15), a condition that most certainly entails the prior removal of all of the fallen angels. Therefore when we are told that "death and Hades" will be thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14-15), we are certainly meant to understand Satan's legions as being included (inasmuch as Hades, and specifically the Abyss or Tartarus, is the present place of incarceration of a goodly number of demons, and their likely place of residence during the Millennium). The Lake of Fire: Though the Bible uses a variety of terms to describe both the interim and the eternal, self-selected place of condemnation for unbelievers and fallen angels (e.g., "the grave", "Topheth", "Sheol", "Gehenna", "Hades", "torments", etc.), the final "hell" to which all reprobate creatures are condemned is a very real and distinct place, called at Revelation 19:20 "the lake of fire which burns with sulfur" (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10; Revelation 20:14-15; cf. Matthew 13:42; Matthew 13:50). The interim "hell", or "torments", is one of the three sections of Hades below the earth (Luke 16:23; the other two being the now empty paradise where departed believers resided prior to the ascension of Christ, and the Abyss, the place of incarceration for certain of the fallen angels), and it is there that all deceased unbelievers will remain until the time of the last judgment. As we are told at Revelation 19:20, antichrist and his false prophet will be the first to be thrown into the lake of fire (at the conclusion of the battle of

Armageddon), with the devil following at the end of the Gog-Magog rebellion some thousand years later (Revelation 20:10), and with his fallen angels following him immediately at that time (as discussed above; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 20:14-15; Revelation 21:8; Revelation 21:27; Revelation 22:5; Revelation 22:15; cf. Daniel 9:24).

Even though it is presently unoccupied, the lake of fire nevertheless already exists. It has "[already been] prepared" – "for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41; cf. Daniel 7:9-11). But while the lake has been prepared for Satan and his followers, we see very clearly in Matthew chapter 25 that unbelieving mankind will share this same fate. For in the judgment of "the sheep and the goats", men and not angels are the ones being judged, and the "goats", human beings who have consciously chosen to reject the Father's gracious offer of salvation in Jesus Christ, are likewise commanded to depart into the lake of fire at the conclusion of this "last judgment" (cf. Revelation 20:14-15; Revelation 21:8). So while neither the fallen angels nor deceased unbelievers are presently in the lake of fire, it is this lake which will be the place of eternal residence for all who deliberately reject God and His love by refusing Jesus Christ.

John answered them all and said, "I am [symbolically] baptizing you with water. But One who is more powerful than me is coming, [One] whose sandal thong I am not sufficient to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit . . . and with fire! His winnowing fork is in His hand, [ready] to cleanse His threshing floor and gather the grain into His barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Luke 3:16-17 The fire itself, besides being literal, is also a symbol of the judgment under which all human beings find themselves for their sinful conduct (John 3:18; John 16:5-11; 1 John 3:14 – and no one has ever been completely without sin save Jesus Christ; cf. Romans 3:9; Romans 3:23; Romans 5:8). We are given to see this intimate connection between divine judgment and the fire which fills the lake of damnation in both Isaiah's and Daniel's accounts of antichrist's final end:

Topheth (i.e., the lake of fire) has long been prepared (cf. Matthew 25:41), it has been made ready for the king (i.e., antichrist). Its fire pit has been made deep and wide, with an abundance of fire and wood; the breath of the Lord like a stream of burning sulfur, sets it ablaze. Isaiah 30:33 NIV

(9) I kept looking until thrones were set down and the Ancient of Days (i.e., the Father) took His seat. His attire was white as snow, as was the hair of His head, [white] like the purest wool. His throne was aflame with fire, and its wheels were a blazing fire. (10) A river of fire was flowing, and it poured forth from before Him. Thousands upon thousands were ministering to Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him. The court was seated and the books were opened. (11) Meanwhile, I kept looking on account of the sound of the arrogant words which the horn (i.e., antichrist) was speaking. I kept looking until he was killed and his body destroyed and given over to the burning fire. Daniel 7:9-11 The lake is thus filled up by a fiery river of divine wrath and judgment (cf. Isaiah 66:15-16; Matthew 3:7; Luke 3:7; John 3:36; Romans 1:18; Romans 2:5-8; Romans 3:5; Romans 5:9; Romans 9:22; Ephesians 2:3; Ephesians 5:6; Colossians 3:6-8; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; Revelation 6:16-17; Revelation 11:18; Revelation 14:19; Revelation 15:7; Revelation 16:1; Revelation 19:15), a river of fire which "flows" forth from the throne of God (with this portion of the scene in Daniel 7:1-28 referring through prophetic conflation to the Father's judgment of Satan and his angels in eternity past; cf. John 16:11). In Revelation chapter 14 we find this now fully prepared lake of fire positioned before

Christ's Great White Throne at the time of the last judgment of human beings (which at the point of our present context in this study is about to commence immediately):

(9) And yet a third angel followed them, saying in a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives [his] mark upon his forehead or upon his hand, (10) he himself will also drink from the wine of God's wrath which has been mixed undiluted in the cup of His anger. And [that person] will be tormented in fire and sulfur before angels, [and] saints, and before the Lamb. (11) And the smoke of their torment will go up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night, those who worship the beast and his image and whoever takes the mark of his name." Revelation 14:9-11 The passage above portrays the act of execution as part of the process of the final judgment of unbelievers. That is the meaning and the force of the phrase in verse ten above, "before the Lamb". Just as the lake was initially filled directly from the Father's throne during the prehistoric judgment of the devil and his followers, so the final judgment for the human race will likewise take place directly in front of the lake of fire (cf. Daniel 7:9-11; Matthew 25:41). Upon the passing of sentence, those whose names are found to have been blotted out of the book of life for the cause of unbelief will be summarily cast in "before" or "in the presence of" the Lamb and all of us His followers who will attend the proceedings. We therefore should not take the passage above to mean that the place of the lake of fire will be the New Jerusalem where the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ will reside with us forever, for we know from elsewhere in scripture that "hell" will instead be far removed their glorious presence:

(6) Since indeed it is just for God to repay with tribulation those who are subjecting you to tribulation, (7) and to give you who are being distressed relief along with us at the revelation of our Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels, (8) wreaking vengeance in a flame of fire upon those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power. 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9

Through the grace and mercy of God the Father, the horrible fate of those consigned to the lake of fire will not trouble us for a moment in the blissful eternity we shall spend with Him and our dear Savior, Lord Jesus Christ (Isaiah 25:8; Isaiah 35:10; Isaiah 65:17-19; Revelation 7:17; Revelation 21:4; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17; Hebrews 12:27). That is so even though there are scriptural indications that the lake of fire and its inhabitants will indeed be visible to us in eternity.

(22) "For just as the new heavens and new earth which I am about to make are going to continue before Me", says the Lord, "so your seed and its name will continue. (23) And it will come to pass that from month to month and from Sabbath to Sabbath all flesh will come to worship before Me", says the Lord. (24) "And they will go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who rebelled against Me, for their worm will not die and their fire will not be quenched and they will be abhorrent to all flesh". Isaiah 66:22-24

Since it already exists, since it will be visible in the future (standing as an eternal memorial to the folly of rejecting God and His mercy: Revelation 14:10), and since it will be no part of the New Jerusalem (or the new heavens and new earth), the lake is in all probability located within the subterranean realm of the present earth. This location has much to recommend it. Firstly, the prehistoric filling of the lake in Daniel chapter seven (quoted above) and the adjudication of Satan's case which accompanied it (John 16:11) must have taken place after the devastation and

inundation of the original heavens and earth within the Genesis gap (that is, following Satan's rebellion which occurred between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2). After this supernatural darkening of the original universe, apart from the third heaven (technically a separate place from "the [twin] heavens and the earth", and, as a paradise in its own right, inappropriate for the location of the lake of fire), only the subterranean earth would have remained unaffected by the judgment upon initial creation stemming from the devil's revolt. For this reason, it would seem to have been the only place available for those proceedings, as well as the only place available for the positioning of the lake of fire, whose filling is described at Daniel 7:10.

According to this interpretation, the third heaven was made and has always remained perfect; the [twin] heavens and earth are the place where creature free will produces imperfection in what was originally created perfect, thus necessitating the choice between mercy and judgment; and the subterranean earth was made as the place for containing and restraining those who choose the latter over the former. It is more than a little interesting to note that while the devil and his angels were not deposited into the lake of fire at the time sentence was passed upon them (it being God's good pleasure to demonstrate the justice of His decision and the mercy which could have been theirs through the process of creating and redeeming mankind), yet He gave them to see the horror of their final end well ahead of time – and yet they made no effort to repent (trusting instead in Satan's ability to defeat the Lord in the contest ahead: human history). The last judgment (covered directly below) will likewise take place in a very similar interlude, after the destruction of the present heavens and earth (Revelation 20:11), but before the creation of the new heavens and new earth (Revelation 21:1). In this instance too, only the third heaven (inappropriate for the presence of evil or the final place of condemnation) and the subterranean earth will remain. It is within the latter, directly in front of the lake of fire, that the final judgment will take place. Finally, after the creation of the new heavens and new earth and descent from the third heaven to earth of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2; Revelation 21:10), Isaiah chapter sixty-six above indicates that there will be some sort of visual access to the lake of fire from the new earth (along the lines of the heavenly sea in the third heaven today which acts as a viewing-port for observing events on the present day earth: compare Revelation 4:6 with Revelation 15:2-3; and cf. Job 1:1-22, Job 2:1-13; 1 Kings 22:19-22; Luke 15:10; John 8:56; 1 Corinthians 4:9; 1 Peter 1:12; Hebrews 12:1; Revelation 6:10). But just as there is a "great fixed-chasm" between the subterranean paradise and the interim hell of "torments" which prevents any access from one place to the other (Luke 16:26), and just as there was little interest on the part of the departed believers in the just fate of those who rejected God in this life (Luke 16:25), so the lake of fire and final end of all those who arrogantly and deliberately chose to oppose our Lord will be of little moment to those of us who are enjoying the ineffable blessings of eternity in the presence of our dear Savior Jesus Christ. The quotation from Isaiah above and many other such in scripture put the lie to the evil heresy which proclaims oblivion for those who oppose God in this life and trample the precious sacrifice of Jesus Christ underfoot. The torment and cursing to which all who have no use for the Lord in this life will be subjected is very real, and it will be never ending (e.g., Matthew 8:12; Matthew 13:42; Matthew 13:49-50; Matthew 22:13; Matthew 24:51; Matthew 25:30; Matthew 25:41-46; Luke 13:28; Revelation 14:10-11; Revelation 21:7-8), consisting of four essential afflictions: 1) fire, 2) sulfur, 3) darkness, and 4) separation from God. The first two "active" forms of cursing are what is doubtless meant in the Isaiah passage above by "their worm" (quoted by our Lord at Mark 9:48). This is an extremely vivid image which evokes the consumption of the present body in the grave by worms,

teaching that, in contrast to the finite nature of the decomposition of the present body, the body with which the unrighteous dead will be resurrected will endure forever, but for cursing rather than for blessing. Literal fire and sulfur will form the environment in which unbelievers and fallen angels will pass eternity, the former producing tangible physical pain, the latter generating an unpleasantness affecting the senses of taste and smell. The result will be an agonizing state of suffering which the image of the undying worm brings graphically to mind, resulting in "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 8:12; Matthew 13:42; Matthew 13:50; Matthew 22:13; Matthew 24:51; Matthew 25:30; Luke 13:28). But there will also be passive suffering to experience in the lake of fire: darkness (Isaiah 8:22; Matthew 8:12; Matthew 22:13; Matthew 25:30), itself a cause of pain and discomfort (Revelation 16:10; cf. Exodus 10:21-23; Revelation 8:12), and a complete separation from the blessed and glorious Persons of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ whose presence defines what paradise truly is. It is more than fitting that those who rejected the light and loved the darkness in life (John 3:19-21; cf. John 1:3-9; 1 John 1:5-7) should dwell in darkness forever (cf. Luke 16:24; 2 Peter 2:17; Jude 1:13), and that those who rejected God and His mercy should spend eternity apart from Him. For those of us who have dedicated ourselves to being near to Him through Jesus Christ, this curse of being deprived of the Word, even more than the fire, the sulfur, and the darkness, is the most appalling thing to contemplate of all. And while their terrible fate rightly causes us to shudder, there are no grounds for sympathy for those who rejected the blood of Christ. They chose the lake of fire by rejecting the only One who could rescue them from it. As a result, by their own personal acts of free will unbelievers will be separated from God in eternity, the very God for whom they had absolutely no use in this life. Herein we find the essential significance of the etymology of the most common Hebrew word for hell, "Sheol". Derived from the root sha'al (שאל), whose essential meaning is "to ask", this word for "hell" indicates that unbelievers are getting exactly "what they asked for", namely, "freedom" from God, and would no doubt ask for it again and again in precisely the same negative way, even if they had a thousand life-times to reconsider.

F. The Last Judgment: Revelation 20:11-15

(11) And I saw a throne, a great white one, and Him who was sitting upon it (i.e., Jesus Christ). From His presence the earth and the heavens fled, and no place was found for them. (12) And I saw the dead, both the great and the insignificant, standing in front of the throne. And books were opened; and another book was opened which is the book of life. And the dead were judged on the basis of the things written in the books, according to what they had done. (13) For the sea gave up the dead which were in it, [that is] death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them, and each person was condemned according to what they had done. (14) And death and Hades (i.e., all unbelievers) were cast into the lake of fire. And this is the second death: the lake of fire. (15) And if anyone was not found written in the Book of Life, he was cast into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:11-15 The verses above take us rapidly through all that remains of eschatology up until eternity begins. That is to say, they conclude God's plan for human history, with the exception of His blessed creation of the glorious new heavens and new earth and the commencement of the eternal state (covered in Revelation 21:1-27, Revelation 22:1-21). The Great White Throne or "last judgment" described above is the final event before darkness, tears and sorrow fade into nothingness forevermore, washed away by the brilliant light of God in the everlasting Kingdom of the Father where we believers shall enjoy sweet fellowship with Him and our Lord Jesus Christ,

world without end. Following the melting away of the old heavens and earth (described in verse eleven), the last phase of the resurrection will take place wherein all millennial believers will be raised and rewarded with eternal life while all the unsaved dead will be raised for the judgment described above and the second death. Since the theme of the book of Revelation is one of our Lord's just judgment upon the forces of evil and His total victory over them, it should not be surprising that these latter events, related elsewhere in scripture (and discussed immediately below), give place here to the disposition of the unsaved in order to emphasize the last judgment itself. And there most certainly will be a last judgment of the unsaved dead as the passage above makes clear (along with many other scriptures, e.g., Matthew 7:21-23; Matthew 16:25-27; Mark 8:35-38; Luke 9:24-26; Acts 24:25, etc.).

Every human being who attains adulthood with normal mental capacity is accountable to God for their free will choices, both their sins and their decisions in regard to seeking out His mercy (or failing to do so). Therefore, just as all are aware of God's existence and character (even if they later deny it or harden their hearts against this universal truth; e.g., Romans 1:18-32), and as all are aware of their own mortality, so all are aware that successfully facing the scrutiny and judgment of a perfect God on one's own merits is an utterly impossible task. All unbelievers know that this last judgment is coming. The truly surprising thing to those of us who love Jesus Christ is the horrific folly of passively ignoring this problem or even actively rejecting God's grace when such things are true.

(1) The heavens recount the glory of God, and the firmament tells of the work of His hands. (2) One day after another pours forth [His] words, and one night after another declares [His] knowledge. (3) There is no tongue or culture that cannot understand their voice (i.e., of the heavens/firmament). (4) Their design has gone out into (i.e., "is visible throughout") the entire earth, and their words to the end of the world. He has set a tent for the sun within them (i.e., hidden it in the heavens'/firmament's night sky), (5) and from this it goes forth like a [resplendent] bridegroom from his [wedding] canopy. [The sun] exults to run its course like an athlete [does]. (6) Its starting line is at one end of the heavens, and its circuit [takes it] to the ends [of the sky]. And nothing is hidden from its view. Psalms 19:1-6

He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. Ecclesiastes 3:11 NIV

(18) God's wrath is about to be revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness – on men who suppress the truth [in their hearts about God] in their unrighteousness. (19) For that which can be known about God [from everyday experience] is obvious to them, because God has made it obvious. (20) His nature, though invisible, is nevertheless plainly apparent, and has been since His foundation of the world, for it may be clearly inferred from this creation of His – [this is true of] both His eternal power and His divinity – so that they are without any excuse: (21) they knew about God, but they neither honored Him as God nor thanked Him. Instead, they gave themselves over to [the] vanity [of this world] in their speculations, and their senseless hearts were filled with darkness. (22) Claiming to be wise, they became foolish, (23) for they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for images and likenesses of corruptible men, of birds and beasts and reptiles. (24) For this [very] reason, God abandoned them to corruption in the lusts of their own hearts, that they might mutually defile their bodies (i.e., the very thing they lusted to do). (25)

[And so] they exchanged the truth of God for the lie [of the devil], and worshiped and served the creature [Satan] in place of the Creator who is [worthy to be] blessed forever. Amen. (26) [Yes,] for this [very] reason God abandoned them to defiling passions. For their females exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones, (27) and likewise also the males abandoned natural relations with the female and burned with desire one for another, males for males, acting out their shamefulness in full, and in their own [flesh] fully receiving the reward due for their error. (28) And just as they did not see fit to keep God in their hearts, God abandoned them to their unfit minds, to do things which are not fitting, (29) filled up with every [sort of] unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, full of envy, murder, strife, guile, maliciousness, gossips, (30) slanderers, God-forsaken-[and]-forsaking, insolent, arrogant, boasters, devisers of evils, not concerned for their parents, (31) unthinking, unreconcilable, uncaring, unmerciful, (32) men who though they had full knowledge of God's righteous decree, namely, that those who do such things are worthy of death, not only did [such] things themselves, but even commended those who made it their practice [to do them]. Romans 1:18-32

(14) For whenever the gentiles who do not have the Law do by nature the things [written in] the Law, these who have no Law are a Law for themselves. (15) For they demonstrate that the essence of the Law has been written in their hearts when their conscience testifies against them, and their [mental] deliberations [based on conscience] alternatively either condemn them or acquit them. (16) [This examination of Romans 2:11-15 will take place] on the day when God will judge the secret things of men through Jesus Christ according to my gospel. Romans 2:14-16 It is appointed unto men to die once, and, after that, judgment is in store. Hebrews 9:27 1. The Destruction of the Universe and the Interlude of Final Judgment a. The Last Resurrection of the Saved and the Unsaved At the end of the thousand-year millennial reign of Jesus Christ, there will be a complete "cleansing of His threshing floor", the post-millennial complement to the Second Advent's "baptism of fire" (Mark 1:8; Matthew 3:10-12; Luke 3:9-17). At this time all stumbling blocks will be removed from the Messiah's kingdom and cast into eternal fire in preparation for the commencement of the eternal kingdom wherein there will be no evil or unbelief forevermore (a cleansing which requires a prior resurrection and judgment of the unsaved).

(12) His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will sweep clean His threshing floor, and will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Matthew 3:12 The wheat are believers; the chaff unbelievers. Bringing the one group into the barn and burning up the other requires the prior resurrection of both and their individual evaluation, an evaluation for reward in the case of believers, but one of judgment for unbelievers.

(47) "Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. (48) When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. (49) This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous (50) and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Matthew 13:47-50 NIV The "end of the age" is the end of human history, coterminous with the end of the Millennium. As in the case of John's analogy to the threshing floor, saving the good fish and throwing out the bad requires their prior resurrection (represented by the collecting of all who remain at the end of the age by the "net") and general evaluation (represented by the fishermen who examine the fish to determine their category, good or bad). This initial separation into two essential categories,

accomplished by angels in the passage above, is also represented in the sheep and goats judgment where the Lord will separate the two groups prior to their specific, individual judgment (Matthew 25:31-33). The parable of the net also places the disposition of the wicked last in the order of these final events (i.e., they are thrown into the fiery furnace, the lake of fire, only after the righteous have been collected). Thus in this passage we have the same sequence as implied by the sheep and goats judgment, John the baptist's description, and our context, Revelation 20:11-15 :

- 1) Resurrection of both groups (i.e., all as yet non-resurrected believers along with all the unsaved from the beginning of human history).
- 2) Separation by group (wheat from chaff, sheep from goats, good from bad fish).
- 3) Salvation and evaluation of the righteous.
- 4) Judgment and final disposition of the unrighteous (into the lake of fire).

Furthermore, we know from Revelation 20:11 b ("From His presence the earth and the heavens fled, and no place was found for them"), that before the last judgment the old heavens and old earth will be destroyed (2 Peter 3:5-13), revealing everything that transpired in all prior history (2 Peter 3:10), and that it is only after the completion of this entire process that the new heavens and new earth will be created and eternity will thus begin (cf. Revelation 21:1).

(24) Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. (25) But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. (26) When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. (27) "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' (28) " 'An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' (29) " 'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. (30) Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.' " (36) Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." (37) He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. (38) The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, (39) and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. (40) "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. (41) The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. (42) They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (43) Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear." Matthew 13:24-30, Matthew 13:36-43 NIV The parable of the wheat and the tares (weeds) above presents an identical sequence of events, only somewhat more detailed. The kingdom of heaven is the Messiah's millennial kingdom (cf. Matthew 13:47) wherein unbelievers (tares/weeds) grow up in close proximity to believers (wheat). The harvest is the resurrection (step one) wherein the weeds are separated from the wheat and are prepared for but not committed to the fire (step two). The righteous are gathered into the barn (step three), and the wicked are then cast into the lake of fire

following the last judgment (step four). Finally, this parable adds the additional detail of showing us the righteous after the conclusion of this entire four-step process, now enjoying life everlasting in the eternal state in "the kingdom of their Father" (i.e., the New Heavens and New Earth as opposed to "the kingdom of heaven", the prior millennial kingdom). For, given that we know from our context in Revelation chapters twenty-one and twenty-two that the Father will only be present on earth after human history has concluded, "the kingdom of their Father" mentioned here as the place where the righteous will "shine like the sun" must certainly be the eternal kingdom of New Jerusalem.

(31) "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. (32) All the nations will be gathered before him (i.e., after that millennial reign), and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. (33) He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. (34) "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. (35) For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, (36) I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' (37) "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? (38) When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? (39) When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' (40) "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' (41) "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (42) For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, (43) I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' (44) "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' (45) "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' (46) "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." Matthew 25:31-46 NIV The sheep and goats judgment agrees with this sequence entirely. Matthew 25:31 encompasses the final events of human history from the second advent ("When the Son of Man comes in his glory") to the last judgment ("he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory"), with the throne referring to the throne of judgment whereon our Lord Jesus will render a final evaluation of reward for all remaining believers (the sheep) and of judgment for all unbelievers (the goats). The phrase "and [when] all the angels [are] with him" is an additional indication that the judgment upon which this description focuses is post-millennial, as there are no indications from elsewhere in scripture that the angels will play a visible role in Christ's millennial kingdom. Further, the fact that "all" the angels are present implies that the fallen angels have now been removed from the scene (an event which takes place at the Millennium's close). In this description too there is a separation of the righteous and the wicked, with the righteous receiving their evaluation first, and the wicked last (which evaluation is followed by their sequestration into the lake of fire). Finally, here too we see believers enjoying eternity at the end of the process in contrast to the prior damnation experienced by unbelievers ("Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life"). As suggested under step one above, this process of rewarding the millennial believers and judging all unbelievers requires the prior resurrection of all

remaining non-resurrected human beings (i.e., the final phase of the resurrection unto life on the one hand, and the joint resurrection of all the unsaved dead on the other). This resurrection is in fact the very last earthly event of human history and a point equally important to emphasize since it underlines the reality of the eternal consequences of our choices in this life and the eternal divergence between the two essential elements of the human race based upon these choices, namely, eternal life for all who respond to Jesus Christ, and the second death for all who refuse the grace of God (cf. Matthew 10:34).

(2) For many who sleep in the dust will awake, some to eternal life, but the others to shame and eternal separation [from God]. (3) Then those who have insight will shine like the shining forth of the dawn, even those who led the many to righteousness, like stars forever and ever. Daniel 12:2-3

(21) Just as the Father raises the dead and brings them to life, so the Son brings to life whomever He wishes. (22) And neither does the Father judge anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, (23) in order that all may honor the Son as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. (24) Truly, truly I say to you, that the one who hears My Word and believes in the One who sent Me has eternal life and does not enter into judgment but has passed from death into life. (25) Truly, truly I say to you that an hour is coming when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear it will come to life. (26) For just as the Father has life in Himself, so He has given to the Son to have life in Himself. (27) And He has given authority to Him to render judgment, because He is the Son of Man. (28) Do not be amazed at this [statement], that an hour will come in which all those in their tombs will hear His voice. (29) For they shall come forth – those who have done what is good to a resurrection of life (i.e., those who have faithfully followed Jesus Christ), but those who have done what is worthless to a resurrection of judgment. John 5:21-29 And I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. Acts 24:15 NIV b. The Destruction of the Present Heavens and Earth

(25) Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. (26) They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed. Psalms 102:25-26 KJV (cf. Hebrews 1:11-12)

Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will quake from its place, on account of the anger of the Lord and on the day of His fierce wrath. Isaiah 13:13 (cf. Haggai 2:6; Haggai 2:21)

All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree. Isaiah 34:4 NIV (cf. Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:24-25)

Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies. But my salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail. Isaiah 51:6 NIV

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. Matthew 24:35 NIV (cf. Matthew 5:18; Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33)

(25) See to it that you do not ignore the One who is speaking [to you]. For if those [of the Exodus generation] did not escape when they ignored the one who was giving them warning from the earth (i.e., Moses), how much more shall we [not escape, if we] turn away from the One [giving us warning] from heaven? (26) His voice shook the earth at that time [at Mount Sinai], but now He has made [us] this promise, saying, "Yet once more shall I shake not only the earth, but also heaven" (Haggai 2:6; cf. Haggai 2:21). (27) And this "once more" clearly indicates the [coming] transformation of things which may be shaken as things which have been made [by Him], so that the [coming] things which cannot be shaken may abide forever. (28) Since, therefore, we have received a Kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude so that through it we may serve God in a pleasing way with reverence and fear. (29) For our God is a consuming fire. Hebrews 12:25-29

(14) And the heaven retreated like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and hill was moved from its place. Revelation 6:14 And I saw a throne, a great white one, and Him who was sitting upon it (i.e., Jesus Christ). From His presence the earth and the heavens fled, and no place was found for them. Revelation 20:11 As the above passages show, the removal of the present cosmos is an essential prerequisite for the commencement of eternity, and precedes the creation of the "new heavens and new earth" which will be the home of all believers and elect angels forevermore. The reason for their removal is the necessity to remove every taint of sin and unrighteousness, and, as befits such a judgment, the precise manner of their removal will be a fiery destruction (cf. Hebrews 12:29):

(7) And the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire by that same Word (of God), preserved for the day of judgment and the destruction of godless men. (8) Let not this one fact escape your attention then, beloved, namely that one day is like a thousand years in the Lord's eyes, and a thousand years like one day (i.e., that "day" will span a millennium). (9) The Lord is not delaying in the fulfillment of His promise (as some think); rather He is exercising patience for your sake, being unwilling for anyone to perish, but desiring all instead to come to repentance. (10) For the Day of the Lord will come like a thief, a day in (i.e., over the course of) which the heavens will depart with a roar, the very elements will ignite and dissolve, and the earth and everything which has been done upon it will be laid bare [for the Lord's inspection]. (11) Since all these things are destined to disintegrate in this way, [consider] what sort of [Christians] we ought to be, [devoted to] holy and godly conduct, (12) as we wait with eager expectation and apprehension the advent of the Day of God. For on that day the heavens will burst into flame and dissolve, and the elements will catch fire and melt. (13) But we are awaiting new heavens and a new earth just as He promised – [a world] where righteousness dwells. 2 Peter 3:7-13 The fact that the present heavens and earth have been "preserved for the day of judgment and the destruction of godless men" (2 Peter 3:7; cf. Matthew 24:35-36; Mark 13:31-32; 1 Peter 4:5-6), indicates the same sequence of events: the destruction of the universe will precede the last judgment, which judgment will in turn precede the creation of the new heavens and new earth. Therefore the last judgment must take place in a sort of brief interim between time and eternity, occurring after the final resurrection of the living and the dead and the annihilation of the present cosmos, but before the creation of the new heavens and new earth and the commencement of eternity. c. The Judgment of the Sheep

Since the last judgment of Revelation chapter twenty occurs in an interval or interim period between the end of time (i.e., following the resurrection and the destruction of the old heavens and earth described at Revelation 20:11 b) but before the beginning of eternity (i.e., prior to the creation of the new heavens and new earth described at Revelation 21:1), and since the sheep and goats are judged sequentially and in the same venue in Matthew chapter twenty-five, we conclude that the final evaluation of the "friends of the Bride", that is, all who are saved from the point of Christ's return until the end of human history, also takes place during this interlude. This is the final phase of the resurrection of the living prophesied by the apostle Paul:

(23) But each [will be resurrected] in his own echelon. Christ [is the] first-fruits (i.e., the initial person and echelon of resurrection). Next [will be] those belonging to Christ at His coming, [all believers at the 2nd Advent]. (24) Then the end [of human history, the resurrection of millennial believers], when He will hand the Kingdom over to the Father, after He has brought an end to all rule, all power, and all authority (i.e., hostile human and angelic control). (25) For He must rule until He has placed all His enemies under His feet. 1 Corinthians 15:23-25 That the sheep are evaluated first (as we have seen above; see also 1 Peter 4:17 where judgment is said to "begin" with the "household of faith", and only afterwards descend upon "those who do not obey the gospel") is also established plainly enough by Matthew 25:31-46; for the sheep on His right hand are commended first (Matthew 25:34-40), and only after their evaluation are the goats judged (Matthew 24:41-45). Moreover, the evaluation of the sheep for reward is completed before the goats are judged (explaining the absence of believers at the Great White Throne; see below). This evaluation will be precisely along the lines of the evaluation of the Church at Christ's 2nd Advent return; it is only the timing which will be different.

Before moving on to the last judgment of all unbelievers, two common misunderstandings about this final evaluation of resurrected believers must be addressed. First, Matthew 25:46 does not in any way conflict with the fact that only unbelievers are seen before the Great White Throne in Revelation 20:11-15. The righteous have already been evaluated, and so of course "go off into eternal life". Nothing in Matthew 25:46 necessitates either that the sheep should have to "wait" until the goats are condemned to experience eternal life, or far less that they must thus be included in the judgment described at Revelation 20:11-15. The sheep have already received their rewards before the judgment of the goats (i.e., the Great White Throne) even begins, as is abundantly clear from the entire prior description in Matthew 25:1-46. Matthew 25:46 merely summarizes the contrasting destinies of the two groups (rather than re-writing the chronological sequence).

Secondly, attempts to equate the sheep and goats judgment with Christ's 2nd Advent (rather than seeing it for what it truly is, the final evaluation of the last echelon of resurrected believers and the last judgment of all unbelievers) are misguided for several reasons:

1) The phrases "blessed of the Father" and "the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world" in Matthew 25:34 are clear references to the Eternal State rather than the millennial kingdom of Christ. For the Father will not make His abode with us on earth until the end of human history (Revelation 21:3; Revelation 21:22). Therefore, rather than the thousand year "kingdom of heaven" in time (i.e., Christ's millennial kingdom; contrast in Matthew 13:24 and Matthew 13:43 respectively), it is the Father's permanent kingdom in eternity which these phrases clearly have in

mind (1 Corinthians 15:25-28; Hebrews 12:28; cf. Hebrews 8:2).

2) The sheep and goats are judged at the same venue and sequentially, and the unbelievers are thrown into the lake of fire immediately at the conclusion of the process of judgment. This only happens following the conclusion of human history (Revelation 20:14-15).

3) The righteous go off "into eternal life" at the conclusion of their judgment, a condition which (while we believers do possess it positionally now, and will have it experientially from the point of our departure to be in the Lord's presence, and bountifully from the time of our resurrection) is only truly descriptive of our ultimate status once eternity begins (i.e., not from the commencement of the Millennium but from the beginning of eternity proper).

4) The separation of a single mixed group into two entirely discrete groups (of believers and unbelievers) is only paralleled in descriptions of the end of history (e.g., the wheat and the tares of Matthew 13:24-30, and the good and the bad fish of Matthew 13:47-50).

It is no doubt because of the overall theme of the book of Revelation, that is, its focusing on God's judgment upon evil and His defeat of the devil, his minion antichrist, and the wicked in general, that we do not find our context providing all of the other details about this final evaluation of the millennial believers (details which, in any case, are available to us from elsewhere in scripture, as we have just observed).

2. The Great White Throne of Jesus Christ: The Last Judgment of the Unbelieving Dead When this life is over, everyone is judged "according to their works" (John 5:29; 2 Corinthians 5:10). For believers this judgment is one of determining rewards (Matthew 16:27; Matthew 19:28; Luke 14:14; Revelation 11:18; cf. Romans 14:10; 1 Corinthians 3:10-17; 2 Corinthians 5:10), since our eternal life is based upon having God's righteousness through faith in Christ rather than upon anything we have "done" (Romans 3:21-22; Romans 4:5; Romans 4:13; Romans 3:28; Romans 5:1; Romans 6:7; Romans 8:1; Romans 9:30-31; Romans 10:6; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8-9; Php 3:9; Hebrews 11:7). By the time we have arrived here, Revelation 20:11-15, all believers have already been evaluated and rewarded. The Great White Throne, the final or "last" judgment in human history, concerns unbelievers only, and is synonymous with the "goats" portion of the "sheep and goats" judgment of Matthew 25:1-46. First and foremost it should be observed that although they have now been resurrected, these individuals are nevertheless described as "the dead" in verse twelve, an appellation appropriate only for unbelievers (as our Lord Himself makes clear: "He is the God not of the dead but of the living", Matthew 22:32; cf. Mark 12:27; Luke 20:38). Secondly, in contrast to believers who "do not come into [this sort of] judgment" since we have "passed out of death into life" (John 5:24) and are thus evaluated for our service in life for the purpose of reward, all unbelievers from the beginning of time are indeed judged here at the Great White Throne according to their works, specifically, "judged on the basis of the things written in the books, according to what they had done" (Revelation 20:12 b). This focus on judgment with a view toward condemnation, the absence of any suggestion of reward in this passage, the context of awe and foreboding (compare Hebrews 12:18-24), the opening of the books, especially the book of life (on which see below), and, perhaps most significantly, the fact that all those judged arise from places associated with unbelievers only (the sea, death and Hades), make it crystal clear that this passage applies to unbelievers only. The Great White Throne is thus without question the last and the final judgment of "the dead", that is, the venue

where all the unbelievers from throughout human history will be judged by Jesus Christ.

[Timothy], I [give] you [this] charge before God and Christ Jesus, the One who is about to judge the living and the dead . . . 2 Timothy 4:1 a

Now the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire by that same Word (of God), preserved for the day of judgment and the destruction of godless men. 2 Peter 3:7 (cf. 1 Peter 4:5-6) As 2 Timothy 4:1, the first passage quoted above, indicates (and as scripture frequently confirms: John 5:22; John 5:27; Acts 10:42; Acts 17:31; Romans 2:16; Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:8; James 5:9; 1 Peter 4:5; Revelation 2:5-6; Revelation 3:1-3; Revelation 3:19-20), as the One into whose hands all judgment has been given as a result of His victory on the cross, the Person sitting on the Great White Throne is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ. He it is who will render final judgment upon the lost, that is, all who refused in life to value and accept for eternal life His precious sacrifice on their behalf. When the Son of Man has come in His glory and all the angels with Him, then (i.e., at the last judgment) He will take His seat on His glorious throne. Matthew 25:31

Then Jesus came over and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me." Matthew 28:18

(22) For neither does the Father judge anyone, but he has given all judgment to the Son, (23) in order that all may honor the Son as they honor the Father. John 5:22-23 a (cf. John 5:27) And He commanded us to proclaim to the people and to bear witness that this [Jesus] is the One appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead. Acts 10:42

"For [God] has appointed a Day (i.e., the final Day of human history culminating in the Last Judgment) in which He is going to judge the world by [the standard] of righteousness through a Man whom He has ordained for this [very purpose], having supplied [us] with the proof [of His identity] by raising Him from the dead." Acts 17:31

[The examination of Romans 2:11-15 will take place] on the day when God will judge the secret things of men through Jesus Christ according to my gospel. Romans 2:16 In Revelation 20:12, John is given to see "the dead, both the great and the insignificant, standing in front of the throne". This multitude constitutes the entire number of unbelievers from Cain to those who persist in unbelief at history's end following the conclusion of the Gog-Magog rebellion. All are seen to be "standing" in front of throne (i.e., recognizable as human beings, having been resurrected). But unlike in the case of believers where there are two phases of the resurrection unto life, one at Christ's return (the Church) and one at the end of the Millennium (the Friends of the Bride), those who have rejected Jesus, whether actively or passively, face a single resurrection – unto judgment.

(28) Do not be amazed at this [statement], that an hour will come in which all those in their tombs will hear His voice. (29) For they shall come forth – those who have done what is good to a resurrection of life (i.e., those who have faithfully followed Jesus Christ), but those who have done what is worthless to a resurrection of judgment. John 5:28-29

(2) For many who sleep in the dust will awake, some to eternal life, but the others to shame and eternal separation [from God]. Daniel 12:2 It is appointed unto men to die once, and, after that,

judgment is in store. Hebrews 9:27

Thus this immense assemblage of unbelievers – the vast majority of human beings coming from every race and nation, time and place – must all be judged by our Lord. Having rejected Him or refused to accept Him during their lifetimes, they will now stand before Jesus Christ the King and render an account, not for reward (as was the case of the two-phased resurrection unto life), but in order to demonstrate their inadequacy for eternal life and their refusal to take advantage of God's great grace and mercy while they lived. John's comment about these unbelievers being distinguishable as to the status they possessed in life (i.e., with the words "the great and the insignificant" he gives us the two extremes) shows the value of human achievement apart from God: it will be less than worthless on the day of judgment. The fact that even unbelievers in condemnation will still be recognizable for who they were and what they did in life (cf. Isaiah 14:9-12; Ezekiel 32:30-32), while no consolation to them since all will share equally in the lake of fire, is surely a solace to us who will all have an equal and eternal share in Jesus Christ: we will continue to be "who we are" forever, only with all sin, pain and trouble far removed, and every deed which distinguished us in the service of our Master living on with us for all eternity. And books were opened; and another book was opened which is the book of life. And the dead were judged on the basis of the things written in the books, according to what they had done. Revelation 20:12 b The "books" mentioned twice here are distinguished by John from the "book of life", and importantly so. As we have seen in our prior treatments of the Book of Life in this series, all human beings have their names recorded in the record of life as part of their birthright as human beings. This is made clear, for example, by Psalms 69:28 where our Lord is asked to blot the godless out of the book, since, being "godless", they never would have had their names recorded in the Book of Life in the first place unless everyone was placed in it originally. Moreover, it is entirely just for God to include everyone in the book initially, because Jesus Christ died for all. God desires everyone to be saved (Ezekiel 18:23; Matthew 18:14; John 12:47; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; 2 Peter 3:9), and has made provision for the same by sacrificing His one and only beloved Son for us, judging all sin in Him on the cross. But while this incomparable offer of eternal life at no cost is available to every human being, the number of those who have embraced God's mercy in this life is infinitesimally small. When a person actively and consciously rejects Jesus Christ in this life, or alternatively resists divine truth persistently until the end of life, that person's name is "blotted out" of the book. The Book of Life thus has at least two important functions: 1) it acts as a safeguard to ensure that no one is condemned who did not deserve condemnation (for only those who are not found in this book will be cast into the lake of fire: Revelation 20:15); 2) it acts as a witness to the inimitable mercy, love and grace of God (for it is only by a person's own actions or refusal to act that their name is erased from the book – that is, through his or her own free will). Only by way of willfully despising the blood of Christ, His death for our sins, will anyone find themselves standing before our Lord's Great White Throne. The one who believes in Him is not being judged, but the one who does not believe has already been judged on the grounds that he has not put his faith in the Name (i.e., the Person) of God's only Son. John 3:18 The "other books" mentioned in Revelation 20:12 contain the life-record of every human being, preserving their every thought, word and deed. They represent a comprehensive "history", but perfectly recorded and divinely interpreted. For God knows not only the facts of everything our mind conceives, our mouth utters, and our hands undertake – He also knows the motivations behind all that we do, and those motivations will be revealed very clearly and painfully on this day of

judgment. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil. Ecclesiastes 12:14 NIV This [examination will take place] on the day when God will judge the secret things of men through Jesus Christ according to my gospel. Romans 2:16

Therefore, do not make judgments before the time, until the Lord shall come, who will illuminate the hidden things of darkness, and reveal the intents of every heart. 1 Corinthians 4:5 a

God the Father is of course under no obligation to have His Son our Lord conduct this final judgment of those who dismissed Him and His sacrifice in life. These unbelievers have already forfeited any chance of eternal life by rejecting the one and only way to avoid death: salvation through Jesus Christ. Thus even though it results in condemnation, the Great White Throne is a gracious act. No unbeliever will go to perdition without the reasons for their damnation, general and particular, being made abundantly clear. As to the judgment itself, Revelation 20:12 states that all unbelievers will be "judged on the basis of the things written in the books", and Revelation 20:13 affirms that they were "condemned according to what they had done". These two statements demonstrate respectively that in each and every case a thorough evaluation of the person's entire life will prove that:

1) Whatever they may have done, "good", bad or indifferent, unbelievers have no claim on eternal life apart from God's work in Jesus Christ (whose sacrifice they have rejected). Nothing they have "done" in their own power could ever be acceptable "coin" to God (Romans 8:8; Hebrews 11:6).

(7) Surely, no one can redeem a man [from God's hand], no one can pay a ransom to God for him. (8) For the redemption price of a life is too precious for Him to relent forever, (9) that one should live on forever, and not see corruption. Psalms 49:7-9

(26) What point is there for a man to come to possess the entire world, if he should then come to lose his life? Or what can a man pay to regain his life? (27) For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay every man in his own coin. Matthew 16:26-27

2) The expunging of unbelievers from the Book of Life is therefore entirely just; although they knew the truth, yet they did not give God His proper due by receiving His Son, condemned in their place and ours, but chose instead to face judgment before Jesus Christ rather than submit to Him in faith.

(18) [In contrast to the righteousness of God which is being revealed through faith (vv.16-17)], God's wrath is being revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness – on men who suppress the truth in their unrighteousness. (19) For that which can be known about God [from everyday experience] is obvious to them, because God has made it obvious. (20) His nature, though invisible, is nevertheless plainly apparent, and has been since His foundation of the world, for it may be clearly inferred from this creation of His – [this is true of] both his eternal power and his divinity – so that they are without any excuse: (21) they knew about God, but they neither honored Him as God nor thanked Him. Instead, they gave themselves over to [the] vanity [of this world] in their speculations, and their senseless hearts were filled with darkness. (22) Claiming to be wise, they became foolish, (23) for they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for images and likenesses of corruptible men, of birds and beasts and reptiles. (24) For this [very] reason, God abandoned them to corruption in the lusts of their own hearts, that they might

mutually defile their bodies (i.e., the very thing they lusted to do). (25) [And so] they exchanged the truth of God for the lie [of the devil], and worshiped and served the creature [Satan] in place of the Creator who is [worthy to be] blessed forever. Amen. (26) [Yes,] for this [very] reason God abandoned them to defiling passions. For their females exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones, (27) and likewise also the males abandoned natural relations with the female and burned with desire one for another, males for males, acting out their shamefulness in full, and in their own [flesh] fully receiving the reward due for their error. (28) And just as they did not see fit to keep God in their hearts, God abandoned them to their unfit minds, to do things which are not fitting, (29) filled up with every [sort of] unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, full of envy, murder, strife, guile, maliciousness, gossips, (30) slanderers, God-forsaken [and] forsaking, insolent, arrogant, boasters, devisers of evils, not concerned for their parents, (31) unthinking, unreconcilable, uncaring, unmerciful, (32) men who though they had full knowledge of God's righteous decree, namely, that those who do such things are worthy of death, not only did [such] things themselves, but even commended those who made it their practice [to do them]. Romans 1:18-32

"Judged on the basis of the things written in the books": As explained above, these "other books" contain the complete history of every human being's life, including every thought, word and deed along with the true motives behind them. What the books do not contain, what they could never contain in the case of any unbeliever, no matter how noble or self-sacrificing, is any trace of evidence for any action or actions worthy of eternal life. That is true for two reasons. First and foremost, no volume of positive deeds could ever suffice to wipe out sin, any sin, no matter how insignificant. Since there is no possible way for us to gain deliverance from the lake of fire on our own, we human beings have thus been placed in an impossible situation at birth – or we would have been, absent the great mercy of God and the great love of Jesus Christ in giving Himself over to death to pay the penalty for all sins in our place. No form of "substitute payment" exists for this inestimable sacrifice (Psalms 49:7-9; Matthew 16:26-27; Mark 8:36-38; Luke 9:25-26), and none will be accepted before the Great White Throne. Having refused to accept God's solution to the problem of sin, by definition unbelievers have chosen to stand on their own works instead. Here is no solid ground to stand at all, only unstable sand destined to lead to a catastrophic collapse.

(24) Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: (25) And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. (26) And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: (27) And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. Matthew 7:24-27 KJV

(16) For God loved the world so much that He gave [up] His one and only Son, [with the purpose] that everyone who believes in Him should not be lost [forever], but have eternal life [instead]. (17) For God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him. (18) The one who believes in Him is not being judged, but the one who does not believe has already been judged on the grounds that he has not put his faith in the Name (i.e., the Person) of God's one and only Son. (19) And this is the [basis for] judgment: the Light (i.e., Jesus Christ) has come into the world, yet men loved the darkness more than the Light because

their deeds were evil. (20) For everyone who commits detestable practices hates the Light and does not come to the Light, lest his deeds be exposed [for what they really are]. (21) But everyone who acts in accordance with the truth comes to the Light so that it becomes obvious that his deeds have been done in God (i.e., in accordance with God's will). John 3:16-21

(1) Therefore you are without any excuse, my friend, everyone of you who judges. For when you judge someone else, you condemn yourself. For you who render judgment are [in fact] making a practice of doing the very same things. (2) [Yes, you condemn yourself], for we know that God's judgment is [rendered] in [all] truth against those who practice things of this sort. (3) And do you [actually] imagine, my friend, you who judge those who make a practice of such things which you also do, that you will escape the judgment of God? (4) Or do you esteem as being of little account this truly valuable tolerance He [is exercising towards you] in [all] forbearance and patience? [If you do, it is] because you fail to realize that it is this very tolerance of God that is leading you to (i.e., giving you the opportunity for) repentance. (5) But in accordance with your hardened and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath and revelation of God's righteous judgment (i.e., the Great White Throne). (6) [God], who will give to each person according to his works, (7) to those who by persevering in the good course are seeking glory, honor and immortality, [He will give] eternal life, (8) but to those who out of selfish motivation are disobedient to the truth (i.e., reject Christ) while obedient to injustice, [there will be nothing but] wrath and anger. Romans 2:1-8

Secondly, even if the blasphemous notion that good works or "charity" ought to weigh in the balance at the last judgment were to be considered (blasphemous, because it necessarily equates what we do with what Christ did), even in such an impossible case, these works would still not suffice, no matter how extensive, because they are necessarily tainted, since they have been done entirely apart from God who alone is good, and therefore cannot in fact be "good" in God's righteous estimate at all (Romans 4:2; cf. Deuteronomy 9:5-6; Isaiah 59:4-8).

(1) For if Abraham really was considered righteous (i.e., in the eyes of men) as a result of the works [he did], then he does have something to boast about – but not in front of God! (3) What does the scripture actually say? [It actually says that] "Abraham believed in God, and [so his faith] was attributed to him for righteousness." Romans 4:2-3

(8) For you have been saved by [God's] grace through faith [in Christ]; and this did not come from you – it is God's gift. (9) Nor did it come from what you have done, lest anyone should boast. (10) For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for [the purpose of accomplishing] good works, which [very works] God has prepared ahead of time for us, that we might walk in them (i.e., live our Christian lives in the accomplishment of them). Ephesians 2:8-10

[God] who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not through our works, but through His own [sovereign] choice [of us] and [His] grace [towards us], [that grace] which was given to us in Christ Jesus in eternity past. 2 Timothy 1:9

(3) For we were also once mindless, disobedient, wandering [pointlessly] astray, enslaved to all sorts of lusts and pleasures, living our lives in wickedness and envy, loathsome and hating each other. (4) But [in spite of our prior sinfulness], when the goodness and benevolence of God our Savior appeared [in the flesh], (5) not on account of [any] works which we had done in [so-called]

righteousness did He save us, but through the washing [away of our sins which leads to our] rebirth and [to our] new beginning from the Holy Spirit (6) whom He poured out upon us bountifully through Jesus Christ our Savior, (7) so that [now] having been justified [in this way] by His grace, we might become heirs in regard to the eternal life for which we hope. Titus 3:3-7

True "good" can only be accomplished by the power of God, and, conversely, anything not done in the power of God cannot be truly "good".

Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:3 NASB For what the flesh lusts for is contrary to the Spirit's will, and the Spirit is opposed to what the flesh lusts for. Since these are diametrically opposed to each other in this way, what you are doing is not what you yourself choose. Galatians 5:17 This impossible situation of being sinful with absolutely no way of redeeming oneself is in fact a great blessing in that it removes the possibility of anyone assuming (in an objective assessment) that there is any way to approach God without Jesus Christ. That is true even for those who attempt to use the only godly standard of works, namely, the Law, for such purposes – and if it is true of works done according to the God-given Law, how much more is it not true for works done according to some arbitrary human standard?

(19) We know that however many things the Law says it says to those under [the authority of] the Law, [and it does so] in order that every mouth may be shut and that the entire world may be [revealed] as guilty in God's eyes. (20) Therefore no flesh shall be considered righteous before Him through the works of the Law, for it is through the Law that we come to acknowledge [our] sin. Romans 3:19-20

(22) But scripture has locked everything up under [the power of] sin, so that the promise which is fulfilled through faith in Christ might be given to those who believe. (23) Before faith arrived, we were being guarded under the Law[s protection], shut in [in anticipation of] our faith which was destined to be revealed. (24) So the Law acts as a guardian to us [who leads us] to Christ so that we might be justified by faith. Galatians 3:22-24 The above realization of guilt capable of leading to genuine faith in Christ is of course only true for those who have not yet corrupted their thinking so as to imagine that their sins are "not that bad" (erroneously assuming that God uses a relative standard of condemnation: i.e., they don't need God), or that what they have done in life "ought to count for something" (erroneously assuming that anything but the blood of Christ could propitiate God's perfect character where sin is concerned: i.e., God needs their help), or that this last judgment will "never happen" (erroneously assuming that God has no right to judge them: i.e., God should worship them). These are blasphemous notions which turn God's true righteousness on its head, ignoring His mercy in Jesus Christ and imagining that His love will overlook His justice in their case in spite of their rejection of His sacrifice of His one and only beloved Son. Such thinking reflects the satanic world view, and only takes hold once our common human appreciation of the true objective reality of life (brought about by natural revelation) has been supplanted by hardness of heart. Since the recognition of the insufficiency of human deeds to effect salvation is universal (until this naturally revealed truth is rejected and the devil's lies accepted in its place), individual judgment will no doubt focus upon the motives behind all such purportedly "good" works wherein the unbeliever placed earthly confidence. The result of divine inspection of these will be to demonstrate without a doubt that even here the deficiency is complete. And that is easy enough to

see, for if they have rejected God and His solution in Jesus Christ (as they patently have), how could the blasphemous offering up of a substitute for Christ's work ever be separated from the rebellious motives of heart that steadfastly refused to accept Him in the first place? Therefore the unbelievers' true motivations, more often than not invisible to us here on earth, are quite different than presently may be assumed (especially in those cases where the charitable actions themselves appear beyond reproach). At the Great White Throne, all of these secrets will be completely exposed, for the Lord knows all the true details (Job 34:21; Psalms 90:8; Psalms 139:1-18; Jeremiah 6:17; Jeremiah 23:24; Hebrews 4:13), and these will all be brought perspicuously to light at the last judgment (cf. Job 19:29; Ecclesiastes 3:17; Ecclesiastes 11:9; Isaiah 26:21; Matthew 10:26-27; Matthew 12:36; Luke 2:34-35). For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil. Ecclesiastes 12:14 NIV

(2) There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.
(3) What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs. Luke 12:2-3 NIV (cf. Mark 4:22; Luke 8:17)

[This examination of Romans 2:11-15 will take place] on the day when God will judge the secret things of men through Jesus Christ according to my gospel. Romans 2:16 So then each of us will give an account to God concerning himself. Romans 14:12 The Lord is the One who judges me. Therefore, do not make judgments before the time, until the Lord shall come, who will illuminate the hidden things of darkness, and reveal the intents of every heart, and then the praise of each shall come to him from God. 1 Corinthians 4:4-5 For the Day of the Lord will come like a thief, a day in which (i.e., over the course of which) the heavens will depart with a roar, the very elements will ignite and dissolve, and the earth and everything which has been done upon it will be laid bare [for the Lord's inspection]. 2 Peter 3:10

It should be emphasized here that whatever use is made at this judgment in the analysis of a particular individual's life of the sins he or she has committed, while these are most definitely a part of the record and will no doubt be introduced to demonstrate patterns of behavior, they are not the basis for condemnation. Jesus Christ died for the sins of all mankind, and in doing so atoned for all sins. However, for the forgiveness God provided as a result of that cleansing, His gracious offer of eternal life by grace through faith in Jesus Christ had to have been accepted in life (Matthew 12:32; cf. John 8:24). After death in torments, and even more especially here at the last judgment, there will no longer be any gap between perception and reality; therefore there will no longer be any possibility of exercising faith or free will. In life, while it is true that the consequences for spurning God's grace are unimaginable, it is entirely possible for a person to shut out that truth. It is in large measure this very deniability of the divine, this ability to reject the truth, that serves as the test of each person's heart. Thus this judgment is not at all about sin; it is instead all about demonstrating definitively how and where and when and why every unbeliever repeatedly rejected the grace of God and His truth. It is all about how everyone condemned chose hell instead of God at every earthly opportunity. For [God] has appointed a Day (i.e., the final Day of human history culminating in the Last Judgment) in which He is going to judge the world by [the standard] of righteousness through a Man whom He has ordained for this [very purpose], having supplied [us] with the proof [of His identity] by raising Him from the dead." Acts 17:31 "When I choose the appointed time, I will judge righteously." Psalms 75:2 As these verses demonstrate, the standard

of judgment at the Great White Throne will be divine righteousness, not human righteousness. It matters not a whit if a person imagines that what they are doing or have done in this life is "right" or "righteous" or "good", not even if most other human beings should happen to agree with him or her, for it is God's perfect standard that counts.

There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. Proverbs 14:12 NASB (cf. Proverbs 16:25)

Righteousness, true divine righteousness and the unbeliever's lack thereof, will be the touchstone that invalidates all of the unbelievers' so-called "good works". God's character in perfect righteousness demanded a truly perfect and righteous substitute to propitiate sin, and Jesus Christ provided that perfect sacrifice which did indeed satisfy the righteous character of God. But those who reject the gift of Jesus Christ have rejected God's righteousness, choosing to stand judgment on their own self-righteousness instead. We believers have substituted God's righteousness for our own (Romans 1:17; Romans 3:22-26; Romans 4:5-22; Romans 5:18; Romans 6:16; Romans 8:10; Romans 9:31; Romans 10:4-10; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:6; Galatians 5:5; Ephesians 4:24; Php 3:9), and for that reason are considered righteous by God in spite of our own many failings and imperfections. But unbelievers have rejected God's righteousness in the blasphemous assumption that God will somehow accept their "works" in place of the work of Jesus Christ (cf. Isaiah 64:6; Ezekiel 33:13; John 16:8-10; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 11:7; James 2:23; 2 Peter 1:1). In truth, not only could no amount of charity ever suffice to wash away the most insignificant sin, but nothing done outside the power of God has the remotest chance of being truly "good". For everything that is produced by sinful man is tainted and unacceptable to the perfect character of God. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. Revelation 19:8 KJV The pristine integrity of God's righteousness and the perfect standard it embodies is seen perspicuously in the appearance of the Great White Throne, with that color indicating that no pollution from sin, no matter how small, can be allowed in the new heavens and earth which are about to be created, a place "where righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13). All sinful human beings must first have been completely cleansed of all of their sins through faith in Jesus Christ to be allowed to enter the eternal state, the ultimate paradise (cf. Isaiah 1:18). That is why we shall wear white in eternity as the above passage indicates, namely, as sign of the perfect righteousness we now possess through faith in Jesus Christ, the One who washed away our sins with His blood, His spiritual death on the cross (Revelation 3:4-5; Revelation 3:18; Revelation 6:11; Revelation 7:9; Revelation 19:14).

(13) And one of the elders who was speaking with me replied, "These people dressed in white robes – who are they and where have they come from?" (14) And I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who are about to come forth from the Great Tribulation. And they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Revelation 7:13-14 But while believers are known by their white attire devoid of any stain or mark, representing the righteousness of God which we possess through faith in Jesus Christ, unbelievers by way of contrast are perspicuous in God's presence in their lack of suitable attire, representing the absence of God's righteousness (and the consequent impossibility of dwelling in His presence). The parable of the wedding banquet illustrates the latter very clearly:

(8) "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. (9) Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' (10) So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. (11) "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. (12) 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. (13") Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (14) "For many are invited, but few are chosen." Matthew 22:8-14 NIV The banquet is the Millennium, and the "good and bad" represent the entrance into the thousand year kingdom of unbelievers as well as believers, everyone who survives the Tribulation (with the exception of those who take the mark of the beast). While those without God's righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ will enjoy the bountiful blessings of the millennial kingdom along with believers, when they come up for inspection at the last judgment (as in the case of the individual in the parable above), they will be condemned – not for any particular offense, but for lack of the righteousness which comes by faith alone. For this reason, blessing attends all believers who not only have God's righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ, but who guard it zealously by guarding their faith – lest both be lost in the Great Apostasy in the times of trouble ahead of which the book of Revelation warns:

Happy is he who both stays awake and guards his clothing, in order that he may not walk about naked and [people] see his shame. Revelation 16:15 b

Happy are they who are washing their clothing (cf. Revelation 7:13), so that they will have a right to the tree of life and they may enter by the gates into the city [of New Jerusalem]. Revelation 22:14 In contrast to the unacceptable works of unbelievers accomplished in the energy of the flesh, believers have been given works to do in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:10). As we saw above, believers' works, since they are of God, are evaluated for the purpose of reward (to show their value, and also to eliminate from consideration anything that may have been done in the flesh instead of in the Spirit: 1 Corinthians 3:11-15). Rather than pseudo-works proceeding from fleshly motivations, therefore, all believers will have at least one truly "good" work to offer before the Lord on the day of their evaluation – the "work" of putting their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, of accepting the offer of His righteousness in place of their own:

(28) Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" (29) Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." John 6:28-29 NIV

Therefore true faith is the "work" God requires, not a mere intellectual appreciation of who Jesus is and what He has done (for "even the demons" know this), but an acceptance and commitment of heart to this truth as the way of salvation. It is this change of heart that produces the new birth wherein the human spirit is given to see the truth unimpeded by the sin nature (whereas hardness of heart is the complete subordination of the spirit to the flesh). The struggle between the two led by the Spirit of God then characterizes the believer's life after being born again (Galatians 5:15-25), with all who have appropriated the righteousness of God by faith having something "good" to show for their time on earth as a result, the basic "good work", their faith preserved, if nothing else. But unbelievers have no share in any of this. Their "works" are material and of the material with no element of the spiritual whatsoever. Since they were not done by God or through

God, and certainly not for God, by definition they are not acceptable to God.

(41) "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (42) For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, (43) I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' (44) "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' (45) "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' (46) "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." Matthew 25:41-46 NIV

"The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." Luke 3:9 NIV

It should thus not be missed that since this is an absolute judgment, there will be no question of degrees of guilt or innocence. All human beings are guilty before Him to whom we must give an account, and our guilt is only removed and replaced by righteousness through the justification we have in Jesus Christ. For unbelievers it will not be a question of "relative worth" or "relative evil". It will avail nothing to have led a moral life, a patriotic life, a life characterized by charity and amity and lawful behavior. It will not make any difference that a person has lived "very well" in comparison to others – these things do matter in this world, but not before the Great White throne. For even the most noble and virtuous unbeliever who has ever lived (whoever that may be) has still been steeped in sin from birth, and will still have no answer to the charge that though he or she knew about God and His righteous demands, yet they refused to accept the gift of the One Person whose work would have provided them entrance into eternal life: the blood of Jesus Christ, His work in expiating all sins at the cross.

(23) For all sin and fall short of God's glory, (24) [but we believers are all] justified without cost by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. (25) God made Him a means of atonement [achieved] by His blood [and claimed] through faith, to give proof of His justice in leaving unpunished in divine forbearance [all] previously committed sins, (26) so as to prove His justice in the present, namely, so that He would be [shown to be] just [in this] and [justified] in justifying the one who has faith in Jesus. Romans 3:23-26

"Condemned according to what they had done": As the above should make clear, the condemnation of unbelievers in Revelation 20:13 is based not upon their deeds (the examination of which has merely served to demonstrate the truth about their life-choices), but upon their rejection of God's offer of salvation through faith in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. This judgment has shown that nothing they "have done" could ever possibly save them – and indeed has instead been the chief exhibit of evidence against them: they have chosen to stand upon their own inadequate, tainted works and self-righteousness instead of upon the sacrifice of Christ and the righteousness of God through faith in Him. Their resultant condemnation is therefore absolutely just.

I will expose your righteousness and your works, and they will not benefit you. Isaiah 57:12 NIV

Thus the operative portion of "what they have done" in terms of the most important question of life, "What think you of Jesus Christ?", is to have refused God's gracious and merciful offer of eternal

life through His Name. It is for this reason that their names were blotted out of the Book of Life.

"He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day." John 12:48 NASB As the pertinent section of Romans chapter one (translated above) makes clear, we should not weep for these unbelievers as if what they are about to suffer is unjust or comes as some sort of surprise. In fact, they knew the issues quite clearly. They knew full well about God, for He made His existence and nature evident to them from the way He has constructed the world and from every aspect of life. They realized full well their own mortality, and the conscience we all possess made it abundantly clear to them just how far from perfection they fell short. At some point in their lives, every unbeliever recognized the reality of God, and the problems posed by the fact that they would one day face the perfectly holy Creator – as soiled, imperfect creatures. For all those who have no desire to have a relationship with God on any terms, these are uncomfortable truths indeed, so that it is no great wonder that unbelievers make concerted efforts to blot these divine realities out of their thinking. For all those who respond to the truth in humility and truly desire an eternal relationship with the Almighty, the gospel of Jesus Christ is made available in every case. But for all who have no such desire and merely wish to be "left alone" during this life in spite of the horrific consequences of ignoring life's fundamental truths, a degeneration of their thinking in respect to these truths inevitably sets in, namely the "hardening of the heart" which makes it possible for those who choose against God to go on with their lives with no further qualms about such matters after decisively rejecting Him. This process and the specific decision points where God's truth was rejected and the devil's lies accepted in its place will be made obvious before the Great White Throne. And, these things being so, the condemnation which all unbelievers suffer at this point as recorded here at Revelation 20:13 will thereby be seen for what it truly is: not only just and justified, but absolutely necessary and self-selected in the case of every unbeliever.

(5) But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. (6) God "will give to each person according to what he has done." (7) To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. (8) But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. (9) There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; (10) but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. (11) For God does not show favoritism. Romans 2:5-11 NIV

(3) For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do – living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. (4) They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. (5) But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. (6) For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit. 1 Peter 4:3-6 NIV

Finally, although they refused to submit to Jesus in faith out of free will during their lives on earth, all unbelievers will nevertheless in any case be forced to acknowledge Him as Lord at the last judgment.

(9) Therefore God exalted [Christ] to the highest place and gave Him the Name that is above every name (10) that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth (11) and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Php 2:9-11 (cf. Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11) 3. The Sea, Death and Hades For the sea gave up the dead which were in it, [that is] death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them, and each person was condemned according to what they had done. Revelation 20:13 The passage above is frequently misquoted and just as frequently misunderstood. To interpret these verses properly it is first necessary to understand what "the sea" means in scripture.³ While many of us romanticize the ocean, in the Bible the sea is nearly always associated with evil and with judgment upon evil since it is God's ultimate means of judgment (e.g., on the original universe following Satan's revolt, and upon the earth of Noah's time, to name the two most extreme sea-judgments). That is its primary meaning here, that is, we have to do with a general reference to the place of judgment (the residence of all unbelievers who died prior to the end of history), rather than the literal sea per se. For in biblical "geography", the sea covers and conceals the entire tripartite underworld, "death and Hades"⁴ (the place of the unsaved dead), the Abyss⁵ (the place of incarcerated fallen angels), and "paradise" or "Abraham's bosom"⁶ (the place of the righteous dead before Christ's ascension). Thus in the passage above "the sea" is meant as a sort of short-hand for what we would call "hell" (or Sheol), and naturally enough from a biblical point of view since the sea is the restraining capstone or "lid", so to speak, upon the entire underworld where the unsaved dead presently reside. This is made clear as well by the fact that the phrase "death and Hades" is in apposition to "the sea" in Revelation 20:13 above. That is to say, "death and Hades" is the same as the sea, and the phrase is offered as an explanation of who the dead are that the sea is seen to disgorge: all of previously departed unbelieving humanity (in contrast to those who were still alive at history's end when they experienced the "resurrection of judgment"). The spirits of the departed are in torment under the waters, even all who reside [there below]. Job 26:5

Death and Hades are therefore a single place (one could punctuate the phrase as death-and-Hades). This is the abode of those who died without God and without salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, whatever name be used to describe this portion of the netherworld, Sheol (the Hebrew equivalent of Hades), be it the grave, torments, death or Hades. Further indications that we have only unbelievers here include:

1) the fact that these individuals are "dead" and are being kept in "death-and Hades" is a further indication that no believers appear among their ranks. For our God is the God of the living, not the dead, and we exit this life for eternal life, not for death (cf. Jesus' argument based on precisely this principle: Matthew 22:29-32).

2) the fact that this group is an undifferentiated mass whereas the biblical practice in places where the two groups really are combined is to show the difference between believers and unbelievers (cf. "tares and wheat"; "wheat and chaff", "taken and left", "sheep and goat" or "dead in Christ" vs. merely "dead").

3) the fact that if any of these people were believers, they would not be coming from below the earth (and all of these people come from below the earth), since all believers have gone to be with the Lord in heaven since His ascension.

4. The Final Disposition of the Unsaved Dead

(14) And death and Hades (i.e., all unbelievers) were cast into the lake of fire. And this is the second death: the lake of fire. (15) And if anyone was not found written in the Book of Life, he was cast into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:14-15 The absence of these unbelievers names from the Book of Life is not the result of any arbitrary decision on God's part. Their names were blotted out either as a result of their active choice (i.e., overt rejection of God and His Son in life), or by default of choice (i.e., stubbornly refusing to come to God in Christ throughout the entire span of their lives). It is on this basis, namely, failure to accept God's free gift of eternal life and righteousness through the blood of Christ, that all of history's unbelievers are condemned (Revelation 20:13). The checking of the Book of Life described above is therefore not a means of judgment but a safeguard which ensures that no believer will experience the second death, being cast into the lake of fire. Clearly, the Lord knows who are His (2 Timothy 2:19), and just as clearly He is incapable of making any such mistake. This check is provided and described for our benefit, that we may have complete confidence in our eternal status through faith in Jesus, and that we may also come to understand the entirely just process whereby those who are condemned are consigned to eternal fire: it is only through their own choice in rejecting eternal life in Jesus Christ who died to provide it that their names are blotted out of the Book of Life.

(3b) They have chosen their own ways, and their souls delight in their abominations; (4) so I also will choose harsh treatment for them and will bring upon them what they dread. For when I called, no one answered, when I spoke, no one listened. They did evil in my sight and chose what displeases me. Isaiah 66:3-4 NIV

Every single unbeliever who stands judgment before the Great White Throne will be shown to have rejected Christ's work in preference to their own works. As a result, every single unbeliever will be condemned at the last judgment, and these all share a common fate: being "cast into the lake of fire". As explained above, the lake of fire is a real place, a place of eternal torment, not of temporary purging nor of oblivion. As bad as the suffering of that place of darkness and fire will be, however, from the believers' point of view the worst thing about it will be the eternal separation from God which residence therein will entail. For many who sleep in the dust will awake, some to eternal life, but the others to shame and eternal separation [from God]. Daniel 12:2

(5) [These tribulations which you are enduring] are evidence of the righteous judgment of God in His [judging] you to be worthy of His kingdom on behalf of which you are also suffering. (6) Since indeed it is just for God to repay with tribulation those who are subjecting you to tribulation, (7) and to give you who are being distressed relief along with us at the revelation of our Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels, (8) wreaking vengeance in a flame of fire upon those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power, (10) when He comes on that [great] day to be glorified in the midst of His saints (i.e., resurrected believers) and to be marveled at among all those who have believed – as our testimony has been believed in your case. 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10

Thus the Great White Throne judgment is the last stone to be put into place in the edifice of human history before we enter the eternal Kingdom of the Father in the New Jerusalem, the new heavens and the new earth. On that day it will be clear to all, believers and unbelievers, men and angels

alike, that God has worked His perfect will in every way and in every individual case from the beginning to the end, with grace and mercy and blessing forever more in abundance for all who would but come to the grace and mercy and blessing He has freely provided through the sacrifice of His one and only Son, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

G. New Jerusalem and the Eternal State 1. The New Heavens and the New Earth

(1) And [then] (i.e., at the conclusion of the last judgment) I saw a New Heaven and a New Earth [appear]. For the previous heaven and the previous earth had passed away (Revelation 20:11), and the sea [now] no longer existed [on this New Earth]. Revelation 21:1 As we have seen, the old heavens and the old earth had already been consumed before the Great White Throne judgment (Revelation 20:11), so that John's mention of that event in Revelation 21:1 is retrospective (i.e., they "had" [already] passed away previously, before this coming of the New Heavens and New Earth). The purpose of the repetition here is to emphasize that the New Heavens and the New Earth cannot exist in tandem with the old, that the making of all things new requires the prior destruction of the old, and, most importantly, that the New Jerusalem cannot exist side-by-side with anything sinful or corrupt or tainted in any way (also indicated by the absence of the sea; see immediately below). For the New Jerusalem is the abode of God, and God the Father will only come to abide with mankind again when the universe has been purged of every trace of evil and has become instead a place where only righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13).

It is important to understand precisely what is being described in Revelation 21:1. First, the New Heaven mentioned here consists of both the sky (the first heaven) and the universe (the second heaven), but not what we often call "heaven" per se (i.e., the third heaven, the abode of God: 2 Corinthians 12:2). The third heaven is "not part of this [part of the] creation" (Hebrews 9:11; cf. Hebrews 7:26 where our Lord ascends to the third heaven which is "higher than the heavens", pl.), and has not been contaminated by sin so as to require the same cleansing by fire undergone by the rest of the visible universe (i.e., the earth and the twin heavens of atmosphere and space beyond). Indeed, the reason for the existence of the third heaven in the first place was to carve out, so to speak, a locality where God and the elect angels could continue to commune despite the pollution of the physical heavens and earth by Satan's rebellion. This deliberate separation and sanctification of God's presence from the corrupt universe was essential in order to preclude its immediate destruction (a judgment which the direct contact of holy God with anything profane necessitates: Psalms 5:4-5; cf. Genesis 1:6-7; Job 38:4-7; Hebrews 9:11). This separation of the third heaven from the rest of the cosmos is seen most perspicuously in the symbolism of the veil which closed off the holy of holies in the tabernacle-temple and shielded the Shekinah glory of God: only the high priest could enter once a year, and did so as a type of Christ. The earthly veil was split after Christ's death for sin (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:46), symbolically demonstrating that the way back to perfect God had now been opened up – for all those cleansed by Christ's sacrifice (Heb.10:19-21). That John is using the singular "heaven" here to mean the twin heavens taken together as one (i.e., the atmosphere and universe beyond the sky) can be clearly seen from his practice elsewhere in the book. While many biblical writers pluralize the word following the Hebrew custom (i.e., in Hebrew the word "heavens", shamayim, שָׁמַיִם, is always in the plural or, more accurately, the dual), of the fifty-one times in Revelation where John uses the Greek word for heaven, ouranos (οὐρανός), he employs the singular in every passage save one (Revelation 12:12 – to emphasize the totality of the devil's exclusion from the celestial realms and

his confinement to earth exclusively). Whether John means by this word the third heaven (as is frequently the case; cf. Revelation 8:1) or the twin heavens of the physical cosmos (as in, e.g., Revelation 8:10) must be determined from context, but the meaning is always evident as it is here. We may therefore be sure that, although John's habit of expressing this concept is somewhat different from that of other biblical writers (Peter and Isaiah, for example), with the word "heaven" he is indeed referring both to the sky and to the physical universe beyond it, namely, the visible "twin heavens", although not to the third heaven. For John, then, the term "New Heaven" means precisely the same thing as the phrase "New Heavens" found in Isaiah and 2nd Peter: the physical sky and the physical universe beyond earth's atmosphere – but not the third heaven, God's present dwelling place. The replacement of the old earth by the New Earth described in Revelation 21:1 means precisely that. That is to say, we have to do here only with the substitution of the New Earth for the old earth, but not the replacement of the areas "under the earth" (places "not of this cosmos" which, like the third heaven, are separated from the physical world and not a true part of it). It is true that following the Great White Throne judgment, with all believers resurrected and with all unbelievers and fallen angels consigned to the lake of fire, there will be no further need for three of the compartments of Hades below the earth (i.e., Paradise, a.k.a. Abraham's Bosom; the Abyss, a.k.a. Tartarus; and Torments, a.k.a., Sheol). However, it is more than likely that this now otherwise empty nether region is also the place of the Lake of the Fire. The Lake of Fire and Hades, the (theologically but not materially) subterranean realm wherein the lake most probably exists, will continue in that existence forever, completely separated from the New Heavens and the New Earth. Theologically speaking, the third heaven and Hades are the two opposite poles which bound the present universe, and, like the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden of Eden, respectively represent the choice which faces every human being: eternity with God through the reconciliation which the sacrifice of Jesus Christ effects for all who desire it, or eternal separation from God. The old cosmos has a limited life-span and will pass from existence in what is, compared to eternity, the blink of an eye. Heaven and hell are, therefore, the only two possible eternal residences, and neither is part of this present creation. But while hell in its permanent iteration will continue to be separate from the New Creation just as it was from the old (with the major difference being that the Lake of Fire will unquestionably be worse than the present day abode of deceased unbelievers, namely, Torments), heaven and earth will be separated no more. No longer will God reside apart, having deliberately and necessarily sequestered Himself from the material universe. With the descent of the New Jerusalem, heaven will come to earth, and there will no longer be any differentiation between the two.

(25) Of old You founded the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. (26) Even they will perish, but You endure; And all of them will wear out like a garment; Like clothing You will change them and they will be changed. Psalms 102:25-26 NASB

"For behold, I am going to create New Heavens and a New Earth, so that the former things will not be remembered, nor will they [even] come to mind." Isaiah 65:17

"For just as the New Heavens and New Earth which I am about to make are going to continue before Me", says the Lord, "so your seed and its name will continue". Isaiah 66:22

(7) And the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire by that same Word (of God), preserved for the day of judgment and the destruction of godless men. (8) Let not this one fact

escape your attention then, beloved, namely that one day is like a thousand years in the Lord's eyes, and a thousand years like one day (i.e., the "day" will span a millennium). (9) The Lord is not delaying in the fulfillment of His promise (as some think); rather He is exercising patience for your sake, being unwilling for anyone to perish, but desiring all instead to come to repentance. (10) For the Day of the Lord will come like a thief, a day in (i.e., over the course of) which the heavens will depart with a roar, the very elements will ignite and dissolve, and the earth and everything which has been done upon it will be laid bare [for the Lord's inspection]. (11) Since all these things are destined to disintegrate in this way, [consider] what sort of [Christians] we ought to be, [devoted to] holy and godly conduct, (12) as we wait with eager expectation and apprehension the advent of the Day of God. For on that day the heavens will burst into flame and dissolve, and the elements will catch fire and melt. (13) But we are awaiting New Heavens and a New Earth just as He promised – [a world] where righteousness dwells. 2 Peter 3:7-13 As it says in Isaiah 65:17 quoted above, the wonders of our eternal existence will be so fantastic, that with an eternity to spend, the old order of things will not only not be remembered but will never even come to mind. It is on this New Earth that God will reign forever, an earth restored, remade, and specifically reconstructed for saved mankind's eternal blessing. It will be better than the garden of Eden by untold orders of magnitude, better even than Jerusalem in the Millennium. The New Jerusalem will be the paradise par excellence, matchless, eternal, filled with all the blessings exemplified in the previous paradises but superior in ways and to degrees which we cannot even begin to contemplate at present. It will be without sin and without end; it will be the place where we will live forever in the presence of God Himself. The glory, the wonder, and the blessing of the New Heavens and the New Earth can only be dimly imagined at present, "for now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face" (1 Corinthians 13:12 KJV). Nevertheless, the Bible does allow us to say a few things about that blessed eternal state, keeping in mind our present perceptual limitations.

First, the absence of the sea mentioned here in verse one has a significance beyond its mere lack of presence on the New Earth. For one thing, without any sea the entire planet will be available for direct use (instead of the present one fourth or so of dry land). Coupled with the greatly expanded size of the New Earth (see below), this will result in ample and abundant space for all of us destined to inherit eternal life. Even more significant, however, is the symbolism behind the removal of the sea. In terms of biblical symbolism the sea signifies evil, for the sea is one of God's most prominent instruments of judgment.⁷ So while many of us today may enjoy certain aspects of the world's oceans, their absence from the New Earth represents the complete and concomitant removal of every aspect of sin and evil with which the present cosmos has been permanently marred by Satan's rebellion (2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21:7-8; Revelation 21:27; Revelation 22:14-15; cf. Isaiah 52:1). Thus the lack of any sea is tangible proof that every trace of evil has now been burnt away (2 Peter 3:7) so that on the New Earth only righteousness will dwell (2 Peter 3:13): even God's most conspicuous reminder of judgment now past will no longer exist. The absence of the sea, therefore, constitutes a promise of eternal peace, blessing and prosperity. Just as the rainbow reminds us of God's pledge not to destroy the present earth by means of the sea (Genesis 9:12-17), the fact of the sea's complete removal will be a pledge of the replacement of death and judgment with eternal life and limitless divine blessing, world without end. Once the glory of God has melted away every last trace of corruption, there will be no further need of any sea as a means of judgment and separation from God: The sea represents death (Revelation 20:13); but from now on there will be only life eternal. The sea represents judgment (Genesis

6:1-22, Genesis 7:1-24); but from now on there will be only divine favor. The sea represents evil (Revelation 11:7; Revelation 17:8); but from now on there will be only goodness and blessing. The sea was the source of antichrist (Revelation 13:11); but from now on we will live with Jesus Christ. The sea (the "lid" on the underworld) represents separation from God (Genesis 1:7; Genesis 1:10; Job 26:5; Ezekiel 1:22-28; 2 Peter 2:4-5; Revelation 4:6); but from now on the Father will tent with us (Revelation 21:3). The heavenly sea in the present third heaven, the "waters above" as seen from the heaven-side of things, constitutes a sort of viewing-port for the observation of all that is currently happening on the present earth (Revelation 4:6; Revelation 15:2; cf. Ezekiel 1:22-28; Ezekiel 10:1). We are told in Isaiah's final verse (i.e., Isaiah 66:24), that saved humanity will "go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who rebelled against Me, for their worm will not die and their fire will not be quenched and they will be abhorrent to all flesh". So while the earthly sea will be no more, it is likely that the heavenly sea will come to earth along with the New Jerusalem, with the words "go forth" indicating that this viewing-port will be somewhere outside of the city.

Second, we may draw some comparisons between the New Heavens and the New Earth and what the Bible tells us about the blessed resurrection body which every saved person will enjoy for all eternity. The New Heavens and New Earth appear to be "resurrected" in a fashion analogous to our rising from the dead: they are also transformed completely, but still bear a close enough resemblance to their previous forms to retain the names "heavens" and "earth", even though they will be fundamentally "new". Just as the new covenant is in truth a fulfillment of the promises of the old covenant (and better in every respect: Hebrews 8:6), and just as the resurrection body is a fulfillment of the promise we now possess of eternal life (and better in every respect: 1 Corinthians 15:35-38), so the New Heavens and the New Earth are the fulfillment of the promise of the present cosmos, a perfect world not only for the absence of all that is imperfect, but also for the presence of all that is good and right and blessed and delightful. Moreover, there is certainly a direct relationship between the resurrection body and the new cosmos, since the new order of things has been specifically designed by God for us as the place in which to enjoy our eternal life:

Just as the resurrection body will still be recognizable, merely inestimably better than before (cf., Luke 24:31; John 20:16; John 20:20; John 20:26-28; John 21:12), so the New Heavens and New Earth will represent an improvement of unfathomable proportions over the old order (while still being discernible as "heaven and earth").

Just as the resurrection body will retain all of its legitimate functions, merely adding to them in ways as yet not fully understood (Matthew 28:10; Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:15; Luke 24:43; John 21:13-15), so the New Heavens and New Earth will provide all their previous joys and benefits to an infinitely greater degree, and with many other wonders added thereto.

Just as the resurrection body will no longer be subject to pain, disease or death (Romans 6:9; Revelation 21:4), so the New Heavens and New Earth will lack any trace of anything pernicious, harmful, or disagreeable.

Just as the resurrection body will be perfectly attuned to the glory, the power and the spirituality of the eternal life which will be ours (1 Corinthians 15:41-44), so the New Heavens and New Earth will be perfectly adapted to us and for our eternal life.

Just as the resurrection body will be a body of light with all trace of darkness utterly and eternally absent (1 Corinthians 15:43; Revelation 1:16 b), so the New Heavens and New Earth will be refulgent with the glory of the Father and Son, a place of light without darkness forever for all those who are "light in the Lord" (Ephesians 5:8).

In short, the transformation of the universe described here is in no way a subtraction of anything good (only of everything evil); rather it will be a multiplication of the good to something better by orders of magnitude we can only superficially and imperfectly limn at present. As will be the case with our eternal bodies, the New Heavens and New Earth will be neither immaterial nor intangible (cf. Matthew 28:9; Luke 24:39; John 20:17; John 20:27); rather they most definitely will be both tangible and material, only without any hint of sin or evil forevermore, like to the Garden of Eden, only without the presence of the tree of knowing good and evil (or any further need for it).

Third, as we have seen and remarked many times in the past, the New Heavens and New Earth are the seventh and the ultimate Paradise. As such, the new cosmos shares all the essential characteristics of the Edens which preceded it.

Beautiful and Awesome Topography (Genesis 2:10-14; Isaiah 14:13; Ezekiel 28:14-16; compare with Revelation 21:10; Revelation 21:16).

Sensual Delightfulness (the name Eden means "delight"; Genesis 2:9; Genesis 2:18; compare with Revelation 21:15-21; Revelation 22:1-2).

Enjoyable Occupation (Genesis 2:15; Luke 16:25; 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 21:26; compare with Revelation 2:7; Revelation 2:17; Revelation 2:26; Revelation 3:12; Revelation 3:21; Revelation 21:14).

Peace and Prosperity (Genesis 2:16; Isaiah 51:3; Joel 3:18; Micah 5:5; compare with Revelation 3:5; Revelation 21:26; Revelation 22:12).

Presence of and Fellowship with God (Genesis 2:22; Genesis 3:8; Ezekiel 48:35; 1 Peter 3:19; compare with Revelation 21:3; Revelation 21:7; Revelation 21:22-23; Revelation 22:5).

Fourth, we can get a glimpse of how much better the New Heavens and New Earth will be by comparing their magnitude to that of the present cosmos. The habitable proportions of the New Jerusalem are 1,440,000 times greater than those of the millennial Jerusalem (i.e., 1,200 times greater in both length and width; see below). Since the promises of inheritance to Israel will still be valid in the eternal state, we may posit that the eternal territory of Israel, and by necessity the size of the New Earth (and most likely therefore also of the New Heavens) will be expanded to the same, proportional degree. Yet we know from our Lord's resurrection body that our own physical shapes will be of approximately the same size. Whether or not the New Heavens and New Earth will be 1,440,000 times bigger – and therefore that much better – the imponderable factor remains that while we are now quite limited in our ability to enjoy the universe (spatially, temporally, and morally), at that time there will be no such limitations. Whatever its future size, it is safe to say that the eternity will not suffice to plumb its wonders. Best of all, of course, will be the complete and unfettered fellowship we shall enjoy with our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ as well as with God the Father. That will be an inestimable joy for which there exists no present point of comparison.

2. The Descent of New Jerusalem

(2) And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, beautified as a bride adorned for her [future] husband. Revelation 21:2 The fact that the New Jerusalem is here described as descending is not meant to suggest that it never comes to rest upon the New Earth, staying suspended above the clouds (as some have suggested). The meaning here is clarified by the similar language used to describe this glorious event earlier in the book: The one who wins the victory I will make a pillar in the temple of My God and he shall never go out again. And I will write upon him the Name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem (which is going to come down from heaven from My God), and My new Name. Revelation 3:12 The point in both passages is the provenance of New Jerusalem: it comes down from heaven. This phraseology places the emphasis on the eternal city's origin and upon the symbolism of its return to earth (for earth is the original paradise: Isaiah 14:13; cf. Ezekiel 28:14-16). New Jerusalem is the abode of God (2 Corinthians 12:4; Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:22). It cannot return from its sequestration in the third heaven (i.e., "from God") before eternity begins, not until all sin and evil have been removed from the cosmos, and the earth and (lower twin-heavens) find themselves renewed, purged of everything and anything unholy: imperfection cannot stand in the presence of holy God (Exodus 33:20; Psalms 5:4). This descent from the third heaven of the New Jerusalem, holy and pure, signifies the holiness and purity of the New Heavens and New Earth along with all who will inhabit them forever, and heralds the return of the Father to abide with His creatures in this blessed new creation for all eternity (Revelation 21:3).

Just as each iteration of paradise manifests certain important common features, so every Eden, every "place of delight", has its own unique characteristics. That is also true of the New Jerusalem, even though the city itself in its archetypal form presently exists in the third heaven (from which it shall descend) in the form of the Heavenly Jerusalem, the present paradise whither all departed believers now go to be with the Lord.

(2) I know a man, [a believer] in Christ – fourteen years earlier such a one was snatched up to the third heaven (in his body perhaps, or out of it, I don't know – God knows). (3) And I know that this man (in his body perhaps, or out of it, I don't know – God knows) (4) was snatched up to paradise, and heard inexpressible words which are not permissible for a man to speak. 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 But the Jerusalem above is free (i.e., the heavenly Jerusalem as opposed to the present, earthly Jerusalem which is in bondage to the Law), [and it is she] who is our mother. Galatians 4:26

(20) For our [true] citizenship has a heavenly existence (cf. in the Greek text: Acts 23:1; Ephesians 2:19; Php 1:27), and it is from there that we expectantly await our Savior, Lord Jesus Christ, (21) who will transform this humble body of ours into one that matches His glorious body through His powerful ability to subordinate everything to Himself. Php 3:20-21

(8) By faith, Abraham, when He was called [by God], obeyed and went forth into the place he was destined to receive as an inheritance. He went forth, moreover, in ignorance of where [exactly] he was heading. (9) By faith, he sojourned as an alien in the land he had been promised, dwelling in tents with Jacob and Isaac, coheirs of [this same] promise. (10) For he was waiting for the foundation of that city (i.e., the New Jerusalem) whose architect and builder is God. Hebrews 11:8-10

(13) These all died [while still walking] in faith, though they had not received the [fulfillment of their] promises. But [while they lived] they did catch sight of [these promises] from a distance and salute

them, [so to speak], thus making it plain [to all the world] that they were [in effect] strangers and sojourners on the earth. (14) For people who express [their faith] in this way make it quite evident that they are eagerly in search of a homeland [other than the place they now occupy]. (15) Indeed, if these [believers'] hearts had yearned for the [land] from which they had departed, they would have had [ample] opportunity to turn back. (16) But they were zealous for a better place, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God. He has, in fact, prepared a city for them (i.e., the New Jerusalem). Hebrews 11:13-16

(22) But you have come [not to Mount Sinai but] to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, [that is, you have come to] the Heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of [elect] angels in assembly [before God], and to the Church of the firstborn enrolled [as its citizens] in heaven (i.e., all believers, living or dead), and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of justified [believers] [who have now] completed [their tasks] (i.e., departed believers in interim state now residing in the Heavenly Jerusalem), (23) and to Jesus, the Mediator of a better covenant, and to sprinkled blood (i.e., the work of Christ in bearing our sins) which speaks [far] more powerfully than that of Abel[']s sacrifice]. Hebrews 12:22-23 For we do not have here [on earth] a city which [is meant to be] lasting; rather we are eagerly looking forward to the city that is destined [to come] (i.e., the New Jerusalem). Hebrews 13:14 The main differences we may discern from scripture between the present, Heavenly Jerusalem, and the New Jerusalem to come are all explainable by the fact that the ultimate paradise will be attuned to the presence of believers in resurrection and to the New Earth which we shall inhabit forever. For example, in the present Heavenly Jerusalem there is still a temple (Revelation 7:15; Revelation 11:19; Revelation 14:15-17; Revelation 15:5-8; Revelation 16:17), for the sanctification of God's holy Person against all that is profane is still a necessary symbol (i.e., the temple precinct represents the separation of the holy); no temple will exist in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:22), since at that blessed future time no longer will any such distinction be necessary with all sin and evil having been cleansed from the New Heavens and New Earth. In the present Heavenly Jerusalem there is no discernible sign of the river of living water nor the tree of life (cf. Rev.4-5); in the New Jerusalem these will be central features of the city, designed for the blessing of the inhabitants, all of whom by that time will occupy resurrection bodies capable of enjoying these delights to the full. In the present Heavenly Jerusalem there is no discernible sign of any walls, or gates or foundations, and reasonably so since it does not rest upon the earth; but all of these features are notable additions to the New Jerusalem to come, familiar forms from our prior earthly existence, only exceeding the most magnificent of any such in human history by untold orders of magnitude.

3. The Advent of the Father

(3) And there was a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is [now] with men. And He has taken up residence with them, and they will be His people, and He Himself will be their God." Revelation 21:3 With the descent of New Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem, the tabernacle of God" (a structure which by its name is designed for temporary use) has become a permanent city (with all the accouterment of a fixed abode). The conflict that was human history is now over; God is here with mankind to stay – forever. The return of the Father to take up residence on earth once more and to dwell with saved mankind for all eternity is the final punctuation, the ultimate exclamation point, on what we know as "history". Satan's revolt, an event occurring untold eons before the creation of human beings, had occasioned the departure of the

Godhead from the original earth. The devil's insurrection eventually met with severe divine judgment, executed upon the world of that prehistoric time, but not yet carried out upon Satan and his angels. Human history would constitute God's demonstration to all His creatures of the justice of all He had done in creating them with free will, and of all He was willing to do in His boundless grace and mercy to save those willing to repent of rebellion against Him. Mankind (some small portion of it at least) would do what the rebel angels would not: respond to God's gracious provision, not initially in the garden of Eden, but eventually by way of the cross which opens the way that leads back to paradise and to the presence of God through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Throughout all the ages of Man, God has never left Himself without a witness to the truth, for the whole creation sings of His existence and of His goodness (Psalms 19:1-6; Acts 14:17; Romans 1:18-23), and when the fullness of times arrived (Galatians 4:4; Ephesians 1:10; cf. Mark 1:15; Romans 5:6), He sent His one and only Son our Lord to make the promised reconciliation a reality by the sacrifice of Himself on Calvary's cross. Christ's initial return at the conjunction of the ages was the decisive event of the relatively short seven-thousand-year period which followed known to us as "human history". At the cross, He "put death to death" through His own death on our behalf (2 Timothy 1:10). Heaven has now received our Lord Jesus since His resurrection and ascension (Acts 3:21), and from the Father's right hand He awaits the time of His return when all His enemies will be made the footstool for His feet (Psalms 110:1-7). Between the two advents of Christ, we believers of the Church Age, that time wherein the greatest number of His assembly is being called out, have been blessed to experience the advent of the Holy Spirit who empowers all our efforts on behalf of our Lord Jesus. His return too will be interrupted – not for two thousand years, but for the seven year period of the Tribulation (2 Thessalonians 2:6-7), after which He will return along with the Son, being poured out abundantly during the glorious millennial reign of Jesus Christ (Joel 2:28-39). At history's end, the Father will join the Son and the Spirit and the restoration will be complete. Eden, paradise, will then have been restored in its perfect and eternal form with the establishment of the New Jerusalem on the New Earth. From this point forward without end and forever, elect angels and saved mankind will enjoy sweet fellowship with the Trinity on earth as it was always meant to be, but in a universe superior in every way to all that went before. When God judges, restores and replaces, it is always for the better, and that beyond comprehension.

(21) For since death [came] through a man, resurrection of the dead also [had to come] through a man. (22) For just as in Adam, all die, so also in Christ, shall all be made alive. (23) But each [will be resurrected] in his own echelon. Christ [is the] first-fruits (i.e., the initial person and echelon of resurrection). Next [will be] those belonging to Christ at His coming (i.e., all believers at the 2nd Advent). (24) Then the end [of human history – the resurrection of millennial believers], when He will hand the Kingdom over to the Father, after He has brought an end to all rule, all power, and all authority (i.e., hostile human and angelic control). (25) For He must rule until He has placed all His enemies under His feet. 1 Corinthians 15:21-25 With the vanquishing of all God's enemies, even death (Isaiah 25:7-8; Hosea 13:14; 1 Corinthians 15:26; 1 Corinthians 15:54-57), and with the removal of sin and unrighteousness from the world (2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21:7-8; Revelation 21:27; Revelation 22:14-15), the way will be cleared for the return of the King, that is, the taking up by the Father of His residence once more on earth. He will return not to the original Eden which Satan defiled, but to a new and extraordinary paradise, the New Jerusalem, likewise a paradise of divine design, now constructed in the form of a city, that is, a paradise specifically designed for

mass human habitation (Hebrews 11:10; cf. Hebrews 2:16). At that time, the Glory will truly return to earth (cf. Ezekiel 10:18), and God the Father, who gave His Son to take on true humanity in order to save it (Hebrews 2:14-15), will, along with Christ through whom He made the world and around whom He fashioned the history we are now contemplating, dwell with us and we with Him forevermore. At that time, God will "be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28; cf. 1 Corinthians 3:21-23), and that will be the most sublime completion to His creation imaginable.

Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Matthew 13:43 NIV 4. The Passing away of the Old

(4) And He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And there will no longer be any death, or cries of pain, or grief. For the previous things have passed away. Revelation 21:4

Before moving on to the splendors of the New Jerusalem, John is given to assure us here that in addition to all the positives of the eternal state, all of the negatives of this present earthly life will have "passed away". Whatever grief and trouble we know in this world, God will comfort us in eternity. "Wiping away all of our tears" means the removal of every source of heartache and discomfort in a complete and absolute way.

[A]nd the ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away. Isaiah 35:10 NIV

Simply put, we will no longer even remember how to cry, we will no longer be capable of experiencing physical or emotional distress, nor will there be any possible source of such things any longer. Death, the ultimate cause of all our trouble and sorrow, will be no more (2 Timothy 1:10). Absent also will be any thought of or occasion for physical agony ("cries of pain") or emotional affliction ("cries of grief"). Totally apart from the wonders and blessings of the eternal life to come, all of the things that bring heartache to our present existence will be banished forever. They will not even be remembered.

"For behold, I am going to create New Heavens and a New Earth, so that the former things will not be remembered, nor will they [even] come to mind." Isaiah 65:17

We should also understand this verse in a positive way, suggesting as it surely does the bliss we shall have from our fellowship with God Himself who is the One described here as wiping away our tears. Just as the old material environment has now been replaced by an entirely new one, so also the old spiritual environment will be completely transformed in eternity. Everything in the past that clouded our view of our dear Savior and interfered with our ability to focus on Him, everything, that is, that disturbed the perfect peace which is our heritage as sons of the Living God and members of the Church of Jesus Christ, has now been taken out of the way. Given our inability now to appreciate or truly understand the blessedness of this aspect of our eternal life to come, this verse concerns itself with communicating to us this future ecstatic spirituality in terms of our present frame of reference by expressing it as the lack of our present-day negatives. For although believers of great spiritual maturity do begin to get an inkling of the rapturous nature of the peace and presence of the Lord (Isaiah 26:3; Isaiah 51:11 b; Isaiah 54:13; John 14:27; John 16:33; Romans 5:1; Romans 15:13; 1 Corinthians 7:15; Php 4:7), we cannot at present truly begin to appreciate how that eternal peace and spirituality will suffuse and illuminate every aspect of our

eternal existence. Since we cannot as yet even dimly assess this positive feature of our coming life with Jesus, scripture expresses it in terms of the comfort we shall have in the removal of all temporal negatives. While false pagan pictures of the afterlife invariably focus upon the satiation of material lusts, the true, biblical picture of eternal life with God is one of spiritual ecstasy beyond our present capacity to apprehend.

5. The Nature of New Jerusalem

(9) Then one of the seven angels who have the seven bowls filled with the seven final plagues came [up to me], and he spoke with me, saying, "Come. I will show you the Bride, the Lamb's wife". (10) Then he carried me in the Spirit to a mountain, great and high, and he showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, (11) and [it shone] with the glory of God. It was radiant like an extremely precious gemstone, like a [purple] jasper stone, [only] translucent like crystal. (12) It had a wall, great and high with twelve gates, and at the gates were twelve angels. Names were written on [each of] the gates which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. (13) Three gates faced east; three gates faced north; three gates faced west; and three gates faced south. (14) And the city wall had twelve foundations, and on [the twelve foundations] were [written] the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. (15) And the [angel] who was speaking with me had a golden measuring rod [which he used] to measure the city [along with] its gates and its wall. (16) The city was square in its design with its length equal to its width. And he measured the city with his [golden measuring] rod, and [it came] to 12,000 stadia (i.e., approx. 1590 miles): its length and its width and its height were precisely the same. (17) He then measured the [city's] rim, 144 cubits (i.e., approx. 84 yards) in human measurement which is the same [here] as the angelic standard. (18) The wall of [the city] was composed of [purple] jasper, and the city [itself] of pure gold [which was] transparent like crystal. Revelation 21:9-18

The Bride: We have already been told (Revelation 21:2) that the New Jerusalem appears "beautified as a bride adorned for her [future] husband". Here we see the eternal city actually described as "the Bride, the Lamb's wife". Of course we know – and at this point scripture expects us to know – that the believers resurrected at Jesus' return are "the Bride of Christ". Equating the place with its people is a figure of speech (technically known as a metonymy) where the residence takes on the name of the residents (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:9-17; 1 Corinthians 6:19; Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:21 and Revelation 3:12, where believers are also compared to structures in whole or in part). Apart from the reference to our Lord, John is not given at any point to see the human or angelic residents of New Jerusalem. But since this is to be the Church's eternal residence it is certainly understandable that he is given to describe it as "the Bride" (since that is where the Bride will indeed live forevermore).

The Mountain: The existence of this mountain, "great and high", on the New Earth is a clear indication that, apart from the absence of the oceans, its topography will be similar to that with which we are now familiar (though undoubtedly grander in every way as this description suggests). John is taken up to the top of this mountain in order to receive a better perspective of the whole of the new city (in a manner similar to the view the Lord gave Moses of the promised land: Numbers 27:12; cf. Ezekiel 40:2). This is our first hint of the massive size of New Jerusalem and also of its essential layout: like the prehistoric "Mountain of God" (Isaiah 14:13) and the miraculously elevated millennial Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2; Ezekiel 40:2; Zechariah 14:10-11), so too the center of the new city must be of considerable height to necessitate this action.

The Exterior of the City: In verse eighteen of Revelation chapter twenty-one we see that

"the city [itself was composed] of pure gold [which was] transparent like crystal", although initially in verse eleven we are told that it appeared to John "radiant like an extremely precious gemstone, like a [purple] jasper stone, [only] translucent like crystal" and that it "[shone] with the glory of God". The apparent discrepancy between the two descriptions has to do with John's change of perspective. Later, he has apparently been conveyed by the angel around the city's exterior and then into the city proper (otherwise he would never have been able both to see the gates on all sides of the city, and later also the throne, the tree of life, the river of living water, and the other sights within its walls). Within, the true nature of the city is plain to see: it is composed of translucent, crystalline-gold. Without, the city has a purple "radiance": the illumination of its exterior by the glory of God gives it an incandescent appearance of translucent, crystalline-[purple] jasper. This exterior covering has a similar function to the tent of the tabernacle (which was similarly composed of blue, purple and red materials), defining and visibly demarcating the holy space wherein the Glory of God dwells. The Wall: John employs precisely the same description for the wall, "great and high", as he did for the mountain. This fact alone makes it clear that the 144 cubits mentioned in verse seventeen is not referring to the height of the wall (indeed, it is not referring to the wall per se at all; see below). For as monumentally massive as a seventy-yard high wall would be in our present-day experience, those proportions are dwarfed by the size of the city. For someone given to see New Jerusalem in a panoramic view (one wide enough to take in the entire city at once as John is given to do), a structure of such relatively meager dimensions would be nearly invisible. We are not, in fact, ever given the dimensions of the wall, but they must be prodigious in order for it to be noteworthy from John's perspective, and especially in order for him to describe it as "great and high" even in comparison with the enormous size of New Jerusalem. We may expect that its dimensions are in perfect proportion to those of the perfect city. We should also note here that by the time the wall becomes visible New Jerusalem has now come to earth where John is seeing it in situ. The Twelve Gates: As in the case of the millennial Jerusalem described in Ezekiel 48:30-34, the New Jerusalem will also have twelve gates bearing the names of the tribes of Israel. There are differences between the two, however, and those differences are profound:

1) The naming of the gates of millennial Jerusalem proceeds in a clockwise fashion (i.e., north to east to south to west), whereas the New Jerusalem's gates are enumerated counterclockwise (east to north to west to south).

2) Millennial Jerusalem has a gate for Levi and combines Ephraim and Manasseh into one tribe, Joseph, whereas the New Jerusalem has no gate for Levi and separate gates for Ephraim and Manasseh.

3) While in the New Jerusalem the order of the gates and tribes associated with them has everything to do with rank (see below), the gates of millennial Jerusalem are ordered according to birth by means of a formula which takes into consideration both age and motherhood:

North: the three eldest sons of Leah, Reuben, Judah and Levi.

East: the sons of Rachel, Joseph and Benjamin, along with Dan, the first son of her maid, Bilhah.

South: Leah's three other sons, Simeon, Issachar and Zebulun.

West: Gad, Asher, the two sons of Leah's maid (Zilpah); and Naphtali, Bilhah's second son. As will be seen, by comparing the arrangement of the jewels of the high priest's ephod with the gemstones which serve as foundations for the wall (along with the gates with which they are thereby necessarily associated), it is possible to determine the specific tribes associated with each gate (and the probable significance of the linkage). For the moment, it is important to point out that each gate represents a division of the Church, and it is for this reason that each gate has one of the twelve apostles and an angel associated with it. The angels are positioned "at the gates", while the apostles names are inscribed on their respective foundation stones. In terms of the apostles, they would seem to be in charge (or at least to be the titular heads) of the twelve divisions of the Bride of Christ; in terms of the angels, they would seem to be the liaisons to and/or comparable heads of the angelic divisions which correspond to and are eternally associated with the divisions of the Church (and we will suggest the particular identification and assignments of each college of twelve below). This magnificent vision given to John to see in all its glory is not only one of breath-taking beauty, but it also will give us a key to the possibilities of our eternal status, depending upon "what was accomplished through this body, whether it be good or worthless" (2 Corinthians 5:10). The Measurement and Design of New Jerusalem: Revelation 21:16 tells us that the city will be a cube measuring 12,000 stadia on each side. The stadion/stadium was a Greek measurement of 600 feet (cf. Herodotus 2.149), although the precise length of the "foot" varied from place to place. It is important to note, however, that the precise standard used here is the same one employed for the millennial Jerusalem in Ezekiel 40:1-49, Ezekiel 41:1-26, Ezekiel 42:1-20, Ezekiel 43:1-27, Ezekiel 44:1-31, Ezekiel 45:1-25, Ezekiel 46:1-24, Ezekiel 47:1-23, Ezekiel 48:1-35. That is clear for two reasons; first, in verse seventeen we are told that the human and angelic measurement are identical here (i.e., the longer, angelic standard is being employed just as it was when the angel measured the temple for Ezekiel: Ezekiel 40:5); second, the length of the sides of the New Jerusalem are precisely 1,200 times longer than those of the millennial Jerusalem (i.e., millennial Jerusalem measures 4000 cubits or 100 stadia per side, subtracting the area for the temple-sanctuary which is not present in New Jerusalem: Ezekiel 45:2; Ezekiel 48:30), thus indicating that the same heavenly standard is to be understood. Based upon the above, the dimensions of the New Jerusalem would be approximately 1590 of our own statute miles in length, breadth, and height. In terms of the present day earth, the city would not only cover all of the expanded, millennial Israel, but also most of the middle east, with its border running roughly from the river Danube to the Caspian Sea to the Red Sea to the Libyan desert and back north again to the Danube (we know that New Jerusalem's borders run due north to south, and due east to west, because of the orientation of its gates: cf. Revelation 21:13). Given the necessity for the eternal territory of Israel to continue to exist outside of this massive city, as suggested above we most likely have to do with a greatly enlarged New Earth which has been expanded proportionally so as to accommodate this need. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God. Genesis 17:7 NIV

One aspect of the New Jerusalem which sometimes leads to confusion is its height, described in verse sixteen as equal to its length and breadth. However, we should not think of the city as having "floors" stacked some sixteen hundred miles into the sky. Rather, this third dimension will be largely vacant, with the surface of the city functioning in precisely the same way as every other iteration of Jerusalem and of paradise, a habitable two-dimensional surface, but enclosed by a

sanctified exterior of three dimensions. The holy of holies in the tabernacle furnishes us with the pattern of interpretation we are to use here. After all, we are explicitly told that the tabernacle was a model of heavenly types (Exodus 25:40; Hebrews 8:5). We have seen before (and will consider below) some of these representations (for example, the ark of the covenant representing the chariot-throne of God, and the threefold illustration of Jesus Christ provided by the altar of incense, the menorah, and the table of the bread of presence). Apropos of our current discussion is the similarity between the holy of holies and the New Jerusalem in terms of spatial proportion, arrangement of pertinent contents, and exterior covering.

Both the holy of holies in the tabernacle and the New Jerusalem are perfect cubes (cf. Exodus 26:16; Exodus 36:21). The holy of holies contained the ark of the covenant (corresponding to the throne of God the Father and Lamb: Revelation 22:1-2), with the mercy seat and the cherubim overlooking it (corresponding to the angelic presence in the New Jerusalem). However, most of the actual space within the holy of holies was empty. In a similar fashion, only the surface of the New Jerusalem will be furnished (with the throne, the tree of life, the river of the water of life, the main street, and no doubt with other unnamed glories, our own personal, eternal habitations included). The throne will be found at the center of the city and will be elevated, and, given the proportions of the city, it is probable that the height of the central "mount" will be great (as indeed in relative terms the ark and mercy seat are proportionally quite high as compared to the floor-level of the tabernacle). This is in keeping with the residence of God throughout creature history:

Before the creation of mankind: For you said in your heart, "I will ascend heavenward. I will set my throne above the stars of God. And I will take my seat on the mount of assembly on the sides of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the Most High God. Isaiah 14:13-14 In Eden:

Now a river was flowing forth from Eden (i.e., downhill), in order to water the garden, and from there (i.e., after passing through the garden) it divided so that it turned into four headwaters. Genesis 2:10 In the present day third heaven: But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem. Hebrews 12:22 a And I looked, and behold, the Lamb stood upon Mount Zion, and with Him were the 144,000, having His Name and the Name of His Father written upon their foreheads. Revelation 14:1 In the millennial Jerusalem: At the end of days, the mountain of the temple of the Lord will be established as the chief of all mountains, and it will be raised higher than all [other] hills, and all the nations will flow to it. Isaiah 2:2 The man brought me back to the entrance of the temple, and I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, south of the altar. Ezekiel 47:1 NIV And in the glorious New Jerusalem to come: And He showed me the river of the water of life, bright like crystal, coming forth from the throne of God and of the Lamb (i.e., and so flowing downhill as in every other such case). Revelation 22:1 As indicated above, just as the tabernacle was completely covered with an exterior curtain, so the New Jerusalem will have its own distinctive, three-dimensional border. The inner layer of the tabernacle's curtain was composed of linen: blue (reflecting the heavenly origin of the only One who can give us access), purple (reflecting the royalty of the only One who can give us access), and scarlet (reflecting the sacrifice of the only One who can give us access). This layer was also embroidered with cherubim, symbolizing the holy abode of God, the third heaven lying above the firmament of sky and space (unreachable

apart from Christ). The outer layer of the tabernacle curtain was composed of dark, leathery "sea-cow skins", symbolizing the firmament of the sky, glistening, shimmering, with a blue-black watery appearance, and impenetrable to the eye. In eternity, there will be no need to shield the glory of God from His creation. Instead of an intricate, multi-layered curtain, New Jerusalem will be clothed with translucent jasper, and through that covering the glorious light of His being will illuminate the universe: And night will no longer exist. And those [with the Name of the Father and the Son on their foreheads] will not have need of the light of a lamp or the light of the sun: the Lord God will shine upon them. Revelation 22:5 a

Just as the tabernacle was illuminated by the lamp and indwelt by the Shekinah glory of God, so the New Jerusalem will be illuminated by the true glory of God, with that glory illuminating the exterior covering from within and everything without as well, in keeping with the proclamation that He will be "tenting with us" from this point forth forever. For my tabernacle will be over them. Then I will be their God, and they will be my people. Ezekiel 37:27 The City's Rim and Exterior Wall: Contrary to what is found in most translations of Revelation 21:17, the dimensions of the wall surrounding New Jerusalem are not given. As suggested above, if the 144 cubits mentioned referred to the wall, it would indeed be most odd if this wall with its gates of pearl and foundations made of gemstones had even been visible to John in comparison with the massive dimensions of New Jerusalem. Most (though not all) of the versions take the 144 cubits to refer to the height of the wall, though, strangely, height is not mentioned. The 1984NIV is closer to the truth in understanding the measurement as referring to the width of the wall, thus allowing the structure the height necessary in order to be proportional to the towering city. In fact, it is not the measure of the wall that is being specified (where we would need to know whether width or height was being conveyed), but rather of the rim or standoff space between the city and the wall. The reading found in most manuscripts, *teichos* (Gr., "wall") is incorrect. Sinaiticus preserves the correct reading: *cheilos* (Gr., "lip", or "rim").

Just as in the case of the tabernacle furniture which also has rims around its sides symbolizing sanctification (Exodus 25:11; Exodus 25:25; Exodus 37:12), and just as in the case of the millennial Jerusalem where there is an area of free space immediately outside the sanctuary (Ezekiel 45:2), and also outside the city proper (Ezekiel 48:17), so it is appropriate for the wall of the New Jerusalem to be separated from the city by a symbolic distance (i.e., 144 cubits; cf. the 144,000 martyrs, and the twelve thousand by twelve-thousand-stadion sides of the city). The construction of the wall is the same as that of the exterior of the city, translucent purple-jasper, demonstrating the intrinsic oneness of city and wall. The wall, of course, will not be necessary either for defense (for never will anything hostile to the Lord exist in the new universe) nor for sanctification (for never will anything unholy exist in the new universe). Rather, as evidenced by the foundation stones which as we shall see are memorials to the level of service to the Lord we His people evidenced here in time, the wall will serve as a memorial to the fact that the Lord has always been our bulwark of defense.

"For I will be a wall of fire for her, roundabout [Jerusalem]", says the Lord, "and I will be her glory [shining forth from] within". Zechariah 2:5 6. The Foundations and Gates of the Wall (19) And the foundations of the wall of the city were dressed with every [sort] of precious gemstone . . .

[The Southern Gates] The first foundation was jasper (the gate of Gad).

The second foundation was sapphire (the gate of Simeon).

The third foundation was carnelian (the gate of Reuben).

[The Eastern Gates] The fourth foundation was emerald (the gate of Zebulun).

(20) The fifth foundation was sardonyx (the gate of Issachar).

The sixth foundation was sardius (the gate of Judah).

[The Northern Gates] The seventh foundation was chrysolite (the gate of Dan).

The eighth foundation was beryl (the gate of Asher).

The ninth foundation was peridot (the gate of Naphtali).

[The Western Gates] The tenth foundation was chrysoprase (the gate of Ephraim).

The eleventh foundation was jacinth (the gate of Manasseh).

The twelfth foundation was amethyst (the gate of Benjamin).

(21a) And the twelve gates were twelve pearls: each gate was made entirely of a single pearl. Revelation 21:19-21 In addition to its role as a memorial to the perfect protection and deliverance which the people of God have experienced throughout human history, the specific features of the wall, namely, its gates and its foundation stones, also serve to demarcate the particular division along with its "colors" to which each believer will belong for all eternity. The description of the foundations of the wall is nested in-between the initial description of the 12 gates in Revelation 21:12-13 (where we are told of the orientation of the gates) and their specific description in Revelation 21:21 (where we are told that the gates themselves are identical, made of a single pearl each). Thus the foundations are intrinsically connected to the gates; and, specifically, each gate is associated with a corresponding foundation. This is important for analyzing the particular identification, position, and rank of each foundation stone.

Gemstones were used by the Lord to represent in a memorial way the angelic clans (Ezekiel 28:13). They were also used on the high priest's breastplate to represent the twelve tribes of Israel (Exodus 28:17-21; Exodus 39:10-14). The tribal structure of Israel is the ultimate organization into which all members of the assembly of believers in Jesus Christ (i.e., the ekklesia or "Church") will be distributed (Revelation 2:17; cf. Ezekiel 47:21-23; Zechariah 2:11). This distribution will not be based on heredity (gentiles from before Abraham until the return of Christ will be included), nor on specific lineage (Jewish believers themselves will be rearranged in terms of tribe), but according to merit. We see an indication of this in the fact that the twelve apostles are specifically said in Revelation 21:14 to have their names inscribed one to a foundation, with each serving in the capacity of prince for his respective echelon of the duodecad. However, while it is not known to which tribe each of the apostles belonged, it is very clear that they cannot be literal descendants of the twelve tribes, one from each tribe. That is because several of them are brothers (e.g., Peter and Andrew, James and John). We may also be sure that Paul, the greatest of the apostles, will have a grander position than prince of seventh-ranked Benjamin (his ancestral tribe). Therefore we may surmise that the distribution of apostles will take place according to merit rather than genealogy, and that this will be the rule for individual believers in regard to their eternal

assignments as well (cf. Genesis 48:13-20; Isaiah 66:21; Hebrews 7:13-14; and Revelation 7:5-8 [where Dan is omitted on account of being the tribe from which antichrist arises]). Just as the remaining angelic clans which stayed faithful to the Lord were rearranged after Satan's rebellion, and just as individual angels were apparently shifted within these clans as well (especially in regard to those of the three rebel clans who refused to follow the lead of their natural affinities), so also will it be with the 12 tribes (cf. Revelation 3:4). In eternity, in addition to any individual rewards won, including our "new name" which will be perfectly reflective of who we are and what we achieved in time (Revelation 2:17; Revelation 3:12; Isaiah 65:15; cf. Isaiah 62:2 b), we shall all have a very definite rank and a very specific place in the eternal hierarchy of the New Jerusalem (for we are all individually "precious stones" to God: Zechariah 9:16; 1 Peter 2:5).

Although not generally understood (largely due to a failure to read the correct sequence of John's viewing of the gates, i.e., east-north-west-south), careful attention to the details provided in Revelation chapter twenty-one in comparison to the information about the gemstones and tribes as they appeared on the high priest's breastplate reveals that the order of the gemstone-foundations is identical to the order found on the breastplate. John's tour of the gates began on the east (the highest ranking side), and proceeded counter-clockwise to conclude on the south. His description of the gemstones now begins from that southern perspective. That is to say, John's enumeration of the gemstones does not begin with the southern-gate foundation stones because they rank first, but because this side of the city wall is where he now finds himself after his first "lap" around the city. Moreover, not only do the gemstone-foundations reflect the breastplate-order in terms of rank (once the ordering is properly understood: Ex.28:17-21; 39:10-14), but they are also identical to the encampment-order of the tribes around the tabernacle (Num.2:1-31; cf. Num.10:11-33).

The positioning of the tribes in their encampment-order is identical to the positioning of their respective gates in New Jerusalem. There is, however, a difference in ranking nonetheless. The west-gate tribes in their encampment-order have the same rank as they do on the high priest's breastplate: Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin (for Ephraim was the leader of this triad: Numbers 2:18-24); however, while the eastern and southern groups maintain their rank, in the case of the north and west-gate tribes we see the first and last of each triad swapping rank in the circular ranking system of New Jerusalem. That is because the encampment-order was designed to facilitate the commencement of the march, whereas the New Jerusalem order reflects status in an absolute way. The result is the relative promotion of Benjamin and Naphtali (from 9th to 7th and from 12th to 10th respectively), and the relative demotion of Ephraim and Dan (from 7th to 9th and from 10th to 12th respectively). The spiritual application that we do not all end up in the order wherein we begin the Christian race, whether outperforming our station or failing to live up to our advantages, should not be overlooked here. All six of the west and north-gate tribes remain in the same geographic position as was the case when tenting around the tabernacle, but the significance in terms of rank has changed in the cases mentioned on account of the change of system from march-order to one of consecutive ranking. In terms of that rank, the true order begins with Judah in the first position at the northernmost eastern gate and proceeds clockwise until we reach Dan in twelfth position at the easternmost northern gate. John's actual listing of the twelve is given in a counter-clockwise fashion, and begins in the middle of the order, and on the south at that (because that is the place where he starts his consideration of the foundations, and it

is in that direction in which he is given to view the city). John begins with the foundation stones of the southern gates (because that is where he commenced his second lap around the wall), and concludes on the west:

(S.) 6, 5, 4 — (E.) 3, 2, 1 — (N.) 12, 11, 10 — (W.) 9, 8, 7

Given the impressive nature of the gemstone-foundations and the gates, it is likely that both are correspondingly massive in size so as to harmonize with the "great, high wall" – which itself matches in magnitude the monumental New Jerusalem – with the gates of pearl reaching perhaps to half the wall's height or some such pleasing proportion. Since they are described as impressive and therefore highly visible features, the most likely layout of the foundation jewels is that, in the case of the middle gates, they occupy half of the distance on each side of wall before touching the corresponding foundations of the two exterior gates, and that the foundation stones of the exterior gates reach all the way to their respective corners of the wall. The wall itself will then appear above the layer of foundations and gates as a perfect band of uninterrupted, translucent jasper. The actual ranking (along with the reasons for it and the correct identification of the gemstones) proceeding in a clockwise direction and beginning with the position of honor is as follows:

East-side Tribes: The east side is the place of greatest honor, facing our Lord (cf. the orientation of the tabernacle and temple), and therefore the place of greatest fellowship with the Father and the Son (cf. Exodus 25:22; Exodus 29:42). Members of the three eastern tribes have all fulfilled the plan of God for their lives, not only believing in Him and His Son our Lord Jesus (as the Messiah either promised before the cross or revealed after the cross), but growing up in Him spiritually, passing the tests of spiritual maturity, and completing the ministries assigned to them by the Lord. This level of achievement is represented in the visible human-face of the cherub who guards the front of the throne. East-side tribal members have advanced to the point of reflecting the Person of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18; cf. 1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Peter 2:21), having become "complete" in their Christian walk and production of their assigned ministries (Ephesians 4:13; cf. James 1:4; James 2:22). While all three eastern tribes share the honor of having accomplished their God-given missions, they have done so to relative degrees, in the manner of "100/60/30 fold" respectively.

1. Judah: Sardius: Hebrew: **שָׂרְדִיּוֹן** /'odhem; Greek: sardion / σαρδιον (Genesis 49:8-12; Deuteronomy 33:7).

2. Issachar: Sardonyx: Hebrew: **סַרְדֹּנִיִּץ** / pitedhah; Greek: sardonyx / σαρδωνυξ (Genesis 49:14-15; Deuteronomy 33:18-19).

3. Zebulun: Emerald: Hebrew: **בִּרְזֵף** / bareqeth; Greek: smaragdos / σμαραγδος (Genesis 49:13; Deuteronomy 33:18-19).

South-side Tribes: The south side is the place of second greatest honor on our Lord's right-hand. Members of the three southern tribes have all made great progress in the plan of God for their lives, not only believing in Him and His Son our Lord Jesus (as the Messiah either promised before the cross or revealed after the cross), but growing up in Him spiritually, and passing the high-level tests of spiritual maturity. This level of achievement is represented in the visible lion-face of the cherub who guards the right-hand side of the throne. South-side tribal members have advanced to the point of honoring the Person of Christ (1 Corinthians 6:20; 2 Corinthians 8:23; Php 1:20; 1 Peter 1:7), having courageously acquitted themselves in the Christian life (Proverbs 28:1; cf. 1

Peter 5:8). While all three southern tribes share the honor of having trusted the Lord in significant testing, they have done so to relative degrees, in the manner of "100/60/30 fold" respectively.

1. Reuben: Carnelian: Hebrew: ■■■■ / nophekh; Greek: chalcedon / χαλκηδ■ν (Genesis 49:3-4; Deuteronomy 33:6).

2. Simeon: Sapphire: Hebrew: ■■■■ / sappir; Greek: sapphiros / σ■πφίρος (Genesis 49:5-7; cf. Deuteronomy 33:8-11).

3. Gad: Jasper: Hebrew: ■■■■ / yahalom; Greek: iaspis / ■ασπις (Genesis 49:19; Deuteronomy 33:20-21).

West-side Tribes: The west side is the place of third greatest honor in the special guardian position behind the throne. Members of the three western tribes have all made progress in the plan of God for their lives, not only believing in Him and His Son our Lord Jesus (as the Messiah either promised before the cross or revealed after the cross), but growing up in Him spiritually. This level of achievement is represented in the visible eagle-face of the cherub who guards the rear of the throne. West-side tribal members have advanced to the point of trusting the Person of Christ (Exodus 19:4; Isaiah 40:31; Colossians 1:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18; cf. Ephesians 4:15-16; Colossians 2:19), having grown to the point of spiritual maturity in the Christian life (Ephesians 4:13; Colossians 4:12; Hebrews 5:13; James 1:3-4). While all three western tribes share the honor of having advanced in the knowledge of the Lord, they have done so to relative degrees, in the manner of "100/60/30 fold" respectively.

1. Benjamin: Amethyst: Hebrew: ■■■■■■ / 'achalamah; Greek: amethystos / ■μ■θυστος (Genesis 49:27; Deuteronomy 33:12).

2. Manasseh: Jacinth: Hebrew: ■■■■ / leshem; Greek: hyacinthos / ■■κινθος (Genesis 49:22-26; Deuteronomy 33:13-17).

3. Ephraim: Chrysoprase: Hebrew: ■■■■ / shebho; Greek: chrysoprasos / χρυσ■πρασος (Genesis 49:22-26; Deuteronomy 33:13-17).

North-side Tribes: The north side is the final place of honor, to the left-hand side of the throne. Members of the three northern tribes have all responded to the plan of God for their lives, not only by believing in Him and His Son our Lord Jesus (as the Messiah either promised before the cross or revealed after the cross), but maintaining their faith safely intact until the end. This level of achievement is represented in the visible bullock-face of the cherub who guards the left-hand side of the throne. North-side tribal members have endured the trials of life while holding firmly to their faith in the Person of Christ (Isaiah 1:3; 1 Timothy 1:8-19; 1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 4:7; Hebrews 4:14), having refused to exchange that precious faith for a mess of pottage (Hebrews 10:35-39; Hebrews 12:16; 2 Peter 2:21-22). While all three northern tribes share the honor of having kept faith with the Lord, they have done so to relative degrees, in the manner of "100/60/30 fold" respectively.

1. Naphtali: Peridot: Hebrew: ■■■■ / yashepneh; Greek: topazion / τοπ■ζιον (Genesis 49:11; Deuteronomy 33:23).

2. Asher: Aquamarine-Beryl: Hebrew: ■■■■ / shoham; Greek: beryllos / βήρυλλος (Genesis 49:20; Deuteronomy 33:24-25).

3. Dan: Chrysolite: Hebrew: ■■■■■■ / tarshish; Greek: chrysolithos / χρυσόλιθος (Genesis 49:16-18; Deuteronomy 33:22).

It is important to note here that the exceptional achievements of some will not in any way disparage the lesser accomplishments of others. Regardless of the "regiment" into which we are eternally enrolled, just as each believer is a special living stone memorialized before the Lord (Zechariah 9:16; 1 Peter 2:5), so each tribe receives its own unique blessings (as can be seen from a comparison of the blessings of Jacob and Moses cited above). Moreover, each tribe is worthy of special, distinctive memorialization, as evidenced by the beautiful gemstone which is uniquely its own, and by its own individualized gate, each being associated with a specific, high-ranking angel and apostle-prince. Even the lowest-ranking person in the lowest-ranking tribe of Dan, that is, the believer who has earned the least possible reward of everyone in the entire Church, will still be blissfully happy for all eternity, possessing a full share of Jesus Christ, access to the tree of life, and an eternal lodging in the New Jerusalem. Thus even the absolute least in the eternal kingdom has "won the victory" (1 Corinthians 15:54-57; 1 John 5:4; Revelation 2:7; Revelation 2:11; Revelation 2:17; Revelation 2:26; Revelation 3:5; Revelation 3:12; Revelation 3:21), receiving as a result "glory and honor and immortality" with eternal peace and blessing (Romans 2:7-9), and will be inestimably better off than the least unrighteous unbeliever of all condemned to the Lake of Fire.

Martyrdom and Eternal Rewards: It will be noted from the above that the tribe of Levi is not assigned a gate in the New Jerusalem. Levi, of course, was selected from the other tribes for special ministry to the Lord. As such, Levi was not represented by a gemstone inscribed with its name on the high priest's breastplate. That did not mean, however, that Levi had no place or inheritance in Israel. Quite to the contrary, the members of that tribe had chosen the Lord over their own flesh and blood (Exodus 32:26-29). As a result, Levi's place was special (Deuteronomy 33:8-11), and the Lord Himself was their inheritance (Deuteronomy 10:9). The Levites were specially "set apart to the Lord" (Exodus 32:29), being uniquely blessed on account of their dedication to the Lord rather than somehow left out. We see evidence of something similar in the existence of special colleges of elect angels (e.g., the cherubs, the archangels, the four angels of the winds, etc.), namely, specific individuals who have been set apart entirely from the organization of angelic clans, no doubt for exemplary service. In this regard, therefore, we may posit that in addition to these twelve divisions of the Church, there also exists an elite cadre of individuals, analogous to and represented by the tribe of Levi, who have an especially close relationship to the Lord – in reward for their esteeming Him beyond all other things in this life (cf. Isaiah 66:21). The unnamed two who will sit at Jesus' right and left hands clearly belong to this category, and no doubt the apostles too, despite their princely leadership of the twelve divisions (analogous here to the archangels who likewise form a group apart). We may also expect the Old Testament prophets to be included in this elite group (inasmuch as the Church is built upon the foundation of "the apostles and the prophets": Ephesians 2:20). The key characteristic which will merit inclusion into this most august number, however, will be martyrdom (Revelation 20:4). The 144,000 definitely seem to be included (cf. Revelation 14:1-5), for example, and while some of the great prophets and apostles may not have been put to death for the Lord (and while some who die

of persecution may not be accorded the honor of inclusion into this exclusive group), martyrdom on the part of exceptional believers who have otherwise achieved the highest level of reward and right to membership in the highest ranking named tribe (i.e., Judah), would seem to be the most common basis for inclusion into the number of the unnamed tribe of Levi, specially set apart to the Lord for all eternity. At the very least, we may expect that all such believers will have come to the point of experiencing serious persecution for the Name of Jesus, not only believing, trusting, honoring, and reflecting the Person of Christ, but also of sharing His sufferings (1 Peter 4:13; cf. Romans 8:17; 2 Corinthians 1:5; Php 3:10; Colossians 1:24; cf. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

(19) For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision that comes from the Spirit of Jesus Christ, (20) in keeping with my expectation and hope that I will in no way be put to shame, but that now as ever, holding nothing back, Christ will be magnified by means of this body of mine, whether through my life, or through my death. (21) For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Php 1:19-21

While not specifically named, we may expect that the distribution of apostles and angels associated with the twelve gates and their tribes and gemstones is likewise based upon merit. Therefore it would be most unlikely if Paul were not the apostle of the Judah gate (with John and Peter filling out the east-side tribes). As to the angels, it is perhaps not unwarranted to speculate that the same angels who were associated with the seven eras of the Church are likely to be the individuals who continue in a mission of symbolic human-angelic liaison. To them we may add the unnamed head-angels charged with similar duties during each of the four millennial days preceding the Church, and the angel with this mission during the Tribulation (a special joint period between Israel and the Church, not covered under the seven angels' mandate).

Finally, as suggested above, it is entirely appropriate that the names of the twelve tribes should be given to the divisions of the eternal organization of the Church; we are all now one in Christ, made near through His blood with the middle wall of partition which divided us removed by His sacrifice (Deuteronomy 32:8; Micah 5:3; Romans 11:17-21; Galatians 6:15-16; Ephesians 2:11-12). Moreover, as we have noted in the past, based upon the information given by the Jewish ceremonial calendar the final composition of the family of God (Church and Friends of the Bride taken together) will likely be of original gentiles and original Jews in equal proportion (with Jews streaming to the Lord in disproportionate numbers during the Millennium).

7. The Interior of the City

(21b) And the city's [network of] main streets was pure gold as if [made of] diaphanous crystal. (22) And I did not see a temple in the [city], for the Lord God the Almighty is its temple, and [so is] the Lamb. (23) And the city has no need of the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God illuminated it and the Lamb was its lamp. (24) And the nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory into it. (25) And the gates of the city shall never be closed in the daytime. Indeed, there will be no night there [at all]. (26) And they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations (i.e., everything valuable and fine) into it. (27) And nothing profane and no doer of abominations or any liar will enter into [the city], only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. Revelation 21:21-27 The Streets: The Greek word *plateia*, usually translated "street" (ASV, ESV, KJV, NASB; the NIV has "great street"), is actually referring to the main road-network which connects all the aforementioned gates to the city's central hub, "the throne of God and of the

Lamb" (Revelation 22:1; Revelation 22:3). Obviously, for a city of over 2.5 million square miles in area, there is more than one, single street. And just as obviously, each of its twelve main gates must have a major artery entering and exiting through it (for, after all, it must be through these gates that "the kings of the earth bring their glory into [the city]": Revelation 21:24). Often, the Greek word in question is used of a city square, and we may imagine that each of the twelve major arteries in this network possess extreme width (in keeping with the vast size of the city and its gates). That is especially so when one considers that these streets will have the river of living water running down through their midst, with a veritable forest of trees, the tree of life, populating both banks in each case. These twelve massive streets must radiate out from the center of the city like spokes from a hub, intersecting the wall at their respective gates. While it is possible that the angles separating them are equal (i.e., 30 each), thus determining the positioning of the gates, it seems much more likely that the courses of these main avenues are determined by the need to intersect their corresponding gates (which are most likely spaced proportionally along the wall). As impressive as this network of boulevards will be, it is its composition which seems to have caught the apostle's attention. The grid is described in terms which are similar but not identical to those of the city. The crystalline gold of which the streets are composed is not merely translucent but "diaphanous". These words are synonyms in English, of course, but the latter word brings out the additional quality which the Greek adjective *diaphanos* (διαφανής) is meant to convey: not merely transparent but possessing an illuminative property which makes the golden avenues stand out perspicuously even in the midst of a city made of translucent gold. It is certainly appropriate for this network of radiating streets to figure prominently even in the midst of a city more beautiful than the mind of man could ever conceive. In this way, both the entrances into the city (which will likewise be exceptionally conspicuous as gigantic, white, shining pearls) and the avenues which lead through the gates to center of the city will symbolize what was most important in this life: they will lead to and point towards the One who is the Gate to eternal life (John 10:7-9; cf. Matthew 7:13-14), the One who is the only Way to the Father (John 14:6; cf. Matthew 7:13-14), our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. For the throne in the city's center will be the hub from which the twelve illuminated arteries radiate and whence they lead, towering above the city below (cf. Zechariah 8:3; Revelation 22:1), and shining forth with the glory of God Himself (Revelation 21:23; Revelation 22:5).

Lodgings: John's impression of the interior of the city as made of transparent gold (Revelation 21:18 b) is our only indication of the nature of the lodgings New Jerusalem contains. We have already seen that the city's major avenues will provide an abundance of open space. It also goes without saying that around the throne in the center of the city must be a very large open space to accommodate the assembly of the Lord's people in His presence as it was in the past (Job 1:6; Job 2:1), and as is presently the case (Revelation 5:11; Revelation 7:9). Also, we should not imagine that the rest of the city area is entirely "built out" anymore than would be the case with a contemporary polis. That is to say, the Greek word *polis* (found twelve times in Revelation 21:1-27, Revelation 22:1-21) may envisage an entire country, including all of its territory (and the size of New Jerusalem, after all, is nearly the size of the continental United States). We can say that the buildings must produce a profoundly moving impression to rate the general description John gives of the city proper. Do not let your heart be troubled. Believe in God, and believe also in Me. There are many rooms in my Father's house. If there were not, I would have told you. For I am going in order to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I shall come again and

take you to Myself, so that where I am, you may be also. John 14:1-3

Given the enormous size of New Jerusalem and Jesus' promise above, it is clear that every believer will have an eternal lodging in the golden city, and we may be sure that even for the least and the last that residence will be wonderful beyond description. The present heavenly Jerusalem is also the abode of angels (Hebrews 12:22), and we may expect that to be the case in New Jerusalem as well (cf. Genesis 3:24; Exodus 36:8; Psalms 36:7 [Hebrew]; Revelation 4:4-10; Revelation 5:11; Revelation 21:12). We cannot say whether or not our eternal dwellings are already presently in place in the heavenly Jerusalem, but as the final full-complement of the Church is apparently precisely equal to the number of fallen angels, the possibility exists that believers will occupy the former residences of Satan's followers, just as we have replaced them in the family of God (cf. Luke 11:22).

One possibility for the distribution of the twelve tribes may be the occupation of the area on both sides of its main avenue to a parallel which is equidistant from the neighboring avenue on either side. If such is the case, the geometric effect will be that the territories of the four tribes occupying the four central-gate regions will be significantly smaller than those of the eight tribes on either side of each of the four corners – that is, assuming, as certainly appears to be the case, that the gates of the city are spaced at equal distances around the wall (and such would certainly seem to be so from the description given in verses nineteen through twenty-one, with the foundations stones appearing to be identical in size, filling the intervals between the gates). For New Jerusalem is a square, not a circle, and therefore the angles at which the twelve major arteries will radiate outward in order to intersect with the gates so positioned will not be identical. The geometric result will be a noticeably smaller area for the tribes occupying the four central-gates regions. Certainly, this disparity might be offset in a number of ways (e.g., if the central square is positioned obliquely, with its four corners touching the east-west, north-south axes, then at some magnitude its expansion could theoretically render all twelve areas equal, though the unknown width of the avenues makes that point impossible to compute). However, it may also be the case that, as in all other things in the Christian life, extremes whether good or bad tend to be more frequent occurrences than the mean between the two. It may very well be that in all four classes of response to the plan and will of God, more believers have tended to cluster around minimal and maximal effort than to find a medium between the two. In terms of the particular location of our eternal dwelling within the tribe of our final allotment, it is clear that being closer to the Lord will be more desirable, and farther away less so. So it is also possible that the tribes will be distributed concentrically with the higher ranking ones closer to the throne (with Judah nearest to the central assembly area), and with the lower ranking tribes closer to the wall (with Dan directly next to it). We may expect that in each case the greater the reward earned in this life, the larger the habitation and the higher up the hill upon which the throne resides and the closer to the Lord it will be. But although a place near the wall is for these reasons the least desirable situation, it will still be infinitely better to be "a doorkeeper in the house of God" than to rate the most prestigious place "in the tents of the wicked" (Psalms 84:10). The Throne:

(2) Immediately I came to be in the Spirit, and, behold, a throne had been placed in the [third] heaven, and [some] One was sitting [upon it]. (3) And the One sitting [on the throne was] similar in appearance to a gemstone of jasper or sardius. And there was a rainbow (i.e., the glory of God) around the throne similar in appearance to [something] made of emerald. (4) And encircling the

throne were twenty-four [other] thrones. And on the[se] thrones twenty-four elders were sitting, dressed in white clothing. And on their heads were golden crowns. (5) And from the throne [of God] come forth flashes of lightning, voices and peals of thunder. And there [stood] burning before the throne seven lamps of fire, which are the seven spirits of God. (6) And in front of the throne [was something] like a sea of glass similar to crystal. And in the midst of the throne, encircling the throne, were four living-creatures, laden with eyes in front and in back. (7) And the first living-creature was similar to a lion. And the second living-creature was similar to a young bull. And the third living-creature had a face similar to a man's. And the fourth living-creature was similar to an eagle in flight. Revelation 4:2-7

Apart from the absence of the indications of judgment (i.e., flashes of lightning, voices and peals of thunder), and the absence of the crystal sea (unnecessary as a view-port to earth since the city has now come to earth), the mentions in the context of Revelation chapter twenty-one (Revelation 22:1; Revelation 22:3) suggest that the throne will be the same one upon which the Father and Son presently sit in state. There will be no temple building in New Jerusalem, however, as "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (Revelation 21:22; contrast with Revelation 7:15; Revelation 11:19; Revelation 14:15-17; Revelation 15:5-6; Revelation 16:1; Revelation 16:17). Situated at the precise center of the city and on elevated ground from which the river of the water of life flows forth, the glory of God in the Persons of the Father and the Son will illuminate the world with a brilliant rainbow of light more intense than seven suns (Isaiah 30:26), as the Shekinah glory can finally be unveiled without destroying the now perfected creatures privileged to gaze upon the Lord as He actually is (Exodus 33:18-23).

Outside the City: The gates of New Jerusalem will always be open (Revelation 21:25). For there will nevermore be any night (Revelation 21:25; Revelation 22:5), no time of insecurity and danger, nor will anything profane even be able to enter in, since all sinfulness has been burnt out of the New Heavens and the New Earth. The "kings of the nations" will "bring their glory" (i.e., everything valuable and fine produced in the perfect new universe) into the city (Revelation 21:24; Revelation 21:26), and the nations they represent will "walk by its light" (Revelation 21:24). Furthermore, the leaves of the tree(s) of life will benefit these nations outside the city wall (Revelation 22:2). From this compound description it is very clear that there will be a sizeable population living outside of the city wall. It is also clear that they, and in particular their leaders, will enter the city on a regular basis. Therefore this elect group must be carefully distinguished from those mentioned by John at Revelation 22:15 (i.e., "outside are the dogs", etc.). For those reprobates are being deliberately contrasted in that passage with this group which precedes it in verse fourteen, a whole host of people who have "the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city". The "dogs" are those who have been committed to the Lake of Fire, with "outside" referring to the "outer darkness" (Matthew 8:12; Matthew 22:13; Matthew 25:30); the key idea in both cases is one of complete separation from God (the Greek words are *exo* and *exoteros* respectively, the latter being the comparative form of the former). That is to say, "outside" refers not just to the New Jerusalem but to being "outside" the Lord's eternal state entirely (i.e., in the Lake of Fire). For only the names of believers will still be found "in the book of life" as the names of outside-believers are said to be (Revelation 21:27).

Awake, awake, O Zion, clothe yourself with strength. Put on your garments of splendor, O Jerusalem, the holy city. The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again. Isaiah 52:1 NIV

The population of the New Earth outside of New Jerusalem will be composed of the Friends of the Bride, that is, the contingent of millennial believers not resurrected and rewarded until history's end. In number, these will equal the Bride, so that together saved humanity will be equal in number to elect angelic-kind (Satan and his followers having been replaced one for one by the Church, with the millennial cohort furnishing Christ with His "double portion"). The Friends of the Bride will be composed of gentiles (whose kings are described in Revelation 21:24), but also of Jews in disproportionately large numbers (we have posited elsewhere that the proportion of three to one of gentiles to Jews in the Church will be exactly reversed during the Millennium). Directly outside of the city, therefore, we may expect to find the New Israel, in proportion to its capital city greatly expanded in its territory:

"Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring." Genesis 28:14 NIV The remainder of the greatly enlarged New Earth (and possibly also the rest of the New Heavens, for that matter), will be occupied and husbanded by the gentile Friends of the Bride. When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when He divided the sons of men, He established the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel. Deuteronomy 32:8 8. The River of the Water of Life and the Tree of Life

(1) And He showed me the river of the water of life, sparkling like crystal[s of ice], coming forth from the throne of God and of the Lamb. (2) In the middle of the [New Jerusalem's network of twelve main] streets and on both sides of [this] river [of the water of life which ran through them] was the tree of life, producing twelve crops, offering its fruit every month, month by month. And the leaves of the tree are for the enjoyment of [all] the nations, (3a) so that there will no longer be any division. Revelation 22:1-3 a

Just as the river proceeding from Eden (which watered the garden) and the river from the millennial temple (which will water the Arabah and western sea) are prominent elements of their respective paradises, so the river of the water of life will be a dominating feature of New Jerusalem. The same also applies in all three cases to the tree of life. For New Jerusalem, however, this prominence will be abundantly true not only from the tangible aspect of the blessings they will provide forever, but also for their important symbolism. The tree of life represents our Lord Jesus, and eating of its fruit symbolizes placing our faith in Him; the truth about Jesus is the spring of living water welling up to eternal life for all who drink thereof:

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. The one who comes to Me shall not hunger, and the one who believes in Me shall not thirst forever". John 6:35 And all of them (i.e., the Exodus generation) drank the same spiritual drink (i.e., divinely provided water symbolizing the truth in which one believes). For all of them drank from the spiritual[ly significant] Rock which followed them – for that Rock was Christ. 1 Corinthians 10:4 For those who put their faith in Jesus in this life, the water of life and the tree of life will provide spiritual sustenance and physical blessing beyond present understanding and for all eternity.

(7) [Lord,] how precious is your mercy! Both the mighty ones (i.e., angels) and the sons of men will take shelter under your wings. (8) They will drink their fill from the richness [that flows] from your house, for You will give them drink from your river of delights. (9) For with You is the fountain of life. Through your light [on that day] we shall see [true] light. Psalms 36:7-9 The River of the Water

of Life: Just as the river that watered the garden came forth from God's place of "delight", Eden, and just as the millennial river of water which enlivens the Dead Sea comes forth from the temple, so the eternal river of the water of life will come forth from the throne of God, demonstrating clearly the source of eternal life and source of everlasting blessing. Instead of the river of fire which had flowed forth from the throne for judgment (Daniel 7:10), this river emanates from the throne in its final resting place on earth as both a symbolic and tangible source of God's grace for His people.

Ho, everyone who thirsts, let him come to the waters! Isaiah 55:1 As discussed above, the "street" mentioned in Revelation 22:2 above is really the New Jerusalem's network of streets. Therefore the river of the water of life which comes forth from the throne of the Father and the Son does not descend from the eternal Mount Zion in one channel only, but in twelve, flowing down the middle of each of the twelve capacious boulevards, and exiting the city through each of the twelve gates to water the face of the eternal Israel and the New Earth (cf. Ezekiel 47:1-12 : while Ezekiel is given to see only the eastern stream issuing from the millennial temple, there are in fact two: Zechariah 14:8). The water itself, "sparkling like crystal[s of ice]", will be a delight to behold and will provide physical and spiritual blessings for all who partake of it. Since water is a biblical symbol for God's Word of truth (Isaiah 55:1-3; John 3:5; John 3:8 [Greek]; John 4:10; John 4:13-14; John 7:37-39; 1 Corinthians 10:4; Ephesians 5:26; Hebrews 10:22; 1 John 5:8 [of the Trinity]; Revelation 7:17; Revelation 21:6; Revelation 22:1; Revelation 22:17; cf. Exodus 17:5-6; Numbers 20:8; Psalms 42:1-2; Psalms 63:1; Psalms 84:5-7; Isaiah 41:17; Isaiah 44:3), it will perhaps be the case that the particular spiritual nourishment the water provides is precisely that, namely, truth about the Lord, all He is and all He has done. For Jesus is the true spring of living water (Isaiah 8:6; Jeremiah 2:13; Jeremiah 17:13; John 4:10-14; John 7:38; Revelation 7:17). It is thrilling to consider that these waters will never run dry, and that even were a person to drink from them without pause for all eternity, it would still not be possible to drain to the depths the source of truth about the God who made us, loved us, and saved us in Jesus Christ our dear Lord.

One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple. Psalms 27:4 NIV And the Spirit and the bride say "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost. Revelation 22:17 The Tree of Life: There are several important things to note about the tree of life which may not be immediately obvious from an English version. First, the word "tree" is used here in a collective sense. What we have to do with here is a veritable forest of trees. Second, this forest lines both sides of the river of living water along all twelve channels, over 20,000 miles of network, and on both sides of the river channels at that. We can also only guess at the width of the river or of breadth of the wooded area occupied on each side, but the proportions of the city and the likely extensive span of each of the twelve avenues argue for a not inconsiderable distance. Simply put, the tree of life will cover a good deal of territory in New Jerusalem. Third, the twelve crops are not produced sequentially, but simultaneously, regardless of the time of the year (that is the meaning of "every month, month by month"). Rather than being temporally separated, the fruit is geographically separated: the trees along each of the twelve branches of the river bring forth a different type of produce, one for each tribe (in a manner analogous to the twelve loaves of the bread of presence set out in the tabernacle to represent the twelve tribes of Israel: Leviticus 24:5-9). This diversity of location will encourage the visitation of residents of every tribe to all other

areas of the city, in order the better to enjoy and appreciate the whole of New Jerusalem.

(12) Walk about Zion, go around her, count her towers, (13) consider well her ramparts, view her citadels, that you may tell of them to the next generation. (14) For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end. Psalms 48:12-14 NIV When the people of the land come before the Lord at the appointed feasts, whoever enters by the north gate (of the temple) to worship is to go out the south gate; and whoever enters by the south gate is to go out the north gate. No one is to return through the gate by which he entered, but each is to go out the opposite gate. Ezekiel 46:9 NIV

There are three important aspects to the tree of life and its fruit, all of which are symbolized by the furniture in the tabernacle-temple; and all of these symbols are inextricably bound to the Person of the One who is the revealed member of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, the true tree of life (John 15:1-8; Romans 11:17-24). The golden lampstand symbolizes the appearance of the tree of life (Exodus 25:33-34); the bread of the presence on the golden table symbolizes its fruit (Leviticus 24:5-9); and the incense from the golden altar recalls its fragrance (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:15). For Jesus is the light of the world (John 8:12), the bread of life (John 6:35), and the sweet savor of salvation which expiates our sins (Ephesians 5:2; cf. Hebrews 7:27; Hebrews 9:14). The tree of life will thus be the source of palpable joy in its appearance, fragrance, and taste (cf. Genesis 2:9; Ezekiel 47:12). And in this last blessing in particular, the feature emphasized in our context with the reference to the twelve crops, the benefits and delights of partaking of the various fruits will be enormous, eternal manna from God, everlasting communion in the participation of the Body of Christ, a pleasurable experience that will surpass to infinity anything offered by this present, visible world.

We are also told that the foliage of the trees will likewise produce great benefits, though here again the English versions can be misleading. The Greek word *therapeia* (θεραπεία), the source of our "therapy", may indeed have a medicinal meaning, but not necessarily so. Its primary application has to do with care and oversight, a function which does not require some prior problem as in the case of illness (cf. Luke 12:42). Therefore "positive use" or "enjoyment" is a far preferable translation in this context where all tears have now been wiped away forever. This benefit of the tree of life will then be some sort of pleasurable activity apart from eating, and one of its prime applications will be the production of unity among all believers. For the occurrence of the word "curse" found in most of the versions in verse three of chapter twenty-two is based upon a misreading of the text (as we have seen, the "curse" of Genesis chapter three had already been removed at Christ's return: Romans 8:21; cf. Zechariah 14:11 NASB only). As Sinaiticus makes clear, the correct Greek text reads *katagma* (κατάγμα) "division", not *katathema* (καθήμα) "curse". In New Jerusalem there will be no further divisiveness between the tribes, now composed of Jews and gentiles both, nor between the Bride and the Friends of the Bride, nor, for that matter, between saved human beings and elect angels. The therapeutic foliage of the tree of life will provide a pleasurable means of fellowship and harmony between all believers forevermore (Psalms 47:9; Zechariah 2:11; John 10:16; John 11:52). In that blessed time to come, there will no longer be anything separating us from each other – and, most importantly, nothing separating us from God.

Happy are those who wash their robes so that they may have the right to [access] the tree of life, and [the right to pass through] the gates so that they may enter the city. Revelation 22:14 9. The

Blessed Eternal State of the Saved

(3b) And the throne of God and of the Lamb is within her (i.e., New Jerusalem), and His servants will worship Him, (4) and they will see His face, and His Name will be on their foreheads. (5) And there will no longer be any night nor will they have any need of the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will shine upon them, and they will reign forever and ever. Revelation 22:3-5

The Character of our Eternal Life: As to the precise construction of the New Earth and New Heavens and our activities therein, scripture gives us only a little information. That is decidedly a good thing, because if we knew in great detail how wonderful the eternity we anticipate will be, we might be tempted to think of nothing else. Such detailed knowledge also might remove some of the challenge to our spiritual growth. As it is, believers have to exert a certain amount of sanctified will-power to "think about the things above" (as we are commanded to do: Colossians 3:1-2).

We are given to know certain things, however, and it is possible to make some sanctified assumptions from the information we do have. For example:

We will inhabit an amazing, perfect body forever. We know some important things about our future resurrection body from the example of our Lord in resurrection, since "when He appears, we shall be like Him" (1 John 3:2).

We will enjoy the visual and sensual delights of the New Jerusalem, the city itself, the river of the water of life, the fruits of the tree of life and leaves of blessing, the beauty of the city, its walls, gates and foundations, the novelties produced and brought into the city, eternal fellowship with all our kindred believers in Jesus Christ, etc. All these will be eternal joys which will be all the more enjoyable because of the perfect body we shall command, being not only incapable of any ill-feeling, but also possessing a greatly expanded capacity to appreciate the wonders to come.

We will likely have the expanded and perfected new universe to explore forever. Since our Lord is capable of walking through closed doors, moving immediately from one far distant place to another, and ascending through the universe to the third heaven, it would seem to be rather incongruous not to give us His Church bodies capable of such swift, amazing travel, then restrict us to one particular place (viz., we shall be superior to angels, and they currently ply the heavens).

We will have direct access to the Son and the Father for all time, and that will be by far the "best of the best" of anything anyone could ever possibly have or experience. We only understand that now in principle, but on that glorious day of days we will "know even as we are known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). In a word, we cannot yet truly appreciate what is to come. We behold that future glory only dimly as a distant reflection (1 Corinthians 13:12), but we can take great encouragement from the contrasts scripture provides between the difficult life we now patiently endure and the blessed existence that awaits us on the other side of the veil.

Instead of death, only life (John 3:15-16).

Instead of sin, only righteousness (2 Peter 3:13).

Instead of tears, only joy (Psalms 16:11).

Instead of pain, only blessing (Revelation 22:2).

Instead of want, only plenty (Revelation 21:24).

Instead of trouble, only peace (Luke 20:34-36).

Instead of darkness, only light (Revelation 22:5).

Instead of separation from God, eternity in the presence of God (Revelation 22:4). That this last contrast encapsulates all that will be truly good and wonderful in New Jerusalem may be seen from the context of our passage, Revelation 22:3-5. For this passage summarizes our blessed eternal status by listing five salient characteristics of our glorious life to come, all five of which are focused not on us or our resurrection bodies but on the Lord:

1. Our Worship of God: "His servants will worship Him": The word often translated "serve" here is better rendered as "worship", for that is the substance of which our eternal service to the Lord will be composed. These acts of worship which we shall thoroughly enjoy, "with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng" (Psalms 42:4 NIV), will not consist of the shadows of the Law or hollow, invented liturgies which are really only "the teachings of men" (Isaiah 29:13; Colossians 2:22). Rather, they will be genuine and heart-felt acts of worship occurring in accordance with a perfect and specifically prescribed pattern. This perfect worship arranged, designed, and ordained by God Himself will thrill our hearts in an unimaginable way, and we will never have to wonder about when to come before Him, what to bring, what to do, or whether a particular hymn or rite or ceremony or expression is right or correct. Our worship, our service of adoration to the Lord will be perfect on that great day, and incapable of being otherwise, for we will be an eternal "kingdom of priests" (Revelation 1:6; 5:20; Revelation 20:6).

(23) But the hour is coming, and in fact has already arrived, when the true worshipers [of God] will worship the Father in spirit (i.e., spiritually: our spirit responding to His Spirit) and in truth (i.e., truthfully: our heart responding to His truth). Indeed, it is just such worshipers that the Father is seeking. (24) For God is spirit, and those who worship Him must do so spiritually (lit., in spirit) and truthfully (lit., in truth). John 4:23-24

2. Our Fellowship with God: "they will see His face": While at present, no one living has seen God (Exodus 33:20; John 6:46; 1 Timothy 6:16), on that great day we shall all see Him face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12); we shall all be with and enjoy the presence of dear Lord Jesus in Person (John 14:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:10). For the Bride and the Groom will be united as one forevermore (Psalms 45:9-11), never to part (Revelation 3:12; cf. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 1 Peter 2:5). For we shall be His people, and He will be our God (Genesis 7:17; Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 37:27).

3. Our Relationship with God: "His Name will be on their foreheads": The levitical priests wore a plate of pure gold on their turbans inscribed "Holy to the Lord" (Exodus 28:36). As a kingdom of priests, we too will have a special identification of our status as God's eternal possessions. For He will place His sacred Name on our foreheads that all who see may know that we belong to Him forever (Isaiah 43:7).

4. Our Capacity to Appreciate God: "the Lord God will shine upon them": The darkness of this present world which symbolized divine judgment has now given way to a universe of light in which darkness has ceased to exist. The presently unapproachable brilliance of the glory of God on that

day will be given to us to view in awe and reverence. Indeed, it will be the source of light, infinitely brighter than anything presently imaginable (cf. Isaiah 30:26), which will illuminate the entire New Heavens and New Earth. In resurrection, we will not only have the ability to look upon the Shekinah glory without being immediately destroyed, but will also be able to appreciate the wonder of it. One in Jesus, the Light of this present world (John 8:12), we will no longer have any need of lamps or the sun or any other indirect source: from the eternal Mount Zion, the "Place-of-Light", the glory of God will suffuse the entire universe. Nor will there ever be another night, nor any need for us to sleep: there will be no need to miss a moment of eternity, and we shall have the capacity to appreciate and enjoy this and every other eternal blessing to the full.

5. Our Sharing of God's Reign: "they will reign forever and ever": Under the Genesis curse, hard work is required to survive in this present world. But mankind was never created to be idle. Even in the garden, Adam was given a desirable and enjoyable occupation, "to work [the garden] and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15), and Eve was designed as a "helper compatible with him" (Genesis 2:18). Therefore if the blessings already alluded to do not seem sufficient to pass eternity, we may be sure that we will not find ourselves without delightful and pleasurable tasks to perform, work that is in no way burdensome, but instead perfectly complements who we each are. Beyond all question, the most wonderful such occupation to contemplate is that of sharing in the rulership of the universe with our Lord, a blessing of which our context makes clear even the lowest gatekeeper of New Jerusalem will partake. While the devil and those who chose his side had as their ultimate objective the wresting of universal rulership from God, we who have humbly chosen to follow and serve Jesus in this life will find Him and His Father generously sharing their eternal rule with us forever.

Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him. Daniel 7:27 NIV But of all these things, our greatest source of joy and surprise, engagement and wonder will be the Person of God Himself in the face of our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We who have trusted God to bring us through the tough times of this life can certainly trust Him that, after the testing and trials of this life are past, He will provide us with only the brightest and the best, things beyond comprehension, "eternal delights at Thy right hand forevermore" (Psalms 16:11). For Jesus has been our fortress and our refuge in this life, our Shepherd and our Friend. Jesus is our true home, and He will be so forever. Amen. Do not let your heart be troubled. Believe in God, and believe also in Me. There are many rooms in my Father's house. If there were not, I would have told you. For I am going in order to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I shall come again and take you to Myself, so that where I am, you may be also. John 14:1-3

Footnotes:

1. While merely hypothetical since scripture does not mention it, the explosion of Krakatoa in 1883 at the beginning of the Laodicean era is perhaps not merely coincidental in this regard, the era of Laodicea commencing in ca. 1882.

2. The sentence included in some versions, "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished" (e.g., KJV), is a later, non-scriptural addition, and is not a part of the actual biblical text.

3. This principle of interpretation is covered in detail in *The Satanic Rebellion Part 2: The Genesis Gap*, section II.3, "The Sea".
4. See "Hades", in section II.6.d of *The Satanic Rebellion Part 1: Satan's Rebellion and Fall from Grace*.
5. See "The Abyss", in section IV of *The Satanic Rebellion Part 5: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement*.
6. See "Paradise", in section II.6.d of *The Satanic Rebellion Part 1: Satan's Rebellion and Fall from Grace*.
7. See *The Satanic Rebellion Part 2: The Genesis Gap*, section II.3, "The Sea".

02.00 - Theology: the Study of God

Theology: the Study of God by Dr. Robert D. Luginbill We start with God, from whom are all things. For all things are from Him and through Him and for Him. Romans 11:36

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord who is God, "He who is and was and is coming, the Almighty." Revelation 1:8 Website: <http://ichthys.com/1Theo.htm>

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02.01 - The Essence of God: Nature and Characteristics

I. The Essence of God To speak of the essence of God is to speak about who God really is. By essence we mean "being". The word essence is derived from the Latin verb "to be" and is in turn a translation of the Greek word ousia, which also means "being". More than having being or existence, God is being. He makes this clear to all when He proclaims His name Jehovah (or Jahweh) to Moses and explains its meaning:(1)

Then God said to Moses, "I shall be who I am. This is what you will tell the sons of Israel: 'I am sent me to you.'" And God also said to Moses, "Thus you will say to the sons of Israel: 'the Lord [the "is"], the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob sent me to you.' This is My Name forever, and this is how you are to think about me for all generations."

Exodus 3:14-15. The being or essence of God is intrinsically sublime and resplendent. This inherent brilliance is often referred to in scripture as light and glory. Light emphasizes the splendor of who He is as unapproachable and immaculate (James 1:17; cf. Daniel 2:22):

[God] who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen, nor can see.

1 Timothy 6:16 a God is light, and in Him there is no darkness.

1 John 1:5 b

Glory emphasizes the splendor of who He is shining visibly forth to mankind (Exodus 33:18-23; 1 Kings 8:11; Luke 2:9; Acts 7:55; Romans 3:23; 2 Peter 1:17; Revelation 21:23), most prominently displayed through the glorious revelation of His Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Matthew 24:30; John 1:14):

God, from antiquity having communicated to our fathers in the prophets at many times and in many ways, has in these last days communicated to us in a Son, [the One] whom He has appointed heir of all things, [the One] through whom He created the universe. He is the shining forth of [the Father's] glory, the precise image of His essence, the One who sustains the universe by His mighty Word . . .

Hebrews 1:1-3 a As described in His Word, the Bible, His being is best considered in terms of His nature (i. e. the composition of His essence) and His character (i. e. the traits of His essence). God is infinite in nature and perfect in character.(2)

02.01.01 - Infinity

A. Infinity: God is infinite in His nature, unlimited and unbounded in every positive way:

Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord is one.

Deuteronomy 6:4. When firmly grasped, God's infinity – infinity in every way and according to any conceivable true standard – is a clarifying concept, illuminating His abilities. God's infinite nature will always be more than the highest, the best and the purest that the human mind can comprehend.

1. God is Spiritual:(3) God is spirit, and those who worship Him must do so in [His] Spirit and in [His] truth.

John 4:24.

God's being transcends the physical universe. He is not limited or bounded by material issues or concerns. God is not subject to matter in any way. God is not made of matter – God created matter and employs it however He desires (Genesis 1:1; Genesis 14:19 & Genesis 14:22; Deuteronomy 10:14; Job 38:4-11; Psalms 102:25; Isaiah 45:18; John 1:3; Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:3).

2. God is Eternal:

Before the mountains were born, or you gave birth to the earth and world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.

Psalms 90:2.

God's being transcends time. He is not limited or bounded by temporal issues or concerns. God is not subject to time in any way. God is not constrained by time – God created time and employs it however He desires (Psalms 90:4; Psalms 93:2; Psalms 102:24-27; Micah 5:2; John 8:58; John 17:5; Hebrews 13:8; Revelation 4:8-11).

3. God is Immeasurable: Shall God really dwell on earth? Behold, the heavens – even the entire universe – cannot contain You! How much less this temple I have built.

1 Kings 8:27.

God's being transcends space. He is not limited or bounded by spatial issues or concerns. God is not subject to space in any way. God is not confined by space – God created space and employs it however He desires (2 Chronicles 2:5-6; Job 11:7-9; Job 36:26; Job 37:23; Psalms 86:10; Jeremiah 23:24; John 6:21; Acts 17:24; Ephesians 1:23 b).

4. God is Unique:

"With whom will you compare Me that I should be equal [to him]?" says the Holy One.

Isaiah 40:25.

Uniqueness comes from God's infinite nature. No one else in the universe can reasonably be compared to Him. He is absolutely unique within His own creation, and therefore the one Person to whom all honor is due. Uniqueness thus speaks to God's natural authority and ability to order the universe however He chooses. From the standpoint of His transcendence of the physical universe, He is unique by virtue of His spirituality, eternity and immeasurability. From the standpoint of His supremacy within the physical universe, He is unique by virtue of His omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence (Deuteronomy 4:39; Deuteronomy 6:4; Deuteronomy 32:39; Isaiah 43:10-11; Isaiah 45:5-6, Isaiah 45:14, Isaiah 45:21-22; James 2:19). Only God is able to create morally accountable creatures and a world in which they may exercise their free-will.

5. God is Omnipotent:

Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Does any miracle lie beyond my power?

Jeremiah 32:27.

God is all-powerful, irrespective of matter. He can effect anything He desires in the material realm, and nothing can transpire apart from His will. Therefore there is no deed, nor was there ever, nor will there ever be which God is unable to do, small or great. As the Almighty One (Revelation 1:8; Revelation 4:8), His ability to accomplish any event he desires within His creation now and forever is comprehensive and absolute (Genesis 18:14; Job 5:9; Job 26:6-14; Job 38:4-38; Job 42:2; Psalms 8:1-9; Psalms 62:11 [in Hebrew: see KJV]; Proverbs 21:30; Isaiah 40:26; Jeremiah 27:5; Luke 1:37; John 1:3; Romans 1:20; Ephesians 1:19; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3).

6. God is Omniscient:

I am God – there exists no other One;

[I am] God – and nothing like Me exists.

Since the [very] beginning, I have been making known the end;

Since [eternity] past, things that have not yet been done.

Isaiah 46:9-10.

God is all-knowing, irrespective of time. He can effect anything He desires in the temporal realm. Therefore God knows, always has known and always will know everything, the end from the beginning. As the Everlasting One (Psalms 90:2 & Psalms 90:4), His knowledge of every event that ever has or will or even could occur within His creation is comprehensive and absolute (1 Samuel 2:3; Psalms 139:1-4 & Psalms 139:12; Psalms 147:5; Isaiah 42:9; Matthew 10:29-30; Matthew 11:21; John 1:1-2; 1 Corinthians 2:7-10; Hebrews 4:13; 1 John 3:20).

7. God is Omnipresent: Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from before you?

If I should ascend to heaven, you are there.

If I should make my bed in Sheol, there you are.

If I should wing my way to where the sun rises in the east, or take up residence beyond the furthest reaches of the western sea, Even there you would lead me by the hand, you would hold me fast with your [strong] right hand.

Psalms 139:7-10.

God is ever-present, irrespective of space. He can effect anything He desires in the spatial realm (Job 26:7). Therefore God has the ability, has always had and always will have, to be anywhere and everywhere, local and universal. As the Ever-Present One (Acts 17:27-28), His ability to be present at any or every point within His creation whenever He desires is comprehensive and absolute (Job 22:12; Isaiah 66:1-2; Jeremiah 23:23-24; Proverbs 15:3).

02.01.02 - Perfection

B. Perfection: God is perfect in His character, irreproachable and blameless in every possible way. So be perfect, as your Father in Heaven is perfect.

Matthew 5:48. When firmly grasped, God's perfection – perfection in every way and according to any conceivable true standard – is a clarifying concept, illuminating His motives. God's perfect character will never be less than the highest, the best and the purest that the human mind can comprehend.

1. God is Good (Exodus 18:9 KJV; Exodus 33:19; 2 Chronicles 6:41; Psalms 23:6; Psalms 25:8; Psalms 27:13; Psalms 31:19; Psalms 33:5 KJV; Psalms 119:68; Psalms 145:7 a; Matthew 19:17; Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19; Romans 2:4; Romans 11:22; Titus 3:4-5 KJV): The Lord is good to everyone, His kindness extends to everything He has made.

Psalms 145:9.

God's character is good (Hebrew tobh: תוֹב); it is the antithesis of evil. So how does goodness respond to sinful man? In His goodness, God always has our best interests at heart. Therefore His desire for us to be free from evil and devoted to good is genuine. Even though we are sinful and by nature unworthy of His blessing, in His goodness God has nevertheless found a gracious way to redeem us from sin without compromising His character, namely, by giving us the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ.

2. God is Holy (Exodus 3:5; Leviticus 11:44-45; Leviticus 21:8; Psalms 22:3; Psalms 30:4; Psalms 99:9; Isaiah 6:3; Isaiah 43:15; Isaiah 55:5-9; Isaiah 57:15; Acts 3:14; Revelation 4:8): But just as He who has called you is holy, you too should be entirely holy in your behavior. For the scripture says: Be holy, for I am holy.

1 Peter 1:15-16.

God's character is holy (Hebrew qadhosh: קָדוֹשׁ); it is completely separate from evil. So how does holiness respond to sinful man? In His holiness, God can never compromise His perfect standards for any reason. Therefore His commitment to condemning evil and rewarding good is inviolable. But even though we are sinful and by nature deserving of His judgment, in His holiness God has nevertheless found a merciful way to justify us in spite of our sin without violating His character, namely, by judging His Son, Jesus Christ in our place.

3. God is Faithful and True (Deuteronomy 32:4; Joshua 21:45; 2 Samuel 7:28; 1 Kings 8:56; Psalms 33:4; Psalms 36:5; Psalms 89:1, Psalms 89:33-34; Psalms 111:7-8; Psalms 119:89-90 & Psalms 119:160; Psalms 143:1; Psalms 146:6; Isaiah 11:5 b; Matthew 24:35; John 1:14; John 7:28; John 14:6; John 17:3; Romans 3:3-4; 1 Corinthians 1:9; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Corinthians 1:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; 2 Timothy 2:13 & 2 Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 6:18; Hebrews 10:23; Hebrews 11:11; Hebrews 13:5-6; 1 Peter 4:19; Revelation 3:7 & Revelation 3:14; Revelation 15:3; Revelation 16:7):

O Lord, thou art my God.

I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name.

For thou hast done wonderful things.

Thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.

Isaiah 25:1 KJV

God's character is faithful and true (Hebrew: 'omen, 'emeth: אֱמֶת, אֱמוּנָה); it is actively opposed to evil. So how do truth and faithfulness respond to sinful man? In His faithfulness and truth, God is entirely reliable and trustworthy in all that He promises to us and does for us. Therefore His veracity and dependability in offering us a way through Jesus Christ to escape the evil of death and embrace the good of eternal life are beyond reproach. So even though we are sinful and by nature objects of His wrath, in His faithfulness and truth God has nevertheless found a way to make peace between Himself and us and to remove the enmity between Himself and us, caused by our sins, without corrupting His character, namely, by reconciling us to Himself through the death of His Son, Jesus Christ.

4. God is Sovereign (Job 25:2; Psalms 93:1-2; Isaiah 40:21-23; Isaiah 45:21-24; Isaiah 46:10-11; Isaiah 64:8; Jeremiah 10:10; Jeremiah 18:5-10; Dan. 3:34-36; Daniel 7:13-14; Matthew 28:18; Romans 9:20-21; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Ephesians 1:20-21; Php 2:9-10; 1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 4:11): But the Lord shall be seated as king forever: He sets up His throne for judgment, to judge the world in righteousness, to render justice to its peoples.

Psalms 9:7-8.

Sovereignty comes from God's perfect character. No one else has a legitimate right to rule over the universe. He is the absolute sovereign within His own creation, and therefore the one Person to whom all honor is due. Sovereignty thus speaks to God's moral authority and right to order the universe however He chooses. From the standpoint of His transcendence of the moral universe, He is sovereign by virtue of His goodness, holiness and truth (essential qualities independent of His creation). From the standpoint of His supremacy within the moral universe, He is sovereign by virtue of His love, righteousness and life (qualities applying to His creation which correspond to goodness, holiness and truth). Only God is qualified to be the ultimate judge of the morally accountable creatures He has created, and thus to hold them responsible for their actions.(4) As de facto ruler of the universe (through His perfect nature) and de jure ruler of the universe (through His perfect character), God possesses the sovereign authority

1) to demonstrate love to His sinful creatures out of His own goodness – not ignoring their sins, as evil suggests He should, but paying for them Himself by the death on the cross of His Son, Jesus Christ, in their place (redemption). We call the result of this act of His sovereignty grace (Hebrew chen: חֵן; Greek charis: χάρις).

2) to administer justice to His sinful creatures out of His holiness – not abandoning them to their sins, as evil suggests He must, but forgiving them Himself on the basis of the death on the cross of His Son, Jesus Christ, in their place (justification). We call the result of this act of His sovereignty mercy (Hebrew chesed: חֶסֶד; Greek eleos: ἔλεος).

3) to give life to His sinful creatures out of His truth and faithfulness – not allowing them to die in their sins, as evil suggests He will, but reconciling them to Himself through the death on the cross of His Son, Jesus Christ, in their place (reconciliation). We call the result of this act of His sovereignty peace (Hebrew shalom: שָׁלוֹם; Greek eirene: εἰρήνη).

5. God is Love (Deuteronomy 10:14-15; Isaiah 63:9; Jeremiah 31:3; John 3:16; John 15:13; Romans 5:6-8; Romans 8:38-39; Ephesians 2:5-9; Ephesians 3:19; Titus 3:4-7; 1 John 3:16; 1 John 4:10, 1 John 4:16-19).

Whoever does not have love, does not know God, for God is love.

1 John 4:8.

Having love for His creatures, is a natural consequence of God's goodness. Out of the intrinsic goodness of His character, God loves us with a perfect love, desiring to help us in our sinful state. However, He does not overlook His holiness and justice in the process and forgive our sin without consequence (as evil suggests He should). Therefore God had to find a way to reach out to us in love without compromising His character, and did so through the gift and sacrifice of His only Son on our behalf. Grace is the biblical name for God's policy of lovingly redeeming us from our sins through Jesus Christ. We accept and receive God's gracious offer of love and redemption by accepting and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as our savior.

6. God is Just (Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalms 7:9; Psalms 11:7; Psalms 33:5; Psalms 45:7; Psalms 89:14; Psalms 111:7-8; Psalms 119:142; Psalms 145:7 b; Isaiah 30:18; Isaiah 42:1-4; Isaiah 61:8; John 7:18 [not NIV]; Romans 3:4, Romans 3:21-24; Romans 8:1-4; Romans 11:22; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:23-24; Revelation 16:5).

Demanding justice for His creatures is a natural consequence of God's holiness. Out of the intrinsic holiness of His character, God must deal with us in perfect justice, righteously condemning us in our sinful state. However, He does not overlook His goodness and love in the process and abandon us to our sins (as evil suggests He will). For God found a way to treat us as righteous without compromising His character, and did so through the gift and sacrifice of His only Son on our behalf. Mercy is the biblical name for God's policy of justly forgiving us on the basis of the death of Jesus Christ. We accept and receive God's merciful offer of justification by accepting and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as our savior.

7. God is Life (Deuteronomy 30:20 b; 1 Samuel 2:6; Job 10:12; Job 33:4; Psalms 16:8-11; Psalms 36:9; Jeremiah 10:10; John 1:4; John 3:16; John 5:26; John 6:57; John 11:25; John 17:3; Acts 3:15; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 1 John 1:1-2; 1 John 5:20 b; Revelation 1:18) I am the way: the truth and the life.

John 14:6.

Saving the lives of His creatures, is a natural consequence of God's truth and faithfulness. Out of the intrinsic veracity and trustworthiness of His character, God honors His gracious and merciful promise to restore us to Himself and thereby to eternal life, delivering us from the condemnation of death accruing to us in our sinful state. In doing so, however, He has not failed to resolve the competing demands of His goodness and love on the one hand, with those of His holiness and justice on the other (as evil suggests He must). For God has found a way in accordance with His

character to eliminate the wall of sin and consequent wrath which separates us from Him, and has done so through the gift and sacrifice of His only Son on our behalf (He died that we might have life). Peace is the biblical name for God's life-giving policy of reconciling us to Himself on the basis of the work of Jesus Christ. We accept and receive God's offer of life, peace and reconciliation by accepting and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as our savior.

Summary:

God's goodness overflows with love, providing grace for sinful Man:

though evil says a loving God can't condemn,

He did condemn His Son that we might live,

redeeming us in love with the blood of Christ.

God's holiness overflows in justice, offering mercy to sinful Man:

though evil says a just God can't forgive,

He did forgive us, by condemning His own Son,

making us righteous through the blood of Christ.

God's faithfulness and truth overflow in life, producing peace with God for sinful Man:

though evil says that a God of integrity can't restore us,

He did make peace between us through His Son,

reconciling us to Himself and granting us eternal life on the basis of the blood of Christ.

Overall Summary of the Essence of God

02.02 - The Persons of God: the Trinity

II. The Persons of God: The Trinity

02.02.01 - Definition of the Trinity: One in Essence; Three in Person

A. Definition of the Trinity: God is One in Essence, Three in Person Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord, God, the Almighty He who was, and He who is, and He who is coming.

Revelation 4:8. No specific term for the triune nature of God occurs in the Bible. The inspired writers of the New Testament clearly felt that the existence of one God in three distinct persons, the doctrine which we now call "the Trinity", was a relatively straight-forward concept and accessible enough (even with a cursory reading of the scripture) from passages such as the one quoted above.⁽⁵⁾ The Apostolic Fathers, the generation that followed the men who actually penned the New Testament, also felt that merely quoting scriptures was an entirely adequate way of discussing the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Not until the late second and early third centuries did the term "Trinity" itself come into general use as a way of defending (against a variety of heresies which sought to deny various aspects of the unique triune nature of God) what earlier generations of Christians had taken completely for granted based upon their common-sense approach to reading the Bible: that God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit are all God, and that at the same time they are – in what we may call a "personal" way – also distinct from each other. God is one. God is also three. And there is no contradiction between these statements. The simplest, best, and most traditional definition of the Trinity is that God is one in essence, and three in person. To put the doctrine in complete terms, the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God; yet at the same time the Father is not the Son or the Holy Spirit, the Son is not the Father or the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father or the Son.

We can better understand what the Trinity is by first considering what it is not in terms of the definition given above (i. e., "one in essence; three in person"):

1. God is one in essence, but that does not mean that only one person of the Trinity is deity: God is three in person, and all three persons of the Trinity (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit) are divine. Heresies of the past which have challenged the divinity of members of the Trinity include adoptionism (asserting that Christ is the Son of God only in the sense of adoption), the Ebionite heresy (teaching that Christ had only a human nature empowered by God's Spirit), and Unitarianism (which asserts the uni-personality of God, denying the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit). But the Bible teaches that all three members of the Trinity are deity (Isaiah 63:9-14; Matthew 3:16-17; Matthew 28:19; John 14:16-17; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:13; Ephesians 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:1-2; Revelation 1:4-6): a) the Father is God (Matthew 6:9; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 3:14-15):

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

Revelation 1:8. b) the Son is God (John 5:18; John 10:30 & John 10:33; Romans 9:5; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:3): The Word existed in the beginning: the Word was

both present with the [Father] God [before creation] and the Word was God [in His own right]. This same One was present with the [Father] God in the beginning.(6)

John 1:1-2. c) the Holy Spirit is God (Genesis 1:2; Psalms 139:7; Acts 5:3-4; 1 Corinthians 12:11; and compare Hebrews 3:7-11 with Psalms 95:7-11 where the LORD is speaking):

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Lord's Spirit is, there is freedom.

2 Corinthians 3:17.

2. God is one in essence, but that does not mean that the Trinity is only one person (merely displaying three modes or aspects of Himself): God is three in person, and all three members of the Trinity (the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit) are distinct persons rather than manifestations of a single, multifaceted person. Heresies of the past which have challenged the distinct personalities of members of the Trinity include modalism (the idea that Christ and the Spirit are mere "modes" of the Father's personality), and docetism (the notion that Christ only seemed real and was in reality merely a phantom of sorts representing the Father's plan). But the Bible teaches that all three members of the Trinity are distinct persons: a) the Father is a unique person in His own right (for He is distinct from the Son):

I was looking during my vision of that night, and behold – with the clouds of heaven one like a Son of Man was coming up, and He approached the Ancient of Days [i. e, the Father] and they brought Him before Him.

Daniel 7:13. b) the Son is a unique person in His own right (for He is distinct from the Father):

Behold, I have arrived – in the scroll of Your book it is written about Me – to do Your will, O My God.

Hebrews 10:7 (Psalms 40:7-8) c) the Holy Spirit is a unique person in His own right (for He acts as a distinct person): And the Spirit helps us in our weakness in a similar way. For we do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us also with anguished supplications which words cannot express.

Romans 8:26.

3. God is three in person, but that does not mean that there is any inferiority or disparity of status, activity or substance between the members of the Trinity (as would inevitably be the case in any human association): God is one in essence and all three members of the Trinity (the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit) are coequal, coeternal and con-substantial partners in one and the same essence. Heresies of the past which have challenged the coequality of members of the Trinity include subordinationism (which alternatively asserts that either Christ or the Spirit are by nature inferior to the Father) and Arianism (which teaches a Christ not entirely equal in divinity to the Father). But the Bible teaches that all three members of the Trinity are coequal partakers of the same essence: a) they all possess a full and equal share of the status of deity (as seen from the equal rank accorded to each in the formula for profession of faith at baptism):

Then Jesus came over and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, so go and make all nations my followers by baptizing them in the name of the Father and of

the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you.

Matthew 28:19-20 a b) they all possess a full and equal share of the eternal function of deity (as seen from their joint participation in creation):

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our pattern.

Genesis 1:26. c) they all possess a full and equal share of the substance of deity (as seen from the attribution of goodness to all three members in the apostolic benediction of 2 Corinthians, where grace, the policy of the goodness of God, love, the natural consequence [or emanation] of the goodness of God, and fellowship, the ultimate result of the goodness of God are attributed to the Son, Father and Holy Spirit respectively): May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of (the [Father]) God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

2 Corinthians 13:14.

4. God is three in person, but that does not mean that the Trinity is composed of three (or more) different "gods": God is one in essence, and all three members of the Trinity (the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit) are the sole, joint partakers of that same essence rather than three similar beings of similar essence. All so-called Christian sects which elevate saints and angels to the status of divinity essentially belong to this heretical category (after the manner of pagan pantheons, which also possess numerous "deities" of lesser and greater rank). But the Bible teaches that all three members of the Trinity alone share the same unique essence: a) the Father is revealed to be uniquely God:

You were shown these things so as to know that the Lord, He is God, and there is no other besides Him.

Deuteronomy 4:35. b) the Son and the Father are revealed to be uniquely God:

I and the Father are one.(7)

John 10:30. c) the Holy Spirit and the Son and the Father are revealed to be uniquely God:

I will ask the Father, and He will give you another comforter to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive, for it neither sees Him, nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He abides with you, and will be in you.

John 14:16-17.

02.02.02 - The Trinity in the Bible

B. The Trinity in the Bible

1. Introduction: The definition of the Trinity which best does justice to the biblical statements on the subject is the one given above, namely, that God is one in essence and three in person. We get an even clearer picture of what the Bible has to say about the Trinity when we combine this traditional definition with the four corollaries discussed and documented immediately above: a) All three members of the Trinity are divine persons. b) All three members of the Trinity are unique persons. c) All three members of the Trinity have coequal and coeternal essence. d) All three members of the Trinity share the same divine essence. As can be seen from the numerous heresies (discussed above) that have sprung up to challenge orthodox statements about the Trinity, the doctrine can be a difficult one to state in a proper, biblical way. This is especially true the further any definition of the Trinity moves away from actual statements contained in the Bible (which, as we mentioned above, were felt to be sufficient by the Apostles and Apostolic Fathers). It should be noted here that even the terms "essence" and "person" were felt by some theologians of the early church to be controversial. We may talk of Man's essence (we are all cut from the same spiritual cloth), and Man's personality (we are all unique individuals), but the essence of God is different from the essence of Man (for one thing, all members of the Trinity share the same divine essence), and the idea of personality in the Trinity is different from that of human persons (to take but one example, the absolute unity of agreement and purpose of the Trinity throughout all eternity is not only quantitatively but also qualitatively beyond human experience). The lesson here is that rationalistic speculation, always dangerous when expounding the Bible, is even more to be avoided in the case of the Trinity, a doctrine that was only fully revealed with the arrival of the New Testament. What God has chosen to reveal about this doctrine, He has revealed carefully and gradually. The subject of the Trinity in the Old Testament is covered below (C.), but it may be said here that a large part of the reason for this guarded revelation of the doctrine (beyond our human limitations in comprehending it) may be the all too obvious fact (see the discussion above) that wrong ideas about the nature of the Trinity have historically posed such a dire threat to the entire basis of our Christian faith. Just a little leaven in the loaf and Satan can make the Trinity to be an association of "gods" (and so no different from paganism) or one "god" with three hats (thus completely eliminated the importance and efficacy of Christ's incarnation and sacrifice). In His loving wisdom, God has told us what we most need to know without giving us either information that could be misinterpreted, or less than accurate illustrations that might do more harm than good.

2. Illustrating the Trinity: As we have just stated, attempting to illustrate such a carefully protected doctrine as the Trinity has the potential of doing more harm than good. The fundamental problem with illustrations of the type considered below is that they all necessarily contain potentially dangerous and untrue points of comparison, which, if too much stress be placed upon them, run the real risk of leading to heretical conclusions, a danger that far outweighs any good they may do in attempting to shed some light on the subject. The number one objection to such illustrations is that God is divine, and since nothing and no one else is, any illustration will needs be imperfect

and inaccurate (a fact which may well explain why no such illustrations occur in the Bible: Isaiah 40:18). And there is more. Historically, Satan's attacks on the doctrine of the Trinity – a teaching crucial to the integrity of our Christian faith – have focused on the three-fold sovereign personality of God and/or His deity in three persons. But this reality of divine, triune personality is precisely the point that all illustrations of the Trinity miss (of necessity, since there is nothing "like" the Trinity). a) An illustration from the early church: the Trinity "triangle": This oldest of the Trinity illustrations is also in many ways the best, because the non-doctrinal point of comparison (i. e., the triangle) merely serves to organize visually the meaning imparted by the words: all three members of the Trinity are God ("one in essence"), yet they are distinct from each other ("three in person"):

b) The illustration of the family of Man: Like the Trinity, mankind has multiple members, all possessed of similar, spiritual essences. But the Trinity share a unique, divine essence, and their triune unanimity of purpose is unlike anything in the realm of humanity. c) The illustration of the human mind: Like the Trinity, the mind can be said to be at once one thing, yet at the same time several things (intellect, emotion, conscience etc.) and can dialogue with itself, and even be at cross-purposes with itself. But the Trinity is composed of distinct, divine personalities to which the inner-workings of our psyches make a poor comparison. d) Illustrations from the world of nature: There are many things in the natural world that consist of distinct, multiple parts that at the same time constitute one complete whole. For example, distinguishable branches, roots and trunk are all part of one and the same tree, and eggs have three distinct parts (yolk, white and shell) without any of which three you would no longer have an egg. None of the illustrations of this sort really help to explain the unique personalities of the Trinity or their shared divine essence. e) Illustrations from the physical realm: This category of illustration contains some of the more interesting examples that have been used to explain the Trinity, though all suffer from the same objections that were lodged against the former category:

1. Light is one yet distinct: (1 John 1:5)

Radio is heard Visible light is seen Infra-red is felt 2. The universe is one yet distinct:

Time

Space

Matter 3. Time is one yet distinct: past present future 4. Space is one yet distinct: length breadth height 5. Matter is one yet distinct:

Energy

Matter

Phenomena The most that can be said for the best of these illustrations is that to the extent that they remind us of the awesome wisdom and power of God in creating these complex, wonderful things (often taken for granted), they may also help us to realize that the Maker is likely to be even more complex and wonderful, and so accept what we know to be true about the Trinity ("one in essence, three in person"), even if it seems too complex and wonderful to fully grasp. As we have said, however, care must be taken to see that none of these illustrations is taken too far, lest by attempting to understand "beyond what is written" we be led instead to dangerous and extra-biblical rationalizations based on these loose analogies. For the Trinity is often a good

"litmus test" for our Christian faith. To accept it, one must accept not only the existence of God, but the distinctiveness and divinity of Jesus Christ, the true touch-stone principle that divides believers from unbelievers (1 John 2:22-23). By distorting our understanding of the Trinity, the devil ultimately seeks to destroy our faith in Jesus Christ, the real focal point and rationale for satanic attacks that seek to confuse the issue of "one in essence, three in person".

3. Roles of the Trinity in the Plan of God: A more valuable approach than the use of non-biblical illustrations to understand the nature of the Trinity is the examination of the function of the Trinity as described in the Bible. The scriptures have much to say about how God works in human history, and, specific to our topic, what roles the individual members of the Trinity play in that work, otherwise known as the "plan of God". a) Introduction: God has not been operating in human history on an ad hoc or reactive basis, but has been "working everything together for good" (Romans 8:28) since the moment of creation. The Plan of God will be discussed as a topic in its own right in the part 2B of this series (Eschatology), but it will be helpful at this point to consider the unique roles played by the individual members of the Trinity in executing that plan in time, for by so doing, we shall gain biblical insight into the true nature of the Trinity. b) The Names of the Trinity: Much can be understood about the Trinity through a consideration of the names by which they are revealed. Collectively, the Trinity refer to themselves as God. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for God, 'Elohim (translated in the New Testament by the common Greek word for God, theos), is technically a plural of a word originally meaning "mighty one"; collectively then, the Trinity share this appellation, pluralized to express additional majesty. Individually considered, however, members of the Trinity in the Old Testament are referred to most commonly by the Hebrew word Yahweh (translated in the New Testament by the common Greek word for Lord, kyrios), a word that, as we have seen, calls special attention the Lord's timeless and dynamic being (see section I, note 1 above). These two names, God and Lord, emphasize respectively the unity of the Trinity in its three-fold persons ('Elohim is plural but refers to the Trinity collectively), and the joint divine-essence of all three individual members (Yahweh is singular but can be used to refer to any of the Trinity's members individually). With the fuller revelation of the Trinity in the New Testament following the revelation and advent of Jesus Christ (see Part II C. below for the Trinity in the Old Testament), the names Father, Son and Holy Spirit give us an even clearer understanding of the roles of the Trinity (and therefore of the Trinity itself).

1) the Father (the 1 Person of the Trinity):

Origin: The term for and idea of the Fatherhood of God, a designation well known from the New Testament, is also found in the Old Testament from the Pentateuch onward. The word Father is first used for God in Deuteronomy 32:6 : "Is He not your Father? The One who bought you? He is the One who made you and established you." Later in verse 18 of the same chapter, God is referred to as "the Rock who fathered you". The concept of the fatherhood of God can also be seen at Exodus 4:22 , where Israel is referred to as God's "firstborn son".

Significance: The use of the name "Father" is clearly intended to be taken as an analogy from human experience. Like the father who sired us, He is our creator. Like a father, He our authority figure, our trainer, disciplinarian, and teacher (Hebrews 12:5-11). And, not to be underestimated, He is the One who cares for us and loves us deeply, who protects us, keeps us safe, and wants only what is truly best for us (regardless of what we see as best). Being human, our earthly fathers

had strengths and weaknesses, and despite their best intentions had to act on the basis of imperfect information about what was best for us. But our heavenly Father represents the perfect ideal of fatherhood. He acts toward us always in perfect love, and all He does for us is without question for our ultimate good, for whether He disciplines us or blesses us, He does so in perfect knowledge of who we are, and of all that is in our hearts.

Person: The Father is often referred to as the 1 person of the Trinity (i. e., the authoritative "I" person), because He speaks to us as "I", directly manifesting His authoritative will as our God, creator and ruler of the universe (e. g., Exodus 3:14-15; Isaiah 46:9-10).

2) the Son (the 2 Person of the Trinity):

Origin: Along with the holy angels (Job 38:7 [not NIV]), we believers are all "sons" of God (Romans 8:14; Galatians 3:26; Galatians 4:5; cf. John 1:12; 1 John 3:1-2). This widespread franchise of sonship is based upon the paternal position of the Father relative to all His obedient creatures, but there is only one "the Son of God (our Lord, Jesus Christ)". Though Christ's incarnation was, in a veiled fashion, prophesied and foreshadowed by ritual and sacrifice, it remained in Old Testament times very much a mystery until the time of His actual first advent. Now it stands clearly revealed that the archetypical Son of God is our Lord Jesus Christ, and that the Old Testament parallels are types that look forward to this revelation: e. g., Adam is the son of God (Luke 3:38) – Christ is the preeminent "last Adam" (1 Corinthians 15:45; and cf. the "Son of Man [i. e., 'adam]" of Daniel 7:13-14 as well as New Testament usage); Israel is the servant of God (Isaiah 42:18 ff.) – Christ is the suffering Servant who takes away the sins of the world (Isaiah 42:1; 52:13-53:12); Israel is God's son – Christ is the Son (Hosea 11:1 fulfilled at Matthew 2:15); finally, though Solomon was David's direct descendant, Christ is his ultimate descendant, the Messiah, the Son of David who is also the Son of God (Psalms 2:7-12; Psalms 110:1).

Significance: Building on the idea of fatherhood as discussed above, sonship denotes the idea of a special and unbreakable relationship with the Father, one of dutiful subordination to the Father's will, but also one of special privilege, inheritance and shared authority. A son (especially a king's son) is often more accessible than a father. The role of mediator between the king and His offending subjects can only be played by someone who is on a par with both the Father-king and creature-subjects: only a Son (incarnate) can be sent on such a mission of reconciliation (cf. Matthew 21:33-40)

Person: The Son is often referred to as the 2 person (i. e., the accessible "you" person), because He is accessible to us, having appeared in the flesh to forge a relationship with us on the Father's behalf (e. g., John 15:14-15), and having gained access to the Father for us (John 14:6; Ephesians 2:18; Ephesians 3:12).

3) the Holy Spirit (the 3rd Person of the Trinity):

Origin: From the first chapter of the Old Testament (Genesis 1:2), to the closing chapter of the New Testament (Revelation 22:17), the word "spirit" is used to refer to the God the Holy Spirit. The Hebrew and Greek words for "spirit", ruach and pneuma respectively, have the core meaning of "wind" or "breeze", and, again, there are important points to be garnered from the name analogy.

Significance: The wind is a potent, invisible force. Though we perceive it and experience its effects, we can neither see where it has come from or where it is going to (John 3:8). It can have everything from a gentle, warming influence to a powerful, chilling effect. "Wind" is thus an aptly descriptive analogy for the Holy Spirit's role in the plan of God: His invisible yet powerful support of good (Zechariah 4:6; 1 Corinthians 12:3) and restraint of evil (Genesis 6:3; 1 Corinthians 12:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:5-8) in the furtherance of the plan of God must not be underestimated.

Person: The Holy Spirit is often referred to as the 3rd person of the Trinity (i. e., the unseen "he" person), because unlike the Father, He does not speak directly to us, and unlike the Son, He has not been made manifest to us; instead, like the wind, He is unseen by us, but, like the wind, that does not mean that we do not experience His power in a very personal and dynamic way (John 14:16-17; Galatians 5:22-26). n. b.: As should be clear from the discussion above, the names Father, Son, and Spirit are thus representative of the Trinity's individual roles in the plan of God for mankind, and have been given to help us understand the relationships and functions of the three divine personalities in that plan. The names themselves must not be pushed beyond the clearly intended analogies to our human frame of reference as outlined above. This is no small caveat, for it is largely on the basis of the title "Son" that heresies of the past have sought to deny the full and equal divinity of Christ (e. g., casting Him as subordinate in essence to the Father as hyper-Arianism does). The case of the Spirit shows how wrong-headed such analyses based solely on these titles are, for the Spirit is not at all "inanimate" or "impersonal" even though "wind" is a fitting description of His invisible yet powerful role in our Christian lives. He acts in a very personal way towards us and towards the other members of the Trinity (John 3:5; John 14:15-17, John 14:26; John 15:26; John 16:8-15; Acts 5:3, Acts 5:9; Acts 13:2; Acts 16:6-10; Romans 8:26; 1 Corinthians 2:10; Revelation 2:7), and as our Comforter-Encourager (John 14:16; John 16:7). The relationship of leadership (Romans 8:4; Galatians 5:16 & Galatians 5:18), encouragement (cf. John 14:16; John 16:7; cf. 2 Corinthians 1:3-7) and empowerment (Luke 24:49; Romans 15:13) we receive from the Holy Spirit are some of the most "personal" and "animating" relationships we shall ever experience this side of heaven. c) Trinity Roles as Seen from Specific New Testament Scriptures:

1) Matthew 3:16-17 :

Now once Jesus had been baptized, He immediately came up out of the water, and, behold!, the heavens opened for Him, and He saw the Spirit of God coming down like a dove and lighting upon Him. And, behold!, a voice from heaven was saying, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.

Comment: The baptism of Christ had a much different symbolism from any other baptism John ever undertook. John had (rightly) understood the normal meaning of his unique baptism to be a visible act of repentance and a symbolic washing away of sins. This explains why he was reluctant to baptize the sinless Messiah (Matthew 3:14). But in the case of Christ, the symbolism is different: His entrance into the water represents His willingness to submerge Himself into our sins (therefore to die for them); whereas His coming up out of the water represents His resurrection. In this, the role of the Trinity in Christ's victory over death at the cross in death and resurrection is symbolized: the Son who undertook the mission to save us from our sins comes back to life (in His humanity); the Holy Spirit quickens Him (1 Peter 3:18); and the Father who sent the Son pronounces His work

and sacrifice satisfactory, efficacious and well-pleasing.

2) John 14:16 : And I will ask the Father and He will give you another Comforter, that He may be with you forever.

Comment: This verse shows the Father in a position of authority, the Son interceding on behalf of believers, and the Holy Spirit being sent to help us.

3) 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 :

There are different gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are different ministries, but the same Lord; and there are different results, but the same God who brings about all results in all cases.

Comment: Here we see clearly the respective roles of the Trinity in supporting our Christian ministry in life. The Holy Spirit gives us our particular spiritual gift(s) (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:11); specific ministries are said to be assigned by our Lord Jesus Christ; and the Father is said to oversee and empower the results of those ministries: God gives us the gift (the Holy Spirit: He empowers us); God gives us the ministry (the Lord Jesus Christ: we share in His mission); God gives us the results (the Father: all effects are part of His plan).

4) 2 Corinthians 13:13 : May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Comment: The Trinity is seen here from the standpoint of salvation, before, during and after: The love of the Father sends the Son to die for sinful mankind (cf. John 3:16); The Son's sacrifice reconciles us with the Father by satisfying the requirements of the Father's righteousness, and thus providing grace, that is, salvation free to us since He paid; The Spirit unites in fellowship with God all who accept this offer of grace (based on Christ's death) originating in God's love.

5) Ephesians 3:14-17 : For this reason I bow my knees to the Father, from whom His entire family in heaven and on earth has received its name, that He may grant you according to the riches of His glory to be powerfully strengthened in your inner person through His Spirit, so that, rooted and grounded in love, Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

Comment: In this apostolic prayer of Paul, we see the Father as the authority to whom Paul prays; he prays for us to be strengthened by the Holy Spirit; the object of his prayer is that we may grow to be more like our Savior, Jesus Christ, and improve our relationship with Him in every way.

6) Ephesians 4:4-6 :

There is one body and One Spirit – just as when you were called it was in one hope that you were called. There is One Lord [Jesus Christ], one faith, one baptism. There is One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Comment: In this précis of the "unity of the faith" (Ephesians 4:3), Paul reminds us of some of the most important common factors of our Christian faith. In doing so, certain aspects of individual Trinity roles are emphasized: the Holy Spirit's role in bringing us into the body of Christ and our concomitant hope of resurrection in Christ; the Lord Jesus Christ's role as our object of faith and the Spirit baptism by which we enter into union with Him through that faith; the Father's role as the unifying God of love, who knits His family of believers together in every way.

7) 1 Peter 1:1-2 :

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who, though outcasts dispersed throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, were yet selected in the foreknowledge of God the Father, by means of the Holy Spirit's consecration, for the obedience in and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.

Comment: Peter tells us that we believers are elected to eternal life according to the Father plan of salvation, the Holy Spirit's implementation of salvation for us when we believe, and the Son's work of salvation, in which and in whom we put our faith.

8) Revelation 1:4-6 :

Grace to you and peace from the One who is and was and is coming, and from the seven Spirits which are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Comment: In John's salutation from the Trinity, the Father's eternity and imminent taking of possession of the devil's world, the Spirit's supervision of the devil's world (see Revelation 5:6; Isaiah 11:2), and the Son's victory and conquest over the devil's world are emphasized. d) Trinity Roles Explained: When we are face to face with God, we shall "know even as we are known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). Until that time, our understanding of God in three persons is essentially dependent upon the way the Bible reveals the Trinity in the process of carrying out God's plan for human history. Below, the different roles taken by the Trinity in several aspects of administering that plan are considered:

1) The Plan of God: authorized by the Will of the Father (Ephesians 1:11; Revelation 4:11), executed by the Word, the Son (Hebrews 1:2-3; John 1:1-3), administered through the Wisdom and power of the Spirit (Isaiah 11:2; Zechariah 4:6).

2) Creation of the World: directed by the Father (Genesis 1:1 & Genesis 1:3; Revelation 4:11), carried out by the Son (1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2), empowered by the Spirit (Psalms 33:6 b; Proverbs 8:27-31).

3) Revelation of the Word: the Father expresses the Word (Isaiah 55:11; also Isaiah 40:8; Isaiah 45:23), Christ is the Word (John 1:1-3; Hebrews 1:3), the Holy Spirit reveals the Word (1 Corinthians 2:10-16).

4) Christ's 1 Advent: Christ is sent by Father (Hebrews 10:7), conceived (Matthew 1:20), led (Matthew 4:1), and empowered (John 3:34) by the Spirit as He carries out His ministry of self-sacrifice for our salvation.

5) The Victory of Salvation (Matthew 12:20; John 16:33; 1 Corinthians 15:54-57; Colossians 2:15; Revelation 5:5): the Father sends the Son on the mission (John 3:16), the Son accomplishes the mission (John 19:30; Hebrews 10:7), the Holy Spirit supports the mission (Matthew 3:16; John 3:34).

6) Reconciliation of the Believer: though estranged from the Father (Ephesians 4:18; Colossians 1:21; 1 John 1:3 & 1 John 1:6), we are restored to fellowship with Him through the mediation of the

Son by means of His sacrifice on the cross (Ephesians 2:12-13; Colossians 1:22; Hebrews 2:14-15), with the Spirit acting as the agent of our renewed fellowship (2 Corinthians 13:14; Php 2:1).

7) Regeneration of the Believer: the Father holds the key to eternal life (John 5:19-26; Romans 5:10-11), the Son purchased access to eternal life by His death for all who believe in Him (Acts 3:15; Acts 20:28; 2 Peter 2:11), the Spirit quickens or regenerates believers (John 3:5-8).

8) Walk of the Believer: the Father sets the standard of holiness (2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 1:16), the Son is the model (Matthew 16:24; 1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:6), the Spirit provides the power to live as God would have us live (Romans 8:4; Galatians 5:16).

9) Virtues of the Believer: the Father gives us the example of love (John 3:16; 1 John 4:7-12) by sending His Son, who is the object our faith (John 14:6; Acts 16:31), so that we look forward to our resurrection with a hope empowered by the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13).

10) Spiritual Gifts of the Believer: given by the Spirit, with specific ministries assigned by the Son and specific effects decreed by the Father (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

11) Prayers of the Believer: offered to the Father (Matthew 6:6), in the name of the Son (John 15:16; John 16:23), accomplished in the power of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:18).

N. B.: These examples above are given to help explain and expound the Trinity as the Bible reveals the doctrine, but the "division of labor" suggested by them is not to be taken as strict in all cases. In most of these (and other) joint actions of the Trinity, there is overlap and further subdivision of responsibilities which is often only hinted at in scripture. To take the last case, for example, prayer in scripture is almost always addressed to the Father, but Jesus does say (in John 14:14), that if we ask Him anything in His name He will do it. A major controversy in the history of the church – one that split the east from the west – had to do with the "procession of the Spirit" and the question of whether the Father only (John 14:26) or the Father and the Son had sent Him (John 15:26). In some sense, both are right (the issue turns on the Father's role as possessing original authority and the Son's role receiving delegated authority – note the stress on role). Therefore, in our appreciation of the Trinity, we should be careful to restrict ourselves to learning what such scriptures actually teach us, and not build dispositive doctrinal principles solely on deductions stemming from them. For one thing is crystal clear from everything we may glean from scripture: the members of the Trinity are undeniably "one" in their unity and purpose.

02.02.03 - The Trinity in the Old Testament

C. The Trinity in the Old Testament

1. Introduction: The Trinity is not only present in the verses of the Old Testament, but portrayed clearly enough to see (with the benefit of New Testament revelation). When God says "let us make Man in our image (Genesis 1:26), when the angels of God praise Him with their three-fold "holy, holy, holy" (Isaiah 6:3), when Aaron's sons are told to "put My name" on the Israelites with a triple blessing (Numbers 6:24-26), the clear intent is to reflect (if not to convey) the triune nature of God. Moreover, some Old Testament scriptures cast the Trinity in even sharper relief, such as king David's last words which in quick succession refer to God as "the Spirit of the Lord", "the God of Israel", and "the Rock of Israel" (2 Samuel 23:2-3; see 1 Corinthians 10:4 for the image of Christ as Israel's Rock). There are many other passages commonly cited to demonstrate the reality of the Trinity in the Old Testament, a reality shimmering just beneath the veil (e. g., Isaiah 48:15-17; Isaiah 63:9-10), but perhaps the best example is the one used by our Lord to demonstrate that His divinity was indeed prophesied by scripture (cf. Zechariah 2:7-13): As the Pharisees were gathering together, Jesus put a question to them, saying "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They answered Him, "David's son." Then He said to them, "Well then, how can David, speaking in the Spirit, call Him Lord? For he says, The Lord said to My Lord, "Sit down at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." [Psalms 110:1] So if David calls Him Lord, how is He his Son?" And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare to question Him any longer from that day forward.

Matthew 22:41-46.

We are not to assume that David, when he penned this prophecy under divine inspiration, saw the coming Christ as clearly as he wished to. Indeed, we have it from Christ that "many prophets and righteous men desired to see" what was being revealed to Jesus' generation face to face, namely, the unveiling of the Messiah (Matthew 13:17; Luke 10:24; cf. John 8:56; 1 Peter 1:10-12). The revelation of Jesus Christ to the world during His 1 Advent, in addition to explaining passages such as Psalms 110:1 above (Christ is David's Son in His humanity, but David's Lord in His deity), is also, not coincidentally, the basis for explaining many other Old Testament passages that are only fully understood by means of our likewise now more complete understanding of the Trinity. In the Old Testament, the three person stand in front of us like three mighty mountains, one after the other, all partially visible, but not readily distinguishable from each other. Only with the revelation provided by the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the New Testament do we see the Old Testament picture of the Trinity from a sidelong perspective, so that now the three mountains become visible in their own right when viewed from this new vantage point.(8) But the question still remains: exactly why did God decide to veil the triune nature of His essence in Old Testament times, choosing instead to foreshadow it in the manner discussed above?

Idolatry, a major problem in ancient times and one of Israel's most serious stumbling blocks, is often adduced as the reason for this veiling in pre-Christian times of our present knowledge of the

Trinity. Certainly it is true that the threat of idolatry to the faith and practice of Old Testament believers was a very real one. We need only to consider that the first two of the "ten commandments" deal with this subject (Exodus 20:1-6), and that Balaam's counsel of idolatrous seduction was more destructive to Israel than any curse could ever have been (Numbers 25:1-18). The argument suggests that there was, therefore, a need to emphasize the oneness of God in the face of this very real polytheistic threat, thus obviating any possible twisting of a proper understanding of the Trinity. This explanation possesses much of value, but it does not entirely resolve the matter, however.⁽⁹⁾ The full answer lies in the person of Jesus Christ. Before the fact, before we see with our own eyes Christ come in the flesh, His humility, His suffering, His sacrifice for us, can we really appreciate in full the Trinity and what God has chosen to do for us in Christ's incarnation and death on the cross? Without the accomplished reality of the incarnation of Jesus, how could we ever but dimly conceive the glory of it? And without the accomplished fact of His incarnation, how could we possibly understand and appreciate the triune nature of God? For it is only through Christ – after He has come into the world in person – that we begin to see God with the clarity of vision it has now been given us to possess (John 1:18; John 14:9). Just as the temple veil that symbolically separated us from the presence of God was split in two by Christ's sacrifice on our behalf (Matthew 27:51), so the veil that in the Old Testament partially obscured the person of Christ from our view has been lifted by His actual advent in the flesh – to die on our behalf. So that now, through our faith in Jesus Christ, we see God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit more clearly than we ever could before: For God who said, "Let light shine forth from the darkness!", is He who has shone forth [His light] into our hearts to illuminate our knowledge of God's glory in the person of Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:6. For until this very day, the same veil remains [upon their unbelieving hearts] when the Old Testament is read, and it is not removed [when they hear these scriptures], because it is [only] done away with in Christ. 2 Corinthians 3:14.

* We see the Son more clearly after He comes into the world (John 1:14).

* The Son can only reveal the Father more clearly after He comes into the world (John 1:18).

* The Spirit cannot be sent to indwell believers until after the Son has been glorified (John 7:39).

Therefore:

* the Trinity can only be clearly explained and understood after the 1 Advent of Christ, a task undertaken by the New Testament. * while in the Old Testament, before the 1 Advent, the members of the Trinity are, understandably, not as clearly distinguished as they are in the New Testament.

2. The Messiah Pre-figured in the Old Testament: Contrary to much conventional wisdom about the Old Testament, Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on our behalf is depicted everywhere in the Old Testament. Furthermore, we know from New Testament scripture that the necessity for the mission and suffering of the Messiah was understood clearly enough by Old Testament believers (as Christ explains on the road to Emmaus: Luke 24:27; see also 1 Peter 1:10-12 and Hebrews 11:26). In fact, there are in the Old Testament a large variety of "types" employed to pre-figure the incarnation, death and suffering of the Son of God on our behalf. The subject of typology will be covered in more extensive detail in part 4A of this series (Christology), but two major categories of

the Old Testament's portrayal of the suffering of Christ should be mentioned now: a) Blood Sacrifice: From the coats of skin that God provides for Adam and Eve to indicate that One will die in their place (Genesis 3:21), to Abel's sacrifice, superior to Cain's because it depicts the Substitute's death (Genesis 4:4), to the Noahic covenant demanding respect for blood that represents the death of Another in our place (Genesis 9:4), to the whole elaborate series of sacrifices commanded by the Mosaic law, all of which portray redemption through Another's blood (cf. Hebrews 9:22 ff.), God made extensive use of the "teaching aid" of blood sacrifice in order that it might be crystal clear to all Old Testament believers that forgiveness of their sins was no light matter: it was something that only God could do for them, and it involved a steep and bloody price that God would somehow have to pay Himself on behalf of those who trusted in Him. b) Prophecy: The substitutionary suffering and death of Christ on our behalf is predicted and prophesied throughout the Old Testament, for example:

Genesis 3:15 : He will crush your head, and you, [serpent], will strike His heel.

Numbers 21:9 : So Moses made a bronze serpent and put it on a staff. And it came to pass that whoever was bitten by a serpent then looked at the bronze serpent would live.

Psalms 22:1 : My God, My God, why did You forsake Me?

Isaiah 53:3 : He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with suffering.

3. Appearances of Christ in the Old Testament: In terms of their presentation of the Trinity, the main difference between the Old and New Testaments is that in the New Testament, Christ is clearly visible and distinct from the Father, while in the Old Testament, the Father and Son are often difficult to distinguish.⁽¹⁰⁾ Despite the discussion immediately above, there is a common misconception – even in many Christian circles – that the fact that the exact details about Christ's incarnation were shielded in the Old Testament means that the visible person in the Old Testament is primarily God the Father. This is not entirely accurate, for the Father has always appeared to the world through the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, and this fact was just as true in the Old Testament as it is in the New Testament; only the manner of the Father's representation of Himself through His Son changed: in the New Testament, an incarnate Jesus Christ becomes visible to the world (only His true glory is shielded), while in the Old Testament, Christ also represents the Father – but not in incarnate form. Additionally, in the New Testament, when our Lord says "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30), or otherwise speaks the Father's words (John 8:28; John 14:24), the distinction between the Father and the Son (along with this unity) is perfectly clear and obvious. However, in the Old Testament, when God appears, it is consistently the Son who appears, but as the representative of the Father, speaking the Father's words, so that the distinction between the two was not, at the time, completely understood or appreciated (John 8:26 & 28): So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.

John 12:50 NIV a) Definition of Theophany and Christophany: The words "Theophany" and "Christophany" mean, respectively, "an appearance of God" and "an appearance of Christ", the second part of each being derived from the Greek root phan, "appear" (from which we get the word "phenomenon"). In this section it will be argued that in biblical terms, at any rate, the only category of event we really need to be concerned with here is Christophany, for, in my view, all

cases of Theophany in the Old Testament are really Christophanies.

It needs to be made clear right at the outset that by Christophany we are definitely not referring to the literal, physical appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ in His true humanity – ever since His deity assumed true humanity at the incarnation, Christ has not again appeared in temporary, Christophanic form. The position that all Old Testament appearances of God are, in reality, appearances of Christ, also allows for the possibility of other sorts of manifestations of the Father other than an ostensibly corporeal appearance here on earth, such as a dream or vision (Daniel's vision of the "Ancient of Days" being the prime example: Daniel 7:13-14).(11) b) Invisibility of the Father: Until we get to heaven, we will not see the Father. We know that the Father is not invisible to the angels, for they "constantly see the face of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 18:10). But He is our heavenly Father (Matthew 6:9, Matthew 6:26, et passim), and as long as the earthly conflict between His would-be usurper, Satan, and His designated regent, Christ, still rages, in heaven He remains for His majesty's sake, speaking and working His will through His Servant. Until the final and ultimate victory, and only after the complete purging of the universe will the Father come to the new earth to make His abode with us forever (Revelation 21:1-3).(12) Until that time, the Father, though acting and speaking through His representative, His Son Jesus Christ, remains invisible to human eye.

"But", He said, "you cannot see My face. For a man may not see My face and live."

Exodus 33:20.

Surely, You are a God who hides Himself.

Isaiah 45:15. No one has ever seen God. God the only Son – the One who has always been at the Father's side – He has made Him known.

John 1:18. Not that anyone has seen the Father except He [the Son] who has always been with the Father; He has seen the Father.

John 6:46.

He [the Father] who alone possesses immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen, nor can see.

1 Timothy 6:16. No one has ever seen God.

1 John 4:12. c) Inaccessibility of the Father apart from Christ: If mankind were able to see God the Father in all His glory without perishing in the process, it is at least safe to say that the issue of human free-will would be seriously compromised from that point forward. Confronted with the magnitude and majesty of God, not only would it be impossible to deny His existence, but it is also likely that even against their will most men would find themselves obliged to follow Him and His will out of sheer terror (rather than from a truly free choice).(13) Along with the principle of preserving mankind's free-will, the issue of access to the Father also helps to explain why the Father remains unseen to us in this present life.

Although, as discussed earlier in this study, the Father is omnipresent in His creation, for purposes of visibility to His creatures, he is invariably described in the scriptures as residing in heaven (e. g.,

Matthew 6:9, Matthew 6:26). Obviously, as long as we live in these physical bodies, we cannot go to heaven to "seek God" (Deuteronomy 30:12-13; Romans 10:6). The Father, by virtue of the fact that His throne room is in heaven (Revelation 4:2; Hebrews 4:16), is inaccessible to us. This "physical" distance which separates us from the Father is indicative of the spiritual distance between God and mankind. As the person of the Trinity representing the authority and holiness of the Godhead, the righteous Father keeps Himself completely separate from human sin; it is in no small part because of mankind's sinfulness that face to face fellowship with the Father is impossible. In fact, for sinful human beings to be confronted by God brings immediate realization that we are worthy of death by our very nature (Genesis 32:30):

"Woe is me! I am done for! For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

Isaiah 6:5.

Though we cannot go to heaven to plead our case with the Father, Christ Jesus is the one who has come down from heaven on our account (John 3:13). Through faith in Him and His death for us, we now have access to the Father in His name. By His blood (that is, His death on the cross on our behalf), Christ has broken down the barrier of hostility between the Father and those who believe in His Son. Jesus Christ has made peace between us, and, as a result, we now have been granted entrance into the throne room of heaven and the presence of the Father. This means that on the basis of the acceptability of Christ's sacrifice and our acceptance of Him, our prayers and petitions are heard by the Father now, and we ourselves shall enter into the heavenly holy of holies in His good time: So now that we have been justified by faith, let us take hold of the peace [we have] with God [the Father] through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have also obtained our access into this grace in which we stand.

Romans 5:1-2 a For through Him [Jesus Christ] we both [Jews and gentiles] have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Ephesians 2:18. Being in Him [Jesus Christ] and having confidence through our faith in Him we possess this access [to the Father] and freedom to speak [to Him].

Ephesians 3:12. So let us approach with confident free speech to the throne of grace [of the Father] that we might receive [His] mercy and gain [His] favor for timely help.

Hebrews 4:16. For Christ died once for us on account of our sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God.

1 Peter 3:18. The fact that through faith in the Son we now have full access to the Father (sonship, fellowship, acceptance of prayer, and eternal life with Him), shows that before the Son came and died for us, such access was at least limited. The Father's splitting of the temple's veil at the conclusion of our Lord's sacrifice on our behalf is a dramatic indication that through His death the barrier that had previously separated us from the Father (that is, our sins) has now been removed (Luke 23:45). Now we have access to the Father in prayer, though we still cannot enter into His presence in heaven as long as we remain in these earthly bodies. Before the cross, the Father was even more inaccessible to sinful mankind. It would be surprising, therefore, if the instances of Theophany in the Old Testament are actual appearances of the Father. It is much more likely

(based upon this principle of greater access after the cross, less beforehand) that just as the Father made Himself known through His Son in the New Testament (Hebrews 1:1-2), so also in the Old Testament His appearances were mediated by this same Son, that is to say, by Christophany. d) Dignity of the Father: The fact that the angelic rebellion led by Satan precedes the creation of man (Job 38:7; Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:12-19) explains much about the Father's modus operandi of working through the One who will ultimately replace Satan as ruler of this world, His Son Jesus Christ (Luke 10:18; John 12:31; John 16:11; 1 Corinthians 15:24-25; Colossians 2:15; Revelation 11:15).(14) As the Trinity's figure of authority and majesty, the Father chooses a representative to wage the struggle against Satan, even He who by His sacrifice will redeem sinful mankind and replace our adversary, the Morning Star replacing Lucifer (compare Isaiah 14:12 with Revelation 22:16). So it should not be surprising that throughout the Old Testament too, the Son is the One representing the Father, speaking His words whenever He appears (in Christophany), for He is the anointed One, the Messiah, the One sent into the world by the Father (Matthew 10:40; Matthew 21:37; Luke 9:48; Luke 10:16; John 12:44; John 13:20). This principle of the Son representing the Father as His agent in the plan of salvation can also be seen from Christ's . . .

1) Message: Christ is the Word (John 1:1-3). This means that He is the embodiment of the message and truth of the Father, and speaks the Father's words truly and precisely at all times (Deuteronomy 18:18; John 8:55 John 14:10 & John 14:24). Christ is the Father's ultimate message (Hebrews 1:1), the messenger of the Father's new covenant in His blood (Isaiah 42:6; Jeremiah 31:31 ff.; Malachi 3:1; Matthew 26:28; 1 Corinthians 11:25).(15)

2) Mediation: Christ is the Mediator between God the Father and sinful mankind (Galatians 3:19-20; 1 Timothy 2:5), the One who reconciles us to the Father by His blood (Romans 5:10-11; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; Ephesians 2:14-16; Colossians 1:20-22).

3) Mission: Christ is the One anointed and sent by the Father to offer Himself as a sacrifice for our sins (Hebrews 9:11-14). He is thus the ultimate high priest who makes atonement to the Father on our behalf (Hebrews 5:5-10).

4) Monarchy: In recognition of His victory at the cross, the Father has "appointed Him Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36), that is "the Lord anointed (to rule the world)". This passage signals not only Christ's replacement of Satan as ruler of the world, but His acceptance of the regency of the world as the Father's representative (explaining many Old Testament passages referring to the Father's impending return being applied to the Son in the New Testament):

a) the Son's ascension into heaven (Psalms 110:1 with Matthew 22:44); b) the Son's ascension to the throne on earth (Psalms 45:6-7 with Hebrews 1:8-9); c) the Son's primacy from creation to eternity (Psalms 97:7 b with Hebrews 1:6).

All the above examples of Christ's role of representing the Father in the God's plan of salvation support the position that all Old Testament Theophany is truly Christophany, the Son appearing, representing, and speaking for the Father before His incarnation. e) The Visibility, Accessibility and Humility of the Son: While we cannot initially see the Father, we can see the Son and the Father through the Son (John 14:9). While we could not initially approach Father, through the Son we have gained access to Him (John 14:6). And while our sinfulness kept us separated from the

perfect holiness of the Father, the work of the Son has rendered us holy and has reconciled us to the Father (Colossians 1:22). As the visible, accessible member of the Trinity who was willing to humble Himself and associate with us to die for us (Php 2:5-11), Christ has always been our point of contact with the Godhead, whether in Old Testament Christophany, or after His appearance in true humanity following His incarnation. f) Cases of Christophany in the Old Testament:

1) Introduction: We have been in the process of demonstrating that the appearances of God to believers in the Old Testament (Theophanies), are really pre-incarnate appearances of the Father's representative, our Lord Jesus Christ, acting for the Father and speaking in His stead. In the majority (though not all) of these cases, the Old Testament identifies such appearances as "the Angel of the Lord". Sometimes when God appears, however, as in His interrogation of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:8 ff), there is no mention of "angels". Yet it seems clear from a number of passages discussed below, where the "Angel" is variously described as the Lord and "the Angel of the Lord", that all such appearances are an essentially similar phenomenon: God appearing to Man in a recognizable form. The word "angel" is potentially confusing here on account of all the centuries of non-scriptural misinformation we have suffered through. "Angel" is a borrowing of the Greek *aggelos*, meaning "messenger", and is itself a translation of the Hebrew *malach* bearing the same meaning. It is important to note that neither word inherently signifies heavenly creatures; both were originally applied to human messengers. Messengers from God would, of necessity, have to be supernatural, and on many occasions these are "angels" in the traditional English sense of the word, that is, that heavenly race of creatures who serve and minister to God (Gabriel, for example: Daniel 8:16; Daniel 9:21; Luke 1:21-26). But the Angel of the Lord is an entirely different story, for scripture uses this phrase to designate an "appearance" of God Himself, taking on messenger form to deliver a message personally. As we have seen above, it is best to take these appearances of the Angel (messenger-servant) of the Lord to be appearances of the Messenger and Minister of the Father, Jesus Christ our Lord. For example, when we read of Isaiah's vision of the Lord (Isaiah 6:1-13), it is understandable to assume at first that Isaiah's vision was of the Father, but John 12:41 tells us that Isaiah was beholding Christ's glory, and we understand (with our New Testament perspective) that this was a vision of our Lord in His capacity of King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the glorified ruler of the earth who has accepted the mantle of rulership from the Father (as He will return to reign until "He has placed all enemies under His feet" 1 Corinthians 15:25). The appearance of the Lord to Moses in giving the Mosaic Law presents a case similar to the vision of Isaiah. At first glance, we may assume that Moses is actually viewing the Father (or His likeness: i. e., a Theophany). But the New Testament is quite explicit in stating that the law was given "through angels" (Greek: *di' angelon*: Galatians 3:19-20; Hebrews 2:2; Acts 7:38 & Acts 7:53). Since we know that these "angelic appearances" are represented in the Old Testament as appearances of God (e. g., Exodus 34:5 ff.), it must be the case that the New Testament passages which ascribe the giving of the Law to "angels" are in fact indicating that the Father spoke the Law to Moses through appearances of the Angel of the Lord, a manifestation of our pre-incarnate Lord, Jesus Christ (i. e., a Christophany).

2) The Angel of the Exodus: The case of the Angel of the Exodus demonstrates both the divinity of the Angel of the Lord and His identification as a pre-incarnate manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ. a. The Angel first appears to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3:2 ff.). It is the Angel of the Lord who appeared to Moses in the fiery flames (v. 2), but shortly thereafter the Angel

represents Himself as God the Father, saying "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob (v. 6), and "I shall be who I am" (v. 14), and is further identified as "the Lord" (in v. 7). The symbolism of the fire and the bush is important: the bush calls attention to Christ, the Messiah, as the Branch (Isaiah 4:2; Isaiah 11:1; Isaiah 53:2; Jeremiah 23:5; Jeremiah 33:15; Zechariah 3:8; Zechariah 6:12), while the fire represents the fiery judgment of the cross that does not consume Him (cf., for example, the burnt offerings of Leviticus 1:1-17 which represent Christ's work on the cross). This first appearance of the Angel of the Lord to Moses, then, is a Christophany, an appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ representing and speaking for the Father. b. The Angel is called "of God" at Exodus 14:19 as He appears in the column of cloud and fire. Previously, at Exodus 13:21; Jehovah Himself is said to have been the one going ahead of the Israelites in the column of cloud and fire. Once again, the Lord and the Angel are identified as one and the same, and by appearing from within the fire of the column (which would later stand over the place of the ark in the tabernacle where the blood representing Christ's sacrifice would be sprinkled on the day of atonement: Numbers 9:15 with Leviticus 16:1-34), we again have a picture of Christ's saving work, enduring judgment on our behalf. c. At Exodus 23:20-23 as part of the giving of the Law to Moses on Sinai, the Angel of the Lord (identified as such as we saw above from New Testament passages such as Galatians 3:19-20; Hebrews 2:2; Acts 7:38 & Acts 7:53) proclaims that He is going to "send" the Angel before the Israelites to lead and guard them (as Christ is sent by the Father). Moses is also told that they are to obey the Angel "because My Name is in Him" (v. 21), a similar description to that of the returning Son of Man in Revelation 19:11-16. d. Despite the fact that no one has ever seen the Father while on this earth (see above), we are told that the elders saw the God of Israel (in company with Moses and Aaron: Exodus 24:9-11), and we know that Moses entered the cloud of glory and spoke with the Lord on Sinai (Exodus 24:16-18) and petitioned the Lord to "show me Your glory" (a request He granted: Exodus 33:18 ff.). We also find in Numbers 12:8 that Moses saw "the form of the Lord" and from Deuteronomy we know that unlike any other servant of the Lord, Moses spoke with Him "face to face" (Deuteronomy 34:10). This then surely is once again the Angel of the Lord, not the actual presence of the Father, but the appearance of the One who is sent by Him, speaks for Him, and who has undertaken to fulfill His plan of salvation in this world, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, appearing in pre-incarnate Christophany. e. Finally, the last appearance of the Angel in respect to the Exodus is at Judges 2:1-5. Here the Angel claims to be the One who "led you up from the land of Egypt" and reminds the Israelites that He will never break "My covenant with you". Only the Father Himself could make such a claim – or Someone representing Him, that is, His Servant, our Lord Jesus Christ who would fulfill that covenant and minister a new one for us all in His blood.

3) The Angel of the Lord Elsewhere: Other appearances of God in the Old Testament are likewise best taken as Christophanies, whether or not the actual term "the Angel of the Lord" is employed: a. The supernatural "Man" who wrestles with Jacob (Genesis 32:22-32) elicits this response from Jacob: "I have seen God face to face, yet my life was spared". Hosea 12:3-4 confirms that this was the Angel and God. b. The "Man" who appeared to Abraham along with His two companions in Genesis 18:1-33 is later said to be "the Lord" (v. 22). c. The "Man" who appeared to Joshua (Joshua 5:13-15) claims to be the "commander of the Lord's host". Joshua then not only worships Him (a thing forbidden where mere angels are involved: Revelation 19:10; Revelation 22:9), but is also told to remove his sandal because he is standing on ground that is holy (i. e., sanctified by the presence of God: cf. Exodus 3:5 ff.). d. Along with Moses and Aaron, the elders of Israel see "the

God of Israel" on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 24:9-11). Despite the fact that no one has ever seen the Father, nor can see Him and live, they not only see the God of Israel, but have a symbolic meal of fellowship with Him, an event that clearly foreshadows communion based on the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, the coming "King of Israel" (John 1:49). e. The Angel of the Lord who appears to Gideon (Judges 6:11-23) is also said to be the Lord (vv. 16-17). The Angel also identifies Himself with the sacrifice (by touching it with His staff) which then goes up in flames, representing the fiery judgment of God (that Christ was to undergo on our behalf). f. The Angel of the Lord's appearance to parents of Samson is similar to His appearance to Gideon (Judges 13:2-23). The Angel is described as such throughout the passage, but Manoah and his wife, though realizing that an angel has appeared to them, do not realize this is in fact the Angel of the Lord until His fiery departure (v. 21), at which point Manoah exclaims "We have seen God" (v. 22). The symbolism of self-sacrifice by the Angel is even more distinctly drawn in this passage, for He "ascended in the flame" of the burnt sacrifice (v. 20), the very picture of Christ being judged on our behalf, teaching Old Testament believers to look forward to God's future forgiveness of sins through a sacrifice that He would provide. g. We have already discussed Isaiah's vision of Israel's King (Isaiah 6:1 ff.), which turns out to be a vision of Jesus Christ as Israel's appointed ruler in the line of David (John 12:41). h. Similarly, Ezekiel's vision of God (Ezekiel 1:25-28) is strikingly similar to the description of the glorified Christ found in Revelation (Revelation 1:12-16; cf. the elders of Israel on Mt. Sinai: Exodus 24:9-11). i. Zechariah's vision of the Angel of the Lord (Zechariah 1:7-17) is instructive because the Angel, clearly divine as seen from the examples above, is presented as distinct from the Lord of Hosts, that is, the Father, so that this is undoubtedly a Christophany. j. Finally, it has often been pointed out that after the birth of Christ, though angels do make many more appearances in the Bible, the Angel of the Lord no longer appears in the scriptures. g) Conclusion: The Lord Jesus Christ has always been and will always be the Person with whom we have to do, and in whom we must believe in order to have an eternal relationship with the Father. It is only Christ who has "made the Father known" (John 1:18), and only through Him do we come to possess "the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). In the Old Testament, we hear the Father appearing through the (pre-incarnate) Son; in the New Testament, we see and hear the (incarnate) Son speaking the Father's words. So the Trinity has always been present in God's revelation of Himself to those who believe and follow Him. As Christians, whenever we say the word "God" we should keep in mind that for us, this means the Trinity – the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

[Go to Bible Basics 2A: Angelology]

Notes:

1. Jehovah and Jahweh are the two most well-known English vocalizations of what is often called the "tetragrammaton", i. e. the four consonant name for the Lord explained in these verses. In Hebrew, yhvh, (éääää) is traditionally vocalized as 'adonai, though it occurs in the Old Testament without vowels. The divine name "Lord", explained in these verses as based on "I am/shall be", can potentially be derived from either the Hebrew verb "to be" or the verb "to become" (the two verbs being very close in the Hebrew). Likewise, the form éääää is a unique form which appears to be a cross between an imperfect (indicating repeated action irrespective of time as in "I shall be/I am") and an infinitive absolute (summing up the meaning of a verb at one throw: i. e., the very essence of "being/becoming"). Thus it is clear enough from the Hebrew context and verbal forms

that "the Name" is a declaration that the Lord is the very definition of being and existence without regard to time or phenomena. Q. E. D.

2. This infinity of His nature and perfection of His character is unchangeable or "immutable" (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8; James 1:17).

3. God's spirituality is also evident from His creation of our spirits (Genesis 2:7; Numbers 16:22; Ecclesiastes 11:5; Hebrews 12:9), and angelic spirits (Psalms 104:4; Isaiah 40:26; Hebrews 1:7 & Hebrews 1:14).

4. Since the beginning of human history, of course, God has in this life delegated some of this authority to human agencies in order to prevent lawlessness from eradicating mankind altogether (Genesis 3:16 b; Psalms 82:6-7; John 10:34ff.; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13 ff.).

5. On the Trinity as revealed in the Old Testament, see section II C. below.

6. In verse one of John 1:1-2; the clause "the Word was God" cannot legitimately be translated "the Word was a God". First, earlier in the verse, the apostle John had used the definite article with the Greek word *theos* θεός to refer to the Father according to customary usage ("the [sc. Father] God"), and so to use the identical combination again to refer to the Word would be potentially confusing, making it seem as if "the Word" was really identical to "the [sc. Father] God", one of the very points that John is disproving here. Secondly, Greek does not possess an indefinite article ("a/an"), but it does have an indefinite pronoun, *tis* (τις), meaning "a certain one" – the very word that a Greek reader would expect here if the point was that Christ was somehow a god, but not really "God". So John only had three ways to write this: 1) the Word was "the God" (but this would mean that there was no real distinction between the Father and Christ); 2) the Word was "a certain god" (but this would mean that Christ was a lesser sort of divinity, not God on the level of the Father); or 3) the Word was "God" – what John actually did write, thus fully and unambiguously attributing deity to the Word as distinct from the Father.

7. The Greek for "one" here (*hen*) is neuter, not masculine (i. e., not "one person", but "one [thing = essence]"). That even His hostile audience understood this to be a claim to divinity is clear from v. 33: "We are not going to stone you for a good deed, but on account of blasphemy, for though you are but a man, you are making yourself God."

8. This illustration of the Trinity in the Old Testament is commonly called "prophetic foreshortening". For more on this phenomenon, see part 1 of *Coming Tribulation*, section IV. 1.a, "Prophetical Foreshortening".

9. Pagan pantheons (not to mention pagan religions) are different from God and the true worship of Him in every way, and this would have been obvious to true believers, revelation of the Trinity notwithstanding. To state but two obvious points of departure, pagan pantheons are never even close to being "one" in purpose as the Trinity is (John 10:30 cf. 1 Corinthians 3:8), nor are their individual members so integral to the existence of the whole.

10. The Spirit is also more clearly distinguished in the New Testament, especially after He has been sent, but the issue in the case of the Spirit is really more one of degree (i. e., He is more perspicuous in the New Testament) than one of kind. We do see the Spirit distinctly in the Old Testament (e. g., Genesis 1:2; Genesis 6:3; Isaiah 63:10; Zechariah 4:6), though not with the

same degree of clarity or frequency as we do in the New Testament, especially after He has been sent as the believer's Comforter (John 14:16). The Spirit may act more in a "behind the scenes" manner in the Old Testament than in the New, but it is not a matter of His being difficult to distinguish from the other two members of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit will be considered separately in part 5 of this series, Pneumatology.

11. Daniel saw the Father in this vision as well as His Son. Note the unique title used for the Father, "Ancient of Days", a name which in Hebrew construct usage can be taken to imply "more ancient than [the origin] of days", and so may refer to the Father's antecedence to the restoration of the heavens and the earth in Genesis 1:2 ff., a posture that fits hand-in-glove with His delegation to the "Son of Man" of the task of reclaiming the earth from the beast in Daniel 7:1-28. Both of the two most prominent recorded visions of the Father, Daniel 7:1-28 and Revelation 4:1-11; Revelation 5:1-14, deal with the commissioning of the Son to take His place as the new ruler of the world.

12. For more on these matters, until Part 2B of this series, Eschatology, becomes available, please see the series: The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation and Coming Tribulation: A History of the Apocalypse.

13. The hardening of Pharaoh's heart by God in Exodus chapter 14 is similar: confronted with the mighty wonders and miracles of God, no human could have resisted His awesome will without special dispensation from God to allow him to do so; how much more would this be the case if we actually saw Him with our own eyes? See the series Exodus 14:1-31 : Hardening Pharaoh's Heart.

14. The details of Satan's rebellion, its origin, course and resolution, are covered in the series The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation.

15. This is not to say that the Father never speaks for Himself. When He does so, it is from heaven. Three important instances show Him validating His Son's ministry: a) at its beginning with the baptism of Christ (Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22); b) at its foreshadowed conclusion at the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35); c) in response to Christ's prayer prior to His crucifixion (John 12:28).

S. Angelology: the Study of Angels

Angelology: the Study of Angels by Dr. Robert D. Luginbill God's creation of angelic beings, the rebellion of some, His plan and ultimate victory. In speaking of angels, He says, "He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire." Hebrews 1:7 NIV

Outline

- I. The Purpose, Creation and Nature of Angels
- II. Satan's Rebellion and World Rule
 1. The Occasion of the Rebellion
 2. God's Judgment on the Universe
 3. God's Restoration of the Earth
 4. God's Replacement for Satan
 5. Satan and the Fall of Man
 6. The Limits of Satan's World Rule
 7. Satan's World-System
 8. Satan's Strategy
 9. The Angelic Order of Battle
 - 1) The Current Heavenly Truce
 - 2) The Kingdom of God versus the kingdom of Satan
 - 3) The Organization of the Elect Angels
 - 4) Special Functions of Elect Angels
 - 5) General Service of Elect Angels
 - 6) The Organization of the Fallen Angels
 - 7) God's use of Evil Spirits
 - 8) Angelic Combat
 - 9) Believers versus Unbelievers
 - 10) Satan's Tactics

Introduction: The subject of angels has long fascinated mankind, not just believers but unbelievers, and not just dedicated believers bent on spiritual growth, but also those with "itchy

ears" for this subject (but not necessarily for other teachings of the Bible). The purpose of this study is to give an essential overview of what God would have us to know about angels based upon what is actually contained in His Word.

I. The Purpose, Creation and Nature of Angels 1. The Purpose of Angels:

1) God, the Creator, existed before His creation (John 1:1-3). It is important to remember that angels, for all their temporary superiority to mankind, are creatures too. God, the Creator of the universe, of time and of space, existed (and exists) before the universe and outside of it. Angels, on the other hand, as creatures, can only exist within the creation, and are, therefore, subject to time and space. Though their capabilities currently surpass those of human beings, they are still "fellow servants" of God, and subordinate to Him in every way (Revelation 19:10; Revelation 22:9).

Before the mountains were born, or you gave birth to the earth and world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God. Psalms 90:2.

2) God was self-sufficient before He created the universe, and is so now (Isaiah 40:21-26). God did not "need" to create the universe, or angels, or mankind, or anything, for that matter. He is perfect and has no needs whatsoever. This was true before His first act of creation, and remains and will remain so throughout the course of creature history and into eternity.

God, who created the universe and everything in it, even He who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples our hands have made, nor is He ministered to by the hands of men (as if He needed anything from us) – [on the contrary], He is the One who gives life and breath and everything else to us all. Acts 17:24-25.

3) God's purpose in creating angels and mankind is for His glory and our good (Isaiah 43:7; Ephesians 1:5-6, Ephesians 1:11-12). God is the Potter, and all we His creatures are the clay, created for the praise of His glory, and His glory we shall praise on that day of eternity and forevermore (Isaiah 29:16; Isaiah 45:9; Isaiah 64:8; Jeremiah 18:4-6; Romans 9:21). But now, O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter, and we all are the work of thy hand. Isaiah 64:8 KJV This is true not only of His creatures who respond to Him and follow Him and His Son, but also for those who have rejected His authority and His Son (Romans 14:11; Php 2:10-11): By Myself I have sworn. From my mouth a righteous word has gone forth, which will not be revoked, that every knee will bow to Me, and to Me every tongue will swear. And so they will acknowledge Me: "Only in the Lord are righteousness and might." Before Him will come all who raged against Him and they will be put to shame. Isaiah 45:23-24.

Moreover, angels and mankind alike will praise Him for all His marvelous deeds on our behalf, for He is glorified by blessing us. This is the God with whom we have to do! To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, be praise and honor and glory and power for ever and ever! Revelation 5:13 b NIV 2. The Creation of Angels: At some undisclosed time following His creation of the heavens and the earth, God created the angels (Psalms 148:2-5; Colossians 1:16). This event took place after the original *ex nihilo* (i. e., "out of nothing") creation of the universe described Genesis 1:1; and before the restoration of the earth (described also at Job 38:4-7) which followed God's initial judgment upon the universe because of Satan's rebellion (the results of which are described in Genesis 1:2 and following). God created all angelic kind at this time (including Satan and all those who would eventually rebel against Him). Though some would come to choose

against Him, all the angels were originally created holy (Deuteronomy 33:2; Psalms 89:7; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26). God gave each of them distinct duties and definite domains in which to exercise specified authority delegated by Him (Colossians 1:16; Ephesians 6:12; Hebrews 1:7 & Hebrews 1:14; Jude 1:6).

3. The Nature of Angels:

1) Angels are finite beings: As created beings, angels are dependent upon time and space. Though more powerful (2 Thessalonians 1:7; 2 Peter 2:11), mobile (Genesis 28:12) and knowledgeable (2 Samuel 14:20; Acts 7:53) than mankind, they are neither omniscient (Matthew 24:36), nor omnipotent (Romans 8:38), nor omnipresent (Daniel 10:13).

2) Angels are finite in number: Angels are often described as the "host of heaven" and otherwise compared to the innumerable stars (e. g., Job 25:3; Psalms 103:20-21; Isaiah 40:26 w. Luke 2:13), but although they are a highly organized group and quite numerous, it should be understood that they are not infinite in number, however large that undisclosed number may be (Deuteronomy 33:2; Psalms 68:17; Daniel 7:10; Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 5:11). Further, angels are not subject to death (Luke 20:36), nor do they reproduce (Mark 12:25), leading us to the conclusion that their number has been the same since their collective creation.

3) Angels are different from human beings in significant respects: Unlike human beings, angels do not grow old, or hungry or tired. Angels are thus not subject to many of the more obvious material restraints that limit human activity and are, for the most part, completely invisible to us. However, angels can at times appear in bodily form (as in the case of the announcement of Christ's birth: Luke 2:8-15), and can also affect the material world with great power (consider the angels who control the winds: Revelation 7:1-3).

4) Angels are similar to human beings in significant respects: Like human beings, angels possess personality and individuality (as evidenced, for example, by joy: Job 38:4-7; Luke 15:10; desire: 1 Peter 1:12; and choice: Jude 1:6). And like us, they are created to serve and worship God for His glory (Psalms 103:20-21; Psalms 148:2; Matthew 4:11; Hebrews 1:14; Revelation 4:8).

5) Angels are temporarily superior to mankind: In terms of power and ability, the present angelic superiority to mankind is obvious in every passage of scripture in which they are described. This current angelic superiority significantly also extends to the area of longevity. While mankind is enjoying a sequential residence on earth (generation following generation), angelic kind has been experiencing a continuum of existence in heaven, even before the creation of Man. This longevity, combined with the fact that angels (though creatures like Man) are not subject to the same degree to the restraints and necessities of time and space that encumber mankind, undoubtedly contributes to their superior knowledge and wisdom as well. By its very essence, therefore, the angelic nature is superior to our present earthly human nature in terms of appearance, intellect, power, mobility and authority (2 Peter 2:11).

6) Angels will ultimately be inferior to mankind: Angels will not always be superior to mankind. Just as our Lord's humanity is, in resurrection, superior to angels in every way (Heb. 1:4-2:18), so also we are destined to share that superiority with Him in our resurrection (1 Corinthians 6:3; Hebrews 2:5).

7) Angels are acutely aware of and involved in human affairs: The involvement of angelic beings in human affairs is part and parcel of their role in promoting (or, in the case of the fallen angels, opposing) God's plan for human history (see "Satan's Rebellion" immediately below). On a more personal level, however, angels are also apparently extremely interested in observing human behavior in general and in the playing out of God's plan in particular (1 Timothy 3:16; 1 Timothy 5:21; 1 Peter 1:10-12). This is particularly true in the case of the Son of Man, our Lord Jesus Christ. They were present at His birth (Luke 2:13-14), temptation (Matthew 4:11), resurrection (Luke 24:4), ascension (Acts 1:10-11), and return (2 Thessalonians 1:7), evidence which underscores angelic interest in the most crucial phase of God's plan, namely the life and work of the Messiah. By observation, angels are learning (to their joy in the case of the elect angels, to their sorrow in the case of the fallen angels) about the wisdom, the power, the grace and the mercy of God (cf. Luke 15:10; 1 Corinthians 4:9; 1 Corinthians 11:10).

8) Angels should neither be worshiped nor disrespected: In any discussion of angels, it is important to keep in mind both their present superiority and their eventual subordination to us. Angels are not to be disrespected (Luke 10:20; 1 Peter 2:10-12; Jude 1:8-10; cf. Romans 13:7), but neither are they to be worshiped (Revelation 19:10; Revelation 22:9; cf. 2 Kings 17:16; Jeremiah 19:13; Colossians 2:18). This is especially important in regard to fallen angels. God counterbalances their evil efforts with the work and ministrations of His holy, elect angels. Therefore, although we are to have a healthy respect for the Adversary and his potential to oppose us (2 Corinthians 2:11; Ephesians 6:11; 1 Peter 5:8), we are not to be unduly terrified by him and his minions. And while we are to have an awareness and appreciation for the positive function of the elect angels on our behalf, we are not to be inordinately fixated upon them (especially since both their persons and their work are invisible to us). In neither case should we "go beyond what is written" in the Bible about angels, whether through excessive fear of Satanic influence or an exorbitant fascination with the ministrations of the holy angels.

II. Satan's Rebellion and World Rule The rebellion of the devil and his angels against God is a most important subject in the consideration of eschatology, the biblical study of the events of the end times. This is because Satan's rebellion is central to the whole course of human history as well as to God's final resolution of history, beginning with the Tribulation. Mankind is, in many ways, God's response to the devil, and the devil's repeated attempts to destroy mankind are, necessarily, connected inextricably with God's plan to defeat Satan through the agency of mankind (in the Person of His Son). It is therefore not too bold a statement to say that it is impossible to understand human history, from the divine point of view at any rate, without taking into consideration the satanic rebellion and role mankind plays in God's response to it.

1. The Occasion of the Rebellion:

1) Satan's original status: Satan was originally the top ranking angelic creature endowed with extraordinary honors. He preeminently reflected the glory of God as "Lucifer" (Isaiah 14:12); he was the very model of symmetry (Ezekiel 28:12); he was blessed with the greatest wisdom (Ezekiel 28:12); he was adorned with magnificent paraphernalia (Ezekiel 28:13); he was, in short, the "anointed cherub", entrusted with the highest angelic responsibility and in highest position of honor (Ezekiel 28:14).

2) Satan's Character: Contrary to much popular opinion, the devil was not created evil. Indeed, God created Satan "blameless", as Ezekiel 28:15 tells us. This is a critical piece of information, because through this scripture we are assured that the devil's decision to sin was not some inevitable action originating with God, but was instead a free-will decision on Satan's part. Satan was created without sin, and with no necessity to sin. He and he alone is the one who bears the complete responsibility for all the trouble he has brought upon his fellow angels, upon humanity, and upon himself. God bears none of the blame for Satan's fall. Satan took the opportunity of using the free will God gave him to reject God and follow instead the path of evil.

3) Satan's Sin: In his instructions to Timothy regarding the essential qualifications of pastors, Paul concludes by warning that the potential candidate should not be a neophyte (i. e., one new to the faith and spiritually immature). Otherwise, Paul says, such a person might easily "become puffed up" (i. e., blinded by arrogance) "and so fall into [the same] condemnation as the devil [did]" (1 Timothy 3:6). In Paul's caveat, pride, that is, an unwarranted sense of superiority, when indulged creates a breeding ground for further sin. This was certainly so in Satan's case. The devil's exorbitant pride over the qualities and attributes given him by God (Ezekiel 28:17) was allowed to corrupt his entire thought process and led in turn to his plotting against God (Isaiah 14:13-14; Ezekiel 28:17 b). The eventual result was a full scale rebellion. The substance of Satan's corrupt thinking, a sinful pattern of thought which (as is so often the case) inevitably resulted in sinful action, is recorded for us by Isaiah: For you said in your heart, "I will ascend heavenward. I will set my throne above the stars of God. And I will take my seat on the mount of assembly on the sides of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the Most High God. Isaiah 14:13-14.

4) Satan's Fall: Ezekiel 28:15-18 describes the process by which the devil put his arrogant plan into practice, tracing the matter backward at first from the result to the cause: In all your ways you were perfect from the day of your creation until unrighteousness was found in you. In your extensive conspiring, you were filled with wickedness, and you sinned. So I cast you from the mountain of God as one profaned, and I blotted out [your memory] from among the stones of fire, O covering cherub. Your heart became haughty because of your beauty, [and so] you destroyed your wisdom on account of your splendor. So I cast you to the earth, and I made a spectacle of you before kings. In the abundance of your iniquity, in the unrighteousness of your conspiring, you profaned the sacred places entrusted to you, so I made fire come out of your midst which devoured you, and I made you like the dust of the earth in the eyes of all who beheld you. Ezekiel 28:15-18.

Arrogant pride, attributed specifically to Satan's high esteem for his own appearance, is at the root of the thought pattern described in Isaiah's five "I wills" (Isaiah 14:13-14; see above). Persistent and obsessive preoccupation with his own loveliness over time had a corrupting influence upon Satan's whole mental attitude, neutralizing, then effectively destroying his conscience, his character and his wholesome fear of God (cf. Ephesians 4:19; 1 Timothy 4:2). This arrogance led to a complete perversion of the devil's thought process, and these mental attitude sins blossomed into overt activity; specifically, they led to the canvassing of his fellow angels for support in rebelling against the Lord (i. e., "your extensive conspiring" and "the unrighteousness of your conspiring"). The judgments described here are largely yet future, but, since the devil's fate is certain (since it has been decreed by God), they can be described as already having taken place.

5) Satan's coup d'État : As would-be usurper of God's throne, Satan found himself in a delicate position. When he conceived his nefarious ambition, he was on his own. Even in his unparalleled arrogance, he realized that he would need help if he were to be successful in his attempt to dethrone the Lord of the universe. Satan did have some advantages. As the preeminent and highest ranking angelic creature (not to mention the most impressive), the devil had considerable influence and authority over the other angels. None would be likely to rebel from the Lord instantaneously on Satan's say-so, but, with proper preparation, it might be possible to sway some of his fellows. The devil's plan was not to overthrow God by force (for such a course of action was a complete impossibility, as even Satan with his inflated sense of self saw clearly enough), but rather to effect a coup d'état . By winning over the allegiance of the angels, Satan thought to present God with a fait accompli which He would be powerless to reverse. For if the angels were to choose Satan over God, the devil seems to have felt secure that this fact in itself would protect him from divine retribution.

It is evident from the events that followed the conception of his plan that the devil was indeed able to bring a large proportion of angels (one third in fact: cf. Revelation 12:4) over to his way of thinking about God's probable reaction to any such coup d'état (an appropriate name for an overthrow of authority based not upon a contest of relative force, but rather upon political intrigue). For before any of the angels followed him, they would need to be convinced of the prospects of success: had they instead been certain of swift retribution from the Lord Almighty, it is fair to ask how many would have voluntarily enlisted into Satan's cause. There had to be something more, however. Satan's own motive of universal rulership is clear enough, but his potential followers would have to be wooed. Paradise, after all, could not have been so terrible as to force them into rebellion against God for its own sake, and the obvious fact that, in spite of Satan's assurances, at least some element of risk would be involved in betraying God could not have been lost on them. Satan needed a platform, one persuasive enough to convince his contemporaries to throw in their lot with him and take the risk of eternal condemnation.

6) Satan's Platform: This necessity of a positive platform, a goal that could tempt his audience and incite their lust, was even more important than convincing his would-be followers that rebellion against God would be safe and meet with success. But what do angels lack, and what could they possibly want that it is not lawful for them to have? Angels are not affected by the elements, as we are, not plagued by disease or the ravages of time, not in any need whatsoever that might incite the lust for acquisition that so inflames mankind. Yet it is precisely in that fact which liberates the angels from all the cares and concerns we humans feel so intensely that Satan found his chief selling point, the prime inducement to his fellow spirit-creatures to gamble their eternal futures and bind their fate to Satan's forevermore: namely, their lack of a physical body.

While we humans possess both a spiritual and a material part, angels, are primarily spiritual creatures. The absence of true corporeality such as we humans possess is in many respects a blessing for it spares the angels the pain, suffering and tears which are the common heritage of mankind since the fall. But this lack of corporeality seems to have left many of the angels wondering what might have been as they observed the animal life of the original earth prior to its cataclysmic destruction as a result of Satan's rebellion (and subsequent restoration during the seven Genesis days). From everything we know about the angels from scripture, possession on their part of animals and of humans is contrary to the will and the law of God in every way. Satan

observed the curiosity and interest of his fellows towards corporeal sensuality and applied the universal principle of sinful motivation treated above: they didn't have bodies and, moreover, were forbidden to possess the bodies of other creatures; therefore they wanted them, wanted to experience first hand the sensual, corporeal life "that had been denied them" (according to satanic propaganda). Clearly, God was not going to stand by and allow a wave of possessions contrary to His commands (much less any program of breeding and genetic manipulation that may be evidenced by the hominid portion of the fossil record). The only way to "escape" the rather pure spirituality God had "inflicted" on them was to fall in behind a new leader and take what they wanted in defiance of God.

God rained down complete destruction on the world of that time, but it is interesting to note that there are number of biblical passages which demonstrate that the lust of the devil's followers for bodies which most approximate their own essential shape is still very much alive:

1. Angels have no strictly material bodies of their own: Without taking possession of the bodies of other creatures, angels are unable to fully experience the material world in any sensual way. Paul's list of "bodies" in 1st Corinthians chapter fifteen mentions "heavenly bodies", but by this he clearly means the planets. Significantly, he does not mention angels. Many passages stress the spiritual (and hence non-material) nature of angels (Hebrews 1:7, Hebrews 1:14; Hebrews 2:14-16 [esp. Hebrews 2:16]). This radical difference from human (and animal) kind helps to explain how angels are occasionally called "gods" (i. e., having more in common with the spirituality of God than the materiality of Man: Psalms 8:5; Psalms 82:1 & Psalms 82:6). Angels are not "flesh and blood" as we, in our material part, clearly are (Ephesians 6:12). When our resurrected Lord appeared to His disciples and was taken for a ghost, He commanded them to "touch Me and see that a spirit (pneuma) does not have flesh and bones as you see Me having" (Luke 24:39). The word He used, the Greek pneuma (πνεύμα), is the same word used for angels wherever they are deemed "spirits" (e. g., Hebrews 1:7 & Hebrews 1:14). No stronger confirmation could be asked to show that angels are different from us in this main, crucial point of corporeality (and, therefore, in the enjoyment of all that is sensual).

2. The Serpent of Genesis 3:1-24: It is no accident that when we first encounter Satan in scripture, he has taken possession of a material creature, the serpent. We can assume from the context that this especially "subtle" creature was Eve's special pet, and a perfect vehicle for the devil's seduction. But was his possession of the creature necessary to accomplish his goal (any more than his possession of Judas was: cf. Luke 22:3)? What we can say is that possession of the bodies of material creatures is part of Satan's normal modus operandi, and indicates that this is more than something the fallen angels "have to do" to accomplish their nefarious purposes. Rather, it is something they dearly desire to do.

3. The Angelic Infiltration of Genesis 6:1-22: As both Jude 1:6 and 2 Peter 2:4 make clear, "the sons of God coming in to [mate with] the daughters of men" was a Satanic attack of immense proportions which violated God's ground rules for the resolution of the angelic rebellion in human history. The direct mixing of angelic and human seed is clear-cut proof of the desire on the part of Satan and his followers to attain the (for them) unattainable: corporeality.

4. The Legion of Demons and the Swine: In Mark chapter 5, when Jesus cast the demon legion from a single man, these fallen spirits "begged" Him to "send us among the pigs; allow us to go

into them" (Mark 5:12). There is very little to explain their motivation for this request until we accept that these satanic angels, being deprived of their human home, were desperate to regain some material abode, be it ever so mean.

5. The Wandering Spirit (Luke 11:24-26): The return of the "wandering spirit" to the man he had previously possessed is a likewise telling case that only fully makes sense when we take into account the "addiction" the fallen angels have to the corporeality which, as part of our nature, we understandably take for granted. The demon goes through desolate places seeking "rest" (i. e., another willing subject to inhabit), but when it is disappointed in this hope, it returns to its "house" (Greek *oikos*). The terminology used here is significant, for in 2 Corinthians 5:2; Paul calls our coming resurrection body, the super-material home in which we shall spend all eternity with the Lord, a "dear-house from on high" (Greek *oiketerion*, the diminutive of the very word used for house above being used in a [grammatically] familiar sense). Our material abodes, the bodies that house our spirits now and then, are given to us by God, but it is the devil's plan, and his prime inducement to his followers, to take by force the homes that properly belong to others.

Satan's false gospel to the angels who fell with him was one of "deliverance" from their non-sensual state. He found them curious about the experience of material existence, and inflamed this curiosity into outright lust and rebellion, so that they became obsessed with the possession of material bodies, and addicted to the experience (in the same way that many of our fellow human beings are destroyed by drugs). Therefore, the widespread and dishonest trade of Ezekiel 28:16 & Ezekiel 28:18 is better translated "canvassing" or "campaigning". Satan found his issue and seduced a large part of angelic kind with it.

2. God's Judgment on the Universe:

Scripture neither mentions nor records the length of the interval between God's confrontation of Satan's coup and His judgment upon the primeval world, but it is entirely possible that this period was aeons long in human terms. Such a grace interval would demonstrate beyond any shadow of a doubt who had chosen for God and who for Satan, as the devil commenced his earthly reign over what had been the original paradise, the original "Eden" (i. e., the pre-Adamic earth). Given the demons' longing for physical bodies and the integral part in Satan's plan that the satisfaction of that desire played, it is not unreasonable to suppose that much of the fascinating fossil record we now possess from that archaic earth is a result of the devil's manipulation and misuse of earth's original fauna for just such purposes: the Bible's identification of Satan with reptiles (dragons, serpents), and his obvious fascination with the same (cf. Genesis 3:1-24), make the possibility of this theoretical satanic origin of the terrible, powerful creatures of pre-history all the more conceivable.

Eventually, earth came to bear no resemblance to the primal paradise the Lord had created ex nihilo, and when no further purpose would be served by additional delay, but, to the contrary, the devil and his angels had emphatically confirmed their evil and rebellious intentions, God Almighty executed an awesome judgment upon the pre-historic earth. By delaying judgment, He had demonstrated to all angelic creation how pitifully inadequate Satan's efforts were, how hollow his promises, how tyrannical his rule. Now was the time to put an end to the devil's "experiments", to turn out the lights in the universe, and to leave the adversary and his followers to contemplate in terror what God would do next. In a terrifying judgment, all life on earth was annihilated and the

universe, originally resplendent and luminiferous, plunged into utter darkness (an event which must have been incredibly traumatic for all the angels, creatures of light that they are). This entire period of prehistoric angelic existence, the devil's revolt and first earthly reign, and God's subsequent judgment upon the earth are summarized in a mere two verses in the book of Genesis, or, more correctly stated, fall into the "gap" between Genesis 1:1 (which speaks of the original creation) and Genesis 1:2 (which describes the earth subsequent to judgment and prior to the seven days of re-creation):

Before all else, God created the heavens and the earth [original creation]. But the earth came to be ruined and despoiled – darkness lay upon the face of the abyss while God's Spirit brooded over the surface of its waters [all as a result of God's judgment in response to the devil's revolt]. Genesis 1:1-2. The ruination and destruction of the earth under Satan's pre-historic rule is aptly described by the Hebrew phrase *tohu wa-bohu* (i. e., "ruined and despoiled": *úää áääá*). Many creative (and misleading) translations have been offered in an effort to remove the difficulties caused by a literal translation of this phrase. For the description of earth in this devastated condition causes obvious problems for the summary-statement interpretation of verse one: how and when could the earth have been so ravaged if no gap is to be understood between verses one and two? Moreover, the words *tohu* and *bohu* always refer to "emptiness", "uselessness" or, "worthlessness", that is to say, a confused, chaotic state, inevitably the result of some cataclysm, and usually one that has been brought on by divine judgment (cf. Deuteronomy 32:10; 1 Samuel 12:21; Job 6:18; Job 12:24; Job 26:7; Psalms 107:40; Isaiah 40:17; Isaiah 41:29; Isaiah 44:9; Isaiah 45:19; Isaiah 49:4; Isaiah 59:4). Finally, the state of the earth in Genesis 1:2 described as in "darkness" is really only understandable when a judgment of this sort is assumed to be the source of the darkness. For God is a God of light (1 John 1:5), and everything He creates is perfect, while darkness is synonymous with evil (Ephesians 5:11; Ephesians 6:12; 1 John 1:6 1 John 2:11), and is a characteristic result of divine judgment (Isaiah 5:30; Isaiah 8:22; Ezekiel 32:7-8; Acts 13:11).

3. God's Restoration of the Earth:

While Genesis 1:1 thus describes the original, *ex nihilo* creation of the universe, the second verse of the Bible, Genesis 1:2; split grammatically from verse one with an abrupt, adversative construction (in the Hebrew), propels us untold eons forward in time from the original, awesome act of creation, and moves us to the other side of the Genesis gap, describing for us the state of the universe as it existed before God re-created the earth.

Original creation had been marred by Satan's revolt, and cast into darkness by God's judgment upon the rebellious angels. In order to make the universe habitable once more for creatures with physical bodies (the attempted possession of which was a major issue in Satan's pre-fall propaganda), a re-creation of the earth was essential. Gen. 1:3-2:3; the account of the seven days, is a description of this renewal of the heavens and the earth. The objective behind this process of the seven days is also quite clear: the creation of Man. Everything God accomplishes within the period of re-creation is specifically designed to make life supportable for this His second category of creature possessed of free will (and ultimate replacement for the devil and his angels). That the seven days are indeed a re-creation distinct from the original creation of Genesis 1:1 can also be seen from the following:

1) The presence of the heavens and earth in place at Genesis 1:3 shows this is re-creation: As God begins to work on the earth in Genesis 1:3; earth (and the heavens in which it exists) is already in place, an impossibility unless this is a re-creation (for if it describes the original creation, where then did the earth come from?).

2) The presence of the angels during the seven days shows this is re-creation: The angels are present too (also necessarily having been created at some earlier time – before the Genesis gap – an impossibility unless this is re-creation), "shouting for joy" at the reconstruction of the earth (Job 38:4-7).

3) God's pronouncement of His acts as "good" shows this is re-creation: God, being God, creates only what is good in the first place. Bringing light out of darkness, dry land out of only sea, life out of lifelessness, are all acts of bringing something good out of something "not good" (i. e., darkness, sea, lifelessness). The pronouncement "and God saw that it was good" is a stamp of divine approval on the restoration of what had been originally good and now was restored to its "good" condition following an interval of judgment upon evil (Genesis 1:4, Genesis 1:10, Genesis 1:12, Genesis 1:18, Genesis 1:21, Genesis 1:25, Genesis 1:31).

4) God's construction of the firmament argues that this is re-creation: In Genesis 1:6-8; God constructs the firmament which separates the "waters above" from the "waters below", and calls this firmament "heavens". Now it can hardly be that we are meant to understand that prior to this constructing of the firmament, the earth, above which this firmament is set, had nowhere to exist, or that the light and darkness, after separation, or the waters, prior to separation, should be understood as having existence, yet somehow not existing in the heavens (for they can only be understood as existing within the universe). Indeed, both the heavens at large and the earth had already been created in Genesis 1:1. This interpretation is strengthened both by the fact that rather than "creating" the firmament from nothing, the language of Genesis 1:7 specifies that God "made" it from something.⁽²⁾ Therefore, since there was already a universe, the formation of this firmament can only be seen as an act of re-creation.

5) Re-creation explains appearance of age: The Genesis gap is the most likely explanation for the perceived contradiction between the biblical account of the seven days and the fossil record. The exact space of time between Genesis 1:1 and God's creation of the angels, or between their creation and Satan's fall, or between God's judgment on the original Eden-earth and His restoration of it in Genesis 1:2 are not recorded for us anywhere in scripture and could well encompass untold eons of time (a commodity which is felt and measured much differently in the angelic sphere, after all). In addition, there is also the point that when God creates, He creates in mature perfection. The plants, animals, and people (Adam and Eve) created during the six days are all created in a mature status, thus giving the appearance of age. It is no great stretch to see the restored "heavenly lights" and reconstructed earth benefitting from a similar, complete creation that might well give every impression of a lengthy geological history that does not in fact comprise real time, in our limited understanding of it: By faith we understand that the ages have been constructed by the Word of God, so that what we see (i. e., the material world) has not come into being from the things we now see. Hebrews 11:3. For it escapes their notice in maintaining this, that heavens existed long ago and an earth formed by the Word of God from and through water – [and that it was] through these [waters] that the world of that time was deluged by water and

destroyed. Now the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire by that same Word (of God), preserved for the day of judgment and the destruction of godless men. 2 Peter 3:5-7.

6) Re-creation is analogous to other divine restorations: Adam's fall resulted in a curse on the earth that is analogous to (though not nearly so devastating as) the Genesis gap judgment (Genesis 3:17-19). Nevertheless, all creation now "groans" in anticipation of the removal of the curse, a phenomenon to come at the return of Christ which also parallels the restoration of earth in Genesis 1:2 (Romans 8:19-22). A few of the many other such instances of the pattern of divine judgment followed by gracious restoration include: 1) the renewal of the earth after the flood (Genesis 8:1-22; Genesis 9:1-29); 2) Joseph's deliverance from prison and restoration to his family (Genesis 45:1-28); 3) Israel restored to the land after the Babylonian captivity (Ezra 1:1-11); and Ezekiel 4:1-17) the most significant and spectacular restoration of all: the reconciliation of sinful Man to God through the redemptive work of the God-Man, our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. esp. Romans 5:6-11). Suffice it to say that our God is a gracious God who may hold just judgment in the one hand, but always has merciful restoration in the other for all who will repent and return to Him. The restoration of the devastated earth was a clear sign to Satan and his followers that their slanderous insinuations that God would be unable or unwilling to provide for reconciliation were about to be undeniably refuted.

7) Re-creation is focused on Man as a replacement for Satan and his angels: Finally, all of God's work throughout the seven days is focused on Man (an eventuality which can only be understood as a response to the devil's revolt, and must thus follow original creation):

Day 1: Light out of darkness, necessary to sustain life.

Day 2: Atmosphere, also necessary for all life.

Day 3: Dry land, essential for any animal life, and for Man; vegetation as a source of food, materials, pleasure, etc.

Day 4: Lights to "serve as signs": for the ordering of human life in necessary increments of time.

Day 5: Other creatures: enriching human life.

Day 6: Land animals and livestock to support and bless human life; finally, Man.

Day 7: God's Sabbath rest: Man requires a breathing space to fellowship with God.

4. God's Replacement for Satan: The Bible's teachings about the purpose, nature and creation of Man are properly the subject of part 3 of our Bible Basics series. It should be mentioned here, however, that in Genesis 1:26-30 the creation of Man is the culmination of God's work. The process begins with the divine conference of the Trinity announcing God's decision: "Let Us make Man in Our image, according to Our pattern" (Genesis 1:26). Man is then created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), blessed and given rule over all other creatures on earth (Genesis 1:28), and provided with food (Genesis 1:29; as are other creatures: Genesis 1:30). The creation of Man, along with an environment to support our lives in these physical bodies, is clearly the purpose and goal of the seven days of God's restorative work in the world. Only after the earth has been restored to viable conditions, Man created upon it and placed in charge of it, does God conclude that all He has made is "very good" (Genesis 1:31 : the Hebrew adjective me'odth being added

only here to God's evaluations of His various acts during the seven days as "good"). Even the pattern of the seven days is one that suits and reflects the subsequent history of mankind, with each day standing for one millennium of human history and with the seventh day signifying the millennial rule of Christ (this principle will be explained in more detail in Part 2B of this series). The fact that God's restorative work during the seven days is entirely focused on Man also argues for Genesis 1:2 beginning a process of re-creation, for Man, specifically through the God-Man, Jesus Christ, is meant in no small part as a replacement for Satan and his fallen angels.

Besides being an indication to the devil and his followers of their ultimate fate, the Lord's cataclysmic judgment upon the world also served to demonstrate the faithfulness of the angels who had rejected Satan's appeal. They trusted instead in God, that He would somehow not allow His universe to remain cloaked in darkness and devastation, and they were not disappointed. For truly, the Lord's solution was an eventuality which Satan and his followers did not expect in their wildest imaginings: the complete re-creation of the heavens and the earth in seven literal days, accompanied by the creation of something completely new: Man, a creature who would be God's means of exposing all of Satan's slanderous lies, a creature who, while possessing obvious limitations, had what Satan and his demons coveted most: a physical body to house his spirit.

5. Satan and the Fall of Man: In addition to the detailed treatment of this topic found in part 3 of the Satanic Rebellion series, the fall of mankind as a specific topic will also be covered in part 3A of the present series. It is only necessary to emphasize here what should be plain from a simple reading of Genesis chapter three, namely that although Adam and Eve were guilty, they almost certainly never would have fallen without the devil's crafty intervention. The specific tactics used by Satan in this first attack upon mankind serve as a kind of paradigm for us explaining his methods generally (see the two cited studies for details). In its barest essentials, his deception of Eve focused upon her misunderstanding of the Word of God, specifically, both the exact nature of God's commandment to refrain (which Satan distorted) and the purpose for it (which was really for their good, contrary to the devil's lies). His indirect attack upon Adam, on the other hand, was aimed at Adam's lack of faith in God, specifically, his doubts about God's ability to solve the problem of Eve's fall (without taking matters into his own hands). One moral to this most famous story is that while we as individual human beings may be self-aware, the devil is almost always more aware of our weaknesses than we are (through the process of simple observation of the way in which we live our lives). It is very clear from even a cursory reading of Genesis chapter three that it is complete folly for us to engage the devil in a conversation, either directly (as Eve had done), or indirectly (as with Adam's response to Eve). And it is important to note that Satan himself does not have to be visible for us to make this mistake (indeed, he was not in either Eve or Adam's case). It is enough for us to engage in consideration of any satanic influence (of which this world is full) to open ourselves up to successful temptation and attack. For when it comes to temptation, Genesis chapter three makes it unmistakably clear that we members of the human race are at an appalling disadvantage faced with the devil's wiles. Flirting with sin and evil is, quite simply, a game we can never, never win. Our first parents could not – and they were not disadvantaged by the sinful nature that works against us from the inside. Only with God's help and the through the resources that God provides (the Spirit and the Truth of scripture in particular) is it possible for us to resist the crafty assaults of the adversary, and, generally speaking, this usually involves forcefully turning our backs on him and his, in whatever form or manifestation.

6. The Limits of Satan's World Rule:

We must be careful to avoid two extremes in our consideration of the devil's strategy and system for world control. On the one hand, it is painfully obvious to all who delight in the works of the Lord that Satan's strategic and administrative skills cannot be compared to God's. Attempting to find complete consistency or ultimate brilliance in Satan's modus operandi is a fool's errand. On the other hand, it would be equal folly to underestimate the present ruler of this world. The reactive strategy or "plan" which he has adopted to combat the inexorable divine plan of God is indeed doomed to failure, and the organization he has imposed on this corrupted world in his partial control is highly imperfect, to say the least. Nevertheless, he has in the course of human history caught the majority of mankind in his toils, and done inestimable damage to believers of every stripe as well. It is only through the grace, the power, and the providence of God that we who have chosen for Jesus Christ can win the victory of faith over our arch-enemy. Not until the middle of the Great Tribulation will the devil and his angels be cast from heaven once and for all (Revelation 12:7-17). Until that time it is the earth where such conflict as there is between the angelic forces of God and Satan respectively is taking place. Just as the elect angels appear before God at certain appointed times (the so-called "assembly of the holy ones", i. e., of the angels; cf. Job 15:8; Job 38:7; Psalms 29:1 ff.; Psalms 89:5-7; Jeremiah 23:18 & Jeremiah 23:22), so too there is evidence that the fallen angels on occasion present themselves before God (cf. 1 Kings 22:19-22; Job 1:6; Job 2:1; Zechariah 3:1). This combination of facts (i. e., spiritual warfare on earth and a sort of "truce" in heaven) demonstrates that while there is indeed a conflict of the most deadly seriousness being played out between God on the one hand and the devil and his forces on the other, the latter nevertheless continue to abide by certain mandatory restrictions and commands on account of the awesome might and irresistible power of God. Satan is therefore "free" to act on earth, but only within very distinct parameters laid down by God and well-known to the devil and his angels. These "rules of engagement" allow the devil and his minions to tempt mankind in a variety of ways, but generally do not allow overt attack upon human beings without specific consent (cf. Job 1:12; Job 2:6; 1 Corinthians 5:4-5; demon possession is a unique case wherein an individual first must yield up his will for possession to occur).

1) Satan was allowed to play the role of tempter in the garden of Eden: In addition to furnishing the garden with a test of obedience in the form of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Satan was not only allowed to observe these new creatures destined to replace him and his followers, but also to provide them with false information. Picking his target and lies carefully, Satan took full advantage of his opportunity to subvert mankind and was successful in inducing our first parents to choose foolishly against God.

2) Adam forfeited his God-given rulership of Eden/earth at the fall: Adam and Eve's subsequent expulsion from the garden of Eden and their subjection to the curse of mortality were not the only negative consequence of their actions. Adam also lost his position as undisputed regent of the Lord's re-created earth, serving under the delegated authority of God.

3) By instigating the fall of Man, Satan has usurped the rulership of earth: As we have seen, Adam's right to rule earth in God's place was given to him by the Lord (Genesis 1:26-28; Psalms 8:5-8; cf. Hebrews 2:5-9). Scripture records no such grant to the devil. Indeed, even Satan himself supports the proposition that he is currently in control of the world as a result of Adam's forfeiture

and fall. While in the process of attempting to persuade Christ to "worship him", the devil showed our Lord all the kingdoms of the world and proclaimed . . .

"I will give you all this power and all their glory – for it has been surrendered to me and [so] I [can] give it to whomever I please." Luke 4:6. The Greek word *paradidomi* (παράδωμι) in this passage indicates that Satan's reign over the earth was not wrested from God or awarded to the devil, but was rather relinquished by Adam, abandoned, abdicated, given over by default, or "surrendered". The devil, therefore, has temporarily usurped or "snagged" dominion over planet earth. To put the matter in legal terms, Satan's rulership of the earth is based only a *de facto* control – his reign has never been and will never be a *de jure* one.

4) Satan is now allowed a wider range of influence over mankind: The sphere within which the devil now operates on earth is much larger than was the case in the garden of Eden. Instead of a single tree to test the hearts of mankind, we now face an entire world filled with multifarious temptations. And instead of the limited lying influence of the devil (in possession of Eve's shining serpent), satanic lies and influences are ubiquitous in this world we inhabit, ranging from the patently obvious to the almost invisibly subtle. The limited avenue of opportunity in the garden of Eden proved to be sufficient for Satan to instigate humanity's corporate fall in Adam. Small wonder then that with exponentially greater access to mankind and a freer reign to exercise his influence that the world "lies in his [sphere of influence]" (1 John 5:19). The devil also has an extraordinary advantage in his quest to lead humanity astray: the sin nature that now resides in the flesh of all of Adam and Eve's descendants (Christ being the sole exception). For the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life" (1 John 2:16), universal manifestations of mankind's collective heart, are tailor-made for satanic exploitation. Indeed, it is not too much to say that the devil has kept our sinful tendencies in mind in constructing his world-wide system of temptation, deception and control. It should come as no surprise, then, that the world is the terrible place that it is, given the evil resident in the heart of Man, and Satan's ability and opportunity to exploit that evil.

5) The limits of Satan's control over the world: The devil's dominion over the world is in some ways analogous to a hostile power's temporary control of territory conquered during a protracted war. Similarly, Satan's rulership of the earth is temporary, and must be maintained by force and vigilance. Satan's control over earth is restricted by the will of God, that is to say, the devil can do that which and only that which God allows him to do. Much as he clearly would have liked to, Satan was not permitted to lay a finger upon Job until God expressly gave His consent, and, despite his unique sufferings, Job never was completely destroyed, because God would not allow it (Job 1:1-22 & Job 2:1-13; Job 42:12 ff.). Satan's request to "sift [Peter] like wheat" was denied in response to a prayer on his behalf by our Lord (Luke 22:31-32), and there are at least two New Testament cases of rebellious believers being "handed over to Satan", plainly indicating that the withdrawal of God's protection had to be sought by apostolic intercession before the devil could have free rein with them (1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 Timothy 1:20; cf. Psalms 78:49; Psalms 109:6). A prime reason for Satan's malevolent will being restricted by God's gracious will is our free will. The existence of mankind cannot be fully understood without reference to Satan's rebellion against God. A primary purpose for our creation was and continues to be God's replacement in the family of God of unwilling fallen angels with willing human beings. Much to his surprise, Satan's successful seduction of our first parents did not head off this inevitable eventuality – it merely

changed the circumstances and timing of the filling up of the full number of willing worshipers from the ranks of human kind. It goes without saying that if humanity could be eliminated from the earth, or be subjected to a degree of manipulation so severe that the exercise of a free will choice for God would be impossible, God's plan (not to mention our eternal future) would have been in jeopardy. Therefore while God allows the devil to operate within a wide range of latitude in this world which Satan claims as his own, his sphere of operations is not absolute, and is unquestionably more restricted in the case of those of us who have chosen to become followers of God than it is in the case of those who have chosen to become followers of Satan.

It is important to note that the Bible never actually proclaims Satan the "ruler of the earth". The devil is "ruler of the cosmos (i. e., world: John 12:31 John 14:30; John 16:11)", but his rule is not one of physical, material occupation in the sense of an invading army visibly and corporeally on the scene, holding sway on the earth. A simple visual inspection of our surroundings confirms this obvious fact. Satan's rule over the world of mankind is instead exercised largely through human beings, by means of demonic influence and possession. This point helps to explain a number of passages that deal with the devil's current rulership of the world:

Ephesians 2:2 calls Satan "the prince of the power of the air", and, "the spirit who is now working in the sons of disobedience". The devil's sphere of influence proceeds from the air around us rather than proceeding from a material and visible earthly presence. He and his followers are spirits and their influence on mankind largely of a non-material nature (influencing and, occasionally through possession, compelling, but altogether invisible).

Ephesians 6:12 says that "our struggle is not with flesh and blood, but with . . . spirits of evil in the heavenly places". This passage likewise identifies the devil's realm of power and influence as off of the physical earth (though nonetheless powerfully influential).

1 John 4:4 tells us that He who is in us "is greater than he (i. e., the devil) who is in the world". For Satan is in the world exercising great power, but he is not directly and physically administering planet earth.

1 John 5:19 states that the "whole world is in him", i. e., under the devil's non-material influence rather than his corporeal control.

2 Corinthians 4:4 calls Satan the "god of this age", also emphasizing the non-material nature of his control. He is further said to have "blinded the eyes of unbelievers" indicating the means and method of his influence, not a physical compulsion generally, but a spiritual deception that induces human beings to turn away from the one, true God.

Thus the devil's kingdom is predominately an immaterial (or "spiritual") one, "hovering over" the human kingdoms of the world, and using demonic influence of varying degrees to produce the desired effects. Mankind is still "in charge" of physical planet earth in a sense (cf. Psalms 8:4-8; Psalms 115:16), but is far inferior in power and intelligence to angelic beings. Left to our own devices, we could no more hope to get the better of a spiritual encounter than we would from a material one (should the devil be allowed to attack us in this way). But God has graciously laid down very specific boundaries that preserve our existence and ability to exercise free will in this life, in spite of the massive power of the devil's forces, and provided safeguards which prevent the devil from running amok in human affairs.

6) The conscience as a restrainer of satanic influence: The first of these safeguards, common (at least initially) to all human beings, is today most often termed "the conscience". Subsequent to eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve acquired an internal, mental and emotional sensitivity that was capable of distinguishing between right and wrong, between good and evil. God graciously constructed the necessary test of their obedience in such a way that disobedience would provide them with this essential internal compass, a mechanism without which moral navigation through a satanic world would be impossible, especially for persons in a sinful state. Once the protection of the perfect environment of Eden had been removed, and the entire world transformed into one big tree of testing, as it were, an "internal guidance system" became necessary gear for the human race. For while in the garden there was only one, very straight-forward test about which the Lord God had given specific instruction, the devil's world would be full of all manner of tests and temptations, ranging from the completely obvious to the quite subtle. Without some way of judging the rightness and wrongness of our actions (both potential and completed), we human beings would be completely at the devil's mercy, master of deception that he is. Eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil resulted in our first parents acquiring just such an ability, the conscience, and they have since physically passed this capability down to all of their offspring (Romans 2:12-16). The conscience, therefore, is a universal, God-given aspect of our common human nature capable of evaluating the goodness (and evil) of the phenomena we encounter in this world, and is especially concerned with our own behavior. It is not really a separate organ, but a facet of the heart (the inner person as a complete combination of body and spirit). All this is obvious from the very existence of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, from the consequences of Adam and Eve's partaking of its fruit, and from the effect of the fall on human behavior ever since: we not only "do wrong" as a result of the sin now inherent in our mortal bodies, but we also know when we do wrong, at least until the conscience is so seared that its function is lost or even perverted (cf. 1 Timothy 4:2). Before evil can find a comfortable home in our hearts, the conscience must first be suppressed. As sinners by nature, we are predisposed toward wrong, but thanks to God's gracious provision (initially through the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and subsequently by inheritance from our first parents) we are also born with an inner compass which, until we willfully de-magnetize it, will point in the general direction of the good, and which, if we conscientiously calibrate it with God's truth, is capable of giving us very clear and specific guidance. Conscience, then is a universal barrier in the hearts of all human beings that must be broken down before the devil can exert his influence and will.

7) Law and nationalism as a restrainers of satanic influence: In addition to the internal check that conscience provides on the devil's manipulation of mankind, God also limits Satan's control of human affairs by law (cf. Romans 2:14-15; Romans 13:1-5; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17), by nationalism (cf. Genesis 11:6; Deuteronomy 32:8; Job 12:23; Psalms 74:17; Jeremiah 18:7-10; Acts 17:26-28), and by direct divine intervention (e. g., any of the myriad occasions of the Lord's direct annihilation of Israel's enemies). Since God's destruction of the tower of Babel (cf. Genesis 11:6), law and nationalism have been and continue to be the two major visible barriers that keep Satan from complete world domination.

Law is an outgrowth of conscience, a society-wide codification of our collective impulses to protect what is right and restrain what is wrong, built on tradition, experience and experimentation, but always for the general purpose of good. Not that any system of law has ever been perfect (with the

sole exception of the law handed down to Moses by God Himself). Imperfect human beings produce imperfect systems of governance, but the fact of orderly, generally good-oriented legal authority is definitely from God in every legitimate case (i. e., where crime is outlawed and punished, while good behavior is protected and rewarded):

Therefore it is necessary to be subject [to authority] not only because of this severity, but also for conscience' sake. Romans 13:5 .

Nations are made by God (cf. Genesis 11:6-9; Deuteronomy 32:8; Job 12:23; Acts 17:26-28). The term "nationalism", however, is considered by some to be applicable only to comparatively modern times (i. e., the eighteenth century forward). But whatever term one prefers, the differentiation of peoples (according to language, culture, geography etc.) is a phenomenon which goes back thousands of years (specifically, to the post-Babel diaspora of the nations). When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when He divided the sons of men, He established the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel. Deuteronomy 32:8.

Nationalism also acts as a serious check on the devil's earthly operations. This can be seen clearly enough by considering the horrendously evil state of affairs into which the entire world had fallen prior to the great flood. A universal society, with an identical culture and language (as the antediluvian world was) is much easier for the devil to control and manipulate: as in the case of a single biological entity, as soon as any virus invades it, the disease quickly spreads and infects the entire organism. A one-world state thus offers no more resistance to gross forms of evil, once initially penetrated. A multi-national world, however, is more resistant to Satan's influences, precisely because of its diversity. Communism, or Nazism, or sexual libertinism, or what have you, must be introduced and promoted in every country individually, giving time and space for resistance to whatever new strain of evil the devil is currently promulgating. For from one man [Adam], [God] created the nations of mankind, that they might inhabit the entire face of the earth. And He predetermined both their appointed times and the boundaries of their settlement, that they might seek God, if perhaps they might even [deign to] grope after Him and so come to find Him – for He is not far from every one of us. Acts 17:26-27. This last passage makes clear that nationalism has been important, not only in the preservation of human life on earth, but also in the greater purpose for which mankind has always needed to be preserved: to seek and find God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Satan styles himself "ruler of the world", and so he is – but not without limitations. God is ultimately the One in control of the history of the nations (cf. Isaiah 10:5-7, Isaiah 10:15; Jeremiah 10:7; Daniel 2:21), but the devil does his best to undermine the barriers that keep them separate (yet can only do so within God's permissive will):

Those who look at you will contemplate you; they will consider you: "Is this the man who confounded the earth, who weakened the nations? He made the world like a desert, and trampled its cities underfoot. He did not let its prisoners go home. Isaiah 14:16-17.

8) Satan is now on the defensive: God's plan for the defeat and replacement of the devil through Jesus Christ has been rolling irrepressibly forward ever since Adam and Eve departed from the garden. Moreover, since the Kingdom of God became imminent with the arrival of our Lord Jesus Christ in human form (without diminution of His deity), the devil has stepped up his operations (Matthew 11:12), and these will find their most intense expression during the Great Tribulation when he is finally excluded from the heavens, once and for all (Revelation 12:7-17).

Thus this has never been an uncontested struggle, and, indeed, Satan's ultimate defeat at the hands of Jesus Christ was prophesied by God before human history outside of Eden began: So the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, you are accursed, more than any beast or wild animal. You shall go on your belly and eat dust all the days of your life. And I shall place hostility between you and the woman, that is, between your seed and her Seed. He [Christ] will attack you head-on [so as to destroy you], but you will attack Him from behind". Genesis 3:14-15.

Christ's "head-on" or mortal attack on Satan and his kingdom began at the cross and will be effectively completed at the second advent when the Son of God returns to regain complete, direct control of the earth for Man on behalf of God as the God-Man. Even until that time, moreover, Christ is nonetheless the de jure authority over all the earth (Psalms 110:1; cf. Psalms 82:8; John 5:27 1 Corinthians 15:27):

Then Jesus came over and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, so go and make all nations my followers by baptizing them [with the Spirit] into the Person (i. e., "name") of the Father and [into the Person] of the Son and [into the Person] of the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you". Matthew 28:18-20 a

Christ's parable of the growing seed (Mark 4:26 ff.), and mustard seed (Mark 4:30 ff.) depict the spread of the militant Kingdom of Heaven here on earth, a veritable invasion of the devil's realm in the person of believers who are not of this world or subjects of Satan in any way, but are instead by the blood of the Lamb citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven (John 17:16 Ephesians 2:19; Php 3:20; 1 Peter 2:9 & 1 Peter 2:11). The imminence of the Kingdom of Heaven means also the concomitant imminence of the devil's removal. Christ came to "destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8 b; cf. Hebrews 2:14), and even before His sacrifice at the cross spoke of Satan's impending fall from heaven (Luke 10:18), a prospect made even more secure by His triumph on the cross (Colossians 2:15). This assurance that our adversary the devil is on the point of defeat is a part of normal Christian encouragement (Romans 16:20). It is also the fulfillment of God's judgments against Satan dating back to his original fall:

Concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned [already].

John 16:11.

Now that Christ's victory is secure, we await only the completion of the calling out of the full number of Christ's Church (and the prophesied events of the last days), until Satan will be completely expelled:

Now is the judgment of this world. Now will the prince of this world be driven out.

John 12:31.

Until the devil is removed from the world (and sin removed from mankind) the world will never be a truly "good" place (cf. Matthew 12:29). Indeed, even after a thousand years of Christ's personal rule, Satan will be allowed one last attempt on mankind, and will in comparatively short order bring about the rebellion of a large portion of the earth's population against our Savior's perfect regime (Revelation 20:1-15). This will be the last time sin and Satan team up. From this point on God will create a new heaven and a new earth "in which righteousness dwell", where there is no more devil

and no more sin nature (mankind existing at that time only in a resurrected, perfected state). No, God is not going to "fix up" this present world, but will instead create a new, perfect one, where every trace of sin and evil have been burned away forevermore: For on that day the heavens will burst into flame and dissolve, and the elements will catch fire and melt. But we are awaiting new heavens and a new earth just as He promised – [a world] where righteousness dwells.

2 Peter 3:12-13. On that blessed future day, we descendants of the first Adam who have in this world trusted in the Last Adam (our Lord Jesus Christ), we who have a share in Him will also share in the new, blessed world to come, replacing Satan and his followers in a restored, complete family of God. When Christ shall have defeated the devil once and for all, and turned His Kingdom over to the Father (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:28; Revelation 21:1 ff), then God's reign on the new earth will begin at last, never to be challenged again.

7. Satan's World-System: The world that Adam and Eve entered after their expulsion from the garden of Eden could not have been more different from the perfect environment they had so recently taken for granted. Instead of abundant prosperity, ready at hand, they had entered a world of limitation, shortage and scarcity. Instead of a world where all their needs were instantly provided for without any effort on their part, back-breaking toil was now necessary for survival and uncertainty for the future entered into the equation. Life was now a matter of pain, sweat, tears and trouble. Our first parents would also now experience for the first time the full gamut of destructive and sinful emotions, including fear, jealousy and hostility. The domestic tranquility that had reigned in Eden as a matter of course would now be infected by anger, frustration, bitterness and resentment. Before too many years had passed, Adam and Eve would even come to see one of their own children murder his brother. And finally, in crowning futility, when they had lived out their finite years, the ground would receive them back to itself as the Lord God had proclaimed. Death would put an end to all they had worked and striven for in the sorrowful interim. But God did not leave them orphans on the earth, completely bereft of all hope and of Himself. In the same judgment that rendered our first parents mortal, God also promised them the Seed who would one day crush the head of the serpent who had deceived them. Christ's sacrifice was also foreshadowed in coats of skin with which He graciously clothed them, replacing the garments born of their own efforts with symbols of the coming One who would one day die in their place (discussed in part 3A). Thus before they even left the garden of Eden, God had given Adam and Eve a new tree of life to replace the one they had forsaken: that is, the cross of Jesus Christ (foreshadowed in the animal skins and in the prophecy of the Seed). Like their descendants after them, Adam and Eve were thus given the opportunity to regain the spiritual relationship with God lost at the fall. He Himself would make the promised sacrifice that would blot out sin and destroy the advantage the devil had gained, crushing Satan's head first at the cross and making a final end of him at the conclusion of history. It only remained for our first parents to accept our Lord's generous offer of boundless grace, trusting in Him for their deliverance from the inevitability of the grave, the unavoidable reality which had now become life's central issue. From a spiritual point of view, life remains essentially the same for us today as it was when our first parents trekked out of Eden some six thousand years ago. The critical issue for every human being is identical now to what it was then: we must all choose whether or not to accept through faith God's solution to the problem of sin and death (in the person of His Son Jesus Christ). And just as Adam and Eve were left in the world beyond the point of faith, so also we today are not immediately transferred to our

heavenly home after salvation, but remain here in the world to prove our faith, to grow in it, and to help others do the same. But this world is no Eden. As followers of God and believers in Jesus Christ, we can be forgiven for feeling ill at ease in this present world where we scarcely even belong, for it is not a place where the knowledge of God abounds and the will of God is always done. On the contrary, this parlous world through which we pass lies largely under the influence of the evil one (1 John 5:19). This world is the devil's world, a world which we believers are merely passing through as temporary sojourners. We are striding forward day by day toward the promised land, carrying the cross of Jesus Christ. We are marching toward Zion on a holy pilgrimage, living for Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:7-10; Php 1:21), eager for the day when we shall be with Him forever (2 Timothy 4:8; Titus 2:13; cf. 1 Corinthians 16:22; Ephesians 6:24 Romans 8:23). Until that time, we wait for something better as homeless wanderers (Hebrews 13:13-14; 1 Peter 1:1; 1 Peter 2:11) in a world which finds our perspective and our hope worthless, even idiotic (1 Corinthians 1:18-31; 1 Corinthians 3:18-21). But by our faith and the actions that faith produces, we show the world that we are not of it, do not love it, and acknowledge that we have no true part in it – except for the God who is the focus and the object of our love all the days of our sojourning here in the devil's inhospitable desert (cf. 1 Chronicles 29:15; Psalms 23:1-6; Psalms 39:12; Psalms 63:1; Psalms 84:5-7; Psalms 119:19; Hebrews 11:37-38).

1) The Vanity of this Life: In His judgment upon Adam and Eve, God laid down the fundamental calculus of human life outside of the garden: that we must earn our bread through sweat and toil throughout our short lives and afterwards return to dust (Genesis 3:16-19). The curse of a life filled with difficulties followed by an inevitable death will only be removed when God has brought history itself to an end (Revelation 22:3). In the meantime, the cycle of painful birth, thistles and thorns, and return to the ground from whence we were originally taken is destined to repeat for us, one and all.

"Utter futility! Utter futility!" says the teacher, "Everything is futility!" Ecclesiastes 1:2.

Many men strive for things that cannot be achieved, for even with prodigious effort, achievement is not really within the power of Man to control: The race is not to the swift, or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise, or wealth to the brilliant, or favor to the learned, but time and chance happen to them all. Ecclesiastes 9:11 NIV And of those who do achieve what they have set their hopes on, many of them will lose what they have striven for, since everything in this life is ephemeral (cf. Isaiah 40:6; Matthew 6:19-21; Luke 12:14-21, Luke 12:33; James 1:10-11; James 5:2; 1 Peter 1:24; 2 Peter 3:10-13):

Moreover, no man knows when his hour will come: As fish are caught in a cruel net, or birds are taken in a snare, so men are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them. Ecclesiastes 9:12 NIV And of those who do manage to retain what they have striven for all the days of their lives, death will ultimately bereave them of all their precious accomplishments. For death, in particular, makes a mockery of all human achievement:

What profit will a man have if he gains the whole world but loses his life? Matthew 16:26. The ultimate loss of life is the common heritage of all mankind, so that Jesus' words are particularly penetrating: unless some solution can be found to the overarching problem of our physical mortality, even achievement on a level unsurpassed in human history is essentially meaningless. Indeed, one may even make the argument, that the greater the achievement, the greater the

futility, on account of the correspondingly greater loss involved at death. Along with life, the poor lose only their poverty in death, but the rich, successful person loses the things esteemed most in this vain, secular world. Death thus renders all secular achievements essentially pointless: Do not be overawed when a man grows rich, when the splendor of his house increases; for he will take nothing with him when he dies, his splendor will not descend with him. Psalms 49:16-17 NIV

Apart from God, nothing we do is truly original (Ecclesiastes 1:10). Nothing we do will ultimately be remembered (Ecclesiastes 1:11). Despite all our efforts, death will snatch away from us all we have gained in this life "though we had named lands after ourselves" (Psalms 49:11 b), and we will be oblivious to the fate of our prized possessions after our departure (Ecclesiastes 2:17-21). Nothing is secure. Nothing is forever . . . apart from God.

It is in this connection that our Lord commanded us to look beyond the hollow rewards of this life to the true rewards, eternal in the heavens, which come from God:

Don't stock up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and corrosion eat them away and where thieves dig through and steal them. But stock up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor corrosion eat them away and where thieves neither dig through nor steal them. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:19-21. The heathen quest for "myth-happiness", that is, satisfaction in life apart from God, is vain for two primary reasons: 1) apart from God, very little can truly satisfy; 2) apart from God, security can never be guaranteed. Beyond the simple, God-given pleasures of food, family and labor, the attainment of successive plateaus of wealth, fame, power or pleasure may entertain for a brief moment, but like a feast to a man with a full belly, they quickly lose their appeal, thus spurring the myth-happiness faithful on to the next level of dubious achievement as the cycle progresses on its never-ending way:

Fame fades; no one can continue to capture the public eye forever; all glory is fleeting, and death eventually reduces all its remnants to dust (Ecclesiastes 1:11).

Pleasure sates easily; no experience can be savored forever, like tears in a bottle; no experience can be exactly repeated or guaranteed for the future; and though one were able to push enjoyment into areas never before experienced, even these would eventually mock the practitioner, when in the end satisfaction drains away, leaving death to bring an end to pleasure altogether.

Power is inevitably circumscribed by human limitations (among other things: Acts 17:26-27), and while its accretion may feed arrogance, arrogance' appetite is a bottomless sea that can never be satisfied; and death eventually sweeps away even the most powerful ruler.

Wealth likewise can never be sufficient; the more one has, the more obvious it becomes to the possessor that, after an initial flush, all the fame, pleasure and power it can provide do not ultimately produce lasting satisfaction; the more wealth, that universal secular solution which myth-happiness proclaims will certainly bring joy, the more frustration when joy is not achieved.

Without the confident hope of life after death, what is the point of living long and prospering when afterwards one dies? Can a long life and the experience of material prosperity really soften the blow of death for the unbeliever when it finally arrives? It may do so for the living who feel less grief for someone who has died peacefully in a good old age and in a prosperous state, but does

past experience, however blissful, really make the loss of everything an easier pill to swallow? While the average unbeliever generally makes a habit of ignoring the possibility of his own death (until it comes suddenly upon him), one thing is sure: no amount of achievement or wealth can forestall the inevitable:

Why should I fear in troubling times, when I am surrounded by the wickedness of my deceivers, those who trust in their wealth and boast in their great riches? Surely, no one can redeem a man [from God's hand], no one can pay a ransom to God for him. For the redemption price of a life is too precious for Him to relent forever, that one should live on forever, and not see corruption. Psalms 49:5-9.

While human beings are only too willing to accept the idea of the mortality of others, a sense of personal immortality, or, more correctly put, an ability to procrastinate mentally until the very moment of death, is the rule when one examines one's own life. Just as "somebody else's troubles" cause little anxiety, so the eventuality of death is always in another man's court, until the actual termination of life (at which point contemplation and re-examination is, needless to say, too late). Great wealth may help to postpone the inevitable (at least people seem to think that it can), but no matter what fastidious care we are able to take of our lives and persons, the delay achieved will ever be laughably insignificant (Matthew 6:27). So despite the fact that our ephemeral nature is the prime lesson of life, human beings persist in running after wealth and accomplishments until some mythic, personal Eden be achieved, ever hedging in their gains and themselves, as if the brief moment would or could last forever. But in the absence of the hope of the resurrection, the hope of myth-happiness achieved and preserved continues to be the holy-grail of the unbelieving life, that, and the equally vain hope that grasping the brass ring for a few short moments will somehow take away the sting of death. From time to time, we are all attracted to the vanities of the world. We all stray from the steep and narrow path that leads to true deliverance. We sin, we fail, we fall; but we believers are called to wash ourselves clean from the world's pollution, not to wallow in it, to grow closer to God, not to keep Him at a distance. Our sin nature is in fact our adversary's greatest ally. The "lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life" that percolate through our corrupt bodies are ever present opponents that attract us to the meaningless things of life and will, if not mastered, draw us into the same life of vanity and futility we have escaped through God's grace in Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Peter 2:20-22; 1 John 2:16). As Christians, we are not here in this life to love the world, but to love God; we are not here to mold ourselves after the world, but after God:

Don't be a lover of this world, nor of what is in this world. If anyone is a lover of this world, a [genuine] love for the Father is not in him. 1 John 2:15. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by this renewal of your thinking (i. e., through obedience to the Word of God; cf. 1 John 2:1), so that you may discern what God's will for you is, namely what it is good, well-pleasing, and correct [for you to do]. Romans 12:2. As believers, we still have to live here in the devil's world in order to fulfill the purpose God has for our lives. Like all human beings, we feel the pull of myth-happiness, the lie that tells us there can be satisfaction apart from God on the other side of our multifarious lust. But with God's help, through the truth of His Word and the anointing of His Holy Spirit, we have ample resources, both the knowledge and the power, to resist the lie (John 8:31-32; Galatians 5:16-17). Such behavior is completely unintelligible to the unbelievers amongst whom we move (1 Peter 4:4). But the devil understands: we are true servants of the God he has

defied, and his blood enemies by nature. For this reason alone, we will never, can never be at home here on earth as long as Satan exercises any measure of control. As long as this earth is in any sense "the devil's world", all who have sworn their allegiance to Jesus Christ will find it to be enemy territory.

2) The Hostility of the Devil's World toward Believers: From the moment we turn away from the hollow manner of life handed down from generation to generation (1 Peter 1:18), and turn instead to the living God through faith in His Son Jesus Christ, we are reconciled to Him, and at the same time alienated from the world. There can be no middle ground. Either we are friends of God, or friends of the world (James 4:4). Satan has done his best to structure the kingdom he tenuously controls and its mode of operation to invite compromise and involvement in the activities and values he sponsors. But God is holy. God is righteous. God is absolute, and the issues He puts before us (of accepting salvation first, and following Jesus Christ ever afterward) are equally absolute. To be sure, Christians sin, Christians stumble, Christians fail; but our imperfect obedience does not change the fact that God's standards are unbending, unsullied and perfect in every way:

You adulterously unfaithful people! Don't you know that friendship with the world means hostility toward God? Whoever wants to be a friend of the world establishes himself as an enemy of God. James 4:4. This world, often referred to in the New Testament by the Greek word kosmos (κόσμος, cf. "cosmos"), is and has been since the fall of Adam and Eve a place by nature antithetical to godly values and godly lives. In no small part for this very reason, scripture often refers to the physical earth, its population, and its present system of diabolical governance under the all encompassing title of "the cosmos" (kosmos, Greek κόσμος), that is to say, "the world". For "the world" sums up not only geographic planet earth with its human population, but also the entire system of satanic influence with which the devil has been manipulating mankind since the first day our original parents fell into sin. This scriptural designation is both fitting and important, because it is truly impossible to separate one from the other, and extremely dangerous for Christians to try. Only God can sever the monstrous tie between the devil's system of influence and administration (i. e., "Satan's world-system") from the anthropological-geological earth. Sever the two He will, but through His own might in Jesus Christ when He returns to crush Satan under His feet (Revelation 20:1-10). Until that future time, everything the world is represents a threat to those who believe in Christ, to those who follow God and not the devil. Christians ignore to their peril this reality of the world's essential evil and hostility towards them. The devil's world will never be healed; the devil's system will never be successful in bringing in perfect environment apart from God. Indeed, Satan's kosmos is not at all designed to do so – it is to the contrary constructed to appear to have the betterment of humanity as a prime objective, in order to further the devil's plans of enslaving and misleading as many people as possible. While masquerading as a kingdom of light, Satan's world is entirely a kingdom of darkness, and so the Bible describes it, making abundantly clear the distinction between God's world to come and the present cosmos of evil (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:14; 1 Peter 2:9):

[God the Father], who rescued us from the power of darkness and delivered us into the kingdom of His beloved Son. Colossians 1:13. The theme of light and darkness in the Bible is critical to understanding and appreciating to what an absolute degree the world is not only vain and pointless, but utterly evil. For just as the original cosmos, a place of brilliant light, was plunged into

literal darkness at Satan's fall, so following the fall of our first parents this present world became morally dark, and irremediably so (cf. Romans 5:12 "sin entered the kosmos"). As a result, this evil world is now the devil's "kingdom of darkness", and in it there is no "light" whatsoever apart from God. In biblical terms, light is a very clear and potent metaphor for truth and holiness, while darkness, on the other hands, is an equally powerful symbol of the lie and of all that is sinful and repugnant to God. In His grace, God has always made the light of truth visible and available to mankind, even in the midst of Satan's light-less world, and this light of truth has always been embodied in His Son: In Him was life, and this life was the light of men. And this light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not quenched it. John 1:4-5.

Jesus Christ is the true light of world, the embodiment of all truth, the living Word of God, the One who illuminates the sinful darkness with blinding, holy light (cf. John 12:46).

I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. John 8:12 b In this regard, Christ is clearly pictured as invading an enemy kingdom, a kingdom where evil and darkness reign. He is "sent" as the world's Savior (1 John 4:14); He "comes into the world" as the true light (John 1:9-10); He "conquers the world" (John 16:33), and ultimately "triumphs" (Revelation 5:5). The Bible's symbolism of Christ as diametrically opposed to the world we now inhabit is striking and unyielding: light to darkness.

It should come as no surprise, then, that we who become "light in the Lord" (Ephesians 5:8) have from the point of salvation forward little in common with the world in which we walk. We believers in Christ are no longer "of the world" (John 17:14-16), but are sojourners and aliens in a strange and hostile environment. The corollary to this principle is equally true and equally compelling: just as we have chosen God over the world, so the world has little use for us who have rejected it. The fact that the present kosmos is under the devil's influence makes this eventuality the more understandable (1 John 5:19). As soon as we stop playing according to Satan's rules, we are no longer his subjects, but only interlopers in his realm. Thus we lose all further consideration on the part of the world and its ruler. By choosing Christ, we gain our lives, but lose the world, thus incurring its undying hostility (Matthew 16:26):

I have given them Your word, and the world hated them, because they are not of the world just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. For they are not of the world just as I am not of the world. John 17:14-16. This hostility on the part of the world towards believers is complete and absolute. As those who reflect the light of God's truth (2 Corinthians 3:18), believers naturally stir the resentment of those whose deeds are evil, those who love darkness and hate the light (John 3:19-20; 1 John 3:12). No one has ever challenged the world and its evil more than did the true light, Jesus Christ. And there can be no greater example of the fact that the world as a system of evil is incurable than what the devil's kingdom did to our Lord and Master. Though He was the true light of the world, the One who not only told the truth but was the truth, the One who came into the world to save all those in the world who would turn to Him, He was nevertheless crucified by the world (cf. Acts 3:13; Acts 13:27-28; Romans 3:11; 1 Corinthians 2:8, 1 Corinthians 2:14-15; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4; 1 John 3:1). As the Light of the world, He naturally incurred the world's hostility, because He exposed the world for its utter and unrepentant evil: And this is the [basis for] judgment: the Light has come into the world, yet men loved the darkness more than the Light, because their deeds were evil. For

everyone who commits detestable practices hates the Light, and does not come to the Light, lest his deeds be exposed [for what they really are]. John 3:19-20. As His followers, we Christians are targets of the same hostility, when we walk as He walked, for in so doing we reflect His light in an ungrateful world (cf. Matthew 5:14-16; Php 2:14-15):

Though the world hates you, know that it came to hate Me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own. Now because you are not [a part] of the world, but I chose you out of the world, for this reason the world hates you. John 15:18-19. A world steeped in sin, populated for the most part by people who want no part of God (cf. Ephesians 2:1-3), and ruled by the devil will never be a "comfortable" or "friendly" place for those who choose to follow Jesus Christ. Of this we must be sure. There is perhaps no greater mistake a believer can make than to assume that he or she can ever have any true peace with this world and its diabolical sovereign (James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17). This is one reason why peace and prosperity are potentially harmful to the believer's spiritual equilibrium. For the devil is at work in "good times" too. Indeed, he does some of his most effective work on such occasions. Followers of Christ need to remember that the world is not an essentially "friendly" place where bad things happen only from time to time. Rather, it is an entire cosmos of evil where darkness reigns, a mad beast that can never be tamed, only destroyed (as God shall eventually do: cf. 2 Peter 3:10-12). We owe a great debt of gratitude to God that in our time we have been the beneficiaries of much divine restraint, but during the Great Tribulation the true nature of the world and of him who currently rules it will become manifest to all. Until that time, we Christians should be ever vigilant not to allow "good times" to blind us to the true nature of our relationship to the world. We are journeying through enemy territory, as did our Lord (1 John 4:17 b). God is our life, our love, but the world does not know Him (John 17:25). Therefore it does not understand us, sees us as weak and foolish (1 Corinthians 1:28-29; cf. 1 Corinthians 3:18-19), and is even resentful of us (John 15:18-19; John 17:4; 1 John 3:13). We are not "of" this present evil world (John 17:14-16), but in Christ have been delivered from it (Galatians 1:4; Colossians 1:13), and crucified to it (and it to us: Galatians 6:14; cf. Colossians 2:20). As citizens of the kingdom of heaven and as ambassadors of Christ, we still remain in it (John 17:15 cf. 2 Corinthians 5:20; Php 3:20; 1 Peter 2:11), but are not to be conformed to it (Romans 12:2). From God's point of view, the world is filled with spiritual pollution and moral corruption (2 Peter 1:4; 2 Peter 2:20; James 1:27); as long as we are in it, we will have trials and tribulations (John 16:33), but through Him we will overcome the world (1 John 4:4 1 John 5:4-5) and come to judge it (1 Corinthians 6:2).

3) The Devil's World a Spiritual Battlefield: There is another dimension to be considered beyond our alienation to the world, beyond its essential futility, and beyond the enmity between it and us: the world is also a battlefield where the struggle between Satan's present kingdom and the coming kingdom of heaven continues to be played out in deadly earnest (as has been the case since the devil's fall). For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against [angelic] princes, against [angelic] authorities, against the cosmic powers of this [present] darkness, against evil spirits in the heavenly realms. Ephesians 6:12. So far then from being capable in any way of essential betterment or rehabilitation, the world is a combat zone where the devil and his minions, visible and invisible, are waging war against the plan of God. Therefore, we who have chosen for God through Jesus Christ are all combatants in this largely unseen conflict, like it or not, perceive it or not. We are living out this temporary life of the flesh on a battlefield, and cannot separate the two. We may choose to be poor soldiers in the fight; we may seek to avoid the fray as far as possible;

we may (as many have done in the past and even more are predicted to do in the future) go "A. W.O. L." from our Lord or even desert to the enemy. But the fact remains, no matter how we choose to respond to it, that this world is the prime battlefield of the struggle between God and the devil, and that this truth has more to do with the texture, course and purpose of our individual Christian lives than the things our eyes can see, than the things the world tells us are really important.

Endure hardship with me like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 2 Timothy 2:3.

Satan has never and will never lose sight of his objective to hinder and oppose in every conceivable way the plan of God for salvation (which necessarily entails his replacement). Therefore as soldiers in the army of the Son of God, we believers are of no inconsiderable interest to Satan.

Stay sober and stay awake [on guard]. Our adversary the devil roams about like a roaring lion, looking for someone he can devour. Resist him, strong in your faith, remembering that your fellow believers in this world are undergoing the exact same sort of suffering [as you are]. 1 Peter 5:8-9.

We are more than interlopers in Satan's realm. We are chosen by God, choosers of Him, and eventual replacements for the devil's followers. We are sons of God whose continued existence here is a testimony to the power and faithfulness of God and a continual reproach to the devil. We are soldiers of truth, who seek to know, to live, and to proclaim the truth, whose very presence here on earth contradicts the devil's lies and threatens to undermine all that he seeks to accomplish. For nothing shatters the power of darkness like light. The night is close to over, and day is near at hand. So let us put aside the works of darkness and put on [instead] the armor of light. Romans 13:12.

It is therefore foolish to assume that we believers can somehow remain aloof from the unseen conflict that rages around us, especially since Satan's system can be seen in full operation throughout the world. Moreover, the devil and his forces, both human and angelic, are operating with the clear and discernible objective of opposing the kingdom of heaven with all possible means, and will be doing so with an increasingly desperate sense of purpose as the ultimate day of reckoning draws ever nearer.

Woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come to down to you, having great anger, because he knows that he has [only] a short time [remaining]. Revelation 12:12. But when the Son of Man returns, will He find faith on the earth? Luke 18:8 b

We may not always have a precise understanding of the enemy's specific tactical objectives in all the complicated web of human (and angelic) affairs – after all, our (military) intelligence as to the particulars of individual situations is necessarily limited. But scripture does make clear that we believers are primary targets of all the devil's martial assets, and that we are to order our lives accordingly. Failing to understand the dangers the world really poses, failing to maintain a conscious alertness as to our role as Christians in it, or, worst of all, falling into the devil's most insidious and effective trap of trying to improve "cosmos diabolicus" (the devil's kosmos or world), are mistakes that can put our entire Christian walk, our entire faith at risk. We have enlisted in the army of Jesus Christ, and until He calls us home, or the final trumpet blows, we have a fight on our hands here in the enemy's territory:

Fight the good fight of faith. 1 Timothy 6:12 a

I give you this command, Timothy my child, in accordance with the prophecies that were made long ago about you, that you conduct a good [military] campaign, one that is in keeping with them. 1 Timothy 1:18.

I have fought the good fight. I have completed my course. I have kept the faith. 2 Timothy 4:7. When our life in the world is viewed in this light, we can see Satan's cosmos entirely for what it is: a battlefield wherein our adversary the devil has established many hostile fortifications, land-mines and booby-traps. It is a dangerous place garrisoned by his forces of darkness, an area under hostile fire wherein we are combatants. It cannot be emphasized often enough that the world is therefore not "fixable" any more than a combat zone can be "fixed" in any way before the enemy who disputes its control has been utterly defeated. At the second advent, Jesus Christ will return in glory to completely vanquish the forces of Satan, human and angelic. Until that day, as long as we campaign here on the devil's earth, we must fight our battles on the spiritual plain with the "sword of the Spirit", the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17): For the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, but are powerful for God, for the destruction of strongholds, destroying sophistries and every presumption that raises itself up against the knowledge of God, and taking every thought prisoner so as to obey Christ. 2 Corinthians 10:4-5.

After the fall, when our first parents accepted God's gracious offer of salvation, they "hit the beach", so to speak, becoming, in effect, invaders of the devil's realm. From this time forward, the devil would hold as his enemies any and all who would choose to follow God, to think and act contrary to the manipulative system of lies that Satan has developed to keep as much of humanity as possible enslaved to his will. Amid the set-backs, the trials and the tears, amid the harsh realities of life as Christians in the middle of the devil's realm, it is tremendously important that we learn this essential principle of Christian soldiering: whatever happens, you must not take things personally. As Jesus told us in very plain language, the world opposed Him, and so it will oppose all who belong to Him as well (John 15:18-19). This struggle for control of the earth, for the salvation of those who walk in darkness, for the spiritual advance and growth of all who follow Christ, this struggle is not about us individually; this struggle is about Jesus Christ. Despite the economic and technological "prosperity" that characterizes our present day and age, from a spiritual point of view we live in some of the toughest times the Church has ever experienced. The devil's system has never been so close to dominating world thinking and controlling world culture; and never since the tower of Babel has Satan been closer to forging a world-wide uni-culture (based on his intricate and multifarious lies). Everything that is in any way connected to the truth is under increasingly heavy assault from the forces of cosmos diabolicus. Under such trying circumstances, it is absolutely imperative that we who believe the truth, who love the truth, who serve and seek the truth, not take the devil's assaults on us personally. Because of the nature of the world as a battlefield in the conflict in which we are now embroiled and our status as followers of Jesus Christ, we must expect tribulation to be the rule, not the exception:

[They were] strengthening the hearts of the disciples, and encouraging them to remain in the faith, and saying "We must pass through many tribulations to reach the Kingdom of God". Acts 14:22.

Remember this principle I taught you: A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. John 15:20.

Indeed, all who are willing to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. 2 Timothy 3:12.

Beloved, don't be alarmed at the fiery ordeal which has befallen you and is putting you to the test – as if something out of the ordinary were happening to you. But to the degree that you are [truly] participating in Christ's sufferings, be joyful about it, so that at His glorious revelation, you may also rejoice with great gladness. 1 Peter 4:12-13. This "sharing of the sufferings of Christ" (cf. Romans 8:17; 2 Corinthians 1:5-7; Php 3:10; Colossians 1:24; 1 Peter 4:13) is only occasionally the result of overt and obvious persecution for being Christian. More often than not, it comes instead from invisible, demonic sources or through human agencies in ways that are not overtly connected to attacking us for our Christianity per se. Satan has many minions, many means of turning up the heat on all who are determined to follow Christ in the midst of his kingdom and in despite of his lies.:

Stay sober and stay awake [on guard duty]. Our adversary the devil roams about like a roaring lion, looking for someone he can devour. Resist him, strong in your faith, remembering that your fellow believers in this world are undergoing the exact same sort of suffering [as you are]. 1 Peter 5:8-9. As believers in Christ, followers of Christ, ambassadors for Christ, indeed "little Christs" (as the name Christian indicates), we need to understand that the resistance, attacks and persecution we receive from our adversary the devil are not personal, any more than enemy artillery fire on a strictly human battlefield is meant for any one soldier in particular. Now the fact that Satan's attempts to discourage us, seduce us and even to destroy us are not personal do not make them any less deadly. The point is, like soldiers in combat, we need to be able to react to the "shot and shell" in an impersonal, highly professional way. We simply cannot afford to allow our morale to be seriously damaged or even destroyed by the devil's inevitable assaults. We are not unique. As the passage from 1st Peter quoted above teaches very plainly, all believers are subject to the same type of treatment. Satanic opposition is, quite frankly, a normal and continual part of the Christian life. Certainly, these assaults will take a variety of forms; certainly, they will differ greatly from time to time, from place to place, and from individual to individual. But the fact of their occurrence is a given. As long as we march across this battlefield, we are going to be subject to enemy fire, of greater concentration and intensity to the degree we increase in the effectiveness of our Christian lives (growing spiritually and helping others to do likewise). This struggle is not about us, but we cannot avoid being completely involved in it as long as we hold our position on planet earth. With the crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and session of our prince leader Jesus Christ (Hebrews 2:10; Hebrews 12:2), the devil has lost his last opportunity to attack our Lord directly. We are the next best thing. And while we are hardly the exclusive targets of satanic operations in this world, we believers are nevertheless special "targets of opportunity", whom the devil delights in tripping up, then accusing in the presence of God (Revelation 12:10). When we are being "hit" by set-backs, suffering, even disaster, we, as potentially very emotional creatures, need to remember this principle of "not taking things personally". Like Job, we don't know, can't know now the exact purpose that our individual episodes of suffering have in the plan of God; and like the unseen chariots that Elisha revealed, we can't see the forces that God is deploying in our defense and support. Our job is to continue to advance up the hill God has given us to assault; we should expect the enemy to fire back (why wouldn't he?). What we cannot afford to do is to become disoriented by the experience and take this satanic opposition personally, "as if some strange thing were happening to us" (1 Peter 4:12-13), or as if we were the first to fall under the devil's fire

(1 Peter 5:8-9). This is, admittedly, a difficult perspective to maintain, but a very important one nevertheless. Most notable in scripture in this regard is the example of Job, who – after enduring tremendous and tremendously unexpected suffering with a patience that was destined to become proverbial – finally made the mistake of taking the experience personally in the end (as a result of the cold comfort doled out by his supposed friends). We can certainly understand Job's reaction, his vehement "Why me, God?", but we must also acknowledge that God has preserved his story for us for a very important reason: whenever we find our ourselves under grinding, unexplained and unexplainable pressures, we need to be extremely careful not to blame God. When we groan, and moan, and complain about our lot, we are not far different from the soldier who is convinced that trench foot was invented by the enemy to plague him personally, or that his adversaries are shelling the position in order to kill him personally. Such notions are ridiculous. But how much more ridiculous is it for believers who profess to trust God, who claim to know something about His mercy and grace, to whine and complain that "God isn't listening to me!" or ask "Why did God let this happen to me?" Job didn't realize that the intense suffering he was forced to undergo was in fact an incredible compliment. For God had in fact singled him out from all the believers of his day to reproach the devil:

Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you noticed my servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth: a blameless man and righteous who fears God and turns away from evil. Job 1:8.

Like Job, we too are in the dark about the particulars of the unseen conflict that rages around us. We know so very little about what is happening in heaven or in the invisible angelic realm here on earth that it is incredibly foolish (not to mention wrong) for us to ascribe our problems and difficulties to some indifference on God's part – the very God who sacrificed His own Son to save us from hell. He did the most for us then; will He not also take heed of all our other problems as well (Hebrews 13:5-6; and cf. Romans 5:8)? We may know intellectually that He provides for us and protects us, we may also have believed this essential principle, but it is certainly a different matter to apply this truth when we fall under intensive enemy fire. It is all too easy to become focused on ourselves and our problems (massive and seemingly insoluble though they may be), and forget why we are here and who we are here for; it is all too easy to take our suffering personally, and, if we are not careful, once we head down this slippery slope to blame God. We are here for Him, for His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ; we are here to serve God. We have pledged our lives to Him. Indeed, we claim to wait in eager anticipation of the next life, the eternal life that we have been promised by the Father and the Son which has been pledged to us through the indwelling Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14). Death, the inevitability that makes a mockery of life on this earth without God, no longer has any terrors for us, or so we say, for to us to die is gain (Php 1:21), a blessed entrance into the real, eternal life we yearn for, into an everlasting fellowship with God the Father and Jesus Christ our Lord, into reward, refreshment and ultimate resurrection. If the worst that the devil and his world can do to us is to hasten our exit from this life of tears into the next with all its joy and glory, then why do we often behave as if this world and our residence in it will go on forever?

Between this life and the next, we are here to serve God in whatever way He desires. There has never been a problem or a disaster or a heartache that He has not known about – long before the earth was made; and there has never been any situation that He has not made provision for – long before Man walked the earth. He is perfect; His plan is perfect; His provision is perfect. These are

simply facts – to those who believe. God could have taken us home to Himself immediately at the point of our entrance into His family through faith in Jesus Christ, but He has left us here, in the devil's world, on this battlefield called earth, to soldier on according to the Word with which we have been entrusted. The world being what it is (as we have seen), and given the implacable nature of our adversary the devil, opposition, resistance and suffering are not the exception for Christians, but the norm. One of the biggest mistakes we can make as we proceed on this journey, this mission, is to forget where we are (the world), why we are here (to serve God), and what our Christian growth will cost (intensifying opposition from the adversary). The last thing we can afford in this dangerous and hostile place and in the face of such a wily opponent is to take the devil's harassment personally.

All this takes faith, and faith requires diligent intake of God's Word consistently applied to life in order to grow. Only through the continuation of this irreplaceable process do the realities of heaven begin to become more real than the ephemeral "realities" our eyes behold. But once we have grown to this perspective, we may honestly say as Job did "the Lord gives and the Lord takes away; blessed be the Name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). As soldiers of Jesus Christ, we will be opposed by the devil, but if we stand our ground the victory will be ours (James 4:7). As soldiers of Jesus Christ, we will be tested, but God will never allow the pressure to intensify beyond what we can actually bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). As soldiers of Jesus Christ, we will know sorrow and suffering, but God will never leave us without superabundant comfort (John 16:7 2 Corinthians 1:3-7). As soldiers of Jesus Christ, when our race is finally run, we shall be able to look back on this short life and say with the apostle Paul that though in every way we were oppressed, we were not completely distressed, that though we were without lavish means, we were not left totally without them, that though we were persecuted, we were not left completely in the lurch, and that though we were thrown down, we were not destroyed (2 Corinthians 4:8-9). When we came forth into this world, it was not the garden of Eden we found, but a battlefield where our enemy the devil held sway. May it be said of us all that in this life we served honorably – even with distinction – the One who enlisted us into His service by His own blood.

Endure hardship with me like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one on military campaign becomes involved in the affairs of normal life. [He avoids such things] that he may please the one who enlisted him. 2 Timothy 2:3-4.

4) Satan's System of Propaganda: Satan's world-system is an administrative philosophy designed to secure and increase his control over human kind for the purpose of opposing God's plan to replace him and his followers. In this section, we will be concerned with the specifics of Satan's world-view for mankind, an all encompassing system of lies, carefully crafted for maximum seductive effect, a mesh of doctrines, teachings and ideas that the devil has employed since the expulsion from Eden and designed to delude and enslave humanity. We have termed this system "Satan's world-system" in order to better correlate the idea with the Greek word kosmos ("world"), the term that most frequently references in the Bible the devil's system of anti-truth. As Christians, we are to have as our focus in this life the Word of God, both the living Word, Jesus Christ (John 1:1-5), and the written Word, the Bible (2 Peter 1:19-21). Truth, therefore, is at the very center of our earthly lives (Psalms 119:1-176), and we walk according to what our God tells us is true, not by what our eyes see (2 Corinthians 5:7), for everything in this life is passing away, but God's Word is forever (Isaiah 40:6-8; 1 Peter 1:23-25). Satan's world-system is predicated on the

principle of opposing this basic tenet of all orthodox, Christ-centered thought. For it is the primary objective of the devil's system to reverse this perspective, to turn humanity's focus completely around and fix it firmly instead on this earthly life. For Satan, every human being who looks away from God and towards this world instead is a triumph, just as for God, every person who turns his gaze away from the devil's dark world unto Jesus Christ is a victory:

"[I am sending you to them] . . . to open their eyes that they might turn away from darkness and toward the light, even from the power of Satan unto God, that they might receive forgiveness of their sins and a share among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me." Acts 26:18.

Stay sober, stay awake! Your adversary the devil roams about like a roaring lion searching for someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8. As he proved in his cunning seduction of so many of his fellow angels, Satan has a tremendous grasp of how best to prey upon his fellow creatures. He understands his subjects (angelic and human alike) and does not shrink from boldly exploiting any and all weaknesses. A common theme in his approach is his focus upon whatever it is that one of his intended victims lacks: the angels lacked physical bodies, so he promised these to them (the fact that engineered, possessed bodies would never have amounted to the real thing doesn't concern the devil, only that the lie he is selling be believable). Adam and Eve lacked the knowledge of good and evil, so he tempted them to acquire it (no matter that it meant their ultimate physical death). Following the fall, human beings are, in many respects, much easier targets for Satan. Instead of a narrow window in which to attack (where the temptation is in no way connected with necessity: i. e., physical bodies for angels; the knowledge of good and evil unnecessary for perfect humans in paradise), human beings outside of the garden of Eden face a wide range of potential shortages and needs as a result of our now universal mortality and the curse God has placed upon the ground. Add to this the fact that the devil has a natural ally on the inside of each and every one of us (i. e., the sin nature), and it is not difficult to see how Satan's system of false promises and lies has been able to make so many converts throughout the course of human history – the vast majority, in fact, of all human beings who have ever lived. Yet God has never left Himself without a witness; all have had a choice; in every generation there have been those who have heard the small still voice of truth and turned away from the devil's system unto God (1 Kings 19:12; Acts 14:17; Acts 17:27), a remnant according to the election of grace (cf. Romans 11:5).

Even for believers, however, temptation emanating from the devil's system continues to be an issue throughout life for obvious reasons: 1) pressure from the sin nature: salvation brings forgiveness for sin but does not eradicate the sin nature resident in our corrupt flesh, which will continue to remain a source of spiritual vulnerability for us throughout this earthly life (Genesis 8:21; 1 Kings 8:46; Psalms 130:3; Romans 7:18, Romans 7:24; James 1:13-15); 2) pressure from the now corrupt world: our physical mortality (the ultimate result of our internal corruption) coupled with the inherent nature of the world outside of Eden (prone to shortages and requiring hard labor to provide sustenance as a result of God's curse in sharp contrast to the garden: Genesis 3:17-19) are urgent vulnerabilities which keep up a constant physical and psychological pressure.

Just on the basis of these two primary sources of internal and external pressure (which largely drive secular human behavior in this life), much of the depraved and godless conduct that is human history would no doubt have come about even without the devil's help. But, inasmuch as it is in his interest to oppose divine influence in his realm, Satan has developed a tactical scheme

and philosophy of administering this world calculated to maximize the blinding of mankind so as to 1) lead us away from truth, away from God; and 2) lead us to do his will instead of God's. The devil's main tactical aim is to increase his influence and control over humanity (individually and collectively), and he mercilessly exploits any opportunity, any weakness to do so. The essence of his approach, the premier weapon aimed at the battleground of the human heart (the mind-spirit interface) is the lie. Satan is the deceiver of the whole world (Revelation 20:1-3), and the father of lies (John 8:44). These titles are suggestive of his central tactical objective: to obscure the truth in any and every way. Satan's world-system, however, is no mere disinformation campaign. The devil is (and always has been) out to win the "hearts and minds" of all human beings. He is very well aware that we can be influenced, pressured, and tempted physically and emotionally as well. Much of his system is directed toward the body with the purpose of affecting the heart thereby. The satanic world-system is for that reason a network of interconnected lies, emotional appeals and physical pressures which, at their most effective, are difficult to disentangle.

Satan's world-system is the lie writ large, extending like a spider's web into every corner of the globe, into every area of human activity, and thus making its way into every single human heart (as far as the devil can bring that to pass), blocking, denying, opposing God's truth however, wherever and whenever it can. It is important to note at the outset that the satanic world-system encompasses not only behaviors that anyone and, indeed, almost everyone would view as satanic, and areas that are generally acknowledged as sinful, but also very many areas that are normally deemed "good". In his choice of tactics the devil has no scruples. He will encourage any and all behavior – what men may see as good or what they may see as bad – in order to block God's truth and thus increase his own influence in the world.

Since the fall, three facts have stood at the very foundation of human experience:

- 1) Universal mortality: the reality of death for all (Genesis 3:19 b).
- 2) Universal depravity: the reality of sin in all (Genesis 2:17 [spiritual death – see part 3B]).
- 3) Universal temptation: the reality of the devil against all (Genesis 3:15).

Because of Adam's sin, we shall all die physically. Because of Adam's sin, we are all born with the physical presence in our bodies of inherent sin, that is, the "sin nature" (which in every case – except that of the virgin-born Christ – works its way out in the practice of sin). Because of Satan's usurpation of Adam's rule over the earth, we are all subject to the attacks of the evil one.

These three essential realities of human life, made clear even as Adam and Eve were being expelled from Eden (Genesis 3:14-19), are the basis for three all-important corollary principles that establish the ground rules for restoring and building our relationship with God.

- 1) We need God (we cannot turn death into life).
- 2) We are not God (we cannot expiate our own sin).
- 3) God does not need us (we cannot substitute anything for His Word so as to help Him). This basic calculus of human existence was made clear to our first parents at the fall, and there is every indication that they accepted the truth of it. In His awesome grace, God promised, and has since provided in the flesh, a substitute to wipe away death by carrying our sins – and there is no

substitute for Him. Adam and Eve knew 1) they needed God 2) recognized immediately their own inability to atone for what they had done, and 3) accepted the promise of Him who would die in their place rather than attempting to solve the problem by their own actions (evidenced, among other things, by their acceptance of the coats of skin provided through symbolic sacrifice: Genesis 3:21).

Nevertheless, most of humanity has in fact lived their lives as if the opposite of each of the three basic principles listed above were true. A large part of the reason for this is the system constructed by Satan to turn these essential truths of human existence on their head, and to replace them instead with a system of lies to blind mankind to the truth, a world-system designed to capture and ensnare as much of human kind as possible. Satan's kosmos is thus based on a complex system of propaganda which he and his demons foster throughout the world, a clever and elaborate network of lies that at their root are simple refutations of the basic truths 1) We need God; 2) We are not God; 3) God does not need us:

Satanic Lie #1: "I don't need God": By all rights, the reality of death should bring every human being to the realization that without God there is no hope. But in the course of human history the devil has been very effective at using the fear of death to enslave humanity (Hebrews 2:14-15). This is because in our post-Eden world life is lived very close to the edge. Without work and effort by the sweat of our brow there is no bread, and without bread, there is nothing to sustain life. Fear is therefore a major element in our collective psychology outside of the garden, because we are all aware that without material means, life will not, cannot be sustained. Satan concentrates on intensifying this worry in hopes of turning mankind away from the issue of ultimate mortality towards the everyday problems of survival instead. It is a very common and a very human reaction to ignore the big problem (impending death with no solution) and to focus instead on the immediate smaller ones (how to provide food and clothing today). But as our Lord has told us, this is turning things inside out. We should first seek the kingdom (God's solution to death in eternal life through Jesus Christ), then everything else we need to survive in this short life will be added to it (Matthew 6:25-34). But when the devil's teachings are accepted instead, unsaved humanity strives instead for material success (Matthew 6:32), so that whether out of failure and panic ("God isn't helping me; I need money, not God"), or out of success and self-confidence ("I have helped myself; I have money; I don't need God"), the true need for God to deliver us eternally is blindly overlooked in the quest for temporary substitutes that can provide only temporal sustenance. This first satanic lie always seeks to undermine the authority of God by undermining His truth. We know from His Word, we all know from the way He has constructed the universe and from the obvious inevitability of death that we need God more than anything else, but the devil tells us that there is no hope of eternal life and so no point in seeking God, so that we may take our eyes off of truth and focus them on life's material needs and distractions instead. the lie: I don't need God. What counts are my physical needs, not my spiritual ones. the truth: We do need God. Without Him and His help we are powerless in the face of death. analog lie: There is no need of God. There is no help from God, so I have to help myself. analog truth: God provides for our needs. First seek the kingdom, then all will be provided. the lie's impetus: Worry. the lie's manifestation: Greed.

Jesus' response to Satan: Life does not come from bread alone, but from obeying God's Word.

Jesus' model prayer for us: Give us today our bread for today. The opposite virtue: Faith. Trusting in God rather than in possessions. The opposite vice (1 John 2:16): Lust of the flesh. Trusting in possessions rather than God. The lie's true object of worship: Things. The lie's blind-spot: Being in denial about death and mortality. The reality: Even if you gain the world, there is no eternal life without God.

2. Satanic Lie #2: "I am like God": Once we reject the truth that our lives are completely dependent upon God and that He is the only hope for eternal life, once we take matters into our own hands and begin to worship the work of our own hands, once we come to believe that success in providing for ourselves in this material world can somehow compensate for our complete impotence in the face of impending death, it is a small step to believing that the will we are exerting is equal to God's will. For after we once reject God's will to learn the lesson of this world's futility and of our hopelessness without Him in the face of our mortality, we necessarily become reliant on our own will in place of His. After God's authority was destroyed in Eve's eyes, the temptation to "be like God" was great, and just as she ate of the forbidden fruit in anticipation of becoming divine but only became alienated thereby from Him who is divine, so also we, by substituting our will for God's will in this life come to think in our heart of hearts that we are the true "masters of our fate" on an equal par with God. Just as the devil used fear to instill in us desperation about our material needs in order to cause us to focus upon this temporary world instead of the eternity which should be our main concern, so in this second lie the devil appeals to our subjective pride. In ignoring our eternal needs we ignore God. In this second lie, by taking unjustified pride in our own abilities, accomplishments, and will, we reduce God in our thinking to our own level. With the first lie, we think we have no need of God who is greater than we are. With the second lie, we become so self-secure that we now see ourselves on an equal footing with God. Though we have been given free will by God to respond to Him in this life, we now use our will as if we were God, responding to the devil's lie and our own pride instead. Putting ourselves in the place of worship instead of God (for that is what arrogance and pride amount to) results in seeking our own glory instead of God's, glorying in our own accomplishments, instead of realizing that they have come from God, and attributing the gifts, abilities, and successes we have to ourselves instead of God (Deuteronomy 8:18). Satan's second lie in this progression encourages us to love self instead of God, and to do so requires not only that we ignore God (as in lie #1) but that we take this to the next step and belittle Him (for that is what comparing ourselves to Him amounts to). In responding to lie #1 we ignored our own mortality and our need for God's help to overcome it so as to think we had no need of God at all but material things instead. In responding to lie #2 we ignore our own sinfulness and our need of God's help to overcome it so as to think that we are not sinners at all but crave praise for ourselves instead. A large part of this lie and, indeed, an essential component of it is Satan's preaching of relativism. For only by denying the absolute nature of good and evil could we ever deceive ourselves into thinking that we are good (and only by being good could we possibly be "like God"). As the devil convinces us to worry about the material concerns of the day instead of the "distant" day of death, so after we buy into this second lie we begin to believe that instead of being concerned for the eventual judgment upon our sins that we have true worth that ought to be praised. In falsely building up our righteousness in our own eyes we necessarily impugn God's righteousness. By substituting our own flawed character as worthy of praise (and blinding ourselves to our inherent sinfulness) we necessarily impugn God's perfect character. the lie: I am like God. I don't need a Savior, rather I should be praised (worshiped) for my good. the truth: We

are not like God. Without His help we are only worthy of condemnation not glory. analog lie: I deserve the glory. analog truth: The glory is God's. God honors those who honor Him. the lie's impetus: Subjective arrogance. Excessively arrogant pride directed toward self. the lie's manifestation: Self-glorification and self-promotion. Crediting self instead of God.

Jesus' response to Satan: Worship belongs to God alone.

Jesus' model prayer for us: Forgive us our debts. We are unworthy and in need of forgiveness. The opposite virtue: Love. Esteeming God and His children rather than ourselves. The opposite vice (1 John 2:16): Boastful pride. Loving oneself and the world's glory. The lie's true object of worship: Self. The lie's blind-spot: Being in denial about personal sin and sinfulness. The reality: No accomplishment removes your sin or makes you like God or worthy of His glory.

3. Satanic Lie #3: "God needs me": The first satanic lie seeks to blot out the issue of our mortality (based on inherited sin), and instead to establish our independence from God (based upon our own efforts). The second satanic lie seeks to blot out the issue of our sinfulness (evidenced by our own personal sins), and instead to establish our goodness apart from God. This third satanic lie seeks to blot out the issue of the incurably evil nature of the world (steeped in creature rebellion and irretrievably sullied by it), and instead to suggest the possibility of establishing a new man-made Eden on earth (both personal and collective) . . . by helping God! By the time we have bought into this third lie we have moved from worshiping things and worshiping self to worshiping what we esteem, what we do, what we make. We create an idol (a personal good or goal), and glory in its accomplishment. That good or goal is not God's good or goal, but we assume in doing so that our intentions trump God's desires. We assume that God needs us to accomplish this good or goal, and that without us it wouldn't be, couldn't be done. We assume that we are helping God, but in reality we are only helping the devil. Our lives will never be "fixed" apart from God, through His work and His truth. And this world will never be "fixed" apart from God, through His Messiah and in His Kingdom. But by the time we have bought into this third lie, we have jumped from confidence in self instead of God and esteem for self instead of God to looking to self for ultimate truth instead of to God. In reality, of course, we end up relying on, esteeming, and looking to the devil (but that of course is the purpose of this integrated system of deception). As outrageous as it is to assume that we pitifully limited human beings could ever rise above the sin and evil that is in us and create our own personal paradise on earth (individual or collective), it is really a small step from assuming that we have no need of God and that we are in fact equal to Him (the essential logic that flows from believing the first two lies) to assuming that our view of the world and of our lives is "better" than what He proclaims in His Word, to assuming, in effect, that we are superior to God (though we would never put it in these terms, that is what such behavior amounts to). For when we try to "help Him" apart from His will, when we determine that it is for us to decide what is good to do for the world and for ourselves (apart from what He wills), how are we not establishing ourselves and our standards as superior to Him? While this may seem not only an outrageous but unlikely mind-set, it is in fact the principle upon which the majority of the world's population is currently operating. For whether in the social, political, or religious realms, the majority of mankind is of the opinion that what they are doing is "good", even though it is patently obvious to any Christian that most of what is happening in the world is far from good in the divine definition of that word. But most people and most groups are adept at justifying their actions – not on the basis of divine standards of truth (for the truth of God reproves and corrects us and moves us back to the

truth when we respond and repent), but on the basis of their own self-constructed standards, standards that are generally flexible enough to bend to whatever they desire at any time, standards that are really diabolical at their base. But it is important to understand that it is what God says is good which is really good, and that, conversely, just because we may say something is good does not make it good. This third satanic lie is based upon denying the truth that God's will is the issue, not our will, that God's righteousness is the perfect standard, nor our own pathetic self-righteousness. It is, of course, right and proper for every Christian to want to please His Lord – but only according to His will. When Paul went to Damascus with every intent to have the leaders of the Christian community there arrested and brought back to Jerusalem for trial and what amounted to judicial murder, on some level, at any rate, he felt that he was "doing good" and "helping God" by working to eradicate this blasphemous sect (cf. John 16:2). In reality, of course, he was persecuting Jesus Christ and His church (Acts 9:5; Acts 22:7-8; Acts 26:14-15; Galatians 1:13), the cause to which he would later devote his life and for which he would ultimately lose it. Jesus Christ is the only true good – the center and focus of all God's solutions, the number one thing that the devil would like to replace and substitute for. "Doing good" apart from Jesus, worse yet, "doing good" while denying Jesus subverts the entire purpose of the plan of God for history and for the lives of every individual. For only in Jesus Christ is there any solution to the mess we sinful human beings find ourselves in, that is true whether the issue be our own personal lives or this world as a whole. Only through faith in Him and His work on the cross are we saved and delivered from the sin, the evil, the disease, the death that characterize this world. Only through His glorious return and coming Kingdom based upon His victory at the cross will this world ever be straightened out. Claiming to be able to do good apart from God, to be able to improve a world that God has long ago marked for complete destruction in order to burn the evil out of it entirely, is, in essence, to deny the need for a Savior, to deny the need for God's help, to proclaim arrogantly instead that we are somehow able to "help God" by these paltry activities, and, in reality, to help the devil instead. the lie: God needs me. the truth: God does not need us – we need Him. analog lie: It is possible to improve things in the devil's world apart from God. analog truth: Only God can improve our lives; only God can fix the world. the lie's impetus: Objective arrogance. Excessively arrogant pride projected on the world. the lie's manifestation: Self-righteousness. Looking to oneself for truth rather than to God.

Jesus' response to Satan: Do not put God to the test. He tests us.

Jesus' model prayer for us: Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. The opposite virtue: Hope. Confidence in God's ultimate solutions rather than in our own. The opposite vice (1 John 2:16): Lust of eyes. Viewing the world as your kingdom instead of God's. The lie's true object of worship: Satan. Seeking to replace God makes you the devil's pawn. The lie's blind-spot: Denying and seeking to replace God's control of history. The reality: Seeking to change the world apart from God merely advances Satan's kingdom.

5) The integrated Satanic world-system: The three basic lies treated above form the essential propaganda system for Satan's implementation of his rule over the world. The three are progressive (in the order listed above) and, when accepted, serve to mutually reinforce each other: lie #1: The devil turns need to greed (the fears and pressures of life are at its root). lie #2: The devil turns self-awareness into self-worship (subjective arrogance is at its root). lie #3: The devil turns our desire for God into a desire for pseudo-good (objective arrogance and self-righteousness

are at its root). The lie is the basis for Satan's world system. He gained a following through the lie that seduced many of his fellow angels. He re-gained control of the earth through the lie that corrupted Adam and Eve. He exercises control over his cosmos through the lie that seeks to ensnare all of mankind. Our common human responses to the devil's propaganda, namely greed, pride and self-righteousness, culminate in an integrated system of organized sin and evil that is better known as the chaos called "human history". Human history (as opposed to the plan of salvation which God is carrying out in the course of history) is not really progressive at all from the divine point of view, but actually and inherently regressive. Without organization and help from the evil one, this would not necessarily have been the case. Given active divine restraint of gross evil (the flood being one prime example), and given the internal mechanism for evaluating right and wrong contracted at the fall from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (that is, the conscience), the sensible efforts of good and just men may well have moved humanity "forward", or at least have retarded its decline. As it is, however, human kind and human civilization are accelerating on the downward spiral that has been our track since being expelled from the garden of Eden. The wide-spread fallacious assumption that we are now somehow better off than mankind of ages past certainly does not proceed from a divine or even a humanistic, moral point of view. True faith in God is in shorter supply and in more diluted form than ever before in the history of the world, and the progression of evil, one may even say the astounding invention of new and more elaborate forms of evil and their widespread distribution and availability, is in greater supply and in more concentrated form than ever before. This trend will continue, through the dark tribulational period ahead, until the return of our Lord. How is it then that though our present world boasts less self-discipline and self-control than ever before, and at the same time more crime, more sin, more demonstrable evil, and more opportunity for the exercise of these vices (along with an ever greater ability to rationalize them) that we can even think in terms of progress? The answer, of course, is that in terms of "human achievement", things are surely different. We do live in an era of change, technological-economic, socio-political, even religious change. And while most Christians would rightly see some of these things as obviously bad (increase in occult activities, dilution of genuine faith in and adherence to the Bible, for example), many more of the changes that masquerade as advances are anything but benign. To cite but one example, recent reports indicate that more time is logged on the Internet in pornography and sexually deviant activity than any other single use. Many of you access these studies via the Internet, and there are other positive uses for the medium, not to mention morally neutral ones, but there is no question about the fact that this technological "super-highway" for information is being used by Satan in a most aggressive fashion. Technology is a tool, but a tool in the hands of a sinful person is at best a morally ambiguous thing. Add to this equation a world system constantly influencing us toward sinfulness, self-love, and, finally, active evil, and technology becomes merely a means of accelerating the devil's implementation of his will. We are not Luddites. We cannot stop technology nor do we wish to try. Indeed, we use technology for God's work and our own. But we would be foolish to bestow too much praise upon it, for, like almost all "progressive" forces in history, it is in truth helping to cement the devil's hold on his world and advance his plans for the enslavement and destruction of the human race.

Dearest to the devil's heart, as we mentioned above, is the establishment of a one-world state for "good" (wherein all of God's built-in restraints to protect human freedom of will could be abolished – a phenomenon which God will not allow to happen until the dark days of the Great Tribulation).

Thanks in great part to this materialistic "progress", the realization of this wicked dream is closer than ever before. Part of the reason for this is that such techno-cultural progress is inevitably coupled with a corresponding spiritual regression. The reason for this is simple. The more we depend upon ourselves and our human abilities, the less we are interested in God and all that He does for us. Technological and scientific "progress" require no moral progress at all. Indeed, all our collective accomplishments on this score (minuscule from the standpoint of all that is in the universe, not to mention from the true point of comparison, the Creator of the universe) have helped to alienate mankind from God, creating a false sense of mastery over the material world (though death remains and suffering has, in some cases, intensified). If we are not careful to take the true spiritual realities of life into consideration (the forgiveness of our sins through the blood of Jesus Christ, first and foremost), it is all too easy to let this dependence upon our technology undermine our reliance upon God.

Plunging headlong into the myth that scientific, technological, social, cultural human progress is the ultimate value is merely helping the devil to build the new tower of Babel. Faith in technology (instead of faith in God), hope in political solutions (instead of God's solutions), and love for human cultural accomplishments (instead of for God and the sacrifice of His Son) are common variations on the devil's theme of working to make heaven on earth. But cutting God out of the equation is not only impossible – it is foolhardy. For only God can satisfy the true needs of humanity: forgiveness, spiritual peace, and eternal life. Satan's offer of a re-won paradise here on earth is insanely laughable for sinful, mortal creatures. Or it would be, if so many had not bought in to this myth. It is the height of absurdity to openly flaunt a disbelief in God (despite the limitless witness He has reserved for Himself in every aspect of His creation), while at the same time proclaiming unreserved faith in sinful mankind's "progress". The pseudo-trees of life offered by the devil merely hold out false hopes. In worshiping progress, we are merely establishing a new system of idolatry here on earth behind which has a new god: the devil.

Satan's integrated world system has inserted its tentacles into the entire woof and warp of human life. For our purposes, however, it will be helpful to concentrate on three well-recognized categories of human experience where the devil's influence bleeds through most perspicuously.

1. Religion and the Occult: This area is perhaps the most obvious of Satan's infiltrations of influence into the world of mankind, since it is in the field of religion and the occult where the devil opposes the truth of God most directly.

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

Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation. Before Christ, those who sought Him looked forward to the promise of the cross, from Adam and Eve and their coats of skin onward (bespeaking Christ's work through symbolic animal sacrifice). After Christ, we look back to His saving work for us on the cross (commemorated in the ceremony of communion). But before or after the cross, Christ has always been the only way to God. All other religious, occult systems, doctrines, groups, cults and the like are false paths. To approach God, we have to do it God's way, and His way is a narrow way, the only true Way, His Son Jesus Christ. Only pure and unadulterated faith in the Son brings salvation, forgiveness of sins, and the promise of resurrection. This cannot be achieved by good works, by self-sacrifice, or by ritual. It cannot be achieved by membership in any organization. Salvation comes through faith in Christ alone.

Despite the hyper-materialistic nature of the world in which we live, human beings have a spiritual side and a deep and abiding need to satisfy this essential part of their makeup. Only a true relationship with God through Jesus Christ can truly satisfy this need, but the devil, recognizing the drive for spirituality in mankind, has developed a kaleidoscopic variety of alternatives. These run the gamut from staid and traditional religions to outlandish, mystical or cabalistic activities. The devil is anxious to find something for everyone, anything to intrigue the spiritual side of man, anything but the truth of Jesus Christ. Any and all religious activities which do not put Christ in the undiluted center of things put Satan there by default. For by helping to still the innate desire to seek their Creator, such activities merely perpetuate separation from Him.

Organization is one of the keys to satanic false religion. The devil knows well that people will do things in a group that they would never do on their own. Corollary to this and equally important is the principle that if enough people are doing something in a highly organized manner, then an air of legitimacy will be lent to the enterprise, a false patina of orthodoxy, in effect, that will help to blind initiates new and old to the fact that God and Christ may in reality be entirely absent and the organization subtly evil in every way. Once enough people become involved in such religious organizations, a momentum and critical mass is achieved that allows pseudo-groups to present to the world a false picture of spirituality (even though in truth God is not in their midst at all). It is also a common human failing that once we become involved in something, once we have "thrown good money after bad" long enough, we come to have a vested interest in believing the lie we have been sold. For if we admit we have "been had", we not only look foolish, but all our sacrifice has been in vain. For these reasons, organizations make good targets for the devil. Even legitimate, originally God-fearing Christian groups can and have historically succumbed to Satan's infiltration: succeeding generations of followers and leaders alike are almost never as dedicated and clear in their thinking as the original founders, and when tradition and organization come to be as or even more important than the Word of God, it becomes an easy matter for the devil to gain a foothold.

There are a number of common factors, present in varying combinations, that connect paganism, cults, the occult, and organized pseudo-religion. First and foremost is the fact that by denying the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ, they are fellow participants with the devil in the process of "blinding the minds" of potential believers (2 Corinthians 4:4), "stealing the seed" of the gospel out of hearts which are seeking God before they can turn to God in Christ and thus be saved (Luke 8:12): Some other derivative characteristics one often finds in Satan's substitutes for the true worship of God through Jesus Christ include:

Emphasizing "secret doctrines", mysteries, and esoteric materials.

Seeking to minimize the sting of death, denial of final judgment, denial of hell.

Substitution of another god or gods, whether of a different name, or so perverting what the Bible says about the one true God that it amounts to the same thing.

Promise of "becoming a god" or "like God" or otherwise transcending the mortal plane.

Denial of the need for a Savior, substituting works or reincarnation.

Focus on ritual and rote worship instead of true communion with God.

Emphasis of feelings or ecstatic behavior over scripture.

Odd, alienating, isolating behavior.

Intolerance of other opinions and dogmatism not based upon true biblical authority.

False teaching within the flock of true believers in Christ is a particularly perfidious satanic attack that requires special, individual treatment. As the Body of Christ, the Church universal (those who genuinely follow Jesus Christ) understandably comes under more severe pressure and more insidious attack than any other segment of humanity. Often unable to persecute and destroy the godly outright, Satan reverts to false teachers and false doctrines, hoping to turn believers in Christ from the true path. Though in every age of the Church (and, indeed, since the serpent in the garden) there have been false teachers and false doctrines ready to compromise pure faith in the truth of God's Word, a trend toward intensification of this insidious phenomenon in these last days is prophesied in scripture. It would be hard to underestimate the importance for the believer of being forewarned on this critical issue. The reader's careful attention, therefore, is sought in examining these pertinent scriptures (see also Colossians 2:16-23; 1 Timothy 4:1-5; 2Ti. 2:23-3:9; 2 Peter 2:1-22):

I entreat you, brothers, to mark those who are creating conflicts and pitfalls contrary to the doctrine you have learned, and stay away from them. For such men do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own stomachs, deceiving innocent hearts with their fancy sermons. Romans 16:17-18. For men of this sort are false apostles, workers of guile, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And it is no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. So it comes as no surprise that his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be according to their deeds. 2 Corinthians 11:13-15.

[Let us grow spiritually] . . . that we may no longer be immature, swept off-course and carried headlong by every breeze of so-called teaching that emanates from the trickery of men in their readiness to do anything to cunningly work their deceit. Ephesians 4:14. The Spirit explicitly says that in the end times certain men will rebel from the faith, giving their allegiance [instead] to deceitful spirits and demonic doctrines. With their own consciences seared away and speaking with the hypocrisy of men [who peddle] lies, they will [instruct their victims] to refrain from marriage, and to keep away from certain foods . . . 1 Timothy 4:1-3 a

These [false teachers] must be silenced – they are the sort who disrupt entire households by teaching things they should not, for the sake of disreputable gain. Titus 1:11. And there arose among the people false prophets, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who shall introduce destructive false doctrines – even denying the Master who bought them – and bringing swift destruction on themselves. And many will follow their lascivious ways so that the way of truth will be subject to blasphemy on their account. And in their greed they will exploit you for profit by means of their fraudulent teachings. 2 Peter 2:1-3 a With eyes full of adultery and on the lookout for sin without restraint, they entrap those insufficiently grounded (in the truth). They are accursed children whose hearts are well-trained for greed. Having left the straight way behind, they have wandered astray and followed the way of Balaam, son of Beor, who loved the pay that comes from unrighteous behavior. 2 Peter 2:14-15. Who is the liar if not the one who that Jesus is not the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. 1 John 2:22. For certain men have slipped in among you unawares, men who long ago were destined for this very doom, ungodly men who substitute lasciviousness for the grace of our God, and deny our only Master

and Lord, Jesus Christ. Jude 1:4.

Certain essential characteristics of these false teachers can be summarized from the passages above:

1) They have always been present, but as we approach the end of the Church age, will become more prominent, more numerous, and more influential.

2) They have a facade of righteousness, but are in truth steeped in sin under the surface (though this may be covered with the ascetic veneer of the white-washed tomb: Matthew 23:27).

3) They are out for their own profit, advantage and pleasure, utilizing their followers as chattel rather than genuinely caring for them.

4) They teach things which are not biblical but have been manufactured to gain a following and to promote their own ends (though they may claim a scriptural basis).

5) They falsely pretend to be servants of the Lord (though in reality they only serve themselves, and Satan).

6) They deny Jesus Christ as Savior (though they may fill their speech with His name, they deny salvation through faith in His name alone). This last characteristic, the "Christ test", is the most basic and most essential criterion for ferreting out false teachers, but its employment is also becoming an ever more subtle matter as charlatans increasingly try to make capital out of our Lord's name. That the words "God" and "Christ" come easily to a person's lips does not guarantee that they are believers and followers of God and Christ according to the will of God as set forth in His Word. As L. S. Chafer pointed out, "denying the Master who bought them" does not mean that false teachers will necessarily deny the person of Christ – they may only (surreptitiously) deny the work of Christ and the need for His death to cleanse us from sin (or deny His true humanity, or deny His deity, e. g.).(3) For it is true that there are many ways to deny Him in fact while giving the appearance of embracing Him. Wrapping their lies in cocoons of hypocrisy, giving their false teachings bright and shiny "white-washed" coverings, cleaning the outside of the pot, the outside of the tomb, but brimming with abomination within are all tell-tale characteristics of false teachers concerning which our Lord Himself warned us to beware (cf. Matthew 24:4-28; John 10:1-18). Ultimately, only Biblical Christianity is of God – all else is of the devil. Between the false extremes of materialism and superstition stands the truth of the Word of God.

Occult practices (easily and normally separated from religion) are also becoming increasingly pervasive, accessible and influential in our world. All such acts and activities, no matter how innocent they may appear, are extremely dangerous. It is a much smaller step than people are generally willing to believe from the Ouija board, the horoscope and the tarot card to the destruction of one's faith and complete ensnarement by demon forces. Occultism is a more direct acknowledgment of and allegiance to Satan than even false religion is. For in such activities there is a relatively clear understanding that the devil and demons lie directly behind such blatantly anti-God practices. A partial list of such activities includes the aforementioned Ouija board, horoscopes, tarot cards, voodoo, angel worship, demonism, Satanism, chanting, magic, witchcraft, spells, potions, curses, amulets and charms, superstitious actions and behaviors, attributing anything to "luck", fortune telling, anything related to "seeing into the future", visions and

dream-interpretations (apart from God), divination from any sort of "-mancy", any system of false taboos, secret wisdom, special day worship, mediums, seances, hypnotism, any ecstasies, mind-reading, psychics, false tongues, "channeling", trances, psycho-kinetics, drugs, all mind- or consciousness-altering substances or activities, anything to do with ghosts or vampires, graveyard fetishes and the like. The preceding list does not make any claims of being complete: forms of direct demonic involvement of this kind are becoming more numerous by the day (and more popular too). The fact that we human beings collectively seem to be losing our outrage, disgust, fear and suspicion of such activities merely heightens the danger, both of their expansion, and of the rapid ensnarement of those foolish enough to become involved with these things on even a seemingly superficial level. In reality, there is no such thing as superficial involvement with evil. All such dalliances amount to spiritual adultery: Can a man take fire into his lap and not have his clothes burned up? Or can a man walk on [hot] coals and not have his feet scorched? Proverbs 6:27-28.

All such things are, for good reason, forbidden by scripture (cf. Deuteronomy 18:10-12; 2 Chronicles 33:6; Jeremiah 27:9; Micah 5:12; Galatians 5:20), for behind them lie real and effective satanic influences (cf. the case studies of Jannes and Jambres: Exodus 7:11; Exodus 8:7; Balaam: Joshua 24:10; the witch of Endor: 1 Samuel 28:15; the man of sin: 2 Thessalonians 2:9). It is in this connection that we should note that occult activities are very closely related to pagan idolatry (a phenomenon on the verge of mounting a comeback). The Bible is particularly intolerant of idolatry, the out-and-out worship of demons by other names (Deuteronomy 32:17; Psalms 106:37; Acts 8:9 ff.; Acts 13:6 ff.; Acts 16:15 ff.; Acts 19:19 ff.; 1 Corinthians 10:20; Colossians 2:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10; Revelation 13:14).

2. Politics and Society: Scripture is clear in stating the importance of organized authority to suppress and punish lawlessness (Romans 13:1-7; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17). Additionally, separate governments promote freedom and preserve the opportunity for mankind to seek and worship God (impossible under one-world rule: Genesis 11:1-9; Acts 17:26-27; cf. also Daniel 10:13; Isaiah 14:16-17; Ezekiel 28:1-26; Psalms 2:1-12; Revelation 16:1-21). The new millennium is opening with a series of disturbing trends which see the basic purpose for government (protection of rights, punishment of evil-doers) being undermined, and government being used instead for the advancement of evil purposes. Relativism in law, reluctance to punish criminals, the increasing venality of justice, the intrusion of political and social agendas into the legal arena, the use of law and politics to address social issues in perverse ways with no regard to underlying principles of justice, the blanket application of faulty and un-biblical sociological principles by fiat without regard to individual cases – space does not permit an exhaustive treatment of the issue. It is enough for believers to read the "signs of the times" (Matthew 16:3), and understand the gathering momentum of the satanic forces around them. It is also important for believers not to react to the point of being caught up in the devil's machinations. Satan is presently experiencing great success in captivating believers and honorable unbelievers with a number of modern socio-political "causes" that appeal to the self-righteous crusading instinct in us all. While it is understandable that believers should shudder to see many of the degenerate trends engulfing modern society, Satan in his crafty way makes use of this reaction too, and is always thrilled when he can persuade people (especially Christians) out of boredom or lust for an exciting challenge to attack the symptoms of social degeneration rather than being concerned with the root causes and

the one true solution. Turning to Jesus Christ and deepening our relationship with Him through faith in Him and His Word (and the application of that faith to our lives and ministries) is the only way to have "impact" for God. Buying into Satan's propaganda lie #3 and trying to make the world a better place "for God" by one's own self-righteous efforts is not of God and therefore only furthers the devil's purposes. As in our discussion of the occult, the number of bizarre and anti-God cultural aberrations sprouting up in modern society are too numerous and ubiquitous to mention comprehensively. One rule of thumb: anything touted on a bumper sticker probably should be included on any such list of what to avoid. Vegetarianism, animal rights, anti-meat, anti-fur, anti-almost anything, drug use of all sorts, gambling, sexual aberrance, celebrity worship, glorification of athletes and athletics, most (if not all) of what appears on television, fantasy of all kinds, most (if not all) of what can be heard on the radio – one could go on at length. To put it in perspective, the Bible has nothing good to say about any human cultural activities (with the exception of those related to worshiping God, almost exclusively related to the construction of and worship in the tabernacle and temple). Culture inevitably involves some sort of mimesis, that is, a mimicking of some aspect of life to entertain (whether the level be gross, sublime or somewhere in-between). All such mimesis is, by definition, not the truth, not really "real". Whether it be Disney or depravity we are "watching", there is an element of unreality there, an artificiality, a lie, to be specific, and attention to lies is anything but healthy from a spiritual point of view. It is, to be sure, very difficult to avoid exposure to such influences, but we should at least be aware that the influence is there. Science fiction, to cite one particularly egregious example, may be "fun", but it leads (especially in the simple-minded) to the horrendous and anti-God belief that there actually might be some other focus to the divine plan than the conflict in which we are presently engaged on this earth. Such speculations and beliefs are an insult to God and to His Son who came here to save us. In sum, political, societal and cultural contacts and associations can no more be avoided in this world than can the air we breathe or the food we eat (1 Corinthians 5:9-10), but it is incumbent upon us as believers to be aware of the influence they wield and the threat they pose, and so to approach them with appropriate circumspection (1 Corinthians 15:33).

3. Economics and Technology: For believers, economics and technology are, of all the areas of modern human activity, arguably the most difficult from which to maintain a healthy degree of separation. These all-pervasive forces are inseparably interwoven with the need for us to earn our daily bread by the sweat of our brow. And, in turn, these two powerful forces interweave with culture, politics and society, thus making Satan's integrated system a tar-baby of sorts, that is virtually impossible to stay completely clear of (monastic movements failed in this in the past – how much more so today!). Ever since Cain (cultivation: Genesis 4:1-18), Tubal-Cain (techno-crafts: Genesis 4:19-22), and Nimrod (urbanization, specifically, his one-world ziggurat construction project: Genesis 10:8-12 with Genesis 11:1-9), satanic fostering of science, technology and "enlightenment" has paid the devil dividends. Modern rationalistic materialism has, in fact, reached such a pitch that any belief in the spiritual, non-material dimension is considered "ignorant". Mass communication, technological advance and economic globalization are moving ever more rapidly toward the diabolic dream of one integrated world – a world where there are no fire-walls to resist the implementation of the devil's will (a horrible prospect destined to come to full fruition in the Great Tribulation). Faith does not oppose development in these areas, but it is a fact that increased reliance upon and faith in techno-economic progress cannot help but undermine faith in God – it is impossible to serve two masters. Possibly the best example of this is the

phenomenon of modern medicine. As believers, we understand that God's will is paramount (Matthew 6:10), and that His plan has taken all the various circumstances of our lives into account (Romans 8:28). We know that He is a God who heals (Psalms 103:3), and yet we also know that He gives us means to deal with the needs and problems of life (cf. Acts 10:15). For the believer firm in his faith, modern medicine presents less of a problem, but the issue is a subtle one. It is all too easy for the general public (and for the medical establishment itself) to see medicine as the new religion, hospitals as the new temples, and doctors as the new priests, even gods. For it is (obviously) in the sphere of and the fear of death (and, therefore, of life-threatening illness) where our mortality is most acutely felt, and it is exactly this fear of death that is one of the devil's main weapons for the enslavement of humanity (Hebrews 2:15). Just as excessive worry about the economic means of life (food, clothing, shelter) is used by the devil to induce fear and turn us away from trusting in God (cf. Matthew 6:25-34), so also Satan makes use of excessive worry about threats to our health to persuade us to rely on medicine more than on God as the solution to our problems. But while these two worries are similar and have similar consequences when allowed to triumph over faith, fear for the loss of one's health is potentially more spiritually dangerous to the degree that 1) except in times of severe catastrophe, provision of the rudimentary means of life is far easier for the individual than retrieval of health is likely to be, and 2) the consequences of health-threats in normal times are also likely to be more immediate and more dire (not to mention more painful). Improvements in medical technology have only served to heighten this spiritual vulnerability, for in history past, the limitations of medicine made the issue much more clear, namely that without God's help there could be no healing. From a believer's point of view, the choice a mere century ago was rather more straightforward: seek what medical help was available – a means like any other – but trust to God for deliverance. Today, without question, this is still the issue (and the proper approach), but increases in medical effectiveness, increases in cost out of all proportion to results (the mortality rate, for instance, remains at 100%), morbid media preoccupation with health issues and concerns, and growing "options" available for the sufferer (with no guarantees) have all contributed to a climate of growing fear of illness, over-estimation of the worth of medicine, and a concomitantly increasing threat to faith – not from disease, but from an unhealthy reliance upon the magic religion of medicine. As believers, we know we are going to die, but we also know that this is not the end of the story – we look forward to the day of our release when we will be with Jesus forever (Php 1:20-23)! We are not going to live forever in these corrupt bodies – we wouldn't want to. The resurrection bodies we shall receive after the pattern of our Lord are beyond anything we could ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20-21). So while there is certainly no harm in making sensible use of available medical technology to help deal with legitimate health concerns, we have faith in God's provision while we are in these bodies, and we know for certain that we will depart from them in the Lord's good time. What is harmful is to succumb to the very real pressures of the current medical climate (whether in the grips of disease or out of the fear of disease), and making the terrible mistake of trusting medicine more than God.

6) The believer's perspective: It is important for believers to remember that we are not "missing out" on anything by following God. It is important because everything in the devil's world-system militates against us exercising pure, uncompromising faith. In every place, in every sphere of life, the siren-song of Satan's kosmos seeks to draw us away from really believing God, from really seeking God, from really knowing God, and from really walking with Him day by day. By way of contrast to the devil's kingdom, there was a nation where belief in God, where deep abiding faith in

Him was the rule, not the exception. The example of Israel (past and future) is the precedent which all present-day believers ought to emulate, for it is this cultivated olive tree into which we wild olive branches have been grafted (in company, of course, with the present-day remnant of believing Jews). This was an entire nation that (for many of its citizens during much of its history) really knew and trusted God! Close attention to the Psalms of David or the Law of Moses or the examples of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Hannah, Elijah and Daniel (to name but a few) shows how real God was to these great believers of the past. In this last generation of the Church, the influence of anti-"superstition" science and technology and the world-wide explosion of information has certainly engendered a "know-it-all" attitude and a general belittling of God, not just among the masses of unbelievers, but sadly among those who style themselves believers as well. This failure to recognize who and what God really is, the magnitude of Him, the glory of Him, is exactly the mind-set that the devil seeks to cultivate. The coming Kingdom of God is so much more desirable than anything the kingdom of this world has to offer, the glory of God is so much more satisfying than any glory we could receive ourselves in this ephemeral world, the power of God is so much more real than anything the science and technology of this world can generate, that it behooves us as believers to be careful not to give undue attention to the cheap substitutes of this world, to worship them, in effect, instead of the One who possesses the true kingdom, the true power, and the true glory. As believers, we are warned not to love this present age (2 Timothy 4:10), not to love this present world (1 John 2:15), and not to be conformed to it (Romans 12:2), but to love God instead and be transformed by Him (Matthew 22:37-38; Romans 8:29). In keeping our focus on God (and off of the devil's world) there is great profit (1 Timothy 6:6). After all, what price, one might ask, can be put on eternal life? And, once we are secure in our salvation, can the most dramatic accomplishments, the most extensive acquisitions in this life really be put in the scales with even the slightest, smallest bit of eternal reward? The tiniest bit of praise from God as we stand before Him is without question more valuable than the most vociferous and widespread of accolades possible in this life. And if we believe all this, should we not then live as if we did?

8. Satan's Strategy (to counter the Plan of God):

God's plan of salvation in the promised person of Jesus Christ caught Satan completely by surprise. With the commencement of human history outside of Eden under the promise and potential of salvation, God's plan for the final disposition of Satan and his followers began its ineluctable forward march. Left unopposed, it would only be a matter of time before human beings, now in a sinful state, would do from weakness what fallen angels would not do from strength, namely, respond to the gracious offer of a Savior and return to a merciful God. Faced with this inevitable progression, Satan's only possible alternative, his only recourse in the face of God's plan for redeeming willing humanity through the Person and work of Jesus Christ, was to oppose the plan of salvation in every possible way and with every available means at his disposal. As redemption through Jesus Christ summarizes the plan of God for human history, so opposition to faith in Christ is not only at the heart of the devil's world system, but is also the guiding principle in his reactions to the grand movements of the Plan of God as they become manifest to him.

Following the commencement of human history after Eden, the devil, as we have seen, was left without a strategy. Being a mere creature, and having no actual use for mankind, any strategic operations on his part are of necessity merely reactions to God's actions. To put it another way, he really has no grand plan of his own – except to try and stop God's plan. Having been thwarted in

his attempt to halt the progress of the Plan of God through his seduction of Adam and Eve (failing to anticipate God's promise of redemption through the woman's Seed), the devil has now been left with little choice but to oppose the ultimately unopposable Plan of God for human history. Despite the essential futility of their actions, the devil and his forces are and always have been extremely active in their attempts to turn mankind away from God. Every human being – and believing human beings in particular – have always been important "targets of opportunity". But in addition to this general policy of using any and all means to deceive and to destroy humanity at large, Satan has also concentrated significant resources throughout the course of human history on more specific "prime targets", inevitably important for him because of their importance in the Plan of God, and it is this reactive counter-strategy that forms our subject here.

1) Satan's antediluvian attack on the purity of the human line (the Nephilim): The devil's first counter-attack on the plan of God had the potential of being just as effective as the outright elimination of the human race, namely, its pollution to point of no longer being truly human at all.

Unable to prevent the inevitable replacement of himself and his followers that was taking place in the persons of saved human beings, the devil cunningly surmised that if he could introduce a measure of impurity into the human line, once that impurity had affected the entire human race, there would be no more true humanity, no pool of legitimate replacements, and, most importantly, no possible way of bringing his ultimate nemesis, the Seed of the woman, into the world.(4) The means whereby the devil sought to accomplish this (and came within eight persons of doing so) was to promote the cohabitation of his followers with human women.

1. Genesis 6:1-2: Angelic Cohabitation:

Now it came to pass that when men began to multiply on the face of the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God (i. e., the fallen angels) noticed the daughters of men, that they were beautiful. So they took wives for themselves from all whom they selected. As the passage above indicates, the period before the great flood was a time of rapidly increasing population growth, with the new inhabitants of the earth now separated from the fall (and the prophecies given to Adam and Eve) by many years and many generations. It was also a time of little spirituality outside of the direct line of Seth, a circumstance which was to provide the devil with his opportunity for attack.

Everywhere else in scripture the phrase used here, *beney ha-'elohiym*, "sons of God" (along with its variants), refers not to men but to angels (Job 1:6; Job 2:1; Job 38:7 [anarthrous]; Psalms 29:1 [cf. Psalms 103:20; Psalms 148:2]; and Psalms 89:6 : *beney-'elim*). But the "sons of God" mentioned here are exclusively fallen angels. Clearly, the people of that time had sons as well as daughters, but their female progeny are singled out because they became the objects of the attentions of these "sons of God". They were the main point of interest for the devil's minions because it is the female who carries the essential seed of our humanity (witness the virgin birth).

There are three New Testament passages which reference the events of Genesis chapter six, and all three clearly link fallen angels to the activities here described:

It was also by means of the Spirit that [Christ] visited the [angelic] spirits in prison (i. e., in the Abyss), and proclaimed [His victory]. [These are the angels who] were disobedient in the days of Noah at the time when God patiently waited (i. e., delayed judgment) while the ark was being built. 1 Peter 3:19-20 a For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but plunged them into

Tartarus with its gloomy pits (i. e., the Abyss), preserving them for the [day of] judgment, and did not spare the antediluvian world, but kept safe Noah as a proclaimer of righteousness and the seven with him when He brought the flood upon the ungodly inhabitants of the world, and condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction, reducing them to ashes and making them an example to those bent on similar ungodly behavior, and rescued righteous Lot who was tormented by the depraved lifestyle of those lawless men – for through the things he saw and heard just by dwelling among them this righteous man was damaging his righteous way of life day by day on account of their lawless deeds. For the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment – especially those who in their lust pursue the polluting of the flesh and so despise [God's] divine authority. 2 Peter 2:4-10 a

Although you know all these things, I want to remind you that though the Lord saved [all] His people from the land of Egypt at the first, in the end He destroyed those who proved unfaithful, and the angels who did not keep to their own realm but deserted their proper habitation He has imprisoned with everlasting chains in the gloom below (i. e., in the Abyss) in anticipation of the judgment of that great day, just as He did with Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring cities, for they all prostituted themselves in the same manner as these [angels] did, having pursued sexual relations [lit. "flesh"] that were inappropriate for them (i. e., outside of the natural order). [And so it is that] they have been appointed an example, and incurred the penalty of eternal fire. Jude 1:5-7.

Note that all three New Testament passages make reference to the imprisonment of fallen angels (in the Abyss) on account of their activities just prior to the great flood. Moreover, the second two (2 Peter 2:4-10 and Jude 1:5-7) clearly connect this activity with illicit sexual behavior comparable in its outrageousness (though not identical, obviously, in its specifics) to that practiced in Sodom and Gomorrah. Finally, the third passage (Jude 1:5-7) is quite specific in stating that this intermarriage of fallen angels with willing human women constituted an unauthorized abandonment of the rightful angelic sphere (one reason for the severe, temporary judgment inflicted upon the perpetrators of these acts). Although angelic cohabitation with human woman may seem unlikely, even bizarre in a vacuum, in the context of the devil's strategy to resist God's plan in every conceivable way the enlistment of some of his more reckless followers to pollute (and thereby effectually destroy) the human race bespeaks a certain cold logic. This is especially true when one considers that the success of this operation would have removed the possibility of God's eventual carrying out of the judgment already proclaimed against the devil, because it would have made the birth of the promised Messiah, the woman's pure human Seed, an impossibility.

Genesis 6:1-2 (quoted at the beginning of this section) leaves unstated the obvious background to these events. Rapid expansion of the human race brought with it an increased carelessness about acknowledging (let alone following) God and His natural law. Of this we may be sure, for it is just this expanding depravity of human behavior, seen here on earth for the first (though certainly not the last) time that forms the basis for a divine displeasure so extreme that the great flood becomes the only acceptable remedy (Genesis 6:5-8, Genesis 6:11-13; see below). These conditions provided Satan with his first major strategic opportunity since his success in corrupting Adam and Eve. Apparently prohibited from direct, outright destruction of human beings (otherwise he would long ago have taken this obvious remedy), and stymied in his abortive attempt to have human

beings slaughter each other to the point of extinction (by God's prohibition of murder in the wake of Cain's killing of Abel), he now found himself confronted with the intriguing prospect of introducing a fatal disease, so to speak, among the growing ranks of the spiritually weak. If he were not allowed to give such a disease to humanity (and thus destroy us apart from our free will), Satan discerned that granting us an opportunity to contract such a disease would be a different matter. Offering the possibility of cohabitation with some of his followers would be an attractive leaven that would soon infect the whole lump. To abide by the principle of preserving human free will in the unseen conflict that rages around us, it would only be necessary to make these initial liaisons voluntary. The insidious nature of the plan was that this seed, once planted, would quickly spread. Although the majority might refuse such abominable joining in the first place, there would be some who would accept or even seek such alliances given the "talented" offspring that would be produced. And the situation would ever be such that a refusal would only be a temporary "win" for humanity, while an acceptance would be a permanent "loss". Once the angelic seed was introduced into the human gene pool, sooner or later every human family would become infected and spread that infection (always by choice), until at last there would be no possibility of a pure line for the Messiah.

Despite its attractive possibilities, the plan presented problems as well. God's reaction vis-a-vis tainted humanity is well-known: that is, His extermination of such monsters by means of the world-wide flood. Less celebrated, but equally as awe-inspiring, is His reaction to the angelic participants in Satan's scheme to irrevocably pollute the human race. Following these events, all fallen angels guilty of cohabitation with human beings were punished with the most severe penalty possible this side of consignment in the lake of fire. The penalty for "not keeping to their own realm" was to be plunged into the lightless Abyss (1 Peter 3:19; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6), a terrifying prospect for these creatures of light, even in their fallen state. This awful prospect motivated the "legion" of demons who had possessed the demoniac at Gadara to beg Christ frantically not to have them confined to that terrible place (Luke 8:31; cf. Jude 1:6; Revelation 9:1-11, Revelation 9:13-16; Revelation 10:1-3, Revelation 20:7).

We may surmise, therefore, that just as humans are induced into illicit sexual activities in full cognizance of the possible repercussions, so some of the fallen angels were induced (no doubt by the devil) to take this action, even though it must have been quite clear that swift and sure judgment from the Almighty was likely to follow. Satan, by all indications (there are still "legions" of demons loose in the kosmos), was unable to convince all of his followers to act recklessly in this fashion, and probably did not want his best lieutenants to do so in any case. Nevertheless, the events described here show that he was able to find a cadre willing to "abandon their first estate" and risk the consequences that in the event did befall them. We have already noted above the desire of fallen angels for physical bodies of their own (a desire the devil exploited to the full in garnering support for his rebellion), and we may see these events as corollary to that principle. The selection process, of which Genesis 6:2 makes a particular point, certainly points in this direction (i. e., the fallen angels carefully "chose" certain women). Important as well is the fact that these verses betray no idea of force, indicating that the liaisons were voluntary on the part of the women involved, and, given the involvement of patriarchs in the marriages of that time, of their fathers.

2. Genesis 6:3: the Spirit's Restraint: And God said, "My Spirit will not strive with Man forever in their sinful manner of life – for this [is the way of] flesh. Therefore his days shall be 120 years." The

divine displeasure evident in the verse above (very odd if the two preceding verses were only relating normal human procreation which had been divinely commanded in Genesis 1:28) follows directly on the heels of the intermarriage described in Genesis 6:1-2. Verse three suggests a double judgment of the most extreme severity. In a mere 120 years (brief by the extended life spans of the time), God would all but bring the human race to an end. And for the progeny of those who would survive in the postdiluvian world to come, the longevity Man had previously experienced (nearly a millennium in some cases) would be reduced to a scant 120 years, and this would be a maximum norm scarcely ever approached, and only rarely exceeded. Even in such dire judgment, however, God's gracious nature is clearly perceptible, because for the one family of believers left on earth (i. e., that of Noah), the 120 years were an important grace period that gave the necessary time for the ark – God's chosen means of deliverance – to be completed. It is ever thus that by the patience of our God we are delivered (1 Peter 3:20; cf. Isaiah 48:9; Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9, 2 Peter 3:15).

3. Genesis 6:4: the Nephilim: The Nephilim were on the earth in those days and afterwards as well (i. e., both before and after the start of the 120 grace period before the flood). For when the sons of God went in to the daughters of men, they bore to them those "mighty-ones" (i. e., the Nephilim) whose names are famous from ancient times. The transliteration of the Hebrew word Nephilim (nephilyim: ðôîéí) is standard practice now (cf. the NASB and NIV) on account of the clear unacceptability of the Septuagint's "giants". However ineffective this parallel drawn from Greek mythology may be, the Septuagint's interpretation is clearly correct in the sense that it recognizes these "creatures" as not entirely human (as the Greek giants were not). By the time we reach Genesis 6:4; interpretations which try to make these Nephilim entirely human have run into a host of difficulties. In the verse above, the extraordinary nature of these creatures is directly related to the fact that they are the progeny of the "sons of God", a mention that makes little sense if these "sons of God" were normal human beings. The etymology of the word naphiyil (Hebrew: ðôéí; Nephilim is actually in the plural) is also enlightening. The root, naphal means "to fall", and the qatiyl noun formation here is passive in nature as is generally the case (cf. `asiyr, àñéø, "one in bondage" or "prisoner", and mashiyach, îùéç, "one sent" or "Messiah"). The meaning "fallen ones" is directly in line with our understanding of the passage so far, for the Nephilim were a) "fallen" from the ranks of pure humanity; b) the offspring of fallen angels; and c) fallen in the spiritual sense as well, giving no indication of desiring a relationship with God, a conclusion to which we are forced by their failure to respond to His gracious 120 year delay of judgment (for only Noah and his family entered the ark).

4. Genesis 6:5-7: the Divine Assessment:

Now the Lord saw that Man's evil had spread abundantly on the earth – indeed, the underlying intent of all his innermost thoughts was invariably evil. So the Lord regretted that He had made Man on the earth, and it grieved His heart [that He had done so]. And God said, "I shall wipe Man whom I have created off of the face of the earth, both Man and beast and the crawling creatures and the birds of the air, for I regret that I made them." In our own time as well mankind is universally disposed toward evil because of the sin that resides in our mortal bodies as a result of our descent from Adam. However, the intensity of evil described here – evil that leaves no place for anything else and is untouched by any other consideration – is a clearly unprecedented state of affairs in terms both of the concentration and of the homogeneity of the evil involved. There can be

little doubt that this rock-hard dedication to evil which had become the rule on earth was a result of the majority of mankind at this point being of mixed seed. From their angelic progenitors these "mighty men" had acquired that quality of adamant fixation of purpose common to the angelic race (and treated above) in addition to the talents and stature that gave them the fame they still enjoy today.

It is also important to note the vast difference between the human and divine assessments of the situation on the antediluvian earth. While mankind is impressed, even fascinated with the likes of the Nephilim, individuals of exceptional prowess (whether physical or otherwise), God is concerned with the heart, with the individual's attitude toward Himself and His truth. These pre-flood "supermen" may be the stuff of human legend and may continue to capture the imagination of mankind today, but to God their complete lack of respect for Him and a total absence of any desire for a relationship with Him were causes of profound regret. Indeed, despite the fact that these semi-humans were in many ways gifted beyond anything today imaginable, and would be objects of extreme veneration and emulation by the present day inhabitants of earth, God's response to their inveterate evil is completely the opposite: they must be wiped from the face of the earth.

God's profound regret and grief expressed here are not in any way to be understood to mean that He was "surprised" by these events (for history is entirely dependent upon Him and His decrees). These events are related to us in language that we can understand. Even though we cannot hope to fathom the true depths of God and His love, we can see from these expressions His merciful purpose for mankind – even for these rebellious, partially angelic humans – and His profound lack of pleasure in their failure to accept that mercy, for He does not desire any of His children to perish (1 Timothy 2:4). The Lord is not delaying in the fulfillment of His promise (as some think); rather He is exercising patience for your sake, being unwilling for anyone to perish, but desiring all instead to come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9.

Patience, in the italicized phrase above, is from the same Greek root as the verb Peter had used in his first epistle to indicate the patience of God during the 120 year grace period that preceded the great flood (1 Peter 3:20: *makrothumia* vs. *makrothumeo* above). Even in the face of such intense, intractable evil, God went the extra mile to provide an opportunity for repentance before visiting the ultimate judgment upon the world of that time. Truly, ours is a God to be feared, both for the ineffability of His unexpected mercy upon the undeserving (Psalms 130:4), and for the ineluctable and devastating power of His judgments upon those who systematically refuse it in their wickedness. Or do you esteem as being of little account this truly valuable tolerance He [is exercising towards you] in [all] forbearance and patience? [If you do, it is] because you fail to realize that it is this very tolerance of God that is leading you to (i. e., giving you the opportunity for) repentance. Romans 2:4. And consider the Lord's patience towards you as [leading to your] salvation, just as also our beloved brother Paul has written to you, according to the wisdom given to him. 2 Peter 3:15.

God's great patience, God's great provision, God's great love and desire for the human race of that time to turn to Him was, in the event, despised, forcing the issue of His terrifying judgment. Only after it has been demonstrated for all to see that, in spite of extraordinary patience and provision, the human race had become irredeemably corrupt, did the deluge begin. That judgment,

of course, was a total one, exterminating not only all of polluted mankind, but all lesser creatures as well, leaving not even a hint of pollution by association to survive. But God does not blot out the righteous with the wicked. One man had turned to God, and so by his righteousness (the righteousness imputed by God to those who turn to Him: Genesis 15:6), stood in the gap for our entire race.

5. Genesis 6:8-10 : Noah: But Noah had found favor in the Lord's eyes. These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, and perfect in his generations (i. e., of pure human seed). Noah, moreover, made a habit of walking with God. Moreover, Noah was the father of three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth. In stark contrast to his contemporaries who wanted nothing whatsoever to do with God, Noah aggressively pursued a relationship with Him, seeking Him, finding Him, following Him, and, finally, coming to serve Him in the unique way for which he is now so famous. This attitude of responding to God in all that He initiated gained for Noah God's favor, a treasure more valuable than anything else on earth (and still to be sought in the very same way). Noah was not of mixed seed (his purely human pedigree is the point behind the Hebrew phrase *tamiym hayah bdhorothayv*, "perfect in his generations"). This fact, it is true, redounds to the glory of his parents and forefathers who did not succumb to the temptation of intermarrying with the semi-angelic seed. But Noah had also in his own right forsaken this disastrous course at a time when, due to the intensification of evil mentioned in context and the spread of the angelic strain to nearly all of the human race, such intermarriage must have been more difficult to avoid than ever before. God honored Noah's steadfastness, providing a wife for him of equally pure human stock, and blessing them with three boys born during the final 120 years before the flood (compare Genesis 5:32 with Genesis 7:6), for whom God would provide acceptable spouses as well. We can only guess the degree to which Noah was ridiculed, ostracized and threatened for such "stubborn aloofness". But for anyone who truly sought and followed God, the alternative course of action would have been unthinkable, so clearly and obviously would it have violated the natural law of God (cf. Leviticus 19:19; Deuteronomy 22:9). By resisting the temptations of his day, and by persistently following after God wherever He led, Noah became prepared for the ministry God had in turn prepared for him: that is, to stand in the gap for the entire human race.

Now it was through the ark that God chose to effect the physical deliverance of that remnant of the human race from which we all derive (i. e., Noah, his wife, their three sons and their three wives). But it was Noah, after all, who built the ark, and that fact is far more important in God's eyes than any wooden structure ever could be. God, of course, could have plucked this family from the rising waters through any number of miraculous means. Instead, He chose to make use of Noah's faith and faithfulness. Given the mammoth nature of the task, it must have taken Noah the better part of the 120 year grace period that preceded the flood to build this vessel capable of containing not only himself and his family, but a remnant of all the world's animal population as well. And while it is this fabulous structure which has captured the attention of posterity since that time, the really amazing part of the story is that Noah persisted at this seemingly impossible task, day after day, and decade after decade, sticking faithfully to the charge that God had given him. We can scarcely imagine the opposition and active discouragement he encountered from the world for this faithful dedication to the Lord's command, but, in the end, God vindicated Noah, His "preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5), and his work of witness to God in the most dramatic possible way.

It is interesting and important to note that, although in our own discussions of such things it is scarcely possible to say the name Noah without mentioning the ark in the same breath, yet in the frequent references to Noah in the Bible (following the Genesis account of the flood), the ark is generally not even discussed (Isaiah 54:9; Ezekiel 14:13 & Ezekiel 14:20; Matthew 24:37-38; Luke 17:26-27; 2 Peter 2:5; the exceptions are 1 Peter 3:20; where the mention is not substantive, and Hebrews 11:7; where the focus is upon Noah's reverent response to God's command in building it). The reason for this is obvious enough: the ark and the "animals two by two" are the parts of the story that impress human beings, but God was impressed by Noah's heart, by Noah's faithfulness. It was as a result of this previously proven character that Noah was chosen to build that most famous vessel as a means of deliverance not only from the coming flood, but also from the perverse generation that had made the deluge a necessity (1 Peter 3:20: they were saved through the water [i. e., brought safely through it and so delivered from the threat of that generation]).

6. Genesis 6:11-13: Divine Judgment and Divine Deliverance:

Now the earth was ruined before God because the earth was filled with wrongful violence. For God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was ruined, because all flesh had ruined its way [of life] upon the earth. Then God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with wrongful violence on their account. So, behold, I am about to ruin them completely along with the earth. The continual evil in the collective thinking of mankind that had attended the permeation of the angelic strain throughout the human gene pool had produced a deadly side-effect that made the destruction of the antediluvian civilization an absolute necessity: that is, a culture of "wrongful violence" (Hebrew *chamas*: *çîñ*). Intimidation, it would certainly seem, will have been an additional factor in the rapid disintegration of the pure human stock, making Noah's determination to keep himself and his family pure all the more noteworthy and commendable. Since this endemic violence had essentially compromised the principle of free will, and since the mixed population of that time had universally rejected God (despite the witness of impending judgment given by the construction of Noah's ark), God determined upon an equally complete destruction of them and their world by means of a flood which the Bible takes pains to show was universal in nature (Genesis 7:17-24). Thus ended Satan's first major counter-attack, an assault which came within a single family of accomplishing its goal – though with God, the most slender thread is an unbreakable bond. Deprived of its fabulous trappings, this direct angelic interference in human affairs was essentially an attack on human freedom, beginning with overwhelming temptation and ending with overwhelming violence. Following the destruction of the earth and the mixed seed that had resulted from this gambit, all the fallen angels directly involved in human procreation were imprisoned in the Abyss, a fearful prospect for these creatures of light, and no like design has been attempted since on any scale, large or small.

2) Satan's postdiluvian attack on human freedom (the Tower of Babel: Genesis 11:1-9): The devil's second major counter-attack focused entirely upon the issue of human freedom. For Satan was (and is) well aware that, short of destroying the human race (outright or through genetic pollution), the best way to stop mankind from turning to God is to compromise our ability, our freedom to do so. The Tower of Babel incident occurred no later than one hundred years after the great flood (as we know from the naming of Peleg: compare Genesis 10:25 with Genesis 5:32 and 11:10-16). By this time, the family of Noah had expanded rapidly. The descriptions given in Genesis chapters ten and eleven paint a picture of a post-flood population boom progressing at a

pace beyond anything the world had yet seen, a fact no doubt attributable at least in part to the decreasing life-span and consequent shortening of generational intervals (cf. Genesis 11:10-24). As in the pre-flood world (cf. Genesis 4:17, Genesis 4:21-22), this expansion of population was apparently accompanied by concomitant "advances" in technology and civilization (cf. the urbanization of Genesis 10:10-12) – and by a concomitant decline in the general level of interest in and concern for God. Thus is it ever so. It was not long after this process had gathered momentum that Satan launched his next major counter-attack, inspiring the premier political leader of that day, Nimrod, to fuse this growing population into a united, one-world society. Such a development, still somewhat inconceivable in today's multi-cultural world, would provide tremendous advantages for the devil's objective of turning mankind away from God. A highly cooperative, highly homogenized, highly centralized society need only be shifted in a godless direction once. For once the worship of the only true God is deemed anti-social and made illegal, it becomes an easy matter to discourage it entirely under such circumstances – especially in the absence of any alternative society on the face of the earth where religious "dissidents" who had chosen for God might find refuge. One cannot therefore imagine a more ideal scenario for the devil's squelching of faith than to bring about a single unified, top-down state in charge of all human affairs on earth. For from this beginning it would be but a short step to eradicating all faith on earth by taking away the freedom of those who might choose to exercise such faith. That Nimrod was the human genius behind this satanic plan is evident from a comparison of Genesis 10:8-12 with the account of the tower of Babel at Genesis 11:1-9. First, the tower is built in the very place of Nimrod's initial urban power base: the plain of Shinar (that is, Babylonia: Genesis 10:10; Genesis 11:1). Since this is one the place where all humanity is concentrated in the century following the flood, his supremacy in creating a political and urban structure for the rapidly expanding human race cannot be ignored.

Secondly, Nimrod is the only major political figure distinguished in scripture operating at the time of the "division of the earth" (Genesis 10:8-12). He is the grandson of Ham through Cush, while Peleg, the great-grandson of Shem through Arphaxad and Eber, saw the earth divided in his days. Assuming roughly equivalent generations, Nimrod would have been older than Peleg, and could thus have been in a position to foment the building of the tower by the time of Peleg's birth. And as the builder of the most important cities of his day, it seems impossible that any such world-wide cooperative activity such as the construction of this infamous tower would have been possible without his approval and support.

Thirdly Nimrod is singled out by the Bible for his active hostility toward God at this time:

Now Cush became the father of Nimrod. It was [this Nimrod] who became the first "mighty-one" (i. e., famous and prominent individual) on the earth [after the flood]. In particular, he was mighty at hunting [men] in opposition to the Lord. For this reason we have the proverb "[To be] like Nimrod, mighty at hunting [men] in opposition to the Lord". Genesis 10:8-9.

Nimrod is the first to be called gibbor (Hebrew: גִּבּוֹר) since the destruction of the Nephilim (Genesis 6:4; a fact also emphasized in the genealogy of 1 Chronicles 1:10). The word gibbor means "mighty" not only in terms of physical strength, but also in the sense of fame or prominence in other areas as well. The Nephilim, it will be recalled, were apparently gifted with any manner of human talents and abilities, and were possessed of almost overwhelming attractiveness. In a similar way, Nimrod was not a gibbor chayil (that is, a "mighty man of valor", talented as a warrior,

the most common application of the word in the Hebrew Old Testament). Rather, Nimrod's prominence lay in the sphere of political persuasion, and that is why the verses above carefully spell out the area of his "mightiness", namely "hunting [men] against God". That the "hunting" here referred to does not pertain to the taking of animals for sport is plain to see. God's covenant with Noah after the flood authorized the use of animals for food (Genesis 9:3), save only that the blood, a symbol of life in general and the work of Christ in particular, had to be drained off in a specific way (Genesis 9:4). There is thus no reason that literal hunting should be in any way "against God" (the meaning of the preposition *liphney* here). As indicated by his success in organizing the growing population of the earth into cities (initially, Babylon, Erech, Akkad and Calnah, all on the plain of Shinar: Genesis 10:10), Nimrod's amazing talent lay in his ability to persuade men to follow him, to "hunt" and capture their hearts, similar to the way in which Absalom "stole the hearts" of the men of Israel as a first step in fomenting rebellion against his father David (2 Samuel 15:6; "fishers of men" is the righteous antithesis: Matthew 4:19; Mark 1:17). This ensnaring of his fellows' will was clearly "against God" as the sequel shows, and it is more often the case than not that, where political mass-movements are concerned, their entire purpose and foundation are, when stripped of all facade, anti-God in the extreme.

Fourthly, the very name Nimrod means, in Hebrew, "let us revolt". We may surmise, therefore, that Nimrod was not this individual's original name, but that it was changed (as so often was the case in Old Testament times) to reflect the crowning characteristic of his personality as well as the most significant event of his career. The rallying cry that became the name by which history knows him, that is, "Nimrod", is reminiscent of the similar call to arms that will be raised by the leaders of the final revolt against God, the Gog-Magog rebellion (Revelation 20:7-9):

Why are the nations forming into a mob and the peoples [of the earth] grumbling idly. The kings of the earth are assembling and its princes are gathering together – against the Lord and His Anointed One, [saying] "Let us pull off Their chains, and cast Their cords from us!" Psalms 2:1-3.

Finally, Nimrod's career is clearly split into two phases in Genesis 10:10-12. The second phase, directed not at the plain of Shinar (where all of mankind was concentrated in the century after the flood), but to the more northerly climes of Assyria, must reflect God's frustration of Nimrod's original, more grandiose scheme. Following the defeat of his attempt to forge all humanity into one indivisible whole, Nimrod continued to put his special talents to work in the north. The ambitious agenda of creating a single world-wide state capable of retaining its hold upon the growing population of the earth required more than an individual of preeminent political abilities. It required a rallying point, a unifying symbol that would at once capture the imagination of the postdiluvian world while at the same time providing sufficient motivation for collective action. In the selection of the famed "tower of Babel", Nimrod (unquestionably under the careful guidance of the devil) chose just such a symbol. This massive and impressive construction project could not help but be the universal subject of conversation in the uni-cultural, uni-lingual world of that time. Like the ark, it was unique and (to this point) completely unprecedented. Unlike the ark, however, which had, after all, been commissioned by God as a sign of impending judgment (as well as a vehicle of deliverance from that judgment), the tower of Babel was not only not of God, but was instead decidedly anti-God. This is true for a number of reasons.

First, the main objective sought by Nimrod and his diabolical master in the pursuit of this project was to parlay the universal cooperative effort of the tower's construction into a future (enforced) unanimity of action on the part of all mankind. Once the precedent had been set and sufficient time had passed in such a unified, all-out effort, the roots of a monolithic world state would have been firmly set (compare the securing of the Roman Empire through the lengthy reign of Augustus). It would have been a short step for Nimrod and his cadre of sub-leaders from overseeing this lengthy, all-consuming construction project to assuming complete political control.

Secondly, based upon the use to which similar structures were put in later times (specifically, the ziggurats), celestial worship – the worship of demons in place of the true God – was undoubtedly a major hidden purpose in the tower's construction (for the symbolism of a tower reaching into the heavens clearly betokens an attempt to make contact with the gods). After political unification had been cemented, the symbolic center-piece of the new collective would be used for pagan religious activity. This pagan devil worship would (as in later times in Babylonia) be a mandatory part of life in the new society, and, as this would be the only society on earth, all true spirituality would forever be fatally compromised.

Now at this time [a century or more after the flood] the entire world spoke a single language and had identical customs. And it so happened that in their expansion eastward they found a [favorable] valley in the land of Shinar (i. e., Babylonia) and took up residence there. And they began to say, every man to his friend, "Come, let's make bricks and fire them." Now these bricks they used in place of [dressed] stone, and they used tar in place of mortar. Then they began to say, "Come, let's build a city for ourselves – and a tower whose top will reach to the heavens. That way we can establish our identity and not be scattered over the face of the entire earth". Genesis 11:1-4. The specific description in Genesis 11:4 of the "popular movement" to build the tower of Babel is the best testament we have to the uncannily persuasive powers of Nimrod. For the budding population of earth has taken his words and plans as their own ("Let us build . . ."). Now, clearly, this focused idea did not spring into the minds of the human family en masse of its own accord. It must have originated with someone, and the sole individual of the period reported by the Bible to be actively involved in the promotion of urbanization (before and after the tower incident) is Nimrod, who plainly found a way to further this plan on a "grass roots" level and thus be in a position to cast himself in the role of a humble facilitator of the popular will rather than of a high-profile dictator. Another interesting point about his strategy to be gleaned from the narrative is the fact that the campaign to found Babel and build the tower was advanced very much in the manner of similar politically-correct, "good"-covered-evil schemes of our own day. Part of the population bought the idea immediately, then began to coerce their more reluctant neighbors to take part ("And they began to say, every man to his friend"), indicating that peer pressure has always been an important element in political persuasion. Furthermore, the plan did not start with the tower, the mostly clearly anti-God element of Nimrod's design.

First, collective action in general construction is secured ("Let us make bricks . . ."). Second, in a classic "bait and switch" maneuver, the construction of a city is put forward as a worthy construction objective, with the tower, the real focus of the operation, disguised as a subordinate "after-thought". We can see how the promise of a large urban center would have appealed to the post-flood generation, who had been a strictly rural civilization before Nimrod came on the scene, but who had doubtless heard about the antediluvian cities and would only naturally be desirous of

reduplicating such inventions (Genesis 4:17). Now cities and urbanization, like technology, are not evil in and of themselves. But as with many things in life, that which is allowable is not always beneficial to our spirituality (1 Corinthians 6:12; 1 Corinthians 10:23). Many things in life, by their very nature, bring with them increased potential for temptation and turning away from God (and, because of the diversity of our sin natures, these things often differ from person to person). As the sequel shows, the building of Babel did in fact have terrible spiritual consequences for the reasons addressed above.

Third, for those who were not fooled about the importance of the tower in the plan to build Babel, and who had the character to resist the intense peer pressure to join in this whole-world effort, Nimrod provided an attractive incentive and rationale for the need to construct such an edifice: without the tower, so the claim went, the heritage and history of the human family would be lost. Unless some extraordinary step were taken, their identity as a distinct people would be obliterated by the passage of time and by the rapid growth and dispersal of a population that by and large had not even second hand knowledge of the pre-flood civilization. Thus Nimrod's appeal also played craftily upon the common human tendency to wish to preserve its roots, a characteristic no doubt all the more open to exploitation on account of the recent memory of the world-wide flood which had eradicated every tangible trace of the antediluvian civilization.

Lost in the enthusiasm of the moment (by all but the unnamed, unsung faithful few) was the fact that this attitude, let alone this act of creating a monument to themselves, flew in the face of any true faith in God. He is our Father, and our names are known forever by Him (Isaiah 56:5; Isaiah 62:2; Isaiah 65:15; Luke 10:20; Revelation 2:17). We are written in His book (Exodus 32:32-33; Psalms 139:16; Daniel 12:1; Php 4:3). Everything on this earth is dust, destined for destruction (1 Peter 4:7; 2 Peter 3:12), and the idea of preserving ourselves through preserving our "name" is a fatal vanity (cf. Luke 12:25). The tower of Babel, therefore, in addition to providing a framework whereby all future generations could be influenced and coerced into ignoring God, was essentially a monument of anti-faith, for its express purpose was to do what only God can do (i. e., preserve human life and identity forever), and its very building a blasphemous statement to the effect that God could not or would not do so. The tower of Babel was thus a complete rejection of faith in the covenant made by God with Noah, wherein He pledged never to wipe out mankind again, replacing as it did the amazing rainbow of promise with a man-made edifice of dirt.

Now the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men were building. And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people and they all speak the same language. And since they have actually begun to accomplish this thing, in the future they will not be restrained from anything which they have contrived to do. Come, let us go down and confuse their language in that place so that no one will be able to understand his neighbor's speech". In doing so, the Lord scattered them from there over the face of the entire earth, and they stopped [cooperatively] building the city. For this reason, the city is called Babel, since there the Lord changed the universal language of the earth to babble, and from that place the Lord scattered [humanity] over the face of the whole earth. Genesis 11:5-9. By confusing the common human language of the time, God rendered world-wide cooperation and the godless objectives it inevitably pursues impossible. So it will remain until the advent of antichrist, when the new technological tower of Babel that is currently under construction (i. e., the incipient one-world techno-society) will make such activities as world-wide persecution of believers a possibility again. For by His confusion of human language, God restrained

"accomplishment" of this most offensive and evil kind, and thus God delivered those who resisted the idea of preserving life and identity apart from God. God always leaves a remnant of believers for Himself (Romans 9:27; Romans 11:1-5), which, in this case, must have included Noah and Shem, who both outlived Peleg in whose days these events took place.

3) Satan's attack on the line of the Messiah (Anti-Semitism): The third satanic strategy of anti-Semitism, or, more precisely, a systematic policy of attempting to eradicate all Jews from planet earth, has been in play since the day of Abraham's circumcision, and will continue until the devil is removed from the world. This strategy can be divided into three phases: 1) before Christ; 2) the time of Christ; 3) after Christ.

Before Christ, the Jewish people were a special target of the devil because of the fact that the Messiah was destined to come from Israel. If he could not eliminate, corrupt or subject the human race to his complete control, destroying the line of the Promised One would suffice to bring the plan of God to an abrupt end. Complete annihilation of the Jewish state and the Jewish people was the only sure way to accomplish this objective, and so it was that Satan devoted considerable resources to attacking Israel, both internally and externally. Internally, Israel became the target of every corrupting influence the devil could bring to bear (one needs only read the prophets, especially Jeremiah, to get a sense of the idolatries into which she was led), while externally Satan worked tirelessly to array the nations of the world against her for the purpose of her destruction (consider, for example, the concentration of his agents in neighboring nations: Daniel 10:13, Daniel 10:20). The Messiah was the object of Satan's destructive intentions throughout His earthly life. From Herod's attempt to destroy Him (Matthew 2:1-18; the devil undoubtedly had a part: cf. Revelation 12:4), to the devil's personal, intensive temptation of Christ (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13) and attempts to oppose Christ (Matthew 4:11; Matthew 16:23; Mark 8:33; Luke 4:29-30; John 7:30 John 8:59; John 10:39), to his active role in the betrayal of Christ (Luke 22:3; John 13:2 John 13:27), Satan spared no effort in undertaking to frustrate the Father's plan for Him.

Since the time of Christ, Israel has continued to be a prime focus for the devil's destructive attentions, though for a different reason. Although Satan failed to prevent the coming of the Messiah by extirpating the people from whom He was to come, he still has hopes of rendering His second coming pointless by eradicating the people to whom He is destined to return. For without Israel's continuation as a people, there would be no possible way of fulfilling the many specific promises made to them by God, the majority of which will only be brought to complete fulfillment under the millennial reign of Christ (e. g., the regathering of the nation, to name but one: Isaiah 49:8-26). Without an Israel for the Prince of Israel to rule, the devil would have effectively frustrated God's plan.

Needless to say, all the devil's efforts in this regard will ultimately prove ineffective. Nevertheless, as events of recent and current history show only too well, he is continuing to pursue this strategy. But woe to those who allow themselves to be used by him in this way (Isaiah 27:7). For I shall bless those who bless you, but those who utter curses against you I shall lay under a [true] curse, and thus will all the families of the earth be blessed through you. Genesis 12:3. No weapon forged against you shall prosper. And you shall reprove every tongue that rises up to judge you. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and My vindication on their behalf, says the Lord.

Isaiah 54:17. For thus says the Lord of hosts, "In later times He [the Father] shall send Me in glory against the nations who have plundered you (for whoever touches you touches the apple of My eye). At that time, behold, I shall wave My hand against them, and they will be plundered by their slaves. In this way you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent Me. Zechariah 2:8-9. The many prophecies of the Lord's future retribution against all who would harm or damage Israel are paralleled by numerous historical examples. The principle of God using others to discipline His people – but of holding this instrument to close account – can be seen in the case of Assyria, the "rod of His anger" (Isaiah 10:5), of whom He says, When the Lord has finished all His work against Mount Zion and Jerusalem, He will say, "I will punish the king of Assyria for the willful pride of his heart and the haughty look in his eyes." Isaiah 10:12 NIV (cf. Isaiah 10:5-19)

Egypt, Assyria, Babylon and many nations and tribes large and small were used by the Lord in Old Testament times to scourge His people when they strayed far from Him, but always with the purpose of bringing them back to Himself, and never to utterly destroy them. In each instance, it was the oppressor who was, in the end, chastened far more severely than Israel, the original object of wrath. In modern times as well the examples of Russia (imperial and communist) and Nazi Germany stand as vivid reminders of the results of active antisemitic agendas. It is well for those who follow Jesus Christ to consider that, although the suffering of Jews in this Church Age may be the result of divine visitation (according to the same pattern of chastisement to turn His people back to Him in truth), the consequences for those used in such a capacity remain dire indeed. Disputes between the Lord and Israel are very much a "family affair" and so, as in the analogy, it is wisdom to avoid becoming involved.

Judging from the continual backsliding and idolatry of the Old Testament nation Israel (trends continually denounced by the prophets), and from the "hardness in part" that holds sway over the greater part of Israel today (Romans 11:25), it is plain that "all Israel is not Israel" (Romans 9:6), and that we can therefore expect the Lord to continue with His work of discipline for the gracious purpose of repentance and salvation. But we must never forget that this "special attention" is a blessing (for some have always responded), and one that the Lord provides uniquely to this people who are "beloved because of the fathers" (Romans 11:28). For although a Jewish genealogy does not automatically bring salvation (Romans 9:30-32), this valuable heritage does bring a special consideration, a special oversight from God Himself (Zechariah 2:8-9; Romans 11:28).

Much then does it behoove us who are of the "wild olive tree" to respect and to pray for those of the "natural olive tree", and to be exceedingly circumspect in all our dealings in this regard. And we should do this not only to avoid falling under the same judgment that Israel's persecutors have suffered in the past. We should adopt God's own attitude of objective compassion. For while no one shall come to Him apart from Jesus Christ (John 14:6), He nevertheless desires all men to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). How much more then is this true in the case of the descendants of Abraham, the original heir of His promises, "from whom is the Christ according to the flesh" (Romans 9:5)! If we are truly walking in love as Christians should, showing the same consideration for all our neighbors as we do for ourselves and adopting God's attitude of desiring and working for the salvation of all who will accept it, then this approach presents no problem whatsoever. To the Jew first, and also to the Greek (i. e., gentile). Romans 1:16; Romans 2:9-10.

4) Satan's attack on the body of Christ (Persecution of the Church): Since the resurrection, ascension and session of Jesus Christ, the devil's primary focus has been Christ's body on earth, His Church. Having been defeated in all three of the campaigns discussed above, the devil is faced now with the sure and certain prospect of being replaced along with his followers by the Church as it continues to grow apace. The reality is that Satan has therefore been reduced to fighting a futile rearguard action in the vain hope of somehow staving off the inevitable. In spite of this, the opposition the devil is now visiting upon true believers world-wide is all the more furious as he attempts to prevent the growth and completion of the Church. This means opposing believers and attempting to prevent our spiritual growth, but it also means taking all possible measures to try and prevent unsaved humanity from coming to the light of Jesus Christ. The main target during this era, however, is true Christian orthodoxy. Wherever believers are seriously attempting to pursue a close and genuine relationship with their Lord, we can expect to find active opposition. There is a point of view which suggests that major persecutions of the Church are largely a thing of the past, but such opinions are not informed by events today taking place in countries such as China, India, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt and Iran (to name but a few of the more prominent and well-known examples) where to be and to walk like a true Christian is still to take one's life in one's hands. Even in places where no such direct threat of persecution exists at the moment (such as the United States), more subtle forms of attack are being employed (the increasingly corrosive and hostile popular culture, for instance). One thing is certain: as long as the Church Age continues, the devil will continue to make a priority of targeting Christians who are advancing spiritually in an attempt to dissuade others from following suit.

Stay sober and stay awake [on guard]. Our adversary the devil roams about like a roaring lion, looking for someone he can devour. Resist him, strong in your faith, remembering that your fellow believers in this world are undergoing the exact same sort of suffering [as you are]. 1 Peter 5:8-9.

5) Satan's supreme offensive (the Tribulation): Although the Church Age may for the most part represent for Satan a hard-fought rearguard action, its last seven years, the Tribulation, will be the time of his ultimate and most potent offensive prior to the return of Jesus Christ. We should not underestimate the fury he will unleash during this last battle of the Church Age.

Woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come to down to you, having great anger, because he knows that he has [only] a short time [remaining]. Revelation 12:12. But when the Son of Man returns, will He find faith on the earth? Luke 18:8 b

Jesus' question in this second quote is an indication of the intensity of pressure that will be brought to bear against believers during the final seven years that precede His return. During the Tribulation, his "final offensive", the devil will hold nothing back, but will instead take risks he has never before dared (including personal ones involved in his dangerous gambits vis-a-vis antichrist: compare Genesis 3:15; Genesis 6:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:9; Revelation 13:3-4, Revelation 13:12, Revelation 13:14; Revelation 16:13-14; Revelation 17:8, Revelation 17:11), committing all the resources he has thus far husbanded to this one last attempt at thwarting the plan of God. Specifically, he will undertake the elimination of the Jews, and of the whole community of believers on earth, setting in motion the train of events that will bring about open hostilities with God Himself, both in heaven (the "war in heaven" of Revelation 12:7), and on earth (Armageddon: Revelation

16:14-16). That his utter defeat is a foregone conclusion does not in any way alter the fact that, as a result of his massive effort, the Tribulation will be the most difficult period which humanity has ever experienced, one in which a careful walk with God will be more important for the believer's spiritual safety than ever before.

If anyone [is marked] for captivity, he is going into captivity. If anyone [is marked] for death by the sword, by the sword [he must] be killed. Therefore endurance and faith [on the part] of [my] sanctified ones is [called for]. Revelation 13:10.

6) Satan's last battle (the Gog-Magog Rebellion): The devil will launch one last offensive before being confined to the lake of fire forever. At history's end, he will be released from the Abyss for a short period of time – a final demonstration on God's part of Satan's intractably evil character (Revelation 20:7-10). For immediately upon his release the devil will set to organizing the population of a world at peace and experiencing the most profound prosperity in its history under the universal rule of Jesus Christ to rebel against the Anointed One (Psalms 2:1-12; Matthew 13:26; Revelation 22:1-14; Revelation 20:7-10). In this last battle, the devil's strategy comes more clearly to the fore than ever before: he will attempt (unsuccessfully) to directly unseat his divine Replacement, Jesus Christ. From the divine point of view, it may be observed that Satan's actions seem to make little sense. For he is fighting against God in all these operations. And even though he has the advantage of attacking the weakest link in the plan of God, sinful mankind, with God in control even this weak reed becomes an unbreakable rod of iron (Genesis 18:14; Matthew 19:26; Luke 1:37; Luke 18:27). The devil's "madness" is thus of the same sort we see commonly in the human race (the rule, really, and, unfortunately, not the exception). It is a madness born of arrogance (which corrupts all true thinking), a madness that blinds itself to the reality of God, His eternity, His power and His mercy, and substitutes self in His place. In all the diabolical undertakings given in synoptic form above, God has always been in charge in the Person of Jesus Christ our Lord who is blessed forever. Through Him we too shall have our share in the ultimate victory. For everything that has been born from God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world: our faith [in Christ]! 1 John 5:4 (cf. 1 John 5:1) But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! 1 Corinthians 15:57. In all this we are decisively victorious through Him who loved us. Romans 8:37.

9. The Angelic Order of Battle:

"Order of Battle" is a military term generally used to denote the force structure of a particular combatant in any given military campaign. The term is appropriate for our discussion of the devil's forces, given that angels are organized into "hosts" (i. e., "armies", the Hebrew word *ōāà*, *tsabha'*: compare Judges 9:29 with 1 Kings 22:19), and that God's angelic forces will one day "do battle" with and defeat Satan's forces (Revelation 12:7-17).

1) The current heavenly truce: In the middle of the Great Tribulation, God will cast the devil and his angels from heaven once and for all (Revelation 12:7-17). Until that time, however, such conflict as there is between the angelic forces of God and Satan respectively is taking place exclusively on the earth. For not only do the elect angels regularly appear before God (the "assembly of the holy ones" or angels in Psalms 89:5-7; cf. Job 15:8; Job 38:7; Psalms 29:1 ff.; Jeremiah 23:18 & Jeremiah 23:22), but there is also evidence that the fallen angels too present themselves before God at certain appointed times in company with the elect angels, and, one may infer, after the

same organizational pattern that obtained before their fall (cf. 1 Kings 22:19-22; Job 2:1; Zechariah 3:1):

Now the day came when the sons of God (i. e., all the angels, elect and fallen; cf. Genesis 6:4) came to assemble themselves in the presence of God. And Satan also came into their midst.

Job 1:6. The continued assembly on the part of Satan and his rebel angels indicates what may be gathered from a number of other passages of scripture, namely that there exists in the angelic realm a certain obedience of necessity on the part of the devil and his followers toward God (cf. James 2:19; 1 Peter 3:19-20; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6). This is not in any way a choosing for God from the heart, but rather an enforced response (along the lines of the restrictive rules of engagement that govern the limits of demonic activity on earth: cf. Job 1:12 & Job 2:6).

2) The Kingdom of God versus the kingdom of Satan: God's Kingdom has existed since the original creation. The fact that it is not at this time materially and physically visible on earth does not in any way diminish its spiritual role, either in the past, or in its even more significant present role (as witnessed to in the person of all those who are citizens of the Kingdom though here on earth, that is, believers in Jesus Christ in whom Christ dwells). The physical reestablishment of God's worldwide Kingdom on earth, prophesied until John the baptist (who first heralded its coming: Matthew 11:12), then offered in the Person of Jesus Christ (and rejected by His own countrymen: John 1:11), will not take place until our Lord's return, finally to become permanent and unchangeable when the Father returns to take up His residence with His children in the New Jerusalem on the new earth, with every enemy being finally defeated and annihilated (1 Corinthians 15:24-28, 1 Corinthians 15:50-57; Revelation 21:1 ff.).

Currently, this world is the devil's world, that is to say, the kosmos of sinful mankind under the all pervasive dark influence of Satan and his forces. Scripture is very careful not to ascribe this present, sinful world-order to God. It is certainly true that in an absolute sense this world belongs to the Lord, and that His authority, witness and influence here in the devil's kosmos are definitive (e. g., Job 41:11; Psalms 24:1; Psalms 29:10; Psalms 33:10-11; Isaiah 40:22). But in keeping with God's plan of allowing every moral creature the chance to choose to follow Him of their own free will, Satan has for the present been allowed a significant latitude of operation in order to test the hearts of sinful mankind, so much so that Christ in particular regularly refers to "the world" as an area of Satan's influence and control (e. g., John 12:31 John 14:30; 15:30; John 16:11). Therefore by referring to the "devil's world", we are in no way denying nor undermining the Lord God's absolute dominion in every part of the universe; but to fail to recognize the devil's vast and pernicious influence on earth as it is presently constituted would not only be a mis-statement of the teachings of God's Word, but also a dangerous underestimate of the perils that surround us because of that influence.

It is important to note that this "rule" over the earth on the part of the devil is: 1) a usurped rule (based on his dethronement of Adam); 2) a rule depending entirely on God's permission (to make the issue of free choice clear); 3) a rule limited in the main to influencing human beings to follow himself and his will instead of God and His will; 4) a rule which is temporary, soon to be abrogated at the return of Jesus Christ.

God is not at present theocratically administering the world in an outright and absolute manner. He did so in the past (before Satan's fall, and on the re-created earth before Adam and Eve fell); He will do so in the future (during Christ's millennial rule, and to an infinite degree in the eternal state which will follow it). However, during the six thousand years between Eden and Christ's return, this world populated by sinful people, is, to a very large degree, under the devil's control by way of his extensive and powerful influence over every heart that does not belong wholly to God. The devil has clearly constructed his rule and his kingdom as an antitype to God's rule and God's Kingdom. Establishing a "replacement realm" has been part and parcel of Satan's plan ever since he decided that his position of "Covering Cherub" was not grand enough for his abilities and sought to replace God in his pre-historic coup d'état . When called into the presence of the Most High, the devil promenades as if he were on an equal footing with God (Job 1:7; Job 2:2). He styles himself (and so is called) the "ruler of this world" (John 14:30 John 16:11), and represents himself on earth as being a god in his own right (2 Corinthians 4:4); in this capacity the devil is the real object of worship for all false religions (Romans 1:25; 1 Corinthians 8:5-6; Revelation 13:4-12). The devil has a "throne" or center of worship on earth (Revelation 2:13), earthly servants (2 Corinthians 11:15; cf. 1 Timothy 5:15), and legions of angels organized for battle. During the Great Tribulation, he will also have an earthly pseudo-Messiah who will rule over a world-wide satanic kingdom, destined to be destroyed by Christ at His return (Daniel 2:44; Daniel 7:27; Revelation 11:15). In this world, the devil's world, only those of us who have chosen the Kingdom of God over the kingdom of the devil have been delivered from his most terrifying power, that is, the power to blind the eyes of the unbelieving and lead them to destruction; only those who have trusted in Christ have been rescued from Satan's realm: To open their eyes, and to turn them away from the darkness and into the light, and from the power of Satan unto God. Acts 26:18.

[God is the One] who rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of His beloved Son. Colossians 1:13.

[Jesus Christ], who gave Himself on behalf of our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age according to the will of our God and Father.

Galatians 1:4. In keeping with our observations about the limitations upon the devil's powers and abilities, it is important to note several key differences between Satan's realm and the Kingdom of God:

God's Kingdom is an everlasting kingdom (Daniel 2:44); the devil's kingdom is temporary, and its demise is imminent (John 12:31 John 16:11; Romans 16:20).

God's Kingdom is universal (Psalms 47:2-3); the devil's kingdom is confined to this world and limited in its control here (Revelation 11:15).

God's Kingdom is one of eternal life (Revelation 21:6-7); but in the devil's kingdom, fear of death is an important element in Satan's continued control (Hebrews 2:14-15).

During His first advent, Christ bore witness that His Kingdom would not take literal possession of the world until the appointed time (Matthew 25:34; Matthew 26:29; John 18:36 Acts 1:3-8; cf. Daniel 7:22). Until He comes again, the nations of the world are often heavily influenced by the devil and in his nominal control. But in spite of the devil's considerable influence, we must not forget that history is ultimately in the hands of the Lord. All that Satan does, he does only through

God's permissive will and, in the end, he cannot hinder the inexorable progress of the plan of God in even the most minute way. The Lord God Almighty is the One who is truly in charge of all that happens in history; He is the real ruler of the nations (cf. Exodus 19:5-6; Psalms 9:7-8; Isaiah 40:23): Who will not fear You, O King of the nations? For You are worthy [of such respect]. Jeremiah 10:7.

[This has been decreed] that [all] living may know that the Most High reigns over the kingdoms of mankind, and that He bestows [this authority] upon whomsoever He desires, even elevating the lowliest of men [to power]. Daniel 4:17 b

Seven years will pass you by until you recognize that the Most High reigns over the kingdoms of mankind and bestows them upon whomsoever He desires. Daniel 4:25 b His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" Daniel 4:34-35 NIV

3) The organization of holy angels (including titles, ranks and functions): Just as God, who is completely capable of doing everything Himself, chooses to dispense much of His grace through faithful human beings in the visible world, so also in the invisible world much of what transpires on our behalf is accomplished by God through His angelic servants (Psalms 104:4; Hebrews 1:7, Hebrews 1:14). Much of what the Bible has to say about angels, holy and fallen, is couched in military language and terminology. Among the military terms used to describe angelic groupings are the words "hosts" (1 Kings 22:19; Nehemiah 9:6; Psalms 103:21; Psalms 148:2; Daniel 8:10; cf. Luke 2:13), "army" (Luke 2:13; Revelation 19:9), "legion" (Matthew 26:53; Mark 5:9; Luke 8:30), and "band" (Psalms 78:49). This is not surprising when one considers that there are no non-adult angels and they never grow, so that there is no reason why every male angel would not be permanently capable of military-like functions (and so be permanently organized into military formations, at least for the duration of the devil's rebellion). Just as the Israelite assembly was, when "numbered", a warrior assembly (Numbers 1:1-54; Numbers 2:1-34; cf. Deuteronomy 1:15), so it is only natural for the angels to be characterized in the same way. For not only is God the Lord of the armies of Israel (Joshua 5:13-15; 1 Samuel 17:45) and King of the nations (Job 12:23; Jeremiah 18:7-10), but He is also "Lord of Hosts", that is, commander of the angelic armies (e. g., Psalms 84:3; Isaiah 6:5; Amos 5:14-16; Zechariah 1:3-17):

I saw the Lord sitting on his throne with all the host of heaven standing around him on his right and his left. 1 Kings 22:19 NIV The Lord Jesus Christ, in addition to His divinity a true human being ever since the virgin birth, is not an angel. It is, however, important to remember at this point that along with being Head of the Church (Ephesians 1:22; Ephesians 4:15; Colossians 1:18), He is also Head (and Creator) of all angelic kind (Ephesians 1:21; Colossians 1:15-20; Colossians 2:10; Hebrews 1:1-4). It is in His capacity of "the Angel of the Lord" (i. e., God's supreme heavenly "messenger" [the meaning of both the Hebrew and Greek words for angel] – not, in His case, an actual angel) that Jesus Christ appeared as the visible representative of the Godhead prior to His incarnation. For He who is "the Son of Man" (Matthew 8:20; Matthew 9:6; Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:62; etc.), is also the King of all human kings and Lord of all angelic lords (Revelation 17:14; Revelation 19:16; cf. 1 Corinthians 8:5; 1 Timothy 6:15), and the "first born of all creation" (Colossians 1:15-18; cf. Romans 8:29; Hebrews 1:6; Revelation 1:5), His titles and authority

having been confirmed by His victory on the cross (Matthew 25:31; Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:20-21; Ephesians 3:10; Php 2:9-10; Colossians 2:15).

Scriptural references as to the specifics of angelic organization and hierarchy are even fewer than is often supposed. Many common assumptions about the arrangement of angelic organizational structure are based on extra-biblical sources rather than on what scripture itself has to say on the subject. Here is an overview of what we can say about the hierarchical structure of the elect angels of God:

1. Cherubs: The titles cherub (Ezekiel 1:5-26; Ezekiel 10:1-22), seraph (Isaiah 6:2-7), and "living creature" (e. g., Revelation 4:6-9) all refer to the same order of angelic creature, namely the four attendants of God's chariot-throne. This is the highest angelic rank. Cherubs (Heb. cherubh, עֲרֻבִים) take the lead in worshiping God (Isaiah 6:1-13; Revelation 4:8 b; Revelation 5:8 & Revelation 5:14; Revelation 7:11-12; Revelation 19:4), act as intermediaries for God (Revelation 6:1-7; Revelation 15:7), and control access into His presence (compare their depiction on the veil that guarded the holy of holies of the tabernacle: Exodus 26:1, Exodus 26:31; and their guarding of the "way to the tree of life": Genesis 3:24). The cherubs are usually seen in close connection with the "chariot-throne" of God (represented by the "mercy-seat" above the ark of the covenant; cf. Exodus 25:17-20). God sits "enthroned" between the cherubs (Psalms 80:1), and it is there "between the cherubim" that He met with Moses (Exodus 25:22). The seraphim of Isaiah chapter six, and the "living creatures" of Revelation (especially Revelation 4:6 ff.) are representations of these same creatures. In all of these instances, the creatures depicted are multi-winged angels, closely associated with God's throne, engaged in worshiping Him as they shield (and sometimes propel) His chariot throne. The living creatures, whose multiple faces bear an undeniable similarity to the cherubs of Ezekiel, praise God with the refrain "holy, holy, holy" in the exact manner of the seraphs of Isaiah (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8 b). The Hebrew word seraph (שֶׂרָפִים) most likely means "burning one" and this designation matches well the description of Ezekiel who notes that "the appearance of the creatures was like burning coals of fire or like torches" (Ezekiel 1:13; for this fire imagery compare Deuteronomy 4:24; Psalms 104:4; Ezekiel 1:4; Ezekiel 10:2; Ezekiel 28:14; Revelation 4:2-6). It is a tragic irony that Satan, having once been entrusted with this guardianship of God's holiness, should now, by his own treachery, be fated to an eternal existence shut off from the presence of God, seeking in the meantime to deny mankind access to the Father which was once his special prerogative. In contrast to Satan, Christ by His loyal fulfillment of the Father's plan in sacrificing Himself for us has gained for us access into the holy place, past the cherubim, and into the presence of the Father (Romans 5:2; Ephesians 2:18; Ephesians 3:12).

Satan was the "covering cherub", that is, the ultimate "imperial guard", charged with warding off all that is profane from the exquisite holiness of God (Ezekiel 28:14-16). He was Lucifer, the "morning star" (Isaiah 14:12), who, though he was the preeminent creature, his position of honor has now been occupied by the Son of Man (and true God), Jesus Christ, the "Bright Morning Star". Satan's unique guardian role has been taken on by the four holy cherubs, each of whom depict in their persons four important aspects of Christ's unique Person and work:

Bullock-face: (Gentiles): Christ promised to all humanity in general as Savior.

Lion-face: (Israel): Christ promised to Israel in particular as Messiah.

Human-face: (Church): Christ come in person in the flesh in humility as the Servant.

Eagle-face: (Millennium): Christ come in person in the flesh in glory as the King. a) Their Number: The cherubs are, according to the above discussion, four in number, and are almost always described as such. The one true exception to this rule is their depiction on the mercy seat. This exception is entirely understandable when it is considered that the mercy seat and the temple depictions are essentially two dimensional representations. Since the cherubim stand by the sides of God's chariot-throne in pairs (when carrying the throne), only two cherubs are fully visible to someone viewing the scene from the direct forefront, and so it is that they are represented in that context (cf. 2 Chronicles 3:10 where in Solomon's temple the addition of the two cherubs on the back wall of the holy of holies at a right angle to the two cherubs on the mercy seat has the effect and possibly the purpose of making four cherubs visible). b) Their Wings: The wings of the cherubim are described as numbering six in Isaiah and in Revelation as well. Ezekiel's mention of only four wings is to be accounted for by the fact he is describing the cherubs as they are in the process of transporting the chariot-throne of God (not the case in either Isaiah or Revelation where the throne is at rest). The "wheel-with-a-wheel-within-it" which Ezekiel describes as being by the side of each cherub (Ezekiel 1:15-18; Ezekiel 10:9-13) is, in actuality, the additional set of wings providing rotary locomotion to the chariot wheels (thus giving the appearance of a "wheel within a wheel" in each case; cf. Ezekiel 3:13). The description of these "wing-powered wheels" overheard by Ezekiel and recorded in verse thirteen of chapter ten as the "whirlwind wheels" (Hebrew: galgal: âiâi) is most revealing in this respect, for this image (i. e., of a funnel cloud) portrays substantial three dimensional depth just as a circularly rotating pair of wings (one from each side of the cherub) would possess, but which wheels alone would not. This also explains why the wheels are "full of eyes", a characteristic of the cherubs' wings: the rapidly rotating wheels with the pair of wings interlocked gives the appearance that the eyes are part of the wheels (compare Ezekiel 1:18 and Ezekiel 10:12 with Revelation 4:6 and Revelation 4:8). c) Their Symbolism: As mentioned above, all four cherub-faces symbolize Jesus Christ, with each representing that aspect of His historical mission at the forefront during the age for which they stand. The bullock face (Gentile age) is a picture of Christ the suffering Servant. The bullock not only bears burdens (as Christ bore our sins: cf. Isaiah 53:4), but is also the most esteemed sacrificial animal, whose blood was shed under the Old Testament economy as a symbolic representation of Christ's promised work on our behalf (Leviticus 1:5 ff.). The lion face (Jewish age) is a picture of Christ as the promised Messiah. The lion is the symbol of the tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5; cf. Genesis 49:9-12), and has a messianic connotation throughout the Old Testament (cf. Numbers 23:24; Numbers 24:9). The generation of Israel to whom He came was ready to embrace the lion (the Messiah as avenging warrior), but stumbled over the bullock (the Messiah as self-sacrificing servant). The human face (Church age) is a picture of Christ as the incarnate, visible Savior of the world. He is the Son of Man (Matthew 9:6), the archetypical human being who is truly human in every way apart from sin (Hebrews 2:14 with Hebrews 4:15). He is the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45). The Church, composed of all believing Jews and gentiles, is His body here on earth, not yet glorified as indeed He was not glorified until after His work on the cross was completed (John 17:1-5). The eagle face (Millennial age) is a picture of Christ exalted in resurrection and victorious in battle. Glorified by the Father for His victory at the cross (Ephesians 1:19-23), following His resurrection and ascension He is now seated at the right hand of God the Father until the day of His return (Psalms 110:1-7). At that time (the Second Advent), He will fulfill all the messianic prophecies recorded in the

scriptures and will rule the world in glory for a thousand years (Ephesians 3:10-12; Colossians 1:20). With its connotations of forbidding majesty and awe (Deuteronomy 28:49; Jeremiah 48:40; Jeremiah 49:22; Ezekiel 17:3, Ezekiel 17:7; Daniel 7:4; Hosea 8:1; Habakkuk 1:8), the eagle is an appropriate symbol for Christ's majestic and awe-inspiring double victory, first at the cross (with its accompanying resurrection, ascension and session at the Father's right hand), and ultimately at the Second Advent (Matthew 24:28; Luke 17:37; compare the picture of the glorified Christ at Revelation 1:12-16). d) The Number of their Faces: Of all human features, the face is at once one of the most memorable and expressive, making it a most effective means for the type of symbolic representation discussed above. Although their bodies resemble human form (Ezekiel 1:5), the faces of the cherubim are unique and four in number. These faces stand symbolically for the various aspects of our Lord's earthly ministry just described. In this way, the faces of the cherubim reflect the glory of the Son of God instead of their own glory, just as, ideally, the world should see the face of Christ in us, His servants, when we walk as He commanded us to do (2 Corinthians 3:18; cf. Matthew 16:24; John 13:15 1 Corinthians 11:1; 2 Corinthians 2:15; Galatians 4:19; Ephesians 5:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 1 Peter 2:21).

All four faces of the cherubim are entirely obscured in Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-7), because as the cherubs hover over the throne of God, they cover their faces with one set of wings (so as not to look upon the glory of God). In Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:4-26; Ezekiel 10:1-22; Ezekiel 41:18-20), the cherubs (along with their wing-wheels) are positioned under the chariot throne, so that no veiling of their faces is necessary. All four faces, as a result, were visible to Ezekiel. In Revelation (Revelation 4:6-8), the cherubs encircle the throne and are part of it (i. e., in direct contact with it), but are not positioned so as to provide locomotion (i. e., they have rotated into a guardian position). Here, they are roughly on the level of God's throne (i. e., not completely below it as in Ezekiel, nor hovering above it as in Isaiah). As a result, we may surmise that they are seen by John covering all but their outward looking face (so that he can describe them as if they had only one face). In actuality, therefore, each cherub in all three passages possesses all four faces: that of a man on the front, an eagle on the back, a lion on the right and a bullock on the left (as in Ezekiel 1:6-9). From the viewer's perspective, however, each cherub may seem to have only one face, since only one of the faces is generally visible at any given time (cf. Ezekiel 10:14; where it states literally in the Hebrew that "the face of the first one was . . . [etc.]", although Ezekiel is previously quite clear about the fact each cherub has four faces: Ezekiel 1:6-9). e) Their Order: Ezekiel's initial description of the faces in verse ten of chapter one proceeds in a natural and understandable order, making mention of the forward looking face first (that of a man), then moving to the right and left sides (the lion and the bullock respectively), and finishing with the rearward-looking face (the eagle). Ezekiel 10:14; by way of contrast, is not a generic description of a single cherub, but rather an account of the entire college of four as they carry God's chariot-throne.

Each had four faces. The face of the first was [that of a] cherub; the face of the second [was] the face of a man; the face of the third [was] the face of a lion; the face of the fourth [was] the face of an eagle.

Ezekiel 10:14. In this second description, Ezekiel's account thus moves around the chariot-throne in a clockwise fashion (left-front, front-right, right-rear, rear-left), mentioning the outward-looking face in each case. Ezekiel begins with the cherub stationed on the left-front corner of the chariot

no doubt because this angel was closest to his view, for the chariot-throne is described at this point as standing south of the temple (Ezekiel 10:3), while Ezekiel himself was positioned near the temple's entrance (viz., to the north of the chariot-throne: Ezekiel 8:16). His description of this cherub, elsewhere with the bullock face, as having "the face of a cherub" may be explained by fact that in the Hebrew culture the cherubh (cherub: Hebrew עֲרֻבָּיִם) must have generally been understood as having the appearance of a bullock, precisely the reason why Ezekiel made such a point of articulating that the genuine, heavenly cherubs had four faces, only one of which resembled a bullock. The order of the cherubim given in Revelation 4:7 of Lion, Bullock, Man, Eagle, is thus consistent with what is found elsewhere in scripture (i. e., Isaiah 6:1-7; Ezekiel 1:4-26; Ezekiel 10:1-22; Ezekiel 41:18-20). In Ezekiel's description, the cherubs are actually in contact with the chariot-throne while flying, in Isaiah's description, the cherubs (called seraphs) are disengaged and flying, and in Revelation, the cherubs are in contact with the throne (though they have apparently shifted), and are not flying but are instead "in the midst" of the throne (Greek: εν meso: εν μεστω το θρονου). As to the order per se as given in Revelation 4:7; John lists the cherubim in the following manner right, left, front, rear. This is similar to what Ezekiel does when describing the four faces of the individual cherubim in the tenth verse of chapter one, but not identical. For while Ezekiel sandwiches the left and the right in between the front and the rear, John, on the other hand, shifts this order, giving the left and the right, followed by the front and the rear. This change of order (from the more natural order of Ezekiel) is due to the fact that, in the book of Revelation (the "unveiling of Jesus Christ", its literal title), it was appropriate for John under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to list the faces of the cherubim so as to reflect these symbolic representations of the Person and work of our Savior in respect to their specific relationship to the overall Plan of God. Therefore the ranking in Revelation 4:7 (Lion-Bullock-Man-Eagle) has the following significance: The symbol of the historical Age of Israel is placed first. The symbol of the coming Kingdom of Israel is placed last.

These two symbols enclose the two symbols of the predominantly gentile ages, of which . . . The symbol of the Age of the Gentiles is placed first. The symbol of the Church Age (where gentiles are grafted into Israel) is placed next to it.

Thus Israel and Kingdom Israel enclose the gentiles and the mystery gentiles (Ephesians 3:6). The symbolism thus rendered of Israel enclosing the gentiles and the gentiles fulfilling Israel is at once powerful and appropriate, for Christ, whose Person and work these four ages and their corresponding cherub-faces represent, is the One who fills and completes everything in every way (Ephesians 1:23; cf. Ephesians 1:9-10). f) Their intimate connection with the throne of God: As the highest ranking angelic creatures, it is appropriate for cherubim to be closely associated with God's heavenly throne, so close, in fact, that a bit later they are described as essentially one with that throne. For just as the Lamb is "in the middle of the throne" (Revelation 5:6), so the four cherubs are identically described as "in the middle of the throne" (Revelation 4:6). It is true that in the verse just cited, the "four living creatures" (i. e., the cherubim) are also described as being "around the throne" as well as "in the middle of" it, a combination of characterizations which nicely describes their position as guardians proportionally positioned around the throne (from which positions they also provide this "chariot throne" with locomotion, their wings being closely interlocked with its wheels: Ezekiel 1:4-26; Ezekiel 10:6-17; cf. Isaiah 6:1-6; Revelation 4:6, Revelation 4:8-9; Revelation 5:6, Revelation 5:8, Revelation 5:11, Revelation 5:14; Revelation 6:1,

Revelation 6:6; Revelation 7:11; Revelation 14:3; Revelation 15:7; Revelation 19:4): The Lord reigns. Let the nations tremble. He is enthroned above the cherubim. Let the earth shake. Psalms 99:1 (cf. Psalms 80:1; Isaiah 37:16)

2. Elders: Next in rank behind the cherubs are the angelic elders (Greek: presbyteroi, πρεσβυτεροι). In terms of their physical location, they are closest to the Father after the cherubs (seated around the chariot-throne of God which the cherubs bear). In terms of their description, they are associated with royal paraphernalia (crowns and thrones: cf. Isaiah 24:22-23; Revelation 4:4, Revelation 4:10; Revelation 5:5-6, Revelation 5:8, Revelation 5:11, Revelation 5:14; Revelation 7:11, Revelation 7:13; Revelation 11:16; Revelation 14:3; Revelation 19:4). Given that they are described in regal terms, we may assume that these (kingly) elders are mimicked in Satan's system by the "thrones" mentioned in Colossians 1:16. Though never a set number, there always existed in Israel as well a multiplicity of elders, chiefs or "nobles" of the twelve tribes. In his capacity of guardian cherub, Satan was adorned with nine jewels comparable to the twelve jewels found on the breastplate of the high priest of Israel, where each jewel represented one of the twelve tribes liable for military service (Levi being excepted). In a similar way, we may assume that the nine jewels born by the covering cherub represented the nine original divisions of the angelic order. Revelation 12:4 describes the great dragon (the devil) as sweeping away a third of the stars of heaven and casting them to the earth, referring both to the angels who followed him during his pre-historic rebellion and to believers who apostatize to follow his antichrist during the Tribulation (cf. Daniel 8:12-13; Matthew 24:10-13; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 Timothy 4:1). This combined reference to fallen angels literally cast down to the earth on account of prior judgment at the Tribulation's mid-point and fallen believers figuratively cast down on account of apostasy in the Great Apostasy of that period can be best appreciated by a comparison of the two most telling passages where the actions of the devil and his earthly surrogate (antichrist) are described in comparable terms: And [the little horn (i. e., antichrist)] magnified himself against the host of heaven [both categories], and he cast down to the earth some of the host [fallen believers] and some of the stars [fallen angels], and he trampled them underfoot (i. e., their association with him is their downfall). Daniel 8:10. And [the dragon's] (i. e., the devil's) tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven (i. e., both fallen angels and fallen believers) and threw them to the earth (i. e., their rebellion or apostasy and consequent association with them in their fall). Revelation 12:4 a

Combining this information with the likelihood that angelic organization is predicated on clans or tribes in a manner similar to Israel (based upon the analogy of similarities between the memorial gemstones born by both the covering cherub and the high priest), and that, as in Israel, clans and tribes tend to act corporately (cf. the corporate rebellion of the ten tribes after Solomon's death: 1 Kings 11:26 ff.), we may posit that this rebellion of one third of the angels also occurred in a corporate fashion, and therefore involved three of these original nine angelic clans (the "third" of Revelation 12:4). This left six loyalist clans, and we may understand the twenty-four angelic elders as clan leaders, with four elders for each of the six angelic divisions remaining faithful to God and rejecting the devil's appeals for rebellion (cf. Revelation 4:4). The postulate that each clan should have four elders is strengthened by the consideration that the number four is a particularly common and important angelic number (i. e., four cherubs: Revelation 4:6-9; four charioteers: Zechariah 6:1-8; four restrainers of the winds: Revelation 7:2; four destroying angels: Revelation 9:13-15; four craftsmen: Zechariah 1:18-21). Since this college of elders must post-date Satan's

rebellions (because it is based upon six clans rather than nine), we should also understand these twenty-four angels to have gained their positions through meritorious service in the cause of our Lord. This should serve as a reminder to all who consider it of the great value of being and remaining loyal to the Lord, and of the exceptional benefits promised to those who excel in the struggle in which we are now engaged.

3. Archangels: "Archangel" is a Greek word, a combination of the two roots arch- (rule/ruler) and angel- (angel), and is almost certainly a translation of the Hebrew word sar, meaning prince or chieftain. In Daniel chapter 10, Michael is referred to several times in the Hebrew as sar, and this word is rendered in the Greek of the Septuagint alternately as archon and angelos. Along with Michael (Daniel 10:1-21; Jude 1:9), Gabriel is the only other elect angel mentioned by name in scripture (Daniel 8:16; Daniel 9:21; Luke 1:19, Luke 1:26). For this reason and because in Luke 1:19 he is said to "stand before God" as do the archangels of Revelation 8:2; we may be sure that Gabriel is an archangel as well. Furthermore, the mention of other unnamed sariym ("princes") in addition to Michael in Daniel chapter ten indicates a plurality of archangels beyond these two (Daniel 10:13, Daniel 10:20-21; Daniel 12:1). We can also glean from the usage in Daniel chapter ten (as well as from the use of the word sar for human leaders elsewhere in the Hebrew Old Testament) that sar ("prince" or "archangel") is a martial office. The situation outside of the book of Daniel confirms this impression: a) the archangel of 1 Thessalonians 4:16 shouts a command for the dead to rise (followed by a military trumpet blast commanding assembly). b) Michael in Jude 1:9 fights with Satan over Moses' body. c) in Revelation 12:7; Michael leads "his angels" in battle against the devil and his forces, successfully driving them from heaven down to the earth. As the last two examples indicate, Michael, as the archangel of Israel (Daniel 10:13 : "Michael your [plural = Israel] prince"; Daniel 10:20; Daniel 12:1; Jude 1:9; and see Revelation 12:7; where the description of his victory over the devil is sandwiched inside the allegory of the "woman" Israel), holds a unique position among the unnamed number of archangels (or "princes"), both elect and fallen: a) he is the protector of God's preeminent people (into whom we gentiles are grafted by grace: Daniel 12:1; Romans 11:11-24). b) he is the only sar/archangel specifically named as such (Daniel 12:1; Jude 1:9). c) he is not only called "one of the great princes" (Daniel 10:13), but also "the great prince who stands over your people" (Daniel 12:1).

We should also understand the angelic "rulers" or archai of the epistles of Paul to be archangels (1 Corinthians 15:24; Ephesians 1:21; Ephesians 3:10; Ephesians 6:12; Colossians 1:16; Colossians 2:10, Colossians 2:15; also the "angels" of 1 Peter 3:22; where the arch- part is left out), the -angelos part of their title being omitted as unnecessary (and potentially confusing) since in all of the instances cited, they are mentioned in company with other angels and angelic ranks.

Finally, the "seven angels with the seven trumpets" of Revelation 8:1-5; although not explicitly identified as such, are also archangels. For they "stand in state before God" (cf. "I am Gabriel, who stand before God" in Luke 1:19). They are also called "the" seven angels, the definite article here serving to distinguish them in rank and status. In this context we see another function of the archangels in the administration of divine judgment, heralded by the military trumpets. The archangels often have paraphernalia that is appropriate to their current mission, trumpets for proclamation (as here in Revelation 8:1-5; where they serve a monitory function), the seal of God for special marking (as at Revelation 7:2), or bowls for pouring out judgment (as in Revelation 15:7). The archangels thus constitute a college of seven (Gabriel and Michael being the only two

named in scripture), who stand before the heavenly throne, ever ready to carry out God's mandates. They are the highest ranking angels to undertake such missions on earth, the cherubs remaining with the chariot throne, and the elders before it in heaven (Daniel 8:16; Daniel 9:21; Daniel 10:13, Daniel 10:20-21; Daniel 12:1; Luke 1:19, Luke 1:26; Ephesians 1:21; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Jude 1:9; Revelation 7:2; Revelation 15:7).

4. Authorities: Along with the two following categories, the majority of scriptural mentions of these angelic offices are references to fallen angels, but the designations are valid for elect angels as well (e. g., Ephesians 1:21; 1 Peter 3:22), so that they may be taken as part of the original hierarchical structure. "Authority" (Greek: ἐξουσία, exousia) is a somewhat lower rank than that of archangel, but, as their name implies, these angels are invested with significant spheres of operational authority. We may take them as high-level commanders, subordinate to the archangels (indeed, the archai are usually only mentioned in tandem with the exousiai: 1 Corinthians 15:24; Ephesians 1:21; Ephesians 3:10; Colossians 1:16; Colossians 2:10, Colossians 2:15; 1 Peter 3:22 [where angeloi = {arch}-angeloi]), but with significant numbers of subordinates of their own. It is probable that the four angels of Revelation who restrain the winds and administer the first four trumpet judgments are of this rank (Revelation 7:1-3; Revelation 8:7-12).

5. Powers: In three places (1 Corinthians 15:24; Ephesians 1:21; 1 Peter 3:22), a third category of ranking angel is mentioned: that of "power" (Greek: δυνάμις, dynamis). These are angels of some considerable ability and command authority (undoubtedly with a significant number of subordinates), higher in importance than the rank and file, yet considerably lower than the superior "authorities". In Ephesians 6:12; these angels (at least in the Satan's order of battle) are referred to as "world-powers" (Greek: κοσμοκράτορες, kosmokratores), emphasizing their control as limited to the devil's "cosmos".

6. Spirits: Rank and file angels, that is, angels of no special rank or position, are often referred to simply as "angels" or "spirits" (the term "demon" being reserved for rank and file angels of the devil's forces). The vast majority of angels, elect and fallen, belong to this category. Of the elect rank and file we may observe that, just as is the case in the Body of Christ, these "private soldiers" are no less significant in God's eyes or less important in the accomplishment of His plan (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12 ff.). This becomes even more obvious when we consider some of the special functions and general services entrusted to individual spirits often designated simply as "angels":

4) Special functions of elect angels:

1. Restraining (as agents of God): e. g., of the Winds: Revelation chapter 7 (cf. Michael in Daniel 12:1).

2. Watching (as agents of God): the horsemen watchers of Zechariah 1:1-21, and four chariot watchers of Zechariah 6:1-15 who observe events on earth on behalf of the Lord (this function is also referred to in Daniel 4:13, Daniel 4:17, Daniel 4:23, under the Aramaic title of "watcher": 'iyr).

3. Judgment (as agents of God): the seven angels with the seven trumpets (Revelation 8:6 ff) and the Bowl carriers of Revelation 15:1-8; Revelation 16:1-21 are prime examples of angels who carry out the Lord's decreed destructions (cf. also Genesis 19:1 ff; Ezekiel 9:1-11; Revelation 7:3; Revelation 14:18; Revelation 16:5).

5) General service of elect angels:

1. to Local Churches (as ministers of God): We know from Revelation chapters 2-3 that local churches have individual angels assigned to them, for oversight, guidance and protection (as the context of the seven churches indicates).

2. to Believers (as ministers of God): Much extra-biblical speculation exists on the topic of "guardian" angels. What we can say for certain is that scripture does indicate a definite role for angels in the protection, guidance and oversight of individuals (see especially Genesis 32:1; 2 Kings 6:16-17; Psalms 91:11-12; Daniel 6:22; Matthew 4:11; Matthew 18:10-11; Luke 16:22; Acts 12:15; Hebrews 1:14).

3. for Special Tasks (as ministers of God): As servants of the Lord God (Psalms 103:21; Hebrews 1:7 & Hebrews 1:14), angels are entrusted with a variety of tasks in the accomplishment of His will. Some of those recorded in scripture include: a) escorting the spirits of believers to heaven [currently; prior to Christ's ascension, escort to the subterranean paradise of Abraham's Bosom] (2 Kings 2:11-12; Luke 16:22). b) escorting believers to their resurrection-rendezvous with Christ at His return (Matthew 24:31; compare Luke 17:35 with 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). c) escorting of inspired believers in visions (Revelation 17:3; Revelation 21:9-10; cf. 2 Corinthians 12:4; Revelation 4:1-2). d) providing manna during the years of the Exodus (Psalms 78:25). e) rescuing believers (2 Kings 6:16-17; Daniel 6:22; Acts 5:19; Acts 12:1 ff.). f) making proclamations and communicating with believers on God's behalf (Matthew 28:5-7; Luke 2:8-15). g) praising God (Nehemiah 9:6; Revelation 5:11 ff.)

Despite the wealth of information scripture provides about angels, elect and fallen, the Bible's treatment of that subject is neither exhaustive nor comprehensive. There is much more that we would like to know and many questions we would ask if we could. There are certainly grounds for the Bible's lack of full disclosure on the topic. Non-scriptural speculation throughout the ages has been responsible for many a full-blown system of angelic worship. From ancient Gnosticism to modern, more "respectable" religions, there has always been a tendency outside of true Christianity to glorify angels and so, for all intents and purposes, to worship them (exactly the result which the quondam ranking angel, Satan, has always craved for himself). Much of the Pauline epistles of Colossians and Ephesians are devoted to refuting gnostic teachings (e. g., Colossians 2:8-10; see also Ephesians 1:23; Ephesians 3:19; Ephesians 4:10; Colossians 1:19; Colossians 1:25 ff.; Colossians 2:2, Colossians 2:20-23), and the epistle to the Hebrews goes to great lengths to emphasize Christ's superiority to angels (see esp. Hebrews 1:1-14; Hebrews 2:1-18). In short, as fascinating as the topic may be to some, we must never forget that angels, despite their present superiority to us, are creatures too, and that all glory belongs to the Creator (Romans 1:25):

Let no one gain control over your life, desiring to [enslave you to himself] through a show of false humility and the adoration of angels, basing his approach on what he has [allegedly] seen while puffed up by his own fleshly thoughts, yet not embracing the Head [Christ]. For it is from this Source that the entire body [the Church] is [truly] supplied and instructed through [all] its joints and sinews, and [thus] produces the growth that God has given. Colossians 2:18-19. And I, John, am the one who saw and heard these things. And when I had seen and heard them, I fell down at the feet of the angel who was showing them to me in order to worship him. And he said to me, "Don't

do this! I am a fellow servant of your brethren and of the prophets and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God! Revelation 22:8-9.

6) The organization of fallen angels (including titles, ranks and functions): The first point to be made about the devil's angels is that in terms of their substance there is no evidence that they are in any way different from the elect angels. Whatever properties, whatever abilities, whatever general characteristics are possessed by the one class seem to be entirely similar in the other. Where the two groups do differ is in their choice of allegiance (i. e., to God or to the devil), a choice which makes all the difference in their eternal status as is the case for humanity as well. The differences in organization between the two groups can be attributed not only to the sharply disparate missions of the two camps (serving and opposing God respectively), but also to definite imperfections in the devil's reorganization of his forces (versus the perfect, original organization of God).

One of the ways in which Satan built a following in his attempted coup d'état against the Lord God was by promising his potential followers a share in his rule. We may therefore posit a significant inflation of ranks and ranking officers in the devil's hierarchy partly as a result of Satan's need to reward powerful and influential members of his following with suitable plums. Since his successful (though temporary) wresting of the rulership of the planet away from mankind at the fall, the devil also seems to have divided up earth as conquered territory among his subordinates. When we hear in the book of Daniel (Daniel 10:13 & Daniel 10:20) about "the prince of Greece" and "the prince of Persia", clear references in the context to adversarial angelic beings, we are doubtless dealing with tangible (if loosely held and impermanent) rewards bequeathed by Satan on some of his more prominent officers. Thus the kingdoms and territories of this kosmos have been divided up by Satan and portioned out to his minions in a highly political and therefore less than perfect way for the prosecution of his ends.

Retention and degree of domination over individual areas of the globe will then be dependent on a number of factors, not the least of which will be the ability, resourcefulness and determination of the devil's followers. That is why Satan's statement to Christ to the effect that all the kingdoms of the world have been "handed over" to him and that he is free to give them to whomever he wishes (Matthew 4:8-9; Luke 4:5-7) is, like so many of the devil's lies, in some sense true (though in its totality it is a clever lie): Adam's fall did indeed leave the door open for Satan to usurp Man's God-given rule over the earth, and the devil has done so to a large degree, so much so that our Lord would call him "the prince of this world" (kosmos: John 12:31 cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4). However, the degree to which the devil is actually able to exercise this rule is far from absolute. For it is limited by the over-arching will of God, the free will of mankind (ever protected by God through various grace means), and by the imperfections of the devil, his followers, and their overall organization, tactics and strategy. Created perfect by a perfect God, the devil and his angels have corrupted themselves through rebellion against God, and the arrogance, jealousy and avarice under the influence of which they are now operating (to name but a few of the sinful trends manifest in their collective behavior), make for serious imperfections in their organization, tactics and strategy. We shall first discuss organization:

1. Satan (cherub level): The devil was originally a cherub, first in rank among the elect angels, and second only to the theophanic manifestation of the second Person of the Trinity, that is, our Lord

Jesus Christ appearing as The Angel of the Lord. In God's system, Satan has now been replaced by the four cherubs who continually attend God. In his own system, the devil represents himself as being God – this is clear from all his words and deeds, from his original coup d'état which attempted to replace God, to his present representation of himself as the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4; cf. John 12:31; John 14:30; John 16:11; Ephesians 2:2), to his predicted appointment and possession of the antichrist, the beast who will temporarily rule the earth representing himself to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:4; cf. Ezekiel 28:2). In terms of his followers, the devil is very clearly "the ruler of the demons" (Matthew 12:24), and "father" of those who reject the truth of our heavenly Father (John 8:44). Satan, it seems, always has a headquarters on earth. In circa 67 A. D., that headquarters was in Pergamum (Revelation 2:13). We might have expected Rome, but when one considers 1st century Pergamum's prominence as a site of emperor-worship as well as pagan idolatry, the choice is more understandable. The devil's power over humanity stems almost exclusively from influencing human behavior. The key to his success has always been and will continue to be the especially deadly combination of worship of himself (all false religion) coupled with the worship of live human beings (to culminate in antichrist). Scripture is not specific about previous satanic headquarters (Babylon at the time of the tower of Babel seems a likely guess), and we can only conjecture about the centuries since, but suffice it to say that wherever men are worshiped as gods and the spirit of idolatry runs high in any of its forms (Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5), the devil is likely to be near.

2. Thrones (elder level): These "kings" are apparently the heads of Satan's world-wide network for administering his realm. These highest ranking of the devil's subordinates are likely much more numerous than their elect equivalents, the elders (cf. Colossians 1:16). For rather than sitting enthroned before God Almighty (and rendering Him appropriate worship before His throne: Revelation 4:4-10; Revelation 5:6-14; Revelation 11:16; Revelation 19:4), these "kings" sit enthroned throughout the nations of the world posing as gods. In the guise of pagan deities, these high ranking members of Satan's inner-circle receive worship from men (instead of giving it to God). As the plural number in Daniel 10:13 makes clear (plural in the Hebrew as KJV; NIV is incorrect), pagan nations inevitably possess a plurality of such "kings". 1 Corinthians 8:5 also states that there are many of these so-called "gods", confirming for us the fact that high-ranking demons stand behind pagan religious practice. Amos 5:26; for example, equates false gods, idols and "kings" in this sense. Given that any worship besides that of the true God is idolatry (Ezekiel 14:3 ff.; Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5), we may expect the full complement of these "thrones" to be numerous indeed, and present in an authoritative and influential capacity wherever excessive human enthusiasm approaches an idolatrous pitch.

3. Princes (archangel level): These are the sarim discussed above. Daniel 10:13 and Daniel 10:20-21 mention the "prince of Persia" and the "prince of Greece", from context not only demons, but probably of equivalent rank to the angel who speaks with Daniel, and certainly of comparable power to the archangel Michael, whose help is necessary for Daniel's interlocutor to disengage and come to his help (Daniel 10:20-21). Like the elect archangels, these "princes" are high ranking military officers with significant numbers of subordinates. It is likely that Abaddon-Apollyon, the demon general of the "first woe", also falls into this category (Revelation 9:11).

4. Authorities (authority level): This is the only rank level for which both elect and fallen angels share a common scriptural designation. The best explanation for this fact is that authorities are

high enough in rank to be uncommon, but not so high as to attract special attention in the biblical account. We only find them mentioned in combination with other demonic officials, most commonly right after the archai, or "princes", the demon equivalent to archangels, whose deputies the exousiai or "authorities" are (1 Corinthians 15:24; Ephesians 1:21; Ephesians 3:10; Ephesians 6:12; Colossians 1:16; Colossians 2:10, Colossians 2:15; 1 Peter 3:22).

5. World-rulers (power level): These are the demon equivalent to the dynamis or "powers". They are actually called "powers" in the majority of passages in which reference is made to them (1 Corinthians 15:24; Ephesians 1:21; 1 Peter 3:22). The exception is Ephesians 6:12; where they are called kosmokratores (κοσμοκράτορες). The implication of their name, "those who exercise power in the kosmos" is that, beyond any mid-level command authority they may hold, they also exercise special powers of some kind. We may note in passing that they would likely be the type of demon behind the exercise of pseudo-miracles and satanic demonstrations of power (cf. Revelation 13:13). The restriction by name in Ephesians 6:12 to this world shows that their originally God-given powers/authority are now limited to doing the devil's work in his present realm.

6. Lordships (spirit level): The word "lord" or "lordship" (note the small "l") represents the rank and file of fallen angels or demons (indicative of the "rank-inflation" in Satan's system). Known by a variety of names, demons (Leviticus 17:7; Matthew 9:34), evil spirits (Luke 7:21; Acts 19:13), unclean spirits (Matthew 10:1; Mark 1:27), and devils (John 6:70), the term "lordship" is employed for them at Colossians 1:16 and elsewhere (cf. Revelation 17:14; Revelation 19:16), because they exercise angelic, or "lordly" power (cf. Hebrew `el or "mighty one" in Psalms 8:5; Psalms 82:1 & Psalms 82:6; Psalms 138:1; John 10:34-35), a basic function common to all angels vis-a-vis humanity until the resurrection changes the situation. Jesus Christ, in addition to being King of the kings of the earth, is also Lord of all angelic lords, that is, of all angels of all ranks, whether elect and fallen, from the highest to the lowest (Revelation 17:14; Revelation 19:16).

7. Demons are currently not at liberty: One third of angelic kind followed Satan in his rebellion against God (see the discussion under the subject of the elect angelic elders above). At present, however, the devil is operating with less than this full complement of his original supporters. As a result of their pre-flood attempt to pollute the purity of the human line (an activity which violated the parameters God had set for Satan's attacks on mankind: cf. Genesis 6:1-13; Jude 1:6), a large number of demons are presently being restrained below the earth in a compartment of Hades variously called Tartarus or the Abyss (Luke 8:31; 2 Peter 2:4; Revelation 9:1; Revelation 20:1). Some of these are destined to be released temporarily during the Tribulation (Revelation 9:1-12). Judging from the request of the demon "legion" to our Lord not to throw them into the Abyss, we can say that incarceration in Tartarus for conduct out-of-bounds is an ever present possibility that prevents Satan and his followers from overstepping the limits of behavior God has set for them (Luke 8:31).

We also know of one additional large contingent of demons presently restrained: the four demon generals and their horde of some two hundred million (Revelation 9:13 ff.). These sarim (and their army) are presently "bound" within the Abyss (as opposed to being unchained yet locked in the Abyss like many of their compatriots). The river Euphrates is the site of their future release evidently because of its proximity to historical Babylon (the symbolic successor of which is most

significant throughout the Book of Revelation). The reason for their double imprisonment or this point of eventual release is not specified, but, on the Genesis chapter six analogy, some egregious violation of God's ground rules for putting humanity to the test must be the root cause, probably having to do with Satan's attempt to forge a one-world pagan state connected with the construction of the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:3-9).

8. Other individual characteristics: In our discussion of the elect elders we noted that the degree of performance of the faithful angelic orders differed (as different individuals and orders demonstrated everything from zealous to lukewarm support for the Lord in the face of Satan's attempted coup). A similar situation obtains in the case of the fallen angels in that they too are subject to personal differentiation. There are apparently varying degrees of depravity among the demons (Matthew 12:45; Luke 11:26), and varying degrees of persistence in that depravity (Matthew 17:21). The point should be made in this connection that the "less evil" demons are in no wise less subject to the judgment of eternal damnation because of their lesser evil: evil is evil. In the angelic realm, eternal security is based upon the decision to choose for God rather than for Satan; in the human realm, it is based upon choosing Jesus Christ over the devil's world.

7) God's employment of evil spirits: Satan and his demonic forces can do nothing apart from the permissive will of God. For His own purposes, purposes having to do with His own glory and the principle of free will, human and angelic, God allows the devil to operate within certain specified parameters. What, then, if He should use Satan and his minions in the furtherance of His plan? In one sense, everything that happens is part of the plan of God for the ultimate possible good (Romans 8:28). It is thus of no great moment if He should choose to make specific use of evil spirits to accomplish His own perfect will. As Christ gave instructions not to hinder any doing God's will (Luke 9:50; cf. Php 1:18), and as the apostle Paul on occasion made use of the inclinations of demonic forces for divine ends (1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 Timothy 1:20), so there are a number of instances in scripture where God clearly employs the devil's minions for His own perfect purposes, by allowing them to perform mischief that would otherwise be denied to them:

1. God's permissive testing of Job (Job 1:12; Job 2:6).
2. The evil spirit sent by God to Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem (Judges 9:23).
3. The evil spirit from the Lord who vexed Saul (1 Samuel 16:14; 1 Samuel 18:10).
4. The Lord inciting David to number the people through Satan (compare 2 Samuel 24:1 with 1 Chronicles 21:1).
5. Micah's story of the evil spirit who volunteers to deceive the king (1 Kings 22:19-23).
6. The unleashing of demonic forces to warn and to punish the earth during the Tribulation (Revelation 9:1-19).

Every action Satan and his subordinates have ever taken has been fully anticipated by God and, indeed, incorporated into His plan. The fact that God can, in the furtherance of that plan, employ at will even His sworn enemies is indicative of the complete degree of control He has over all the events that are transpiring in the world (or ever have, or ever will).

8) Angelic combat: Open warfare will not break out in heaven until mid-way in the (future) tribulational period when Satan and his angels will be ejected from heaven and hurled to the earth (Revelation 12:7-9). At the present time, there is an uneasy truce in the heavenly realms. Although Satan and his followers are at present free to appear before God (and the devil makes full use of this opportunity to accuse believers: Job 1:6-12; Job 2:1-7; Luke 22:31; Revelation 12:10), angelic combat is apparently incessant upon the earth (consider Daniel 10:1-21), with elect angels and fallen angels struggling with each other in an invisible warfare (2 Kings 6:17). As non-corporeal beings, angels cannot be wounded or killed in the way that human beings can. Angelic combat therefore consists not in destroying or damaging each other, but rather in hindering each other from certain actions or, alternatively, compelling one another to certain actions. The angel who visits Daniel in chapter 10 of that book is at first kept from coming by demon opposition (Daniel 10:13 a), then helped (i. e., the hindering demons are forced to relent) by Michael (along, no doubt, with forces under his command: Daniel 10:13 b; Daniel 10:21). The actions of the unseen angelic forces supporting Elisha against the king of Aram (2 Kings 6:17; cf. Daniel 11:1), the (unrealized in this instance) actions of the legions of angels at our Lord's disposal (Matthew 26:53), or any of the many actual angelic appearances and operations documented in scripture (and the innumerable instances not recorded in the span of human history; cf. Psalms 91:1-16) all suggest the continued necessity of such combat by elect angels against satanic forces wishing to oppose God's will. Michael, for example, was not allowed to collect the body of Moses without a fight (Jude 1:9). Earth and, more precisely, mankind is at issue now, with Satan and the demons vying with the elect angels of God for control of the hearts of men. Jacob's vision of the angelic siege ramp or military highway stretching up to heaven to the presence of God (Genesis 28:10-19; cf. John 1:51) makes the situation very clear: it is the earth (not the heavens) which is being contested (cf. Genesis 32:2). While the world may, in the sense of gross diabolical influence, be in the power of the devil, God's overarching control is absolute, and He keeps a close watch on the earth by means of His angelic servants (e. g., Psalms 91:11-12; Zechariah 1:9-17; Zechariah 6:1-8; Revelation 7:1-4). Mid-way through the tribulation, Satan and his followers will be forced out of heaven (and restricted to earth) by elect angels under Michael's command (Revelation 12:7-17). At present, being incarcerated is the worst fate that can befall Satan's angels. The "legion" of demons about to be ejected by our Lord from the demoniac at Gadara frantically begged Christ not to have them confined in the Abyss (Luke 8:31). There a large number of demons now imprisoned (i. e., in the Abyss and at the river Euphrates: Revelation 9:1-19) who will be joined by Satan and the rest of his followers at our Lord's return (Revelation 20:1-3). Ultimately, all of God's enemies will come to occupy the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10). Like reprobate human beings, the devil and his angels will not be physically obliterated, but will instead be relegated to this terrible place forever. Our Lord, in His victory at the cross and in His resurrection, has become in His humanity superior to all angels in every way (cf. Ephesians 1:20-21; Colossians 1:16-17; Colossians 2:9-10, Colossians 2:15; 1 Peter 3:22; Heb. 1:1-2:18). As His body, the Church, we believers share in this superiority positionally and, in the resurrection, will do so experientially. This superiority is not only one of rank, but also of abilities. In terms of our future superior rank, we shall sit in judgment over individual fallen angels (1 Corinthians 6:3; Revelation 20:4; cf. Matthew 19:28). It is unclear whether resurrected humans will be in any way involved in physically depositing demons in the Abyss or the lake of fire (elect angels do this where such activity is recorded: Revelation 20:1-3; cf. Revelation 9:1-3; Revelation 12:7-9), but given the superior properties of our resurrection bodies,

we will certainly be capable of it (cf. Isaiah 24:21-22).

9) Believers versus Unbelievers: Finally, included in the devil's order of battle are a vast number of living human beings. This is most significant, because the primary way in which the devil and his fallen angels exercise their power in the world is through their influence upon its inhabitants. Absolute dominion over certain persons by way of demon possession is certainly one extreme form of control, but an even more insidious and widespread method of swaying the will of individuals and thereby affecting the course of events is that of demon influence. Demon influence is the propagation of demon doctrines. Such influence need not be direct. Whether Satan and company wish to promulgate grossly and obviously anti-God thinking (e. g., pagan religion), or merely subtle disinformation (e. g., humanistic philosophy), it matters little whether the object has had a demon whisper in his ear or has simply read a book or watched a television show. The result, in both cases, is the same for all who believe the lie, whatever the source: enlistment into the devil's auxiliaries. Often, the battle lines are not so clearly drawn. Unbelievers, for example, to the extent that they are moral, law-abiding citizens (see section II. 7 above), are in large measure useless to the devil. He can only hope to keep them from Christ, and to use their example and influence to hinder the salvation of others as well. On the other hand, nominal believers, to the extent that they have bought into one-world politics, or self-generated solutions to societal ills, can be very useful to Satan indeed. We can be sure of only one thing in regard to Satan's human auxiliaries: however long their enlistment and however vehement their loyalty, the devil will use anyone he can to the greatest degree that he can, and has absolutely no loyalty to those who serve him or compunctions about the destruction of those who have benefitted him:

[The servant of the Lord must] in humility be correcting those who oppose him, in the hope that God may grant them to repent and acknowledge the truth, and that they may come to their senses, [escaping] from the devil's trap, though they have now been taken captive by him to do his will. 2 Timothy 2:25-26.

You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you desire to do. John 8:44. And you [too were once spiritually] dead in the transgressions and sins in which you then lived your life, after the fashion of this temporal world (lit., kosmos), after the pattern of the ruler who holds sway in the air [around us (i. e., the devil)], that spirit who is now at work in those who have chosen disobedience.

Ephesians 2:1-2.

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

Romans 1:25. As soldiers in the army of the Lord, we also need to keep it in mind that these captives of the devil are our fellow human beings, men and woman for whom Christ died, and whom God desires to be saved (Ezekiel 18:23; Matthew 18:14; John 12:47 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; 2 Peter 3:9). Unlike purely human conflicts, where one side is out to destroy the other, God's desire is (and our desire must also be) the winning over to the love of Jesus Christ of all those who have been drafted by the devil:

We beg you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God! 2 Corinthians 5:20.

10. Satan's Tactics: By way of introduction, it will be helpful to give a quick overview of some of the most important scriptures which discuss the methods and tactics used by the devil to manipulate humanity:

Opposition to the Gospel: And the ones beside the road are those who have heard [the truth of the gospel], then the devil comes and removes the Word from their heart, so that they might not believe and be saved. Luke 8:12.

Accusation of Believers:

Simon, Simon. Behold, Satan has asked to winnow you like wheat. Luke 22:31.

Demon Possession:

Now while the supper was in progress, the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Him. John 13:2.

Demon Influence:

Then Peter said, "Ananias, why did Satan fill your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and appropriate for yourself part of the proceeds of the lot?" Acts 5:3.

Blinding Unbelievers: To open their eyes, and to turn them away from the darkness and into the light, and from the power of Satan unto God. Acts 26:18.

Punishing Wayward Believers:

[For I have already decided, i]n the name of our Lord Jesus, when all of you are gathered together with my spirit by the power of our Lord Jesus, to hand such a one over to Satan for the destruction of his body so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord. 1 Corinthians 5:4-5.

Among these [apostates] are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they might be taught not to speak blasphemously. 1 Timothy 1:20.

Temptation: Do not deprive each other, except for short periods by agreement in order that you may have opportunity for prayer, and may then be together again, so that Satan might not tempt you through your lack of self-control. 1 Corinthians 7:5.

Plotting against us:

[I grant my forgiveness] in order that we may not be taken advantage of by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes. 2 Corinthians 2:11.

Dissembling: For men of this sort are false apostles, workers of guile, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And it is no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. 2 Corinthians 11:14.

Harassing Faithful Believers: And on account of my superabundant revelations, for this reason (lest I become puffed up beyond measure) I was given a stake in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to batter me, that I might not become puffed up beyond measure. 2 Corinthians 12:7.

Exploiting Unbelievers: In these [sins] you once walked, according to the temporal orientation of this world (i. e., not living life in the light of eternity), according to the prince of the power of the air [the devil], the spirit who is now working in the sons of disobedience. Ephesians 2:2.

Menacing: So do not give the devil an opening (lit. "place" to attack). Ephesians 4:27.

Deceit:

Put on the full armor of God, so that you may be able to stand firm against the tricks of the devil. Ephesians 6:11.

Hindering Christian Ministry:

Therefore we wished to come to you – I, Paul did, not once but twice – but Satan impeded us. 1 Thessalonians 2:18.

Exploiting Vulnerable Believers:

Don't [appoint] a novice [as pastor], lest his head swell and he fall under the [same judgment as] the devil. 1 Timothy 3:6-7.

Enlisting Apostate Believers: For some have already turned aside to follow Satan. 1 Timothy 5:15.

Trapping and Dominating:

[A]nd that they may come to their senses, [escaping] from the devil's trap, though they have now been taken captive by him to do his will. 2 Timothy 2:26.

Intimidating through the Fear of Death:

Likewise [Christ] also partook of [flesh and blood] in order that through His death He might put an end to the one possessing the power of death, that is, the devil. Hebrews 2:14 b
Attacking the Weak:

Therefore subordinate yourselves to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. James 4:7.

Stay sober and wide awake. Your adversary the devil prowls about like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8.

Leading into Sin: The one who is committing sin is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. For this reason the Son of God appeared, that He might put an end to the devil's deeds. 1 John 3:8.

Influencing the World for Evil:

We know that we are from God, but that this entire world lies in the power of the evil one. 1 John 5:19.

1) Names for the devil: Nearly all of Satan's scriptural names are descriptive designations which, in very straight forward fashion, reveal much about his character and his modus operandi:

1. Lucifer: This Latin name meaning "light-bearer" is a common translation for the Hebrew *heylel* (הֵילֵל) at Isaiah 14:12; and refers to the Morning Star. This is the only title for the devil which is not

derogatory, stemming from his pre-rebellion status as the representative of God to the angels. As the One who brings God's light to the world (John 1:4-10), Jesus Christ has won the name "Morning Star" (2 Peter 1:19; Revelation 2:28; Revelation 22:16). For the original "bringer of light" has become the "prince of darkness" (cf. Acts 26:18; Ephesians 6:12; Colossians 1:13).

2. Satan: The Hebrew word *satan* (שָׂטָן), connotes enmity and opposition. According to this primary name, the devil is the Enemy (cf. Luke 10:19), the Opponent (cf. 1 Peter 5:8), or the Adversary (1 Timothy 5:14).

3. Devil: The Greek word *diabolos* (διδυβολος) means "slanderer" or "accuser". According to this primary name, Satan is the one who accuses us before God and slanders God to mankind (Zechariah 3:1-10; Job 1:1-22; Job 2:1-13; Revelation 12:10).

4. Tempter: (Matthew 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5).

5. Liar: (and the father of it: John 8:44 cf. 1 John 3:8).

6. Murderer: (from the beginning: John 8:44 cf. 1 John 3:8).

7. Evil One: (Matthew 5:37; Matthew 6:13; Matthew 13:19, Matthew 13:38; John 17:15 Ephesians 6:16; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; 1 John 2:13 f. 1 John 5:19).

8. Snake: (the snake or serpent implies treachery, danger and guile: cf. Genesis 3:1-24; 2 Corinthians 11:3; Revelation 20:2). Several other related terms should be noted. Dragon, Leviathan and Rahab add the notion of monstrous size and power to the snake's other characteristics: a) Dragon (i. e., a very large snake-like creature: Revelation 12:3-17; Revelation 13:1-4; Revelation 16:13; Revelation 20:2; cf. Job 26:13). b) Leviathan (i. e., a sea-serpent: Job 3:8; Psalms 74:14; Isaiah 27:1). c) Rahab (i. e., a sea-monster: Job 26:12; Isaiah 51:9).

9. Belial: or Beliar"; the name means "without profit" or worthless (2 Corinthians 6:15).

10. Beelzebub: the name means "ruler of the flies" and is formed from the Hebrew-Aramaic word for lord (*bal, bel*) and the onomatopoeic sound of the fly (*zzzbh*; cf. Matthew 12:24-27). Flies, because of their pesky nature and disgusting habits, made a good analogy for demons, of whom Satan is the current "lord".

11. Pseudo-god and world ruler: These terms describe the devil in his would-be role of master of the earth and human race, for example: "god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4); "ruler of this world" (John 12:31 John 14:30; John 16:11); " prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2); "strong man" (Mark 3:27).

2) Demon Influence: the Tactics of Temptation: Satan is generally able to achieve his ends through demon influence and demon temptation without resorting to direct attack or possession. In fact, in the vast majority of cases, such influence and temptation do not even require direct demonic involvement. The world system which Satan has so laboriously constructed is by now so chock-full of ready-made temptation and institutionalized satanic influence that a sizeable, built-in momentum for perpetuating and deepening its influence on earth has already been achieved. Without divine intervention, one may hypothesize safely that no further direct demonic activity would be required for the world to continue in its degenerate direction until absolute corruption had

been achieved. Satan, of course, is not satisfied with this. His only hope (and a false one at that) for avoiding the inexorable approach of God's judgment lies in the complete obliteration of faith from the earth. For this reason, continued and intensifying demonic influence (through his world system) and temptation (individual entrapment) can be expected as the devil makes every effort to strengthen his grip on the world.

Satan has a built-in ally in each one of us: our sin nature (James 1:14). Luring us into sin is the basic approach for tricking, trapping and tempting believers and unbelievers alike into doing his will instead of God's (2 Timothy 2:26). Sin, of course, encompasses more than gross lascivious conduct. In terms of the devil's propaganda system studied above, those who buy into the lie of self-worship (i. e., "I am a god": subjective arrogance) and the lie of self-righteousness (i. e., "God needs me": objective arrogance) are ultimately the most useful to him. And Satan is always recruiting "useful" human beings. We have already made the point that demons are not allowed by God to do everything they would like to do on the earth, otherwise they would long ago have extinguished the human race entirely (the one sure way to extinguish the lamp of faith). Demons do not have their own bodies and their ability to possess human beings has been restricted by God (see below), and their attempt to create a hybrid angel-human race was crushed by God through the flood. In short, their material influence on the earth and human beings is limited. The most effective way the devil has, therefore, of exercising control over his erstwhile domain is to have human beings do it for him. In the history of the world, Satan has found no lack of individuals who, actively or passively, in full or partial knowledge, embracing or merely being influenced by the system of lies he has established, have "joined his team", so to speak, and have thus contributed to his control and direction of the world. The world "lies in the lap of the evil one" in large part because the evil one has found so many volunteers to help him rule it (1 John 5:19).

Beyond the influence of the world system already in place, the devil also actively tempts human beings he has targeted. Scripture is limited in what it has to say on this subject, but certain basic principles are clear:

1. Acquisition of Targets: In the same way that God employs angelic watchers to reconnoiter the earth (cf. Zechariah 1:11; Zechariah 6:5 ff.), we can safely assume that Satan too employs his extensive demonic assets to "keep tabs" on as many human beings as possible. It is important that we not underestimate the amount of intelligence that the devil possesses about us, but it is also important not to overestimate Satan's capabilities: unlike God, he is not omnipresent. Scripture, however, is very clear about the fact that we are being observed by angels (Job 1:1-22 & Job 2:1-13; Luke 15:10; 1 Corinthians 11:10; 1 Peter 1:12).

2. Targeting: From what we know of his methodology, we can also expect Satan to be opportunistic and efficient (according to his lights) in the employment of his resources. Temptation of human beings utilizes assets, and so we can safely assume that not every human being will come under the same degree of direct, demonic temptation. Highest on the devil's priority list will be those who might serve him most effectively in extending his influence (the rich, powerful, prominent, or those possessing potential in these and other important areas). Particularly important targets from Satan's point of view are any and all individuals who are on the point of becoming believers in Christ: the devil makes every effort to remove the seed of the gospel from their hearts before they can believe (Matthew 13:19; Mark 4:15; Luke 8:12). Believers are perhaps

the most tempting targets, and, in corresponding fashion, we may expect that the more useful we are to God, the higher on Satan's list we will be (cf. Job 1:8; Luke 22:31). Timing is also a key issue in the devil's selection of targets for active temptation. We should not underestimate his ability to discern either the temptations to which we are likely to be the most vulnerable or the best time for him to set the temptation in motion. Common sense tells us that if we could observe someone (even ourselves) for an unlimited time in complete secrecy, we would easily come to know (or at least be able to guess with some assurance) their specific areas of weakness and the best time to put them under the pressure of temptation (1 Peter 5:8). On the other hand, it is also important not to overestimate the devil's abilities in this regard. Only God is omniscient. The devil, for example, can only guess what is going on in our hearts.

3. Tempting: Satan does actively employ a strategy of temptation against human beings, especially believers, in order to distort the truth, disrupt proper behavior, disrupt the environment for learning and applying the truth, prevent us from coming to God and following Him, disrupt our faith, destroy our witness, degrade our usefulness to God, and create a usefulness for himself (1 Thessalonians 3:5). We know from scripture that even great believers sometimes succumb to these methods (e. g., David was moved by Satan to number the people: 1 Chronicles 21:1). It is important to remember, however, that the devil is not omnipotent. And we have it from God that He will not allow Satan to bring more pressure to bear upon us in this regard than we are able to bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). We can summarize the most important aspects of the devil's methodology of temptation as follows: a) Deception: At the heart of all direct temptation from the devil lurks the lie. Deception is the true key to effective temptation (Genesis 3:13; John 8:44 2 Corinthians 2:11; 2 Corinthians 11:3, 2 Corinthians 11:14-15; Ephesians 6:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12; Revelation 12:9; Revelation 19:20; Revelation 20:3 & Revelation 20:10). For, if we knew the truth, feared God as we should, and appreciated the consequences of succumbing to temptation, we would appreciate how counterproductive, how devastating to our faith and to our lives every defeat at the hands of the devil truly is. In short, we would never do it. Satan (through his demonic servants) makes a point of masking the truth in all his efforts at temptation. This is obvious from the first case study in human experience, Adam and Eve, where the fall of our first parents into sin would never have occurred had not Satan deceived them into a false appraisal of the situation. The devil may deceive us by suggesting that some sin isn't sin at all, that some sin is necessary, or he may simply present us with an offer that is "too good to pass up", but even in this last case, we have been deceived as to the hollowness of the prize before us and the painful consequences certain to follow from turning away from God. b) Verbal Suggestion: One of the best ways to tempt someone to sin is through suggestion and encouragement from others (cf. 2 Peter 2:18-19). There is something about the human heart that leads it to eagerly embrace a suggestion from another person that it would never adopt (or perhaps even conceive) on its own. Peter's suggestion to the Lord that He put out of His mind the idea that He must suffer death is an example of the devil trying to use another human being as a lever to induce sin (as our Lord remarked: Matthew 16:23). c) Visual Suggestion: Sometimes the mere appearance of an object of temptation (or something closely related to whatever one lusts for) is enough to start the wheels of the sin nature rolling. In our mass-media world, where sin-inducing images abound (consider that advertising, for example, is almost completely directed towards stoking our natural covetousness), it is no great matter for the devil to probe our resistance by supplying the most tempting images at the most opportune time (Job 31:1; Psalms 101:3; 1 John 2:16). d) Subconscious Suggestion: Subtle suggestion

below the conscious level is also a weapon in the devil's arsenal (1 Chronicles 21:1; cf. Matthew 16:23). It is important to note that we no more have to take any heed of sinful and evil "ideas" that occur to us (only some of which are from any demonic source – our sin nature is quite capable of generating a sufficient dialogue in this regard) than we do the overt verbal suggestions of others enticing us to leave the path of truth. At some point along the spectrum of increasing openness to sin and evil, however, receptivity to such communications increases and this direct channel to demonic doctrine widens (Ephesians 2:2; 1 Timothy 4:1). e) Coercion: Satan does not "play fair". He uses any and all means available to him. One particularly effective means of temptation is the pressure of circumstance. Fear, of loss, of embarrassment, of inconvenience, of injury, of unpopularity, of death, of anything in the face of which we feel fear, is a powerful tool in Satan's hands. By suggesting to us the terrors that may result from doing what is right (or abstaining from what is wrong), the devil is often able to manipulate us into sin and evil (and away from God's will: Romans 8:15; 2 Timothy 1:7; Hebrews 2:14-15). f) Reassurance: For every potential wrong action, there seems to be no lack of examples of those who have acted similarly without serious consequence. Such observations are faulty, for God is a judge of perfect righteousness (cf. Psalms 37:1-40 & Psalms 73:1-28 for the eventual recompense of the wicked). In addition to such apparent (though only apparent) case studies ready at hand that seem to cast doubt on the principle of divine punishment for sin and evil, the devil is always quick to supply those who are only too willing to give us verbal reassurance that what we are doing is "O. K.". After all, everybody does it, just about. And who can say whether it's "really" wrong. And, anyway, it's not really your fault – you just found yourself in a situation. Such false reassurance has a powerful tendency to undermine the resolve of those who receive it. However, relativism, avoidance of responsibility, and blaming God for the circumstances in no way absolve us from sinful or evil conduct. As believers, we ought to take great care not to be guilty of subverting the resolve of those for whom we care (a thing which is all too frequent and often done out of misguided love: we ought not to condemn the sin of others from self-righteous motivation, but we also ought not to give them false information about its consequences). g) Sin: Temptation does not have to result in sin. When it does, it is because of our own free will choice to take the wrong path. James (James 1:14-15) tells us the mechanics: after being tempted, lured and baited (by our own lust), that lust then comes to fruition in sin (i. e., we succumb to the temptation), and sin in turn alienates us from God (death in a spiritual sense). The devil, being "a sinner from the beginning" (1 John 3:8), is well-acquainted with this process. Instead of succumbing to temptation (or, if we do succumb, instead of refusing to confess our sin, change our ways, and so recover from our lapses), we ought to remember that Christ died for these sins of ours precisely to rescue us from this present evil age (Galatians 1:4) h) Reinforcement: Failure to seek God's forgiveness and face up to our errors (through repentance, confession, and reform of our sinful ways) tends to reinforce bad behavior. As a result, we become more and more reluctant to come to the light of God's love and grace (John 3:19-21). Left unchecked, complete spiritual blindness (2 Corinthians 4:4), and total negativity toward God (Job 21:14-15) can result. In the end, we become fit only for the devil's use.

4. Case Studies (Satan's two most significant temptations): a) Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:1-24): Satan's deception in the garden of Eden concentrated on heightening the desirability of the unknown by means of cleverly concocted lies. b) The Temptation of Christ (Matthew 4:1-25; Luke 4:1-44): The three temptations of Christ, the Last Adam, present a view of the devil's strategy of temptation in outline: i) stones to bread: the temptation to do a right thing in a wrong way (food is

legitimate, but God's purpose was for Christ to abstain during this period). ii) kingdoms of the earth: the temptation to do something that seems right but is subtly wrong (Christ is certainly the coming King, but not through Satan's agency, and not in that way or at that time). iii) jump: the temptation to act impulsively in order to justify oneself (to put God in a position to have to rescue you, in order to prove something, is wrong on all counts).

3) Demon attack: Within a restricted range, demons can occasionally make material attacks upon people and property. Although direct demon attack was widespread in times past (e. g., during the era of lawlessness preceding the Great Flood) and will be again in the future (i. e., during the Great Tribulation), during the current period of the Church, this type of demonic activity seems to be fairly limited, or at least not overtly obvious. As indicated by the examples of Job (Job 1:1-22 & Job 2:1-13), Micah (1 Kings 22:19-23), Peter (Luke 22:31), and Paul (1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 Timothy 1:20), such attacks are apparently limited to instances where specific divine permission has been obtained. Demons cannot attack arbitrarily, for God is in complete control of His creation (Jeremiah 27:5).

Disease constitutes an important sub-category of demon attack which is to be distinguished both from it and from demon possession. Clearly, much disease has no demon involvement at all (though some illness is in fact a result of demonic assault). Also, in those cases of disease which are attributable to the work of demons, many do not involve demon possession (Luke 13:11-16; Acts 10:38). Job and Paul we know for certain were afflicted (and definitely not possessed) precisely because of their superior spiritual status, and were not touched without God's specific knowledge and express purpose (Job 2:6-7; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10). In the present post-apostolic pre-tribulational era of the Church – far from being able to state with certainty whether a demon-induced illness is divine punishment or an acknowledgment of superior spiritual achievement – it is impossible to say for certain even whether any given illness is a result of demon attack. The New Testament contains many instances of such cases, but it is important to remember that not only were special spiritual gifts operational at that time to deal with these unique problems, but also that a large part of the reason why such intense and visible demon activity was allowed was to demonstrate the power of God and the imminence of His Kingdom in the Person of Christ through its defeat at Jesus' hands (Acts 10:38):

Then his disciples questioned Him, saying, "Master, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but [this has happened] so that the works of God may be revealed through him". John 9:2-3.

4) Demon possession: Demon possession is an especially virulent form of demonic attack that must be addressed separately. In demon possession, a fallen angel (or several) takes up residence in the body of a morally accountable human being. In so doing, the demon gains a large measure of control over the individual in question (through that person's body). Such possession of human bodies was a major selling point in the devil's enlistment of followers to rebel against God. Fallen angels crave the sensual experience that only a physical body can provide, and it is safe to say that without divine restraint, much more such possession would occur. Demon possession does not extinguish the personality or the will of the possessed, but it does repress it to a very great degree. The Gadarene demoniac, for example, was able to bring himself to Jesus in search of deliverance despite the resistance of a whole legion of demonic inhabitants (Luke

8:26-37; cf. also Acts 16:16-18). Judas, (possessed by Satan after becoming confirmed in his decision to betray Christ: John 13:27), later was able to express his (pointless) regrets. Soothsayers and oracles (the witch of Endor, for example: 1 Samuel 28:3-19) also exhibit greater or lesser ability to maintain some sort of joint control of their persons in company with the forces that possess them. As with demon afflictions of all kinds, demon possession is also subject to the permissive will of God. Unlike demonic attack and infliction of disease, however, demon possession also requires the willful acquiescence of the possessed. This is true even in the case of the "boy" with the unclean spirit which is sometimes taken as an exception (Matthew 17:14 ff.; Mark 9:24; Luke 9:37 ff.). When Jesus asks the time of his initial affliction, his father replies "since he was a boy", however this phrase translates the Greek adverb paidiothen which means here not "from childhood" but "from adolescence", based on the word pais (παῖς) which is often used to make this distinction in Greek (Luke 2:43). A person has to "agree" to demon entrance in order for it to happen. This agreement need not be in the form of a conversation, but merely a conscious consent to allow an unnaturally great influence of supernatural forces into the life. Involvement in paganism, the occult and even some aspects of more "respectable" non-Christian religions obviously helps to advance this process and make possession a more likely possibility. Any activity that surrenders the will in a supernatural context (even "socially acceptable" practices like hypnotism, Quija board use, tarot cards, etc.) helps weaken resistance to demon entrance. The fact that spiritism (necessarily involving possession) is strongly prohibited in the Old Testament demonstrates the ultimate culpability of the possessed (Leviticus 20:6, Leviticus 20:27; Deuteronomy 18:10-11; Isaiah 8:19). Demon possession, inevitably regretted after the fact, is as much an individual responsibility as is getting "hooked" on drugs, alcohol, or any other destructive behavior. As temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16; cf. 1 Corinthians 10:21), believers are exempt from demon possession, a principle that makes much sense when one considers that opening oneself up to overtly satanic influences (a practice antithetical to following Jesus Christ) is a prerequisite for possession (see Ephesians 4:17 ff.; 1 Timothy 4:1).

You can't drink the Lord's cup [of communion-fellowship] and the cup of demons. You can't share in the Lord's [communion-fellowship] table and the table of demons. 1 Corinthians 10:21.

Ending demon possession is not a simple matter, but it must be kept in mind that God is still in charge of His creation, and that He is capable of terminating all such cases whenever and however He chooses. He is also a God who answers prayer, and the prayer of those who seek Him diligently is always highly esteemed (James 5:16 b). It will be remembered that the most difficult case of possession encountered in the gospels brings the observation from our Lord that "this kind only comes out with prayer" (Mark 9:29). As to the issue of exorcism, the word itself does not occur in the Bible, exorcism being the noun form of the Greek word "adjure", as in, "I adjure you in the name of Christ whom Paul preaches" (Acts 19:13). In the case just mentioned, the "exorcists" were not believers, and the exorcism was ineffective. Examples of believers putting an end to demon possessions (not associated with disease) are few and far between in scripture. Aside from the deliverances on this score wrought by the Lord (e. g., Mark 1:34, Mark 1:39; Luke 4:41), we have the example of the 12 and the 72 sent forth by Him to proclaim His kingdom (Matthew 10:1; Mark 3:15; Mark 6:7, Mark 6:13; Luke 9:1; cf. Luke 10:17), and Paul's command for the demon to come out of the slave girl with the familiar spirit (Acts 16:18). The first set of instances deal with the heralding of the kingdom of Christ (an offer that Israel of that day would

reject). The incident in Acts 16:1-40 is part of an apostolic ministry establishing the Church of Christ. The spiritual gifts and abilities given to the 72 apostles of the kingdom and the spiritual gifts and abilities given to the 12 apostles of the Church were extensive and unique, wholly in keeping with the unique ministries they were to discharge. Extraordinary gifts and extraordinary events quite commonly precede important eras in the history of the world, that is, in the history of world from God's point of view. One can consider by way of comparison the exceptional events and exceptional miracles performed by Moses at the time of the Exodus from Egypt. We will next see a concentration of such events and miracles on the verge of Christ's return (in the tribulational period). At the present time, however, most such gifts and miracles are not functioning. Since "authority over the demons" is a power (or gift) only given to apostles and their associates, "exorcism" is not a valid activity for believers. The only weapon we possess to combat suspected cases of demon possession is prayer, but, as our Lord told us, this is the most powerful weapon of all (cf. Mark 9:29). Where the power of God is involved, anything is possible. Consider, for example, Christ's expulsion of one demon from a distance (Mark 7:29). Demon expulsion is no easy matter under any circumstances (cf. the implications of Luke 11:18), and not necessarily a once and for all thing. The restless spirit who brings seven more wicked spirits back with it reenters the victim (Luke 11:26), and in one case our Lord specifically commanded the demon not to reenter the formerly possessed person (Mark 9:25). Demon possession only happens by acquiescence, and, even after expulsion, there is no guarantee that without turning to Christ a victim of possession will not resort to his or her former behavior.

5) Accusation of believers: The last and most despicable method of demon attack is reserved entirely for believers. Satan, as we have mentioned, engages in intensive observation of human beings, especially believers, and makes the most effective use he can of the information gathered. In the case of believers, this includes accusing them before God. Now God, of course, is omniscient, and is well aware of all our failures (knew them, in fact, before we or the universe had been created). But the devil, whose name means "accuser", delights to point out to God the sins and errors of His followers, partly to imply that God is inconsistent (which is, of course, a blasphemous lie), partly to attempt to get God to do the devil's work for him by punishing the offending believers. Scripture records this particularly offensive habit of the devil in a number of places (Zechariah 3:1; Job 1:1-22 & Job 2:1-13; 1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 12:10). We should not underestimate this venue of attack, for Satan and his minions are powerless in the face of God's defense of us, but who can oppose God? What a joyous day it will be when the devil no longer has access to the throne room of heaven to cast his accusations against us (Revelation 12:10)! Until that time, it is a most salutary thing that we have as our advocates before God both the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, John 14:26; John 15:26; John 16:7), and our Lord Jesus Christ, the righteous One (1 John 2:1).

6) Resistance: It is helpful to consider that even during the early days of the Church, when the apostles operated with exceptional powers, "spiritual warfare" as it is often termed today, consisted of very limited direct contact and confrontation with demon forces. These great believers functioned on the whole in the same way that we do (read "should" do) today. They fought the good fight by seeking God, committing themselves to spiritual growth, and energetically setting themselves to the ministries God had given them. They were not overly concerned with details they could not know about a conflict they could not see (beyond certain physical manifestations,

sicknesses and the like). If that was true during a time when overt miracles were being empowered for the reasons discussed above, how much more is it true today? We do gain great encouragement from the knowledge scripture gives us about the impending victory of God over the devil and our place in the struggle (cf. Luke 10:18). Many things are explained thereby, and in contemplating the unseen conflict we are guided to put this world and our lives in it into the proper, biblical, God-seeking, God-fearing perspective. But we must never succumb to a morbid fascination with such things. We must not "go beyond what is written" (1 Corinthians 4:6), and must take care to give a wide berth to anything that smacks of the occult.

Only do not rejoice in this, that the spirits obey you. But [rejoice] that your names have been recorded in heaven. Luke 10:20.

Direct demon interaction in the world seems less obvious today than ever before. In part this may be due to a strategic decision by the devil to concentrate on using science and technology to undermine faith for the time being. But part of the reason seems also to stem from God's sovereign decision to make it so through the restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit (2 Thessalonians 2:6-7). In short, when we believers are under pressure, we cannot know the precise source of the pressure (whether demonic or otherwise), but we should know that God is with us in any and every strait: For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, neither angelic nor human authorities, neither things present nor things to come, neither heavenly powers, be they the highest [of the elect] or the lowest [of the fallen], nor any other created thing [on this earth] will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38-39.

We can also take comfort in the many scriptures that assure us that along with an unseen enemy, there are many unseen allies, angels of God (too numerous to count) to fight this battle for us (Genesis 19:11; 1 Kings 19:5; Psalms 91:11; Daniel 6:22; Matthew 4:11; Matthew 18:10; Luke 16:22; Acts 5:19; Acts 12:10-15; Hebrews 1:14). Unable to perceive the ebb and flow of the spiritual conflict around us, we become like private soldiers on the battlefield, only conceptually aware of what is going on beyond our individual fox-holes. Under such circumstances, the correct procedure is to walk by faith, not by sight, and to learn to trust God unfailingly (Psalms 23:1-6; 2 Corinthians 4:18; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 11:1). The closer we move to God, the more we grow spiritually, the safer we shall be in this conflict, and the more effective our prayers to influence what we can see will become. The one thing that a solid understanding of the matters discussed here should produce is the conviction that every single scrap of scripture, every small opportunity to improve our relationship with God, is of critical importance, because a much larger, all-inclusive battle is being waged just beyond what our eyes can see. In all circumstances, and especially touching our demonic foes, trusting God is our main line of defense: The Lord is faithful, who will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one. 2 Thessalonians 3:3.

I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but that You guard them from the evil one. John 17:15. But deliver us from the evil one. Matthew 6:13. In summary, the knowledge that we are living out our lives on what amounts to a spiritual battlefield here on this vain earth should not be depressing, but liberating. Knowing this truth "sets us free" in great measure (John 8:32 Galatians 5:1), because in this way we come to see clearly that all the pointless things of life, things after which the world runs with such gusto, things that in the end do not satisfy, are not the things that are really important. We come to see the world as it really is, looking with the eyes of faith to the

things that are not seen (2 Corinthians 4:18), the things that are eternal. And we have confidence that our personal victory over whatever part of the devil's world we now occupy will find its ultimate complement and fulfillment in Christ's complete victory over Satan and his cosmos when He returns.

Knowledge of the vanity of the devil's world is a clarion call to turn away from that world's evil and towards God for the only real answers there are in this life. The world and the devil supply handy false answers, but only God has the truth. The devil's realm is a vast desert in which there is nothing of value, nothing that lasts, nothing that satisfies, nothing but false directions, endless marching toward empty nothingness – only in God through Christ do we gain true direction. In this desert of a world, where almost everything else is a lie, in God, in Christ we find the cold, clear, refreshing water of truth.

Footnotes:

1. Much of the material covered here can be found in greater detail in two further series 1) The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation, and 2) The Coming Tribulation: a History of the Apocalypse. Readers are invited to consult these studies after digesting the material here.
2. i. e., He constructed it out of existing material rather than creating it ex nihilo, the verb here being the Hebrew 'asah, not bar'ah: see part 2 of the Satanic Rebellion: The Genesis Gap, section III. 2, "The Genesis 2:4 Creation Summary".
3. Systematic Theology v. 2, p. 106.
4. For this "replacement principle" see part 2B of this series and the Satanic Rebellion series.

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